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The US Presidential Race: July 2011 Update

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The Iowa caucuses, the first step in the US presidential nominating process, are a little more than six months away. For the past four decades, at this point in the race, the Republican Party has had either a sitting president or a clear front runner who clinches the nomination. So far, however, no such candidate has emerged, leaving a slew of GOP contenders still vying for the opportunity to challenge Democratic President Barack Obama in November 2012.

American policy towards Israel is a key issue on the campaign trail. In his major Middle East policy speech in mid May, Mr. Obama stated that the 1967 borders, with mutually agreed upon swaps, should be the basis for an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. In the wake of the uproar caused by this statement, he emphasized at the annual AIPAC meeting a few days later that his remarks on the 1967 borders were “misrepresented” and that this basic framework had long been the starting point for negotiations, including under President Bill Clinton.

Nonetheless, the Republican candidates have been quick to attack Mr. Obama’s position on Israel. What follows is a look at who’s who in the still-crowded Republican field and some of their most recent statements on US policy towards Israel.

Mitt Romney, *Former Governor of Massachusetts*

In the year’s first *Des Moines Register* Iowa Poll, conducted in June, Mr. Romney narrowly received the most support (23 percent) from likely Republican caucus-goers. Mr. Romney, who fell short in his bid for the 2008 Republican nomination, said that President Obama threw Israel “under the bus” when he called for 1967 borders to be the basis for an agreement. “He has disrespected Israel and undermined its ability to negotiate peace,” Mr. Romney said.

Michele Bachmann, *United States Representative, Minnesota*

Ms. Bachmann, a Tea Party favorite who received 22 percent of support in the Iowa poll, said in a pre-campaign video released earlier this year that Israel and the United

States “share the same exceptional mission—to be a light unto the nations.” An evangelical Christian, Ms. Bachmann often speaks about her religious connection to Israel. She volunteered on a Negev kibbutz in 1974, when she “came to the understanding that Israel is not merely the cradle of our faith but is the greatest strategic asset that the United States has in the region.” In an ad on her website, Ms. Bachmann says that Mr. Obama “betrayed” Israel in his Middle East policy speech.

Herman Cain, *Former CEO of Godfather’s Pizza*

Mr. Cain, a radio host and pizza magnate, was the only candidate besides Romney and Bachmann to hit double digits in the Iowa poll. “The pizza guy,” as some call the candidate who has never held public office, received 10 percent of support from likely Republican caucus-goers. In an interview on Fox News Sunday on May 22, Mr. Cain reaffirmed his so-called “Cain Doctrine”: “You mess with Israel, you are messing with the US.” He said that if elected president, he would offer Palestinians “nothing” in peace process negotiations because he is “not convinced that the Palestinians are really interested in peace.”

Newt Gingrich, *Former Speaker of the House of Representatives*

Commentators have been questioning the future of Mr. Gingrich’s campaign since his senior staff resigned en masse in early June. Still, Mr. Gingrich, a polarizing figure with an established pro-Israel record, received 7 percent of support in the Iowa poll. On June 12, Mr. Gingrich told the Republican Jewish Coalition in California that if he is elected president, he will, under certain circumstances, cut off funds to the Palestinian Authority. He described Mr. Obama’s position on the Palestinian Authority and Israel as “suicidal” for Israel, and asked Congress to condemn Mr. Obama’s proposal regarding the 1967 borders.

Ron Paul, *United States Representative, Texas*

Mr. Paul, a twelve-term Congressman known for his libertarian views, has been called the “intellectual godfather” of the Tea Party. “While President Obama’s demand that Israel make hard concessions in her border conflicts may very well be in her long-term interest, only Israel can make that determination on her own, without pressure from the United States or coercion by the United Nations,” Mr. Paul said after Mr. Obama’s Middle East policy speech. In the Iowa poll, Mr. Paul received 7 percent of support.

Tim Pawlenty, *Former Governor of Minnesota*

Mr. Pawlenty called Mr. Obama’s proposal to base a border on lines drawn before the 1967 Arab-Israeli War a “mistaken and very dangerous” demand. In an interview at the Council on Foreign Relations this June, Mr. Pawlenty said that it “breaks my heart that the president of this country treats Israel, our great friend, as a problem rather than as an ally.”

Mr. Pawlenty received 6 percent of support in the Iowa poll, a disappointing sign for his campaign.

Jon Huntsman, Jr., *Former Governor of Utah and US Ambassador to China*

Obama campaign manager David Plouffe once identified Mr. Huntsman as the only Republican who made him “a wee bit queasy” about the 2012 election. A relatively moderate Republican who served as U.S. ambassador to China until recently, Mr. Huntsman has described Obama’s positions towards Israel as “hostile.” In response to Mr. Obama’s remarks on the 1967 borders, Mr. Huntsman said, “It’s always been one of the basic tenets of foreign policy. Friends and allies, we let them handle their own strategy. Israel’s our friend and ally.” Mr. Huntsman received just 2 percent of support in the Iowa Poll.

Rick Santorum, *Former United States Senator, Pennsylvania*

Santorum, who was the third-ranking Senate Republican and one of his party’s most rapidly rising stars before he lost his bid for a third term to a Democrat, has poor poll ratings. Santorum wrote in an op-ed on May 20, 2011, the day after Mr. Obama delivered his Middle East policy speech, that Israel has never been in more danger of disappearing and that Mr. Obama “has just put Israel’s very existence in more peril.”

Gary E. Johnson, *Former Governor of New Mexico*

Mr. Johnson, a libertarian known for his efforts to legalize marijuana during his two terms as governor of New Mexico, has no clear base and little name recognition outside of his home state. “I’ve been to Israel and the Golan Heights, and I understand the threats Israel faces from outside and within,” he said when asked about his views on the Middle East and Israel in January 2010. “I can’t summarize my position as the issues are too complex.”

Thaddeus McCotter, *United States Representative, Michigan*

Mr. McCotter, a five-term congressman from Michigan, launched his long-shot presidential bid at the beginning of July. “Mideast peace will not result from arbitrarily and unilaterally imposed solutions that will, in consequence, only further destabilize the region,” Mr. McCotter said in a statement he issued right after Mr. Obama delivered his speech.

Sarah Palin, *Former Governor of Alaska and 2008 Vice Presidential Candidate*

The Republican field is “not yet set,” Ms. Palin, who could join the race any day, told a *Newsweek* reporter in early July. “But I do believe that I can win.” Ms. Palin, who departed from 40 years of US policy when she called for an expansion of Israeli settlements in November 2009, responded to Mr. Obama’s Middle East policy speech on her Facebook page: “President Obama has in essence boxed Israel in without regard for the facts on the ground and without appreciating the fact that Israel looks across the

negotiating table and sees the terrorist organization Hamas in alliance with Fatah,” she wrote.

Rick Perry, Governor of Texas

Aides say that Mr. Perry is “50-50” on whether to run. Mr. Perry criticized Obama after the president delivered his Middle East policy speech for alienating Israel, “one of our strongest partners” in the war on terror. “President Obama is asking our Israeli friends to give up too much security and territory as a prelude to a renewed peace process,” he said.

