



DNC 2016 Platform: In denial over Mideast challenges, Dispensable Language on Israel

By Joe Macaron

July 28, 2016

Like every partisan document in a tense prelude to national elections, the 2016 Democratic platform reflected the party's status quo with presidential nominee Hillary Clinton taking the foreign policy mantle from President Barack Obama while putting her own stamp on how the party views global challenges. However, the [platform](#) language on the Middle East reflected how difficult it is for Democrats, as the incumbent party in office, to address the daunting international challenges.

Besides former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, no speaker at the Democratic Convention this week spoke directly and thoroughly about foreign policy challenges. Yet, if compared to the GOP platform, the DNC document included a significant mention of the Middle East. The platform identified a list of global threats including terrorism, Syria, Iran and Russia, with no mention however of the debacle in either Iraq or Libya.

Defeating ISIL

The suggested strategy to defeat the Islamic State (ISIL) in Syria, Iraq and Libya included three elements. First, dismantling the global network of terror. Second, improving US intelligence capabilities. And third, investing more resources in homeland security. Two noteworthy points were also mentioned; the need to “press the Gulf countries and local forces on the ground” to take a more active part in the fight against ISIL and update the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) without demanding “large-scale combat deployment” of US troops.

The platform attacked Trump's foreign policy approach and rejected his “vilification of Muslims” and his calls upon the military to reinstate torture as an investigation tool. Interestingly, Democrats also rejected “Trump's willingness to mire tens of thousands of our combat troops in another misguided ground war in the Middle East,” even though the Republican nominee is running on a non-interventionist and anti-war rhetoric, including opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Absent Issues

Two important issues were understandably absent from the document, first the use of drones by the Obama Administration as a key tool in the fight against ISIL, a contentious issue with the progressive wing of the party. Second, the current chaos in Libya, in particular the September 2012 attack on the US consulate in Benghazi during Hillary Clinton's tenure as Secretary of State. On Syria, the platform offered no new policy recommendation beyond stating the need to have a political transition that ends the rule of President Bashar Assad, however it did not refer to the coordination between Washington and Moscow nor the Iranian intervention in Syria.

The Iran Deal

The platform reiterated support for the Iran nuclear deal and rejected Trump's views that the US "should walk away from a deal that peacefully dismantles Iran's nuclear program," while hinting that Democrats under Clinton "will not hesitate to take military action if Iran races" toward developing a nuclear weapon. It also talked about "the detrimental role" of Iran in the region, in particular its support for Hamas and Hezbollah, and called on "robustly" enforcing the non-nuclear sanctions against Tehran.

Russia and Global Partners

The language on Russia was timely as the Clinton campaign accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of intervening to impact the outcome of the US presidential elections while Trump encouraged more hacking of DNC emails, even though he backed away from this statement within 24 hours noting he was being "sarcastic." The platform affirmed that Russia is "propping up the Assad regime in Syria, which is brutally attacking its own citizens" and warned from Trump's overturning "more than 50 years of American foreign policy by abandoning NATO partners."

In another rebuff to Trump, the Democrats' platform praised globalization and affirmed that multilateral organizations "have a powerful role to play and are an important amplifier of American strength and influence." On free trade deals, Sanders delegates had their way, with the platform noting that these deals "often boosted the profits of large corporations." The document stated, "We will oppose trade agreements that do not support good American jobs, raise wages, and improve our national security," in direct reference to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that President Obama is seeking to pass in the US Congress before the end of his term.

Lack of Democratic unity on Israel

Even though Israel is no longer a focal point of developments in the Middle East nor is it actually facing any tangible threats, the Democratic platform extensively addressed the issue. However, unlike the GOP platform, Democrats elaborated on Israel's right to defend itself and retain its qualitative military edge, while opposing any effort to "delegitimize Israel, including at the United Nations or through" the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement.

On the two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the platform emphasized a negotiated solution designed to produce "a secure and democratic Jewish state with recognized borders and provides Palestinians with independence, sovereignty and dignity." However, there was no reference to the Palestinians' right to have control of their own security. The platform noted that Jerusalem should remain "the undivided capital" of Israel, however a phrase was added highlighting that "Jerusalem is a matter for final status negotiations." There was also no mention of the Gaza siege or the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Senator Bernie Sanders' delegates on the platform committee [wanted](#) the Democratic Party to walk away from the outspoken American support of Israel, however, unlike their success on economic issues, their efforts on foreign policy have failed in the face of resistance from the Clinton camp.

Even though Clinton as Secretary of State had different views from Obama on Egypt and Syria, among other issues, she has yet to offer a new path in addressing national security challenges. While the platform moved to the left on domestic issues, it has stayed at the center on foreign policy and gave the clear impression that a potential Clinton Administration will more or less continue the same policy outlook of the Obama Administration.