

GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE

www.greatfallstribune.com

Trump's immigration order will make Americans less safe

Trudy Rubin

February 3, 2017

President Trump says his sweeping executive order on immigration was meant to make America safer.

Yet this ill-conceived plan, with its slap-dash implementation and failure to consult Congress or relevant cabinet secretaries, will make Americans less safe.

One look at the details of the order reveals how counterproductive it is — and how incoherent. That's even before you consider the moral issues, or the way it has tarnished America's image around the world.

The president banned travel from seven Muslim-majority countries — Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, and Libya — for 90 days. And he suspended all refugee admissions for 120 days, with Syrian refugees suspended indefinitely.

But no person accepted to the United States as a refugee, Syrian or otherwise, has been implicated in a major fatal terrorist attack since the Refugee Act of 1980, according to a Cato Institute study.

As for those seven countries, the list makes no sense. None of the 9/11 terrorists came from those countries. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which produced most of the 9/11 killers, were exempt. Clearly, Trump didn't want to tangle with important Gulf allies (or with Pakistan, which produces terrorists galore and harbored Osama bin Laden).

This points out the absurdity of the whole exercise. If Trump wanted to be 100 percent sure that no jihadi would ever enter our shores in the coming months he would have to ban entrants from all over the world.

So what was the real intent? Perhaps Rudy Giuliani has the answer. The former mayor of New York told CNN that Trump wanted to implement an outright "Muslim ban" as he had promised his base, and formed a commission to find a way to do it legally. The group came up with the idea of a ban "on places where there is substantial evidence that people are sending terrorists into our country."

Nothing better illustrates the stupidity of this political move than the inclusion of Iraq on the list.

No terrorist acts have been committed on U.S. soil by any of the tens of thousands of Iraqi immigrants over the past decade.

However, Iraq is supposedly a U.S. ally in fighting against ISIS. At this moment, the United States has at least 5,000 troops and advisers fighting alongside Iraqi troops in the battle of Mosul, and the Iraqis have taken heavy casualties.

“This order is like spitting in the face of the Iraqis,” Mowaffak al-Rubaie, a former Iraqi national security adviser, told CNN. “We thought we were strategic allies. This is going to increase anti-American sentiment in Iraq and in the region in general. It will make it difficult to defend American troops staying in this country.”

On Monday, the Iraqi parliament voted for a reciprocal visa ban on Americans, which could affect U.S. security contractors. Iraqi President Haidar al-Abadi, who has cooperated closely with Washington, may not wish to sign the ban, but will be under heavy pressure from pro-Iranian militias and politicians in Baghdad.

This gratuitous American insult to Iraq will also strengthen the hand of Iran in the region. Tehran has huge influence in Baghdad; the ayatollahs hope to expel Americans from Iraq — and the whole Mideast — after the fall of Mosul, and to cement their control over the Baghdad government. Trump views Iran as equivalent to ISIS, but he has just given the ayatollahs a gift.

Trump’s order also gives a big boost to ISIS. Despite his denials, the president has clearly signaled that America wants to exclude Muslims; he trumpets that the ban won’t apply to Christians and other minorities.

“This executive order may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security,” Republican Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham warned on Sunday.

So far, 19 Republican legislators have opposed the ban, and 31 others expressed reservations.

One of the most shameful aspects of the ban, McCain rightly notes, is that it also blocks Iraqi interpreters who are under death threat because they risked their lives to help our military and diplomats.

There are 50,000 such Iraqis, including family members, who are still waiting for U.S. visas. Now their fate is even more up in the air.

Of course, the president claims his executive order was meant to provide “extreme vetting” for refugees and visa applicants from suspect countries. But this claim also fails to hold water.

Extreme vetting procedures have been in place for the past five years.

In 2011, two Iraqi refugees were arrested in Kentucky because of terrorist activities they had conducted in Iraq, not in this country. (These are the only such cases of Iraqis among hundreds of thousands of immigrants who have come here.) After this case, intense vetting measures were put in place that can take two-to-five years for applicants, even interpreters who worked with the U.S. military.

So it is false to claim that Iraqis, and other refugees are not vetted extremely. What wasn't vetted was the president's executive order, which he never discussed in advance with his new secretaries of defense or homeland security, or with knowledgeable GOP legislators.

No wonder the whole process has turned into such a dangerous mess.