

# THE DAILY GAZETTE

## Trump's Refugee and Visa Ban is Morally Bankrupt

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In a move diametrically opposed to the values the U.S. strives to promote, today President Trump is expected to sign the “Executive Order on Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Attacks by Foreign Nationals.” A draft of the executive order has been leaked, and it will halt refugee resettlement in addition to implementing a temporary ban on visas for individuals from seven Muslim-majority countries. Not only does the executive order seem to discriminate on the basis of religion, it represents a massive blow to refugees fleeing persecution, as my own grandparents did some 80 years ago. Unless the U.S. is to repeat past mistakes with deadly consequences, we must speak out against this executive order and our elected representatives must take action.

With respect to visas, in 30 days the U.S. will impose a 30-day pause on visas issued to individuals from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. During this period, officials will investigate whether individuals from those countries are being properly screened. While it is not exactly clear what sort of vetting will meet those standards, if the screening process is not judged to be sufficient after this initial investigatory period, an indefinite ban on visas issued to individuals from those countries will be implemented. However, according to the Cato Institute, not a single American has been killed in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil conducted by individuals from these seven countries since 1975. Furthermore, although this measure does not target all Muslim countries, the wholesale halt of visas for individuals from seven Muslim-majority countries is a dangerous step in the direction of President Trump's blatantly discriminatory “Muslim ban” campaign promise.

The other major component of the executive order is a 120-day ban on refugee resettlement. During this period, the Secretary of State will review refugee admittance procedures in an attempt to ensure no individuals will be admitted that pose threats to national security. After that period, refugees will continue to be banned from countries that are judged to lack adequate safeguards. Whatever the outcome of these reviews, the total annual refugee admittance will be slashed from 120,000 refugees to 50,000, leaving U.S. support to refugees far below that of similar countries.

However, the executive order provides for exceptions for religious minorities, most likely intending to cover Middle Eastern Christians. These applicants are certainly worthy recipients of refugee status. Still, Muslims deserve assistance, too. The vast majority of victims of violence in the Middle East have been Muslims and, far from supporting terrorists, they are often the ones

most threatened by them. Since religious minorities have been deemed safe enough to continue entering the U.S., the implication that Muslims are severely threatening security while Christians are not is discriminatory and in violation of American standards of religious freedom.

Further, the provisions on refugees hinge on a faulty assumption that the refugee resettlement program poses a security threat. Refugees are the most heavily screened entrants to the U.S. and there are almost no cases of refugees conducting terrorist attacks. The resettlement process takes 18 to 24 months, including extensive background checks and in-person interviews. The U.N. uses a needs-based process to allocate applicants to one of 28 host countries, and refugees do not choose which country they go to. Were someone planning to attack the U.S., it is not likely that they would choose to use the path that would make them wait two years, subject them to extensive investigation, and give them a marginal chance of even being placed in the U.S.

This unfounded fear of refugees is hardly new. Prior to World War II, many Americans believed German Jews were communists or German spies, a fear shared by President Roosevelt. In 1939, a poll asked Americans whether they would support admitting 10,000 German Jewish children. 61% of respondents opposed the idea.

My grandparents were among these German Jewish refugees. The reluctance of the U.S. and others to accept Jews made it difficult to flee, and both my grandparents were exceptionally fortunate to find ways out. My grandfather required a friend's aunt in San Francisco to put up the equivalent of \$90,000 in today's money to demonstrate that he would not be a financial burden on the U.S. My grandmother's family used an archaic 19th-century law allowing the entrance of German dentists to Britain.

Their family members that remained in Germany were all killed. These cases were hardly unique. The U.S. turned away over 900 Jewish refugees on the S.S. St. Louis, most of whom were later killed by the Nazis. Anne Frank's family were denied visas to the U.S., and as most of us know, she later died in a concentration camp.

It is not as if the period before the Holocaust had a moral clarity today does not. According to the U.N., there are more refugees in the world today than there have ever been, and the need to assist them is just as clear. Discriminating against groups based on their religion is just as wrong as it has ever been. Average citizens like ourselves must take immediate action, making clear that the U.S. is better than this and pushing our representatives to say the same.

These lawmakers, including Senators Bob Casey and our Representative Bob Brady, must forcefully speak out against these measures. Governor Tom Wolf should state that Pennsylvania remains committed to religious freedom and open to refugees. For his part, Senator Pat Toomey should make amends for his past calls to halt refugee resettlement, recognizing the unfounded security concerns on which these calls were based. These elected officials should use their platform to make it clear that President Trump's executive order must quickly be reconsidered.

If these officials do not speak out, their silence will have a message of its own. It will say that they support misplaced fears and bigotry over assisting some of the world's most vulnerable people. It will say that early steps towards a "Muslim ban" do not concern them. It will say that they have no problem with history repeating itself and that if they were living in the 1930s, they

would think people like my grandparents were just too great a security threat. They would have thought that if my grandparents and their families couldn't get out of Nazi Germany, it wouldn't be America's problem.