



THE INVESTIGATIVE PROJECT ON TERRORISM

Salam al-Marayati



Salam al-Marayati visited the White House at least 6 times with Paul Monteiro, Associate Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement on September, 17, 2009; June 8, 2010; July 14, 2010; July 16, 2010; June 29, 2011; July 28, 2011

Biography

Salam al-Marayati is a one of the founders of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)¹ and the current president of the organization.² In 1999, then-House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt nominated al-Marayati to serve on the National Commission on Terrorism. Gephardt later withdrew the nomination after a public backlash highlighted al-Marayati's defense of terrorist acts and the groups who carry them out.³

As the following examples show, al-Marayati tries to affect a moderate tone, but he rarely, if ever, criticizes violence committed by Palestinian terrorists or other violence targeting Israel. That includes years of rationalizing violence by Hizballah, the terrorist group second only to al-Qaida in killing Americans. But he never hesitates to blame the Jewish state for the ongoing conflict, including in cases involving attacks on Israel.

¹ Salam Al-Marayati biography, Muslim WaveLength, http://www.islamicity.com/mpac/salam_al-marayati.shtm (Accessed September 9, 2012).

² Salam Al-Marayati biography, Muslim Public Affairs Council website, <http://www.mpac.org/about/staff-board/salam-al-marayati.php> (Accessed September 9, 2012). For more on al-Marayati, see the IPT profile here: <http://www.investigativeproject.org/profile/114>

³ "U.S. Muslim leader denies he's terrorist sympathizer," CNN.com July 29, 1999, Available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20060618151419/http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/07/29/terrorism.commission/> (Accessed September 9, 2012).

Marayati's Anti-Israel Statements:

- On Sept. 23, 2011, MPAC released a statement⁴ publicly denouncing the prosecution and conviction of the “Irvine 11” for disrupting a speech by Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren at the University of California, Irvine in February 2010. Calling the prosecution by the Orange County District Attorney’s office “selective and heavy-handed,” the MPAC leader implied that the case only progressed because of pressure from pro-Israel forces in the U.S.
 - “It’s a sad day for democracy when nonviolent protestors are criminalized by their government and are found guilty for exercising a constitutional right,” said al-Marayati. “You can heckle the President, you can heckle high ranking government officials, but if you heckle an Israeli diplomat you will be prosecuted.”⁵
- In November 2009, al-Marayati lent his support to Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) and 35 other representatives who voted against a House resolution condemning the Goldstone report (a one-sided U.N. report condemning Israel and not Hamas for civilian casualties during Operation Cast Lead.)
 - “In the interest of seeking the truth of what took place, it is imperative that we support the three dozen members who opposed this extremely biased resolution and the two dozen who voted 'present' rather than supporting it,” al-Marayati said at the time.⁶
- In July 2006 during the Israeli-Lebanon War, Larry Mantle interviewed al-Marayati on his show on 89.3 KPCC Radio. During the discussion Marayati said that the Holocaust was no excuse for Israeli “dehumanization” of Arab peoples:
 - “And as far as the Holocaust is concerned, we’ve come out very clearly saying that the Holocaust is the worst genocide, war crime, in the 20th century. We’re against Holocaust denial, but we’re also against people who exploit that as a way of shoving this kind of war propaganda and dehumanization of the Arab peoples and the Muslim peoples as if they have to pay the price for what Nazi Germany did to the Jews back in the 20th century.”⁷

⁴ MPAC news release, “Muslim Groups Appalled by ‘Irvine 11’ Guilty Verdict, Declare Travesty of Justice,” September 23, 2011. <http://www.mpac.org/issues/civil-rights/muslim-groups-appalled-by-irvine-11-guilty-verdict-declare-travesty-of-justice.php> (Accessed September 9, 2012).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ MPAC Action Alert: “Thank 36 Members of Congress for Opposing HR 867, Dismissing Goldstone Report,” November 5, 2009. <http://www.mpac.org/issues/foreign-policy/action-alert-thank-36-members-of-congress-for-opposing-hr-867-dismissing-goldstone-report.php> (Accessed September 9, 2012).

⁷ Larry Mantle, Salam Al-Marayati, and Rabbi Mordecai Finley, “Lebanon, Israel and Hezbollah: Southern California's Perspective” *KPCC “AirTalk” Radio*, August 3, 2006.

- At the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) Annual Conference in 2006, al-Marayati claimed:
 - “And I think what has happened is that there is now this political shift to change this from a fight against al-Qaeda to this whole creation of a new Middle East that they have. So the issue is not centered around al-Qaeda as much as it is centered around whatever the powers that be in the Middle East, with the power obviously centered around the government of Israel and eliminating all of its adversaries in the region one by one, step by step. That is what the new Middle East now is beginning to look like in terms of the policy of the United States.”⁸
- Speaking on a radio show in Los Angeles a few hours after the 9/11 attacks, al-Marayati accused Israel of complicity in the attacks:
 - “If we're going to look at suspects [for 9/11], we should look to the groups that benefit the most from these kinds of incidents, and I think we should put the state of Israel on the suspect list because I think this diverts attention from what's happening in the Palestinian territories so that they can go on with their aggression and occupation and apartheid policies.”⁹
- Following an Aug. 8, 2001 suicide bombing at a Jerusalem pizzeria, MPAC issued a statement calling the attack “the expected bitter result of the reckless policy of Israeli assassination that did not spare children and political figures.”¹⁰ The bombing killed 15 people, including 7 children, and wounded 130 others.
- In April 1997, al-Marayati gave a chilling, anticipatory justification for anti-American terrorism along with an indirect criticism of the U.S.-Israel relationship. “Where Israel goes, our government follows... What is important is whether the American people are aware of and ready for the consequences... America is much more vulnerable than Israel and has much more to lose.”¹¹

Apologist for Islamic Terror:

http://www.publicradio.org/tools/media/player/kpcc/news/shows/airtalk/2005/08/20050831_airtalk1?start=00:00:00&end=00:28:15

⁸ ISNA Annual 43rd Conference, September 1-4 2006, Rosemont Convention Center, Chicago IL.

⁹Larry B. Stammer, “Jewish-Muslim Dialogue Newly Tested,” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 2001. <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/22/local/me-48579> (Accessed September 9, 2012).

¹⁰ “MPAC Issues Statement on August 8 Bombing in Jerusalem,” August 9, 2001, available at: http://web.archive.org/web/20010915155303/mpac.org/news/press_010809.shtml (Accessed September 9, 2012).

¹¹ Salam al-Marayati, “What Do We Expect?” Muslim Public Affairs Council, April 4, 1997, available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/19970624092112/http://www.mpac.org/analysis/art008.html> (Accessed October 3, 2012).

Al-Marayati has repeatedly minimized Islamist terrorism, casting it as a result of depression by the killer. During a 2006 conference, he said terrorists **“are suffering from depression and despair, and then they resort to violence as a result.”**¹²

He made a similar argument in the wake of the 2009 Fort Hood shooting massacre by Army psychiatrist Nidal Malik Hasan,¹³ saying Hasan may have “snapped,” and minimizing the religious motivation self-evident in the attack.¹⁴ One week after the attack, which left 13 people dead and 32 wounded, after Hasan’s communication with al-Qaida cleric Anwar al-Awlaki was well documented, al-Marayati claimed Hasan likely “had a complete psychological breakdown and resorted to shooting anyone around him. What triggered the murderous act remains to be determined by investigators.”¹⁵

Al-Marayati blamed “speculative and unconfirmed news reports” for creating “an indelible impression” Hasan was influenced by al-Qaida.¹⁶

During an August 2012 teleconference, however, al-Marayati was asked how Muslims should respond to questions about Hasan’s religious motivation, including the fact that he shouted “Allahu Akhbar,” or “God is great,” as he opened fire. This time, to a predominantly Muslim audience, al-Marayati was direct. But he claimed the people who deny the problem publicly are best equipped to fight it and he used language – like “Muslim extremism” – which MPAC says should be off-limits when it comes to the government:

- “[T]hey are terrorists. I think that we are together with all Americans in fighting that kind of terrorism. The question is – what’s the effective way of dealing with that kind of terrorism? ... **we are in the battle of ideas with religious extremism, with Muslim extremism, and the ones that have the most credibility in cutting apart the extremist ideas that are promoted by Nidal Hasan, by the Yemeni sheikh, by the bin Ladens, by all those extremists, is actually within the Quran, which is Islam. Islam is the antidote to that kind of extremism ...** We represent the moderate Muslim thinking. We are the most powerful in terms of dealing with that threat. And we are also the

¹² ISNA Annual 43rd Conference, September 1-4 2006, Rosemont Convention Center, Chicago Ill.

¹³ “Final Report of the William H. Webster Commission on the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Counterterrorism Intelligence, and the Events at Fort Hood, Texas, on November 5, 2009,” p. 1, July 19, 2012.

¹⁴ [Salam Al Marayati, “Fort Hood: A Defining Moment for Muslim Americans,”](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/salam-al-marayati/fort-hood-a-defining-moment_b_353977.html) The Huffington Post, November 12, 2009. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/salam-al-marayati/fort-hood-a-defining-moment_b_353977.html

¹⁵ [Salam Al Marayati, “Fort Hood: A Defining Moment for Muslim Americans,”](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/salam-al-marayati/fort-hood-a-defining-moment_b_353977.html) The Huffington Post, November 12, 2009. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/salam-al-marayati/fort-hood-a-defining-moment_b_353977.html

¹⁶ [Salam Al Marayati, “Fort Hood: A Defining Moment for Muslim Americans,”](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/salam-al-marayati/fort-hood-a-defining-moment_b_353977.html) The Huffington Post, November 12, 2009. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/salam-al-marayati/fort-hood-a-defining-moment_b_353977.html.

most capable in partnership with law enforcement in dealing with that threat.¹⁷

- Al-Marayati repeatedly went to bat for **Sami Al-Arian**, a former University of South Florida professor arrested in 2003 for allegedly serving as North American leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a designated terrorist organization. Yet, despite indisputable evidence showing Al-Arian to be an officer in a murderous Islamic terrorist organization, MPAC and al Marayati defended Al-Arian when he was first arrested. They protested the fact that he was being put on trial and even defended him after Al-Arian pled guilty in 2006 to making and receiving contributions of funds, goods, and services to or for the benefit of the PIJ. In March 2006, al-Marayati lauded Al-Arian at a fundraising dinner:
 - “Sami Al-Arian is the gentleman who defied the odds in a system that is unfair, and there is no way you can get a fair trial in view of any of these issues today. But regardless, he was able to defy the odds and he was acquitted of all the terrorism charges that were levied against him.”¹⁸
- In a 1999 PBS interview, al-Marayati referred to Hizballah attacks on Israeli soldiers as “legitimate resistance.”¹⁹
 - “If the Lebanese people are resisting Israeli intransigence on Lebanese soil, then that is the right of resistance and they have the right to target Israeli soldiers in this conflict. That is not terrorism. That is a legitimate resistance. That could be called liberation movement, that could be called anything, but it's not terrorism.”²⁰
- During the 2006 war between Israel and Hizballah, al-Marayati said Hizballah’s cross-border attack, which killed five Israelis and ended with the kidnapping of two soldiers, did not justify Israeli retaliation:²¹
 - “Initially there was concern and condemnation over the attacks against those Israeli soldiers by Lebanese people, but now people see it’s like, hey, Israel is just using that as an excuse, just like they used the PLO as an

¹⁷ MPAC National Teleconference on “The Real World Impact of Epidemic of Hate Rhetoric in America,” August 15, 2012.

¹⁸ “Sami Al-Arian Banquet Dinner,” Anaheim, CA, March 12, 2006.

¹⁹ Salam al-Marayati, “Muslims in America.” NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, PBS, November 24, 1999. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/race_relations/july-dec99/muslims_11-24.html (Accessed September 9, 2012).

²⁰ Salam al-Marayati, “Muslims in America.” NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, PBS, November 24, 1999. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/race_relations/july-dec99/muslims_11-24.html (Accessed September 9, 2012).

²¹ “[Lebanon, Israel and Hezbollah: Southern California's Perspective](#),” Air Talk radio show, KPCC-FM, Southern California Public Radio, August 3, 2006.

excuse in 1982, so now people are basically saying we have to defend our country and join the resistance. I'm not here to defend Hizballah. The only people who should resolve the Hizballah question are Lebanese, not the Israelis not anybody else.”²²

- In a 1999 article, al-Marayati likened Hizballah's 1983 bombing of an American Marine barracks in Beirut killing 241 people, to the American revolution:
 - “Yet this attack, for all the pain it caused, was not in a strict sense, a terrorist operation. It was a military operation, producing no civilian casualties -- exactly the kind of attack that Americans might have lauded had it been directed against Washington's enemies.”²³

Critical of Counter-Terrorism Efforts & U.S. Foreign Policy:

- In a January 2012 appearance on Russia Today's “Cross Talk,” al-Marayati painted Iran as the victim in the current diplomatic crisis:
 - “The problem in the case of Iran is that it is singled out as the threat. We [the U.S.] don't deal with North Korea the same way we deal with Iran,” al-Marayati said. “With other countries, we utilize the IAEA, we use multilateral instruments to deal with the nuclear problem. In this case of Iran, there is no dialogue, there is (sic) no negotiations, it is all confrontational policies that is part of a war mongering mentality here in the U.S. and they're just waiting for the tripwire and then the machinery of war will begin.”²⁴
- In a debate in February, 2012, al-Marayati also accused the American government of bending to the will of its Israeli allies:
 - “The other point here, which is very important historically, the United States has done a lot of dirty work that has served the interests of Israel,” al-Marayati said. “It destroyed Iraq. It supported the destruction and crippling of Egypt. It has crippled the Gulf. And now, it is looking to Iran as the next target for crippling and destroying. I think this is madness. Who is driving our foreign policy? President Obama or Prime Minister Netanyahu?”²⁵

²² Ibid.

²³ Salam Al-Marayati, “A Position Paper on U.S. Counter-terrorism Policy,” Muslim Public Affairs Council, June 1999.

²⁴ “Cross Talk,” Russia Today, January 2012, Video available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6tj9HHgNQA>

²⁵ Ibid.

- Referring again to the U.S.-Israel relationship, Marayati says, “It [Israel] is not an ally, it is a liability to the United States.”²⁶
- Al-Marayati insulted law enforcement and threatened to sever ties with the U.S. government in a strongly-worded *LA Times* op-ed published in October 2011. Expressing anger over the use of “anti-Muslim” training materials by the FBI and a U.S. Attorney’s office, al-Marayati wrote: “If this matter is not immediately addressed, it will undermine the relationship between law enforcement and the Muslim American community—another example of the ineptitude and/or apathy undermining bridges built with care over decades.”²⁷
 - Al-Marayati also threatened to withhold whatever assistance the Muslim community does provide to law enforcement if the government does not meet a set of demands, and concluded by directly challenging Attorney General Eric Holder and FBI Director Robert Mueller: “Atty. Gen. Eric H. Holder Jr. and FBI Director Mueller, take some leadership on this matter, or the partnership we've built to counter violent extremism will forever be handicapped. The question you have to answer is simple: Are we on the same team or not?”²⁸
- In June 2009, after federal authorities disrupted an alleged plot to bomb synagogues and fire missiles at American military aircraft, al-Marayati continued his attacks against law enforcement. Asked in an interview whether it was useful to have informants in mosques, al-Marayati replied by suggesting that the defendants, later convicted, were not real terrorist threats: “These were individuals who were either petty criminals or gullible people who were guilty of stupidity. They were not imminent threats to our country, as the FBI has stated,” al-Marayati told Fox News. “We want those tax dollars to be used to fight al-Qaeda...”²⁹ All four defendants were found guilty and sentenced to 25 years in prison.³⁰
- In an April 2009 interview with *al Watan al Arabi*, translated into English by the Investigative Project on Terrorism, al-Marayati claimed that U.S. counterterrorism policies were representative of a broader “war on Islam.” Al-Marayati argued, “There is Islamophobia in the American government too, and this is a problem, since there are people in it spreading fear of Islam and

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Salam al-Marayati, “The wrong way to fight terrorism,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2011. <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/oct/19/opinion/la-oe-almarayati-fbi-20111019>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interview with Salam al-Marayati by host Jane Skinner, Fox News *Happening Now*, June 9, 2009

³⁰ *U.S. v. Cromitie et al.*, 09cr558, Southern District of New York, Sentencing, June 29, 2011. For more, see:

<http://www.investigativeproject.org/case/324>

distributing misleading generalizations against American Islamic organizations."³¹

- Speaking to an audience in Dallas in 2005 about the use of informants, al-Marayati stated:
 - “[W]e reject any effort, notion, suggestion that Muslims should start spying on one another. In fact if you look at the Lodi case, the disaster of Lodi is that Muslims were reporting each other to the authorities saying, ‘Oh, this person is an extremist.’ [T]his is the model not to follow. The model to follow in terms of counter-terrorism is a healthy partnership between our community and law enforcement. Law enforcement is going to come to your mosque; it already has as far as I can tell. Everywhere I go either somebody tells me that officials have met with them publicly or they tell me that they know who those folks are that are representing law enforcement. ... The question is how do you deal with it in a healthy, open, transparent manner. **That is why we are saying have them come in community forums, in open-dialogues, so they come through the front door and you prevent them having to come from the back door.**”³²
- Commenting on the government's actions against alleged terrorist financiers, in October 2004, Salam al-Marayati said, “It is a sham. You just hope at the end of a long battle these people can be vindicated because they did nothing wrong.”³³
- Marayati repeated the criticism during an August teleconference, saying Muslim charities should be unfettered in America, even when they are found to be routing money to terrorists.
 - “[I]f you’re talking about the shut-down of Muslim charities, that’s exactly the wrong approach. We don’t need to shut down Muslim charities; we need to open up charities that do good...in the Muslim world on behalf of America. That shows America’s goodwill towards the Muslim world. That will build stronger relations between the United States and the Muslim world. And that will lessen the threat. That will marginalize the bin Ladens and...empower the moderate communities.”³⁴

³¹ Salam al-Marayati interview, Al-Watan Al-Arabi, April 8, 2009. Translation available at:

<http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/380.pdf>

³² ISNA Dallas Conference. July 1-3, 2005; Session: “The Muslim Political Outreach Agenda,” July 1, 2005

³³ Renee Gadoua, “Muslim Vote’s Impact Weighed,” *The Post-Standard*, (Syracuse, NY) Oct. 12, 2004, reprinted at <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-123143102.html>

³⁴ MPAC National teleconference on “The Real World Impact of Epidemic of Hate Rhetoric in America,” August 15, 2012.

- In a March 2003 *Los Angeles Times* article, Marayati blasted the FBI for allegedly targeting people on the basis of race and religion. Ignoring several prominent terrorism cases across the country, he added, "That's what they've been doing since the attacks, and we don't know of any case that has resulted in the arrest, indictment or prosecution of a terrorist."³⁵
- Al-Marayati argued in a 2000 article entitled *Defining Terrorism for America: Jewish and Muslim Cases and their Readings by the American Public*,³⁶ that U.S. policies encourage: "Double standards in opinion—and policymaking vis-à-vis counterterrorism; it also exacerbates tensions in interfaith relations...biases the Middle East peace process, and intensifies the clash of civilizations between Islam and the West."

³⁵ H.G. Reza, "FBI Has a Pledge and a Request for Muslims," *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 2003.
<http://articles.latimes.com/2003/mar/16/local/me-mosques16>

³⁶ Salam al-Marayati, "Defining Terrorism for America: Jewish and Muslim Cases and Their Readings by the American Public," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Fall 2000. Available at:
<http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/378.pdf>