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Driving the Conversation:

Arena Ref: David Mark

Would Romney be better for Israel?



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It makes sense for Mitt Romney to go to Israel because it helps highlight important differences between himself and the president. I think President Obama hurt his own credibility in the national security arena when he made a big point of reaching out in a friendly fashion to foreign governments hostile to the U.S. and created distance between us and countries close to us in recent years - like Israel.

Obama's policies have reflected naiveté and hurt American standing with important friends. One of the things Gov. Romney wanted to do on this trip is remind people of that.

Many things President Obama has done regarding Israel are negative, but some are positive. The more positive things have related to defense cooperation where the Obama administration has continued and built on some of the cooperative policies in place when it came to office. That's been positive - the president could have cut off that cooperation, but didn't. To be fair, you have to say he didn't run thoroughly antagonistic policy toward Israel.

But his administration's diplomacy on Arab-Israeli peace issues has not been well informed. It is based on an antagonistic view of Israel -- that Israel is to blame for the lack of peace. There was a conscious move to distance the U.S. from Israel under Obama. The president went out of his way to show unhappiness with Netanyahu and treated him very badly when he visited. In one instance, Obama refused to be photographed with the Israeli Prime Minister, a slap that I believe is unprecedented. The rebuffs of Israel were intended to win greater cooperation from Palestinians and move peace negotiations forward - but they failed. That's not a success for Obama administration in any way.

Public opinion polls show Obama is very unpopular in Israel. There's no mystery as to why the Israelis would embrace Romney and make his visit to Israel as positive as possible. The Israelis in general don't like and don't trust president Obama so they will naturally give Romney a very happy reception.