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## Sarah Palin - pro-Israel by default?

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YOAV SIVAN, THE JERUSALEM POST

During the fierce rivalry between Sen. Hilary Clinton and Sen. Barack Obama over the Democratic nomination, at times it seemed the latter was the only Democratic candidate who could turn the bulk of Jewish voters away from the Democratic Party.

A near perfect score on Israeli-related issues from AIPAC, coupled with unquestionable evidence of a being circled by Jewish lifelong friends, close aides and party operatives, were hardly enough to ease the unfortunate suspicion that had regrettably been the burden of a middle name with a Muslim sound or the more serious allegations regarding Obama's former pastor Jeremiah Wright.

But then Sen. John McCain invited the Alaska governor, Sarah Palin, to be his running mate, and made it perfectly clear to the lifelong Democratic Jews who had second thought about Obama: Their true home is nowhere but in the Democratic Party.

True enough, McCain has become a turn-on to many Jewish voters who are liberal on internal affairs but hawkish on foreign policy, who after eight years of George W. Bush in power, considered McCain to be exactly the Republican they could stomach: not tied to religious right and religiously driven, understanding the fine line crossing faith from policy, with an impressive record in the Senate that suggests that even if he can be a hard-liner on security, he's far from extreme on the dividing internal issues.

But this is exactly what makes Sarah Palin such a turn-off to the same group. Palin is progressive on nothing but naming her children. She is strongly pro-life and opposes abortion even in the case of rape; she vetoed a bill denying benefits to gays as unconstitutional; she endorses teaching creationism alongside evolution in schools; and she supports teaching intelligent design in public schools. To top it all off, on security and foreign policy, a big concern for Jewish voters and strength of McCain with them, she's completely clueless. It's not that she's got a bad record on Israel - she's got no record at all.

ADMITTEDLY, WHEN it comes to foreign policy Palin's attraction becomes a trickier matter. You can expect she enjoys some liking among Jews who generally assume that if you are conservative on internal affairs, it will translate into being conservative on external issues. Even if thus far she didn't have to bother herself with the threats to the existence of the Jewish state, when she ascends to national prominence, she'd follow her conservative instinct and will have Israel's interests close to heart.

Perhaps. Still many, who wish to see that the incumbent's support for Israel is shared by a new, younger, feminine politician, would have hard time with a candidate who derives her insights into foreign policy from the proximity of her home to the Russian mainland. Her recent appearance on TV

where she exhibited such incompetence in understanding, never mind defending, basic concepts of the right-wing doctrines that she supposedly upholds, is alarming. While it is fair to say that some Jewish voters would interpret this incompetency and ignorance as a promise for pro-Israel stance, for others this provides a horror show of a politician without any record on foreign policy - including on Israel - possibly with only a heartbeat of a 72 year old separating her from the White House.

Take, for example, Joe Lieberman, the Democratic senator turned into an independent, who shared the Democratic presidential ticket with Al Gore in 2000. His strong and powerful endorsement of McCain resonated well among like-minded Jewish voters, where his appeal is especially strong. Their hearts and votes have always been with the Democratic Party, but they suspect Obama and his "talk with Iran" has too soft a foreign policy.

When Lieberman says, "I'm here to support John McCain because country matters more than party," and bluntly identifies himself as a Democrat, his speech was intended for the Jewish household in Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio and New Jersey, where the Jewish population may be pivotal in determining the final color of their state on Election Day.

However, when Lieberman comes to endorse the joint McCain-Palin ticket and call the Alaska governor "a reformer," he loses credibility. Support for McCain is one thing, coloring Palin as progressive is another.

Let's make no mistake. In six months Obama is not going to gain the status of the darling of the Jewish community, of which substantive parts have been gradually shifting to the right. Surely he will win the vast majority of Jewish votes, but still suspicion and lack of enthusiasm in some quarters of the Jewish community can harm him where he most needs that backing.

IN AN election that is everything but decisive, a few points in each direction in a few key states with considerable Jewish population can help determining the identity of the person in the White House. Yes, liberal Jewish voters, many previously supporters of Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary, were willing to consider McCain, now that Obama won the Democratic nomination - some unlike outspoken Lieberman, only in their heart of hearts and under the anonymity of the ballot box. But inviting Sarah Palin onto the Republican ticket should make them think twice and remind them that the Obama-Biden is the natural ticket for the vast majority of Jews in America.

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