



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on September 18, 2019

## Robert O'Brien, Former Bush Official and Romney Advisor, Named National Security Advisor

Robert O'Brien (shown on left), who has been serving in the Trump administration as envoy for hostage affairs at the State Department, and was an official in the George W. Bush administration, as well as an advisor to the 2012 presidential campaign of Mitt Romney, has been selected by President Donald Trump to replace John Bolton as Trump's national security advisor.



It is reported that O'Brien was supported by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for the post.

"I am pleased to announce that I will name Robert C. O'Brien, currently serving as the very successful Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs at the State Department, as our new National Security Advisor," Trump announced in a Tweet on Wednesday morning. "I have worked long & hard with Robert. He will do a great job!"

Trump fired Bolton last week as national security advisor, arguing that Bolton and he had differed on several issues, and that Bolton did not get along well with other members of Trump's foreign policy team. Bolton, a noted neoconservative advocate of the use of military force to solve foreign-policy problems for the United States, was apparently at odds with Trump over how to respond to Iranian actions in the Middle East, and about how quickly to get out of Afghanistan.

Trump praised O'Brien for his work in freeing U.S. rapper A\$AP Rocky earlier this year, who had been imprisoned in Sweden. O'Brien has been highly supportive of Trump's foreign-policy moves in public, praising Trump's "unparalleled success in bringing Americans home [from being held hostage, or being detained] without paying concessions."

Most observers believe that the selection of O'Brien signals the growing dominance of Secretary of State Pompeo in influencing Trump's foreign policies, and a corresponding diminishment of the role of national security advisor. While in some past administrations the national security advisor rivaled, or even surpassed, the influence of the secretary of state (such as Henry Kissinger in the Nixon administration), the clout of the person holding the national security advisor position has waned in recent years.

According to a report by CNN, Trump was looking for a national security advisor who agreed with his "overarching view that the United States should limit its activities abroad."

O'Brien is not listed as a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), an organization that generally promotes American interventionism. However, O'Brien has certainly been involved in American foreign policy in the past. President George W. Bush named O'Brien as an alternate representative to the United Nations General Assembly, where he served from 2005 through 2006. In a review of O'Brien's book, *While America Slept: Restoring American Leadership to a World in Crisis*, for the journal *Foreign Policy* in 2016, Daniel Runde, was mildly critical that O'Brien had not supported a



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greater role for the UN. Still, Runde concluded that O'Brien was someone "who should be entrusted with great responsibilities." Generally speaking, *Foreign Policy's* articles are very similar to those found in *Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the globalist CFR.

In the review of O'Brien's book, Runde wrote that O'Brien "writes from a series of beliefs and assumptions that I also hold: a deep belief in American Exceptionalism, that peace comes through strength, that the United States is stronger when it partners with its allies and when America is a reliable friend to its allies, that the greatness of America comes from a people that respect tradition and the rule of law, and that (yes) we are the good guys and there are some bad guys out there."

The book stresses the concerns that O'Brien has about what he calls our "hollow military force," our weakened Navy, and the dangers of China and Islamic extremism.

In October 2011, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, then a candidate for the Republican nomination for president in 2012, named O'Brien to his Foreign Policy and National Security Advisory team. Romney tapped O'Brien to co-chair the International Organizations Work Group. Finally, in 2015, then-Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, who was making his own bid for the Republican presidential nomination for 2016, asked O'Brien to advise him on foreign policy and national security affairs. In 2007, Bush made him the co-chair of the U.S. State Department's Public-Private Partnership for Justice Reform in Afghanistan, which was begun at the initiative of then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

O'Brien was critical of President Barack Obama's Iran nuclear deal.

O'Brien is a graduate of UCLA, where he also received his law degree.

It remains to be seen if O'Brien will be a substantive improvement over the interventionist tendencies of John Bolton, but it is hard to see how he could be worse.

Photo of Robert O'Brien: [U.S. Department of State](#)

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