



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on October 23, 2012

“Bayonet” Policy: Obama and Romney Debate, Peace Candidates Blacked Out

President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney engaged in a nationally televised foreign policy [debate](#) Monday, October 22, and agreed to continue aggressive American military involvement around the world. According to an instant [poll](#) by CNN, viewers gave a narrow 48-40 percent victory in the Lynn University debate to President Obama.



The debate took place just one day in advance of a third-party debate by four peace candidates, Libertarian [Gary Johnson](#), Constitution Party nominee [Virgil Goode](#), Green Party nominee [Jill Stein](#) and Justice Party nominee [Rocky Anderson](#), which is not expected to be televised by any commercial U.S. station (C-SPAN, Al Jazeera, and Russia Television are expected to broadcast the third-party debate). All four third-party peace candidates agree on ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (which is now largely waged by U.S. troops), stopping a possible war against Iran, closing Guantanamo Bay prison, and other issues. The Obama-Romney debate was televised by most domestic commercial news channels.

Obama and Romney both agreed to edge up to war with Iran and to continue military and drone strikes across the Middle East. Obama [started off](#) the debate with the claim that “my first job as commander in chief, Bob, is to keep the American people safe. And that’s what we’ve done over the last four years.” He added that part of keeping America safe is to “project military power overseas.”

The United States government spends more than [40 percent of all worldwide military spending](#). With the U.S. enjoying a major technology edge in the military weaponry, neither candidate made a case for efficiently defending the nation with less spending. Governor Romney pledged “I will not cut our military budget,” and his campaign has put a floor on military spending at four percent of gross domestic spending, which is the level the United States spent during the Iraq and Afghan wars.

Obama countered with the [boast](#): “keep in mind that our military spending has gone up every single year that I’ve been in office. We spend more on our military than the next 10 countries combined; China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, you name it. The next 10.” Obama stressed that “The budget that we are talking about is not reducing our military spending. It is maintaining it.” Obama’s budget proposal would maintain the baseline military budget, after downsizing from the Iraq and Afghan wars, while Romney would maintain the wartime high funding levels.

Romney [charged](#) that Obama’s minor military cuts would create a hollow Navy: “The Navy said they needed 313 ships to carry out their mission. We’re now at under 285. We’re headed down to the low 200s if we go through a sequestration. That’s unacceptable to me.”

Obama pounced on Romney with what was certainly the [best retort of the night](#):

You mentioned the Navy, for example, and that we have fewer ships than we did in 1916. Well, Governor, we also have fewer horses and bayonets, because the nature of our military’s changed.



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We have these things called aircraft carriers, where planes land on them. We have these ships that go underwater, nuclear submarines. And so the question is not a game of Battleship, where we're counting slips. It's what are our capabilities.

Indeed, the U.S. maintains [more aircraft carriers afloat than the rest of the world combined](#).

Both candidates agreed on the continued use of drone strikes across the Middle East, with Mitt Romney [noting](#) that "I believe we should use any and all means necessary to take out people who pose a threat to us and our friends around the world. And it's widely reported that drones are being used in drone strikes, and I support that entirely, and feel the president was right to up the usage of that technology, and believe that we should continue to use it."

Iran: Both candidates pledged to deny Iran a nuclear weapon, refusing to leave an offensive military attack off the table. President Obama [said](#) "we're going to make sure that if they do not meet the demands of the international community, then we are going to take all options necessary to make sure they don't have a nuclear weapon." Romney agreed, charging that "the greatest threat that the world faces, the greatest national security threat is a nuclear Iran" and repeating his mantra that trade sanctions imposed by the Obama administration were not the "crippling sanctions" needed.

Israel: On Israel, both candidates agreed to commit U.S. troops and blood to defend the Jewish state in war. President Obama claimed that "I will stand with Israel if they are attacked." Romney underlined that endorsement, stressing "I want to underscore the same point the president made which is that if I'm President of the United States, when I'm President of the United States, we will stand with Israel. And if Israel is attacked, we have their back, not just diplomatically, not just culturally, but militarily."

China: Romney continued his attack on China's trading policies, claiming that "China has not played by the same rules, in part by holding down artificially the value of their currency. It holds down the prices of their goods. It means our goods aren't as competitive and we lose jobs. That's got to end. They're making some progress; they need to make more. That's why on day one, I will label them a currency manipulator, which allows us to apply tariffs where they're taking jobs." Obama responded, noting in a Chinese tire dispute: "I have to say that Governor Romney criticized me for being too tough in that tire case; said this wouldn't be good for American workers and that it would be protectionist."

Lynn University is located in Boca Raton, Florida, and the debate was moderated by Bob Schieffer of CBS News.

Photo of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney at the October 22 presidential debate: AP Images



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