Mamdani appoints top DNC and Obama adviser in bid to secure Democratic Party establishment support

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11 July 2025

Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the winner of last month's Democratic primary for New York City mayor, has responded to the wave of threats and denunciations from Donald Trump and sections of the ruling class by further entrenching his campaign within the Democratic Party establishment and the trade union bureaucracy.

Mamdani has announced major additions to his campaign team, including former Democratic National Committee (DNC) Political Director Jeffrey Lerner as communications director and Deandra Khan, a top official from Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 32BJ, to the campaign's political team.

A *New York Times* article published Wednesday portrayed Mamdani's expanded campaign team as a major step toward securing support within the Democratic Party, as he prepares to face incumbent Mayor Eric Adams and former Governor Andrew Cuomo—both running as independents—in the November mayoral election.

Lerner served in the Obama administration from 2009 to 2011 as White House southern political director before moving to the DNC to lead political strategy for Obama's 2012 reelection campaign.

Lerner was also communications director for Andrew Cuomo when Cuomo was New York State attorney general under governors Eliot Spitzer and David Paterson. He has occupied top positions at major public relations firms Actum, LLC and Dan Klores Communications (DKC), and served as a senior adviser to California Senator Laphonza Butler from 2023 to 2024.

The *Times* article notes, "In the Obama White House

and at the DNC, [Lerner] worked closely with Patrick Gaspard, a senior party official who has played a growing role advising Mr. Mamdani." Gaspard served as Obama's ambassador to South Africa, White House director of political affairs and executive director of the DNC from 2011 to 2013.

Gaspard was also president of the George Soros-connected Open Society Foundation from 2017 to 2020. He publicly endorsed Mamdani earlier this month and has previously advised his campaign.

Khan is a labor and political strategist who has served as political director and senior adviser to the president of 32BJ SEIU, one of the largest property service unions in the US, representing tens of thousands of janitors, building superintendents, doormen, porters, and maintenance workers.

In 2021, Khan was named to City & State New York's "40 under 40" list for her role in the union apparatus. Her career is emblematic of a broader trend: proposing token reforms in an era in which the pro-corporate labor bureaucracy is completely hostile to the interests of rank-and-file workers.

Since his primary victory, Mamdani has faced a coordinated campaign to block his election from both the Republican fascist right and major sections of the Democratic Party. Donald Trump has repeatedly attacked Mamdani on social media, calling him a "100 percent Communist Lunatic," questioning his citizenship, and threatening to block his reelection though unspecified means.

A number of prominent Democrats, including Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida and Laura Gillen of New York, have smeared Mamdani as "antisemitic" in response to his opposition to the Israeli genocide in

Gaza.

The vicious hostility to the Mamdani campaign from dominant sections of the ruling class is motivated by fear over the broad opposition to inequality and US imperialist policy that underlies his upset victory. New York City is gripped by a deepening social crisis, with over two million residents—one in four—living in poverty, nearly twice the national average. Child poverty has reached 26 percent, while median rents have surged to a record $3,900 per month.

Mandani's own response, expressing the politics of the DSA, has been to accommodate his program to big business and shift further to the right. In interviews following the election, Mamdani stressed that he has a "vision... for every single New Yorker, including business leaders."

The hiring of Lerner signals a strategic deepening of ties with the Democratic Party establishment. The appointment of Khan is also significant, as the leadership of New York's union bureaucracy coalesces around his candidacy.

This is further underscored by the earlier endorsement by UAW President Shawn Fain, who has echoed Trump's nationalist rhetoric by backing tariffs and denouncing "free trade." Mamdani's praise for Fain signals his alignment with the union bureaucracy's efforts to funnel working class opposition behind the Democratic Party collaborators with Trump.

The vote for Mamdani in the Democratic primary reflects a broad shift to the left among workers and youth, driven by growing anger over inequality, war and the repression of democratic rights.

In the two weeks since his victory, Mamdani has moved rapidly to court the Democratic Party establishment and present himself as a reliable defender of capitalist stability. This trajectory expresses the essential function of the Democratic Socialists of America, which exists to channel mass opposition back into the dead end of the Democratic Party and smother it.