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## The 2012 Presidential Election and American Foreign Policy in the Middle East

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## ABSTRACT

The United States presidential election this November comes at an important moment for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The Arab uprisings have delivered new governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen that necessitate reconsidered U.S. policy. The uprising in Syria has devolved into civil war, and the international community has stalemated in response. The international conflict over Iran's nuclear program has not been resolved, and opinion diverges over whether to continue negotiation or pursue military solutions.

The evolving political landscape in the region will, over the next four years, pose new challenges to American foreign policy and demand creative policy solutions. Both President Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney are prepared to face the challenges of a new Middle East, yet the two candidates articulate markedly different policy visions for the region. This analysis uses the candidates' policies and foreign policy statements about select countries in the region to clarify their preferred approaches to the Middle East. It also addresses how these past policies and statements may affect policies in the next presidential term. Finally, the report closes with an investigation of the candidates' differing visions of the international sphere and the U.S.'s proper place in that world.

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## THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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## CONTENTS

IRAN | 3

SYRIA | 7

EGYPT AND THE ARAB UPRISINGS | 10

ISRAEL | 13

BAHRAIN | 16

YEMEN | 19

TURKEY | 20

NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE STRATEGY | 23

THE UNITED STATES' ROLE IN THE WORLD | 28

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# THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The United States presidential election in November comes at a crucial moment in world affairs, particularly in the Middle East. The year-long uprising in Syria has devolved into civil war. The conflict between Iran, on the one hand, and the U.S., Europe, and Israel, on the other, has not been diffused. The transition of power in Iraq and the planned force reduction in Afghanistan suggest that both countries will continue to experience marked change. The future of relations with new governments in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen must be reshaped.

Beyond these specific challenges, the evolving political landscape in the region as a whole ensures that American foreign policy in the Middle East will continue to be active. Given Turkey's position as an influential regional power and NATO member, the results of the presidential election are of great interest and import. The election's effect on Turkey is especially pronounced with the close bilateral and multi-lateral relations developed in recent years.

Both candidates are prepared to meet the challenge of fashioning a Middle East foreign policy, yet their respective visions differ significantly. A full treatment of how each candidate approaches the many varied issues facing the Middle East is essential to understanding the implications of this election. Outlining the respective visions of President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney provides insight into the ways the upcoming election might influence the Middle East in the coming years.

## IRAN

Fewer than three months after taking office, Obama announced a major policy shift regarding Iran's nuclear program. Unlike former President George W. Bush, who had demanded the cessation of nuclear enrichment as a precondition for negotiations,



Non-military solutions are Obama's preferred method; however, he has remained steadfast that "all options are on the table," including military strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Obama declared that the administration was willing to talk with Iran "without preconditions." When Iranian citizens engaged in large street demonstrations in June 2009 to protest election tampering in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's reelection bid, Obama proceeded cautiously. News reports cited the President's concern that he would jeopardize his administration's overtures to Iran to enter nuclear negotiations. As the Khamenei regime cracked down on protestors with violence and eventually suppressed the Green Movement, Obama initially expressed that he was "deeply troubled" by the regime's actions and waited one full week before condemning the crackdown. Besides these statements, Obama remained mostly on the sidelines.<sup>1</sup> He drew withering criticism for what many saw as a missed opportunity to support the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people.

By 2010, Obama recognized that his preferred policy was ineffectual and shifted course. Offers of negotiations without preconditions elicited no change from the Iranian regime. The UN Security Council ratified a fourth round of sanctions on Iran in June 2010, targeting mostly military purchases and transactions initiated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. and EU then independently approved additional sanctions on Iranian banking, investments, trade, and technology transfer.<sup>3</sup> Throughout 2011, the Obama administration and the EU led efforts to freeze Iranian assets, introduce crippling sanctions on the Iranian banking sector, and cease the purchase of oil from the regime. In part due to Obama's diplomacy and persistent calls for the toughest sanctions possible on the Iranian regime, the EU agreed to cease oil imports from Iran beginning in the summer of 2012.<sup>4</sup> Obama continues to use diplomacy and bilateral negotiations with allies to enact more pervasive sanctions against Iran.<sup>5</sup>

Non-military solutions are Obama's preferred method; however, he has remained steadfast that "all options are on the table," including military strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. Some critics have disputed the sincerity of Obama's commitment to the military option and argued that Obama has undermined the U.S.'s deterrence capability. These critics felt emboldened when Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta addressed Iran's nuclear program at the Brookings Institution's Saban Forum in December 2011. Panetta, in the question period after his speech, outlined the extensive difficulties and risks posed by a hypothetical attack on Iran, which many read—fairly or not—as an intimation that the administration was not serious about keeping its options open.<sup>6</sup> Obama hewed closely to his chosen phrase, reiterating many times that the

1. Borger, Julian. "Barack Obama: Administration willing to talk to Iran 'without preconditions.'" *Guardian* 21 Jan. 2009.  
MacAskill, Ewan. "Obama to drop uranium precondition for Iran nuclear talks." *Guardian* 14 Apr. 2009.

Sanger, David. "U.S. May Drop Key Condition for Talks With Iran." *New York Times* 13 Apr. 2009.

2. MacFarquahar, Neil. "U.N. Approves New Sanctions to Deter Iran." *New York Times* 9 Jun 2010.

3. "EU leaders approve fresh sanctions against Iran." *BBC*, 17 Jun 2010.

Bulley, Sarah. "EU, US Unilateral Sanctions Upset Russia." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* 18 Jun 2010.

Castle, Stephen. "Europe Imposes New Sanctions on Iran." *New York Times* 26 Jun 2010.

4. Castle, Stephen and Alan Cowell. "Europe and U.S. Tighten Vise of Sanctions on Iran." *New York Times* 23 Jan 2012.

5. Hornby, Lucy. "Geithner seeks Chinese support on Iran sanctions." *Reuters*, 10 Jan 2012.

6. "Remarks by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta at the Saban Center." U.S. Department of State. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, 2 Dec. 2011.

administration had taken no options off the table. At the same time, Obama and his top officials all made it very clear that the United States' emphasis, for the time being, is on diplomatic and economic pressure.

In April 2012, European Union High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Catherine Ashton began six-power talks with Iran to find a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear development. Through the first two meetings in Istanbul and Baghdad, the administration and its allies achieved little progress. In exchange for Iran ceasing enrichment of uranium to 20 percent and shipping out supplies, the six powers offered Iran nuclear fuel, isotopes for its medical reactor, and the easing of sanctions on civilian aircraft parts. The Iranians balked at this incremental deal, seeing recognition of its right to enrich and more sanctions relief as the big prizes. Some reports speculated that U.S. officials were considering a "go big" strategy that would eschew simple confidence measures in favor of a more comprehensive bargain.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, as talks proceeded to Moscow, U.S. officials did not propose a more comprehensive deal. In response to Iranian indications that it might be willing to stop 20 percent enrichment in exchange for an acknowledgement of its right to enrich, the six powers refused to codify such a right. Ashton did indicate openness on eliminating one U.S. and EU sanction set to take effect, but argued that sanctions would be removed in response to real change in the nature of Iran's program. Some within the six-power group argued that the Obama administration hardened its position between the Baghdad and Moscow round of talks.<sup>8</sup>

Still, the Obama administration has continued to support a diplomatic solution to the Iranian program, which has kept the six powers broadly aligned while enabling more expansive sanctions against Iran. On July 1, two new sanctions took effect—the European ban on Iranian oil and the injunction against Europe-based insurers covering the shipment of Iranian oil anywhere in the world. These sanctions complement existing ones in force by the U.S., creating a highly effective, multilateral sanctions regime the removal of which is Iran's top priority in negotiations.<sup>9</sup>

Romney's rhetoric suggests a considerable divide between his own preferred policies and the President's. In the Republican Presidential Primary Debate sponsored by CBS, *National Journal*, and the South Carolina Republican Party on November 12, 2011, Romney described Iran as Obama's "biggest failing." He criticized Obama's passivity during the 2009 Green Movement protests and the President's inability to attain Russia's cooperation despite the massive foreign policy concessions the Obama administration delivered.<sup>10</sup> In June 2012, Romney suggested that Obama was more concerned with Israeli military action against Iran than he was with Iran becoming a nuclear power.<sup>11</sup>

In response to Iranian indications that it might be willing to stop 20 percent enrichment in exchange for an acknowledgement of its right to enrich, the six powers refused to codify such a right.

7. Rozen, Laura. "US Mulls Seeking Broader Deal In Nuclear Talks With Iran." *Al Monitor* 7 Jun. 2012.

8. Rozen, Laura. "US seen hardening its position in Iran nuclear talks." *The Backchannel*. Backchannel.al-monitor.com, 27 Jun. 2012.

9. Rozen, Laura. "Iran Seeks Sustained Dialogue." *The Backchannel*. Backchannel.al-monitor.com, 4 Jul. 2012.

10. Republican Presidential Primary Debate. CBS News, *National Journal*, and South Carolina Republican Party. Spartanburg, South Carolina, 12 Nov. 2011. Transcript via Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/republi-can-debate-transcript-south-carolina-november-2011/p26540>

11. Liptak, Kevin. "Romney calls Obama weak on nuclear Iran." *Political Ticker*. CNN.com, 17 Jun. 2012.

If Romney is elected with the promise that Iran will not get a nuclear weapon, how might this change the Iranian regime's calculus?

Yet in terms of policy, Romney's specific proposals have broadly aligned with those articulated by the Obama administration. He expressed in the primary debates the need to hit Iran with "crippling sanctions." He said that the Obama administration should have built a credible threat of military action without describing the way in which the President's "all options on the table" formulation was not credible and without defending the effectiveness of additional threats.<sup>12</sup> Romney advisers have noted that negotiated solutions are the preferred course of action—something the Obama administration has pursued in the six-power negotiations.<sup>13</sup>

Romney aides claim that the Obama administration has gone out of its way to degrade the threat of military options, citing Panetta's willingness to discuss the military option's risks. These advisers argue that by addressing the risks, Panetta failed to preserve the appearance of a severe threat, thereby making a negotiated solution impossible.<sup>14</sup> Romney also supports working with Iranian opposition figures to actively encourage regime change. On this point, he does not elaborate on how to accomplish this objective or on its potential consequences.<sup>15</sup>

The stark rhetorical contrasts merit attention because they can dramatically affect foreign policy outcomes even when candidates' policy proposals are broadly aligned. In the South Carolina debate, Romney declared, "If we reelect Barack Obama, Iran will have a nuclear weapon. And if we elect Mitt Romney—if you'd like me as the next president—they will not have a nuclear weapon." In a January 2012 article in *Foreign Policy*, Michael Cohen discusses the ways such stark rhetoric can make managing foreign policy significantly more difficult. If Romney is elected with the promise that Iran will not get a nuclear weapon, how might this change the Iranian regime's calculus? Romney's stark language could make implementing solutions more difficult while encouraging Iran to pursue nuclear weapons more doggedly.<sup>16</sup>

Romney's coterie of close advisers provides further indication of his foreign policy proclivities. With a roster full of top officials from the George W. Bush administration—including several early champions of war with Iraq—Romney may be reasonably seen as more inclined than Obama to eschew sanctions in favor of a military strike on Iran. Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN and Romney adviser John Bolton expressed relief at the failure of six-power negotiations in Baghdad.<sup>17</sup> For those who believe that a military strike against Iran is the only effective method of preventing it from attaining nuclear weapons, Romney is likely the preferred candidate. For those who believe that serious

12. Ibid.

13. Gharib, Ali. "Romney Adviser Lays Out Iran Policy Nearly Identical To Obama's: 'Romney Will Seek A Negotiated Settlement.'" *Think Progress Security*. ThinkProgress.org, 14 Jun. 2012.

14. Gharib, Ali. "Romney Camp Attacks Obama Administration For Honest Discussion Of Iran Attack Consequences." *Think Progress Security*. ThinkProgress.org, 26 Apr. 2012.

15. Republican Presidential Primary Debate. CBS News, *National Journal*, and South Carolina Republican Party. Spartanburg, South Carolina, 12 Nov. 2011. Transcript via Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/republican-debate-transcript-south-carolina-november-2011/p26540>

16. Cohen, Michael. "A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing." *Foreign Policy*, 11 Jan. 2011.

17. Bolton, John. "Baghdad dreaming." *Washington Times* 4 Jun. 2012.

negotiations and the prospect of a diplomatic resolution with Iran are the primary objective, Obama's commitment to aggressive sanctions and steady negotiations is reassuring and preferable.

## SYRIA

Regarding the Syrian government's violent crackdown on citizens protesting Bashar al Assad's regime, Obama has centered his administration's policy on finding an internationally-coordinated political end to the conflict. Through diplomatic efforts and increasingly severe economic sanctions, the Obama administration has supported efforts to transition Assad from power. However, the Obama administration has consistently resisted calls for direct military intervention in the ongoing conflict.

The Obama administration moved slowly in its initial response. In late March of 2011, Secretary of State Clinton deplored the violence against protestors, but she left open the possibility that Assad could still reform and rejected the possibility of U.S. military action in Syria.<sup>18</sup> In April, the administration responded to increased violence with new sanctions on the Syrian regime, which complemented existing sanctions in place since 2004. Obama announced sanctions that targeted Syria's spy agency and several key relatives of President Assad—though not Assad himself.<sup>19</sup> In May, the White House extended sanctions to six other senior officials, including President Assad, as the regime's violence against Syrian citizens continued.<sup>20</sup> In August, the Obama administration called on Assad to step down and extended sanctions to freeze all assets of the Syrian government. The administration had held off initially on its formal demand for Assad to step down to allow time for Turkey's diplomatic efforts to progress.<sup>21</sup> When the Obama administration determined that Assad would not be swayed, it proceeded with its declaration.

In early October, a draft resolution considered by the UN Security Council would have condemned "grave and systematic human rights violations" in Syria and called for a Syrian-led political process to address the Syrian people's aspirations; however, the resolution failed due to a dual-veto by Russia and China. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice expressed outrage at the failure to pass a "watered down" resolution that

The Obama administration has consistently resisted calls for direct military intervention in the ongoing conflict.

18. Madison, Lucy. "Clinton: No military action in Syria for now." *CBS News*, 27 Mar. 2011.

19. Executive Order 13572—Blocking Property of Certain Persons with Respect to Human Rights Abuses in Syria. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 29 Apr. 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/29/executive-order-blocking-property-certain-persons-respect-human-rights-a> McGregor, Richard, Peter Spiegel, and Abigail Fielding Smith. "Obama unveils new Syria sanctions." *Financial Times* 30 Apr. 2011.

20. Executive Order 13573—Blocking Property of Senior Officials of the Government of Syria. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 18 May 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/18/executive-order-13573-blocking-property-senior-officials-government-syri>

Myers, Steven Lee and Anthony Shadid. "U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Syrian Leader and 6 Aides." *New York Times* 18 May 2011.

21. Radia, Kirit. "Obama Calls on Syria's Assad to Step Down, Freezes Assets." *ABC News*, 18 Aug. 2011.

Executive Order 13582—Blocking Property of the Government of Syria and Prohibiting Certain Transactions with Respect to Syria. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 18 Aug. 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/18/executive-order-13582-blocking-property-government-syria-and-prohibiting>



The Geneva meeting recapitulated the ineffectual principles of the Annan Plan—ignoring the fact that the Plan had collapsed weeks earlier under the weight of its own irrelevance and that the UN had suspended its monitoring mission in mid-June.

made no mention of sanctions. Rice conveyed the Obama administration's belief that targeted sanctions and an arms embargo were necessary to protect the Syrian people.<sup>22</sup>

The Obama administration continued employing international diplomacy in an attempt to curb the Syrian regime's brutality. A second Security Council resolution crafted by Arab states and calling for Assad to relinquish power came before the Security Council in February. Though amendments were made in hopes of satisfying Russia, and though Clinton conducted bilateral negotiations with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, both Russia and China vetoed the resolution.<sup>23</sup> Speaking for the administration, Ambassador Rice expressed "disgust" at the second draft resolution's failure and Clinton called the proceedings a "travesty."<sup>24</sup>

At the Friends of Syria meetings, the U.S. offered modest non-lethal material assistance while furthering its harsh rhetoric against Russia's and China's respective efforts to obstruct international action against Assad. In Tunis, the U.S. threatened new sanctions, and in Istanbul, the Obama administration pledged communications equipment for the rebels and new humanitarian aid, bringing the total U.S. commitment to \$25 million.<sup>25</sup> The administration also introduced new sanctions on companies supplying technology used by the Assad regime to crack down on dissent.<sup>26</sup> However, the U.S. did not commit funds for opposition fighters' salaries or arms despite pledges from Arab states totaling \$100 million.<sup>27</sup>

The Obama administration continued to emphasize sanctions, humanitarian aid, and a political solution, even as military conflict deepened. The administration supported the Annan Peace Plan for Syria that ostensibly came into effect shortly after the Friends of Syria meetings. The ceasefire at the center of the plan was never implemented by the Assad regime, yet the administration continued to support the Annan Plan into late June, with Clinton expressing "great hope" that the Geneva meeting of world powers would be a turning point in the Syrian conflict. The meeting recapitulated the ineffectual principles of the Annan Plan—ignoring the fact that the Plan had collapsed weeks earlier under the weight of its own irrelevance and that the UN had suspended its monitoring mission in mid-June.<sup>28</sup> Though consultations among world powers did not succeed in constructing a more effective plan, the Obama administration did not forward any alternatives.

Obama has failed to find common ground with President Putin and Russia on Syria. Though the administration has used various strategies, including harsh condemnations

22. "Security Council fails to adopt draft resolution condemning Syria's crackdown on anti-government protestors, owing to veto by Russian Federation, China." United Nations Security Council Department of Public Information. 6627th Meeting, 4 Oct. 2011.

23. Charbonneau, Louis. "U.N. council to vote on Syria resolution Saturday." Reuters, 3 Feb. 2012.

24. Levinson, Charles. "U.S. Steps Up Pressure to Oust Assad." *Wall Street Journal* 6 Feb. 2012.

25. "Clinton blasts Russia, China for opposing action on Syria." Associated Press, 24 Feb. 2012.

26. Baker, Peter. "U.S. Sets New Sanctions Against Technology for Syria and Iran." *New York Times* 23 Apr. 2012.

27. Myers, Steven Lee. "U.S. Joins Effort to Equip and Pay Rebels in Syria." *New York Times* 1 Apr. 2012.

28. Cumming-Bruce, Nick and Rod Nordland. "Talks Come Up With Plan for Syria, but Not for Assad's Exit." *New York Times* 30 Jun. 2012.

and bilateral consultations, nothing has brought the powers closer together. Obama and Putin met on the sidelines of the G-20 meetings in late June. Obama aimed to convince Putin that the U.S. had no interest in damaging Russia's strategic interests or undermining its relationship with Syria. Putin fixated on the lack of a post-Assad strategy, citing both Libya and Egypt to demonstrate the perils of unplanned transition.<sup>29</sup> Russian intransigence—and the Obama administration's ineffectual response—have prolonged and deepened the Syrian conflict. All of Obama's actions to date suggest that he opposes U.S. military intervention in the conflict, despite the Assad regime's continued killing of civilians.

Romney believes that Syria is significantly different than Libya, and he does not believe that a no fly zone would be effective.<sup>30</sup> In June 2012, Romney's campaign began suggesting that the time had come to arm select parts of the Syrian opposition; however, the U.S. should not intervene directly with its own troops. In his foreign policy white paper "An American Century," Romney endorsed a vigorous push for a UN resolution, yet by June the campaign suggested that the U.S. should be prepared to move beyond UN consensus if necessary.<sup>31</sup> Still, Romney currently opposes both direct U.S. military action and moving beyond the UN Security Council. Because even the weakest draft resolutions were stymied by Russia and China, Romney would find himself in a situation similar to the one Obama is in presently.

Romney supports more independent and strident U.S. actions. In a Republican Primary debate in November 2011, Romney voiced support for covert actions in Syria to induce regime change. He also argued that the U.S. should support rebels defecting from Assad's army and meet with Alawi leaders to ensure that they believe their future in a post-Assad Syria is secure.<sup>32</sup> These remarks provide more detail for the policy proposal in his white paper—namely, that the U.S. should support the opposition "when the time comes for them to forge a post-Assad government."<sup>33</sup>

Most importantly, Romney does differ from the Obama administration on the question of arming the opposition. By the end of May, Romney responded to the ineffectual international landscape by advocating U.S. efforts to organize and arm forces opposing the Assad regime. Though his proposal is less aggressive than the one proposed by Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, arming the opposition is a bolder step than any supported by the Obama administration—which fears heightening the militarization of the conflict.<sup>34</sup>

In June 2012, Romney's campaign began suggesting that the time had come to arm select parts of the Syrian opposition.

29. Cooper, Helene. "Face to Face, Obama Tries to Persuade Putin on Syria." *New York Times* 18 Jun. 2012.

30. Republican Presidential Primary Debate. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation. Washington, District of Columbia, 22 Nov. 2011. Transcript via Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/us-election-2012/republican-debate-transcript-washington-dc-november-2011/p26579>

31. Romney, Mitt. "An American Century: A Strategy to Secure America's Enduring Interests and Ideals." 7 Oct. 2011. White Paper.

Slavin, Barbara. "Top Romney Adviser Says US Should Arm Syrian Rebels." *Al Monitor* 13 Jun. 2012

32. Republican Presidential Primary Debate. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation. Washington, District of Columbia, 22 Nov. 2011. Transcript via Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/us-election-2012/republican-debate-transcript-washington-dc-november-2011/p26579>

33. Romney, "An American Century."

34. Landler, Mark. "Romney Calls for Action on Syria, but His Party Is Divided." *New York Times* 29 May 2012.

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## EGYPT AND THE ARAB UPRISINGS

President Obama met the Egyptian revolution with caution at first. The first five days of the Tahrir Square protests showcased Obama's approach. He made no mention of the protestors in his State of the Union address just days after demonstrations in Tahrir began, and Clinton initially characterized Hosni Mubarak's government as stable. The Obama administration's relationship with Mubarak prior to the revolution continued the U.S.'s long-standing policy toward Egypt. It promoted stability, peace with Israel, and neutralizing Islamist sentiment. Early in its term, the Obama administration deemphasized liberalization in Mubarak's policies and cut funding for democracy promotion by 60 percent.<sup>35</sup> The administration was initially loath to break with its regional ally and its existing approach.

After days of sustained protests, Clinton began calling for an orderly transition to democracy; however, the administration stopped short of calling for Mubarak to step down due to fear of a political vacuum that could give rise to anti-American forces in the country.<sup>36</sup> In early February, the Obama administration discussed with Mubarak a proposal to immediately turn power over to his newly-appointed Vice President Omar Suleiman, but Mubarak balked.<sup>37</sup> This careful balancing act continued even as Obama increased pressure on Mubarak. Obama called for an orderly transition of power "that begins now"—without expressly calling for Mubarak to resign immediately.<sup>38</sup>

Despite its highly cautious approach, the Obama administration expressed support for democracy and the protestors upon Mubarak's resignation. Obama responded to the news with a statement hailing the protestors for their non-violent resistance and for catalyzing the democratic process. Clinton pledged to support the nascent democracy with millions of dollars in aid and business incentives. In September 2012, the Obama administration agreed to forgive \$1 billion in Egyptian debt, and was preparing to send a bill to that effect to Congress.

As the military-led transitional government took power and then prepared for parliamentary elections, the Obama administration refrained from intervening. Yet, in November, only days before the parliamentary elections, the administration strongly criticized the Supreme Council of Armed Forces for cracking down on protestors who demanded a more expeditious transition to civilian rule.

The Obama administration took a firm stand with the new Egyptian government in February 2012, when 16 American NGO workers were arrested for operating without licenses and for political activities serving foreign interests. The Obama administration condemned the arrests, which the media speculated would bring a reconsideration of U.S. aid to Egypt. While maintaining an unwavering public line, the administration

35. Hamid, Shadi. "Prioritizing Democracy: How the Next President Should Re-Orient U.S. Policy in the Middle East." Campaign 2012 Papers. Brookings Institution, 20 Jun. 2012.

36. Landler, Mark. "Clinton Calls for 'Orderly Transition' in Egypt." *New York Times* 30 Jan. 2011.

37. Cooper, Helene and Mark Landler. "White House and Egypt Discuss Plan for Mubarak's Exit." *New York Times* 3 Feb. 2011.

38. "Egypt unrest: Obama increases pressure on Mubarak." *BBC*, 5 Feb. 2011.

worked behind the scenes to apply pressure and negotiate the NGO workers' release. The Obama administration was able to secure the release of the Americans held, but was unable to apply pressure to scuttle the cases altogether.

After the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party's (FJP) sweeping parliamentary victory, the administration quietly steered U.S. policy toward engagement with the Brotherhood leadership. The Obama administration demonstrated its evolving approach when, in January 2012, Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns met with Mohamed Morsi, the head of the FJP. The Obama administration has tried to cultivate ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and the FJP ever since, especially after Morsi's victory in the presidential elections. Obama extended an invitation in July 2012 for Morsi to visit Washington, and Burns reiterated Clinton's promise to assist the troubled Egyptian economy. Burns also welcomed Morsi's commitment to uphold international treaties, including the one with Israel.<sup>39</sup> Clinton met with Morsi in Cairo in mid-July. She expressed U.S. support for a complete transition to civilian rule and for the military to return to its national security role. The statements were made in context of suspicions about U.S. motives—any strong statement could provoke backlash.<sup>40</sup> Though some analysts have called for the U.S. to review its military aid to Egypt, the Obama administration has shown no inclination to do so. The Obama administration has approached the Arab uprisings cautiously in general, avoiding bold action and consistently weighing new developments before changing course.

In this context, Obama's claim that Egypt was neither an ally nor an enemy surprised many. The President said that relations were a "work in progress" and that Egypt had a new administration trying to chart its own path.<sup>41</sup> Obama did thank Morsi for his efforts to protect the U.S. embassy against violent protesters after the release of an anti-Islam video clip on the Web. Though the Obama administration moved quickly to establish relations with the Brotherhood and the Morsi government, Obama's statement suggests he will continue to assess the relationship as the Morsi administration takes shape.

Romney, despite early indications that he viewed the Egyptian revolution along lines broadly similar to Obama, has highlighted important areas of divergence over the past year. These areas of divergence center on the extent of U.S. involvement in Egypt's transition—and the Arab uprisings more generally—and on deep-seated wariness of Islamic movements.

In early February 2011, Romney discussed the developing Egyptian revolution on Good Morning America with George Stephanopoulos and with Piers Morgan on CNN. While noting the muddled nature of the Obama administration's early messages, Romney stated on February 2<sup>nd</sup> that the administration had begun pursuing the right approach. That approach meant advising Mubarak, stressing the importance

The President said that relations were a "work in progress" and that Egypt had a new administration trying to chart its own path. Obama's statement suggests he will continue to assess the relationship as the Morsi administration takes shape.

39. Blair, Edmund and Marwa Awad. "Obama invites Egypt's Islamist leader to U.S." Reuters, 8 Jul. 2012.

40. Kirkpatrick, David. Clinton Visits Egypt, Carrying a Muted Pledge of Support." *New York Times* 14 Jul. 2012.

41. "Obama: Egypt is not US ally, nor an enemy." *BBC* 13 Sep. 2012.



Immediately following his expression of support for the Egyptian protestors, Romney said that the U.S. was interested in a process leading to “permanent democracy” and not one that would be “kidnapped by the Islamists.”

of a political transition, and helping manage the process. When asked whether the U.S. should call on President Mubarak to resign, Romney demurred, claiming that the Egyptian President had been a friend and ally for a long time, and the U.S. should not treat allies as disposable. At the time, Romney explained that it was difficult to know what the Egyptian transition would look like. He noted that both an increased role for the military and a managed transition toward permanent democracy led by Mubarak were possible outcomes.<sup>42</sup> Though Romney did not claim these were the only possibilities, his comments highlight a focus on stability as critical to the transition by citing scenarios underscoring continuity.

Romney revealed both the impetus for, and methodology of, a managed revolution in comments on Piers Morgan’s program. The comments echoed statements he made in his 2008 presidential bid and foreshadowed a line of attack he would employ against Obama throughout 2011. Romney said that the Egyptian protestors wanted to know that the American people stand with their demands of freedom and democracy, and then stated that this was the position of the American public. Yet, immediately following this expression of support, Romney said that the U.S. was interested in a process leading to “permanent democracy” and not one that would be “kidnapped by the Islamists.”<sup>43</sup> Here, Romney frames the idea of democracy and Islamic movements as mutually exclusive.

In a 2007 Republican presidential primary debate, Romney conflated the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Hezbollah, and al Qaeda, bundling them all into the “worldwide jihadist effort to try and cause the collapse of all moderate Islamic governments.”<sup>44</sup> Although Romney pivoted to the far right in his 2008 presidential bid, the quote remains illustrative. Romney does not believe that all Islamic movements are anti-democratic and immoderate, as evidenced by the distinction in the quote. However, by bundling the Muslim Brotherhood—an organization categorically different than Hezbollah and al Qaeda—under the jihadist label, and by expressing fears that the Egyptian revolution would be hijacked by Islamists, Romney reveals that his definition of acceptable Islamic government is quite narrowly-tailored.

In “An American Century,” Romney reinforces the notion that his definition of moderate Islamic government is strictly defined. In critiquing the Obama administration’s policy toward the Arab uprisings, Romney wrote, “already, destabilizing jihadist forces... often better funded and organized than their democratic counterparts, are seeking to exploit the upheaval to make political inroads.”<sup>45</sup> Without expressly identifying the Muslim Brotherhood, Romney seems to group it with the “jihadist forces,” since in the period before the election, it was by far the best-organized group in Egypt. Romney’s

42. “Mitt Romney on Egypt, 2012.” *Piers Morgan Tonight*. Piers Morgan Tonight Blog, 2 Feb. 2011.

“Romney on Obama’s ‘Anti-Growth Administration.’” Clip from *Good Morning America*. Youtube, 1 Feb 2011.

43. “Mitt Romney on Egypt, 2012.” *Piers Morgan Tonight*.

44. Cook, Steven. “Adrift on the Nile.” *Foreign Affairs* Mar.-Apr. 2009.

45. Romney, “An American Century.”

strongest criticism of Obama's approach was that the administration did not attempt to influence the election's outcome by throwing support behind liberal, secular, and democratic groups in Egypt.

The differences between Obama and Romney do not hinge on whether to promote democratic transitions in Egypt and other Arab uprising countries—both candidates support this. Moreover, both Obama and Romney were, and continue to be, heavily concerned with regional stability. The main differences center on ideological flexibility in the face of democratic outcomes and the methods the U.S. pursues to support fledgling democracy. Obama moved swiftly to establish connections with Muslim Brotherhood leaders as it became clear the group would be a dominant voice in the new Egypt. He has focused on supporting the emergence of democracy without privileging support for a specific political group. Conversely, when faced with the Egyptian uprising, Romney conveyed skepticism of the Muslim Brotherhood and a willingness to support specific types of opposition groups at the expense of others.

The main differences between Obama and Romney center on ideological flexibility in the face of democratic outcomes and the methods the U.S. pursues to support fledgling democracy.

## ISRAEL

Obama has maintained the U.S.'s decades-long commitment to Israel and its security. On numerous occasions, Obama, Clinton, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and Panetta have all defined that commitment as "unshakeable."<sup>46</sup>

In Obama's 2010 budget, security-related aid to Israel increased to \$2.775 billion as part of a 10-year, \$30 billion dollar agreement.<sup>47</sup> In 2009, the administration secretly sold Israel bunker-buster bombs—a fact which, when it emerged in 2011, led some to speculate that the U.S. was facilitating a future Israeli attack on Iran.<sup>48</sup> The Obama administration approved more than \$200 million for Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system, and in July 2012, Obama approved an additional \$70 million to strengthen the system. Despite Republicans' politically-motivated rhetoric to the contrary, Obama has maintained the centrality of Israeli security to American policy in Israel and Palestine.

Despite Obama's public and private efforts to exert pressure on Israel to take meaningful steps toward peace, little substantive progress has been made. Early in his administration, Obama made achieving a peace deal a central goal of his regional foreign policy, and he pressured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept a Palestinian state in principle and to enact a settlement freeze. In early 2010, Obama urged Israel to broaden the freeze to include building in East Jerusalem. Israel's refusal—and a poorly-timed announcement of new building that coincided with Vice

46. Cohen, Tom. "Obama signs U.S.-Israel security act on eve of Romney trip." CNN, 27 Jul. 2012.

Quinn, Andrew. "U.S. affirms 'unshakeable' bond with Israel." Reuters, 16 Mar. 2010.

Pellerin, Cheryl. "Gates Reaffirms 'Unshakable' U.S. Support for Israel." American Foreign Press Service, 24 Mar. 2011.

Cassata, Donna. "Clinton, Panetta defend administration on Israel." Associated Press, 1 Mar. 2012.

47. Benhorin, Yitzhak. "Obama approves aid to Israel, PA." *Yediot Ahronot* 18 Dec. 2009. English Edition.

48. Lake, Eli. "Obama Sold Israel Bunker-Buster Bombs." *The Daily Beast* 23 Sep. 2011.

Borger, Julian. "Obama administration 'supplied bunker-busting bombs to Israel.'" *Guardian*, Global Security Blog, 27 Sep. 2011.

In his foreign policy address on the Middle East and North Africa, Obama diverged from Bush's laissez faire treatment of Israel. Obama stated unequivocally that a Jewish and democratic state is impossible with permanent occupation.

President Joe Biden's visit—led to harsh statements from Clinton that Israeli settlement construction jeopardizes the possibility of a peace settlement.<sup>49</sup> By late 2010 though, Obama had scaled back his stance on Israeli settlement-building. Talks broke down in the fall of 2010, when the settlement freeze Obama had urged Israel to implement expired. Obama pushed Israel to accept a three month extension of the settlement freeze, and in return, he offered 25 fighter jets and a promise not to ask Israel to freeze settlement construction again.<sup>50</sup> When the deal stalled under Israel consideration, the U.S. pulled the deal after reconsidering whether it represented the most productive way to restart peace talks.<sup>51</sup>

Though the Obama administration was frustrated by Israel's recalcitrance on continued settlement construction, it has consistently supported only negotiated solutions to the conflict. When Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas pursued statehood at the United Nations in the fall of 2011, the Obama administration declared it would veto the measure, continuing the long-standing American policy that supports Palestinian statehood only through negotiations with Israel.<sup>52</sup>

In his foreign policy address on the Middle East and North Africa, Obama diverged from Bush's laissez faire treatment of Israel. Obama stated unequivocally that a Jewish and democratic state is impossible with permanent occupation. He called on Israel to negotiate a final status agreement using the 1967 borders and land swaps to accommodate major population centers as the starting points for negotiation.<sup>53</sup> Though officials and scholars have long considered an approach like the one Obama recommended, the formal declaration incensed conservatives in both the U.S. and the Israeli Likud-led government.<sup>54</sup> More recently, the administration has shown openness and flexibility with regard to the tentative Fatah-Hamas reconciliation. In this policy, the Obama administration differs sharply from Prime Minister Netanyahu, who has declared that President Abbas may have negotiations with Israel or peace with Hamas but not both.<sup>55</sup> Through much of 2012, the Obama administration has worked to manage Israel's fears of the Iranian nuclear program. At the annual AIPAC conference, Obama delivered a speech focused heavily on Iran. He assured participants that the security of both the U.S. and Israel was paramount and that he absolutely opposed Iran developing a nuclear weapon; however, he argued, loose talk of war with Iran diminished regional

49. Richter, Paul. "Hillary Rodham Clinton's harsh words stun Israel." *Los Angeles Times* 14 Mar. 2010.

Kelemen, Michele. "Clinton: Israel's Building Plans Imperil Peace." *National Public Radio* 22 Mar. 2010.

50. Ravid, Barak and Natasha Mozgovaya. "U.S. offers Israel warplanes in return for new settlement freeze." *Ha'aretz* 13 Nov. 2010. English Edition.

51. Lis, Jonathan. "Netanyahu: Israel agreed to new settlement freeze, but U.S. retracted offer." *Ha'aretz* 3 Jan. 2011. English Edition.

52. Mak, Tim. "U.S. to veto Palestinian state." *Politico* 9 Sep 2011.

53. President's Remarks on the Middle East and North Africa, May 19, 2011.

54. Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa." U.S. Department of State, 19 May 2011. Speech.

55. Ravid, Barak. "Netanyahu: PA President must choose between peace with Israel and peace with Hamas." *Ha'aretz* 6 Feb. 2012. English Edition.

security.<sup>56</sup> Though Netanyahu sought greater detail and assurances from Obama, the President held firm that the U.S. would continue on its path of sanctions while keeping all options on the table. Panetta argued that military options were a last resort. Obama, while reaffirming Israel's right to take action in defense of its own security and reiterating the two countries' bond, warned of the risks facing the U.S.—and Israel—should Israel strike prematurely.<sup>57</sup> Obama's firm stand may be interpreted as a subtle effort to keep Netanyahu in check as he pursues a diplomatic solution that obviates the need for risky military action. Judging by Netanyahu's increasingly strident criticisms of Obama's policies in September 2012, the administration's effort to frustrate the Israeli Prime Minister's aggressive push for a military solution has been successful.

Where Obama maintains a balance between uncompromising commitment to Israeli security and willingness to openly criticize detrimental Israeli actions, Romney's foreign policy vision places Israel at the center of the U.S.'s Middle East policy, advocating resolute defense of—and broadly uncritical support for—Israel and its policies. Romney supports a policy akin to what has been called “no daylight.” In this view, demanding Israeli gestures of good faith—such as settlement freezes in advance of talks—is an act of “unilaterally setting preconditions” and amounts to “pressuring Israel.” Similarly, Romney says he would respect Israel's decision to act on Iran if it believes that is necessary.<sup>58</sup> In his resistance to any type of pressure on Israel, Romney differs from Obama, who wants Israel to allow the U.S. to lead international action against Iran's nuclear program.

Meanwhile, Romney would reduce assistance to the Palestinians if they form a unity government with Hamas. In this view, American influence should dictate Palestinian internal politics but should refrain from encouraging Israel to modify its policies.<sup>59</sup> Romney confirmed his lockstep alignment with Israel in his reaction to the President's outline of a final-status resolution during his remarks on the Middle East and North Africa. He said that Obama had “thrown Israel under the bus. He has disrespected Israel and undermined its ability to negotiate peace.”<sup>60</sup> For the Republican candidate, U.S. efforts to lead both Israel and the Palestinians toward a resolution are an act of betrayal against Israel. In September 2012, *Mother Jones* leaked video of a Romney fundraiser from May in which Romney claimed that a Palestinian state would threaten Israel's security. Romney further argued that there is no way to implement a two-state solution, and that focusing on stability in what would remain an unsolved problem is key.<sup>61</sup> The promise to make Israel the destination of his first trip overseas should he be elected is emblematic of Romney's vision of foreign policy and the Middle East.<sup>62</sup>

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56. Cooper, Helene. “‘Loose Talk of War’ Only Helps Iran, President Says.” *New York Times* 4 Mar. 2012.

57. Kampeas, Ron. “Obama and Netanyahu disagree, in private and in public.” *JTA*, 6 Mar. 2012.

58. Friedman, Emily. “Romney Softens Tone After Aide Says He Would ‘Respect’ Israeli Attack Decision.” *ABC News*, 29 Jul. 2012.

59. Romney, “An American Century.”

60. Chaddock, Gail Russell. “Was Obama's speech too tough on Israel? Republican criticism mounts.” *Christian Science Monitor* 19 May 2011.

61. Corn, David. “SECRET VIDEO: On Israel, Romney Trashes Two-State Solution.” *Mother Jones* 18 Sep. 2012.

62. Republican Presidential Primary Debate. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation. Washington, District of Columbia, 22 Nov. 2011. Transcript via Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/us-election-2012/republican-debate-transcript-washington-dc-november-2011/p26579>

During the President's first term, he only intermittently challenged the Netanyahu government on actions detrimental to peace. In a second term, Obama would be more likely than Romney to press Israel on alignment with the American foreign policy vision.

As a second term President, Obama would have wide latitude to expend political capital to pursue his objectives. The absence of a future election will reduce—though not eliminate—the political considerations of decision-making. During the President's first term, he only intermittently challenged the Netanyahu government on actions detrimental to peace. In a second term, Obama would be more likely than Romney to press Israel on alignment with the American foreign policy vision. Certainly, a re-elected Obama would be freer to pressure Israel to align with U.S. policy on Iran. The dual factors of Obama's greater willingness to blend steadfast support of Israel with measured criticisms and his flexibility during a second-term set his approach apart from Romney's.

### BAHRAIN

When protests erupted in Bahrain in February 2011, the Obama administration approached them with the same initial caution that guided policy toward other Middle East uprisings. Obama urged King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to show restraint against non-violent protestors and to begin enacting reforms. After the king enlisted his police force to use violence against protestors, the administration pressured Bahrain to cease its violent crackdown, a demand to which King Hamad temporarily agreed. Only days later, Bahrain's police violently attacked protestors, killing several people.<sup>63</sup>

Though the use of lethal force continued, the administration continued to both condemn the violence while avoiding any concrete actions like those taken against Libya. In March 2011, Clinton called Bahrain a long-time friend and ally while reiterating U.S. opposition to the use of "excessive force." Then-Defense Secretary Gates reiterated the administration argument that the U.S. was applying consistent private pressure to the regime, encouraging political reform.<sup>64</sup> Gates visited Bahrain in mid-March as a sign of continuing U.S. support for the monarchy.<sup>65</sup> Despite the entrance of 1,000 Saudi Arabian forces who initiated a more pervasive crackdown, and despite the monarchy's efforts to dismantle the Shiite opposition in April, the Obama administration also kept its ambassador in Bahrain and did not consider any sanctions like those implemented in both Libya and Syria. Bahraini activists accused the administration of hypocrisy on the issue, saying Obama called for democracy and freedom while overlooking the abuses of a friendly dictatorship like Bahrain.<sup>66</sup>

Administration officials claimed that the handling of Bahrain was consistent with Obama's stated approach of treating the Middle East uprisings on a case by case basis.

63. Slackman, Michelle and Nadim Audi. "Bahrain Forces Open Fire, First on Protesters, Then on Arriving Ambulances." *The Washington Post* 19 Feb. 2011.

64. "Stunned U.S. Urges Bahrain to Show 'Restraint' After Bloody Crackdown." MSNBC.com News Services 15 Mar. 2011.

65. Bumiller, Elizabeth and Neil MacFarquhar. "Gates Visits Bahrain Amid Huge Protests." *The New York Times* 11 Mar. 2011.

66. Warrick, Joby and Michael Birnbaum. "As Bahrain stifles protest movement, U.S.'s muted objections draw criticism." *The Washington Post* 15 Apr. 2011.

In April 2011, Deputy National Security Adviser Denis McDonough defended the administration's position. He argued that "consistency or precedent" is not a compelling reason to intervene in conflict; rather, U.S. interests—of which democratic ideals are only one—hold sway in those decisions. Clinton agreed with McDonough, though she emphasized values more. She argued in a speech at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum that core interests and values remained the same, but other concerns—including terrorist threats and Iranian power—must be considered as well. She then defended the status quo in Bahrain, reiterating that Bahrain had been and would remain a friend while condemning violence generally.<sup>67</sup>

In his May 2011 speech on the Middle East and North Africa at the State Department, Obama extended the administration's strategy of frank words without any change in the government's actions. He explained that some U.S. allies had fallen short in respect for individual rights, but he declined to propose alternative policies.<sup>68</sup> The Washington Post editorial board noticed. An unsigned September 2011 piece noted that since Obama's speech, the administration had neither followed up with senior diplomatic visits nor commented further on the crackdown in Bahrain.<sup>69</sup>

The Obama administration did find limited success in its efforts to influence the Bahraini regime. The administration prevailed on Bahrain's government not to ban the Shia opposition group Al-Wefaq.<sup>70</sup> After the crackdown on protestors, the administration exerted pressure on the monarchy to appoint the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) to investigate allegations of abuse during the uprising—this instead of the Bahraini regime's preference for an internal investigation, which the administration argued would not be credible.

Despite Bahrain's suppression of dissent, the Obama administration had reached a deal in late 2011 to sell \$53 million in arms to the Bahraini government. Congressional scrutiny—and threats from Senators to block the deal—led the administration to delay action for months. However, in late January 2012, the State Department announced separate arms sales were moving forward without the traditional reporting and approval processes. By splitting up sales into separate transactions less than \$1 million, the administration skirted reporting requirements. The State Department reassured skeptics that the package was for Bahrain's external security and comprised items not typically used for internal security and crowd control—a claim which drew skepticism given Bahrain's methods of clamping down on protestors in Manama.<sup>71</sup>

In May 2012, the administration announced the new arms sales with the stipulation that they would provide for Bahrain's external security. In a special briefing with media

Deputy National Security Adviser Denis McDonough argued that "consistency or precedent" is not a compelling reason to intervene in conflict. U.S. interests—of which democratic ideals are only one—hold sway in those decisions.

67. Ibid.

68. Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa." U.S. Department of State, 19 May 2011. Speech.

69. Editorial. "Bahrain needs U.S. attention now." *The Washington Post* 10 Sep. 2011.

70. Hokayem, Emile. "U.S. Has Few Options to Curb Crackdown in Bahrain." *The Atlantic* 19 Oct. 2011.

71. Rogin, Josh. "Obama administration using loophole to quietly sell arms package to Bahrain." *The Cable*. Foreign-Policy.com, 27 Jan. 2012.

The lack of opposition on Obama's Bahrain policies makes sense. Neo-conservatives have long favored democracy promotion, yet historically, they have directed their attention overwhelmingly toward the U.S.'s adversaries.

members, senior administration officials refused to provide specifics on the arms sold and the total cost of the package. Hewing close to administration policy throughout the uprising, officials expressed concern at some of the Bahraini government's actions—and human rights violations—against protestors. Officials also argued that Bahrain was implementing some recommendations of the BICI and that the Obama administration continued to advocate political reform.<sup>72</sup>

In large part, the Obama administration's consistent reticence on Bahrain represents longstanding U.S. policy. The U.S. has long viewed Bahrain as a key Gulf ally. The U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet is stationed there as a major regional presence and, more specifically, as a bulwark against Iran. Further, the administration broadly accepts that Bahrain is Saudi Arabia's "back yard," and therefore, that the U.S.'s ability to exert influence without damaging regional relationships is inherently limited.<sup>73</sup> The Obama administration believes—as did previous administrations—that maintaining regional presence and influence are important and that the U.S. may effect positive change through moderate pressure.<sup>74</sup>

Though the Obama administration's Bahrain policy has been subjected to intense criticism, Romney has been noticeably silent on the issue. He did not address the country's uprising in any of the primary debates, nor did he mention Bahrain in his foreign policy white paper. Romney has not scrutinized the administration's Bahrain policy on the campaign trail. Because Romney has delivered withering criticism of other aspects of the administration's Middle East policy, perhaps he finds little fault in Obama's approach.

Because Romney draws his foreign policy advisers from the neo-conservative wing of the party, the lack of opposition on Obama's Bahrain policies makes sense. Neo-conservatives have long favored democracy promotion, yet historically, they have directed their attention overwhelmingly toward the U.S.'s adversaries. Some conservative think tanks have criticized Obama's Bahrain policies for exerting too much pressure on the monarchy to show restraint towards the cleric-led, sectarian Al-Wefaq opposition group.<sup>75</sup> Romney has voiced concern that the Arab uprisings would be dominated by Islamist politics. Bahrain's status as a U.S. ally, its perceived strategic import, and the relatively liberal monarchy's stand against an Islamist party suggest Romney would oppose strong pressure on the regime. At its core, Obama's policy—as delineated openly by Deputy National Security Adviser McDonough—is one focused on stability and interests. As President, Romney would likely support the same approach—perhaps with even less criticism and pressure.

72. "Senior Administration Officials on Bahrain." U.S. Department of State, 11 May 2012. Special Briefing.

73. Warrick and Birnbaum.

74. Ziezulewicz, Geoff. "With Bahrain home to 5th Fleet, US faces dilemma over crackdown on protests." *Stars and Stripes* 12 Feb. 2012.

75. Roach, Morgan Lorraine. "The Obama Administration: Ill-Informed on Bahrain." *The Foundry*. The Heritage Foundation, 1 Feb. 2012.

## YEMEN

After diminished focus on Yemen in the latter Bush administration years, the Obama administration reengaged the country from the beginning of its term. The administration increased aid to Yemen, both for security and development. However, the administration emphasized the relationship's security elements and devoted the majority of its resources there, doubling military aid to \$155 million for 2010.<sup>76</sup> Early on, the Obama administration received permission and support—at least privately—from then-Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh for drone strikes against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants.<sup>77</sup> The administration carried out strikes in late 2009 and early 2010 which caused public outrage in Yemen—one which mistakenly killed a government official and another which killed many civilians in addition to the militant targets. Some argue that the administration's blunders bolstered the effectiveness of the militants' narrative that Yemen is under attack from the West.<sup>78</sup>

With the start of popular protests against Saleh's rule, the administration initially refused to criticize Saleh publicly. In April 2011, the administration told allies they saw Saleh's presidency as unsustainable—though they still did not publicly endorse his leaving office. In any transition to new leadership, the administration would maintain a core interest in continuing counterterrorism activities.<sup>79</sup> In fact, the administration used the growing uncertainty surrounding Yemen's leadership to intensify its drone attacks, striking at AQAP militants in early June.<sup>80</sup>

In late December 2011, the Obama administration finalized its permission to Saleh to seek medical treatment in New York. In January 2012, he flew to the U.S., and he remained there until after the Yemeni election in late February.<sup>81</sup> On the day of the election, the administration offered new President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi incentives to centralize the factionalized armed forces and implement good governance; however, the administration secured its most important assurance—that counter-terrorism efforts would continue apace.<sup>82</sup>

The Central Intelligence Agency sought—and Obama approved—expanded authority in drone strikes in April 2012. Whereas strikes had previously been limited to cases in which individual targets were known, the expanded program enables the CIA to conduct “signature strikes”—ones authorized based on intelligence patterns and not

The administration used the growing uncertainty surrounding Yemen's leadership to intensify its drone attacks, striking at AQAP militants in early June.

76. Schmitt, Eric and Scott Shane. “Aid to Fight Qaeda in Yemen Divides U.S. Officials.” *New York Times* 15 Sep. 2010.

77. Booth, Robert and Ian Black. “WikiLeaks cables: Yemen offered US ‘open door’ to attack al-Qaida on its soil.” *Guardian* 3 Dec. 2010.

78. Johnsen, Gregory. “Ignoring Yemen at Our Peril.” *Foreign Policy* 31 Oct. 2010.

Raghavan, Sudarsan. “In Yemen, U.S. airstrikes breed anger, and sympathy for al-Qaeda.” *Washington Post* 30 May 2012.

79. Kasinof, Laura and David Sanger. “U.S. Shifts to Seek Removal of Yemen's Leader, an Ally.” *New York Times* 3 Apr. 2011.

80. Mazzetti, Mark. “U.S. Is Intensifying a Secret Campaign of Yemen Airstrikes.” *New York Times* 8 Jun 2011.

Johnsen, Gregory. “Resetting U.S. Policy Toward Yemen.” *Council on Foreign Relations* Sep. 2011. Policy Memorandum.

81. Kasinof, Laura. “Yemen Leader Leaves for Medical Care in New York.” *New York Times* 22 Jan. 2012.

82. DeYoung, Karen. “U.S. plans to step up aid to Yemen if conditions are met.” *Washington Post* 21 Feb. 2012.

Though the administration has steadily increased development aid, security and military aid dominate, and U.S. interests are framed in the context of counteracting AQAP. The administration has failed to target the root causes that allow jihadist militants to achieve success in Yemen.

necessarily knowledge about the presence of a high-value target.<sup>83</sup> In so doing, the Obama administration acknowledged the inability of surgical strikes to stem AQAP's progress, but offered only more drone strikes as a solution.<sup>84</sup>

Yemen observers have criticized the Obama administration's policy as singularly focused on AQAP, drone strikes, and counterterrorism. Though the administration has steadily increased development aid, security and military aid dominate, and U.S. interests are framed in the context of counteracting AQAP. The administration has failed to target the root causes that allow jihadist militants to achieve success in Yemen.<sup>85</sup>

In August 2012, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan spoke to the Council on Foreign Relations about the administration's Yemen policy. He sought to combat the notion that the U.S. is singularly focused on counterterrorism activities, citing the \$178 million—more than half of all aid—that the administration has committed to political transition, humanitarian aid, and economic development.<sup>86</sup> However, the \$337 million the U.S. has appropriated does not include much of what the U.S. spends directly on its own military activities in Yemen.<sup>87</sup>

The topic of Yemen did not figure prominently in the Republican primary process, and Romney has not delved into the issue in any detail. In his foreign policy white paper, Romney does group Yemen with Afghanistan and Somalia under the category "failed or failing states." Romney notes correctly that these states can become havens for illegal activity and terrorism. However, he does not comment specifically on U.S. drone policy, and Romney has not discussed Obama's approach to the Yemeni revolution and transition process.<sup>88</sup> Still, drone strikes have been a consistent U.S. tactic irrespective of whether the administration is headed by Democrats or Republicans. While Obama has relied increasingly on the strategy, there is little information on whether Romney would maintain the Obama administration's aggressive approach or change course.

## TURKEY

Only months after his inauguration, Obama traveled to Europe and included Turkey on the itinerary for his first trip abroad as president. The itinerary did not include Turkey at first, but Obama himself added Turkey to his trip, because he wanted to deepen the U.S.'s relationships with emerging powers.<sup>89</sup> He explained that the visit stemmed

83. Miller, Greg. "White House approves broader Yemen drone campaign." *Washington Post* 26 Apr. 2012.  
Becker, Jo and Scott Shane. "Secret 'Kill List' Proves a Test of Obama's Principles and Will." *New York Times* 29 May 2012.

84. Johnsen, Gregory. "Drones, Drift and the (New) American Way of War." *Waq al-Waq*. Bigthink.com, 4 Jun. 2012.

85. Open letter to President Obama. Yemen Policy Initiative. Atlantic Council and Project on Middle East Democracy, 25 Jun. 2012. <http://www.acus.org/files/Yemen%20Policy%20Initiative%20Letter%20to%20Obama%206-25-12.pdf>

86. <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/us-policy-toward-yemen/p28794>

87. Johnsen, Gregory. "Fuzzy Math." *Waq al-Waq*. Bigthink.com, 8 Aug. 2012.

88. Romney, "An American Century."

89. Ignatius, David. "U.S. and Turkey find a relationship that works." *Washington Post* 8 Dec. 2011.

from the importance of U.S.-Turkey relations in addressing issues as diverse as energy, terrorism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a prelude to his June 2009 speech in Cairo, Obama first emphasized his effort to reengage the Muslim world in his speech to Turkey's Grand National Assembly. Obama also acknowledged Turkey's Western political tradition in vocally supporting Turkey's bid to join the European Union.<sup>90</sup>

Only weeks later, Obama issued a statement on the occasion of Armenian Remembrance Day. Though Obama had used the word genocide regarding the massacre of Armenians during his campaign, he avoided doing so in his statement as President. He used the Armenian term *Medz Yeghern*—"the great calamity"—to refer to the events of 1915. Despite Obama's own views, he encouraged Turks and Armenians to assess historical facts in the context of a Swiss-sponsored dialogue.<sup>91</sup> Some Turkish analysts suggested Obama's avoidance of the genocide term was politically wise—the president faced criticism from Turkish officials, but the U.S.-Turkey relationship suffered no longer-term consequences.<sup>92</sup>

The Obama administration—led by Clinton—heavily criticized the Turkey-Brazil-Iran nuclear pact in May 2010. The administration claimed that Turkey and Brazil had allowed themselves to be pawns in an Iranian effort to undermine international consensus and progress on sanctions. Clinton criticized the deal's mimicry of an old Russia-U.S. proposal that Iran rejected; in the meantime, Clinton argued, Iran's stockpile of enriched material had grown so as to render those earlier terms insufficiently effective.<sup>93</sup> Turkey's vote against sanctions in the UN increased tensions between the two countries—which had already been strained by the IDF raid on the Mavi Marmara in May 2010.<sup>94</sup>

However, despite the cold relations between Turkey and Israel that have continued into late 2012, Obama has managed to maintain close relations with both sides without irreparably harming either alliance. In the summer of 2011, Obama put pressure on Israel to apologize for its role in the incident as part of a deal to restore normalized relations, but Israel refused.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, Obama warned Erdoğan that maintaining its opposition to U.S. sanctions on Iran and its hostility toward Israel would make it more difficult for Turkey to obtain desired American weapons.<sup>96</sup> Yet, by late 2011, the Obama administration agreed to sell attack helicopters to Turkey and the administration was urging Congress to approve the sale of Predator and Reaper drones as well.<sup>97</sup> In early 2012, Obama named Erdoğan among the world leaders with whom he had the closest

The administration claimed that Turkey and Brazil had allowed themselves to be pawns in an Iranian effort to undermine international consensus and progress on sanctions. Clinton criticized the deal's mimicry of an old Russia-U.S. proposal that Iran rejected.

90. "Obama tells Turkey: U.S. 'not at war with Islam.'" Associated Press 6 Apr. 2009.

"President Obama Visited Turkey." Embassy of the United States, Ankara, Turkey. [http://turkey.usembassy.gov/president\\_obama\\_visit\\_turkey.html](http://turkey.usembassy.gov/president_obama_visit_turkey.html)

91. Obama, Barack. "Statement of President Barack Obama on Armenian Remembrance Day." Office of the Press Secretary, 24 Apr. 2009.

92. "Obama avoids g-word, brands Armenian killings 'great atrocity.'" *Today's Zaman* 26 Apr. 2009.

93. Dombey, Daniel, Harvey Morris, and Geoff Dyer. "Clinton attacks Turkey-Brazil deal with Iran." *Financial Times* 18 May 2010.

94. Dombey, Daniel and Delphine Strauss. "Turkey-US ties face 'breaking point' over vote." *Financial Times* 8 Jun. 2010.

95. Sanders, Edmund. "Israel refuses to apologize to Turkey for flotilla deaths." *Los Angeles Times* 18 Aug. 2011.

Somfalvi, Attila. "Netanyahu to Clinton: No apology to Turkey." *Yediot Ahronot* 17 Aug. 2011. English Edition.

96. Dombey, Daniel. "US warns Turkey on Iran and Israel." *Financial Times* 15 Aug. 2010.

97. Whitlock, Craig. "Pentagon agrees to sell three attack helicopters to Turkey." *Washington Post* 2 Nov. 2011.

Obama named Erdoğan among the world leaders with whom he had the closest relationships. The President did not let tension between close allies affect the strength of the U.S.'s relations with either Turkey or Israel.

relationships.<sup>98</sup> Obama did not let tension between close allies affect the strength of the U.S.'s relations with either Turkey or Israel.

Though Turkey initially opposed the U.S.-led military action against the Qaddafi regime in Libya, the divergence between the allies remained brief. The Obama administration designated Turkey as the protecting power for the U.S. in Libya after the American embassy was closed.<sup>99</sup> In this capacity, Turkey secured the release of four *New York Times* journalists held captive in Libya.<sup>100</sup> When the U.S. wanted to diminish its role in the military campaign, Turkey participated in successful talks to move the operation under NATO's auspices—a move opposed strongly by France initially.<sup>101</sup> Istanbul hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Libyan Contact Group, and Clinton praised Turkey's emergence as an economic power and key ally in addressing global challenges.<sup>102</sup> During the meeting, Turkey pledged a \$200 million line of credit to the National Transitional Council and advocated the unfreezing of Libyan assets for the NTC to access.

In September 2011, Turkey agreed to host an advanced American-made early warning radar system as part of the increasingly robust NATO missile defense system. Turkey insisted that non-NATO countries not gain access to real time data from the system on Turkish soil, though the Obama administration reserved the right to combine intelligence from all its systems in order to maximize the effectiveness of the combined missile defense. Although Turkey assented to hosting the radar system, the Obama administration rebuffed a request that NATO's missile defense architecture address immediate threats on Turkish soil.<sup>103</sup>

The Obama administration imposed the toughest ever sanctions on Iran's oil industry, but it granted Turkey—along with a select group of other countries—a temporary exemption. The six month exemption was granted because Turkey substantially cut Iranian oil imports before the sanctions went into effect.<sup>104</sup>

The Obama administration and the Turkish government increased coordination on the Syrian conflict and transitional planning in mid-2012. In a joint press conference in Istanbul in early August, Clinton announced the creation of a joint American-Turkish task force including military, intelligence, and political leaders to engage in detailed post-Assad and contingency planning. The body would review ways to aid the opposition and refugees while also planning for catastrophic circumstances, such as a chemical weapons attack. The new joint task force held its first meeting in late August 2012.<sup>105</sup>

98. "Obama names Turkish PM Erdoğan among trusted friends." *Hurriyet Daily News* 20 Jan. 2012.

99. Labott, Elise. "Turkey to serve as protecting power for U.S. in Libya." *CNN* 20 Mar. 2011.

100. O'Brien, Emily and Andrew Sinclair. "The Libyan War: A Diplomatic History." Center on International Cooperation, New York University, August 2011.

101. Traynor, Ian. "Libya: NATO to control no-fly zone after France gives way to Turkey." *Guardian* 25 Mar. 2011.

102. "Citizens rally against separatists as Clinton praises Turkish democracy." *Daily Star* 18 Jul. 2011.

103. Entous, Adam. "Turkey to Station U.S. Radar to Counter Iranian Rockets." *Wall Street Journal* 2 Sep. 2011.

Goren, Nilsu. "Turkey's Plans for Missile Defense are Shaping Up." Arms Control and Regional Security for the Middle East, [middleeast-armscontrol.com](http://middleeast-armscontrol.com), 8 Aug. 2012.

Stein, Aaron. "Turkey Marches Toward Missile Defense." *National Interest* 23 Aug. 2012.

104. "US exempts seven states from sanctions over Iran oil." *BBC*, 11 Jun. 2012.

105. Cave, Damien. "U.S. and Turkey to Tighten Coordination on Syria." *New York Times* 11 Aug. 2012.

Lee, Matthew. "US, Turkey step up planning for Syria disaster contingencies, post-Assad future." Associated Press, 23 Aug. 2012.

In sharp contrast to Obama's deep engagement with Turkey from the first days of his presidency, Romney has largely ignored Turkey during his campaign. When Texas Governor Rick Perry claimed Turkey was ruled by "Islamic terrorists" during a Republican primary debate, Romney did not defend the U.S.'s close collaborator and NATO ally. The lack of a defense for Turkey does not suggest Romney's agreement with the sentiment. It may indicate a lack of knowledge about, attention to, or interest in a key American ally.

Romney discusses Turkey only in the context of other foreign policy issues. On Syria, Romney said in June 2012 that he would encourage Turkey and Saudi Arabia to arm opposition groups in the country—something that is already happening in Syria and which has led the Obama administration to try steering arms away from al Qaeda operatives.<sup>106</sup>

Romney also addresses Turkey in the context of his Israel policies. He notes that Israel faces heightened regional security problems, in part due to "deteriorating relationships" with Turkey and Egypt. Romney will "work intensively with Turkey and Egypt to shore up the now fraying relationships with Israel that have underpinned peace in the Middle East for decades." The U.S., Romney argues, must "forcefully resist the emergence of anti-Israel policies in Turkey and Egypt, and work to make clear that their interests are not served by isolating Israel." Besides the glaring superficiality of these recommendations, Romney implies that the deterioration is unilateral.<sup>107</sup> Nowhere does Romney indicate that Israel bears any responsibility for the diminished relationship with Turkey. It is hard to imagine such an openly one-sided approach yielding fruitful negotiations or reconciliation—certainly when compared to Obama's consistent but subtle pressure on both sides and his strong relationships with both countries.

Nowhere does Romney indicate that Israel bears any responsibility for the diminished relationship with Turkey. It is hard to imagine such an openly one-sided approach yielding fruitful negotiations or reconciliation.

## NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE STRATEGY

Obama moved swiftly in his first term to curtail some of Bush's most controversial national security practices. Executive Order 13491 ended the use of CIA black sites—secret prisons outside U.S. legal jurisdiction to hold and interrogate suspected enemy combatants in the war on terror.<sup>108</sup> The black sites were an integral part of Bush's program of extraordinary rendition, in which suspects were brought to countries with lax rules about treatment of prisoners under interrogation. Then-Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Leon Panetta stated in April 2009 that the CIA would end extraordinary rendition as well.<sup>109</sup> These actions, combined with Obama's more highly-publicized promise to cease transferring prisoners to—and ultimately close—Guantanamo Bay, demonstrated the Obama administration's opposition to

106. "Romney to urge Turkey to give arms to Syrian opposition." *Today's Zaman* 17 Jun. 2012.

107. "Middle East." Foreign Policy: An American Century. MittRomney.com. <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/middle-east>

"Israel." Foreign Policy: An American Century. MittRomney.com. <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/israel>

108. Executive Order 13491—Ensuring Lawful Interrogations. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 22 Jan. 2009. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/29/executive-order-blocking-property-certain-persons-respect-human-rights-a>[http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/EnsuringLawfulInterrogations/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/EnsuringLawfulInterrogations/)

109. Pilkington, Ed. "CIA chief Leon Panetta orders closure of secret rendition sites." *Guardian* 10 Apr. 2009.

In the first three years of his administration, Obama ordered 248 drone strikes in Pakistan alone—about six times as many as Bush ordered in his four years.

some legally murky practices of the Bush administration. Yet, Obama preserved key elements of Bush's national security regime. Rendition did not end in all its forms; the CIA maintained flexibility to operate sites used for short-term and transitory detention. Captured prisoners may also be taken to places where they will not be tortured, and there they may be detained and interrogated.<sup>110</sup> Once captured, prisoners may still be indefinitely detained under the administration's policy.

The Obama administration also deployed drones more persistently and more aggressively than did the Bush administration. This stemmed in part from technological developments, but it also signified Obama's preferred approach to combatting terrorism, favoring tactical, precise strikes that put no troops at risk. In the first three years of his administration, Obama ordered 248 drone strikes in Pakistan alone—about six times as many as Bush ordered in his four years. In his administration's final year, Bush ordered 36 drone strikes in Pakistan; in 2010, Obama ordered 122 such strikes.<sup>111</sup> In addition to these increases, Obama set a precedent for extra-judicial killing of American citizens in ordering the strike on Anwar al-Awlaki.

In part, the Obama administration has leaned heavily on drone attacks in combatting terrorism due to a shifting vision of U.S. defense strategy. The administration's effort to wind down both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan necessitated a recasting of U.S. defense strategy. In January 2012, the Department of Defense released "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense"—a new strategic guide for U.S. defense strategy. The paper specifically calls for resizing defense forces to permit the U.S. to successfully negotiate one full-scale, long-term conflict and deny an enemy's objectives in a second conflict.<sup>112</sup> The strategy marks a clear break from massive troop deployments to two theaters of conflict and restrains the Defense budgets the administration deemed too costly for a post-war military and post-recession economy.

One other strategic decision emanated from the Obama administration's plan to strategically rebalance and downsize defense forces: increased reliance on the Special Operations Command (SOCOM). Obama has relied heavily on the elite forces, most notably in the raid which killed Osama Bin Laden. In February 2012, SOCOM leader Admiral William McRaven requested increased latitude to position his forces where intelligence and world developments suggest they are needed. Obama is weighing the proposal, but the request alone is indicative of where he has placed his military emphasis to date.<sup>113</sup>

On the most contentious elements of the Bush administration national security regime preserved by Obama, Romney supports the President's policy views and decisions. In

110. Miller, Greg. "Obama preserves renditions as counter-terrorism tool." *Los Angeles Times* 1 Feb. 2009.

111. "The Year of the Drone." Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative, New America Foundation. 10 Jan. 2011.

112. "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st century Defense." Department of Defense. Jan. 2012.

113. Schmitt, Eric, Mark Mazzetti, and Thom Shanker. "Admiral Seeks Freer Hand in Deployment of Elite Forces." *New York Times* 12 Feb. 2012.

Haddick, Robert. "The Toughest Op." *Foreign Policy* 16 Feb. 2012.

a January 2012 Republican primary debate, Romney responded in the affirmative to a question about whether he would have signed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) signed by the President. In his response, Romney argued that Americans who join al Qaeda are not entitled to due process afforded by the Constitution; rather, they have committed treason and should be classified as enemy combatants. As such, these combatants may be detained indefinitely according to Romney.<sup>114</sup> In a November 2011 presidential primary debate, Romney also stated his agreement with the President's policy of targeted assassination of American citizens like Anwar al-Awlaki, who work with terrorist organizations and have been deemed by the U.S. as enemy combatants. Not only do these citizens forfeit their Constitutional rights, they would be legitimate targets of drone strikes according to both Obama and Romney.<sup>115</sup>

Romney's views diverge most strongly from the President's regarding conceptions of U.S. defense policy. Whereas Obama's Defense Department supports a strategic rebalancing toward East Asia and the Pacific region in addition to a force resizing, Romney has supported increases in military spending, ship-building, and personnel strength. In a November 2011 presidential primary debate, Romney lambasted Obama for ceasing or delaying work on major upgrades to air force and navy military systems to save \$350 billion, calling this a failure to "lead with strength."<sup>116</sup> Romney promised that he would set a 4% budget floor for defense spending, rejecting what he called Obama's efforts to "balance the budget on the backs of the military."<sup>117</sup> He believes that Obama is trying to implement a "peace dividend" despite the U.S. facing increased threats from its enemies abroad. Romney pledges to rebuild U.S. naval strength by increasing the number of ships built per year from nine to fifteen.<sup>118</sup> He has also proposed adding 100,000 new troops to bolster existing force strength.<sup>119</sup>

Romney has given little indication of how he would pay for his proposed defense increases. Merely increasing ship-building—one of his more modest proposals—would cost \$40 billion over five years. Romney's pledge to find efficiencies in the Defense Department rings hollow to many experts, given that Gates captured most of the easily-won efficiency savings in 2011.<sup>120</sup>

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114. Palazzolo, Joe. "Romney Boosed for Support for Indefinite Detention." *Wall Street Journal Law Blog*. Blogs.wsj.com, 17 Jan. 2012.

115. Republican Presidential Primary Debate. CBS News, *National Journal*, and South Carolina Republican Party. Spartanburg, South Carolina, 12 Nov. 2011. Transcript via Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/republican-debate-transcript-south-carolina-november-2011/p26540>

116. Republican Presidential Primary Debate. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation. Washington, District of Columbia, 22 Nov. 2011. Transcript via Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/us-election-2012/republican-debate-transcript-washington-dc-november-2011/p26579>

117. Republican Primary Debate—Charleston, South Carolina. 19 Jan. 2012. Transcript via *Washington Post*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/2012-presidential-debates/republican-primary-debate-january-19-2012/>

118. Romney, "An American Century."

119. "The Candidates on Defense Policy." Council on Foreign Relations, 10 Apr. 2012.

120. Ackerman, Spencer. "Wallets Aweigh: Romney's Navy Surge Could Cost \$40 Billion." *Danger Room*. Wired.com, 17 Oct. 2011.

In his remarks on Libya, Obama argued that, when the nation's values and interests align and force is necessary, the U.S. must act. Yet, this should not be a primary course of action.

## THE UNITED STATES' ROLE IN THE WORLD

Analysis of Obama's first term, as explored herein, is central to understanding how his administration would govern in a second. At the same time, reflection on Obama's foreign policy vision—as revealed through the aspirations included in major addresses—improves understanding of how the President sees the world. Similarly, Romney's foreign policy white paper, his Citadel speech, and select responses during Republican presidential primary debates help clarify the principles by which he would guide U.S. foreign policy. When examined side-by-side, differences of vision emerge that sharpen our insight into how Obama and Romney would respectively conduct foreign affairs.

Obama views domestic economic vitality as the centerpiece of a robust foreign policy, fueling the United States' ability to project the full range of its power in international affairs. In his December 2009 speech "The Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan," Obama said, "prosperity provides a foundation for our power." He expounded on the point, noting that the prosperity funds both military and diplomatic endeavors—hard and soft power.<sup>121</sup> The administration sees the different types of American power as complements, not substitutes.

Obama further clarifies his understanding of complementary power in explicitly stating an *a priori* reluctance to use force. In his June 2009 speech in Cairo, Obama cited Thomas Jefferson to support this view. "I hope that our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us that the less we use our power, the greater it will be," he quoted.<sup>122</sup> In his remarks on Libya, Obama argued that, when the nation's values and interests align and force is necessary, the U.S. must act.<sup>123</sup> Yet, this should not be a primary course of action.

In those same remarks on Libya, Obama outlined a comprehensive vision of his administration's approach to international intervention. He presented the circumstances that justify intervention, guiding principles for how the U.S. would play its role in relation to the international community, and an extensive use of force doctrine.

Obama outlined the ways in which Libya was a textbook case for intervention, thereby indicating the major factors that influence his decision-making on how the U.S. responds to international conflict. He noted the prospect of imminent acts of violence against civilians, the international mandate for action, a broad coalition of actors, regional support, and a direct plea from a largely unified opposition. The list of factors is not comprehensive, and Obama did explicitly note that not every factor listed is necessary for action in future cases. Yet, each factor he listed is seen as contributing to the legitimacy and efficacy of intervention.

The Obama administration has forwarded a novel understanding of the U.S.'s role in coalition-based international intervention. In its conception, the U.S. focuses on and

121. Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan." United States Military Academy at West Point, West Point, NY, 1 Dec. 2009. Speech.

122. Obama, Barack. "A New Beginning." Cairo, Egypt, 4 Jun. 2009. Speech.

123. Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya." National Defense University, Washington, DC, 28 Mar. 2011. Speech.

executes aspects of the mission in which its special capabilities are needed, thus facilitating truly collaborative international actions. Obama was explicit about this vision in his Libya speech. "I said that America's role would be limited; that we would not put ground troops into Libya; that we would focus our unique capabilities on the front end of the operation and that we would transfer responsibility to our allies and partners," he assured, in his address. Consideration of how the U.S. leads while also creating space for its partners to contribute and lead has been a centerpiece of the Obama administration's internationalist approach.

Obama also outlined a two-tiered doctrine for the use of force by the United States. To defend the homeland, core interests, and allies, unilateral force is permitted. The administration has demonstrated that in some of its methods to combat terrorism, including drone strikes, and in its decisions about troop strength and mission in Afghanistan. To defend American values and interests when security and core interests are not directly threatened, the U.S. should step forward—but not alone. Mobilizing the international community in these cases—and Libya qualified—is mandatory in the administration's conception. Obama outlined this view clearly. "Real leadership creates the conditions and coalitions for others to step up as well; to work with allies and partners so that they bear their share of the burden and pay their share of the costs; and to see that the principles of justice and human dignity are upheld by all," he said, in his remarks on Libya. In concert with increased emphasis on collaboration in the international sphere, the administration has stressed that the U.S. is not in a position to "dictate the scope and pace" of change. Obama has traded strong language and forceful individual action for leadership from within—leadership that does not outpace the U.S.'s international allies.

Romney ideologically opposes Obama's conception of economic vitality as foreign policy's center; instead, Romney argues that robust American power yields prosperity and security. In his foreign policy white paper, he states, "It is only American power—conceived in the broadest terms—that can provide the foundation of an international system that ensures the security and prosperity of the United States and our friends and allies."<sup>124</sup> This reversal is important, as it prefigures Romney's vision of American foreign affairs. Romney's foreign policy center is the maximization (and projection) of American power (influence) (and its projection) in the world.

In his October 2011 speech at The Citadel, Romney unveiled a vision for an "American Century" as his foreign policy platform's signature promise. In that speech, Romney said, "this century must be an American Century...In an American Century, America leads the free world and the free world leads the entire world."<sup>125</sup> Though the statement appears unremarkable given the history of American power, the statement's provenance suggests what Romney envisions for U.S. international relations. Coined by Henry Luce

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124. Romney, "An American Century."

125. Romney, Mitt. "Mitt Romney Delivers Remarks on U.S. Foreign Policy." The Citadel, Charleston, South Carolina, 7 Oct. 2011. Transcript. <http://www.mittromney.com/blogs/mitts-view/2011/10/mitt-romney-delivers-remarks-us-foreign-policy>



Romney draws a direct correlation between presentation of American strength and the security of the U.S. and its ideals. Romney characterizes Obama's statements as "apologizing for America" and "unilateral disarmament in the diplomatic and moral sphere."

in a 1941 article in *Life*, the notion of an "American Century" was used to exhort the nation to fully enter World War II and ascend to its rightful place as the unparalleled international power. The term has connoted the righteousness of U.S. power as well. A Romney administration would be animated by the notion that the U.S. should act powerfully and in keeping with its own vision of the international sphere.

Romney's emphasis on this historical term suggests a nostalgic—or perhaps outmoded—approach to foreign policy—an understanding which gains strength through broader analysis of his stated positions. Returning to his focus on American power, Romney cites President Reagan and his idea of "Peace through Strength" as the font of his foreign policy vision. "It is only American power—conceived in the broadest terms—that can provide the foundation of an international system that ensures the security and prosperity of the United States and our friends and allies around the world."<sup>126</sup> Romney's favorable view of the U.S. protecting its allies and presiding over the international sphere serves as a marked contrast to Obama's emphasis on collaborative and coalition-based international action.

Romney criticized Obama's foreign policy as fundamentally weak, believing the absence of both strong language and independent international action signal an abdication of American strength and leadership. "Without American leadership," Romney said at The Citadel, "without clarity of American purpose and resolve, the world becomes a far more dangerous place, and liberty and prosperity would surely be among the first casualties."<sup>127</sup> Here, Romney draws a direct correlation between presentation of American strength and the security of the U.S. and its ideals. Regarding Obama's admission that the U.S., at times, has acted without regard for the international system, Romney issued a strong rebuke, characterizing the President's statements as "apologizing for America" and "unilateral disarmament in the diplomatic and moral sphere."<sup>128</sup> At The Citadel, Romney saved his clearest statement for last. "This is very simple: If you do not want America to be the strongest nation on Earth, I am not your President. You have that President today."<sup>129</sup> A Romney administration would find no place for public reflection on U.S. foreign policy shortcomings, believing they cripple the U.S. in the international sphere. Romney scorns Obama's belief that willingness to acknowledge missteps increases credibility and strengthens American allies' belief in U.S. leadership; rather, Romney believes such statements signal American weakness and shake its "resolve."

Romney's consistent return to the image of American "resolve" is telling. The allusions to a one of Bush's favorite formulation are noteworthy. On many occasions, Bush also noted the importance of American resolve in strengthening U.S. foreign affairs.

126. *ibid*

127. *ibid*

128. Romney, "An American Century."

129. Romney, Mitt. "Mitt Romney Delivers Remarks on U.S. Foreign Policy." The Citadel, Charleston, South Carolina, 7 Oct. 2011. Transcript. <http://www.mittromney.com/blogs/mitts-view/2011/10/mitt-romney-delivers-remarks-us-foreign-policy>

Romney approaches international institutions with all the skepticism of his neo-conservative predecessors and little patience for process-based international diplomacy. In his foreign policy white paper, Romney writes that an “international system undergirded by American values of economic and political freedom” is “necessarily superior to a world system organized by multilateral organizations like the UN.”<sup>130</sup> Romney sees a multilateral, coalition-based international order and an international system imbued with American values and leadership as mutually exclusive. Romney’s vision of multilateralism—as an impediment to American leadership—differs markedly from the President’s vision, which sees multilateralism as a vehicle to increase the legitimacy of American international leadership and actions.

Beyond scorning multilateralism, Romney believes that process is worthwhile only if it serves productive action. In a brief critique of the UN in his foreign policy white paper, Romney notes, “bodies like the UN tend to confuse process with substance, prizing the act of negotiating over the outcomes that negotiations can reach.”<sup>131</sup> Hardly the first person to notice the UN’s predilection for debate and protocol, Romney treats the body with scorn reminiscent of the George W. Bush administration and John Bolton. The subtext of Romney’s argument is that the UN is not valuable as a forum for building internationally legitimate policy; rather, it is merely a tool through which the U.S. may promote its international agenda.

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130. Romney, “An American Century.”

131. Ibid.





The United States presidential election this November comes at an important moment for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The Arab uprisings have delivered new governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen that necessitate reconsidered U.S. policy. The uprising in Syria has devolved into civil war, and the international community has stalemated in response. The international conflict over Iran's nuclear program has not been resolved, and opinion diverges over whether to continue negotiation or pursue military solutions.

The evolving political landscape in the region will, over the next four years, pose new challenges to American foreign policy and demand creative policy solutions. Both President Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney are prepared to face the challenges of a new Middle East, yet the two candidates articulate markedly different policy visions for the region.

This analysis uses the candidates' policies and foreign policy statements about select countries in the region to clarify their preferred approaches to the Middle East. It also addresses how these past policies and statements may affect policies in the next presidential term. Finally, the report closes with an investigation of the candidates' differing visions of the international sphere and the U.S.'s proper place in that world.

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