



## Donald Trump's National Security Speech: Fear, Ignorance, BS, and More Fear

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On Monday, Donald Trump took to a stage in Youngstown, Ohio, to deliver a speech that he surely hoped would make people forget about the latest wave of bad news surrounding his presidential campaign. The address, which focused on national security, came amid reports that the campaign's organization is in disarray in key states, that the Republican National Committee is apparently thinking about shifting its focus to down-ballot races instead of the presidential contest, and a damning New York Times story in which Trump staffers painted their boss as moody and impossible to control.

So this was Trump's chance to get the media talking about something other than his amateurish fight to win the White House and perhaps come across as an even-keeled future leader, rather than an insult comic. Reading large chunks of his speech off of a teleprompter, and sticking mostly to his script, Trump was less animated than his usual self.

Nevertheless, the content of his address served to reiterate the more nationalistic and belligerent aspects of Trump's campaign platform: his proposed restrictions on immigration, willingness to use brutal tactics to achieve his foreign policy goals, and a doubling down on the angry rhetoric Republicans like to level at "radical Islamic terrorism."

Trump opened the speech with a laundry list of terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe that were committed by first- or second-generation immigrants, before moving into a description of the turmoil that has roiled the Middle East during the Obama administration. "Libya is in ruins," the Republican candidate declared. "Syria is in the middle of a disastrous civil war... Iraq is in chaos, and ISIS is on the loose."

This sort of fear mongering is par for the course for Trump. "It felt like the background to his speech was like a horror film, where everything is to be feared, and he comes in as the knight in shining armor," was how Angela Kelly, an immigration expert and senior vice president at the left-wing Center for American Progress, described Monday's speech to VICE.

When Trump veered outside his apocalyptic comfort zone, his logic became a bit muddled. He decried Barack Obama's first-term "apology tour" through the Middle East (which, like the term

"radical Islamic terrorism," has become a conservative trope), and he accused the president of not sufficiently criticizing human rights abuses in the Muslim world. That bit of grandstanding would have rung a little bit more true, though, if Trump didn't go on to praise the Egyptian government of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who boasts his own **atrocious human rights record**.

Trump's contradictions didn't end there. He also repeated the **dubious claim** that he had opposed the Iraq War "from the beginning" and criticized both the war and the subsequent withdrawal of US troops, before saying that "we should have kept the oil in Iraq"—a **long-standing** position of his that, on its face, amounts to an endorsement of the idea that the US should engage in wars to seize foreign resources. He also praised NATO, saying that since calling the alliance "obsolete" earlier this year, the organization had created "a new division focused on terror threats"; he neglected to note, of course, that NATO has had an Emerging Security Challenges Division **since 2010**.

But what, other than saying "radical Islamic terrorism" a lot, would President Trump actually do to fight the evil Muslim bogeymen he conjures up? According to Monday's speech, he would "aggressively pursue joint and coalition military operations to crush and destroy ISIS," which is of course already happening. He also said he would continue drone strikes in the Middle East and keep open the prison at Guantanamo Bay, a national embarrassment that his opponent, Hillary Clinton, has **said she would close**.

Mostly, though, Trump's answer to terrorism goes back to immigration, the defining issue of his disastrous presidential campaign. Expanding his past calls for a ban on Muslim immigration, Trump announced Monday that he wants to implement an **"extreme vetting"** of potential immigrants to the US, to ensure that they support pluralistic American values.

Of course, immigration experts across the political spectrum say that the vetting of immigrants to the US is already pretty extreme. "It's hard to see what more the government could really do to weed out potential terrorists," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute. According to Nowrasteh, who spoke to VICE after Trump's speech Monday, immigrants commit acts of terrorism so rarely that an American's chances of being killed by a foreign-born permanent resident in a terrorist attack are one in 57 million annually.

Kelly at the Center for American Progress agreed. "[Trump] should probably spend a few minutes learning the immigration code and learning that the heavy screens he's calling for already exist," she told VICE.

Late in his speech, Trump compared Clinton to German chancellor Angela Merkel, calling Merkel's handling of her country's refugee crisis a "disaster." But Europe is facing a much larger influx of refugees than the US; as Nowrasteh pointed out, migrants "can walk [to Europe], or take a short boat ride."

"We're not going to have this issue with a million people showing up at our doorstep," he added.

In the end, though, what makes Trump's jumbled facts, obfuscation of his own past positions, and invention of urgent global crises so concerning is that it creates a kind of stew of fear and hate among Americans. In particular, Kelly said, Trump's linking of terrorism to immigrants and

their children is "deeply disturbing." She added, "It's so divisive, and it's really tearing the country apart."

This was supposed to be a more somber, presidential side of Trump, not the unhinged id on display at his rallies—and still, he painted immigrants, especially Muslim immigrants, as enemies of America. Trump said his policies "will help heal the divisions in our country," but it's hard to see how that would happen, when his own campaign is doing just the opposite. And while Trump's current dip in the polls makes it increasingly unlikely that he'll actually win, his rhetoric could have ripple effects that go beyond the 2016 race.

"He's creating 30-second ads for ISIS," said Kelly.