

Gary Johnson's 'Aleppo' Gaffe Is Far From Disqualifying

I'm not a fan of Gary Johnson as a presidential candidate. I gave him a look after the Republican party nominated Donald Trump, but while I appreciate his honesty and his small-government philosophy, his positions on foreign policy and national security really bother me. In fact, every time he speaks on these topics (and a few others), I find myself increasingly disappointed.



I guess I was hoping he'd throw disaffected Republicans and conservatives like me more of a bone than he has. Instead, he's helped remind me of why I'm not a Libertarian. Libertarians tend to be non-interventionists when it comes to foreign affairs, and Johnson, of course, is no different. While his hands-off approach to Middle Eastern conflicts and Islamic terrorism may strike a chord with war-weary Americans, it also feeds into an attitude of relative disinterest in global strife.

That's why it shouldn't have been all that surprising that Johnson drew a blank the other day when asked about "Aleppo," the city at the heart of the Syrian battle between Bashar al-Assad and rebel groups.

It was a bad gaffe. Someone running for president (even if they're only polling around 10%) shouldn't have had to ask what "Aleppo" is.

What I found even more remarkable, however, was how the media reacted to Johnson's flub.

The incident earned Johnson the most attention (by far) he's received throughout his entire candidacy, spawning big headlines in every major newspaper in the country. It spread like wildfire across social-media punditry, and quickly became a huge topic on the cable and network news shows. The overwhelming sentiment (from the hard-lefties on *The View* to the Trump lackeys on *Fox News*) was that it was a disqualifying moment for Johnson. Yes, *disqualifying*.

Clearly these people have been watching a different election cycle than I have, because nothing...I repeat, *nothing*...is disqualifying this year.

Let's look at foreign policy alone...

As U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton stored top-secret government information (of the highest level of classification) on a private email server with less security than a Gmail account. She then deleted tens of thousands of those emails to escape accountability for what she did over her four years in office, and has been lying exhaustively about her role in all of it ever since. These revelations came, of course, as a result of her scapegoating a YouTube video and its creator for the Benghazi terrorist attacks.

If none of that is disqualifying, *nothing* is.

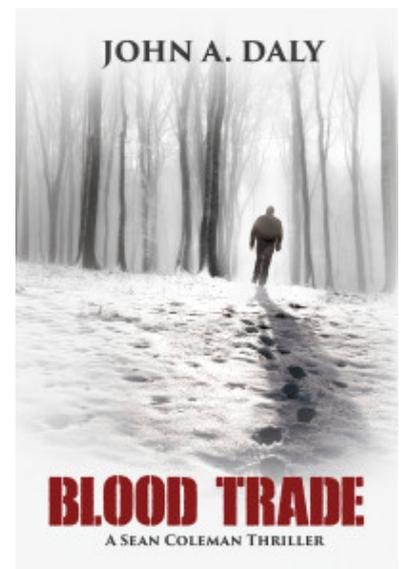
Donald Trump didn't know what the *nuclear triad* was. He didn't know the difference between "Quds" and "Kurds." He wasn't aware of the annexation of Crimea. He said he would force the U.S. military to commit war crimes (torturing terrorists and killing their families). He claimed that President George W. Bush lied about WMDs to start the Iraq War, and that President Obama was the "founder" of ISIS. He touted (and continues to tout) Vladimir Putin as a model for national leadership, even praising Putin's contrived approval ratings.

If none of that is disqualifying, *nothing* is.

Yet, when Gary Johnson is asked about “Aleppo,” and doesn’t identify the word with the civil war in Syria, he might as well end his candidacy? Give me a break.

In a normal election year, the critics might have a point. In this *election* year, such criticism is absolutely meaningless.

The deeper irony is that a number of Johnson’s harshest detractors over this controversy (whether they be professional commentators or amateur bloggers) have gone well out of their way over the past year to gloss over, excuse, and run interference for the very conduct from Clinton and Trump that I described above (respective to which candidate they’re pulling for, of course). It’s the height of hypocrisy, and unlike Clinton and Trump, Johnson actually took responsibility for his screw-up – something almost unheard of these days.



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Furthermore, I’m not convinced that half of these *analysts* – had they heard the word “Aleppo” without the word “Syria” attached to it – would have immediately associated the two

either. Perhaps I'm being overly cynical with that charge, but I suspect I'm not...which makes their sanctimony all the more nauseating.

Many voters and many in the media decided months ago that presidential candidates in the year 2016 can't do or say anything to disqualify themselves from contention. So let's get off our high horses when it comes to the guy who didn't have a shot to being with. Okay?