

## Obama-Biden on the Middle East

Sep 20, 2008



In-Depth Reports

**D**ownload (<templateC04.php?CID=300>) the complete proceedings.

On September 20, 2008, Richard Clarke -- a senior foreign policy advisor to Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama -- addressed The Washington Institute's annual Weinberg Founders Conference. Mr. Clarke's three decades of government experience include service as special assistant to the president for global affairs, national coordinator for security and counterterrorism, and special advisor to the president for cyber security.

The following is a rapporteur's summary of his remarks.

It is a different world today than it was before the September 11 attacks. The United States is engaged in two large-scale military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, al-Qaeda is resurgent, and Iran has gained enormously in power and influence since our intervention in Iraq and continues to pursue a nuclear weapons program. Furthermore, our ability to act as a superpower is now limited as a result of our financial meltdown. In fact, the message the secretary of the Treasury and chairman of the Federal Reserve Board gave this week to the congressional leadership was that we were days away from complete economic collapse.

In order to restore our strength as a nation, we need a leader with the qualifications necessary to deal with the many challenges that lie ahead. The past eight years have demonstrated that prior length of service does not ensure good judgment in national security issues. If that were the case, the current enormously experienced administration would have guided us on the path to greater security. Yet, seven years after September 11, the United States still faces the threat of terrorism and the risk of another attack by al-Qaeda.

Barack Obama has the judgment on national security affairs we need to get us back on course. In particular, he has shown better judgment than John McCain on two key issues: first, Senator Obama had the courage to oppose the war in Iraq when the vast majority of experts were in favor of it. He was right when he said that going into Iraq would greatly strengthen our enemies in the region and prove counterproductive. Second, he astutely identified Afghanistan and Pakistan, not Iraq, as the central front in the war on terror. While Senator Obama called for the deployment of an additional two brigades to Afghanistan last August, Senator McCain suggested that we merely "muddle through" in that country. Today, a year later, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has called for two additional brigades to be sent there, and the secretary of defense has done so as well. Although the president has now said he agrees that such a move is necessary, he claims it cannot be done during his administration.

Senator Obama's solid judgment on national security issues is also demonstrated in his choice of Senator Joe Biden as his running mate. Any president, no matter how young or old, may unexpectedly leave office; therefore, the choice of vice president is the first major national security decision a candidate makes. Ideally, such a choice is done not according to who will help provide the most electoral votes or political appeal, but who has the most experience and ability to walk into the Oval Office in the president's absence and give orders during a crisis. Choosing Joe Biden, a man who has spent an enormous amount of time on national security affairs and foreign relations, shows that Obama has judgment we can rely on -- judgment that is demonstrably better than that of his opponent.

Obama has viable plans for tackling national security issues at home and abroad. Having consulted a number of military leaders, he has laid out a legitimate timetable for withdrawing our forces from Iraq. Specifically, he has proposed the withdrawal of one brigade per month over the course of fifteen to sixteen months, but he remains flexible and willing to adjust the schedule as necessary.

He also has asserted that Tehran's growing influence must be curbed and that Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon is unacceptable. Despite facing much criticism for his approach, Obama intends to use diplomacy as part of his campaign against Iran's nuclear ambitions. When Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union the "evil empire" and sent diplomats to negotiate with Moscow, no one thought of it as a sign of weakness; that approach, in fact, may have prevented far greater calamities. Obama supports negotiating even with today's "evil empires," including such states as Iran and North Korea. If circumstances required the use of military force, Obama would not hesitate, but his first inclination is not to pull the trigger.

Obama has also called for genuine negotiations concerning Middle East peace -- not just at the end of an eight-year administration, but beginning from the first month. Furthermore, he has pledged his personal involvement, demonstrating his commitment to achieving a lasting peace in the region.

At home, Obama will provide a steady hand at restoring our economic strength. Among the many things he called attention to long before anybody else was the need for greater regulation of the financial markets in order to prevent economic collapse. In the uncertain conditions we now face, we need someone who is consistently looking forward -- someone who sees problems that are coming down the pike and formulates the correct solutions. That person is Barack Obama. If we continue to make the wrong decisions about our leadership and fail to do enough as individuals to affect the outcome of this election, America's continuing role as a great superpower and a force for peace and justice will no longer be assured. Barack Obama is the future, and electing him is the way to restore our strength as a nation and defeat the enemies of the United States and other democracies around the world. ❖

---

## RECOMMENDED

---

### BRIEF ANALYSIS

#### [Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Grant Rumley

[\(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations\)](#)



### ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

#### [How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Anna Borshchevskaya  
(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## [Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Simon Henderson  
(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

### TOPICS

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](#)

[Peace Process \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)

[Terrorism \(/policy-analysis/terrorism\)](#)

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](#)