

The Obama-Sarkozy "Gaffe" Proves Obama Strong For Israel

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The global media are all aflutter over two lines of **an overheard dialogue** between Presidents Obama and Sarkozy.

"I cannot bear Netanyahu, he's a liar," Sarkozy told Obama, unaware that the microphones in their meeting room had been switched on, enabling reporters in a separate location to listen in to a simultaneous translation.

"You're fed up with him, but I have to deal with him even more often than you," Obama replied, according to the French interpreter.

The lede in coverage has been, naturally, that Sarkozy called Bibi a liar, and that Obama sympathetically implied that Bibi is an enormous pain. Just as naturally, many Zionists see this gaffe as an embarrassment, and many American Israel activists see the affair as a sign that President Obama is less supportive of Israel in private than he is in public. (Leftist Zionists may interpret the matter this way with much wringing of hands, and right-wingers the same way, but with purrs of contentment.)

But the real story isn't these two lines. The real story is how the subject came up in the first place, and how the subject came up demonstrates conclusively that President Obama is working behind the scenes to advance Israel's interests.

During their bilateral meeting on November 3, on the sidelines of the Cannes summit, Obama criticized Sarkozy's surprise decision to vote in favor of a

Palestinian request for membership of the U.N. cultural heritage agency UNESCO. "I didn't appreciate your way of presenting things over the Palestinian membership of UNESCO. It weakened us. You should have consulted us, but that is now behind us," Obama was quoted as saying...

...Obama told Sarkozy that he was worried about the impact if Washington had to pull funding from other U.N. bodies such as the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization and the IAEA nuclear watchdog if the Palestinians gained membership there. "You have to pass the message along to the Palestinians that they must stop this immediately," Obama said.

The full story, in other words, is this: Obama approaches Sarkozy to say, *you shouldn't have supported the PA UN membership bid*. Sarkozy responds, *But Bibi is a liar*. Obama counters: *I don't like him either, and still I'm telling you this statehood bid was a bad move*.

Whether Obama's sympathetic response to Sarkozy's complaint was genuine or merely a sympathetic nod to build rapport hardly matters. In either case, our President's message was that, irrespective of the Israeli Prime Minister's personality, Israel's preferred course of negotiations rather than unilateral UN recognition of Palestinian statehood is correct.

In this light, Obama's personal disdain for Bibi strengthens, not weakens, his pro-Israel *bona fides*. First, it shows that Obama's analysis of the situation genuinely favors Israel's position, rather than being a concession to a friend. Second, since the President would never have said such a thing knowing a microphone was hot, it demonstrates that Obama's private views of this matter match his public pronouncements. To hear Republicans talk, you'd think an unguarded moment between these two leaders would sound something like: "I wish I could have stood with you, Nicholas, but I need Jewish and Christian Zionist votes." Or, "I'm glad you took that stand. I couldn't, but just for political reasons." Or, "At last, my fellow mujahid, our plan to assert Shari'a law over all the world is coming to fruition."

Instead, what we heard was: *Bibi's a pain, but* "You have to pass the message along to the Palestinians that they must stop this immediately." As an American Zionist who cares much more about Israel's geopolitical position than about Bibi Netanyahu's personal dignity, I certainly like what I hear.

It nearly need not be said that everyone (and not just politicians) would be wise to assume that every microphone they ever see is presently on and recording. It should be added that the wisest course of all is simply to assume that at every moment such a microphone is present, whether or not one is visible, but that may be asking too much of most people. In any case, when these gaffes appear, they are indeed revealing. Let us have care, however, to discern what is really being revealed.

[The obligatory caveat: BJPA is apolitical. This post represents my own analysis, not the organization.]