

Trump and Democrats compete on militarism and war

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Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, in a fascistic speech in Ohio, called for “vicious” and “extreme” methods to combat the threat of terrorism, including a crackdown on immigrants from the Middle East, expansion of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp and a war of extermination against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The speech was delivered to a hand-picked, friendly audience at Youngstown State University in eastern Ohio, one of the few “battleground” states where the floundering Trump campaign is still competitive against Democrat Hillary Clinton, according to recent polls.

Trump read his speech from a teleprompter, using a text prepared by Republican Party advisers, although he ad-libbed several of the threats of brutal treatment for “terror” prisoners and refugees. One of these was his suggestion that immigrants should be subjected to “extreme vetting” over their religious and political viewpoints to detect potential sympathizers of “radical Islam.”

The candidate did not spell out the details, but campaign aides told the Associated Press after the speech that this would involve a test of immigrants’ views on social issues such as religious freedom, gay rights and gender equality. Anyone strictly adhering to the Republican Party platform adopted last month in Cleveland would likely fail such a test, an irony that appears to have escaped the Trump campaign.

The bulk of Trump’s speech was the mixture of militaristic threats, chest-thumping self-praise, brazen lies and non sequiturs that have become familiar in the course of his campaign. Among the lies were Trump’s claim to have “always” opposed the war in Iraq (he supported the Bush administration’s decision to go to war in 2002-2003) and to have opposed the US-NATO

bombing of Libya (he supported it publicly).

These lies are aimed at giving his campaign credibility with the overwhelming majority of Americans who oppose the wars in the Middle East carried out by the Bush and Obama administrations.

Trump seeks to combine this bogus antiwar stance with ferocious militarism in relation to ISIS, which was the sole focus of his Youngstown speech. He called for the immediate and outright destruction of the group, without indicating anything he would actually do differently than the Obama administration.

His one clear difference with Obama was to employ the term “radical Islamic terrorism,” which he presented as a sort of magical talisman that would cause ISIS to disintegrate. “We have a president that doesn’t want to say the words,” Trump complained. “Anyone who cannot name our enemy is not fit to lead this country.”

There is a real content to this seemingly bizarre conflict over naming the opponent in the Middle East. The US military-intelligence apparatus avoids the term “radical Islam” because it has long made use of such elements as part of its covert operations in the region.

While Obama is not the “founder” of ISIS, as Trump claimed last week, the CIA is certainly the “founder” of Al Qaeda, recruiting Islamic fundamentalists in the 1980s for the guerrilla war in Afghanistan against the Soviet army, who included Osama bin Laden and his associates.

More recently, under the Obama administration, similar Islamists recruited by the CIA were the spearhead for the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, then shipped into Syria where they were unleashed against the government of Bashar al-Assad, allied with Russia. The CIA has also backed radical Islamists fighting Russian forces in Chechnya and

elsewhere in the Caucasus, as well as fighting Chinese forces in Xinjiang.

ISIS emerged out of the radical Islamist milieu in Syria, armed and financed under the auspices of the CIA, the Pentagon and US allies like Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The group only came into conflict with the US when ISIS fighters crossed the Syria-Iraq border in 2014 and began to wage war against the Shiite-dominated regime in Iraq.

The fascistic character of the Trump campaign was displayed in the candidate's frequent references to the need for "vicious" and "extreme" methods, not only against ISIS itself, but against immigrants from countries where ISIS is active (many of them actually refugees fleeing ISIS).

At one point he said that the mistake made by previous US administrations in Iraq was failure to seize the country's oil. "In the old days when we won a war, to the victor go the spoils," he said, embracing a law of war that would be enthusiastically embraced by any fascist dictator. American imperialism has generally sought to conceal such crude appetites, presenting itself as the protagonist of the "free world" even when doing battle for the interests of Exxon Mobil or Goldman Sachs.

The Democratic Party response to Trump's ravings and embrace of torture and violence was to indict him for focusing too narrowly on the Middle East and ISIS, and ignoring the global interests of the United States.

Vice President Joe Biden, in his first campaign appearance with Hillary Clinton in Scranton, Pennsylvania, denounced Trump for his professed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin, including his suggestion that Russia could be a suitable ally in the struggle against ISIS because of its own conflicts with radical Islamists.

Biden said of Trump, "He's even showered praise on Saddam Hussein, one of the vilest dictators of the 20th century, a man who repeatedly backed terror attacks against Israel because he was supposedly—the reason he admires him—he was a killer of terrorists. That's why he likes Saddam. He would have loved Stalin. He would have loved Stalin."

The vice president then added that he was on his way from Pennsylvania to Eastern Europe, including the Baltic States, to reassure the right-wing governments of these countries that the US would stand by its

obligation under NATO to defend them in any conflict with Russia.

Trump was lending credence to those in Turkey who were accusing the Obama administration of backing the coup attempt against Erdogan, Biden complained, adding, "Does he have any idea of the adverse consequences these outlandish comments have on our allies, our friends, and the physical safety of our troops?"

The conclusion of Biden's speech, as Hillary Clinton stood nodding in approval, was a declaration of American supremacy that sought to outdo Trump. "It's never, never, never, ever been a good bet to bet against the United States of America!" he shouted, going on to say, "We never bow. We never bend. We never kneel. We never yield. We own the finish line. That's who we are. We are America!"

The dueling speeches of Trump and Biden aptly sum up the character of the 2016 presidential election. On the one hand, the fascist demagoguery of the Republican billionaire, and on the other, the militarist, patriotic claptrap of the Democratic imperialist.



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