

Donald Trump's unprecedented immigration measures fit his contradictory approach to politics

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President Donald Trump's executive order banning the nationals of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States on the grounds of combating terrorism is not based on facts. It is grounded in mainly fear-mongering and reliance on "alternative facts", which also helped him win sufficient electoral college votes to assume the presidency of the United States.

Trump has declared Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan and Somalia to be sources of terror against the United States. He has banned their citizens, including those with dual nationalities, from travelling to the United States for at least the next three months – that is, until such time that he can put vigorous vetting procedures in place.

President Trump not too pleased by a federal judge's ruling temporarily blocking his immigration ban.

However, the facts are contrary to the president's claim in relation to these states. According to the Cato Institute, a conservative think tank based in Washington DC from 1975 to 2015, no American citizen has been killed by terrorist actions caused by people from these countries. The culprits have mostly been home grown, with some coming from elsewhere in the broader Middle East. This raises the question as to why these countries have been targeted, but not, as several commentators have pointed out, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Afghanistan or Pakistan, from where some of the terrorist attacks on American citizens have originated.

The answer seems to lie in Trump's political, strategic and commercial calculations.

First, Trump had made anti-terrorism a key issue of his presidential campaign. He now wants to show to his supporters that he is a man of his word. He is acutely conscious of his credibility gap as one who has been untruthful in the past and who has not won the popular vote.

Second, the targeted countries are not important to Trump personally. He has no investment in those states – no Trump Tower and no Trump golf course. These states are also generally unimportant to the US as sources of investment. Amongst them, the US has tried to be the main beneficiary of Iraq's oil wealth, but without much success, given that the cost of its military involvement has outstripped any benefits that it could have reaped.

Iran is oil rich, but has had adversarial relations with the United States, and Trump has vowed to undo its July 2015 nuclear deal with the world powers, on which former President Barack Obama signed off as one of his major achievements.

Yet, the same cannot be said about the countries that are not subjected to Trump's ban. Some of them are either economically and/or strategically important to the United States, and Trump also has a personal stake in them. America has a substantial military presence in others, such as Afghanistan, and Trump does not wish to see American soldiers paying a high price for his executive decision. With regard to nuclear-armed Pakistan, where Muslim extremist groups have been active for a long time, Trump may have been cautioned against any major action, given Pakistan's fragile domestic situation, and its close relationship with China – a country that Trump has lambasted as a real threat.

If the the contradictory Donald Trump continues on his present path of political behaviour, he may unleash the very forces that could bring about his demise. Photo: AP

Third, Trump's unprecedented immigration measures fit his overall contradictory approach to life and politics. If one looks at his career as a business entrepreneur and showman, he has never been consistent or principled. As revealed throughout his presidential campaign, he was prepared to engage in wedge, divisive and confrontational politics and false accusations to denigrate, discredit and outmanoeuvre both his Democrat and Republican opponents.

He refused to present the American public with a clear and detailed policy agenda. He ignored the conventions that had protected the integrity of American democratic ideals and values. He used his gift of the gab to speak in a language that could appeal to those segments of the electorate that had been affected by the consequences of the modern age of technological revolution and the forces of globalisation, and who were disenchanted with the Washington political elite for their declining fortunes.

Trump now sees himself as the leader of a new political and social movement not only in the United States, but also in the world, given the stimulus that his unconventional political win has generated for right-wing groups in other democracies. Yet, if he continues on his present path of political behaviour, he may also unleash the very forces that could bring his downfall.

Although American democracy has weakened at its core, there are still some important checks and balances in place in its system to prevent Trump and his ultra-conservative ministerial and staff appointees from absolutely undermining the traditional image of the United States as a force for freedom, liberty, justice and diversity.

As the situation stands, Trump's extremism mirrors that of his Muslim counterparts, against which he has declared war. However, the danger is that his approach can only play into the hands of those counterparts, helping them to widen their circles of violence and recruitment. His stance

can also turn away those groups that have historically pinned their hopes on the US as a source of support for bringing about pro-democratic transformation of their societies. Trump has said that he does not want to impose his values on other countries, but this is what he is precisely doing, with potentially serious damage to America and, for that matter, the rest of the world.