

# Obama Handily Wins Third Debate

By Matt Zeller - October 22, 2012



Tonight's third Presidential debate featured a battle between Obama the Professor-in-Chief vs. Romney the student-who-didn't-do-the-reading. As someone who has ADD, even I had trouble keeping up with many of Governor Romney's non-linear arguments. Indeed, Romney's desperation to hit all of his talking points and critiques at all costs came at the expense of appearing Presidential. Presidents and leaders don't just critique problems they offer specific solutions on how to fix them -- in that regard, Obama handily won.

Romney clearly can memorize the talking points Dan Senor and John Bolton feed him -- hence his obsession with Israel and Iran -- but they all need to look at a map, because last time I checked Iran has a whole ocean border with the Indian Ocean (I'm still not sure how Syria is Iran's path to the sea). Also, a pre-emptive attack on Iran will do nothing but unite the Iranian people with the Ayatollah's for at least another generation -- Obama gets that, Romney scarily does not. The last thing America or the planet needs is an American war with Iran. While Governor Romney clearly wanted to use Israel against President Obama as much as possible, the President's story about visiting the Holocaust memorial and shelled Israeli cities while Romney held fundraisers was one of the most poignant and moving moments of the debate.

In fact, I'd argue too much time was spent on Israel and Iran and not nearly enough on what I think will be the single most important foreign and economic policy development of the 21st century -- the emergence of the Chinese middle class. The day China's middle class can replace the US middle class as consumers is the day China no longer needs to fund our debt. President Obama at least attempted to talk about long-term competitiveness of American labor via improved education standards because we need to be able to make things better and cheaper than everyone else. Sadly, neither man offered up enough specifics on policies that the US could enact to protect the American economy from the loss of China's investment. Now is the time to solve our coming China problem -- not 10-20 years from now when China decides it no longer needs us to buy its goods to keep its economy growing. .

I found it striking that Afghanistan got such little mention (in comparison to Iran and Israel) as we still have just under 100,000 troops in Afghanistan. Once again, neither candidate acknowledged the truth about American involvement in Afghanistan -- that we will remain in combat in Afghanistan potentially until 2024. Governor Romney absolutely incorrectly screwed up when he said we will be finished in Afghanistan in 2014. America signed a treaty to train the Afghan Security Forces till 2024. Combat won't stop simply because we bring home "combat troops" (i.e. the 82nd Airborne, 101st Airborne, etc...). I was an adviser to the Afghan Security Forces, I got shot at on my 13th day in country and many days

thereafter and yet I wasn't technically a "combat troop" -- the same will happen to our advisers for the next ten years.

Sadly, the conversation of Pakistan was also too limited. Pakistan is the most dangerous country on the planet (a state sponsor of terrorism, Osama Bin Laden's last sanctuary, and the greatest proliferator of nuclear weapons and material on the planet). The US-Pakistan alliance has essentially collapse over the last decade and yet neither candidate offered specifics on how to fix that relationship. The US must find a way to keep Pakistan from falling apart or Afghanistan and Iraq will look like a cakewalk.

Also, what happened to Europe? Their economy is on the verge of collapsing and could take ours with it -- yet not a single mention during the debate.

I enjoyed the discussion of Syria but I still can't find a difference in either candidate's policy towards the conflict. Indeed, while neither candidate wants to commit the US militarily to Syria, this probably is not possible - esp. if the conflict expands to Turkey and Jordan, our staunchest allies in the Middle East. I had hoped both men would have offered specifics on how to address the growing regional war in the Levant.

I found the limited conversation of US drone attacks frustrating and supremely disappointing. Lethal drone strikes have become the weapon de jure of the war on terror and could actually move people (i.e. the children of the killed) towards terrorism in the future I found President Obama's acknowledgement that we need to move people away from terrorism refreshing, but to do that, we actually need to expand literacy as literacy increases the access to the marketplace of ideas. We need to prevent today's children from becoming tomorrow's terrorists, but to do that, we'll likely have far greater success with words, not drones.

Had I been Mitt Romney's debate coach, I would have had him congratulate President Obama off the bat for getting Bin Laden. Such a move would have come across as magnanimous and would have taken the bite out of President Obama's forceful narrative on what it means to be a President: "When we bring those who have harmed us to justice that sends a message to the world...because that's the kind of clarity of leadership [that a President must make]." Conversely, I would have never have allowed Romney to call himself a son of Detroit who's father ran a car company. Most sons of Detroit and their fathers worked the line and not in the board room. Romney continued to come across as out of touch with the American middle class. A point further exacerbated by the President's criticisms of Romney's business practices that helped send many of those Detroit jobs to China. Indeed, it took three debates, but President Obama finally pointed out that Romney helped pioneer outsourcing to China.

President Obama came across the most Presidential and coherent when he tied the ending of the Iraq war with increased resources for fixing things at home and taking care of our veterans. As a veteran, I applaud the President for taking the time to acknowledge the need to take care of our veterans -- a point Romney did not make once in all three debates.

President Obama continues to be the most culturally in-tune President in modern American history. His use of David Spade throwaway line "The 1980's called and want their foreign policy back" was

simultaneously hysterical and powerful. Even more poignant were President Obama's statements regarding the changing nature of warfare, especially the "we used to have horses and bayonets" line. President Obama's correctly asserted that warfare changes and evolves to demand new weapons and tactics -- a lesson that sadly many politicians and US government officials never learn. For example, the US military spent billions of dollars on the F-22, an aircraft designed to fight Soviet MiGs but now finds itself unused as we face enemies who fight with IEDs and small unit ambushes. We can no longer afford to learn the lessons of the last war during the first moments of the next one.

Finally, thank God President Obama acknowledged that we all hate campaign ads -- a sentiment with which I'm confident all Americans can agree.

Follow Matt Zeller on Twitter: 