



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on November 13, 2011

GOP Debate: Ron Paul Dissents from War on Iran and Syria, Assassination, Torture

New Wars Against Iran and Syria

Mitt Romney came out for war against Iran at the beginning of the debate. “If all else fails,” Romney [told](#) debate moderator and CBS News Anchor Scott Pelley in the South Carolina debate at Wofford College, “then of course you take military action. It is unacceptable for Iran to have a nuclear weapon.” Likewise, Romney sought war against Syria, [suggesting](#) “Of course it’s time for the Assad dictatorship to end. And we should use covert activity.”



[Herman Cain](#) told CBS moderator Scott Pelley that he wouldn’t invade Syria, but would wage war against the country by funding a bloody insurgency instead: “I would not entertain military opposition. I’m talking about to help the opposition movement within the country.”

Newt Gingrich also [called for war](#) against Iran in the form of “maximum covert operations to block and disrupt the Iranian program — including taking out their scientists, including breaking up their systems. All of it covertly,” Gingrich added, to audience laughter: “All of it deniable.” On Syria, Gingrich would likewise seek widespread “covert” war. Asked by *National Journal* Host Major Garrett if he would approve military assistance and covert smuggling, Gingrich [replied](#): “I would actively approve taking those steps would which defeat his regime, which would probably be mostly covert.”

Texas Governor Rick Perry didn’t mention war against Iran, as he wasn’t asked the question on it, but [suggested](#) that the United States “sanction the Iranian Central Bank right now and shut down that country’s economy.”

Former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum also [sought war](#) against Iran. “I proposed exactly the things that Herman and and Mitt Romney suggested, which was to give money to the rebel forces there to help the pro-democracy movement and to put tough sanctions in place.”

On the other hand, Texas Congressman Ron Paul advocated following the U.S. Constitution on war, which he [called](#) “the old-fashioned way, the Constitution. You go to the Congress and find out if our national security is threatened. And I’m afraid what’s going on right now is similar to the war propaganda that went on against Iraq.”

Torture

Republican candidates also staked out clear positions in favor of torture — without calling it torture. Herman Cain [said](#) of waterboarding: “Yes, I would return to that policy. I don’t see it as torture. I see it as an enhanced interrogation technique.” (Cain also said “I’d keep Gitmo open,” a reference to the



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Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba where hundreds of detainees have been held without trial or formal charges for as long as nine years.) Michele Bachmann [agreed](#), telling the audience that “If I were president, I would be willing to use waterboarding.”

Ron Paul [called](#) waterboarding torture and said that torture “uncivilized” and “un-American.” He also said that torture is “illegal under international law and under our law. It’s also immoral. And it’s also very impractical. There’s no evidence that you really get reliable evidence.”

Texas Governor Rick Perry, replying to Ron Paul, [said](#) that “the idea that we have our young men and women in combat today, Senator [sic], where there are people who would kill them in a heartbeat, under any circumstance, use any technique that they can, for us not to have the ability to try to extract information from them, to save our young people’s lives, is a travesty. This is war. That’s what happens in war.”

Jon Huntsman agreed with Ron Paul, [suggesting](#) that “We diminish our standing in the world and the values that we project which include liberty, democracy, human rights, and open markets when we torture. We should not torture. Waterboarding is torture. We dilute ourselves down like a whole lot of other countries. And we lose that ability to project values that a lot of people in corners of this world are still relying on the United States to stand up for them.”

Rick Santorum [sided with the majority](#), favoring torture in all-but-name: “Gitmo is essential to leave open. We have to use enhanced interrogation techniques, all enhanced interrogation techniques.” Santorum also [said](#) that any innocent detainees in the war on terror should abandon hope of ever having a day in court under a Santorum administration: “And using civilian courts is one of the worst ideas I have ever heard. The civilian courts are given to people who have rights under our Constitution. People who have attacked our country and are foreign combatants do not have those rights.”

Presidential Assassinations

Republican Presidential candidates also boldly called for approving an unrestricted presidential authority to kill any American he deems fit to kill. Mitt Romney was [asked](#): “Is it appropriate for the American president on the president’s say-so alone to order the death of an American citizen suspected of terrorism?” Romney [responded](#): “Absolutely. In this case, this is an individual who had aligned himself with a group that had declared war on the United States of America. And if there’s someone that’s going to join with a group like al-Qaeda that declares war on America and we’re in a war with that entity, then of course anyone who was bearing arms for that entity is fair game for the United States of America.”

Newt Gingrich took Romney’s position a step further, noting that a presidential finding “is the rule of law.” When Scott Pelley pointed out that an American citizen on an assassination list is not part of a court proceeding, and is therefore outside of the rule of law, Gingrich [responded](#): “Well, he’s not a terrorist suspect. He’s a person who was found guilty under review of actively seeking the death of Americans. It is the rule of law. That is explicitly false. It is the rule of law.”

Gingrich went on to [explain](#) that the President does not have to grant citizens trials, essentially arguing that a President would never arrest anyone innocent. “If you engage in war against the United States, you are an enemy combatant. You have none of the civil liberties of the United States. You cannot go to court.” Of course, the detainees at Guantanamo contained many [innocent people who later appeared to have been picked up by bounty hunters](#) looking to swindle coalition forces out of reward money. Innocent U.S. citizen and Navy veteran [Donald Vance](#) was detained at Camp Cropper in Iraq as a



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terrorist suspect for some 97 days without trial in 2006, but was released only through publicity of his case. Gingrich even implied that he could shoot terror suspects who had surrendered, as they have no rights under the Constitution: “Civil defense, criminal defense, is a function of being within the American law. Waging war on the United States is outside criminal law. It is an act of war and should be dealt with as an act of war. And the correct thing in an act of war is to kill people who are trying to kill you.”

Ron Paul noted that Presidential assassinations have now included a [16-year-old boy](#) — the son of al-Awlaki — and [condemned](#) “this whole idea that now we can be assassinated by somebody that we don’t even like to run our medical care, and giving this power to the president to be the prosecutor, the executor, the judge and the jury. We better look at that carefully before you automatically endorse something like that.”

Photo of Ron Paul at debate: AP Images



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