



Fact-checking the Las Vegas GOP debate

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The Republican presidential candidates tangled over their approaches to defeating terrorism at home and abroad during the Las Vegas debate, their first matchup since the San Bernardino mass shooting.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie pushed back against frontrunner Donald Trump's proposed Muslim ban, and Sens. Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz and Rand Paul went back and forth over their views on immigration and government surveillance of Americans' phone records. But several statements missed the mark on accuracy. (We'll update this story as we complete more fact-checks.)

The debate kicked off with a discussion over Trump's controversial call to ban all Muslims from entering the United States. Many GOP candidates have criticized the proposal, including Cruz. However, Cruz said, "everyone understands why Donald has suggested what he has," given President Barack Obama's response to the terrorist attacks in California and Paris.

"President Obama and Hillary Clinton are proposing bringing tens of thousands of Syrian refugees to this country, when the head of the FBI has told Congress they cannot vet those refugees," Cruz said.

Cruz's description of FBI director James Comey's comments is inaccurate, so we rated the claim Mostly False.

In his testimony, Comey said he could not *personally* vet every refugee admitted to the United States (which would be required under a bill put forward by House Republicans). But he's never said that the government cannot vet the refugees.

Comey has testified that there are challenges and risks to the screening process. But he's also said the process is "effective," and we've gotten "dramatically" better at the task in the past few years.

Bush attacks Trump's record on ISIS

Bush sparred with Trump throughout the night, calling the billionaire "a chaos candidate." At one point, Bush ridiculed Trump's proposal to go after the families of terrorists as an unserious idea, further evidence, in Bush's view, that Trump is incapable of thinking things through as commander-in-chief.

"Look, two months ago Donald Trump said 'ISIS was not our fight,' " Bush said.

Right away, Trump denied that he said such a thing. But Bush's claim rates Mostly True. The comments that fit within Bush's time frame came on Sept. 28, 2015, when Trump sat for an interview with CNN's Erin Burnett. Trump does appear to suggest that Russia and Syria should be the countries to primarily fight ISIS.

"Let Syria and ISIS fight. Why do we care?" Trump said. "And let Russia, they're in Syria already, let them fight ISIS."

Trump made comments closer to what Bush said about five months ago, in a July 8 interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper. Trump used the words, "That's not our fight," in describing the situation with ISIS.

"The situation with ISIS has to be dealt firmly and strongly. When you have people being beheaded — I would love not to be over there. That's not our fight. That's other people's fight. That's revolutions, that's whatever you want to call it, religious wars."

Rubio and an 'open border'

During an intense and somewhat wonky debate over immigration, Cruz and Paul targeted Rubio as soft on amnesty for illegal immigrants and on protecting the border.

But one of Paul's attacks received our worst rating.

"He thinks he wants to be this 'Oh I am great and strong on national defense,' " Paul said of Rubio, "but he is the weakest of all the candidates on immigration. He is the one for an open border that is leaving us defenseless."

The claim that Rubio "is for an open border" rates Pants on Fire. Rubio co-authored a 2013 bill as part of the "Gang of Eight" that included billions of dollars for border enforcement and more border agents.

"If Sen. Rubio was really for open borders, the Gang of Eight bill wouldn't have been 1,198 pages long while doubling the size of border patrol," said Alex Nowrasteh, an expert on immigration at the libertarian Cato Institute.

After the bill died, Rubio has repeatedly said border security needs to be beefed up. Paul's claim is inaccurate and ridiculous.

Fiorina and the generals

Former Hewlett Packard CEO Carly Fiorina hit both Obama and her Republican rivals in one answer on how she would defeat ISIS.

"To wage war, we need a commander in chief who has made tough calls in tough times and stood up to be held accountable over and over, not first-term senators who've never made an executive decision in their life," Fiorina said. "One of the things I would immediately do, in addition to defeating them here at home, is bring back the warrior class -- Petraeus, McChrystal, Mattis, Keane, Flynn. Every single one of these generals I know. Every one was retired early because they told President Obama things that he didn't want to hear."

Her claim rates Mostly False.

Fiorina was on solid ground with two of her examples: Gen. James Mattis and Lt. Gen Flynn. But she's off the mark with the others.

Even though there was friction between Gen. Stanley McChrystal and the Obama administration over policy, McChrystal was removed from his post after he and his staff were quoted making disparaging remarks about Vice President Joe Biden and others in Rolling Stone.

Gen. David Petraeus' resignation had nothing to do with policy — he shared classified documents with a woman with whom he was having an affair. Gen. John Keane resigned in 2003, six years before Obama took office.