

Republican debate: Deeper into the swamp of bigotry and militarism

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Thursday night's debate in North Charleston, South Carolina was the sixth in the contest for the Republican presidential nomination, and by now, these events have settled into a predictable rut.

Each has been a political freak show, featuring crude insults, bizarre and brazenly false assertions, and appeals to racism and anti-immigrant bigotry. The candidates seek to outdo each other in fear-mongering and militaristic tub-thumping, to appeal to the fascistic "base" of the party.

The latest installment in this increasingly dismal spectacle added anti-Semitism to the mix, thanks to Senator Ted Cruz, whose attack on billionaire Donald Trump for holding "New York values" was a dog whistle to ultra-right prejudice against the largest Jewish community in the United States.

When asked what he meant by "New York values," Cruz replied, "I think most people know exactly what New York values are: socially liberal, pro-gay marriage, pro-abortion, focused on money and the media."

As one Jewish commentator noted later, "the key term in his debate explanation is 'money.' You'll find plenty of social liberalism in, say, Cambridge, Mass ... But that 'focus around money and the media'? That was 'New York = Jews' all the way. Don't kid yourself."

Neither the execrable moderators, Neil Cavuto and Maria Bartiromo of Fox Business News, nor any of the network and newspaper commentators who bloviated after the debate, called attention to the anti-Semitic subtext of Cruz's comments.

An equally significant omission was the silence about the event last April that brought North Charleston to world notoriety: the horrific police killing of Walter Scott, a middle-aged black man who was shot in the back repeatedly by Officer Michael Slager. The cop then planted his Taser by the body in an effort to bolster his claim of self-defense.

Only the cellphone video of the killing, taken by a passerby and circulated widely on the Internet, prevented this cover-up from having its effect. Slager is now jailed and facing trial for murder. There was no mention of the Scott killing in the debate, and only one perfunctory reference to

the killing of nine black parishioners of a Charleston church two months later by white supremacist Dylann Roof.

Senator Cruz set the tone for the evening when he was chosen to be the first candidate to respond to a question—a tacit indication that, at least for Fox Business News, he is a favorite for the Republican nomination.

While he was asked to respond to President Obama's assertion, in his State of the Union address Tuesday night, that the US economy was the strongest in the world, with 14 million new jobs created since 2010, Cruz chose to begin instead with a warmongering diatribe against Iran.

Citing photos of 10 US sailors surrendering to Iranian forces after they entered Iranian territorial waters in the Persian Gulf, Cruz declared, "many of us picked up our newspapers, and we were horrified to see the sight of 10 American sailors on their knees, with their hands on their heads."

He concluded, "I give you my word, if I am elected president, no service man or service woman will be forced to be on their knees, and any nation that captures our fighting men will feel the full force and fury of the United States of America."

By the time of the debate, the 10 sailors had already been repatriated, a signal of the closer relations between US imperialism and the Iranian bourgeois-clerical regime, which bent over backwards to facilitate the return of the sailors, who may have been engaged on a spy mission against Farsi Island.

If one examines Cruz's demagogic statement more closely, it suggests a truly demented sense of US global dominion. American military personnel should be exempt from any consequences, even when they violate the territorial waters of another country. Any country which dares to defend its own lands and shores against such a US incursion "will feel the full force and fury of the United States of America": in other words, nuclear annihilation.

None of the other six candidates raised any objection to this stance, which the audience applauded enthusiastically. Several other candidates cited the Persian Gulf incident as

proof of the spinelessness of the Obama administration and the need to replace it with an even more belligerent and militaristic government.

Media coverage of the debate focused mainly on the back-and-forth between Cruz and Trump, now treated as the front-runners in the Iowa caucuses, the first actual contest, which takes place February 1.

There was also some attention paid to the squabbling among the four contenders vying for third place in Iowa and second place in the New Hampshire primary February 9—Senator Marco Rubio, Governor Chris Christie, Governor John Kasich and former Governor Jeb Bush. Each of these four seeks to become the choice of the Republican Party establishment against the supposed “outsiders” Trump and Cruz.

The tone of the debate was even more strident than its predecessors, with each candidate seeking to denounce the Obama administration, the Democratic Party, and Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton in the most unrestrained and hysterical tones.

Thus Cruz declared Obama “acts as an apologist for radical Islamic terrorism.” Bush said that under the Obama administration, “The world has been torn asunder.” Ben Carson warned that ISIS could use electromagnetic pulses (generated by detonating an atomic bomb) as well as cyberattacks to destroy the United States. Rubio claimed, “Barack Obama believes that America is an arrogant global power that needs to be cut down to size.”

In considering this demagogic, it is necessary to keep in mind that Obama is a ruthless representative of American imperialism, with the blood of tens of thousands on his hands, responsible for continuing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while adding new ones in Libya, Yemen and Syria, as well as drone warfare on a global scale. In his State of the Union speech he boasted of the global supremacy of the US military, asserting that, when faced with an adversary, “our reach has no limit.”

There are few policy differences among the Republican hopefuls. It was particularly noteworthy that only Bush, who is trailing badly in the polls, attempted to criticize Trump’s open appeals to anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant prejudice, and even Bush couched his remarks in conciliatory terms.

Referring to Trump’s call to ban any Muslims entering the United States, Bush said, “I hope you reconsider this, because this policy is a policy that makes it impossible to build the coalition necessary to take out ISIS. The Kurds are our strongest allies. They’re Muslim. You’re not going to even allow them to come to our country?”

When the other candidates were asked to comment on Trump’s proposed ban on Muslims, each employed the same evasion, declaring opposition to the entry of Syrian

refugees into the United States—Kasich and Christie are among 26 governors, Democratic and Republican, who have filed suit over this. None of them made an issue of the flagrantly unconstitutional character of Trump’s proposed ban, or associated calls to create a database of all Muslim residents, which would make possible future mass detentions.

All of the Republican candidates denounced Obama’s State of the Union speech, with its delusional picture of a robust American economy with plentiful jobs and restored prospects for working people. But they did so from the standpoint of proposing even more nakedly pro-Wall Street policies, including slashing taxes on the wealthy and corporations, destroying public social services like Medicare, and turning their backs on the conditions of the poor, the homeless, those devastated by the capitalist crisis.

There was, moreover, a sinister undertone to the incessant right-wing populist demagogic. The Republican candidates treated the Democratic Party not merely as a political rival, but as a treasonous and semi-criminal organization. There were clear suggestions that a Democratic victory in the presidential election would be not only undesirable, but illegitimate.

Rubio declared, “Hillary Clinton is disqualified from being commander in chief of the United States.” Carson said that if the Republicans lose the 2016 election, “this nation is over as we know it.” Cruz’s closing statement contained a scarcely veiled appeal for support by the armed forces and police against any opposition, as he declared, “If I am elected president, to every soldier and sailor and airman and marine, and to every police officer and firefighter and first responder who risk their lives to keep us safe, I will have your back.”



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