

Schoolmarm Diction, Battle of the Cubanos, and Other Stultifying Spectacles

Defeating ISIS was the theme of last night's debate—nominally it was national security—and for the most part the candidates offered nothing new on how to do it. The one exception was Carly Fiorina, who broke through the endless “Gotta defeat ISIS” drum roll by calling on the tech and telecom spheres to break codes, monitor social media, and otherwise fight the jihadists' on their own Internet turf. For a moment, the dull cloud of verbiage dissipated and a light bulb flickered.

Unfortunately, Fiorina's schoolmarm diction and perfectionist deportment doom her election chances. Nor did the battle of the freshman Cubanos give much reason for hope. Which is it? Will Cruz's vote to curtail the National Security Agency's bulk collection of citizens' phone metadata hurt the fight against terrorism, as

Rubio claimed, or will it help it, as Cruz insisted, by replacing the NSA metadata program with other intelligence programs that “covers nearly 100 percent” of data generated by terrorists.

Since the information is classified, it's hard to tell. Rubio does sit on the Senate Intelligence Committee, so we can only hope he's not lying. Time for a Politifact Truth-0-Meter check.

Rubio also attacked Cruz's proposed strategy of carpet bombing ISIS, countering that it must be defeated “by a ground force” and calling Cruz hypocritical for calling for “overwhelming air power” while voting to cut defense budgets.

Immigration was the other big topic of the evening. Trump

stuck to his call for a wholesale halt to admitting Muslims into the country. Bush slammed the proposal, arguing that “We need to engage with the Arab world” to effectively fight ISIS. Calling Trump the “chaos candidate,” Bush took a good shot: “You can’t insult your way to Presidency. ” Take a page from Rubio, Trump taunted Bush that he was only attacking him because his poll numbers were so puny.

“I’m at 41 and you’re at 3...pretty soon you’ll be off the stage.

And so it went as the final Republican debate of 2015 faded to black.

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