**Obama vs. Romney: The Jewish debate**

By Alina Dain Sharon/JointMedia News Service

On May 5, President Barack Obama kicked off his re-election campaign in front of a crowd of 14,000 people at Ohio State University. Obama presented his new campaign slogan, “Forward,” and strongly criticized his presumed Republican opponent Mitt Romney.

Sixty-one percent of respondents in a recent American Jewish Committee (AJC) survey said they would vote for Obama, who garnered 78 percent of the Jewish vote in the 2008 presidential election. Now that a Romney-Obama matchup in November is all but inevitable, JointMedia News Service compares Obama’s record from his first term with Romney’s views and campaign statements on the most important issues to the Jewish community.

**ISRAEL & THE CONFLICT**

**Obama:**

“There should not be a shred of doubt right now: When the chips are down, I have Israel’s back,” the president said at the 2012 AIPAC conference in response to ongoing criticism that his policies regarding the Jewish state and the conflict with the Palestinians are shaky.

On the one hand, Obama had publically opposed last September’s unilateral Palestinian bid for statehood recognition at the United Nations and approved nearly $1 billion for Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense program. However, he also endorsed a solution to the conflict with the Palestinians based on “the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps,” which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said is dangerous to Israel’s security. Obama has also criticized Jewish building in the West Bank.

Under Obama’s administration, the U.S. State Department has refused to publically recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. “Our policy with regard to Jerusalem is that it has to be solved through negotiations,” State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland recently said.

**Romney:**

In the wake Obama’s 1967 borders statement, Romney said that Obama has thrown Israel under the bus, indicating he agrees that such borders will pose a security risk for the Jewish state. Furthermore, “it is disrespectful of Israel for America to dictate negotiating terms to our ally,” Romney said.

Romney has also said that the relationship between the U.S. and Israel should be one of support and not criticism, since Israel is “a nation which shares our values and is our best friend in the Middle East.” He also believes it is not the duty of the U.S. to dictate to Israel where it should have its American embassy. Currently, the embassy is in Tel Aviv because Jerusalem is not internationally recognized as Israel’s capital. “My inclination is to follow the guidance of our ally Israel, as to where our facilities and embassies would exist,” he said.

However, Romney has not explicitly acknowledged support for Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel.

**IRAN**

**Obama:**

“I think both the Iranian and the Israeli governments recognize that when the United States says it is unacceptable for Iran to have a nuclear weapon, we mean what we say,” Obama has previously said regarding Iran.

The Obama administration is primarily focused on using diplomatic sanctions against Iran. Obama has said such sanctions would strike “at the heart” of Iran’s nuclear ability. “We are showing the Iranian government that its actions have consequences, and if it persists, the pressure will continue to mount, and its isolation will continue to deepen.” In fact since 2010 the president signed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010, as well as other sanctions, all of which targeted Iran’s international banking and oil sale abilities.

With regard to a military solution to the conflict, Obama had warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against prematurely attacking the country. As to his own administration, “as part of my solemn obligation to the American people, I only use force when the time and circumstances demand it. And I know that Israeli leaders also know all too well the costs and consequences of war, even as they recognize their obligation to defend their country,” Obama has said.

**Romney:**

Romney calls for another round of tough diplomatic sanctions on the country targeting the financial resources of the Iranian regime, as well as placing more restrictions on the Central Bank of Iran and all business activities of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. If the United Nations cannot lead these sanctions due to vetoes from major world nations like Russia or China, the U.S. must be ready to lead with the support of as many governments as it can muster.

However Romney believes that sanctions will only be effective if they are buttressed by a concrete military presence in the region. According to his campaign website, this should begin with restoring the presence of U.S. aircraft carrier task forces in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf region, repairing relations with Israel, increasing military coordination with Arab allies and conducting more naval exercises to demonstrate American military strength to the region. “Only if Iran understands that the United States is utterly determined when we say that their nuclear-weapons program is unacceptable is there a possibility that they will give up their nuclear aspirations peacefully.” Romney has also promised to "take every measure necessary to check the evil regime of the ayatollahs.”

**THE ARAB SPRING & SYRIA**

**Obama:**

In this year’s State of the Union address, Obama emphasized that “a wave of change has washed across the Middle East and North Africa, from Tunis to Cairo; from Sana’a to Tripoli. A year ago, [Muammar] Gaddafi was one of the world’s longest-serving dictators—a murderer with American blood on his hands. Today, he is gone.” However, Obama also said that the final outcome of the “Arab Spring” remains uncertain. Even so, he pledged more than $800 million in assistance to countries engulfed in these revolutions.

“We will advocate for those values that have served our own country so well. We will stand against violence and intimidation. We will stand for the rights and dignity of all human beings,” Obama said, adding that Syria’s Assad regime “will soon discover that the forces of change can’t be reversed, and that human dignity can’t be denied.”

However, recent estimates put the total death toll since the Syrian conflict began at more than 11,000. The U.S. government has not yet intervened militarily, even though it had intervened in Libya just months earlier, citing UN vetoes by major countries like Russia.

Obama did recently announce his intention to extend a national state of emergency over Syria for another year, which will allow him to continue placing a variety of sanctions on the country. In March he announced that the U.S. government will provide direct humanitarian and communications assistance to the Syrian opposition.

**Romney:**

Romney has said that the “Arab Spring” has spun out of control. “We’re all very happy that a very bad guy in Moammar Gadhafi was killed, but…how can we try and improve the odds so…that the developments are toward democracy, modernity and more representative forms of government? This we simply don’t know,” he said in October 2011.

Romney’s official website statement on the Middle East addresses the concern that rather than evolving into democracies, these Middle Eastern revolutions could lead to radical Islamist regimes: “The Romney administration will strive to ensure that the Arab Spring is not followed by an Arab Winter.” Romney’s campaign claims that the U.S. government will “make available technical assistance to governments and transitional bodies to promote democracy, good governance, and sound financial management” under his leadership.

As for Syria, “the United States must recognize Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad for what he is: an unscrupulous dictator, a killer, and a proxy for Iran,” according to Romney. He argues for increased pressure on the UN to act and collaborate with Saudi Arabia and Turkey against the Syrian regime, and to make it clear that the U.S. and its allies will support the Syrian opposition when it will be building a post-Assad government. However, Romney said at a news conference in March that he too is “not favoring military involvement, direct military involvement by the United States” at the current stage.

**JONATHAN POLLARD**

**Obama:**

Various groups have called on the president to grant clemency Jonathan Pollard, who was convicted of spying for Israel in 1987, arguing that Pollard’s life sentence is disproportionate to sentences given to others serving time for espionage. In April of this year, Israeli President Shimon Peres wrote a letter entreating Obama to release Pollard. The White House responded that “regarding Mr. Pollard the administration’s position has not changed.”

**Romney:**

When it comes to Pollard, Romney seems to be undecided on whether he deserves a presidential pardon, though he has said he is “open to examining” the issue.

*Information and quotations in this report taken from Mittromney.com, Politico.com, Washington Post, Yedioth Ahronoth, Israel Hayom, BBC, Huffington Post, Fox News, Israel National News, Whitehouse.gov, CBS, New York Times, Israeltoday.co.il, jonathanpollard.org and Freebeacon.com.*