



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on May 26, 2011

Middle East Speech a Political Nightmare for Obama

The idea of "land swaps" could be detrimental to Israelis — even Israeli Arabs — as for many, it would mean forfeiting the freedoms and economic privileges of being an Israeli citizen, liberties that may not abide living under a Palestinian state.

In general, Republicans consider Israel a loyal and valuable ally, so naturally, opposition to Obama's new Middle East vision has kicked into full gear. "Rather than stand by Israel against consistent unprovoked aggression by longtime supporters of terrorism, President Obama is rewarding those who threaten Israel's very right to exist," [declared](#) Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah). Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) charged that Obama's new creed is in "stark contrast" to prior U.S. foreign policy and that it "sends the wrong message to U.S. allies about our willingness to stand by our commitments."



Declared and potential Republican presidential candidates Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich, Tim Pawlenty, and Michele Bachmann also joined the fray. Romney [slammed](#) Obama for throwing Israel "under the bus" while disrespecting and undermining "its ability to negotiate peace." Pawlenty said the President's misguided request was a "mistaken and very dangerous demand," and Bachmann [argued](#) that he "has again indicated [that] his policy toward Israel is to blame Israel first."

Following a tense meeting with the President, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [expounded](#) in a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has endured for nearly a century because the Palestinians "refuse to end it." He stressed that a peace agreement "must leave Israel with security, and therefore Israel cannot return to the indefensible 1967 lines."

But Netanyahu, Republicans, and the pro-Israel lobby are not the only ones concerned about Obama's reformed Middle East policy, as Democrats in both chambers are scuttling to mend the President's unpopular exposition. Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) commented that he wished Obama had not publicized his controversial views during Thursday's speech, [labeling](#) it a "tactical mistake." Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), and other prominent Democrats also disputed the President's call for a 1967 border reconstruction.

After much criticism, the President claimed his remarks were a public expression of long-standing U.S. policy, and he attempted to mitigate concerns by insisting that the context of Thursday's Middle East policy speech was purely a matter of Israel's security. "If there's controversy, then it's not based on



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substance," Obama [asserted](#) in a speech at a Washington convention center. "What I did on Thursday was to say publicly what has long been acknowledged privately. I have done so because we cannot afford to wait another decade, or another two decades, or another three decades, to achieve peace."

White House officials insist that Netanyahu and many Republicans have misconstrued Obama's reference to the 1967 lines, and Obama himself argued that his comments had been "misrepresented several times."

"Let me reaffirm what '1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps' means," [retorted](#) an irritated Obama. "By definition, it means that the parties themselves — Israelis and Palestinians — will negotiate a border that is different than the one that existed on June 4, 1967. That's what 'mutually agreed-upon swaps' means. It is a well-known formula to all who have worked on this issue for a generation."

The President then played the "I-have-Jewish-advisors" card, pointing out that two of his closest confidants, Rahm Emanuel and David Axelrod, are Jewish. But with the whole world now aware of Obama's new stance on foreign policy, the damage may already be done. And with [78 percent](#) of American Jews voting for Obama in 2008, advocating a generous transfer of Israeli real estate to Palestine may become a political nightmare for him come 2012.

Up and coming Republican presidential candidates will no doubt be taking note.

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