



## PERSPECTIVES

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# The Double Whammy of the New US Envoy for Iranian Affairs

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The new US administration's emerging policy on the Iranian and Palestinian issues flouts the very principles of human rights and civil liberties it seeks to promote.

The new Biden administration has appointed Robert Malley as special envoy for Iranian affairs. This appointment puts Malley in a key position with great influence on the Middle East as a whole, as the Iranian issue is also connected to Saudi Arabia, Israel, and, indirectly, the Palestinian issue. The administration's move is also part of the effort to nullify everything the former president, Donald Trump, did in the Middle East, even in cases where his actions resulted in positive developments.

On the Iranian issue, Malley is likely to urge the US to return to the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA), lift the sanctions as soon as possible, and free the Tehran regime from any other obligation, including with regard to long-range ballistic missiles and its destructive involvement in other countries' affairs. Malley will seek to restore to Tehran the military and political power it wielded in the days of President Obama, despite the calamities that that power has wreaked on the citizens of Iran and on the region.

On the Palestinian issue, Malley is likely to steer—even from the back seat—a process culminating in a Palestinian state led by the PLO. At the same time, the administration will press Israel to give up the ancient part of its historic capital, withdraw from parts of the Jewish homeland, and remove communities and residents in return for dead letters, documents, promises, and commitments whose fulfillment cannot be ensured. In other words, through the tender mercies of Biden and Malley, another terror state will be established on the hills overlooking Israel from the east, in addition to the existing Gaza terror state to its west.

But Israel is not the only victim of this prospective policy. Anyone with even scant knowledge of Iran's history knows that that country was under the Shah's rule until the end of 1978 and since the start of 1979 has been under the reign of the ayatollahs. The Shah's government was a nationalist dictatorship that roused the anger of American liberal circles. As a result, President Jimmy Carter decided to end his support for the regime when mass demonstrations erupted against it in 1978.

What drove Carter was concern for the human rights of the citizens of Iran. Faced with intensifying violent demonstrations and a lack of US support, the Shah left Iran and his government collapsed. On its ruins rose the Islamic Republic of Ayatollah Khomeini, which quickly turned out to be a far worse dictatorship than the Shah's government had ever been.

There are two main dimensions of oppression in Iran: the personal and the collective. On the personal level, every Iranian citizen knows what will happen if he or she demonstrates against the government or writes a post on social networks that the government does not like. In the best case he or she will be jailed and tortured; in the worst, executed. Women who are caught taking part in anti-regime demonstrations are raped in the prisons.

The collective oppression stems from the fact that Iran is made up of multiple ethnic groups. The Persians, who are the privileged hegemonic group, form about half the population. The other half is composed of Baluchis, Kurds, Azeris, Arabs, Turkmen, Caspians, Kazakhs, Lurs, Bakhtiariis, and others. These groups are forced to live under the rule of the Persians, who quash any attempt at self-determination or at developing local culture, heritage, or language.

And here is where the absurdity comes in: American support for the ayatollahs' rule is essentially support for an oppressive regime that does not recognize either human rights on the personal level or ethno-national rights on the collective level. This support directly contravenes the most basic American values and certainly does not tally with the declared agenda of the Democratic Party.

On the Palestinian issue, too, the Biden administration supports the wrong side of the aisle. According to reports, the administration aims to restore support for the Palestinian Authority with the aim of turning it into a state. This is despite the fact that the prospective state would undoubtedly join the list of Middle Eastern failed states, as it would be a heterogeneous entity and illegitimate in the eyes of its own citizens. This lack of legitimacy stems from three factors:

- The PLO is a thoroughly corrupt terror organization that created the Palestinian Authority in its own image. Mahmoud Abbas is both head of the PLO and president of the PA. Both the PLO and the PA are built on nepotism, as functionaries exploit the advantages of rule for self-enrichment and all other residents are left to fend for themselves. During the year of the coronavirus, the discord between the government and the residents

intensified to levels unknown in the past, with armed clashes breaking out between the government and its opponents.

- PA residents are keenly aware that the democratic elections Abbas is planning for 2021 could well bring Hamas to power, which is what happened in the most recent elections for the Legislative Assembly in 2006. Hamas rule will drag the West Bank down to the dire level of the Gaza Strip, where Hamas has been in power for over 13 years. No one in the West Bank wants that.
- PA rule runs counter to the natural clan loyalty of the West Bank's Arab residents. In the Arab world, the clan is the essential element of the social structure. Consequently, homogeneous states that are built on the rule of the tribe—such as the Gulf principalities—are legitimate in the eyes of their citizens and therefore socially quiet, politically stable, and economically prosperous. In contrast, heterogeneous states such as Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Sudan are not legitimate in their citizens' eyes and hence are socially turbulent, politically fragile, and economically failing. A Palestinian state will be another variant of the failed model, and for that reason its residents do not want it.

The Biden administration, however, is totally oblivious to what the Palestinian man on the street wants, as its members are bonded to the PLO and the PA to the point of supporting a corrupt and illegitimate entity. The Palestinian state is destined to be a failure that is fundamentally hostile to Israel. A state of this kind will always need an invented external enemy as a means of uniting all sectors of the population under the illegitimate umbrella of a repressive, corrupt, and unloved regime. The chances of peace between such a state and Israel are nil.

Lamentably, the Biden administration will apparently favor the establishment of a failed state of this kind in a grave infringement of America's democratic values and proclaimed goal of bringing peace between Israel and its neighbors. The policy now taking shape toward Iran, the Palestinian state, and the Abraham Accords stands in stark contrast to core democratic principles: human rights, group rights, governmental legitimacy, and peace-seeking.

The question confronting Israel is whether it should act as the prophet of doom who alerts the new US administration to the flaws and inherent contradictions of its policy, or submit to the *fait accompli* and accept the misconceptions of Malley and the other incoming members of the White House staff and State Department. The answer to that question will be given in the upcoming Israeli elections.

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