

NYULOCAL

Last Night's War on Terror Debate at Skirball Was Pretty One-Sided

By Rebecca Hadjiloucas on September 8th, 2011

As we approach the tenth anniversary of 9/11, it is necessary as a society to analyze the effects of the War on Terror. How has the war served our national goals of liberty, prosperity, and



safety? Furthermore, if the war has ceased to benefit these goals, is withdrawal sensible?

Last night's Intelligence Squared debate at Skirball, sponsored by Slate, featured two opposing sides regarding an end to the war. Peter Bergen, CNN National Security analyst, and Juliette Kayyem, terrorism specialist and Homeland Security expert, argued that the diminished role of Jihadist terrorists, exemplified by the recent death of Osama

bin Laden, and the Arab Spring, demonstrated a logical completion of our involvement, which should call for an end to the war. They were met with conflict from Richard Falkenrath, Homeland Security Advisor to President Bush from 2001-2003, and Michael Hayden, former Director of the CIA and NSA, who argued that continuing the war is necessary to our safety and standing.

The opening remarks by Bergman and Kayyem expressed dissatisfaction with the cost of the war, and that terrorism no longer posed as great a threat as it had some years ago. Bergman stated our concerns as a nation should surround decaying schools, nuclear armament, and China. He colloquially argued that more Americans die bathing in bath tubs annually than at the hands of Islamist extremism, a remark which I found somewhat insensitive. Kayyem declared the War on Terror to be a crippling mindset.

Hayden and Falkenrath displayed reluctance to end the war, as they argued it would mean a lessening of our ability to successfully defend our way of life. They did, however, admit that what the War on Terror had been in its onset was no more, and that what the war is today is a matter of legality. They argued for the right of a President and a government to protect citizens from Jihadist terrorism through use of military force. After this point had been made, Kayyem seemed to change sides, and argue that the war as we knew it was already over, and that we should instead work on repackaging the idea.

I was disappointed with the lack of fervor and intelligent commentary on the side of Bergen and Kayyem. Kayyem especially appeared to have misunderstood the motion entirely, or else quieted her true opinion. You cannot at once be anti-war while supporting the validity for said war; to be anti-war is to find the very act invalid and worthless.

Bergen and Kayyem could have challenged the principle of a governmental blank-check when it comes to security, but they did not. They seemed content to argue complacently, with no real platform or message.

Hayden and Falkenrath offered well reasoned arguments, and once Kayyem announced her apparent agreement, the winners were clear. An audience wide vote showed Peter Falkenrath and Michael Hayden to be victorious.

If you are interested in watching the debate for yourself, check out www.iq2us.org, or listen on NPR next week for the radio broadcast.