

THE MERCURY

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Ban does more harm than good

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Are you safer this week knowing that no refugees from Sudan or Somalia or Iraq will legally enter the United States for at least 90 days?

Probably not. No Americans have been killed by refugees from those countries in a domestic attack. That's also true of refugees from Syria, Libya, Iran and Yemen, the other four nations cited in President Donald Trump's immigration "suspension" order Friday.

The reality is that most domestic terror attacks have involved U.S. citizens, or at least "homegrown" terrorists, not refugees.

Another reality is that rather than make Americans safer, the president's order probably makes us less safe. Perceptions matter, and despite the administration's denials, President Trump's order is perceived as a ban on Muslims. That's particularly because of his campaign rhetoric and because his order allows Christian refugees from the identified countries to come to the United States.

Islamic terrorists don't lack for motivation to hurt America or Americans, but this order not only could re-energize them but also could lure young Muslims looking for their place in the world to cast their lot with the Islamic State, which welcomes them, instead of the United States, which doesn't. What's more, the disappointment and hostility engendered by this order will almost certainly extend well beyond the immigration ban itself, which is temporary.

Except for a handful of congressional Republicans, members of the president's party have said little about the order. Sens. Pat Roberts and Jerry Moran did object mildly to the fact that the administration didn't consult Congress, but they didn't challenge the substance of the order.

The administration not only ignored Congress, it also didn't consult U.S. military officials, diplomats or the Department of Homeland Security. If surprise was the goal, the White House achieved it, stunning not just the American public but other nations, including our closest allies.

Apart from irritating allies and further alienating much of the Muslim world, President Trump did accomplish something else with his order. He kept a campaign promise. That has pleased millions of Americans who want to believe that the present vetting of refugees seeking to move to the United States is so ineffective as to let terrorists in by the score. It was a scare tactic and it worked. That the vetting, a process that can take up to two years, already is thorough and works well is another inconvenient fact.

According to Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration expert at the Cato Institute, a Libertarian think tank, in the last four decades, 20 out of the 3.25 million refugees who have come to the United

States have been convicted of committing or attempting to commit terrorism on U.S. soil. Just three Americans have been killed in attacks by refugees; they died at the hands of Cuban refugees in the 1970s.

No wonder Mr. Nowrasteh describes President Trump's order as "a response to a phantom menace."

Americans would be wise to wonder whether the president's order will do more harm than good, and increase, rather than reduce, the chances of another attack in this country.