



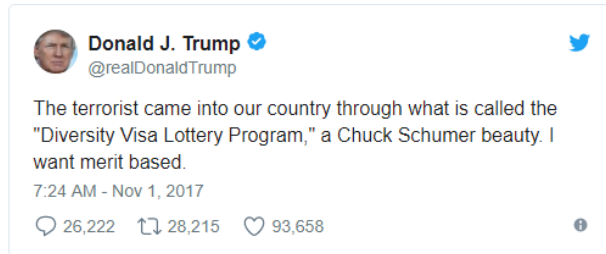
## Immigration and Terror

November 1, 2017

It is disheartening — if not entirely predictable — that President Donald Trump would look upon Tuesday’s truck attack in Manhattan that killed nine and injured 11 and condemn it not as a crime (which it was) or a moment to mourn and console (as the administration insisted was most appropriate behavior after the wake of the Las Vegas attack rather than discuss gun control) but as a way to attack immigration policy. In a Wednesday morning tweet, Mr. Trump blamed the diversity visa program (calling it a “Chuck Schumer beauty”) for enabling a terrorist devoted to ISIS to drive a pickup truck down a bike path in the deadliest New York terrorist attack since 9/11.

The driver, identified by police as Sayfullo Saipov, came legally to the U.S. in 2010 from Uzbekistan. He had a green card granting him permanent residency. He reportedly gained entry through a 27-year-old “diversity” program that is intended to allow people from countries with historically low rates of immigration to the U.S. to relocate here. That program has been criticized before, but it’s not an especially large one, with just 50,000 visas distributed each year. Under the circumstances, the president could have just as easily attacked Home Depot for renting out the pickup truck. That enabled Mr. Saipov’s actions, too. But the real problem isn’t immigration, and it wasn’t a hardware store’s truck rental program. Uzbekistan wasn’t even on Mr. Trump’s list of Muslim-majority countries from which travel should be restricted. Domestic terrorism doesn’t require the perpetrator to be an immigrant — or even to be Muslim, as Stephen Paddock demonstrated when he shot to death 58 people and wounded hundreds more in Las Vegas.

Syrian refugees have, for example, been blamed for exactly zero terrorist attacks in the United States. Indeed, getting killed by a foreign-born terrorist of any kind on U.S. soil is uncommon in the extreme. Americans are far more likely to be killed by a fellow American (more than 250 times more likely, according to one Cato Institute estimate). Even Islamic terrorism has a shaky connection to immigration policy — most people convicted of terrorism in the U.S. since 9/11 have been U.S. citizens. One can be radicalized without ever having stepped foot outside the U.S. Despite a note Mr. Saipov left at the scene pledging allegiance to ISIS, whatever radicalization he underwent appears to have occurred while he was in the United States and has nothing to do with whether the diversity program is a good or bad policy.



So why is President Trump talking about it hours after a national tragedy? Probably for the same reason Mr. Trump often tries to steer the conversation to the “hot button” issues of his core supporters. The more the president disparages immigrants, the better politically for him — or at least that seems to be the White House’s thinking. Why confine the conversation to illegal immigration when one can just as easily vilify legal Muslim immigrants? It’s obvious that Mr. Trump wants a religious war, not merely an anti-terrorism campaign to boost his failing poll numbers.

Mr. Trump’s poll numbers certainly could use a boost. The latest Wall Street Journal and NBC News poll found 58 percent of Americans disapprove of his job performance, a new all-time low as of late October. The subsequent 12-count indictment of Paul Manafort and Richard Gates probably didn’t help the president much in that department either. Anger and distrust of Muslims, fear of refugees and general distaste for people born in other countries? That’s the kind of thing Mr. Trump knows plays well on Breitbart News or the unfailingly jingoistic-with-a-smile “Fox and Friends” morning TV show.

A more honest president would recognize that fighting terrorism requires a much broader, more thoughtful approach and that Americans must understand that not all violence can be prevented. The recent spate of vehicle-related attacks from Berlin to Barcelona should demonstrate that it doesn’t take any more than a grievance and the keys to a car or truck to make headlines around the world. Cities can hire more police, the FBI can infiltrate extremist groups, physical barriers can be installed or other preventive measures taken, but it’s not going to spare a nation from the reality of “lone wolf” attackers who are not controlled by al-Qaida or ISIS but operate more like a disorganized fan base.

What does an immigration crackdown accomplish besides boosting Mr. Trump’s popularity among the far-right? Here are some of the possibilities — producing a religious war that inspires further acts of terrorism, denying the U.S. economy the billions of dollars of benefits that a robust immigration policy provides and promoting a world view of the U.S. as a bunch of paranoid nationalists instead of the welcoming immigrant-built and democracy-loving country that the founders intended.