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Hypocrisy and Condescension: Trump's Speech to the Middle East

May 22, 2017

So after inventing “fake news”, America’s crazed President on Sunday gave the world’s Muslims a fake speech. Donald Trump said he was not in Saudi Arabia to “lecture” – but then told the world’s Islamic preachers what to say, condemned “Islamist terrorism” as if violence was a solely Muslim phenomenon and then announced like an Old Testament prophet that he was in “a battle between good and evil”. There were no words of compassion, none of mercy, absolutely not a word of apology for his racist, anti-Muslim speeches of last year.

Even more incredibly, he blamed Iran – rather than Isis – for “fuelling sectarian violence”, pitied the Iranian people for their “despair” a day after they had freely elected a liberal reformer as their president, and demanded the further isolation of the largest Shiite country in the Middle East. The regime responsible for “so much instability” is Iran. The Shiite Hezbollah were condemned. So were the Shiite Yemenis. Trump’s Sunni Saudi hosts glowed with warmth at such wisdom.

And this was billed by CNN as a “reset” speech with the Muslim world. For “reset”, read “repair”, but Trump’s Sunday diatribe in Riyadh was in fact neither a “reset” nor a “repair”. It was the lecture he claimed he would not give.

“Every time a terrorist murders an innocent person, and falsely invokes the name of God, it should be an insult to every person of faith,” he announced, utterly ignoring – as he had to – the

fact that Saudi Arabia, not Iran, is the fountainhead of the very Wahhabi Salafist extremism whose “terrorists” murder “innocent people”.

He tried to avoid his old racist “radical Islamic extremist” mantra and tried to replace it with “Islamist extremism” but he apparently fluffed his words and said “Islamic” as well. The subtle difference he was trying to make in English was thus for Muslims no more than a variation on a theme: terrorists are Muslims.

All this, let us remember, came after Trump had sewn up yet another outrageous arms deal with the Saudis (\$110bn or £84.4bn) and the proposed purchase by Qatar of what Trump obscenely referred to as “a lot of beautiful military equipment”. It seems almost fantastical that he should make such a remark only two days before meeting the Pope who in Cairo two weeks ago railed along with the Muslim Sheikh of Al Azhar against the evil of arms dealers.

“We are adopting a principled realism, rooted in common values and shared interests,” Trump told the Saudis and the leaders of another fifty Muslim nations on Sunday. But what on earth are those values? What values do the Americans share with the head-chopping, misogynist, undemocratic, dictatorial Saudis other than arms sales and oil?

And when Trump said that “our friends will never question our support, and our enemies will never doubt our determination,” were his friends supposed to be the Saudis? Or the “Islamic world” – which should surely include Iran and Syria and Yemen – and the warring militias of Libya? As for “enemies”, was he talking about Isis? Or Russia? Or Syria? Or Iran, whose newly elected president surely wants peace with America? Or was he – as part of the Muslim world will conclude with good reason – declaring his friendship with the Sunni Muslims of the world and his enmity towards the Shia Muslims?

For that, ultimately, was what the Riyadh speech-fest was all about. Take this little quotation: “We will make decisions based on real-world outcomes – not inflexible ideology. We will be guided by the lessons of experience, not the confines of rigid thinking. And, wherever possible, we will seek gradual reforms – not sudden intervention.” Now let’s parse this little horror. “Decisions based on real-world outcomes” means brutal pragmatism. “Gradual reforms” indicates that the US will do nothing for human rights and take no steps to prevent crimes against humanity – unless they are committed by Iran, Syria, Iraqi Shiites, the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah or Yemeni Shiite Houthis.

It was all about “partnership”, we were supposed to believe. It was about a “coalition”. You bet it would be. For America is not going to bleed as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is the Arabs who must bleed as they fight each other, encouraged by the biggest arms supplier of them all. Thus Trump lectured them on their need to share “their part of the burden”. The Arabs will be “united and strong” as “the forces of good”. If the battle is between “decent people of all religions” and “barbaric criminals” – “between good and evil” – as Trump inferred, it was significant, was it not, that this battle was to start in the “sacred land” of Sunni Saudi Arabia?

By the time Trump reached the bit in which he threatened the bad guys – “if you choose the path of terror, your life will be empty, your life will be brief, and your soul will be condemned” – he sounded like a speech-writer for Isis. Apparently – and unsurprisingly, perhaps – Trump’s actual speech was partly the work of the very man who wrote out his much ridiculed (and failed) legal attempt to ban Muslims of seven nations from the United States. All in all, quite a “reset”. Trump talked of peace but was preparing the Arabs for a Sunni-Shia war. The fawning leaders of the Muslim world, needless to say, clapped away when the mad president of America had finished speaking. But did they understand what his words really portended?