



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS  
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING



---

Israel, the Palestinians, and the 2012 Republican Primaries: Fantasy Politics on Display

Author(s): Lawrence Davidson

Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Summer 2012), pp. 48-64

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Institute for Palestine Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2012.XLI.4.48>

Accessed: 27/08/2015 12:22

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press and Institute for Palestine Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Palestine Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>



## ISRAEL, THE PALESTINIANS, AND THE 2012 REPUBLICAN PRIMARIES: FANTASY POLITICS ON DISPLAY

LAWRENCE DAVIDSON

*This essay looks at the 2012 Republican primaries through the lens of “localism” and how candidates and lobbies manipulate for their own purposes the ignorance of their voting constituencies on issues not relevant to their everyday lives. After a discussion of the wider process, the piece focuses on the eight leading candidates in the presidential primary race with regard to Israel and Palestine, with an overview of their positions and advisers. It ends with some reflections on the consequences of the peculiarly American mix of localism, national politics, and special interest groups.*

LOCALISM IS A UNIVERSAL IMPULSE. It reflects a natural concentration on one’s own environment, giving priority to where one is and what it takes to survive and prosper in that place. It is a condition affecting the orientation of leaders and citizens alike. Along with localism usually comes lack of interest in things farther away, which are assumed not to have an impact on one’s immediate needs and goals. This condition is modified only if the individual feels that something outside the local orbit may, or actually does, affect his or her life. In such cases, the foreign “something” is imported into the local environment and warrants notice.

Localism is often accompanied by “know-nothingness.” Know-nothingness is a knowledge void bred of knowing little or nothing about particular situations—usually those beyond the local sphere. As long as the situation remains separate from the local arena, know-nothingness is not a problem. If, however, for whatever reason, the situation is imported into the local environment and represented as something affecting one’s life, know-nothingness can be dangerous, for it opens the mind to all manner of distortions and illusions. Politics is one of the most common areas in which this situation can occur.

Politicians and government officials (among others) are famous for taking advantage of the knowledge voids of their constituents. Into these voids they can pour all sorts of nonsense with impunity. In certain

---

LAWRENCE DAVIDSON is professor of history at West Chester University. His most recent book is *Cultural Genocide* (Rutgers University Press, 2012). Also, the tenth edition of *A Concise History of the Middle East* (Westview Press), coauthored with Arthur Goldschmidt, will be out in late 2012.

*Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. XLI, No. 4 (Summer 2012), pp. 48–64, ISSN: 0377-919X; electronic ISSN: 1533-8614.  
© 2012 by the Institute for Palestine Studies. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: jps.2012.XLI.4.48.

seasons such behavior becomes predictable and common: for example, in the presidential or congressional election campaigns.

The untruths and misrepresentations offered at these times are not random or arbitrary. They tend to cluster around issues of importance to powerful groups that have money and influence in the political arena. Such groups can help a politically ambitious contender get elected and at the same time help sway public opinion on issues that, objectively, have little or nothing to do with the prosperity or general well-being of the local community. Thus, the motivation of the politicians who espouse positions on such issues can often be found in their connection to special interests with deep pockets.

Here is an example of how this sort of alliance can come about. Let us imagine that there is a politician X from a state such as North Dakota. It makes no difference whether X is Republican or Democrat. X decides to stand for election to Congress, announces his or her bid, and begins to seek backers. Soon X is approached by lobbyist Y, who represents a powerful, nationwide, special interest lobby. This lobby is concerned with specific foreign policy issues that have nothing to do with North Dakota and its local affairs. Thus, X and his or her constituents are likely to be ignorant of the situational details put forth by Y and the ends pursued by Y's lobby.

Y tells X: My lobby is ready to help you with your present and future political campaigns. It will organize support for you both in your state and out-of-state. It will help raise campaign funds and facilitate positive media coverage. If you win, it will use its influence in Congress and within your political party to procure postelection committee appointments. In return, all Y's lobby requires is that X vote and advocate for those bills and positions important to it.

None of these bills and positions are likely to have direct relevance to the local lives of X's constituents. That is where Y's desire for X's advocacy comes in. Y's lobby will want X to start pressing their issues to his or her constituents so that they import them, as it were, into their local environment and come to see them as affecting their immediate lives.

In the case of our hypothetical Y's lobby—the Zionist lobby—the task of getting constituents to adopt its issues is greatly facilitated by the fact that a Judeo-Christian belief system has underpinned American society from its founding. In its more dogmatic manifestation, it has produced a growing number of Americans who describe themselves as “fundamentalist Christians” and adhere to a literal belief in Bible stories. This outlook has also led many to see the Muslim world as a particularly dangerous religious competitor. Israel/Palestine, the so-called Holy Land, has been considered a central battleground in this competition. This, in turn, has encouraged the growth of a Christian Zionist movement that supports Israeli's position and policies in the Middle East.

Even beyond the fundamentalist sphere, in the United States in general, the inherited religious-cultural mindset, combined with decades of

influence in the media, has made a version of events consonant with the Zionist version an accepted part of mainstream American thought. Thus, the views espoused by an ambitious candidate for national office will likely reflect those of the Zionist lobby even in the absence of the kind of direct approach described above. Once a candidate becomes a serious contender, however, cooperation becomes a natural and expected part of the process.

### THE 2012 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES

It is against this background that one can begin to make sense of the ludicrous treatment of Israel and Palestine in the 2012 Republican presidential primary race. So powerful is the religious-cultural mindset in the United States that Christian Zionism, in recent decades, has become a major influence in the Republican Party. At least three of those who ran in its presidential primaries this year can be described as fundamentalist Christians, and the combination of Jewish Zionist political influence and Christian Zionist religious zeal more generally created—with a single exception—a powerful political environment that influenced the policy positions of all the candidates.

The official primary season did not open until January 2012, but the race was in high gear as early as May 2011, when the first of thirteen presidential nationally televised debates was held. By that time, the two main conditions necessary for the scenario outlined above were in place: (a) constituencies (mostly right-wing conservatives) that were largely focused on local issues, with little if any knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and (b) an array of political hopefuls most of whom were know-nothings when it comes to the Middle East. Most of the candidates had long since come to an accommodation with Zionist lobbies in the United States or embraced their views.

The results followed naturally. Sheer nonsense streamed forth about Israel being an important local issue for all Americans. The Palestinians were presented as terrorists or invented people, and so on. In our present case, the nonsense poured from the mouths of those vying for the Republican presidential nomination into the knowledge vacuum that dominates the right-wing of the Republican Party and beyond.

Below we focus on the Middle East views and connections of the eight candidates who held the field most prominently through 2011.

#### *The Front-Runners*

##### *Willard "Mitt" Romney: The Man Who Won the Republican Primary*

Mitt Romney is a Michigan-born Mormon and the son of the successful businessman (CEO and president of American Motors Corp., 1954–62) and politician (governor of Michigan, 1963–69) George W. Romney. He was educated at Brigham Young University in Utah and later earned a

combined master's degree in law and business from Harvard University. His subsequent career has consisted of two pursuits: business management and capital investment on the one hand, and politics on the other. The first pursuit made him a multimillionaire; the second made him governor of Massachusetts (2002–6).

Romney has no special knowledge of the Middle East in general or the Palestinians in particular. With one exception, Romney seems not to have interacted with anyone from the Middle East. The exception, however, is an important one: the current Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu and Romney met in the mid-1970s as graduate students at Harvard. This appears to have led to a lasting friendship. According to Romney, he and the prime minister “share common experiences and have a perspective and underpinning which is similar.” Indeed, the connection is so deep that he and Netanyahu can “almost talk in shorthand.” As a result, Romney, who is inconsistent on almost every other issue, is quite consistent when it comes to Israel. He has “suggested that he would not make any significant policy decisions about Israel without consulting Mr. Netanyahu.”<sup>1</sup>

So here is the situation with Mitt Romney: He appears to have no interest in the plight of the Palestinians, but as a personal friend of the Israeli prime minister (and perhaps also as a practicing Mormon) he is a devotee of Israel. This makes him a ready ally of the U.S. Zionist lobby.

One of Romney's favorite themes is that Israel as a Jewish state constitutes “a vital national interest” of the United States.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, he is not the only candidate to make this assertion. Interestingly, the assertion is always made ad hoc. The logical follow-up question would be, why is this so? But that question is never asked, and therefore never answered.

According to Romney, “America and Israel share common values of representative democracy, human rights, rule of law.”<sup>3</sup> This theme is also asserted by others seeking to be the next president. It functions as a sort of mantra which, repeated often enough, transforms itself into a self-evident fact. Yet even a cursory glance at the overwhelming data put forth by Israeli organizations such as B'Tselem (Israeli Information Center for Human Rights), Gush Shalom (Israeli Peace Bloc), and Rabbis for Human Rights would show that the assertion concerning the values themselves is untrue. Israel's value system (and its practice of democracy, human rights, rule of law, etc.) as it operates in relation to the Palestinians is, in fact, on par with the American value system relative to African Americans before the civil rights era.

Romney maintains that “the reason there is not peace between the Palestinians and Israel is because . . . the leadership of the Palestinian people are Hamas and others who think like Hamas, who have as their intent the elimination of Israel.”<sup>4</sup> Hamas does not constitute the leadership of the Palestinian people, and what leadership position it does hold

is confined to the Gaza Strip. The recognized/principal leadership cadre among the Palestinians is the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) headed by Mahmud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The PA cooperates with Israel to a point considered treasonous by some. What meager demands the Abbas team has made on Israel certainly does not include its "elimination." In any case, according to Romney, trying to negotiate any kind of peace with the Palestinians would be like "setting up a tent in the middle of a hurricane."<sup>5</sup>

Romney has declared that "we will not have an inch of difference between ourselves and our ally, Israel."<sup>6</sup> He asserts that "the right course is to stand behind our friends [Israel], to listen to them, and to let the entire world know that we will stay with them and we will support them and defend them."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the two countries are so closely linked that Romney does not "think America should play the role of the leader of the peace process [but] instead we should stand by our ally"; his own "inclination is to follow the guidance of our ally Israel," for example, concerning where the U.S. embassy should be located.<sup>8</sup> He is also committed to making sure that Israel maintains its "strategic edge."<sup>9</sup> No tough love strategy here. This is the sort of position that has condemned the United States to identify itself strategically and tactically with an expansionist state that has demonstrated no reciprocal concern for U.S. interests and that has proved disastrous for American foreign policy in the Middle East. It has, however, earned a lot of American politicians of both parties enormous amounts of cash and other assistance to carry on with their political ambitions.

*Richard John ("Rick") Santorum: A Man Who Almost Won*

Rick Santorum is a Christian fundamentalist of the Catholic faith. He was educated at Penn State University and the University of Pittsburgh. Eventually he took a law degree from the Dickinson School of Law. He worked for a time as a lawyer and then went into politics. From 1991 to 1995 he served as a congressman from Pennsylvania and then as a Pennsylvania senator from 1995 to 2007.

Santorum's "knowledge" of the Middle East and the Palestine question appears to come largely from a fundamentalist reading of the Bible and from the Zionist version of history current in his circles. Thus it comes as no surprise that during the primary campaign, his rhetoric followed many of the same themes as that of Mitt Romney.

Santorum asserts, for example, that if he were to win the presidency, "we would find no gap between Israel and the United States because our interests are united."<sup>10</sup> This is a variant of Romney's "not an inch of difference" proclamation. Like Romney, Santorum feels no need to explain why "our interests are united."

On occasion, Santorum drifted into biblically inspired fantasy, as when he proclaimed that "the bottom line is that the West Bank is legitimately

Israeli country . . . all the people who live in the West Bank are Israelis, they're not Palestinians. There is no Palestinian."<sup>11</sup> (Actually, one would be hard pressed to find any Israeli, even the most fanatical, prepared to assert that there are no Palestinians on the West Bank.) He also veered toward the apocalyptic when describing Israel as having "never been in more danger of disappearing . . . surrounded by an armed alliance of Jihadist fundamentalists and nationalists, from north to south to east. Its west is the Mediterranean Ocean, where Israel's enemies would like to push her Jewish population. And Pres. Barack Obama has just put Israel's very existence in more peril."<sup>12</sup>

According to Santorum, Israel's return to its pre-1967 borders would be the same as the United States returning Texas to Mexico.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted here that there is documentary evidence that U.S. Pres. James Polk sparked the 1846 war with Mexico based on dubious Texas border claims and thereby waged a manufactured war.<sup>14</sup> To that extent, there may be a similarity between Israel's acquisition of the West Bank and the U.S. acquisition of what was Mexican territory. However, this is certainly not what Santorum had in mind. It is not far-fetched to suggest that he attributes the acquisition of territory in both cases to God-ordained Manifest Destiny.

*[Rick Santorum suspended his campaign 10 April 2012 and endorsed Romney on 7 May 2012.]*

*Newton Leroy ("Newt") Gingrich: Another Almost Winner*

Newt Gingrich is from Georgia. His stepfather was a military officer so he moved around as a child. He was educated at Emory University in Atlanta and eventually earned a PhD in modern European history at Tulane University. Academically, these are good credentials. Subsequently, he taught history at West Georgia College but was denied tenure in 1978, probably because he was spending so much time seeking political office. That same year he was elected as a Republican to the U.S. Congress. He would be reelected six times, and in 1994 became speaker of the House of Representatives.

Gingrich is best described as a Ronald Reagan Republican: ultraconservative on domestic issues and aggressive in foreign policy. As a long-serving congressman, he has long been in the Zionist camp. However, trained as an historian, one must assume that he knows the rules of evidence. That means that, unlike Romney and Santorum, he probably knows when he is spouting historical nonsense.

Just as Santorum often echoed Romney, Gingrich often echoed Santorum. Thus, he tells us to "remember, there was no Palestinian state. [It was] part of the Ottoman Empire. I think we have invented Palestinian people."<sup>15</sup> It is hard to believe that someone with a PhD in modern European history does not know that just about every state in the Middle East today was part of the Ottoman Empire and subsequently "invented"

by European imperialist mapmaking. When the British defeated the Ottomans in World War I, they occupied Palestine and “invented it” as a distinct political entity, that is, as a League of Nations mandate territory separate from Greater Syria. By 1948, when Britain finally was pushed out, Palestine was a political fact that had taken on self-conscious, national solidity in opposition to British and Zionist imperialism. This is not an unusual process. The thirteen American colonies also took on a self-conscious national reality largely in opposition to British imperialism.

Gingrich followed up this historical sleight of hand with others. For example, “Somebody ought to have the courage to tell the truth. These people [the Palestinians] are terrorists.”<sup>16</sup> In an August 2012 op-ed, he described the Palestinian bid for statehood as an “existential threat to the state of Israel.”<sup>17</sup> Such nonsense statements are par for the course in campaign politics, but as we shall see, Gingrich’s nonsense is worth a lot of campaign finance support.

What are some of the things one might have expected of a Gingrich presidency? He said that on his first day in office he would “sign the executive order to move the American embassy to Jerusalem in recognition of Israeli sovereignty”<sup>18</sup> and that he would appoint John Bolton, who had been a highly polarizing figure as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, as his secretary of state.<sup>19</sup> He also promised to “provide all available intelligence to the Israeli government, ensure that they had the equipment necessary, and reassure them that if [Israel decided to take preemptive measures to avert an existential threat, he] would require no advanced notice.”<sup>20</sup>

*[Newt Gingrich ended his campaign and endorsed Romney on 2 May 2012.]*

### ***The Runners-Up***

#### *Herman Cain*

Herman Cain is a businessman and a Tea Party leader. He grew up in Georgia, graduated from Morehouse College, and took a master’s in computer science at Purdue University. As a businessman, Cain is a success story. He served as vice president of Pillsbury Company and was the chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. Cain might know a lot about his business interests, but of the Middle East he knew only what he was told, and not all of that did he remember.

“I’m not convinced that the Palestinians are really interested in peace. . . . If we look at history, it has been clear that the Palestinians have always wanted to . . . push Israel for more and more and more,” Cain told *Fox News Sunday*. If he were the next president, he continued, he would “offer the Palestinians nothing as part of a peace deal with Israel.”<sup>21</sup> Actually, if Cain reversed this statement about history, making it the Israelis who were pushing the Palestinians for “more and more and more,” he would

have the story right. But Cain was a know-nothing when it comes to this issue, so he will unquestioningly repeat any nonsense fed him.

However, he seems not able to do so with complete reliability. When asked the question “where do you stand on the right of return?” on that same *Fox News Sunday*, Cain at first appeared not to know what the questioner was talking about. When he finally placed the issue, he said “that is something that should be negotiated, but not under Palestinian conditions.” The Palestinians can return only “if that is a decision that Israel wants to make.” On an issue closer to home, he promised that if he became president he would not appoint a Muslim either to his cabinet or as a federal judge, because of “this creeping attempt . . . this attempt to gradually ease Sharia law and the Muslim faith into our government.”<sup>22</sup>

In August, Cain tried to make up for his gaffe about Palestinian return when he became the only candidate to attend former Fox News host Glenn Beck’s “Restoring Courage” rally in Israel,<sup>23</sup> where he stated that Jonathan Pollard’s trial was unfair and that, if elected, he would review the case. He also declared that Israel needed to hold on to the Golan Heights.<sup>24</sup>

*[Herman Cain suspended his campaign 3 December 2011.]*

#### *Michele Bachmann*

Michele Bachmann is a Republican member of the House of Representatives from Minnesota. She went to one of the state’s public universities and then took a law degree from the O. W. Coburn School of Law, which is part of the Christian fundamentalist Oral Roberts University. Her only direct experience with the Middle East was working for a summer on an Israeli kibbutz after graduating from high school.

That may have been where she picked up the idea that the “so-called Palestinian ‘right of return,’ would demographically destroy Israel by swamping it with millions of Arabs who never lived in Israel, thereby turning the world’s only Jewish state into the world’s 23rd Arab state.”<sup>25</sup> She also insists that Israel should not have to go back to the pre-1967 borders because those borders are “indefensible.” This strange, ahistorical statement mimics the claim made repeatedly by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Again, it is one of those contentions that functions as a mantra, repeated over and over until taken for granted. Yet in truth, Israel’s pre-1967 borders have always proved defensible. The only attacks those borders have not been able to ward off are rocket fire and small-scale guerrilla raids, but no Israeli border, wherever it might be, could prove absolutely secure from such attacks.

Michele Bachmann attributes her foreign policy views on Israel to her Christian faith. “I am convinced in my heart and in my mind that if the United States fails to stand with Israel, that is the end of the United States,”<sup>26</sup> she told a meeting of the Republican Jewish Coalition meeting in Los Angeles in May 2011. “We have to show that we are inextricably

entwined, that as a nation we have been blessed because of our relationship with Israel, and if we reject Israel, then there is a curse that comes into play.”<sup>27</sup>

Bachmann promised that if elected president, she would announce on the day of her inauguration the transfer of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. In fact, she said she had “already secured a donor who said they will personally pay for the ambassador’s home to be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.”<sup>28</sup> Her administration would also recognize Israel’s 1980 annexation of the Golan Heights and “any settlements which Israel, as a sovereign state, chooses to annex.”<sup>29</sup>

*[Michele Bachmann suspended her campaign 4 January 2012.]*

*Jon Meade Huntsman Jr.*

Jon Huntsman was a well-liked governor of Utah. He was appointed U.S. ambassador to China in 2009, where he served until 2011. Like Mitt Romney, Huntsman is of the Mormon faith. He was educated at the University of Pennsylvania where he graduated with a major in international politics. He served in both the Reagan administration, as a staff assistant to the president, and in the Bush Sr. administration, as deputy assistant secretary of commerce and then ambassador to Singapore. It was Barack Obama who appointed him ambassador to China.

All of Huntsman’s foreign policy experience was with the Far East. That means when it comes to the Middle East and Israel-Palestine, he followed a predictable course based on information purveyed by Zionists. Thus the PA’s bid for statehood at the United Nations was a “cynical, counterproductive ploy,” Obama’s “misguided Middle East policies directly contributed to a breakdown of the peace process,” and President Abbas was trying to isolate Israel from the international community and therefore undermining the peace process.<sup>30</sup> More fundamentally, “the foundation of a successful U.S. policy in the Middle East rests upon a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.” And, “Israel is an ally, a fellow democracy and shares our values and interests. . . . An enduring peace that protects and promotes Israel’s interests should remain our priority.”<sup>31</sup>

*[Jon Huntsman ended his campaign 16 January 2012.]*

*James Richard “Rick” Perry*

Rick Perry is the current governor of Texas. He inherited the job in 2000 when George W. Bush moved on to the White House. In August 2011, he decided to make a run for the White House himself. Perry was educated at Texas A&M University where he studied “animal science.” He credits his ability to communicate “quickly, clearly, and with passion” to a summer internship with a Texas company that trained him to be a “door-to-door book salesman.” After graduating from college he joined the air force and learned to fly planes. In 1977 he

left the military and went into politics. None of this training taught him anything about the Middle East or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And so, like Rick Santorum, he fell back on the Zionist version of history and the Bible. “As a Christian, I have a clear directive to support Israel,” he declared. “From my perspective it’s pretty easy both as an American and a Christian. I am going to stand with Israel.”<sup>32</sup> For example, he condemned the Obama administration for suggesting the 1967 borders as the starting point for negotiations, and characterized the Palestinians’ insistence on the right of return as “a disturbing sign that the ultimate Palestinian ‘solution’ remains the destruction of the Jewish state.”<sup>33</sup>

“I consider the Israeli settlements to be legal, from my perspective, and I support them.” As for the West Bank, “the Israelis are clearly on Israel’s land that they have fought hard to win and to keep.”<sup>34</sup> Yet no U.S. government to date—as pro-Israel as they all have been—has declared the settlements legal or openly challenged the international judgment that Israeli settlements on the West Bank violate the Geneva Conventions and are thus illegal under international law.

*[Rick Perry suspended his campaign on 19 January 2012.]*

#### *And Finally—Ron Paul*

In the Republican primary contest there was one candidate who did not align his foreign policy message with the Zionist lobby line, and that was Ron Paul. Paul was a long-time representative from Texas before giving up his seat to concentrate on his 2012 primary run. He was educated at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania and then went on to earn an MD at Duke University’s School of Medicine. His specialty is obstetrics and gynecology. He served as a medical officer in the air force from 1963 to 1965.

Paul is a libertarian in domestic policy and a noninterventionist in foreign policy. He is against any U.S. military aid or intervention abroad and sees the country’s enormous annual assistance to Israel as mostly “corporate welfare to the U.S. military-industrial complex.”<sup>35</sup> Paul would end such aid to Israel and all other countries if elected president. In addition, he has publicly disagreed with many of the nonsense statements of the other primary candidates on the Middle East in general and Israel-Palestine in particular. He has condemned Israel’s attack on humanitarian flotillas bound for Gaza, defended the right of the Palestinians to elect a Hamas government, and disagreed with Gingrich’s characterization of the Palestinians as “an invented people,” which he said was just Newt “stirring up trouble.” All of this has made Paul anathema to American Zionists and Israel’s leadership.

On the one hand, Paul is an example of a politician whose principles are stronger than the allures of either money or political conformity. He has resisted Zionist pressures and survived, at least as a member of the

House of Representatives. On the other hand, it should be understood that as a noninterventionist, Paul as president would not have materially benefited the Palestinians. Thus, while Paul's policies as president would appear to go against Israeli interests, it would not have substantially altered the power balance between Israel and the Palestinians.

*[Ron Paul did not formally quit the race but participated in no primaries after April 2012.]*

### ***The Advisers***

The often historically erroneous positions taken up by the Republican primary candidates could suggest that they lacked advisers when it came to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is not the case, however. What follows are some of the more prominent advisers identified by the candidates themselves:

#### ***Mitt Romney***

Mitt Romney, who since June 2012 is the Republican party's official candidate for president, has had three principal Middle East advisers to date:

- ***Walid Phares:*** A Maronite Christian from Lebanon who immigrated to the United States in 1990. As a practicing lawyer in Lebanon, Phares was involved in defending terrorists associated with right-wing Christian militias during the civil war. Perhaps that is why, upon coming to the United States, the neoconservatives immediately adopted him as an "expert" on terrorism prevention. He has subsequently served as a "terrorism expert" for Fox News and the Christian Broadcasting Network.
- ***Meghan O'Sullivan:*** A graduate of Georgetown University and Oxford, where she took her DPhil. She got into politics as an aide to Daniel Patrick Moynihan and then went on to the Brookings Institute, where she became known for her expertise in formulating "smart sanctions" against countries like Iraq. She joined the administration of George W. Bush and became an assistant to Paul Bremer, head of the U.S. occupation regime in Baghdad. Later she became the White House "point person" for Afghanistan. With the end of the Bush administration, she went to teach at Harvard.
- ***Mary Beth Long:*** Graduated from Pennsylvania State University in 1985 and was recruited by the CIA in 1986, where she worked on terrorism issues. Eventually, she became George W. Bush's assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs.

The common dominator among Romney's Middle East advisers is that they are all focused either on terrorism or punishment (sanctions). This gives us insight into Romney's point of view when it comes to the countries of the region other than Israel.

*Rick Santorum*

His principal foreign policy adviser was reportedly his former Senate chief of staff Mark Rodgers. Rodgers worked on Capital Hill for sixteen years, mostly dealing with strategic planning and communications issues. He has written and spoken on such subjects as “faith and public life” and “culture and caring.” The closest he may have come to subjects touching on the Middle East is when he majored in petroleum engineering at Penn State University.

*Newt Gingrich*

Gingrich listed no less than thirteen individuals as advisers on the Middle East. The most noteworthy can reasonably be defined as neoconservatives who back Israel unconditionally and see the Muslim world as a perennial threat to the United States. These include (a) James Woolsey, former director of the CIA, who characterizes the “war on terror” as “World War IV” (the cold war was supposedly World War III) and predicts it will last for decades; and (b) David Wurmser, formerly a Middle East adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney and special assistant to John Bolton. He is one of authors of the infamous 1996 report “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” which urged Israel’s leaders to abandon “land for peace” negotiations with the Palestinians.

*Herman Cain*

Cain’s foreign policy adviser (and later chief spokesman for his presidential campaign) was Jeffrey Gordon. His experience in this area seems to have been limited to a career as a defense industry lobbyist. In October 2011, Cain named Imri Eisner as his point man for Jewish outreach. Eisner, a New York lawyer who has lived in Israel, was active in the 2008 McCain campaign.<sup>36</sup>

*Michele Bachmann*

According to the *New York Times*, “Mrs. Bachmann is often influenced by the last person she speaks with on an issue.”<sup>37</sup> On the Middle East, that person was often Frank Gaffney, an Islamophobe who believes that Muslims are conspiring to take over the United States through the spread of shari’a law, that the Muslim Brotherhood is attempting to infiltrate the conservative movement in the United States, and, finally, that President Obama is a secret Muslim.

*Jon Huntsman*

Huntsman’s principal foreign policy adviser on the Middle East was Richard Armitage, a neoconservative who was one of the signatories of the 1998 “Project for the New American Century” letter urging then President Clinton to work for Saddam Hussein’s removal from power in Iraq. Subsequently, Armitage served as George W. Bush’s deputy secretary of state.

*Rick Perry*

On 2 November 2011, when asked by Fox News who his advisers were, Perry's reply with regard to Middle East foreign policy was, "You know, I've had some great foreign policy conversations with Liz Cheney and with John Bolton. I mean, people who actually understand, intimately, where these countries are, why they think like they think." The credentials of these two individuals are as follows: (a) Liz Cheney, the daughter of former vice president Dick Cheney, has a law degree from the University of Chicago. She worked in the George W. Bush's State Department as deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, where she ran programs that funneled money to prescreened organizations seeking to undermine regimes deemed unfriendly to the United States, particularly Iran and Syria. (b) John Bolton, an aggressive neoconservative and confirmed Zionist ideologue, also worked in the George W. Bush State Department before Bush made him U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, even knowing that Bolton believed that the United Nations should not exist. In both places, Bolton earned the reputation of refusing to listen to information or opinions that contradicted his own. Cheney and Bolton doubtless know, as Perry believes, where the countries of the Middle East are, but whether they understand how the people of the region think is highly questionable.

*Ron Paul*

Paul's foreign policy adviser was Bruce Fein, a noted constitutional lawyer and Justice Department official during the Reagan administration. Fein was a vocal critic of the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq and has advocated a noninterventionist foreign policy.

**FOLLOWING THE MONEY**

Zionist lobbies such as AIPAC express their power and influence in multiple ways. One principal way, as suggested in our opening scenario, is the carrot-and-stick form of enticement directed at just about all American candidates for national office. Money, of course, is the main "carrot." AIPAC itself gives no money, but that is just a technicality. It makes public the voting records on Israel-related legislation and, through its close relations with the major national Jewish organizations, helps channel financial contributions from millions of individual donors to those politicians who cooperate with it. It is probably the case that AIPAC has much to say about how approximately \$60 million in contributions from pro-Israel individuals and groups have been distributed since 1990.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond this, Zionist donors have benefited from the so-called super PAC Supreme Court decisions handed down in 2010. These decisions, particularly the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (FEC)* and *SpeechNow.org v. FEC*, have allowed wealthy individuals, corporations,

and unions to donate unlimited amounts of money to political action committees (PACs), which are officially “independent” of candidates and campaigns but in reality are often run by the candidates’ former staff members. There are very wealthy pro-Israel Americans who make significant political contributions to the candidates and to super PACs. For instance, there are fifty people on the AIPAC board of directors, and each averages contributions at around \$70,000 in any one campaign season. But this is small change compared to some donors, such as the ardently Zionist Sheldon Adelson.

Adelson is a casino owner and businessman with a net worth of about \$25 billion. He started the 2012 Republican primary campaign by donating \$10 million to Newt Gingrich’s campaign through the “super PAC” misleadingly named “Winning Our Future.” Other members of the Adelson family kicked in an additional \$11 million. Another \$14 million was spread around to other Republican candidates. With the demise of Gingrich’s campaign, Adelson has shifted his support to the winner of the Republican primary, Mitt Romney. In mid-June 2012, he donated \$10 million to a pro-Romney PAC with the extraordinary name “Restore Our Future.” This is probably only the beginning of Adelson’s relationship with Romney. Adelson has suggested that he, his family, and his associates are willing to funnel as much as \$100 million into Republican coffers in 2012.<sup>39</sup>

#### LOCALISM, NATIONAL POLITICS, AND THE LOBBY

There was a time when foreign policy was generally separate from the greater range of domestic concerns and so had an independent reality base. The State Department, relatively removed from domestic politics, gathered information on actual conditions in foreign lands and then juxtaposed them to U.S. interests, mostly defined in terms of specialized economic pursuits. Having done so, the department would create a range of policy options for the president and Congress. The only time the State Department options might be set aside was when they ran afoul of powerful lobby interests or ideological concerns. As early as the nineteenth century, this was happening occasionally with regard to Latin America. With regard to Palestine, it was not until after World War I, when Britain’s acquisition of the Mandate enabled it to implement its Jewish National Home project, that Zionist lobbying at the highest levels eventually led to the State Department’s Middle East experts being pushed aside. By 1947 and the presidency of Harry Truman, Zionists and their cause had become a factor in the local political environments of major politicians and therefore could not be ignored.

Today, Israel has become a very important part of the local world of all American politicians working at the national level. Their survival and success almost always require that they respond favorably to the demands of Israel’s supporters. It helps that most of them—including

almost all the participants in this year's Republican primary—know little of the region or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In other words, their localism was accompanied by know-nothingness, making it possible for the knowledge vacuum to be filled with Zionist propaganda gradually integrated into the themes and positions espoused.

While this essay has concentrated on the Republicans and their primary antics, it is important to remember that Zionist influence reaches deep into both political parties. This fact accounts for the abrupt changes in position displayed by Democratic president Barack Obama over the past four years. Barack Obama is not a know-nothing and, at least until he ran for president, was not bound to a vision-narrowing local environment. He arrived at the White House wanting better relations with the Arab world and a comprehensive peace in Israel-Palestine based on a two-state solution founded on the pre-1967 armistice lines. These positions did not survive for very long. What Obama learned was that as the head of the Democratic Party he was, perforce, bound by the Zionist orientation of that party. To step too far outside that local political sphere was to abandon one's political home. Thus, Obama was forced by the political power of the Zionist lobby within the Democratic Party to adjust course. The change can be read in the president's rhetoric which, not surprisingly, eventually came to match that of the Republicans. Thus, "we are bound to Israel because of the interests that we share. . . . But ultimately it is our common ideals that provide the true foundations for our relationship."<sup>40</sup> For the first African American president of the United States to say this about a state with a record like Israel's is a great embarrassment. But it does reflect the political realities that define his office.

In terms of policy, Obama's new position has required his administration to combat the "delegitimization" of Israel by those who would tell the truth about its treatment of the Palestinians and continuing violations of international law. Thus Obama had to brag that "On my watch, the United States of America has led the way, from Durban to the United Nations, against attempts to use international forums to delegitimize Israel."<sup>41</sup> Yet the Republican primary candidates dedicated themselves to claiming that the president wasn't pro-Israel enough. Here hyperbole reigned supreme, as when Mitt Romney accused the president of "throwing Israel under the bus."<sup>42</sup>

This preponderant influence in our political system by a powerful special interest lobby, reflected in the fantasy rhetoric of almost every important politician in the country, will continue until the general public is brought out of its know-nothing condition and into the ugly glare of Israeli-Palestinian reality. When that situation, as well as the ongoing negative impact it has on U.S. relations with the Arab world and the planet's billion-plus Muslims, becomes public knowledge and manifests itself as a voting issue, then things may begin to change.

## ENDNOTES

1. Michael Barbaro, "A Friendship Dating to 1976 Resonates in 2012," *New York Times*, 7 April 2012.
2. Mitt Romney, "Mitt Romney Delivers Remarks to AIPAC Policy Conference," Washington, DC, 6 March 2012, [www.mittromney.com](http://www.mittromney.com).
3. Statement published in *The Competent Conservative*, 19 October 2009, <http://americansinisaelforromney.com>.
4. Florida Republican presidential debate, "CNN Live Event/Special," with Wolf Blitzer, CNN, 26 January 2012, [www.archives.cnn.com](http://www.archives.cnn.com).
5. Sara Boxer, "Romney Says That Obama Is Insufficiently Pro-Israel," *National Journal*, 6 March 2012.
6. Florida Republican presidential debate, "CNN Live Event/Special."
7. Fox News-Google GOP debate, transcript, Fox News, 22 September 2011.
8. Boaz Bismuth, "Romney in October Interview: Obama Threw Israel under the Bus," *Israel Hayom*, 3 July 2011.
9. "Backgrounder: The Candidates on the Israel-Palestine Conflict," *Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)*, 4 May 2012.
10. Kim Geiger, "GOP Hopefuls Tell Pro-Israel Group Obama Shows Weakness on Iran," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 2012.
11. Grace Kiser, "Rick Santorum Claims Everyone in Who Lives in the West Bank Is Israeli," Reuters, 22 November 2011.
12. Rick Santorum, "Israel in Peril," *National Review Online*, 20 May 2011.
13. Saree Makdisi, "Pro-Settler Santorum Claims Mexico and the West Bank," *Salon*, 6 January 2012.
14. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), chapter 8.
15. "Palestinians Are an Invented People, Says Newt Gingrich," *The Guardian*, 9 December 2011.
16. Iowa Republican presidential debate, Des Moines, ABC News, 10 December 2011, full transcript.
17. "Backgrounder: The Candidates on the Israel-Palestine Conflict," *CFR*.
18. Newt Gingrich (speech, AIPAC), 6 May 2012, <http://www.aipac.org>.
19. Rebecca Kaplan, "Gingrich and Bachmann Would Move Embassy to Jerusalem," *National Journal*, 7 December 2011.
20. Newt Gingrich (speech, AIPAC), 6 May 2012.
21. Alex Finland, "Cain on 2012 White House Run," Fox News, 22 May 2011.
22. Shannon Travis, "Herman Cain Assailed as 'Bigoted' over Muslim Remarks," CNN, 28 March 2011.
23. Anuagrah Kumar, "Herman Cain Backs Israel with Glenn Beck in Jerusalem," *Christian Post*, 26 August 2011.
24. Tzvi Gedalyahu and Yoni Kempinski, "GOP Hopeful Herman in Cain in Israel: Jerusalem Is One," *Arutz Sheva*, 28 August 2011.
25. Mark Halperin, "Michele Bachmann Delivers Remarks at Republican Coalition Forum," *Time*, transcript, 7 December 2011.
26. Jeffrey Goldberg, "Michele Bachmann's Hazardous Love for Israel," *Bloomberg (News)*, 18 July 2011.
27. Doug Mataconis, "Michele Bachmann: If We Don't Completely Support Israel, God Will Curse Us," *Outside the Beltway Blog*, 20 May 2011, [www.outsidethebeltway.com](http://www.outsidethebeltway.com).
28. Kaplan, "Gingrich and Bachmann Would Move Embassy to Jerusalem."
29. Halperin, "Michele Bachmann Delivers Remarks at Republican Coalition Forum."
30. Jon Huntsman, "Palestinian Statehood Bid: Sign of a Larger Problem," *National Review Online*, 22 September 2011.
31. Jon Huntsman, "Renewing America's Leadership in the World: Israel," Huntsman for President website.
32. Elizabeth Tenety, "Rick Perry: 'As a Christian . . . I Stand with Israel,'" *Washington Post*, 20 September 2011.
33. "Backgrounder: The Candidates on the Israel-Palestine Conflict," *CFR*.
34. Rick Perry, interview by Wolf Blitzer, CNN, 7 December 2011, [www.transcripts.cnn.com](http://www.transcripts.cnn.com).
35. Beth Young, "Ron Paul's Tiny Jewish Following," *JTA*, 12 November 2007.
36. Ron Kampeas, "After Stumble, Herman Cain Stresses Pro-Israel Bona Fides," *JTA*, 1 November 2011.

37. Gabriel Trip, "With Stakes for Bachmann Higher Now, Her Words Get in the Way," *New York Times*, 15 September 2011.

38. Frankel, Glen, "A Beautiful Friendship?" *Washington Post*, 16 July 2006.

39. Philip Elliott and Jack Gillum, "Romney Gets \$10M Boost from Adelson," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 June 2012.

40. Barack Obama, "Obama's AIPAC Speech," transcript, *The Guardian*, 4 March 2012.

41. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the 71st General Assembly of the Union for Reform Judaism," National Harbor, MD, transcript, 16 December 2011.

42. Lucy Madison, "Romney Accuses Obama of Throwing Israel 'Under the Bus,'" CBS News, 19 May 2011.