



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on August 16, 2011

Israeli-Palestinian Debate Enters GOP Presidential Race

As the GOP 2012 presidential campaign evolves, foreign policy issues will become more and more relevant, particularly as pro-Israel candidates debate Palestine's venture for membership into the United Nations. Although domestic issues will continue to play a central role in the debate — largely due to the economy's prolonged comatose state — Palestinian leaders' request for U.N. membership serves a new recipe for the GOP campaign plate.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will [introduce](#) Palestine's application to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon before the general assembly convenes on September 20. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office [said](#) that the Palestinian request was "expected and regrettable," and that "Netanyahu still believes that only through direct and honest negotiations — not through unilateral decisions — will it be possible to advance the peace process."

In the following weeks GOP candidates may be put under the foreign policy spotlight, as the media demands a public position on Palestine's surge for U.N. membership. The degree of Israeli support from GOP candidates may hold considerable political weight, because many conservatives view unwavering loyalty to Israel as a requirement for a GOP candidacy.

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In an op-ed last week, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich [urged](#) that Obama threaten to slash all U.N. funding if Palestine's membership is approved. In the article, Gingrich expressed skepticism about President Obama's stance on the issue:

While the Administration says it opposes this scheme at the U.N., President Obama did not help the situation when he became the first president in American history to side publicly with the Palestinians against Israel in demanding that Israel retreat to its 1967 borders, rather than have borders determined through negotiations.

In spite of the U.N.'s totally dishonest approach to Israel, President Obama apparently retains faith in what is clearly a corrupt organization. The Administration's commitment to "multilateralism" at the U.N. is nothing more than appeasement.

President Obama and the State Department must be clear with Western allies. They should reject action that would reward terrorist groups who refuse to abide by the basic principles of human dignity and freedom.





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GOP candidate Herman Cain has posed concerns about a Palestinian threat to Israeli sovereignty. Following Obama's endorsement of a return to 1967 Israeli-Palestinian borders, Cain accused Obama of throwing Israel "under the bus."

Newcomer to the GOP presidential race, Texas Gov. Rick Perry has also criticized Obama's "incoherent" foreign policy decisions. "Our president has insulted our friends and he's encouraged our enemies, thumbing his nose at traditional allies like Israel," Perry asserted over the weekend. "He seeks to dictate new borders for the Middle East and the oldest democracy there, Israel, while he is an abject failure in his constitutional duty to protect our borders in the United States."

Some critics suggest Perry is the strongest Israel supporter of all the candidates, as his devotion to Israel stems back to his early days of politics. One of Perry's first political initiatives after being elected agriculture commissioner in 1991 was his direct [involvement](#) in the "Texas Israel Exchange" program, which promoted joint technology research in agriculture and natural resources. During an interview with the *Jerusalem Post* in August 2009, Perry [stated](#), "I'm a big believer that this country was given to the people of Israel a long time ago, by God, and that's ordained."

President Obama's "1967 boundaries" speech in May welcomed criticism from several GOP candidates, including Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.), former Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Penn.), and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney. CNSNews.com [reported](#):

Romney's site says his foreign policy would include "bolster[ing] our support for Israel, which has always been and will continue to be our strongest ally in the Middle East."

Bachmann on her site states, "We have a President who tells our true friend, Israel, that it must surrender its right to defensible borders to appease forces that have never recognized that nation's right to exist."

"We must support sovereign democracies under terrorist threats, including Israel, a staunch ally and strategic asset under an ever-growing threat from terrorist forces and hostile nations," says Rep. Thaddeus McCotter (Mich.) on his campaign site. "While we support a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians, we must not dictate any terms of the agreement or force our ally to directly or indirectly negotiate with terrorists like Hamas."

Of all the candidates, pro-Israel critics find Rep. Ron Paul's (R-Texas) stance on the Middle East the most questionable. And Paul's constitutionalist views on foreign policy — less intervention, less foreign aid — might easily be misconstrued as being anti-Israel, rather than a continuation of the noninterventionist foreign policy advocated by George Washington in his farewell address.

Many Jewish organizations, both Republican and Democratic, wildly accuse Paul's political views as being pro-Palestine, largely because of his efforts to defund Israel, among other nations. But critics overlook Paul's libertarian and non-interventionist ideology, which opposes *all* foreign aid. "I am not the only one who can see the absurdities of our foreign policy," Paul said in May, responding to Obama's "1967 boundaries" speech. "We give \$3 billion to Israel and \$12 billion to her enemies. Most Americans know that makes no sense."

Since last Thursday's GOP debate in Iowa, Paul has taken heat for suggesting that Iran has the right to obtain a nuclear bomb. But Paul's assertion was a relatively neutral argument. He was simply arguing that the U.S. should not continue to meddle in Iran's internal affairs — or any country's for that matter — for both fiscal and interventionist reasons. "It's time to quit this," he [proclaimed](#). "It's trillions of dollars we are spending."



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In defense of Paul's political record and his comments during Thursday's debate, [RonPaul.com](#) presented the case that Paul is more pro-Israel than any of the other GOP candidates. First, the website notes, Paul is a pillar for state sovereignty, meaning he would not prevent Israel from defending her interests in any way necessary. For instance, when Israel attacked a nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981, Paul was one of the few dissenters in Congress who voted against the condemnation of Israel. Simply put, Paul advocates the unadulterated right to self-determination — for *all* nations.

Further, RonPaul.com argues that Paul's emphasis on state sovereignty would not deny Israel's right to militarily defend itself if Iran did in fact obtain nuclear weapons, a notion that even some Republicans would not uphold. The website's authors note that Israeli assassination squads are already present in Iran, and while "several Iranian nuclear scientists found themselves torn apart by mysterious explosions over the past few years," Ron Paul did not advocate interference.

In conclusion, the authors write:

Like it or not, Ron Paul is the most pro-Israel candidate out there. His wise policies — not by design, but by pure logical consequence — will permit Israel to blossom as a truly free, independent and powerful state.



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