

# The Palin- Biden Debate: High Time to Move Beyond Clichés

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Global Research, October 11, 2008

11 October 2008

Region: [USA](#)

In-depth Report: [U.S. Elections](#)

One should rightly assume that the weight of the US financial crisis, the full impact of which is just beginning to unravel, and the widening military debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan, would compel new thinking amongst leading US politicians. And then again, maybe not.

Aside from tactical and rhetorical differences, presidential candidates and their vice-president-hopefuls are yet to strictly champion and act upon a truly different leadership strategy: Barack Obama's current foreign policy visions are more or less those of President Bush in his second term. Republican candidate John McCain, however, advocates a less solid and increasingly confusing set of principles: he strives to distance himself from a discredited, unpopular president, position himself as a man of experience and resolve, yet pander to the religious right and defend a hawkish strategy that is no less destructive than that championed by the neoconservative-designed Bush Doctrine, which led to two major wars and a near-complete loss of US credibility and leadership abroad.

More alarmingly however, are both candidates' choices for their vice president. Obama, who has repeatedly cornered his old rival Hilary Clinton with the tireless accusation that, unlike him, she is a Washington-insider, has chosen Senator Joe Biden, the embodiment of what partisan politics is all about, and someone who, prior to his candidacy, seemed much closer to McCain's views, than to those of Obama. On the other hand, McCain, in an apparent game of wit, picked Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska as his running mate, a poor choice by any count, simply because he wished to exploit Obama's fallout with a supposedly disgruntled female constituency following the defeat of his Democratic rival, Clinton.

Back to the seemingly odd choice of Biden. Columnist Susan Abulhawa rationalized Obama's decision. "Biden, the self-proclaimed Zionist, assuages Israeli and Jewish American fears that Mr. Obama might not be so accommodating to Israel." This view was corroborated repeatedly in Israeli media, but most importantly by Biden himself in the first vice presidential debate on October 3. To outdo Palin's passionate answer to a question about Israel, where she asserted that a McCain-Palin administration "will never allow a second Holocaust," Biden cut to the chase: "... no one in the United States Senate has been a better friend to Israel than Joe Biden. I would have never, ever joined this ticket were I not absolutely sure Barack Obama shared my passion."

The new mantra was sure to work. At least he tried it successfully in a talk before Jewish Democratic audience in Florida, on September 23. According to the Israeli Jerusalem Post, Biden sent the audience to repeated rounds of laughter, then, in a solemn decided moment he declared: "My support for Israel begins in my stomach, goes to my heart and ends up in

my head ..I promise you, I guarantee you, I guarantee you, I would not have joined Barack Obama's campaign as vice president if I had any doubt, even the slightest doubt, that he shared the same commitment to Israel that I share."

Considering the deafening cries for war that emanated from Israel and neoconservative circles prior to the Iraq war – and now against Iran – and the unmistakable disastrous policy that has contributed to America's largest foreign policy breakdown in the Middle East, one would think that the agents of "change" in this time of political decline and economic collapse would have the courtesy to exercise a level of restraint in their love for Israel, and, for once place the long-term interests of their country, and the world, first.

Following his 'knockout' answer, Palin graciously opted out of the who-loves-Israel-the-most debate: "I'm so encouraged to know that we both love Israel, and I think that is a good thing to get to agree on, Senator Biden. I respect your position on that."

It's not an overstatement to argue that peace with justice in Palestine and Israel should be the most pressing issue before any future US administration. In order for that administration to embark on a serious rethink with any chances of success in the Middle East, there has to be a complete overhaul in the US' total backing of Israel, and total disregard for Palestinian rights. But neither Biden and Palin, nor Obama and McCain have expressed the slightest interest in abandoning the current course of action, which has fueled untold animosity towards the US in the Middle East and far beyond.

Unlike the Palestinian-Israeli problem, where both parties are clear on their love for Israel and their total dismissal of Palestinians, the Iraq debate is much convoluted. Republicans continue to push mantras of a victorious America with global military responsibilities. Democrats, on the other hand, wary of the unpopular Iraq war, feel the need to paint a different image, albeit a more confusing one. Yet, ironically, according to Biden: "Barack Obama offered a clear plan; Shift responsibility to Iraqis over the next 16 months. Draw down our combat troops...you've got to have a time line to draw down the troops...we're spending \$10 billion a month while Iraqis have an \$80 billion surplus. Barack says it's time for them to spend their own money and have the 400,000 military we trained for them begin to take their own responsibility." Not only does Obama's plan, articulated by Biden lack clear finality, and can always find reasons to justify the delay of the promised withdrawal (such as the Iraqis are not taking responsibilities, the Iraqi army is not yet ready, and so forth), it lacks any hint of moral liability. After all, the US invaded, under flimsy excuses, a sovereign country to control its oil and to extend US-Israeli hegemony in the Middle East. Pointing the finger at the Iraqis for Bush-made disasters is highly dishonest, to say the least.

It's unfortunate that even such hard times as these when America is rife with fears and anticipation, are yet to awaken top politicians in the two leading parties to the urgent need for a different and more sensible course of action in foreign policy. Yet more clichés and more mantras, ones that can perhaps rake in substantial donations but do nothing by way of earnest and decided change, for the sake of America itself, and by extension, the world.

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