

Behind The Presidential Debates, What They Reveal For 2017: More Military Adventures, Limits on Civil Liberties,....

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The 3rd US presidential debate held October 19, 2016 between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton was perhaps the most critically important of the three presidential debates—not so much for what was said, or even how it was said, but for what it portends for US policy in the post-election period regardless which candidate is elected in November.

*The 3rd debate began with a reasonably rational discussion covering topics of **Supreme Court appointments, 2nd amendment gun rights, abortion and then immigration**—each subject revealing the deep differences in positions between the candidates. But then, as in the 1st and 2nd debates, it quickly exploded.*

As the debate addressed the topic of immigration, Trump noted that Barack Obama was the biggest deporter of undocumented Latinos in US history—a fact which Clinton has consistently avoided, he charged. Trump then referred to the recent Wikileaks revelations, where Clinton declared she was in favor of ‘open borders’ throughout the western hemisphere and Trump suggested her ‘open borders’ remark referred not only to more free trade but also more cross border labor immigration as well.

The Wikileaks revelations have been a consistent hot ‘third rail’ in the US election and the debates. The revelations have served as a multi-edged sword against Clinton. By revealing her ‘open borders’ remark they contradict Clinton claims that she opposes the Trans Pacific Partnership trade treaty or free trade, while simultaneously suggesting she would accept more immigration to the US as part of a broad hemisphere free trade deal. Wikileaks further touches another Clinton political ‘raw nerve’: her emails cover-up. And they also reveal Clinton’s cynical ‘dual communications strategy’, in which she consciously says one thing to bankers and big business and another to the US public. The Wikileaks revelations are thus a kind of strategic lynchpin for the Trump campaign in the election, raising multiple issues on which Clinton is vulnerable.

It was not surprising therefore that, almost on cue when Wikileaks was first raised by Trump in the 3rd debate, Clinton angrily went on the offensive and diverted the discussion from the revelations. Her offense-defense was to redirect the debate to an attack on Wikileaks itself. From Wikileaks suggesting free trade, open immigration, email cover ups, and double talking to bankers and voters the discussion was diverted to Wikileaks as Russian hacking of senior Democrat party leaders, Wikileaks as Russian vehicle to disrupt US elections, and from there to Russian aggression in Syria, demonizing Putin as war criminal, and then

demonizing Trump by association as a friend of Putin.

In redefining the Wikileaks debate, Clinton's words and her visual countenance response revealed a deep anger. How dare any country interfere with US elections. How ironic, given the US long and consistent interference in other countries' elections. Clinton's comments reflected the US elite's growing frustration with Russia's recent military offensive and gains in Syria. Clinton's counter-attack on Wikileaks then set up the segway to Putin as the cause of continuing war in Syria, Putin as Saddam Hussein incarnate, Putin as the source of subversion of US democracy, and, then in turn, to Trump as the buddy of Putin and therefore, by association, all the above as well.

Wikileaks was clearly the nexus point of the 3rd debate. Clinton declared Wikileaks "the most important issue tonight", charging Trump with "willing to spout the Putin line", declaring "you continue to get help from him" (Putin) and that "you are his favorite in this race". Trump countered with the charge Putin has outsmarted her and Obama at every foreign policy turn and that's why she, **Clinton, is trying to attack him by a desperate attempt to associate him with Putin.**

The even more disturbing quote from Clinton in the exchange, however, was her repeated call, first raised in the 2nd debate, to establish 'no fly zones' in Syria. When the debate moderator noted that US generals have said such zones would likely lead to war with Russia, Clinton suggested 'no fly' would correspond to 'safe zones' on the ground. But 'no fly' was necessary to confront Putin and Russia in Syria. "We have to up our game" there, she concluded.

The debates reveal that, if elected, Clinton and the US war faction are likely to engage in **new military adventures in the middle east**, in particular in Syria. Or perhaps try to **counter Russia with a more assertive military challenge in the Baltics**, Eastern Europe or the Ukraine as a bargaining chip with Russia in Syria. The 2nd and 3rd presidential debates indirectly reveal something is afoot in that regard, no matter what the outcome of the election in November, but especially if Clinton is elected.

The debates also reveal a new offensive is brewing, indeed already underway, to shut down Wikileaks and to further restrict free speech and civil liberties. Already, Wikileaks' internet connection at the Ecuadoran embassy in London has been cut. Concurrently, in recent days British banks have indicated they will no longer service the accounts Russia TV in the UK. This is a 'shot across the bow' to Russia media as well. A similar move is likely in the US for Russia TV soon after the elections. US government and US banks have initiated similar financial disruption tactics against Latin American progressive media, as the US renewed neoliberal offensive in Latin American continues to deepen. And should Trump lose the US election, it is likely his voice too will be muffled, if not 'silenced', in US media.

That muffling is especially true should Trump refuse to abide by the election outcome in the US. Another Trump 'verbal bombshell' in the 3rd debate was his refusal to say whether he would accept the outcome of the US election if he were defeated. Before the debate, Trump also continually raised the charge the election was being 'rigged'.

That view of media bias and election manipulation resonates with much of the US voting electorate, especially his base of at least 40% of hard core pro-Trump voters. The charge of 'rigging' and potential to refuse to accept the election results may prove a 'game changer'

in US elections. It reflects the deep distrust by broad segments of the US populace of the political elites in the US and their two parties. That distrust is not going away after the election, but will take new forms of protest in 2017 and beyond.

For there is clearly a rebellion underway against the ‘political class’ in the US.

That rebellion is not yet reflected in independent political organization and opposition. It is still being expressed through and within the two wings of the Corporate Party of America—Republicans and Democrats. But that may break down, should Trump lose and the US economy continue to falter in 2017. What the debates reflect is growing disenchantment with the two parties’ organizational cocoon. A ‘rebellion within’ those two wings could evolve post-November easily and quickly to a challenge ‘from without’.

Should he lose, Trump will almost certainly launch a new political party. A Trump new party initiative could also stimulate something similar on the left in the US. Bernie Sanders’ millennials are still clearly not in the Clinton corner, despite their erstwhile leader having thrown in with Clinton. The election may come down to whether, in the 8-9 swing states, Trump can turn out more non-college educated white workers than Clinton can turn out educated urban professionals, women, suburbanites, and Latino-African Americans.

Neither candidate has the millennial vote, now the largest population segment. Millennials may in the end vote for ‘none of the above’. Clinton is trailing well behind Obama for the millennials. Trump too is losing their support, at least among the better educated. Polls show only 54% of the under-35 years old group is currently at all interested in the election. And that will not soon change.

Third party candidates, **Jill Stein of the Green Party and Gary Johnson of the Libertarians, are polling 22%** of likely voters aged 18 to 29. According to a Harvard University survey this past summer, a third of Americans aged 18-29 support Socialism, while not even half back Capitalism. For them, the economy is the main issue and that is going to get worse in 2017 and beyond, not better, regardless who wins in November.

In summary, apart from all the personal mudslinging and the occasional, tangential references to real issues in the debates, what the 3rd—and indeed all three debates—reveal beneath the surface is in 2017 and beyond what’s in store is more military adventures, more limits on civil liberties, a growing loss of legitimacy by the US political elite and their parties among broad segments of the US population, deeper splits and more internecine conflict within the political class and each of their two parties, a growing potential for new forms of independent politics, and more instability within the US political system in general.

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