

Democrats seize on Khan-Trump conflict to woo right-wing support

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The recent anti-Muslim remarks made by Donald Trump against Khizr and Ghazala Khan, Pakistani-American parents of an officer killed during the US occupation of Iraq, have been seized on by the Clinton campaign and the Obama administration to attack the Republican presidential nominee from the right and present the Democratic candidate as the advocate of patriotism and militarism.

The barrage against Trump has quickly taken on the character of a full-scale campaign, with extensive coverage in major daily newspapers and round-the-clock attention from network and cable news, including multiple interviews with the Khans.

Particularly significant has been the condemnation of Trump by veterans groups usually aligned with the Republican Party as well as many Republican senators, candidates and other office-holders.

Eleven families in the Gold Star Mothers of America, a congressionally chartered patriotic support group for the parents of soldiers killed in action, issued an open letter to Trump demanding an apology on Monday. “Your recent comments regarding the Khan family were repugnant and personally offensive to us,” they wrote. “We feel we must speak out and demand you apologize to the Khans, to all Gold Star families, and to all Americans for your offensive, and frankly anti-American comments.”

On Monday, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, one of the two largest veterans organizations, with 1.7 million members, blasted Trump for his comments about the family of Captain Humayun Khan, killed by a suicide bomber in 2004. Brian Duffy, the group’s president, issued a statement declaring, “Election or not, the VFW will not tolerate anyone berating a Gold Star family member for exercising his or her right of speech or expression... There are certain sacrosanct subjects that

no amount of wordsmithing can repair once crossed.”

At the convention of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) in Atlanta, President Obama condemned Trump’s comments without mentioning the Republican candidate by name. “No one—no one has given more for our freedom and our security than our Gold Star families,” he said. “Our Gold Star families have made a sacrifice that most of us cannot even begin to imagine. They represent the very best of our country.”

Obama presented himself as an advocate for the military. “As commander in chief, I’m pretty tired of some folks trash-talking America’s military and troops,” he told the DAV. “Our military is somewhat smaller after two major ground wars [have] come to a close. That’s natural. And we’re gonna keep doing everything we need to do improve readiness and modernize our forces.”

Obama went on to celebrate the military power of American imperialism and his own willingness to use it, declaring that, despite claims by critics like Trump, the United States possessed “the most capable fighting force in history and we’re going to keep it that way.” He reiterated his support for NATO, saying, “In the face of Russian aggression, we’re not going to turn our back to our allies in Europe.”

It is clear by now that in bringing Khizr Khan onto the stage of the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia to deliver a brief critique of Trump—as part of a line-up of speakers proclaiming that Hillary Clinton would be a far superior commander-in-chief than Trump—the Clinton campaign prepared a trap for the Republican candidate.

Khizr Khan, an immigration lawyer in the Washington, D.C. suburbs, spoke about the death of his son, one of the first Muslim-American soldiers killed in the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. He denounced

Trump for his racist call to ban Muslim immigration, but did so largely in patriotic terms, claiming that such bigotry would undermine the US military in “the fight against terrorism”—the pretext employed by successive US administrations to destroy much of the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa.

Trump responded with a crude attack on the Khan family, suggesting that Ghazala Khan, the soldier’s mother, had been compelled, either by her husband or her religion, to remain silent at his side during his six-minute speech. She has since denounced Trump as unfeeling and hypocritical.

The Clinton campaign is using the issue, not to indict Trump as an anti-Muslim racist and demagogue, but to accuse him of being unpatriotic and anti-military because of his slurs against the family of a soldier who “gave his life for his country.” Speaking at a church in Cleveland, Ohio on Monday, Clinton said that Khizr Khan “paid the ultimate sacrifice in his family, didn’t he?” She continued, “And what has he heard from Donald Trump? Nothing but insults, degrading comments about Muslims, a total misunderstanding of what made our country great.”

She went on to link her professed devotion to the US military to her religious faith, adding, “Tim Kaine [her running mate] and I are people of faith.”

Embracing religion along with the military is in keeping with the overall strategy of the Democrats in the post-convention period, which is to outflank the Trump campaign on the right and seek to win sections of the Republican Party either to support Clinton openly or at least to distance themselves from Trump.

The first dividends from this effort were cashed in on Monday, as Senator John McCain, a war hawk and Republican presidential candidate in 2008, became the most prominent Republican and Trump supporter to denounce his attack on the Khan family.

McCain released a lengthy written statement that did not disavow his grudging endorsement of the Republican nominee, but criticized Trump’s slurs against the Khan family in blistering terms.

“In recent days, Donald Trump disparaged a fallen soldier’s parents,” McCain wrote. “He has suggested that the likes of their son should not be allowed in the United States—to say nothing of entering its service. I cannot emphasize enough how deeply I disagree with Mr. Trump’s statement. I hope Americans understand

that the remarks do not represent the views of our Republican Party, its officers, or candidates.” He added, “While our party has bestowed upon him the nomination, it is not accompanied by unfettered license to defame those who are the best among us.”

Similar statements were issued by a bevy of Senate Republicans, including those in closely contested re-election bids in New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin and Missouri, as well as by former presidential contenders Lindsey Graham, John Kasich and Jeb Bush, who have all refused to support Trump.

Bush’s top political adviser, Sally Bradshaw, announced her resignation from the Republican Party and said she would vote for Hillary Clinton in Florida if the race appeared to be close.

In all of the media furor, there has been no criticism whatsoever of the war that led to Humayun Khan’s death—the illegal and unprovoked war of aggression that led to the death and maiming of tens of thousands of US soldiers and the killing or maiming of more than a million people in Iraq, and the conversion of millions into homeless refugees. Clinton, Trump and the entire US political establishment of both big business parties supported this war and support its continuation today in Iraq and Syria.



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