



Trump's terrorism speech: Strong indictment but lacking details

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Speaking yesterday at Youngstown State University in Ohio, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump [outlined his plan for how America can defeat Islamic terrorists](http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/presidential-campaign/291498-full-transcript-donald-trump-addresses-radical) (<http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/presidential-campaign/291498-full-transcript-donald-trump-addresses-radical>). The first third of the speech — [similar to my Fox News piece from August 4](https://www.aei.org/publication/blame-barack-obama-not-donald-trump-for-rise-of-isis/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/blame-barack-obama-not-donald-trump-for-rise-of-isis/>) — contained a strong indictment of the failures of President Barack Obama and Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton since 2009. Specifically, the speech articulated what the Middle East looked like before President Obama and Secretary Clinton took the reins in Washington, DC, and how it has devolved into an utter mess of failed countries and civil wars.



(http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/RTX2L1AR_trump-e1471362902414.jpg)

Donald Trump at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio August 15, 2016. REUTERS/Eric Thayer.

Most importantly, Trump rightly noted that ISIS rose in Iraq after President Obama withdrew US troops, leaving a vacuum which the terrorist group could fill with its wicked ways. As Trump noted:

ISIS has spread across the Middle East, and into the West. In 2014, ISIS was operating in some 7 nations. Today they are fully operational in 18 countries with aspiring branches in 6 more, for a total of 24 – and many believe it is even more than that. The situation is likely worse than the public knows: a new Congressional report reveals that the Administration has downplayed the growth of ISIS, with 40% of surveyed analysts saying they had experienced efforts to manipulate their findings.

At the same time, ISIS is trying to infiltrate refugee flows into Europe and the United States.

The spread of ISIS, especially via refugee flows to Europe, poses [one of the biggest threats to America](https://www.aei.org/publication/dhs-collect-fingerprints-before-visitors-depart-for-america/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/dhs-collect-fingerprints-before-visitors-depart-for-america/>) given how unknown terrorists could acquire identification documents that enable them to reach our shores.

One other strong aspect of Trump's speech came when he declared that America will speak "truth to power" on how Muslim countries treat women, minorities, and non-Muslims. For far too long, American leaders have looked the other way as Middle East allies have failed to modernize their laws to ensure equal treatment of non-male members of their countries. Just as we did during the Cold War, it is important for America to send a strong message to Main Streets across the Middle East that freedom is an inheritance of all citizens.

Related reading: [A proposal for Donald Trump: The national defense](http://www.aei.org/publication/a-proposal-for-donald-trump-the-national-defense/) (<http://www.aei.org/publication/a-proposal-for-donald-trump-the-national-defense/>)

The last element of Trump's speech that plowed new ground was his latest iteration of a screening test for immigrant visas. Trump stated:

We must also screen out any who have hostile attitudes towards our country or its principles – or who believe that Sharia law should supplant American law.

Those who do not believe in our Constitution, or who support bigotry and hatred, will not be admitted for immigration into the country.

Only those who we expect to flourish in our country – and to embrace a tolerant American society – should be issued immigrant visas.

There are several obvious problems with these vague screening standards. First, as with the pre-9/11 questions passengers were asked when checking in at airports, does Trump expect visa applicants to answer truthfully knowing that their answers will get their visas denied? Next, it is very difficult to identify the individual beliefs and attitudes of immigrants short of clear open source statements on social media. Another problem is listing which American principles will be used for the screening. Will dissent be on the list? What about an opposition to a centralized government?

Unfortunately, the remainder of Trump's speech didn't clarify much of a difference from how the Obama administration is currently fighting ISIS and other terrorist groups. For example, Trump's Commission on Radical Islam doesn't sound much different from the work being done since 2011 on countering violent extremism.

It would be beneficial if Trump and Clinton provided Americans with detailed plans on how they would fight the war we are in, better secure our country, ensure our civil liberties are protected, and maintain America's role as the land of opportunity for the world's risk-takers. Both Trump and Clinton have plenty of policy options to consider — including [our work on reforming homeland security](https://www.aei.org/feature/homeland-security-reform-series/) (<https://www.aei.org/feature/homeland-security-reform-series/>) — to meet today's threat.

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