

Opinions – Guest Contributor

A referendum on Obama and Israel: Bob Turner vs. David Weprin is really about the President

BY Douglas J. Feith and Seth Cropsey

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Robert Mecea for News

David Weprin (left) and Bob Turner (right) are vying for Anthony Weiner's seat.

Tomorrow's election in [New York's 9th Congressional District](#) is unusual because, unlike even most presidential campaigns, the outcome may hinge on foreign policy. In deciding between Republican [Bob Turner](#) and Democrat [David Weprin](#), the 9th's large percentage of Jewish voters may provide an important clue about what a part of [President Obama's](#) base in 2008 will do in next year's presidential contest.

The polls show a close race. Obama's coldness toward [Israel](#) may tip the balance against the Democrat. Polls in [Israel](#) are not close on the question of the U.S. President. In May last year only 9% of Israeli respondents thought that the Obama administration was more pro-Israeli than pro-Palestinian. More than five times that number said Obama favored the Palestinians. The polls changed negligibly over the next year.

And for good reason. When [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#) visited the [White House](#) in 2010, Obama demanded concessions from him for the Palestinians. According to press reports, when Netanyahu demurred, Obama quit the meeting and left his aides to pursue discussions. [Britain's Telegraph](#) reported that the President told the prime minister, "I'm going to have dinner with Michelle and the girls." Obama refused to be photographed with him on that visit.

But the current problem in U.S.-Israeli relations goes beyond this deliberate impoliteness. The President does not share the American people's general respect and sympathy for the Jewish state, the supportiveness reflected in the standing ovations that Netanyahu received when he addressed a joint session of Congress in May.

An immediate source of Obama's irritation was that [Israel](#) is building housing for Jews in East Jerusalem. Obama wants [Israel](#) to stop. His logic is peculiar: The [Palestinian Authority](#) has just made a national unity coalition with the terrorist organization [Hamas](#), which rejects [Israel's](#) right to exist and continues to launch missiles from [Gaza](#) against civilian targets in [Israel](#). Yet the American President argues that halting this construction in [Jerusalem](#) will brighten prospects for peace talks.

With whom? With Palestinian leaders who want [Israel](#) destroyed? Their argument is not about borders. They object to [Israel's](#) existence as a Jewish state. But Obama does not see this. He stands by his preconception that [Israeli settlements](#) are the major impediment to peace.

[Israeli construction](#) in East Jerusalem is the consequence of [Israel's](#) victory in the 1967 War. That war began after [Israel's](#) neighbors mobilized military reserves and moved large ground forces near their borders with [Israel](#). [Israel](#) was approximately 10 miles wide at the time - as it had been since the armistice that ended the 1948-'49 Arab war to destroy [Israel](#) - and prospects of cutting it into two pieces fueled aggression among [Israel's](#) neighbors. In a May speech this year, Obama called for [Israel](#) to return to its pre-1967 borders, with only minor adjustments.

In that same speech, Obama commented strangely about the national unity agreement between [Fatah](#), which heads the Palestinian Authority in the [West Bank](#), and [Hamas](#). He said: It

"raises profound and legitimate questions for Israel: How can one negotiate with a party that has shown itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist? And in the weeks and months to come, Palestinian leaders will have to provide a credible answer to that question."

But Palestinian leaders have already provided their answer. To extremists who are speaking for the Palestinians, Obama gently poses a question they have continually, consistently and contemptuously answered. At the same time, he insists that Israel make risky territorial concessions that would not resolve the conflict.

Obama's downgrading of the American relationship with Israel is no aberration; it's part of a pattern of downgrading relations with [America's](#) democratic allies. He and key members of his national security team have written extensively in favor of transforming the U.S. role in the world so that America can become less assertive, more humble, more constrained. Such ideas are implied by the now-famous boast by a White House aide that in [Libya](#), President Obama aimed to "lead from behind."

The 2012 presidential election will test whether American Jews - ordinarily an overwhelmingly Democratic constituency - apprehend the danger that Obama's policies pose to Israel and to America's interests in promoting a safer [Middle East](#) that is more open to democratic reform. In the meantime, voters in New York's heavily Jewish 9th Congressional District may heed the call of former [Mayor Ed Koch](#) and seize the opportunity to demonstrate buyer's remorse that they helped put Obama into the White House.

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