

# THE DENVER POST

## **The first victims of Donald Trump's presidency**

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When Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, I did not join those who took to the streets in protest. I thought it important to respect the democratic process, no matter how dismaying its outcome may be, and wait until the Trump administration had given us something to protest about.

It didn't take long. Eight days after Trump took office, the first identifiable victims of his presidency were on all the major news outlets. Trump's executive order suspending resettlement of Syrian refugees, temporarily barring new refugees regardless of where they are from, and banning all immigration from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen caused immediate harm to people already on their way to the U.S. The order has also prevented many more people from leaving for the U.S.

In justifying his policy, Trump said that he would "never forget the lessons of 9/11." But that is exactly what he seems to have done. The 9/11 hijackers came from Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, all countries unaffected by the new rules. In contrast, a study by Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, concludes that in the 40 years up to the end of 2015, no one has been killed in the U.S. in terrorist attacks by foreigners from any of the seven countries singled out in Trump's executive order.

Iranians, many of whom are legal residents in the U.S., are especially aggrieved. According to Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council, the U.S. itself has produced more Islamic State fighters than Iran — not surprising, given that it is a Sunni organization, and regards Shia, who comprise at least 90 percent of Iran's people, as apostates who can justifiably be killed.

The ban on immigrants from the seven countries makes for dramatic television, because the people it has harmed are able to talk to the media about it. That is not the case with the cut in the total 2017 intake of all refugees from 110,000 to 50,000, and the suspension of the entire refugee resettlement program for four months. In a global refugee crisis, President Barack Obama argued, the U.S. should, in the spirit of Emma Lazarus' words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, do its fair share in providing a new home for the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Trump has turned his back on that vision.

The executive order will provide an early test of the extent to which U.S. courts can restrain the Trump presidency. Judges have temporarily blocked some aspects of the executive order — for

example, those detained on arrival in the U.S. under the order may not be deported, but it will be some time before the courts resolve all the questions the new prohibitions raise.

Among those questions, discrimination on the basis of religion will be prominent. The order says that when the refugee program resumes, the secretary of state shall, “to the extent permitted by law,” give priority to refugee claims on the basis of membership of a persecuted religious minority. Although the order itself does not mention any specific religion, Trump said in a television interview that he wanted to give priority to Christians. Given that the U.S. Constitution prohibits the government from establishing any religion, it remains to be seen whether this provision of the order will withstand judicial scrutiny.

Of equal concern is the threat posed to freedom of expression by a provision stipulating that the U.S. “cannot, and should not, admit those who do not support the Constitution.” In speaking about the order, Trump said, “We only want to admit those into our country who will support our country and deeply love our people.”

I am myself a green-card holder — that is, a legal permanent resident of the U.S. without citizenship. I have written about flaws in the U.S. Constitution, and, much as I admire many Americans, I could not go so far as to say that I “deeply love” Americans as a whole. Does that mean that I could be barred from the U.S.? Would that be consistent with belief in freedom of thought?

According to Nowrasteh, Trump’s executive order will have virtually no effect on improving U.S. security. Trump has repeatedly said that he will always put the interests of Americans first. But will he give infinitely more weight to Americans’ interests than he does to the interests of anyone else? Given the suffering that his executive order is causing, it is beginning to look as if he might just be that unethical — or, what in this case amounts to the same thing, that crazy.