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Trump and his aides keep justifying the entry ban by citing attacks it couldn't have prevented

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President Trump first pitched a ban on Muslims more than a year ago, proposing it in the wake of the terrorist attack in San Bernardino, Calif., in December 2015. He revived the idea after the Orlando club massacre last summer. And when Trump announced Friday that he was suspending travel from seven Muslim-majority countries, his order mentioned the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks three times.

No one involved in those attacks was born in the countries Trump's order included. Even as Trump's aides tried to defend the ban amid its chaotic rollout over the weekend, they continued pointing to some of those attacks, including some carried out by people born in the United States.

The list of countries the ban affects also did not include countries where people behind several other attacks in recent years — along with high-profile plots that were not carried out — were born.

Trump's ban, which also temporarily halted refugee resettlement and sent shock waves around the globe, followed through on a campaign pledge he said is necessary to keep the country safe.

In his order signed Friday, Trump noted that “numerous foreign-born individuals have been convicted or implicated in terrorism-related crimes since September 11, 2001.” Yet the list of countries included in the ban — Syria, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia and Libya — leaves out countries tied to extremist attackers or plots.

[Amid protests and confusion, Trump defends executive order: ‘This is not a Muslim ban’]

Somalia, birthplace of Abdul Razak Ali Artan, the college student who drove his car into a crowd and then stabbed and slashed people in a spree that injured 11 at Ohio State University in November, is included. (The Islamic State, an extremist group also known as ISIS or ISIL, claimed Artan was acting as its “soldier” in the attack, which happened just weeks after Trump's election. Trump visited with the victims.)

Pakistan — birthplace of Faisal Shahzad, the attempted Times Square bomber, and Najibullah Zazi, a man who plotted to bomb New York's subway system — is not included. Nor is Kuwait, birthplace of Mohammad Youssef Abdulazeez, the gunman who killed four Marines in Chattanooga, Tenn.

“The ban is less about national security and more about advancing a worldview based on religious and racial exclusion,” J.M. Berger, a fellow with the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism at The Hague and co-author of “ISIS: The State of Terror,” wrote in an email Sunday. “It’s not likely to make us safer, and it is far more likely to help our real enemies, ISIS and al-Qaeda. We don’t do ourselves any favors when we make their talking points into reality.”

In a joint statement Sunday, Sens. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) — two leading defense hawks — echoed Berger’s points, saying they fear Trump’s order “risks harmful results” and could help terrorists with recruitment.

“Ultimately, we fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism,” McCain and Graham said. They added: “This executive order sends a signal, intended or not, that America does not want Muslims coming into our country.”

[The Islamic State’s inroads in America]

Trump and his aides have used very specific examples in arguing for the ban. White House aides defending the action on Sunday morning talk shows sought to tie it to some of the most high-profile attacks in recent years, even though none involved people born in countries subject to the ban.

Kellyanne Conway, a senior adviser to Trump, went on “Fox News Sunday” and cited Sept. 11, the Boston Marathon bombing and the mass shooting attacks in San Bernardino and Orlando. Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, also pointed to San Bernardino and Boston in describing people who “had gone out to a country and then come back” while appearing on ABC’s “This Week.” In a briefing with reporters Sunday night, a senior administration official who asked not to be identified used some of the same examples.

None of the Sept. 11 hijackers were from countries on the ban list. Most were from Saudi Arabia, which is one of multiple Muslim-majority countries where Trump has business interests and declined to ban travel. (The other hijackers were from Egypt, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates.)

Nor did the home countries of the Boston Marathon bombers — Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, brothers born in Russia and Kyrgyzstan — turn up on the list. Dzhokhar, the younger brother, who was sentenced to death for the bombing, was a naturalized U.S. citizen. Their parents were not refugees as has been reported; they instead came to the United States on travel visas and applied for political asylum.

The two deadliest recent attacks in the United States that precipitated Trump’s public call for a ban both involved people born in the United States.

The Orlando gunman, Omar Mateen, was born in New York, the son of an immigrant from Afghanistan, a country not on the banned list. Syed Rizwan Farook, who carried out the attack in San Bernardino with his wife, Tashfeen Malik, was born in Illinois and, according to the FBI, had been radicalized and plotting attacks years before he met her. Malik came to the country on a fiance visa, and she was born in Pakistan and later moved to Saudi Arabia, two countries not covered by the ban.

[Senate Democrats vow legislation to block Trump's travel ban]

Since 2001, every deadly jihadist attack inside the United States was carried out by a U.S. citizen or legal resident, according to data collected by New America, a Washington-based nonprofit group.

New America tracked nearly 400 cases involving people charged with jihadist terrorism or a related crime. In nearly half of these cases, people involved were born in the United States, while nearly a third involved naturalized citizens or permanent residents.

“Far from being foreign infiltrators, the large majority of jihadist terrorists in the United States have been American citizens or legal residents,” the group notes in a report on its findings. It adds: “In addition about a quarter of the extremists are converts, further confirming that the challenge cannot be reduced to one of immigration.”

[Officials worry that U.S counterterrorism defenses will be weakened by Trump actions]

This tally focuses on acts believed to be jihadist terrorism and does not include cases that might meet the hazy definition of domestic terrorism, including the church massacre in Charleston, S.C., the Planned Parenthood shooting in Colorado Springs, or the 2014 rampage in Santa Barbara, Calif.

Trump's immigration order also significantly reduces the number of refugees who can come to the United States. Despite Trump's assertions that members of the Islamic State could hide among the refugees, refugees have not prominently been among those who carried out attacks in the United States.

Refugees from the seven countries included in Trump's ban weren't responsible for any attacks in the U.S. between 1975 and 2015, according to a report published by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

That report looked at 154 people it identified as foreign-born terrorists who carried out attacks during that span. Out of that number, Cato found that 20 were refugees, and the only three who successfully carried out fatal attacks were Cubans admitted before the Refugee Act of 1980.