

This is Part IV in our series of US election analysis. Parts [I](#), [II](#), and [III](#) can be seen here.

Palestine in the 2008 US Presidential Elections

The Democratic and Republican presidential primaries are in full swing in the United States, yet there is little discussion coming out of Palestinian society on the possible implications the elections may have here. There is little dispute that unwavering American support puts Israel in a formidable position when it comes to negotiating with the Palestinians and that the American influence is most visibly manifested in the actions and comments of the president. The 2008 election, then, should be of central concern to Palestinians and should be present in the overall political discourse, whether in the media or on the streets of the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem.

With that in mind, PASSIA has decided to very briefly summarize the key terms, events, and personalities that will play a role in the upcoming elections, including what could be one of the most hard-fought primary campaigns in modern American history. Perhaps a better understanding of these issues - especially as they pertain to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - will allow for more attention and debate among Palestinians.

Part IV, Early June 2008

Obama Secures the Democratic Nomination:

As the final Democratic primaries wrapped up on 3 June, the campaign of New York Senator Hillary Clinton finally decided it was time to concede. Clinton made a speech on that day that hinted at her willingness to suspend her run for the nomination, and she planned a final concession speech on 7 June. It would bring an end to a truly historic primary campaign, one that was hard fought and groundbreaking in many ways. America saw the most promising female presidential candidate in its history go from being considered the inevitable nominee to being the runner-up behind the country's most promising African-American candidate. Now, Senator Obama has shifted his campaign focus to the general election and his upcoming battle with Senator John McCain.



Illinois Senator Barack Obama at a campaign rally with his wife Michelle

Speculation Rises Over Running Mates:

Almost as soon as Barack Obama was named the presumptive Democratic nominee, rumors began swirling over who he would choose as his potential Vice President. The same speculation surrounded the McCain campaign, albeit to a lesser extent. Much of the excitement is due to the debate over whether Obama should reach out to Hillary Clinton and offer her the opportunity to campaign with him and serve as his Vice President should he end up in the White House.

While it may be interesting to discuss, all of this conjecture is very premature. It is likely that neither McCain nor Obama will settle on a running mate until well after their parties' respective conventions, and it could possibly be well late August before we know who their sidekicks will be. Both candidates have appointed small committees to sort through their options and advise them on who they should choose.

Israel Takes Center Stage in Early June:

Palestine got indirect attention and major headlines in connection with the American election, as all three candidates attended the annual conference of the powerful lobbying group AIPAC. All three offered praise and platitudes to the Pro-Israel Lobby, which is one of the most powerful special-interest groups in American politics.



Arizona Senator John McCain speaking in front of AIPAC

Obama Generates Controversy With Remarks on Jerusalem:

The unflinching support for Israel and AIPAC that was on display as all three candidates attended AIPAC's annual conference came as no surprise, but it was a comment by Senator Obama that was getting the most attention in the immediate aftermath:

"Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel - and it must remain undivided."

This assertion came as a shock to some in the Arab world. Palestinian leaders and those in the community were left wondering why Obama would go so far in his comments. One factor to consider is the general perceptions of all three candidates: while Clinton and McCain have generated more favorable reviews from conservative Israeli observers, Obama has been viewed with more uncertainty. Remember, he made these comments in front of an exceedingly influential group that is aligned with conservative views, and these days it is imperative that any candidate for high public office be in the good graces of AIPAC. The issue becomes even more important for a relative newcomer with liberal values and a name like Barack Hussein Obama. In the end, though, the main issue is that Obama is in the middle of an election campaign, and he was pandering to a certain audience when he proclaimed Jerusalem the undivided capital of Israel. As PASSIA's chairman, Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, said, "Consider that it is an election speech addressing the most powerful American Jewish lobby... People put high expectations on public speeches to reflect the true, genuine political positions of candidates, but they ignore the fact that it is a speech for domestic consumers, limited in its scope, and part of the traditional support for Israel."