

Hypocritical Speech: Trump's Saudi Soliloquy

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Donald Trump just made one of the most [hypocritical speeches in American political history](#): and that's saying something. The same person who told the American electorate that Islam was a religion of violence and evil, and that America must close its doors to all Muslims because, as far as he was concerned, they were all likely terrorists—this same guy fawned and curtsied before the Saudi monarch who's the protector (not a very good one, I might add) of the Muslim holy sites.

This speech and his attendant business deals signed while in the Kingdom, are a triumph of commerce over values. Jobs and lucre and the only things this President cares about. If he can hawk THADD missile systems to the Devil himself he'll descend into Hell to do it.

Iran—fresh from real elections—attacked by [@POTUS](#) in that bastion of democracy & moderation. Foreign Policy or simply milking KSA of \$480B?
pic.twitter.com/ahfvRxK3HV

— Javad Zarif (@JZarif) [May 21, 2017](#)

As I've written here in the past week, the speech is the capstone to a major U.S. pivot away from rapprochement with Shia Iran and towards the Sunni kingdoms. In doing so, Trump will be forced to embrace all the vices of his new allies: their homophobia, misogyny, corruption, nepotism, intolerance, and brutality. He will also be forced to acknowledge something he's conveniently avoided in this speech: that his new pals themselves have been the greatest supporters of terrorism in the region. Who founded al Qaeda? Whose money, recruits and leadership created it? Who funds the most vicious Islamist rebels of ISIS and al Qaeda in Syria? Yep, your pals in the glittering palaces of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

You think because you've called these Islamists bad boys that their patrons will immediately abandon them? Nah. It would be one thing if you called out the Saudis, told them to stop funding ISIS in Syria, and advanced a plan for peace there that would involve negotiations among the different players. But no, you didn't do that. You merely denounced ISIS as if it was a separate, independent entity; and not dependent on the funding and weapons of its patrons in the very Kingdom in which he spoke.

The speech was not just ahistorical, it was bereft of the least understanding of the nature of terror in the Muslim-Arab world. Here's a choice example:

This is not a battle between different faiths, different sects, or different civilizations. This is a battle between barbaric criminals who seek to obliterate human life, and decent people of all religions who seek to protect it. This is a battle between Good and Evil.

Of course it is a battle between different civilizations and faiths. Or at least a battle between extremists who embrace one religion and who have declared war on another. The juxtaposition of the “us” who is “good” and “them” who is “evil” is not just useless as a tool for understanding this conflict—it is profoundly dangerous. It lulls us into the false faith that we are good and all we do must be good, because we are fighting an enemy who is wholly evil. You can see where this sort of thinking leads: to My Lai and Abu Ghraib. And don’t worry, Trump will take us there if we give him enough time.

One of the most pitiable passages in Trump’s address is this:

Our partnerships will advance security through stability, not through radical disruption. We will make decisions based on real-world outcomes — not inflexible ideology. We will be guided by the lessons of experience, not the confines of rigid thinking. And, wherever possible, we will seek gradual reforms — not sudden intervention.

We must seek partners, not perfection...

Here read “stability” as brutal strongman rule and “radical disruption” as populist yearning for democracy. Trump derides the “pointy-headed” concepts of human rights as the “inflexible ideology” of Pres. Obama. But in reality, of course, it is Trump’s Islamophobia that constitutes one of the most rigid of ideologies. And as for “gradual reforms,” that term is meaningless. It really means the stultifying, suffocating status quo. What Trump has endorsed here is a U.S. policy of crony capitalism: we give you all the weapons you need to kill each other. You give us your oil wealth and fund our military-industrial machine. Beyond that, we could care less what you do or how you do it.

You want to kill 10,000 Houthis? Go right ahead. Join with Bashar al-Assad to massacre 250,000 Syrians? You have my blessing. Go to war with Iran? No problem.

Above all, America seeks peace — not war.

What a joke. Says the president who just signed a \$300-billion deal to send Saudi Arabia our most advanced weapons systems over the next decade. What does he think those missiles will be used for? Building schools and hospitals?



Signing ceremony at the Royal Court (Source: The Seattle Times)

Amidst all of Trump's fulminations against "Islamist terrorism" ("That means honestly confronting the crisis of Islamist extremism and the Islamist terror groups it inspires"), there was nary a word about western terrorism. We too have our own homegrown terrorists: white supremacists and the alt-right. They have killed almost as many westerners as Islamist militants have. Yet why not a word of denunciation concerning them? Why not admit that we have our own brand of terror to fight, just as Muslims do? You know the answer without my telling you.

Here Trump rhapsodizes about refugees, calling them "human capital" for a "brighter future." Of course, while ignoring the massive suffering they endure in the god-awful present. In the process he makes one of the most hypocritical statements in the entire address:

I also applaud Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon for their role in hosting refugees. The surge of migrants and refugees leaving the Middle East depletes the human capital needed to build stable societies and economies. Instead of depriving this region of so much human potential, Middle Eastern countries can give young people hope for a brighter future in their home nations and regions.

Well of course they can. If Trump's own allies hadn't turned Syria into a killing field and charnel house. But if you're going to applaud Middle Eastern nations for accepting refugees, why not your own country? Is the Middle East the only part of the world responsible for refugees generated there? If there's one thing we learn from civil wars wherever they happen: they are global phenomena. You cannot build a wall around a failing state and isolate the suffering it generates to a small bit of territory. All that suffering radiates outward and afflicts the entire world. That's why Trump's view is myopic and ahistorical.

The truly worst portion of the speech was reserved for Iran. As you can see above, his

rhetoric matched the false rhetoric of George Bush *père et fils*: the former called Saddam Hussein “the new Hitler.”

His rant begins thus:

For decades, Iran has fueled the fires of sectarian conflict and terror.

It is a government that speaks openly of mass murder, vowing the destruction of Israel, death to America, and ruin for many leaders and nations in this room.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (Source: The Times of Israel)

Actually, none of the above statements are true. I have no idea what Trump refers to as Iranian advocacy of “mass murder.” Nor has Iran ever vowed to destroy Israel. As for Iran’s supposed vow to “ruin” Sunni nations—that compliment has been returned many-fold by all those leaders listening to his speech. This is a Sunni-Shia religious conflict as well as a conflict for regional dominance. To divorce this rivalry from its historical-religious context is an offense against reality. And it will perpetuate the noxious policies and rain of death which afflicts the region today. Conflict may be mediated through discussion and negotiation. But if you demonize your rival, then only war and death is possible. That is the path the Sunni states have chosen and which Trump has ratified. Remember it is Iran which called for talks with Saudi Arabia over their differences; and the Saudis who [rejected the offer](#).

Here’s another bit of false history akin to Trump’s [painting of America’s minority communities as “ghettos” and “war zones”](#) characterized by nothing but suffering and poverty:

...The people of Iran have endured hardship and despair under their leaders’ reckless pursuit of conflict and terror.

If Iranians have endured hardship it is largely of the making of Trump and his western allies who’ve put the country under lockdown economically, financially and commercially. And as for pursuit of conflict: Iran is not the only party pursuing conflict. We have certainly done our share as has Israel and all those Sunni allies he was celebrating. The failure to recognize blame as two-sided is yet another severe weakness of the Trump world-view.

Oh the irony of Trump calling for regime change in Iran, when it is one of the few democracies in the region:

...Pray for the day when the Iranian people have the just and righteous government they deserve.

Well, in fact Iran has the government it deserves. The people just elected that government. Something which has never happened in his host country, Saudi Arabia. Trump’s arrogance and ignorance is unbounding.

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