

What Should a Candidate Know About Islamist Radicalism?

On Thursday, radio host Hugh Hewitt conducted an interview with GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump. The discussion was about Islamist radicalism in the Middle East, and it was clear from the outset that Mr. Trump had little knowledge of the influential leaders and groups (including terrorist organizations) in the region.



When Hewitt asked Trump if he was familiar with Quasem Soleimani (a major general in the Iranian Army and head of the Quds Force), Trump acknowledged that he was, and began talking about America's mistreatment of the Kurdish forces in Turkey.

Hewitt quickly interrupted him. "No, not the Kurds. The Quds Forces. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Forces – the bad guys."

"Right," Trump acknowledged, adding a moment later that he had simply misheard Hewitt. Trump then offered a general criticism of President Obama's Iran deal.

Hewitt said that he believed it was important for someone vying to be our commander in chief to be familiar with major players in the Middle East. He rattled off some names (like the secretary general of Hezbollah and the leader of the Islamic State), and asked Trump if he knew them "without a scorecard."

"No," Trump answered. "You know, I'll tell you, honestly, I

think by the time we get to office, they'll all be changed. They'll be all gone. I knew you were going to ask me things like this and there's no reason because, number one, I... I will hopefully find General Douglas McArthur in the pack. I will find whoever it is that I'll find and ... but they're all changing. Those are like history questions. 'Do you know this one, do you know that one.'"

Hewitt explained that his intent wasn't to ask 'gotcha' questions.

"That *is* a gotcha question, though, when you're asking me about who runs this, this, this." said Trump. He then added, "I will be so good at the military, your head will spin, but obviously I'm not meeting these people. I'm not seeing these people."

Hewitt rejected the notion that it was a 'gotcha' question, and said that at the GOP debate on September 16 (where Hewitt will be a moderator), he may ask the candidates questions about the leaders of different terrorist organizations. He asked Trump if he considers such questions to be of the 'gotcha' nature.

"Yes, I do. I totally do," Trump said without hesitation "I think it's ridiculous. I'm a delegator. I find great people. I find absolutely great people and I'll find them in our armed services, and I find absolutely great people."

Hewitt seemed stunned, but Trump attempted to put the host's concerns to rest.

"By the way," said Trump. "The names you just mentioned, they probably won't even be there in six months or a year ... First day in office, or before then – the day after the election, I'll know more about it than you will ever know. I can tell you that."

Hewitt finished up his questioning: "Last question: So the

difference between Hezbollah and Hamas does not matter to you yet, but it will?"

"It will when it's appropriate," answered Trump. "I will know more about it than you know and believe me, it won't take me long. And if you ask any of these candidates, nobody's going to be able to give you an answer. I mean, there may be one that's studied it because they're expecting a fresh question from you. But believe me, it won't matter. I will know far more than you know within 24 hours after I get the job."

At this point, I'm going to go ahead and make a prediction that the Trump supporters who frequent this website are not going to be happy with me for drawing attention to this interview. They'll insist that Trump's lack of knowledge about what's going on in the Middle East, and who's involved in it, is unimportant at this point in the campaign. They'll remind me that he's a smart, "big picture" guy. They'll insist that he'll study up on foreign policy at some point, and use his talents as a successful business man (should he get elected) to delegate the right people to the right jobs when it comes to dealing with overseas matters.

I would ask those people two questions:

1. Is it a 'gotcha' question to ask someone running to be our nation's commander in chief about major players in the Middle East?
2. Would you object to a different presidential candidate being asked the same questions?

Back in 2008, Republicans relentlessly chided candidate Barack Obama for his lack of foreign policy experience (and overall experience for that matter), and recognized the absurdity of electing a president who would require an enormous amount of *on-the-job training* to even begin to address our nation's greatest challenges. A majority of the electorate didn't share our concerns, and the result has been a foreign policy

catastrophe, accentuated by the losing of a war we had already won, the rise of ISIS, and an Iran far more powerful than we could have imagined.

Now, we have a GOP presidential front runner who believes that specific questions directed at him about leaders in the Middle East are *cheap-shots*, and that voters should just trust that he'll figure it all out later. And of course, we shouldn't worry at all about that candidate's disinterest in some of the region's most dangerous men, because he will be "so good at the military" that our "heads will spin."

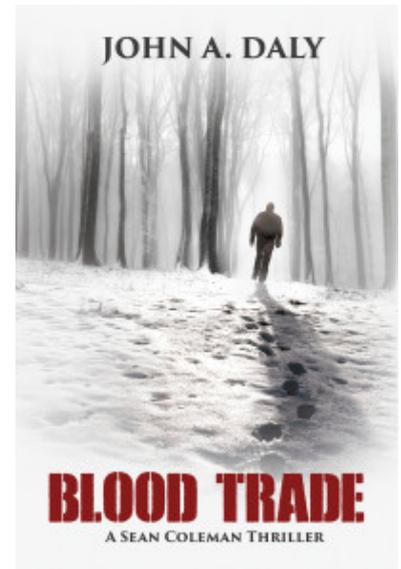
I don't know about the rest of you, but my head's *already* spinning.

My contention is not that our next president needs to be a foreign policy expert. Few candidates could claim such a title, and I certainly wouldn't expect them to know the name of every single terrorist group's leader (especially at this point in the campaign). But shouldn't we, at bare minimum, expect a serious candidate to have enough passion and interest in the topic that they wouldn't feel like they were being personally insulted by being asked about it? Does *any* responsibility at all fall on a presidential candidate to actually familiarize them self with issues that don't fall within their *pre-candidacy* area of interest?

Unless we're willing to accept that any question a candidate isn't prepared for is "unfair", how can we simply shrug our shoulders when that assertion is repeatedly put forth by Donald Trump? And how can his supporters continue to portray him as a victim?

So far, we've learned that if Trump is asked about whether or not he'll run as a third-party candidate, it's an unfair attack. If he's asked about whether or not he'll support the GOP presidential candidate if it isn't him, it's an unfair attack. If he's asked about how he will counter the *War on*

Women campaign tactic that would most certainly be used against him by the Democrats, it's an unfair attack. If *Fox News* personalities speak ill of him and his conduct, it's an unfair attack. And now, if he's asked of his Middle East knowledge, it's an unfair attack.



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Are there any other candidates in the GOP race who have complained this way? I sure can't think of any. Only Trump caused a stink after the first GOP debate, where several candidates were asked tough, uncomfortable questions about their weaknesses. Ben Carson didn't complain when Hugh Hewitt similarly grilled him on foreign policy a few weeks back. Carly Fiorina didn't complain when Hewitt talked to her right after he talked to Trump, and asked her the same questions; she even displayed an impressive amount of knowledge on the Middle East.

So what is it that excludes Donald Trump from the same level of scrutiny as everyone else? What is it that makes him off limits?

One of the things that riles up Trump supporters is that their

guy sometimes isn't treated as a serious candidate. I *get* that. I can respect that. What I find remarkable, however, is that the same people seem to get even *more* upset when he *is* treated as a serious candidate.