

Gingrich's rhetoric stirs GOP's Jewish activists

by [Lauren Markoe](#) in the [January 11, 2012](#) issue

GOP presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich ignited an audience of Republican Jewish activists in Washington by promising to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. And he was just getting started.

Gingrich also promised to use American dollars to fund "every dissident group" in Iran, whose leader has threatened to destroy Israel. And he would appoint John Bolton—former U.S. ambassador to the UN and a conservative favorite—to head the State Department.

With his fiery pro-Israel rhetoric, Gingrich outdid Mitt Romney's speech to the same group earlier in the December 7 meeting. All GOP presidential candidates except Rep. Ron Paul (R., Tex.) spoke to the gathering of the Republican Jewish Coalition, and all expressed strong support for the Jewish state.

Romney, often accused of blandness, had tried to inject some passion into his remarks and even received a few compliments from audience members for his energetic defense of the U.S.-Israel partnership.

But Gingrich, who was gaining significant ground on Romney, seemed to tap directly into the audience's frustrations with what they perceive as a U.S. foreign policy that is unduly patient with those who would do Israel harm.

"Can you imagine if our next-door neighbor were firing missiles at us and we said 'Oh, can we come to the table?' How about saying to Hamas: 'Give up violence and come to the

table'?" Gingrich said, referring to the militant government that rules the Gaza Strip. "It's always Israel's fault no matter how bad the other side is, and it's got to stop," Gingrich added.

Doug Hutt, a Jewish Republican who came to the Washington forum from East Brunswick, New Jersey, called Gingrich's comments—particularly his promise to move the embassy to the ancient capital of Israel—"a lot of red meat for the crowd." (Past peace proposals have tried to divide control of Jerusalem between Israelis and Palestinians.)

Hutt added that he and other Jewish Republicans still wonder if Gingrich, who carries significant baggage related to his businesses and past marriages, is electable.

Jewish Democrats said Jewish voters will overwhelmingly support President Obama, as they did when a solid 78 percent of U.S. Jews cast their ballot for him in 2008.

David A. Harris, president of the National Jewish Democratic Council, called the December 7 meeting "the rarest of audiences—a group that is 100 percent Republican and Jewish." —RNS