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Trump on the future of proposed Muslim ban, registry: 'You know my plans'

By **Abby Phillip** and **Abigail Hauslohner** December 22, 2016

President-elect Donald Trump on Wednesday appeared to stand by his plans to establish a registry for Muslims and temporarily ban Muslim immigrants from the United States.

Speaking outside his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, Trump did not walk back the proposals after he was asked by a reporter whether he was rethinking or reevaluating them in the wake of a fresh terrorist attack in Berlin.

"You know my plans all along," Trump said.

He went on to add that the attack on a Berlin Christmas market, which was claimed by the Islamic State, had vindicated him. German authorities said a 24-year-old Tunisian migrant, who they said has ties to Islamist extremists, was responsible for the attack, which killed 12 people and injured dozens. The suspect was later killed in a shootout with Italian police in Milan.

"I've been proven to be right. One-hundred-percent correct," Trump said. "What's happening is disgraceful."

Trump has long called for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the United States and has expressed openness to a registry of Muslims already in the country.

A year ago, in a statement, Trump said he wanted a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on.”

The proposal was sharply criticized by Republicans and Democrats alike. And later, Trump and his senior aides and surrogates sought to soften the proposal, suggesting that Trump would support a ban on immigration only from countries that had been "compromised by terrorism."

In interviews, Trump has characterized his position as an expansion, not a contraction of his proposal.

But given an opportunity on Wednesday to clarify his remarks, Trump suggested that his plans stood as he had articulated them early in his campaign. The statement proposing a “complete” shutdown of Muslim immigration remains on Trump's website. And Trump has not clarified how exactly he would address the issue as president.

On Thursday, Kellyanne Conway, a senior Trump aide, said that he would not seek an immigration ban based on religion. Asked repeatedly on CNN whether Trump supports a ban on Muslims, Conway said, "That in and of itself? No."

"You're going back to over a year ago and what he said about the ban versus what he said later about it when he made it much more specific and talked about countries where we know they have a higher propensity of training and exporting and in some cases harboring terrorists," Conway said.

The issue is the source of anxiety for Muslims and advocates across the United States.

“I think that at this point, we don’t quite know what he means when he says Muslim ban,” said Faiza Patel, who co-directs the liberty and national security program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University’s law school. “A lot of people have interpreted that as he intends to revive the NSEERS system, which was made inoperational a few years ago,” she added, referring to the registry system developed by current Trump adviser Kris Kobach, which civil rights groups and security experts said unfairly targeted Muslims and provided few security benefits.

Jaime “Mujahid” Fletcher, who founded IslamInSpanish, a center for Muslim Latinos in Houston, said the issue of a registry came up last week when he and other area Muslim leaders met with FBI agents in Houston.

“We met with the head of the FBI in their office,” Fletcher said. “It was all about this new administration coming in: What can we expect from them? Is this going to be a change in the way they approach our community?” He said the meeting was reassuring.

Muslim leaders said they felt that a registry would take America backward and the FBI seemed to agree. “They didn’t foresee us going back to the past. They were reassuring. This is the way they see it,” Fletcher said. It was good to hear, he said, but area Muslims are still concerned. “Obviously the community feels there are orders and commands from higher up, and if those are sent down to a local level, will they act? And how much of what they think now could change in the future?”

In response to other questions from reporters outside Mar-a-Lago, Trump said that he had last spoken to President Obama two days ago.

He was also asked about his characterization of the Berlin attack as an attack on Christians.

“ISIS and other Islamist terrorists continually slaughter Christians in their communities and places of worship as part of their global jihad,” Trump had said in a statement issued after the attack on Monday.

On Wednesday, Trump appeared unfamiliar with the statement issued in his name.

“Who said that?” Trump countered, challenging the reporter. “It’s an attack on humanity. That’s what it is. An attack on humanity, and it’s got to be stopped.”

This post has been updated.

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