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## **Prospective Republican Presidential Candidates**

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With the US presidential election less than two years away, there is much speculation over which Republicans will jockey for their party's nomination and the opportunity to challenge President Barack Obama in 2012. Since January three prospective candidates, eager to bolster their foreign policy credentials, have made trips to Israel. (Obama too came to Israel during his 2008 campaign, and he may return in the near future with an eye to 2012.) What follows is a brief look at some of the possible GOP contenders and their positions on US-Israel relations.

### **Haley Barbour**, *Governor of Mississippi*

As a governor, Barbour has had limited experience with US-Israel affairs. He did visit Israel this February, however, in a trip many saw as an attempt to show his seriousness about foreign policy and national security. Barbour, who came as a guest of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said at the 2011 Herzliya Conference that the United States' relationship with Israel enhances American economic, technological, and military strength. A Presbyterian, Barbour assured the audience that "the overwhelming majority of American Christians are joined at the hip with American Jews in standing by Israel in this hour of turmoil, or any other time of crisis."

### **Mitch Daniels**, *Governor of Indiana*

Daniels, a rising star on the Right, has not made many public remarks about Israel. At a Hudson Institute event in New York in 2009, Daniels called Israel an "ally" and said that Israel had the right to defend itself – including, if necessary, by attacking Iran. Daniels also strongly denounced anti-Semitism, and specifically Islamic anti-Semitism, when he accepted an award from the Anti-Defamation League that same year.

### **Newt Gingrich**, *former Speaker of the House of Representatives*

Gingrich, one of his party's most polarizing figures, has an established pro-Israel record. Gingrich told the *Jerusalem Post* in 2009 that the US should be sending the message to Israel that "we are for the survival of Israel" and that "we are not going to tolerate Iran getting nuclear weapons." In an article in *Israel Hayom* in 2010, Gingrich criticized the

current administration for its policy towards Iran and terror: “Evading the confrontation with evil may bring a second Holocaust,” he wrote. “The mistakes made by the White House will exact a terrible price.” Gingrich became the first major Republican to begin raising money for the 2012 presidential campaign in March. He recently called for the next US president to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

**Mike Huckabee**, *former Governor of Arkansas*

Huckabee, a former Baptist minister who made his fifteenth trip to Israel this January, bases much of his support for Israel on faith. “I have a lot of Jewish friends, and they’re kind of like, ‘You evangelicals love Israel more than we do,’” Huckabee told a New Yorker reporter on a previous trip here. In a speech to the Knesset, Huckabee said, “I promise you, you do not have a better friend on earth than the Christians around the world, who know where we have come from and know who we must remain allies and friends with.” Huckabee defended the Israeli attack on the Turkish flotilla headed to Gaza earlier this year, and he supports Jewish settlement in Palestinian-held lands. He does not believe in a two-state solution, at least “on the same piece of real estate.” In fact, Huckabee does not consider Palestinian a legitimate nationality. “There’s really no such thing as a Palestinian,” he stated on the campaign trail in 2008. “That’s been a political tool to try to force land away from Israel.”

**Jon Huntsman Jr.**, *US ambassador to China and former Governor of Utah*

As the US ambassador to China, Huntsman is one of the only prospective GOP candidates with real foreign policy credentials, but his Israel experience actually began when he was governor of Utah. In May 2009, Huntsman led a trade delegation to Israel with the goal of expanding “strategic relations” between Utah and Israel. At the end of his trip, Huntsman praised Israel’s “dynamism” and said the US could both “learn” and “benefit” from Israel. “I was most touched by the people in Israel,” he said. “They feel a certain kinship with the United States. There’s a great sense of friendship, a great sense of partnership.” Huntsman’s resignation as ambassador will come into effect on April 30, 2011.

**Sarah Palin**, *Former Governor of Alaska and 2008 vice presidential candidate*

Palin has never been to Israel, but she displayed a small Israeli flag in her governor’s office in Juneau, Alaska. During the 2008 vice-presidential debate, Palin expressed support for a two-state solution, promised to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and called Israel the United States’ “best and strongest ally in the Middle East.” She later said that the US could not “second guess” actions Israel might take to defend itself from Iran. In an interview with ABC’s Barbara Walters in November 2009, Palin departed from 40 years of US policy when she called for an expansion of Israeli settlements. “I don’t think that the Obama administration has any right to tell Israel that the Jewish settlements cannot expand,” she said. Palin aides have said that a trip to Israel is high on the former governor’s agenda.

**Tim Pawlenty**, *Former Governor of Minnesota*

Pawlenty has focused on Israel mainly in the context of its relationship with his home state, Minnesota. In 2008, Pawlenty led a trade delegation to Israel, where he met with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to discuss strategic relations between Israel and Minnesota in the development of renewable energy. More recently, Pawlenty has begun to critique the White House policy towards Israel. “The Obama administration has shown an astonishing unwillingness to stand by Israel at the United Nations, an organization with a long history of blaming Israel for just about every problem in the Middle East,” Pawlenty said when reports surfaced that the US might support a presidential statement saying that Israel’s settlement activities lacked legitimacy. “It’s time for our UN ambassador to finally show some leadership, draw a line in the sand, and defend our historic ally.”

**Mitt Romney**, *Former Governor of Massachusetts*

Romney, a Mormon who fell short in his bid for the 2008 nomination, told the Jerusalem Post in 2007 that Israel was “a trusted friend and ally in an increasingly hostile region.” In response to how he would manage relations between the US and Israel, Romney pledged that his administration would aim to stop the flow of finances and weapons to Hamas and Hizbollah, insist that the Palestinians “abandon terror and recognize Israel’s right to exist,” and actively work towards a two-state solution. For the most part, however, Romney has talked about Israel’s security in the context of a larger “jihadist threat” from Iran. At the Herzliya Conference in 2007, Romney said that the US must keep Iran from acquiring a nuclear bomb to protect Israel and “ultimately the world.” Romney visited Israel again this January, and he recently criticized the Obama administration in a National Review op-ed for “seeking to ingratiate itself with Arab opinion” at Israel’s expense.