

## Gay Rights Becomes Part of the Trump Agenda

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If someone does a good thing for a bad reason, does the ill motivation poison the thing itself? Or to give the question a finer point, if the Trump administration does it, is it automatically bad?

It seems that this jaundiced view colored the thinking of many leading gay figures as they reacted to a February 19 scoop from NBC News headlined, “Trump administration launches global effort to end criminalization of homosexuality.”

Since 71 countries around the world penalize homosexual conduct—sometimes with the death penalty—this would seem to be a cause that gay groups would avidly embrace. Yet the response of LGBT outfits was mostly cold. For instance, GLAAD (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) tweeted its skepticism:

We’d believe that the Trump administration will work to protect LGBTQ people around the world if they had not attacked LGBTQ people in the U.S. over 90 times since taking office.

Meanwhile, Ty Cobb, founder of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s global department, took to The Washington Post to zing the president and vice president for their supposed hypocrisy. “So long as Trump and Pence peddle hate within our own borders,” he said, “they cannot expect to be effective in defeating hate abroad.”

Other gay voices went even further. Matthew Rodriguez, writing for Out, headlined his piece, “Trump’s Plan to Decriminalize Homosexuality Is an Old Racist Tactic.” Rodriguez argued that the new policy is “colonial,” smacking of “paternalism,” and thus lacking “any true altruism.”

By such reckoning, the right of Third World countries to chart their own legal and cultural destiny is more important than the right of Third World individuals to be free from harassment and persecution. This is, of course, the opposite of the general progressive view of how Western countries should operate: here, the right of the individual to do in the bedroom whatever he, she—or they—might wish is regarded as supreme. In other words, the human rights universalism that has characterized the left since World War II seems now to be yielding to the conservative particularism of other countries, lest liberal advocates be accused of “colonialism.”

Of course, the Trump administration effort, spearheaded by one of its gay appointees, U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell, has its share of support. The Log Cabin Republicans, for instance, tweeted, “THANK YOU to @realDonaldTrump and the entire administration for standing with the worldwide LGBT community.” The gay GOPers added:

We are proud to see this effort and look forward to working with the administration to bring about an end to the prosecution of the LGBTQ community. The United States must stand firm on human rights and lead our allies and adversaries to end discrimination and prosecution.

So now we'll have to see where the Trump effort goes. Its spearhead, Grenell, says that the initiative is "wildly supported" by both U.S. political parties, although it would seem that their public reaction, at least, has been distinctly muted. That is, Democrats don't want to give the dreaded Trump administration credit for anything, and as for Republicans, well, they evidently don't feel the need to say much.

Moreover, as critics have pointed out, the effort seems inordinately focused on Iran, a country with a terrible gay rights record, but also a country the Trump administration has long regarded as an enemy for other reasons. Other nations also have dismal anti-gay policies, including such American allies as Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia. So what, if anything, are we going to do about them?

Still, something big has happened. As we all remember, Trump swept to prominence four years ago by taking positions that confounded Republican orthodoxy—on trade, immigration, entitlements, and foreign war.

And yes, Trump was also notably dovish on gay issues. One of his featured speakers at the 2016 convention in Cleveland was tech mogul Peter Thiel, who told cheering conventioners: "I am proud to be gay. I am proud to be a Republican. But most of all, I am proud to be an American." We can observe that Thiel makes no great claims about gay issues; indeed, he seems more interested in tech policy and, of course, capitalism.

Moreover, at a time when many Democrats are embracing socialism, one wonders whether Thiel and the Log Cabineers won't be joined by other LGBTers, quietly wary of radicalism. Perhaps there's even a silent majority out there that includes gays—that is, folks who wish merely to get on with their lives. They want to be free of harassment, to be sure, but such freedom also includes the right not to be harassed by some politically correct commissar. And of course, darn few Americans, of any gender identity, look forward to Venezuela-ification.

Speaking of Third World countries, a big issue looming for all Americans is immigration. Specifically, what will this current influx of migrants mean for the liberal status quo?

It's now been more than a quarter century since the political scientist Samuel Huntington coined the phrase "The Clash of Civilizations," thus putting an end—or at least the beginning of an and—to cheery reveries about the "end of history." Huntington's 2004 book, Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity, was also pessimistic about multiculturalism—or, if one prefers, it was realistic.

Indeed, ever since the 2016 massacre at an LGBT nightclub in Orlando, in which shooter Omar Mateen killed 49, it's been obvious to most Americans that some currents within culture and religion are deeply hostile to the modern vision of tolerance and live-and-let-live. Mateen, after all, called 911 from the scene of his crime and identified himself as a "Mujahideen" and an "Islamic Soldier."

To be sure, there have been plenty of home-grown terrorist attacks, before and since, that have nothing to do with jihadi-type ideology. Yet as we look around the world, especially to Western Europe, we can fairly conclude that a spirit of prudence ought to inform our policies on immigration and assimilation. Specifically, it's reasonable to ask: are people from those 71 countries that criminalize homosexuality eager to get away from such cruel policies—or do they support imposing them here?

Some observers are optimistic about the prospects for the irenic assimilation of newcomers. One such is the Cato Institute's Mustafa Akyol, who recently published an op-ed in The New York Times entitled, "The Creeping Liberalism in American Islam." Taking a positive view, he wrote:

To say that change would never happen in Islam would be a view too unfair to this third big Abrahamic religion. It would also underestimate America's great potential to attract, and also transform, people of all faiths and races under a simple but rare principle—equal justice under the law.

Akyol's is an attractive vision, to be sure. But is it really the case that America, now more diverse than ever, is creating a newer civilization in which the peoples of the world come and unite around liberty and justice for all?

Needless to say, Akyol's optimism will not be the last take on the topic. Bruce Bawer, writing in PJ Media, ripped Akyol as a "slithery apologist...[a] systematic whitewasher" for Sharia law, and, for good measure, a "flimflam man."

In the meantime, we're seeing these intellectual disputes embodied in real people, at our gate. For instance, there's the case of American-born Hoda Muthana, a so-called "ISIS bride," who would like to return from the Middle East along with her son. In the curt words of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, she's a "non-citizen terrorist" who "is not coming back." Beyond the questions of her immigration status or of her security threat status, one might also wonder about her attitude towards gay rights.

For sure, these and other immigration-related controversies will be threshed out in the 2020 election—Team Trump will make sure of that. Thus the Trumpist reshuffling of old partisan stances, including gay rights questions, will rumble into the next decade.

Oh, and one other thing: in Ric Grenell, a Republican star is born.

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