Travel ban to keep terrorists out?

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Last month, the Trump administration issued a ban on visitors from several countries. The ban was controversial and ran into judicial resistance. It is being redrafted and is expected to be reissued shortly. According to the headlines on Huffington Post: *"Miller admits: New Ban Will Be 'Fundamentally' the Same."*

The original ban targeted seven countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan and Somalia. The purpose of the ban as stated in the first sentence of the original order is to *"protect the American people from terrorist ATTACKS (emphasis added) by foreign nationals admitted to the United States."* Later, it states *"deteriorating conditions in certain countries due to war, strife, disaster, and civil unrest increase the likelihood that terrorists will use any means possible to enter our country."*

Per an article on the Cato Institute website, 17 people from the seven banned countries were convicted of carrying out or attempting to carry out a terrorist attack on U.S. soil from 1975 through 2015. But note: They killed zero people! And there were zero people from either Libya or Syria even attempting to carry out terrorist attacks.

Even more to the point is the fact that (according to the Cato Institute) no person accepted into the United States as a refugee has been implicated in a major fatal terrorist attack since 1980. In the 1970s, three people were killed in attacks by refugees — all by CUBAN refugees. In total, only 20 people out of 3.25 million refugees welcomed into the United States in the last 40 years have been convicted of attempting or committing terrorism.

So where is the foreign terrorist threat coming from? According to the Cato Institute, the three deadliest countries were Egypt, which gave us 11 terrorists responsible for killing 162 people; the United Arab Emirates, which gave us two terrorists who killed 314 people; and of course there is our good friend Saudi Arabia, which gave us 19 terrorists who killed 2,369 people.

So why aren't any of the countries who actually sent us terrorists that took American lives on this list?

Relative to the Saudis, the obvious answer is oil. We would rather ignore a proven threat to American lives from a country that fosters Wahhabism (which many say is a radical and dangerous form of Sunnism) than risk offending our drug oil dealer.

However, per Richard W. Painter and Norman L. Eisen writing in the New York Times on the Jan. 29, the Trump organization has financial interests in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United

Arab Emirates. One thing that the countries on the banned list have in common is that they are places where the Trump organization does little or no business. Could this affect whether a country is or is not on the banned list? Of course there is no proof of this, but since Trump refuses to put his assets in a blind trust (sell all his properties and corporate interests, and turn the money over to an independent investment manager), the suspicion is easily raised.

The whole banning plan has been accused of being nothing more than bigotry and prejudice against Muslims, but the rationales given for the ban do sound good, don't they?

The problem is that the selected seven countries do not adequately measure up to either of the stated criteria. As pointed out above, the deadliest attacks came from countries not on the list. As to deteriorating conditions, sure, Syria has deteriorated, but shouldn't that be an incentive to stretch out a welcome hand to refugees from the chaos? And what about Turkey? There has been increasing unrest and violence there, but they are not on the list. Could the answer to that be *"Trump Towers Istanbul?"*

Trump promised to be tough and to protect America from terror. By putting out this list, he can say he is fulfilling that promise while not doing anything hard (like taking on Saudi Arabia) and looking out for his and his family's financial interests. If we don't get any bad actors from any of the potentially more dangerous countries doing anything dreadful to us, he will be able to say that he did exactly that, but this is a cynical gamble.

The way to protect ourselves against foreign terrorists is to work to stabilize Middle East governments and push for their compliance with the principles of basic human rights. Yes, we need to be vigilant; yes, we need to work to identify, infiltrate and break up terrorist cells. But the current approach appears to be counterproductive: Demonizing Muslims only further empowers terrorist recruiters.

Meanwhile, we need to step up to the plate as we have done in the past (125,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1975) and as other countries have done (Canada, 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2016, and Germany, 300,000), and open our wallets and hearts. According to the Boston Globe, in 2016, the U.S. admitted 15,479 Syrian refugees. (Seventy-three percent of this number were women and children under the age of 14.) It is estimated that there are about 11 million Syrian refugees. Personally, I would like them to go home (and I think that would be their preference, too), but we can't hide from the fact: They need help. Yes, there is a need for thorough vetting, but please tell me what specifically is wrong with the current process. Look at the stats above.

As Daniel Patrick Moynihan said, *"Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts."* In this age of *"false news"* and *"alternative facts,"* we need to be diligent: Look at the data. Is it accurate? Does it show a real problem? Will the proposed fix address the problem? And most of all, look for the real motives behind a proposal: Is there really a problem, and will the proposed solution fix it? Even if it looks like it will fix the problem, what harm will the solution do? Would the harm be a reasonable price to pay for the fix?

Given the above analysis, I think that the *"terrorist ban"* is simply political grandstanding and bigotry. By going down this path, we risk ending up being nothing more than a paranoid and prejudicial nation, hardly worth the moniker *"land of the free, home of the brave."*