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A Middle East Cheat Sheet For Monday's Foreign Policy Debate

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Of the six segments in Monday night's presidential debate on foreign policy, two will be focused on the Middle East. Here are a dozen Middle East-related questions I hope CBS newsman Bob Schieffer considers posing -- four to President Obama, four to Governor Romney and four for both candidates.

TO PRESIDENT OBAMA:

On Syria: In August 2011, you called on Bashar al-Assad to step aside but fourteen months later, you still have not authorized direct military support to the people trying to oust him, with administration officials citing uncertainty about who in the Syrian opposition should receive U.S. weaponry. If the United States wasn't going to do anything to help Assad's opponents, did we have the right to urge them to rise up against Assad in the first place? And with the billions of dollars we spend on intelligence, why has it taken more than fourteen months to differentiate between good guys and bad guys in the Syrian opposition?

On Egypt: You have said that Egypt -- which recently elected Mohammed Morsi, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, as president -- is neither ally nor enemy. If Egypt is not an ally, why has your administration proposed hundreds of millions of dollars of direct aid to Egypt and supported billions of dollars of additional international loans to Egypt? What sort of conditions should be attached to this massive level of assistance?

On Middle East peace: On your second day in office, you promised a major push to

advance the Middle East peace process. Yet over the past four years, Arabs and Israelis met for just two weeks of formal negotiation, less than under any president since Lyndon Johnson, and there has been zero progress toward a final peace agreement. Who is responsible for this failure? Did we misjudge what was possible? Was it a mistake to call for a freeze on Israeli settlements? Do you think peace is still possible, and what would you do differently in a second term to achieve it?

On Iran: Israel and the United States appear to have different triggers for military action to stop Iran's nuclear weapons program. In his UN address, Israel's prime minister said that accumulation by Iran of enough enriched uranium to fuel a nuclear weapon is the appropriate "red line." In contrast, Vice President Biden, in his debate with Congressman Ryan, offered a different view. He said "weaponization," not enrichment, was the key and he said U.S. intelligence would be certain to identify Iran's bomb-making progress long before they achieved their objective. Who is right -- the Prime Minister of Israel or Vice President Biden?

TO GOVERNOR ROMNEY:

On Syria: You have said that U.S. strategic interests are at stake in Syria, not just humanitarian concerns. If that is true, why don't you support the call by Senators McCain, Graham and Lieberman to establish "no fly zones" to support the military opposition to Bashar al-Assad? And if you don't endorse "no fly zones," what specifically do you propose that the United States do to hasten the demise of the Assad regime? Would you agree to provide arms directly to the opposition, not through cut-outs or third parties?

On Egypt: Some experts believe that without speedy U.S. and international financial support, there is a chance that Egypt may become a failed state of 80-plus million people, astride the Suez Canal and across the Sinai from Israel. Do you support the efforts of some Republicans in Congress to place holds on U.S. economic support to Egypt and thereby risk this potentially dangerous outcome?

On Middle East peace: When you look around the Middle East and the broader Muslim world, how important to U.S. interests is the pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian peace? Where do you rank it among U.S. priorities? Should the U.S. act to help preserve the Palestinian Authority? Is a two-state outcome still possible? If not, what is the alternative?

On Iran: Given Iran's decades-long commitment to develop a nuclear weapon, some experts believe that it will require "regime change" to ensure that the ayatollahs never succeed in this effort. Do you agree? If yes, how would you achieve it? If not, what specific steps are you prepared to take that President Obama has not already done to prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapons capability?

TO BOTH CANDIDATES:

On the war on terror: In light of the Benghazi attack, how would you characterize the level of threat posed to U.S. interests by Sunni jihadist extremism, especially al-Qaeda and its affiliate groups? Are we still fighting a "war on terror"? What additional steps would you recommend that would help us finally to prevail in this conflict? Is "victory" achievable?

On the next war in the Middle East: After fighting a series of wars in the Middle East

over the last two decades, what should the United States be willing to send our armed forces to fight for in this region today?

On the implications of energy self-sufficiency: Both candidates have called for U.S. energy self-sufficiency in the not-too-distant future. Once we achieve that objective, should the United States continue to invest billions of dollars -- and potentially thousands of American lives -- in protecting Saudi Arabia and the other oil exporters of the Persian Gulf? Should the United States really be the principal line of defense for China's main source of energy?

On stopping Iran from achieving a nuclear weapon: U.S. defense officials have stated that the most Israel could do militarily is to delay Iran's march toward a nuclear weapon and, in the process, Israeli action could trigger a catastrophic regional conflict. Do you agree? And in your view, which is more damaging to U.S. interests -- Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon or the repercussions of a possible Israeli preventive action to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon?

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