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Trump retweets fascist anti-Muslim videos from Britain

US President Donald Trump retweeted three videos Wednesday morning that were posted by Jayda Fransen, the deputy leader of Britain First, a fascist outfit that has specialized in such activities as “mosque invasions” and “Christian patrols” in urban areas with large Muslim populations.

Trump’s latest tweeting is an escalation of a political strategy aimed at inciting and encouraging far-right forces. At the time of the fascist rampage in Charlottesville, Virginia in August that left one anti-fascist protester dead, Trump claimed that there were “good people” among the white supremacist demonstrators. Now he has openly associated himself with a fascist group.

The videos, entitled “Islamist mob pushes teenage boy off roof,” “Muslim Destroys a Statue of Virgin Mary,” and “Muslim migrant beats up Dutch boy on crutches,” are crude attempts to whip up hatred of Muslims. The Dutch video, from earlier this year, shows a fight in which no Muslims were involved, and the other two are four-year-old depictions of violence in Egypt and Syria, respectively—no more representative of all Muslims than the murderous rampages in California and Texas exemplified all Americans.

Trump had said nothing further about the tweets, but White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders defended them without reservation. “Whether it’s a real video, the threat is real,” she told reporters. “The threat is real, the threat needs to be addressed and the threat has to be talked about and that’s what the president is doing in bringing that up.”

Britain First was founded in 2011 by former members of the fascist British National Party. One of its founders was known for anti-abortion fanaticism, and the group has also been linked to extreme-right British Loyalists in Northern Ireland.

Jayda Fransen, now 31 years old, was found guilty in 2016 of religiously aggravated harassment for abusing a Muslim mother in front of her four young children in the city of Luton, about 30 miles northwest of London. Fransen screamed at the woman, who was wearing a hijab, that Muslim men force women to cover up to avoid being raped “because they cannot control their sexual urges,” and added, “that’s why they are coming into my country raping women across the continent.”

Thomas Mair, the fascist who killed British Labour MP Jo Cox during the Brexit campaign last year, shouted “Britain First!” as he shot and stabbed the MP, from the Batley and Spen constituency, near Leeds. Britain First, which parades in paramilitary uniforms, has no more than 1,000 supporters, according to the Guardian, but about 500,000 Facebook “likes.” Fransen received 56 votes when stood for parliament in 2014.

Trump’s open endorsement of the fascists was greeted with enthusiasm by Fransen herself, who tweeted her thanks to the White House in capital letters on Wednesday:

“THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, DONALD TRUMP, HAS RETWEETED THREE OF DEPUTY LEADER JAYDA FRANSEN’S TWITTER VIDEOS! DONALD TRUMP HIMSELF HAS RETWEETED THESE VIDEOS AND HAS AROUND 44 MILLION FOLLOWERS! GOD BLESS YOU TRUMP! GOD BLESS AMERICA!”

Within the US, fascist elements were similarly pleased. David Duke, former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, wrote on Twitter, “Thank God for Trump! That’s why we love him!”

Trump’s solidarization with fascists in Britain, like his praise for the Nazi demonstrators in Virginia, is not an aberration. That the president is openly solidarizing with such forces is an expression of the putrefaction of American democracy, under the impact of unprecedented social inequality and the drive to world war.

The current tweeting controversy comes only one day after the North Korean regime’s latest test of a long-range missile, amid worries over Trump’s continuous sabre-rattling that could lead to war, with massive casualties on the Korean peninsula and beyond.

Trump, undoubtedly working in concert or general agreement with his former chief adviser Stephen Bannon of Breitbart News, continues to lay the groundwork for a fascist movement in the US. The scapegoating of immigrants and Muslims is being stepped up,

blaming ethnic or religious minorities for poverty and unemployment, and whipping up fear in the name of the “war on terror.”

Trump’s critics within the Democratic and Republican parties—who are themselves engaged in a ferocious neo-McCarthyite campaign alleging that Russia is “sowing divisions” within the US—are motivated primarily by concerns about the consequences for US imperialist interests abroad and domestic stability at home.

Senator Jeff Flake, Republican of Arizona, whom the mainstream press was calling a profile in courage recently in connection with his book critical of Trump and his decision not to run for reelection, could not seem to summon up much anger in this case. The Senator called Mr. Trump’s retweets “highly inappropriate,” adding, “I hope he takes them down and doesn’t do it again.”

The British political establishment felt obliged to issue its own disclaimers. A few Labour parliamentarians struck an angry pose. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said Trump’s actions were “abhorrent, dangerous and a threat to our country.” Prime Minister Theresa May’s reaction was notably bland, with May declaring, “It is wrong for the president to have done this.” Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, added his meek plea for Trump to make a statement “to make clear his opposition to racism and hatred in all forms.”

Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper spoke more directly to the interests of American imperialism, summing up the reaction in these circles as he has in the past. Clapper, who served under both Bush and Obama, said he worried that Trump’s actions could encourage anti-Muslim violence, “and it causes our friends and allies around the world to wonder about the judgment of the president of the United States.”