

Fact Check: Putin puffery in GOP's latest debate

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Associated Press



AP Photo/Jeffrey Phelps

Ted Cruz speaks as Carly Fiorina tries to make a comment during a Republican presidential debate at the Milwaukee Theatre, Tuesday in Milwaukee.

WASHINGTON — You'd think from the latest Republican presidential debate that Donald Trump and Carly Fiorina have special insights into what makes Russian Vladimir Putin tick because the candidates have been up close and personal with the Kremlin's man himself.

Not so much. Trump declared himself a "stablemate" with Putin because both were on the same TV program — once, and in different segments, thousands of miles apart. Fiorina claimed a "private meeting" with Putin, but the setting was a holding room where they sat before giving speeches; not exactly a summit.

The Putin puffery proved to be one of the odder episodes of an evening that brought viewers a variety of flubs and exaggerations.

Some of the claims Tuesday night and how they compare with the facts:

TRUMP: Speaking of Putin, "I got to know him very well because we were both on '60 Minutes,' we were stablemates, and we did very well that night. But, you know that."

FIORINA: Saying the U.S. is currently in a weak position with Russia and that is "one of the reasons I've said that I would not be talking to Vladimir Putin right now, although I have met him as well, not in a green room for a show, but in a private meeting."

THE FACTS: Trump and Fiorina seemed to be contesting who knows Putin better — Fiorina from a chance meeting in a holding room

before she and Putin addressed a Beijing conference in 2001, or Trump from having appeared on the same "60 Minutes" program as Putin in September.

At least Fiorina actually met Putin. During a September appearance on "The Tonight Show," she described how they sat in adjacent chairs for 45 minutes while they each waited to speak. Trump's only connection to the Russian leader was that they both appeared on the same show. He was interviewed in New York, Putin in Moscow, and they weren't even in the same segment on the program.

BEN CARSON: "Every time we raise the minimum wage, the number of jobless people increases."

THE FACTS: Actually, that usually doesn't happen. When the minimum wage was increased in

1996 and 1997, the unemployment rate fell afterward. In June 2007, when the first of three annual minimum wage increases was implemented, the unemployment rate was unchanged until the Great Recession began six months later.

Economic research has found that when states raise their minimum wages higher than neighboring states, they don't typically fare any worse than their neighbors.

It's not known, though, what would happen to jobs if the minimum wage were doubled to \$15. That's something many fast-food workers who demonstrated before the debate were demanding.

MARCO RUBIO: "Welders make more money than philosophers."

Not so, on average. Rubio is arguing that the U.S. has

failed to invest in vocational training — a point also stressed by President Barack Obama's now-defunct jobs council. But Rubio is wrong to suggest that studying philosophy is a waste of money and time.

PayScale, a firm that analyzes compensation, put the median midcareer income for philosophy majors at \$81,200 in 2008, with welders making \$26,002 to \$63,698.

Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce said in a 2014 analysis that median incomes were \$68,000 for people with an advanced degree in philosophy or religious studies.

So knowing Plato and getting a college degree still pays off.

TRUMP: The Pacific trade agreement signed by Obama with 11 other nations "was designed for China to come in through the back door and take advantage of everyone. ... China takes advantage (of the U.S.) through currency manipulation."

THE FACTS: The Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact, signed last month, does not include China and is intended to give the United States more influence in Asia as a counterweight to China's rising economic power. Obama argues that China could join later, but without having any influence on the agreement's terms.

Regarding currency manipulation, Trump is recycling an outdated claim. He has argued that China keeps its currency undervalued by 15 percent to 40 percent, which would make its exports cheaper and more attractive overseas. Yet the Peterson Institute for International Economics, which had criticized

China for keeping its currency artificially low, concluded in 2012 that China's currency by then was fully valued. The International Monetary Fund has reached the same conclusion.

FIORINA: "Obamacare isn't really helping anyone."

THE FACTS: Public opinion remains divided over Obama's health care law, but it's clearly helping many people.

In the two years since the law's coverage expansion began, the share of Americans without health insurance has declined to 9 percent, a historic low. That translates to roughly 16 million people gaining coverage, even as the economy and hiring have been improving.

Also as a result of "Obamacare," people with pre-existing health conditions can no longer be turned away by insurers, and everyone is required to have coverage or face fines.

While the coverage mandate in Obama's law remains highly unpopular, state-run high-risk health insurance pools like the one Fiorina proposes to replace the law have been tried before by many states and failed to solve the coverage problem. The main reason was cost. The risk pools grouped people who couldn't get private insurance because of health problems, resulting in very high premiums and pricing out low-income people. Some risk pools had long waiting lists.

As a rule, broad insurance pools that include lots of healthy people seem to be better for covering people with health problems than programs specifically targeted to that group.



Najim Rahim via AP, File

In this Oct. 16 file photo, the charred remains of the Doctors Without Borders hospital is seen after being hit by a U.S. airstrike in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

U.S. troops had no eyes on Afghan hospital

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Immediately after the U.S. killed at least 30 people in a devastating airstrike on a charity hospital, Afghanistan's national security adviser told a European diplomat his country would take responsibility because "we are without doubt, 100 percent convinced the place was occupied by Taliban," according to notes of the meeting reviewed by The Associated Press.

More than a month later, no evidence has emerged to support that assertion. Eyewitnesses tell the AP they saw no gunmen at the hospital.

Instead, there are mounting indications the U.S. military relied heavily on Afghan allies who resented the internationally run Doctors Without Borders hospital, which treated Afghan security forces and Taliban alike but says it refused to admit armed men.

The new evidence includes details the AP has learned about the location of American troops during the attack. The U.S. special forces unit whose commander called in the strike was under fire in the Kunduz provincial governor's compound a half-mile away from the hospital, according to a former intelligence official who has reviewed documents describing the incident. The commander could not see the medical facility — so couldn't know firsthand whether the Taliban were using it as a base — and sought the attack on the

recommendation of Afghan forces, the official said.

Members of the unit have told Rep. Duncan Hunter, a California Republican who serves on the House Armed Services Committee, that they were unaware their target was a functioning hospital until the attack was over, said Joe Kasper, Hunter's spokesman.

Looking ahead, the strike raises questions about whether the U.S. military can rely on intelligence from Afghan allies in a war in which small contingents of Americans will increasingly fight with larger units of local forces.

Also at issue is how the target was vetted. American commanders, with sophisticated information technology at their disposal, allowed the strike to go forward despite reports in their databases that the hospital was functioning. Even if armed Taliban fighters had been hiding inside, the U.S. acknowledges it would not have been justified in destroying a working hospital filled with wounded patients.

Jailani, a 31-year-old mechanic who uses only one name, says he was at the hospital to see his brother-in-law, Ibrahim, who was admitted two days before the airstrike.

"On the day of the attack I was in the hospital from 9 a.m. until 5 a.m. During that time, the Taliban came in without guns, as patients or accompanying their patients, or sometimes they came to take their dead out," he said. "They did not have permission to enter the hospital with

their guns."

President Barack Obama has apologized for the attack. The Pentagon has said it was a mistake that resulted from both human and technical errors, and it is investigating, along with NATO and the Afghan government.

"No other nation in the history of warfare has gone to the lengths we do to avoid civilian casualties," Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis said in a statement. "And when we make a mistake, we will not only own up to it, we will also scrutinize all of the facts to learn from them so that it never happens again."

The attack by an AC-130 gunship came after days of heavy fighting in the northern Afghanistan city. About 35 members of the 3rd Special Forces Group had been helping about 100 Afghan special forces soldiers retake Kunduz from the Taliban, the former U.S. intelligence official said. From their position in the governor's compound, they came under heavy assault by Taliban fighters, and sought to use air power to destroy the Taliban's remaining command and control nodes around the city.

The Afghans insisted the hospital was one of those command centers, and urged that it be destroyed, the former official said.

The AP has reported that some American intelligence suggested the Taliban were using the hospital. Special forces and Army intelligence analysts were sifting through reports of heavy weapons at the compound, and they

were tracking a Pakistani intelligence operative they believed was there.

It's unclear how much of that intelligence came from Afghan special forces. They had raided the hospital in July, seeking an al-Qaida member they believed was being treated, despite protests from Doctors Without Borders. After the American air attack, the Afghan soldiers rushed in, looking for Taliban fighters, Doctors Without Borders said.

The U.S. 3rd Special Forces Group knew the hospital was treating patients, according to a daily log by one of its senior officers written Oct. 2.

But 3rd Group also believed the compound was under the control of the Taliban, the daily log says, without explaining why. That belief was so pervasive in the Pentagon that Carter Malkasian, a senior adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, emailed Doctors Without Borders two days before the attack to ask about it. He was told it wasn't true.

It's not clear exactly what the 3rd Group commander who directed the strike knew about the hospital, and why he made the decision to attack. Nor is it known who in the chain of command reviewed and approved the decision, or what those people knew.

Afghan officials say their forces were also a half mile away, and therefore could not have been under direct fire from the hospital.

The hospital was among the only brightly lit buildings in Kunduz at night.

BRIEFLY

Storm brings tornadoes in Midwest

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A storm system moved east into several Midwest states Wednesday, bringing strong winds, large hail and reports of tornadoes, after initially dumping a foot of snow on the Rockies.

The National Weather Service said the system carried thunderstorms into parts of Iowa and northern Missouri and was expected to linger in those states for several more hours before heading farther east.

That meant thunderstorms, large hail and damaging winds of up to 60 mph in some areas, particularly in a region southwest of Des Moines and northeast of Kansas City.

His office had received reports of tornadoes, but he said they could not be verified until survey teams were sent to the affected areas, which included a county in southeast Nebraska and two counties in southwest Iowa.

There were some reports of damage to buildings in Adams County, Iowa, the site of one of the reported tornadoes. He said officials were still gathering information.

The same storm system packed blizzard-like conditions for portions of Utah, New Mexico, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas, the weather service said.

Myanmar to transition to democracy

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's president has promised a peaceful transfer of power to the victorious party of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in general elections, ensuring that the country's march toward greater democracy after decades of military rule will not be derailed.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy said Wednesday it received a message from Information Minister Ye Htut on behalf of President Thein Sein congratulating it for leading the race for parliamentary seats in the Nov. 8 election.

The message helps remove lingering concerns that the military, which has a large influence over the ruling party, may deny the NLD power, as it did after elections in 1990.

It also means that Myanmar is likely to soon have its first government in decades that isn't under the military's sway. But while an NLD victory virtually assures it of being able to elect the president as well, Suu Kyi remains barred from becoming president by a constitutional provision inserted by the military before it transferred power to a quasi-civilian government in 2011.

Suu Kyi has declared, however, that she will become the country's de facto leader.

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