

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.

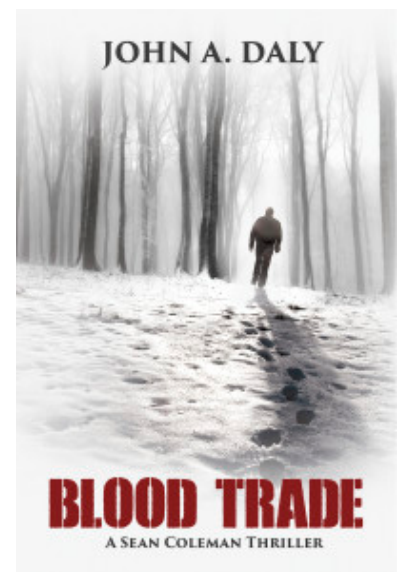
Donald Trump didn't know what the *nuclear triad* was. He didn't know the difference between "Quds" and "Kurds." He wasn't aware of the annexation of Crimea. He said he would force the U.S. military to commit war crimes (torturing terrorists and killing their families). He claimed that President George 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?

Gary Johnson Makes Even a Protest Vote Hard for Republicans

In an election year in which voters are routinely being told that they have to choose between two deeply unpopular, unfit presidential nominees, one would think that an unconventional candidate like Libertarian Gary Johnson might actually find some decent traction.



Johnson and his party, after all, have carved out a diverse political platform that seems to offer something meaningful to just about every type of voter.

People on the political right like that Johnson's a small-government, fiscally conservative candidate – the only one who will be on the ballot in all 50 states this November. As our national debt approaches \$20 trillion, he's the only entrant

in this race who seems to think it's an extremely serious problem that must be dealt with. His free-trade stance is also attractive. The GOP essentially forfeited these policy positions when the party made Donald Trump its nominee. Johnson fills that void.

On social issues, Johnson is pretty liberal. His candidacy lends itself to discouraged Democrats and millennials who may have trouble getting behind Hillary, her lack of character, and what they believe is a contrived *social-justice* mantle. Johnson offers an alternative.

Johnson is big on civil liberties, which is an important issue to many people from both sides of the aisle, as well as independents. His non-interventionist views on foreign policy, for better or for worse, are also popular among the electorate.

Perhaps above all, however, he's positioned to serve as a dignified recourse to what the two-party system has left us with this year. He's a candidate that conscientious Americans feel they can support (even in the form of a protest vote), and still respect themselves afterwards. Johnson comes across as a decent, honest, and acceptably competent individual. That alone places him well above Trump and Clinton, who have lowered the bars of decency, honesty, and competency to a couple of miles below sea-level.

This contrast provides someone like me with sufficient cause to commit my vote to Johnson in November. What drives me nuts, however, is that he doesn't seem to actually want my vote, or the votes of other disaffected Republicans who could potentially give him his biggest electoral boost.

The sell-job really shouldn't be all that difficult. Both Johnson and his running-mate, Bill Weld, are former Republican governors. They understand why a number of Republican voters feel completely unrepresented right now. They understand that

these people aren't searching for ideological purity, but rather someone who shares (and intends to act on) some of their key concerns. Johnson and Weld should also understand that Hillary Clinton is more likely to unite the Democrats than Donald Trump is to unite the GOP. This leaves the Libertarian ticket with an obvious opening.

Instead of sealing the deal with traditionally Republican voters, however, Johnson and Weld appear to be focusing their outreach efforts almost exclusively on the hard-left...at the expense of the political right.

For example, the one issue that gives even the most hardened anti-Trump Republicans pause is *Supreme Court nominees*. Hillary Clinton, as president, would undoubtedly try to tilt the court further left. Donald Trump says he would do just the opposite, but his demonstrated disinterest in the Constitution, his reflexive liberalism, and his inherent dishonesty make his word on this important matter virtually worthless. Still, many desperate conservatives are willing to swallow their pride and vote for Trump based almost entirely on this one specific point, hoping that their gamble pays off.

You'd think that this situation would have Libertarian candidates salivating. Libertarians, after all, are known for their dedication to limited government and the sanctity of the U.S. Constitution. A guarantee from them of conservative justices would hold real credibility. Instead, Bill Weld said in an interview last week that a Johnson/Weld administration would nominate *liberal* judges like Stephen Breyer and Merrick Garland.

Huh?

As Ilya Shapiro of the *CATO Institute* wrote, Breyer and Garland are, "the jurists most deferential to the government *on everything*, whether environmental regulation or civil liberties."

Why on earth would *Libertarian* candidates toss aside perhaps their most compelling argument of the election?

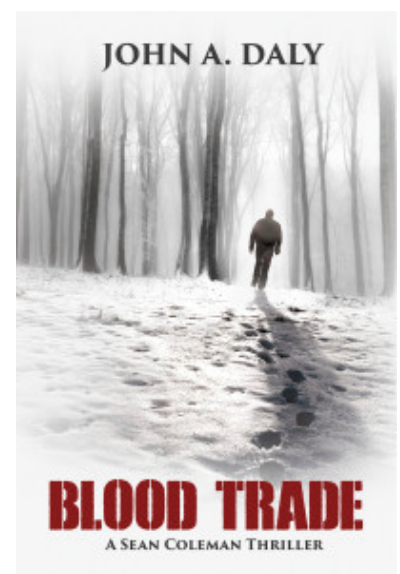
Additionally, Shapiro pointed out in his piece that Johnson also said, in a recent interview with the *Washington Examiner*, that he views religious freedom is a “black hole.” Johnson voiced opposition to religious exemptions from government mandates, and even strangely tied Mormonism to religiously-motivated gun violence.

Huh?

Not only is this an un-Libertarian (and decidedly liberal) stance, but it needlessly turns off religious, traditionally Republican voters who haven’t been able to make a moral argument for supporting Trump. Specifically, it hurts Johnson in states like Utah, where he’s been polling remarkably well.

Johnson has even boasted about a political survey he took that revealed that he agrees with former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders 73 percent of the time.

Huh?



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I understand the political value in presenting oneself as a social liberal in the year 2016 (social issues is what Johnson was referring to), but a disciple of limited government enthusiastically identifying with a proud socialist is an awfully odd maneuver. It makes Johnson appear needlessly extreme to a conservative demographic that is willing to overlook a lot (out of desperation), but possibly not three quarters of the social-culture gauntlet.

There was also Johnson's statement last week that he would, as president, consider pardoning Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning – a very unpopular position that resonates primarily with liberals.

I'd write "Huh?" again, but Johnson's actually been sharing this particular view for quite some time.

Of course, beggars can't be choosers in this election. Estranged Republicans can't expect someone from a different party (even one as similar as the Libertarian Party) to focus entirely on them.

I just have trouble understanding why *any* ticket would be so resistant to a natural constituency that could potentially help them more than any other. Perhaps it's just another political debacle best chalked up to this ever-bizarre circus known as *Election 2016*.

What's Next for #NeverTrump if Trump Wins the Nomination?

We're just a day away from the Indiana primary, and if recent polls are correct, things aren't looking good for those of us on the right who don't want Donald Trump to become the Republican Party's new standard bearer. The general feeling is that if Trump wins the state, he'll almost certainly be awarded the presidential nomination at the national convention in Cleveland.



If that ends up being the case, what will be next for the #NeverTrump movement – that unwavering group of disillusioned Republicans and conservatives who view Trump as an indecent, terminally dishonest man who makes a mockery of the principles and issues they deeply care about?

An estimated 20-40% of Republican voters fall into this category, and contrary to what many Trump surrogates (both official and unofficial) have been saying, these people have made it clear that they won't simply "fall in line" behind Trump to defeat their *supposed* common enemy, Hillary Clinton. In fact, a recent Suffolk University poll suggests that half of these voters might actually throw their support *behind* Clinton, deeming her to be the lesser of the two evils.

I must admit that I have a hard time believing that Clinton would be able to garnish that level of Republican support come November. Most right-leaning voters who are adamantly opposed to Trump are equally opposed to Clinton. They believe both to be undignified, unprincipled individuals who aren't worthy of the Oval Office.

While most political analysts recognize a dire importance in Trump bringing the Republican Party together, the person most disinterested in the effort appears to be Trump himself. Up until now, his unification strategy has been limited to excoriating his opponents and benefiting from the slow attrition of the GOP presidential field. He seems to believe that if he's the *last man standing*, party unity will have somehow been achieved.

Thus, if Trump becomes the nominee, don't expect him to waste a single breath trying to win over the Republicans he's turned off. He'll view them as a lost cause, and he'd probably be right.

After all, you can't smear your opposition as "establishment types" for months and months, and then expect them to suddenly turn around and cast a partisan vote for you – the establishment's new leader. Even if Trump's advisers talked him into choosing a vice presidential candidate with impeccably conservative credentials, it wouldn't work. As George Will wrote in a recent column, Trump's running mate will be viewed as being "unqualified for high office because he or she will think Trump is qualified."

No, the unification ship has sailed...or perhaps was never seaworthy in the first place. The #NeverTrump crowd will be searching for another option (whether it be a write-in or third-party candidate) – someone who they can vote for, and still look their children in the eye afterwards.

It won't matter so much whether or not their candidate has a prayer of winning, because, quite frankly, that candidate *won't* win – not in our country's two-party political landscape. Still, #NeverTrump people will want their discontent heard loud and clear, and they'll probably eventually rally around the individual who can make the most noise.

The biggest beneficiary of the hopelessly splintered Republican Party (other than Hillary Clinton) would have to be Libertarian presidential candidate, Gary Johnson. The former two-term governor of New Mexico is a strong and proven fiscal conservative, and a believer in free markets. He's a longtime advocate of entitlement reform and tackling the national debt. These qualities alone would make him a surprisingly unique candidate in this election, should Trump and Clinton become the nominees of their respective parties.

Equally interesting might be some facts that Jim Geraghty of *National Review* pointed out in a short piece earlier today:

1. The Libertarian Party has already secured a spot on the ballot in 31 states.
2. A presidential candidate must be polling at 15 percent or above in order to participate in this fall's debates.

Some recent polls have shown that somewhere between 15 and 20% of voters would vote for a third-party candidate if the major-party nominees were Clinton and Trump.



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So, if anything, the general election debates could at least provide a good platform for the #NeverTrump people to have one last voice of opposition in this contest.

Johnson would by no means be an ideal candidate for conservatives who believe in a strong military, but much of his plank and qualifications for the job might just be a compromise that many of them are willing to make.

A few days ago, Johnson posted a video appealing directly to the #NeverTrump folks. It was a smart idea, and unsurprisingly, he put forth an attractive message. Unfortunately, his presentation could use some work. A bedhead appearance, an odd snicker, and Dixieland music don't make for a particularly effective rallying cry.

Luckily, he has some time to work on his pitch. We'll see if he makes the best of this opportunity.

A Confederacy of Dunces

Several years ago, John Kennedy Toole wrote a novel called *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Although the book scored well with readers and critics, I didn't care for it. But I did like the title and I think it's an appropriate way to describe the crowd at the Charlotte convention.

For openers, we had a mutiny on the floor of the Democratic convention when thousands of left-wing airheads showed their contempt for both God and Israel. I mean, this is the sort of thing you might expect at a conclave of the Flat Earth Society or a Ron Paul reunion, but not when a major party is

nominating an incumbent president.

Speaking of Dr. Paul, I understand that a number of his deluded followers intend to write in his name on the November ballot. Normally, the realization that if they go through with that childish threat, it will help to re-elect Obama, would have me pulling the last few hairs out of my head. But in this case, I draw comfort from the realization that most of these chowderheads don't know how to spell "Ron Paul".

But they're not alone. There is also a faction threatening to vote for the former governor of New Mexico, Gary Johnson, who is the Libertarian nominee for president. Having seen him speak, I know Gov. Johnson is a congenial sort of fellow. If he were running in a two-man race against Barack Obama, I would definitely vote for him. But then again, in a two man race between Barack Obama and a sack of potatoes, I would vote for the spuds.

I know that Libertarians belong to a group that look at the two major parties and see only Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum, but surely after four years of Obama, you would think that basic survival skills would kick in and they would put their feelings of moral superiority aside this once and vote for Romney and Ryan. After all, it's not just everyone else's freedoms and financial security that Obama, Pelosi and Reid, have confiscated.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the folks who populate third and fourth parties, the only real difference between them and lemmings is that one group destroys their society by leaping off cliffs and the other does it at the ballot box.

It was bad enough having to listen to Bill Clinton, who dislikes Obama nearly as much as I do, droning on for almost an hour showering praise on His Fatuousness. After all, who would expect anything else from the grand old man of his Party? The Democrats, after all, always have a soft spot for

guys like Ted Kennedy, whose greatest claim to fame is that he committed manslaughter and instead of winding up in jail wound up in the Senate. So, naturally, they share similarly warm feelings for Clinton, a horny toad who has a long history of raping and abusing females.

And the Democrats have the gall to suggest that it's gents like Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan who are waging a war on women!

But, then, the Democrats also believe that shutting down the oil and coal industries, while sinking billions of tax dollars in outfits like Solyndra and Ener1, constitutes an energy policy.

The other day, I filled up my gas tank. It cost me \$4.36-a-gallon. Believe me, it wasn't Exxon or Mobil I was cursing out. After all, I knew that their profit margin was only six cents per gallon, and they were the guys who had found the stuff, drilled for it, refined it and managed to get it to the pump. It was solely because of state and federal taxes that I was paying half-a-dollar-a-gallon over the national average, and I wasn't even paying for supreme.

Of course whenever it's suggested by Republicans that we take advantage of our natural resources by drilling in Alaska, offshore and on federal lands, or by opening Canada's Keystone pipeline, the Democrats pooh-pooh the very notion, inevitably telling us that it would take a decade to make us energy-independent. As I recall, this silly argument was first made by Clinton in the mid-90s, well over a decade ago.

On the other hand, when Obama claims, without the slightest bit of evidence, that his policies will cut our national debt by four trillion dollars, he's not talking about next year; he's talking about doing it by 2020! If Einstein hadn't stumbled on his theory first, by now the Democrats would have proven that if time is anything, it's relative.

Another fact of life is that when Clinton took credit for the

Democratic presidents creating all those millions of jobs during their various administrations, he was, as usual, lying through his teeth. For instance, blaming the economic failure of 2008 on George W. Bush is as silly as crediting Clinton with the financial boom of the 90s.

In Clinton's case, it was the fact that Gingrich and the 1994 Republican Congress reined in him and Hillary that turned around the economy. It was exactly the opposite experience that Bush experienced when the Democrats took control of Congress in 2007, and Barney Frank and Chris Dodd, in collusion with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, destroyed the housing market and brought on the crash that left the economy in shambles and Barack Hussein Obama in the White House.

Speaking of the economy, if nothing else the fact that we have an unemployment rate over 8%, an underemployment rate of 8%, and a national deficit over \$16 trillion, should once and for all prove that using the Stock Market as a gauge of our nation's economy is screwier than basing it on tea leaf readings or Tarot cards. If you measured Obama's economic record by the NY Stock Exchange, you would think that he'd done more for the economy than Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and pornography, put together.

But, then, if you only listened to the analysis of Bill Clinton's address in Charlotte by Chris Wallace and Brit Hume, you would have thought they were a couple of teenage girls critiquing Justin Bieber's latest album. While the rest of us Republicans were counting up Clinton's preposterous lies and partisan exaggerations, those two schmucks were swooning on Fox.

Things got so absurd, I actually found myself wondering: "Where are those two honest guys, Bob Beckel and Alan Colmes, when you really need them?"

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Could the Splinter Parties Doom Romney?

✘ According to the esteemed Rasmussen poll, President Obama did indeed get a slight upward bump in the wake of the Democratic National Convention last week at Charlotte, NC. Rasmussen focuses its polling heavily on the crucial battleground states, where the presidential race is considered more or less a toss-up, and in some of them Obama has made gains since the previous polls were taken.

In both Virginia and Ohio, which previous Rasmussen polls had shown to be tied, Obama now enjoys leads of 1 percentage point each. In Florida, where Obama previously was behind by 2 percentage points, he is now said to be ahead by that same amount.

Among the freshest polls, only the one taken in Missouri showed a favorable trend for Republican nominee Mitt Romney. Obama had moved 1 percentage point ahead of Romney after the Todd Akin “legitimate rape” gaffe, but now Romney is ahead by 3 percent, although he is still a bit short of where he was before Akin, the Republican nominee for the Senate in Missouri, put his foot in his mouth.

Rasmussen still hasn’t done any polling in 29 of the 50 states (or is it 57?), but one can hardly find fault with that, because many states are so lopsidedly Democratic or Republican that polling there would be of no practical value. Of the 21 states where polling has been done, 19 show Obama performing worse than he did in 2008.

From this we can confidently conclude that Obama would do worse if the election were held today than he did in 2008,

when he won 53.7 percent of the votes cast for him and his Republican opponent, John McCain.

But how much worse? Obviously, he can do worse than he did last time and still win the election.

My own manipulation of the Rasmussen figures – I will spare you the boring details – indicates that today Obama could expect to win anywhere from 50.1 percent to 50.6 percent of the popular vote awarded to the Democratic and Republican parties. As we saw in 2000, winning more popular votes than your opponent doesn't necessarily ensure victory in the electoral college, but still Obama's lead is something to be reckoned with.

With the margin between Obama and Romney so small, this could be one election in which the splinter parties make a decisive difference in the result. Generally, when Rasmussen conducts its polls in a given state, it finds that about 3 or 4 percent of the voters prefer neither Obama nor Romney, but some other candidate. Sometimes, as in Virginia, the splinter parties get considerably less support; in others, such as New Mexico, they get considerably more.

I regret to say that the presence of splinter parties in the race could hurt Romney more than Obama. Gary Johnson, the Libertarian party candidate, and Virgil Goode, the Constitution party candidate, whose supporters probably would have been more likely to vote for Romney than Obama, are reportedly outdrawing Jill Stein, the Green party candidate, whose supporters generally consist of disaffected Democrats.

ABC News recently came out with a report suggesting that Goode, a former Republican congressman from Virginia, could siphon off just enough GOP voters to give that hotly contested state's 13 precious electoral votes to Obama.

Before you panic, bear in mind that the latest Rasmussen polls evidently do not reflect the public's reaction to Obama's

hopelessly inept handling of the new Middle East crisis. He has shown once again that he has no business conducting our foreign affairs, no business serving as commander-in-chief of the United States – in short, no business being President.

However, if the voters let Obama's demonstrated incompetence just wash off their backs – as many of them seem inclined to do – then we may have to brace ourselves for a very sorry election result, one that augurs ill for the democratic process.