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THE BLOG

A Few Thoughts on the “Muslim Ban”

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President Trump has had a busy first week in office, displaying the anarchic grandiosity, callousness, and ineptitude of which he seems uniquely capable. He is every inch what we knew him to be: a malignant Chauncey Gardiner. And now our institutions have begun to shudder at his whim. The fact that atheists like me can't find the time to worry about the religious crackpots he has brought with him into power is a measure of how bad the man is. Christian fundamentalism has become the least of our concerns. Our democracy has been engulfed by a hurricane of lies.

Many readers have asked me to comment on the president's executive order suspending immigration from certain Muslim-

majority countries. I believe I've stated my positions on the relevant topics fairly clearly. But perhaps a brief summary is in order.

1. I did everything I could to make the case against Trump prior to the election (while many of the liberals now attacking me for enabling his "Islamophobia" actively undermined the candidacy of Hillary Clinton, even in the final days of the campaign).

2. I think Trump's "Muslim ban" is a terrible policy. Not only is it unethical with respect to the plight of refugees, it is bound to be ineffective in stopping the spread of Islamism. As many have pointed out, it is also internally inconsistent: It doesn't include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, or Lebanon, any of which has been a more fertile source of jihadist terrorism than several of the countries Trump named.

3. However, most of what is being said in opposition to Trump's order is thoroughly contaminated by identity politics and liberal delusion. The Left seems determined to empower the Right by continuing to lie about the problem of Islamism. As David Frum [recently wrote](#), "When liberals insist that only fascists will defend borders, then voters will hire fascists to do the job liberals won't do." I have been saying as much for more than a decade—and am vilified by my fellow liberals whenever I do.

4. It is perfectly possible—and increasingly necessary—to speak about the ideological roots of Islamism and jihadism, and even about the unique need for reform within mainstream Islam itself, without lapsing into bigotry or disregarding the suffering of refugees. Indeed, when one understands the problem for what it is, one realizes that secular Muslims, liberal Muslims, and former Muslims are among the most desirable allies to have in the West—and, indeed, such people are the primary victims of Islamist intolerance and jihadist terror in Muslim-majority countries.

5. If liberals who refuse to speak honestly on these topics continue to march with Islamists, denigrate free speech, and oppose the work of the real reformers in the Muslim community, they will only further provoke and empower Trump. And Trump, in turn, will empower Islamists the world over by threatening the civil liberties of all Muslims within his reach.

6. The next acts of jihadist terrorism to take place on American soil will most likely be met with terrifyingly blunt (and even illegal) countermeasures by the Trump administration. If all that liberals can do in response is continue to lie about the causes of terrorism and lock arms with Islamists, we have some very rough times ahead.

7. If you are listening to obscurantists like Linda Sarsour, Dalia Mogahed, Reza Aslan, and representatives of CAIR, and denigrating true secularists and reformers like Maajid Nawaz, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Raheel Raza, and Sarah Haider, you are part of the problem.

Nothing that I have said or written about Islam, the war on terror, or even "profiling" ^[] 1 stands in contradiction to these points.

What we need, above all, is a new center to our politics—one that defends secularism, science, and free speech against their enemies on both the Left and the Right. And now we each must choose between supporting that civilizing project and joining in the chaos to come.

Addendum 1/30/17

The following interview was recorded several months before the 2016 presidential election:

Notes

1. Profiling is perhaps the most confusing case: I believe that “profiling” is just a dirty word for using any information, whether valid or not, to focus our attention when assessing specific threats. Therefore, unless we are determined to suspect everyone equally at all times—the Amish are just as likely as Wahhabis to be suicide bombers; ten-year-old girls are just as likely as thirty-year-old men to commit rape—we will inevitably engage in “profiling” when trying to prevent certain forms of violence. Needless to say, there are good ways to focus our attention and bad ones. And only honest conversation about the real causes of violence can help us decide between them.

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