

The obscene Transparency of the “Mainstream” Pundits: Ask the Candidates Real Questions - Like These

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During recent presidential debates, moderators have asked mostly predictable questions and - except for some notable gaffes - have elicited mostly talking-point answers. But ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern says it's time for citizens to put politicians on the spot with some more pointed questions.

Pity the pundits. It must be hard to pretend to be a journalist and live in constant fear of being one question or comment away from joining the jobless.

This Thanksgiving holiday weekend we can be thankful for the obscene transparency of the “mainstream” pundits’ efforts to avoid at all cost offending the corporations that own and use them.

Rather, media personalities who wish to be around for a while must do what they can to promote the notion of American exceptionalism and the need to sacrifice at home in order to defend and expand the Empire — “so that we don’t have to fight them here.”

From a global perspective looking back a few decades, it is hard to believe that major powers like China and Russia were fiercely competing with each other for improved relations with the U.S., and that we were able to play one off against the other to advance America’s interests.

They are now laughing at us — smiling at how far we have outreached ourselves in our attempts to project power and corner the world market.

It is, actually, hard to believe: Marines now stationed in Australia, which our national security experts apparently believe is near China (well, kind of near); U.S. troops now in Africa where there’s still a lot of untapped oil; U.S threats to use a “military option” against Iran.

And the coup de grace: the feckless effort to build anti-ballistic missile defense systems that can defeat all countermeasures — the U.S. defense-industrial project that has long been one of the most expensive and lucrative corporate welfare programs.

Check out the breaking story, which brings still more good news for the military-industrial complex: Russia is threatening to defeat American missile defense systems in Europe, absent a bilateral agreement regulating them. And so, it’s back to the drawing board and then the production line in the quixotic search for technical systems that cannot be

countered. Is this a great country for weapons researchers and manufacturers, or what?

The pundits will explain, and our diplomats will try to convince others, particularly incredulous Europeans — that such defense systems are needed to defend against an eventual missile threat from Iran, which our national security gurus believe to be near Europe (well, kind of near).

All this at a time when one out of three children in America live in poverty. Our Fawning Corporate Media (FCM), substantially owned and operated by the arms makers, war profiteers and their friends, does what it can to disguise this, as well as other grim statistics.

Be thankful, say the One Percent. Relax already. After all, even poor children — or most of them, anyhow — can watch football on TV and be enticed by heroic advertisements to join the military or some other part of the national security apparatus. Thus, maybe they can qualify for a credit card that enables them to shop like crazy on Black Friday and on future Black Fridays.

To further buck up national morale, our TV networks can be counted on to carry the usual orgy of flag-waving “God-bless-America” renditions – accompanied by those explicit and implicit tutorials on American exceptionalism, expressed with jet-fighter flyovers and cutaways to U.S. troops “defending our freedoms” in Afghanistan and other faraway places.

The message from the One Percent – the ultra-wealthy whom Republican lawmakers are fond of lauding as the “job creators” – was that ALL of you must be grateful this Thanksgiving holiday, including the ungrateful Ninety-Nine Percent, some of whom are grumbling about inequities at “Occupy” protests around the country.

Ask Real Questions

Is there a medicine for this infection of militarism, consumerism and mindless politics? I think there is, but only if we all do our part. We need to find ways to raise the kinds of questions that FCM pundits and journalists avoid like the plague. Go to the rallies, the press conferences, the campaign speeches; press for cogent answers to the real questions.

That’s what I’m going to try to do in the coming weeks and months. Here are three lines of questioning I think we might try to pursue with the candidates themselves. You may wish to try them out yourselves and/or devise your own. I include below the three questions, supplemented by background and potential lead-ins:

-Question 1:

Background: The aims of U.S. foreign policy in the post-World War II period were essentially to enforce a global system in which the Western powers under American leadership would maintain global dominance. This essentially meant being in control of the world’s resources at the expense of non-Western nations.

This fundamental objective of U.S. foreign policy in the post-war period shines through with bare-knuckled candor in a TOP SECRET policy document written by George Kennan in February 1948. He was head of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, and this was its first memorandum. Here is an excerpt:

“We have about 50 per cent of the world’s wealth, but only 6.3 per cent of its population. ... Our real task in the coming period is to maintain this position of disparity. ... To do so we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming. ... We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford the luxury of altruism. ... We should cease to talk about vague, unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we will have to deal in straight power concepts.”

Lead-in: Five years after approval of the basic policy aim of controlling more than our share of “the world’s wealth,” the policy was implemented by throwing millions of dollars at the CIA to overthrow the democratically elected leader of Iran. You see, Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh had the revolutionary, unacceptable notion that more of the profits from Iranian oil should stay in Iran for the Iranian people and not simply go to oil giants like the predecessor of British Petroleum (BP).

The Question: Do you think we had a right to overthrow the leader of Iran in 1953? And would you again give millions of dollars to the CIA to overthrow the Iranian government under your presidency?

-Question 2

Background: Further on Iran: During the Dec. 5, 2006, Senate hearing on the nomination of Robert Gates to be Secretary of Defense, he was questioned by Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., about the possibility of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons and the threat to Israel if it did. Gates said that he believed Iran was trying to acquire nuclear weapons and was lying when it said it wasn’t.

However, amazingly, Gates added that Iran’s motivation was largely self-defense. Sen. Graham asked: “Do you believe the Iranians would consider using that nuclear weapons capability against the nation of Israel?”

Gates replied: “I don’t know that they would do that, Senator. ... And I think that, while they are certainly pressing, in my opinion, for nuclear capability, I think that they would see it in the first instance as a deterrent. They are surrounded by powers with nuclear weapons: Pakistan to their east, the Russians to the north, the Israelis to the west and us in the Persian Gulf.”

This remarkably candid reply explains Iran’s possible motive in seeking nuclear weapons as deterrence against aggression by nuclear powers in the region, including Israel and the United States. In other words, according to Gates, Iran is seeking nuclear weapons to prevent others from attacking it, rather than to attack other states — like Israel.

This comes close to saying that the U.S. should be able to live with a nuclear-armed Iran (and Israel should be able to as well). And, remember, all this talk is properly put in the subjunctive mood. It remains a very big IF; namely, on whether or not the Iranian leaders opt to go for a nuclear weapon.

We were formally reminded last March that the jury is still out on this key question. James R. Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, testified to Congress that the intelligence community judges that Iran has not yet made that decision. So, despite all the current media hype regarding Iran’s nuclear program, there remains some reason to hope against hype, so to speak.

In the above reply, Gates also acknowledged what U.S. officials officially seek to obfuscate: that Israel has nuclear weapons. Remember, that at the time of his confirmation hearing, Gates had already served as CIA director and held other senior national security position in several administrations.

He had been around long enough both to know the details of Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal and the longstanding U.S. policy NOT to acknowledge that Israel has nukes. That policy was designed to have the double benefit of not undermining Israel's policy of studied ambiguity on the issue and of not requiring the U.S. to take a position for or against Israel's possession of nuclear weapons and its refusal to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Iran has signed.

America's supposedly "objective" FCM also readily puts on the blinders when focusing on Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program and simultaneously ignoring Israel's real one. The truth is that there are no U.N. weapons inspectors crawling into crevices in Israel, as they regularly do in Iran.

Lead-in to question: A portion of intelligence funding goes to support intelligence analysis. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates worked in the analysis part of the CIA. [Actually, as an apprentice analyst 40 years ago, he worked in the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch that I led. His portfolio was Soviet policy toward the Middle East.]

Fast-forward 35 years to Dec. 5, 2006, when the Senate held a one-day hearing on Gates's nomination to become Secretary of Defense. When Sen. Lindsey Graham asked Gates whether he thought the Iranians would consider a nuclear attack on Israel, Gates answered:

"I think that they would see it in the first instance as a deterrent. They are surrounded by powers with nuclear weapons: Pakistan to their east, the Russians to the north, the Israelis to the west and us in the Persian Gulf."

This is tell-it-like-it-is intelligence analysis [which exceeded my hopes as his erstwhile mentor]. It even included matter-of-fact mention of Israel's nuclear capability, which President Barack Obama himself has refused to acknowledge. When Helen Thomas pressed the issue at Obama's inaugural press conference (Feb. 9, 2009), the President awkwardly ducked the question, explaining he did not want to "speculate."

The Question: Do you agree with Mr. Gates that Iran would see a nuclear capability "in the first instance as a deterrent?" And how many nuclear weapons do Western experts believe Israel has? President Carter has said 150, but that was some time ago.

A Follow-up: Let's assume Iran does get a nuclear weapon: Do you think it would commit suicide by firing it off in the direction of Israel?

-Question 3

Background and Lead-In: This question deals with torture, an issue that has been given new life recently, with more and more Republican presidential candidates speaking in favor of it. We have surely come a long way since Virginia patriot Patrick Henry insisted passionately that "the rack and the screw," as he put it, were barbaric practices that had to be left behind in the Old World, or we are "lost and undone."

The Question: On Sept. 6, 2006, Gen. John Kimmons, then head of Army intelligence told

reporters at the Pentagon, in unmistakable language: “No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years, tells us that.”

Gen. Kimmons knew that President George W. Bush had decided to claim publicly, just two hours later, that the “alternative set of procedures” for interrogation — methods that Bush had approved, like water-boarding — were effective. Whom do you think we should believe: President Bush? Or Gen. Kimmons?

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