

Clinton vs. Trump on Key Middle East Issues: Prepping for the Debate

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Brief Analysis

Read what both candidates and their parties have said about Syria, ISIS, the Iran nuclear deal, U.S.-Israel relations, and host of other pressing regional issues.

As the first presidential debate approaches, here is a collection of quotations by Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, Republican candidate Donald Trump, and their respective party platforms on key Middle East policy issues.

SYRIA

Clinton

- "We have to support and maintain the ceasefire in Syria. And we should also work with our coalition partners and opposition forces on the ground to create safe areas where Syrians can remain in the country rather than fleeing toward Europe." (March 23 [Stanford speech \(https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-counterterrorism-stanford-university/\)](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-counterterrorism-stanford-university/))
- "I do still support a no-fly zone because I think we need to put in safe havens for those poor Syrians who are fleeing both Assad and ISIS and so they can have some place to be safe." (April 14 [debate \(http://www.cnn.com/2016/04/14/politics/transcript-democratic-debate-hillary-clinton-bernie-sanders/\)](http://www.cnn.com/2016/04/14/politics/transcript-democratic-debate-hillary-clinton-bernie-sanders/))

Trump

- "Let's say you get rid of Assad, you knock out that government -- who's gonna take over? The people that we're backing? And then you're gonna have, like, Libya?" (February 10 [CBS interview \(http://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-lays-out-post-new-hampshire-strategy-foreign-policy-positions/\)](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-lays-out-post-new-hampshire-strategy-foreign-policy-positions/))
- "Assad is bad. Maybe these people [U.S.-backed Syrian rebels] could be worse." (October 13, 2015 [Guardian interview \(https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/oct/13/donald-trump-foreign-policy-doctrine-nation-building\)](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/oct/13/donald-trump-foreign-policy-doctrine-nation-building))
- "I would have stayed out of Syria and wouldn't have fought so much...against Assad because I thought that was a whole thing...So now you have Iran and you have Russia in favor of Assad. We're supposed to fight the two of them. At the same time, we're supposed to fight ISIS, who is fighting Assad." (May 20 CNBC [Morning Joe interview \(https://mediamatters.org/video/2016/05/20/msnbc-morning-joe-lets-trump-falsely-claim-he-opposed-libya-intervention-and-iraq-war/210506\)](https://mediamatters.org/video/2016/05/20/msnbc-morning-joe-lets-trump-falsely-claim-he-opposed-libya-intervention-and-iraq-war/210506))
- "We have to get rid of ISIS before we get rid of Assad...How do you fight them both when they are fighting each other? And I think ISIS is a threat that's much more important for us right now than Assad." (July 21 [New York Times interview \(http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html?_r=0\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html?_r=0))

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

Clinton

- "Without a deal, Iran's breakout time...would shrink to a couple of months. With a deal, that breakout time stretches to a year, which means that if Iran cheats, we'll know it and we'll have time to respond decisively." (September 9, 2015 [Brookings speech \(https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20150909_clinton_iran_transcript.pdf\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20150909_clinton_iran_transcript.pdf))
- "I'll hold the line against Iranian non-compliance. That means penalties even for small violations...I will not hesitate to take military action if Iran attempts to obtain a nuclear weapon." (September 9, 2015 [Brookings speech \(https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20150909_clinton_iran_transcript.pdf\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20150909_clinton_iran_transcript.pdf))
- "This deal must come with vigorous enforcement, strong monitoring, clear consequences for any violations, and a broader strategy to confront Iran's aggression across the region." (March 21 [AIPAC speech \(https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-aipac-washington-dc/\)](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-aipac-washington-dc/))

Trump

- "My number one priority is to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran...This deal is catastrophic -- for America, for Israel, and for the whole Middle East." (March 21 [AIPAC speech \(https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac\)](https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac))
- "They can keep the terms and still get to the bomb by simply running out the clock, and of course, they keep the [\$150 billion]." (March 21 [AIPAC speech \(https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac\)](https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac))
- "[The Iran deal] is one of the worst deals ever, ever made by this country. It is a disaster." (March 10 [debate \(http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/10/politics/republican-debate-transcript-full-text/\)](http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/10/politics/republican-debate-transcript-full-text/))

IRAN TERROR SPONSORSHIP

Clinton

- "I will build a coalition to counter Iran's proxies, particularly Hezbollah. This means enforcing and strengthening the rules prohibiting the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah, looking at new ways to choke off their funding, and pressing our partners to treat Hezbollah as the terrorist organization it is." (September 9, 2015 [Brookings speech \(https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20150909_clinton_iran_transcript.pdf\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20150909_clinton_iran_transcript.pdf))
- "I do not think we should promise or even look toward normalizing relations [with Iran]...Yes, they have to stop being the main state sponsor of terrorism. Yes, they have to stop trying to destabilize the Middle East, causing even more chaos. Yes, they've got to get out of Syria. They've got to quit sponsoring Hezbollah and Hamas. They have got to quit trying to ship rockets into Gaza that can be used against Israel." (February 11 [debate \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/11/transcript-the-democratic-debate-in-milwaukee-annotated/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/11/transcript-the-democratic-debate-in-milwaukee-annotated/))

Trump

- "We will totally dismantle Iran's terror network. Iran has seeded terror groups all over the world...including in the Western hemisphere very close to home." (March 21 [AIPAC speech \(https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac\)](https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac))

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS

Clinton

- "Israelis deserve a secure homeland for the Jewish people. Palestinians ought to be able to govern themselves in their own state, in peace and dignity. Only a negotiated two-state

agreement can provide those outcomes. If we look at the broader regional context, converging interests between Israel and key Arab states could make it possible to promote progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue." (March 21 [AIPAC speech \(https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-aipac-washington-dc/\)](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-aipac-washington-dc/))

Trump

- "A lot will have to do with Israel and whether or not Israel wants to make the deal -- whether or not Israel's willing to sacrifice certain things." (December 3 [AP interview \(https://www.yahoo.com/news/ap-conversation-trump-calls-mideast-peace-toughest-deal-082050498--election.html?ref=gs\)](https://www.yahoo.com/news/ap-conversation-trump-calls-mideast-peace-toughest-deal-082050498--election.html?ref=gs))
- "Let me be sort of a neutral guy [in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations]." (February 17 [MSNBC town hall \(http://info.msnbc.com/_news/2016/02/17/35127534-full-transcript-msnbc-town-hall-with-donald-trump?lite\)](http://info.msnbc.com/_news/2016/02/17/35127534-full-transcript-msnbc-town-hall-with-donald-trump?lite))
- "A [peace agreement] imposed by the UN would be a total and complete disaster...It will only further delegitimize Israel and it would reward Palestinian terrorism." (March 21 [AIPAC speech \(https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac\)](https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac))

U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONS

Clinton

- "As president, I will make a firm commitment to ensure Israel maintains its qualitative military edge. The United States should provide Israel with the most sophisticated defense technology so it can deter and stop any threat." (March 21 [AIPAC speech \(https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-aipac-washington-dc/\)](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-aipac-washington-dc/))

Trump

- "When I become president, the days of treating Israel like a second-class citizen will end on Day One." (March 21 [AIPAC speech \(https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac\)](https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-remarks-at-aipac))

THE ISLAMIC STATE: U.S. RESPONSE

Clinton

- "We cannot contain ISIS -- we must defeat ISIS...We should intensify the coalition air campaign against its fighters, leaders, and infrastructure; step up support for local Arab and Kurdish forces on the ground and coalition efforts to protect civilians; and pursue a diplomatic strategy aimed at achieving political resolutions to Syria's civil war and Iraq's sectarian divide." (March 23 [Stanford speech \(https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-counterterrorism-stanford-university/\)](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-counterterrorism-stanford-university/))
- "I think we also have to try to disrupt [the ISIS] supply chain of foreign fighters and foreign money, and we do have to contest them in online space." (January 17 [debate \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/01/17/the-4th-democratic-debate-transcript-annotated-who-said-what-and-what-it-meant/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/01/17/the-4th-democratic-debate-transcript-annotated-who-said-what-and-what-it-meant/))
- "We will not send American combat troops to either Syria or Iraq...But we do have Special Forces, we do have trainers, we do have the military personnel who are helping with the airstrikes that the United States is leading so that we can try to take out ISIS infrastructure." (February 4 [debate \(http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/us/politics/transcript-of-the-democratic-presidential-debate.html\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/us/politics/transcript-of-the-democratic-presidential-debate.html))

Trump

- "I have a simple message for [ISIS]. Their days are numbered. I won't tell them where and I won't tell them how. We must, as a nation, be more unpredictable." (April 27 [speech \(http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html))
- "We really have no choice...We have to knock the hell out of [ISIS]...I'm hearing numbers of 20,000 to 30,000 [U.S.] troops [necessary to defeat ISIS]." (March 10 [debate \(http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/10/politics/republican-debate-transcript-full-text/\)](http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/10/politics/republican-debate-transcript-full-text/))

THE ISLAMIC STATE: ROOT CAUSES

Clinton

- "The reason we are in the mess we're in, that ISIS has the territory it has, is because of Assad." (December 19 [debate \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/19/3rd-democratic-debate-transcript-annotated-who-said-what-and-what-it-meant/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/19/3rd-democratic-debate-transcript-annotated-who-said-what-and-what-it-meant/))

Trump

- "The decision to overthrow the regime in Libya, then pushing for the overthrow of the regime in Syria...without plans for the day after, have created space for ISIS to expand and grow." (June 13 [speech \(http://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/transcript-donald-trump-national-security-speech-224273\)](http://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/transcript-donald-trump-national-security-speech-224273))

RADICAL JIHADISM

Clinton

- "In our fight against radical jihadism, we have to do what actually works. One thing we know that does not work is offensive, inflammatory rhetoric that demonizes all Muslims...Demonizing Muslims also alienates partners and undermines moderates we need around the world in the fight against ISIS." (March 23 [Stanford speech \(https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-counterterrorism-stanford-university/\)](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/remarks-counterterrorism-stanford-university/))
- "From my perspective it matters what we do more than what we say. It mattered that we got bin Laden, not what name we called him. I have clearly said whether you call it radical jihadism or radical Islamism, I'm happy to say either. I think they mean the same thing." (June 14 [CNN interview \(http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/13/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-orlando-attacks-reaction/\)](http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/13/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-orlando-attacks-reaction/))

Trump

- "As president, I will call for an international conference focused on this goal. We will work side-by-side with our friends in the Middle East, including our greatest ally Israel. We will partner with...Jordan and...Egypt and all others who recognize this ideology of death that must be extinguished." (August 15 [speech \(http://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/donald-trump-terrorism-speech-227025\)](http://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/donald-trump-terrorism-speech-227025))
- "We have a president who wants to be so politically correct that he doesn't want to use the term 'radical Islamic terrorism'...Unless you're willing to discuss and talk about the real nature of the problem and the name of the problem radical Islamic terrorism, you're never going to solve the problem." (June 15 [rally \(http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/06/15/trump_to_obama_radical_islam_is_important_because_if_you_dont_name_the_problem_youre_never_going_to_solve_it.html\)](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/06/15/trump_to_obama_radical_islam_is_important_because_if_you_dont_name_the_problem_youre_never_going_to_solve_it.html))

PARTY PLATFORMS

The following quotes are taken from the publicly released [Democratic \(http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/papers_pdf/117717.pdf\)](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/papers_pdf/117717.pdf) and [Republican \(https://prod-static-ngop-pbl.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/DRAFT_12_FINAL%5b1%5d-ben_1468872234.pdf\)](https://prod-static-ngop-pbl.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/DRAFT_12_FINAL%5b1%5d-ben_1468872234.pdf) party platforms:

Syria/Islamic State

- Democratic: "Democrats will instead root out ISIS and other terrorist groups and bring together the moderate Syrian opposition, international community, and our regional allies to reach a negotiated political transition that ends Assad's rule." (p. 42)
- Republican: "We must stand up for our friends, challenge our foes, and destroy ISIS...We will support the transition to a post-Assad Syrian government that is representative of its people...and contributes to peace and stability in the region." (p. 47)

Iran

- Democratic: "We support the nuclear agreement with Iran because, as it is vigorously enforced and implemented, it verifiably cuts off all of Iran's pathways to a bomb without resorting to war...[We] will not hesitate to take military action if Iran races towards [a nuclear bomb]...Democrats will push back against Iran's destabilizing activities including its support for terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, counter Iran's ballistic missile program, bolster the capabilities of our Gulf partners, and ensure that Israel always has the ability to defend itself." (p. 43)
- Republican: "We consider the Administration's deal with Iran, to lift international sanctions and make hundreds of billions of dollars available to the Mullahs...non-binding on the next president...The defiant and emboldened regime in Iran continues to sponsor terrorism across the region, develop a nuclear weapon, test-fire ballistic missiles inscribed with 'Death to Israel,' and abuse the basic human rights of its citizens." (p. 46)

Israel

- Democratic: "We will continue to work toward a two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict negotiated directly by the parties that guarantees Israel's future as a secure and democratic Jewish state with recognized borders and provides the Palestinians with independence, sovereignty, and dignity." (pp. 49-50)
- Republican: "Support for Israel is an expression of Americanism, and it is the responsibility of our government to advance policies that reflect Americans' strong desire for a relationship with no daylight between America and Israel." (p. 47)

This compendium was prepared by Aryeh Mellman. ❖

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