



The Two Presidential Candidates and Their Middle East Policies

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October 6, 2016*

Most voters almost never decide a presidential election based on foreign policy, but Clinton is one of the leaders of the centrist Democratic foreign policy establishment, and that fact should generate interest among US voters. So far, the candidates have focused on Iran, Israel and ISIS and few other foreign policy issues which are important to US national security and strategic interests. For example, how do the candidates view the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy toward Syria; US relations with key GCC allies, like Saudi Arabia, just to mention a few.

The discussion of foreign policy in this campaign is not just a matter of politics and soundbites. Foreign policy, particularly US policy toward the Middle East, given the regional instability, will be significant for the next Administration, whether it is Clinton or Trump.

Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Clinton vs. Trump

Presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton have outlined their foreign policy priorities over the course of their campaigns, and much of it has centered around the Middle East. Strategies for defeating ISIS both at home and abroad, the future of relations with Iran, and the US relationship with Israel have been some of the prominent topics over the past few months. Clinton and Trump certainly agree on some aspects of Middle East policy. They both want to see some of the same tactics to combat ISIS in Syria, such as airstrikes and more robust intelligence gathering, and are both highly vocal in their support of Israel. However, while Clinton has a track record of policies, stances, and opinions about the region, Trump spends most of his time attacking Clinton and Obama for failed policies and very little time explaining his own ideas. Nonetheless, below is an outline of the policy prescriptions Clinton and Trump have offered for the Middle East.

Israel and Palestine

There is very little daylight between Clinton and Trump on the issue of Palestine and Israel. Trump and Clinton are both vocal in their support of Israel. Both support increasing military assistance to Israel and support Israel's illegal settlement activity.

Clinton: While Clinton gives lip service to a two-state solution, it remains unclear if she is willing to expend the political capital necessary to achieve a successful agreement leading to an independent Palestinian state. Much will depend on who she appoints as her Secretary of State; but will he or she be willing to put in the hard work and time needed to resolve this issue?

Clinton said that, if president, she would increase support for Israeli missile-defense systems, and is vocal about the importance of the close security alliance between the two countries. Clinton is an outspoken defender of Israel and has strong ties to American Jews. She was an early supporter of Israel's right to build a "security barrier," joined Palestinian Media Watch in exposing alleged "anti-Semitic biases in Palestinian schools," and cosponsored the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act in 2006. In 1999, during her Senate campaign, she committed to be an advocate for moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem. Clinton also supported Israel's attack on Gaza in 2014, but later conceded that Palestinians are occupied and denied dignity and self-determination.

Trump: Trump said that, as president, he would have a better chance than anybody of making a deal between Israel and Palestine, and that he would remain neutral in those conversations. He claimed to support a two-state solution, but the Palestinian Authority has to recognize Israel's right to exist. More recently, Trump has been told by his advisors to abandon all hope of a two-state solution. Trump has now amended his position, affirming that he is highly supportive of Israel. Following his September 26 meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Trump said he would move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, a direct contradiction of long-standing US policy.

Despite these campaign pledges no President has kept the promise of moving the US Embassy once in office.

Syria and Fighting ISIS

Both Trump and Clinton have voiced support for conducting coalition military operations to destroy ISIS, to try and cut off its funding, and to expand intelligence sharing to defeat ISIS online. They also have both said they would support the creation of safe zones in Syria, both support an air campaign, and do not want to see more ground troops in the region. They have also both said that defeating ISIS is the priority, and that dealing with Assad will have to wait. Clinton and Trump both support pressuring the Gulf States to do more to fight ISIS.



Trump however, remains vague about his policy to defeat ISIS because he does not want “enemies to know it.” He has said he would convene a meeting of the generals and listen to their recommendation, but ultimately do it his way, not defining what his way would be. Trump does not support military action to remove Bashar Assad from power, apparently believing Syria is better off with Assad.

Clinton has presented a more comprehensive account of her foreign policy regarding ISIS, detailing policies in Iraq and Syria meant to stabilize the two countries and defeat ISIS. She supports defeating ISIS through an intelligence surge, an increase in coalition air strikes, and a ground campaign supported by US Special Forces, and led by Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds. Clinton also will focus on cutting off ISIS financing and networking; and updating UN terrorism sanctions. She also would push the Gulf States to contribute more to fighting ISIS. Unlike President Obama, Clinton supports military action to remove Assad from power. She has said she would order a full review of US strategy in Syria as one of her first priorities if elected President.

Syria/Role of Russia

Trump believes the US should play a role in defeating ISIS, but wants to give Russia more flexibility to control outcomes in Syria than Clinton does – stating he has no desire for the US to get bogged down in the region. Trump has not articulated a clear position on a no-fly zone.

Clinton thinks there is an important role for Russia in resolving the crisis in Syria, but thinks that right now, Putin is making things worse. She would want to more carefully control and coordinate Russian activity in Syria. Clinton clearly supports a no-fly zone in Syria.

Fighting ISIS at Home

In terms of combatting ISIS in the US, **Trump** advocates developing a Commission on Radical Islam, which would explain to the American public the core beliefs of radical Islam, to help them identify signs of radicalization. **Such a commission would undoubtedly promote profiling against Muslim communities.** He is also in favor of keeping Guantanamo open, and has suggested changing international rules that forbid the military from using torture.

Clinton's priorities for combatting terror at home are quite different. She supports closing Guantanamo. She supports better gun laws so that terrorists are unable to acquire firearms, and

wants to build stronger relationships between the government and Muslim communities. She also supports keeping current restrictions on National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance. Unlike Trump, she supports the continued prohibition on harsh interrogation techniques.

Arming Moderate Forces

In Iraq, *Clinton* believes that there needs to be a “second Sunni awakening” and that the US should pressure the government to arm Sunni and Kurdish forces in the fight against ISIS - noting that if Baghdad will not do so, the international coalition should do so directly.

Trump has a different position, stating that the US does not know who makes up these forces, therefore, the US should not arm them. He wants to work closely with other nations such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia instead but like most of his pronouncements, has provided no specifics.

Immigration

Trump has made immigration the signature issue of his campaign. He supports an ideological screening test to let people in the country. He opposes the entry into the US of people (i.e., Muslims) who have hostile attitudes towards the US and its principles, people who believe Sharia law should supplant US law, and people who support bigotry and hatred. He has also said immigration from some of the most dangerous regions of the world, with a history of exporting terrorism, should be temporarily suspended. Trump thinks refugee vetting should be much more stringent, with more screening procedures.

Clinton, in contrast, believes the US Government should work more closely with Muslim community leaders, and supports admitting 65,000 Syrian refugees, after they are vetted and screened. Trump is adamantly opposed to her plan for refugee admittance.



Relationships with Regional Players

Iran

Clinton supports the Iran Deal, but has been vocal about Iran's violation of the UN Security Council resolutions through the testing of ballistic missiles, and supports new sanctions for violations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). While her views on Iran are more hawkish than President Obama's she wants to improve the US relationship with Iran over time. However, she has said her approach toward Iran will be one of "distrust and verify."

After vowing to tear up the Iran nuclear deal, Trump has taken a softer position. He now says he would renegotiate the deal and seek more concessions from Iran. So far, he has not provided any specifics on how he intends to renegotiate the agreement.

Egypt

Trump said the US should not have supported the overthrow of Mubarak. Trump has spoken about his admiration of al-Sisi and a host of other authoritarian leaders, including Putin. Mohamed Ahmed, an Egypt researcher for Amnesty International, recently stated that he heard that Trump will be supporting Sisi in the so-called fight against terrorism and this will lead to cracking down more on human rights, leading to a massive deterioration in the human-rights situation in Egypt.

Clinton believes the US abandoned Mubarak too readily. While the Egyptian uprising was destabilizing for the region, the US has decided it will work with al-Sisi. Clinton is unlikely to make any policy changes with regard to Egypt, but could press Egypt on its democracy and human rights performance.

Saudi Arabia

Trump believes Saudi Arabia should reimburse the United States monetarily in exchange for the protection the US provides them under defense cooperation agreements. He has accused the Kingdom of being another country that is "ripping off the US." He claims that without the US Saudi Arabia would not exist for long. Clearly, he does not seem to understand the importance of the US-Saudi strategic relationship. The next Administration will find US-Saudi relations strained

due to the Iran agreement and more recently the congressional veto override of the Justice against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA).

Clinton has a fairly positive relationship with Saudi Arabia, and despite some concerns about its human rights record, and military action in Yemen, recognizes the importance of the bilateral relationship and the need to soothe tensions in the bilateral relationship. She also supports increased defense and security cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the other GCC States to protect the GCC States against Iranian hegemony. Opponents of the Saudi military action in Yemen believe that under a Clinton Administration, the US policy of enabling Saudi Arabia to conduct widespread human right violations in Yemen will likely increase.