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MIDDLE EAST

* This is my section of the Nov. 25, 2015 cover story.

American Reset?

Presidential contenders compete for U.S.'s top post

HILLARY CLINTON
Born Oct. 1947, 66, is the apparent heir to the Democrat Party in the U.S. 2016 presidential election. Clinton is an American politician who served as the 67th U.S. Secretary of State under President Barack Obama, during which a terrorist attack took place on Sep. 2012, 11 on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi, which killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya dead, Libya. Clinton was former U.S. first lady.

JEB BUSH
Born Feb. 1953, 61, is an American businessman and politician who served as the 43rd Governor of Florida between 1999 and 2007. He is currently one of the contenders for the U.S. 2016 presidential election, and is regarded by many as the possible

business magnate, investor, author, television personality and candidate for President of the United States in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. He currently leads the Republican Party's polls by a wide margin. Trump has never been elected to office, and is criticized for his lack of knowledge when it comes to handling foreign policy issues.

BEN CARSON
Born Sep. 1951, 64, is a retired American neurosurgeon, and a U.S. 2016 presidential election contender, who currently holds the second position after Donald Trump in the Republican Party's polls. Carson has recently likened Syrian refugees to rabid dogs and was quoted as saying he believes the pyramids in Egypt were used in ancient times as silos to store grain.

The United States' interests in the Middle East generally cover

- Iran
- GCC
- Egypt
- Palestine
- Syria

U.S. Presidential hopefuls have vowed to take tougher stances on various issues but will their foreign policy towards the Middle East be different?

By **Roshanak Taghavi**

Security.

It's the thought on everyone's minds following last week's devastating terrorist attacks against civilians in Paris, and is expected to be one of the pivotal issues that will decide the American presidency as we head into elections in the fall of 2016.

But what security will look like for the United States — as well as its Arab allies — is still up for debate in an increasingly polarized Congress, where hawkish Republicans look to leverage the current security threat posed by ISIS to carve out a niche in the run-up to the election.

Democratic and Republican Security Strategy: Same, Same, But Different

For the most part, both Democrats and Republicans are constrained by the current set of circumstances governing the conflicts in the Middle East, as well as the American public's unwillingness to engage in another ground invasion.

"Circumstances to a large degree govern what American opportunities are," says Ambassador James Dobbins, a veteran diplomat who has helped manage international crises under both Republican and Democratic administrations. "You could end up with two [opposing] candidates in the election that will obviously emphasize their differences in terms of the campaign, but may not in fact come to govern all that differently."

Indeed, when it comes to a security issue such as fighting the Islamic State abroad, public opinion is split. A Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted days after the terrorist attacks in Paris found that while 60 percent of Americans believe Washington is not doing enough to fight the Islamic State, about 65 percent don't want US military such as special forces — roughly fifty members of which are already on the ground in Iraq and Syria — deployed to fight it.

"There is this real ambivalence (between) a desire to be tougher and a dissatisfaction with Obama's caution and retrenchment, combined with a strong desire not to pay more, not to take greater risks, not to take greater casualties and not to engage in more open-ended commitments," Ambassador Dobbins tells *Newsweek Middle East*.

Such ambivalence will shape the constraints under which the next president — whether Republican or Democrat — will operate. When it comes to the Middle East in particular, analysts and veteran diplomats tell *Newsweek* that U.S. policy is unlikely to differ much in substance from one administration to the next.

One such area is fighting the Islamic State. In the wake of the recent attacks in Paris, the U.S. administration has shifted from a policy of containment to eradication concerning ISIS. President Obama last week announced minor changes to current U.S. strategy, including the provision of arms to Kurdish and Iraqi security forces, as well as enhanced intelligence cooperation with France and other European allies in order to defeat the spread of ISIS cells beyond Iraq and Syria. Washington has already sent more than 3,000 combat advisers to assist Iraqi security forces, as well as a troupe of elite U.S. special forces to advise Iraqi, Syrian and Kurdish fighters.

Most notably, Washington has also stepped up its bombing campaign against ISIS, targeting hundreds of ISIS tanker trucks last week that were transporting oil and oil products in an effort to weaken and ultimately eradicate a vital source of income for the organization.

These policies are similar to those espoused by Republican contender Donald Trump, who openly supports Russia's direct involvement in Syria and has lauded Moscow's bombing campaign in that country. Trump has also advocated attacking the Islamic State's oil sales and sources of financing in order to defeat it, and like Putin, says he is skeptical about arming Syrian rebels fighting the Assad government.

With Russia now attacking ISIS as part of a coalition with France, a close U.S. ally, some candidates will see their previous hawkish stances towards the country relax. Both Florida junior

Senator Marco Rubio and former Hewlett Packard CEO Carly Fiorina have espoused a greater regulation of Russia's incursions into foreign matters, with Rubio even calling for sanctioning Russia and arming Ukraine. But with France and Russia formally aligned in their bombing campaign against ISIS in Syria, the geopolitical realities in the wake of the escalating ISIS threat may compel such candidates to soften their stance, at least publicly.

Such similar stances on behalf of Democratic and Republican minds demonstrate the limited set of options both parties have in executing their foreign policy goals. What is likely to change instead after the 2016 presidential election, whether a Democrat or Republic wins the presidency, will be the measures the next president takes to enhance perceptions of American activity and leadership abroad.

Both will have to be mindful of rebuilding relationships in order to strengthen frayed alliances, as President Obama did early on in his presidency. John Hudak, a fellow in Governance Studies at the Washington, DC-based Brookings Institution, notes: "To appear to be a bystander in one of the hottest areas of the world... is devastating to a president. The next president is going to have to be more politically interested in recognizing that what it looks like you are doing is maybe as important as what you're doing."

Thus, what is likely to change, depending on who is elected, will be the tone and degree to which the new president forms coalitions, spearheads international summits and publicly advocates the strengthening of global alliances.

War: The Pedestal On Which Hawks Always Seem to Land

And yet — the Paris attacks have opened up one window of political leverage for Republican candidates seeking to carve out a new foreign policy niche for themselves. Indeed, the restoration of ties with Cuba, the achievement of a nuclear deal with Iran, and aggressive efforts to secure a global accord on climate change have all left Republicans in largely reactionary positions following Democratic policy wins.

But now, rather than merely reacting to Democratic policy outcomes, the top ten presidential contenders are shifting their focus to terrorism and national security and proposing fresh foreign policies in order to jockey for political advantage.

One possibility is establishing a no-fly zone in Syria — a policy the Obama administration has refused to implement. Republican contenders such as New Jersey governor Chris Christie, Carly Fiorina, neurosurgeon Ben Carson, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, junior Texas Senator Ted Cruz, and South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham have all proposed this policy. A formal no-fly zone would target Syrian air defense systems and prohibit Syrian government aircraft from engaging in bombing runs, allowing a safe haven for thousands of displaced Syrians.

This solution (one which Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton coincidentally also supports) is likely to pull the U.S. Air Force into a larger-scale military commitment, hearkening back to a more "aggressive" military stance that the Republican party is known for.

Indeed, with the exception of Carly Fiorina, who says Washington should organize a summit with Arab and European allies to decide how to combat and defeat ISIS, and libertarian-leaning

Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, the rest of the Republican candidates have called for immediate and aggressive military action in the region.

Most distinctly, a number of contenders for the Republican nomination, including Jeb Bush, Lindsey Graham, Ohio governor John Kasich, and Ben Carson have all called for American troops to be sent to the Middle East for a larger scale combat mobilization.

Such hawkish stances are not new for Republican candidates, who have historically taken a hardline approach to foreign policy matters. "Republicans are more likely to seek military solutions and unilateral American solutions, and Democrats are more likely to seek diplomatic solutions and cooperative international arrangements," says renowned political historian Allan Lichtman of American University.

What could change in the years to come is the tone and extent to which Republican lawmakers debate military assistance and arms deals to countries beyond Israel. The party, which includes a strong contingent of Tea-Party influenced conservatives elected on a promise to overturn traditional Washington politics, is starkly divided on the role of economic and military foreign aid. So while most Democrats view arms sales as "part of a broader strategy to advance American interests," Republican language on arms deals is likely to change in the years to come, says Hudak, who is also managing editor of the Brookings Institution's FixGov blog, which closely monitors domestic U.S. politics.

"Republican presidents were all about balanced budgets, low taxes and cutting government spending, but never in foreign policy. The new Republican party is much more ... attuned to budget implications," Hudak tells *Newsweek*. "So when you look forward toward what a Republican administration might look like, you're going to see a president who, regardless of whether they continue arms deals, is certainly going to publicly criticize them."

Meanwhile...Expectations in the Middle East

For Arab leaders worried about a potentially ascendant Iran and its regional activities in the wake of the nuclear deal, American security guarantees are expected to remain in place, according to analysts surveyed by *Newsweek*. Military and financial aid to Israel and Egypt in particular will certainly continue, regardless of who wins the presidency.

"The Obama Administration has deepened its security ties to Israel and its Arab partners in the region, as well as brokering a nuclear deal with Iran. The next president, Republican or Democrat, will inherit these commitments," says Andrew Parasiliti, director of the RAND Center for Global Risk & Security in Virginia. "The talk of a US withdrawal or stepping back from the Middle East — I just don't see it."

Samuel Cutler, a policy adviser at the Washington, DC-based law firm Ferrari & Associates also tells *Newsweek*: "There's all this talk about the U.S. reshaping the balance of power in the Middle East in favor of Iran. Congress wants to say: 'No, that is not happening.'"

To temper anxiety amongst Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council members, the U.S. has pledged billions of dollars in military equipment and arms deals to its Arab allies. In a deal widely expected to be cleared by Congress by mid-December, the U.S. State Department most recently approved the sale of more than \$1 billion in advanced weaponry to Saudi Arabia.

This follows two multi-billion dollar deals for air defense missiles and combat ships respectively approved by the US government in September and October. The United States is "working hard to provide munitions to our partners engaged in combat operations," deputy undersecretary of the Air Force for international affairs, Heidi Grant, has said in the trade publication *Defense News*.

In Yemen, where Saudi Arabia is leading an aerial campaign against Houthi forces, U.S. personnel are reportedly providing logistical support and intelligence for airstrikes, with the U.S. Navy at times searching incoming ships and vessels for weapons during patrols in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea around Yemen. In this light, U.S. military aid, arms agreements and security cooperation will continue regardless.

Thus, as Americans look to decide the presidency of 2016, they — as well as Arab leaders — can be sure that current circumstances will strongly shape a commitment to ongoing policies in the Middle East in the lead-up to elections. But whether the recent attacks will further legitimize hawkish stances in the Republican camp remains to be seen, as the current Democratic administration struggles to balance a public unwilling to enter another war with its need to feel secure following the most devastating attack on French soil since World War II.