



## **Commentary: Facts, not fear, should direct U.S. refugee policy**

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Despite real fears and deep divisions among us, I believe fairly reviewing our history, and faithfully respecting facts can help convince our country to move on from constitutional court-imposed stays on banning Muslim refugees and immigrants to permanently lifting the bans, rejecting new bans, and once again welcoming well-vetted refugees.

Reviewing American history, we know as a people that we often celebrate being a nation of immigrants, albeit too often ignoring the horrific treatment of native peoples who first inhabited this land. At the same time we have a long history of public majorities fearing foreigners and opposing the admission of refugees.

In the mid-18th century, Benjamin Franklin feared and hated the wave of what he characterized as “stupid, swarthy Germans” immigrating to Pennsylvania. Irish, Italian, Greek and Chinese immigrants to America all faced open fear, hatred and discrimination in various forms. During World War II, popular fear fueled public support for internment of Japanese Americans.

While U.S. government policy toward refugees has varied over time and depended on the refugees’ country of origin, majorities of Americans have opposed just about every wave of immigration, including refugees from Germany in the 1930s, Hungarians in 1958, Vietnamese after the war, and refugees from Central America, Mexico, Haiti and Cuba.

Today, polls show that a majority of Americans oppose admitting Syrian refugees. This case is similar to public opposition to admitting Vietnamese refugees. Just as the American war in Vietnam was responsible for creating a context that generated a huge flow of Vietnamese refugees, the disastrous U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq fueled the growth of al-Qaida and ISIS, and contributed to continuing conflicts that have generated the flood of refugees from Iraq and Syria.

The difference is that whereas Presidents Carter, Reagan and Ford acted fairly and responsibly to support admitting Vietnamese refugees, President Trump and key White House advisers loudly fuel public fears of Muslims and advocate a blanket exclusion of Syrians, as well as severe restrictions on Muslim refugees and immigrants from six other countries. Significantly, Trump

says nothing about Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, three countries in which he has business holdings and from which terrorists actually have come to attack us.

An important lesson we need to learn from our history is that fear of foreigners, whether immigrants or refugees, is often fueled by falsehoods espoused by demagogues and then used by opportunistic politicians to gain power. Especially when so many news sources and social media tempt us to find “facts” that fit our own opinions, it’s essential, whatever our political views, that we all develop ways to do fact-checking, especially on controversial issues. See “The 10 Best Fact Checking Sites” at [tinyurl.com/10FactCheckSites](https://tinyurl.com/10FactCheckSites). Specifically related to questions about Islam, I recommend Islam Fact Check at [www.islamfactcheck.org/](http://www.islamfactcheck.org/). Here’s a sample of reliable sources about immigrants and refugees, and their relationship to terrorism.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack, of more than 800,000 refugees the U.S. has accepted and settled, three resettled refugees have been arrested for planning some form of terror attack. (Migration Policy Institute)

No refugees from the countries, including Syria, named in President Trump’s Executive Orders have killed anyone in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. (Cato Institute)

In contrast with claims about little or no vetting during the Obama Administration, the process of background checks by the State Department, intelligence agencies, Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI of immigrants and refugees from countries covered by the bans is already quite rigorous, multifaceted and lengthy, often taking 18 months to two years. (Migration Policy Institute)

Terrorism is real, but chances of an American being killed in a terrorist attack by a foreigner in the U.S. stands at about 1 in 3.6 million. (Cato Institute)

Taken together with the scale of the humanitarian crises in the seven affected countries and the examples of Canada and our European allies that already are accepting large numbers of refugees from these countries, these facts should convince us that there is no moral or national security justification for President Trump’s policy of exclusion. The concern, raised by senior Republicans and several military leaders that the clear anti-Muslim motivation of Trump’s policy may actually raise rather than reduce the threat of terrorist attacks adds another compelling reason for people to demand that the bans be permanently lifted.

In a larger frame, what is at stake is the choice between the realistic policies of Presidents Bush and Obama that made a fair, fact-based distinction between Islam as a great, respected religion and a very small minority who use religion to justify their extremist ideology versus the extreme views of White House advisers Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller, and Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn (forced to resign over lying about his contacts with Russia). All three men have espoused white nationalist and anti-Jewish views. All three falsely and dangerously claim that Islam is a political ideology not a religion, and that the “Judeo-Christian West” is at war with Islam. All three support creating a clearly unconstitutional national registry for Muslim Americans.

If President Trump pursues this path, as his promotion of the bans implied, he will fuel fear and hatred of the United States and very likely generate security threats to our country that all Americans will regret.

