Written by **Thomas R. Eddlem** on November 23, 2011

Ron Paul is Standout Winner in Stacked Debate Featuring Patriot Act, War

The debate included questions by former Dick Cheney Chief of Staff David Addington (a Heritage Foundation vice president) as well as Bush administration-era Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz (2001-2005), who helped push the United States into the Iraq War and is now a "visiting scholar" of the American Enterprise Institute. No skeptics of America's foreign wars were asked any questions for the entire duration of the debate.

Heritage Foundation official and former Attorney General Ed Meese led off the presumptive and biased questioning in the debate with this doozy: "At least 42 terrorist attacks aimed at the United States have been thwarted since 9/11. Tools like the Patriot Act have been instrumental in finding and stopping terrorists. Shouldn't we have a long range extension of the investigative powers contained in that act so that our law enforcement officers can have the tools that they need?" The Patriot Act allows so-called "National Security Letters," which are warrantless searches in flagrant violation of the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich replied first, prevaricating and then coming down against the Fourth Amendment and the Sixth Amendment right to trial by jury: "I think it's desperately important that we preserve your right to be innocent until proven guilty, if it's a matter of criminal law. But if you're trying to find somebody who may have a nuclear weapon that they are trying to bring into an American city, I think you want to use every tool that you can possibly use to gather the intelligence," Gingrich responded, concluding with the false implication that there are terrorists wandering our streets with nuclear weapons. "And we need to be prepared to protect ourselves from those who, if they could, would not just kill us individually, but would take out entire cities."

Of course, Gingrich's call for suspension of trial rights of terror suspects has not been historically limited to foreigners or even actual terrorists. In August of this year, the U.S. Court of Appeals allowed a torture lawsuit by innocent U.S. citizens Donald Vance and Nathan Ertel to go forward against former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Vance (a Navy veteran) and Ertel had suffered months of detention without trial and torture at the hands of the U.S. Defense Department at Camp Cropper in Iraq.

Moreover, drone strikes have not only targeted and killed al-Qaeda asset Anwar al-Awlaki — a native-born U.S. citizen — for assassination without trial September 30, they've also targeted and killed his Colorado-born 16-year-old son in a separate drone strike several weeks later.

CNN moderator Wolf Blitzer asked if Gingrich would change anything in the Patriot Act. "No, I would not change it. I'm not aware of any specific change it needs. And I'd look at strengthening it," Gingrich replied.

Ron Paul disagreed:

> I think the Patriot Act is unpatriotic because it undermines our liberty. I'm concerned, as everybody is, about the terrorist attack. [Oklahoma City bomber] Timothy McVeigh was a vicious terrorist. He was arrested. Terrorism is still on the books, internationally and nationally — it's a crime and we should deal with it.
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> We dealt with it rather well with Timothy McVeigh. But why I really fear it is we have drifted into a condition that we were warned against because our early founders were very clear. They said, don't be willing to sacrifice liberty for security.... I have a personal belief that you never have to give up liberty for security. You can still provide security without sacrificing our Bill of Rights.

Gingrich, offered a rejoinder by Blitzer, replied with another false implication that terrorists have ready access to nuclear weapons. "Timothy McVeigh succeeded. That's the whole point. Timothy McVeigh killed a lot of Americans. I don't want a law that says after we lose a major American city, we're sure going to come and find you. I want a law that says, you try to take out an American city, we're going to stop you." In reality, the Oklahoma City bomber was executed for his crimes after a constitutionally-mandated trial by jury. McVeigh didn't "win" in any sense, other than in his own deranged mind.

Paul replied with an appeal to preventing a Big Brother-style surveillance state under the Patriot Act. "This is like saying that we need a policeman in every house, a camera in every house because we want to prevent child- beating and wife-beating. You can prevent crimes by becoming a police state. So if you advocate the police state, yes, you can have safety and security and you might prevent a crime, but the crime then will be against the American people and against our freedoms. And we will throw out so much of what our revolution was fought for."

Congressman Paul's appeals to the U.S. Constitution fell on deaf ears among his fellow candidates, with former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney stating that terror suspects are not entitled to trials. "There's crime and there are rights that are afforded to American citizens under our Constitution and those that are accused of crime. Then there's war. And the tool of war being used today in America and around the world is terror. There's a different body of law that relates to war." Other candidates who voiced opinions on the matter expressed similar views.

On the subject of foreign aid, Paul said, "I think the aid is all worthless. It doesn't do any good for most of the people. You take money from poor people in this country and you end up giving it to rich people in poor countries." He added that "if you're gonna keep sending foreign aid overseas and these endless wars that you don't have to declare and — and go into Libya without even consulting with the Congress, the biggest threat — the biggest threat to our national security is our financial condition."

Rep. Paul was able to turn around one question from Katherine Zimmerman of the American Enterprise Institute's Political Press Project on engaging in Somalia. Paul used the words of uber-interventionist Paul Wolfowitz against himself. Asked what the U.S. would do to prevent Somalia's al Shabaab from becoming an al Qaeda-level terrorist threat, Paul responded:

> You have to understand who the al Qaeda really is. The — the al Qaeda responds in a very deliberate fashion. As a matter of fact, Paul Wolfowitz explained it very clearly after 9/11. He said that al Qaeda is inspired by the fact that we had bases in Saudi Arabia. So if you want to inspire al Qaeda, just meddle in — in that region. That will inspire the al Qaeda. As a matter of fact, he went on to say that that was a good reason for us to remove the base that we had had in 15 years in — in Saudi Arabia and that we should have done that.
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> So there is a response. Al Qaeda responds to that and they — they are quite annoyed with us. So if you drop — if you have a no- fly zone over Syria, that's an act of war. What if we had China put a no-fly zone over our territory? I don't think — I don't think we would like that.

Rep. Paul controlled much of the flow of the debate, even slamming Mitt Romney down for bemoaning the alleged $1 trillion in defense spending cuts that would flow from the sequestration process after the failure of the Supercommittee. Paul pointed out that the "cuts" were actually cuts in projected future spending increases rather than real cuts.

Photo of Ron Paul: AP Images

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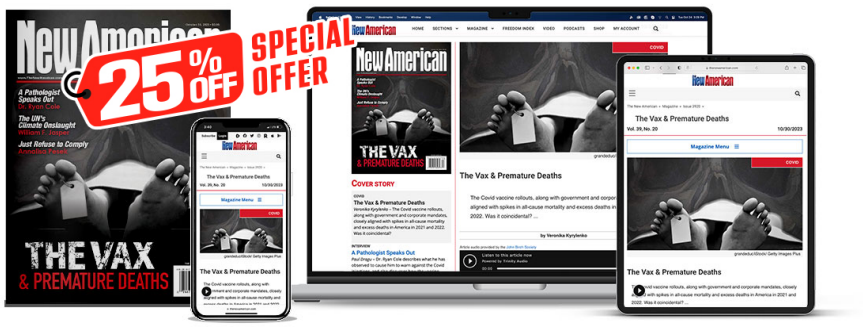

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