



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 13, 2011

Huntsman, with Gingrich, Sees “Transcendent Threat” from Iran

It was billed as a “Lincoln-Douglas -style” debate on foreign policy, though there was, alas, no Lincoln, no Douglas and, apparently, not much debating when Republican presidential candidates Newt Gingrich and John Huntsman (left) met at the Dana Center at Saint Anselm College in Goffstown, New Hampshire, Monday afternoon. Gingrich, the former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and Huntsman, the former governor of Utah and later ambassador to China, spent 90 minutes in a bloodless exchange of views that bore some resemblance to a college seminar.



“I can see my daughter nodding off over there,” Huntsman joked at one point during what [CNN.com](#) called a “friendly and subdued conversation” between the rival candidates. “The candidates kept the conversation very friendly,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported, noting often the areas where they agreed while shying away from discussing their disagreements.

“Now news, just snooze,” was the verdict of [The Guardian](#) of London. The candidates did appear to agree on most issues, most notably the perceived threat posed by a potentially nuclear-armed Iran, with Gingrich warning of a second holocaust and Huntsman calling it “the transcendent threat of this decade.” That apocalyptic vision of Iran with the bomb has generally been more associated with the combative Gingrich than with the more low-key Huntsman. As reporter Justin Elliott observed on Tuesday, Gingrich reenforced his own frequent warnings about Iran in last Saturday’s ABC-Yahoo debate in Des Moines, Iowa, by paying tribute to rival candidate and former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum for repeatedly voicing similar concerns about Iran’s nuclear program. In that statement Gingrich implied that Iran might not only pose an existential threat to Israel, but could even put at risk the very survival of the United States.

“Rick Santorum’s consistency and courage on Iran has been a hallmark of why, if we do survive, it will be in part because of people like Rick who’ve had the courage to tell the truth about the Iranians for a long time,” Gingrich said. As Elliott noted, “Even the most committed anti-Iran polemicists have not proposed that the country could destroy the entire United States.” While political leaders in the U.S. have been warning about Iran and the bomb for years and the U.S. has imposed economic sanctions against Iran because of it, the Tehran government has insisted that its nuclear program is for energy and not weapons production. Reviewing claims made by candidates in the GOP presidential debate held in Ames, Iowa last August 11, [Factcheck.org](#) noted:

“Ron Paul said the CIA told him that there is ‘no evidence’ Iran is ‘working on’ a nuclear weapon. There’s no solid proof, but the International Atomic Energy Agency says there are ‘possible military dimensions’ to Iran’s nuclear program.”



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Yet Gingrich, Huntsman and other candidates have spoken as though Iran's nuclear weapons program were a certainty. Gingrich at Monday's debate that "we're ideally going to do it non-militarily, but we are not going to tolerate and Iranian nuclear weapon." Huntsman sounded even more hawkish, arguing that additional sanctions on Iran "won't work because the mullahs in Tehran have already decided they want to go nuclear." The former diplomat dismissed the need for a multilateral approach to the problem.

"I think we all need to conclude that this is going to be the United States doing it our way at the end of the day," Huntsman said. "Which isn't all bad. I think we work better when left to our own devices."

Gingrich also warned that Pakistan, already a nuclear power "will use" nuclear weapons. Though he has often warned of the rapidly growing economic and military power of China, Gingrich on Monday conceded that Huntsman, the former ambassador to Beijing, "knows far more about China than I do." Huntsman described a "hubristic, nationalist generation" coming to age in China that would put a strain on the country's relations with the United States for the near future.

The debate, sponsored by Saint Anselm College Republicans, eschewed the usual one or two-minute statements and rebuttals of most political debates in favor of the "Lincoln-Douglas" style of extended presentations and counter-arguments by the two contenders. Both men hoped to benefit from the exposure, as the debate in the state with the nation's first presidential primaries was covered by both New Hampshire and national media. Gingrich, shown leading in some polls nationally and in the first caucus state of Iowa, still trails former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney in New Hampshire. Huntsman, whose poll numbers show him in the lower tier of candidates, is counting on a breakthrough in New Hampshire to give traction to his campaign. The former Utah governor said on Monday that he has spent so much time campaigning in the Granite State that he has "acquired this real New Hampshire accent." He predicted his grass roots efforts in the state would provide a considerable obstacle to Gingrich and others seeking the GOP presidential nomination.

"For the speaker to become the nominee, he's going to have to overcome our very formidable operation on the ground here in New Hampshire," Huntsman said.

Photo: Republican presidential candidates, former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, left, and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich shake hands after a debate in Manchester, N.H., Dec. 12, 2011.: AP Images



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