



If this was Trump at his ‘presidential’ best, he’s in big trouble

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After Donald Trump’s big speech yesterday on foreign policy, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich said on Twitter, “Washington elites mock Trump for mispronouncing Tanzania. They don’t get it. He said the most important word correctly: America. He gets it.”

I suppose this is true in a literal sense. It is “important” for an American presidential candidate to pronounce the name of their own country correctly, and if this is the new standard for success, I’m pleased to report that Gingrich is correct: Trump cleared this absurdly low bar.

But aside from pronouncing “America” correctly, the rest of Trump’s remarks were an unnerving mess. MSNBC’s Benjy Sarlin reported:

Looking to soothe fears that he lacked the experience and gravitas necessary to manage the most powerful military in the world, Donald Trump delivered a rare pre-written speech Wednesday in Washington outlining his foreign policy vision.

In many ways it raised more questions than it answered, bouncing between typical anti-Obama talking points, jarring threats to America’s friends and rivals, and soothing talk of peaceful global cooperation.

“Jarring” is the ideal adjective in this case. At one point, Trump said the United States must be prepared to tell our old allies that they should “defend themselves” and not look to us for support. In the next breath, Trump expressed dismay that so many U.S. allies feel abandoned by President Obama.

How did the Republican frontrunner reconcile the contradiction? He didn’t – Trump simply transitioned to new contradictions before anyone could fully come to terms with the last one.

Americans were told, for example, that a Trump administration would replace “randomness with purpose” through “a disciplined, deliberate and consistent foreign policy.” He then insisted, “We must as, a nation, be more unpredictable.”

Trump opposes the idea of a foreign policy based on “ideology,” rejecting the idea of exporting Western-style democracy abroad. He then emphasized the importance of “promoting Western civilization” around the globe.

Trump lamented the way in which our “resources are overextended.” He also believes the United States must “continually play the role of peacemaker” and “help to save lives and, indeed, humanity itself.”

Trump boasted about all of the leverage we have over China, around the same time as he complained about how we no longer have leverage over China.

And don’t get me started about Trump’s ridiculous factual errors.

So, what does Donald Trump believe about foreign policy? He believes in nothing and everything, all at once. As president, he would do more and less, wage war and peace, reach out and push away, all while being unflinchingly consistent and wildly unpredictable.

In other words, Trump doesn’t have the foggiest idea what he’s talking about – and unfortunately for him, quite a few folks noticed. *Politico* reported:

[A]cross the ideological spectrum, and even among natural allies, Trump’s speech received a failing grade for coherence and drew snickering and scorn from foreign policy insiders who remain unconvinced that Trump is up to the job.

“It struck me as a very odd mishmash,” said Doug Bandow, a foreign policy scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute, who shares many of Trump’s beliefs about scaling back America’s role abroad. “He called for a new foreign policy strategy, but you don’t really get the sense he gave one.”

Trump’s speech was “lacking in policy prescriptions,” and its “strident rhetoric masked a lack of depth,” said Robert “Bud” McFarlane, a former national security adviser to President Ronald Reagan who attended the speech.

If Trump had merely presented a blueprint for a *bad* foreign policy, that would at least be the basis for a credible debate. Plenty of candidates offer misguided ideas and dangerous solutions, and if nothing else, they serve as the foundation for something that can be critiqued.

But dealing with an incoherent, contradictory mess is far more difficult.

The irony is, yesterday’s speech, coming on the heels of his five landslide primary victories the day before, was supposed to help Trump appear more presidential. Speaking from a teleprompter, the Republican frontrunner hoped to convey a sense of seriousness and gravitas. But for anyone who actually listened to the content of his remarks, yesterday served as a powerful reminder that the former reality-show host isn’t yet prepared for the role of Leader of the Free World.