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Questions on any real need for Trump's travel ban

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On Dec. 4, the United States Supreme Court allowed the third and most recent version of the Trump administration's travel ban to go into effect pending further appeals.

The policy imposes a varying degree of restrictions to visiting the U.S. on citizens of eight countries: Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen.

The Trump administration lauded the decision to allow the ban to be implemented in full for the time being after lower courts partially blocked the travel ban.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions called the decision "a substantial victory for the safety and security of the American people," and reiterated the administration's stance that the ban is both constitutional and necessary for national security.

"The Constitution gives the president the responsibility and power to protect this country from all threats foreign and domestic, and this order remains vital to accomplishing those goals," he said.

While not necessarily indicative of how the court might ultimately rule on the travel ban if it comes before them, the decision to allow the travel ban to proceed in full is a significant political victory for the White House.

But as the legal battle rages on, it is worth considering whether the policy is actually as essential for American national security as the Trump administration says it is, or if it is actually little more than security theater.

One indication is that the travel ban has shifted significantly over a year, with the nature of the restrictions and countries impacted shifting with every version.

The first version, titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," involved blocking travel for at least 90 days from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. But problems immediately surfaced, with the travel restrictions causing confusion over how to deal with dual citizens and green-card holders, among other issues.

The second version, which Trump called a "watered-down, politically correct version" of the first travel ban, made some changes and excluded Iraq.

The current version removed Sudan but added Chad, North Korea and Venezuela, with restrictions on Venezuela primarily aimed at government officials and their families. Travel

restrictions for all other countries range from prohibitions on actual immigration to prohibitions on any type of entry, including tourist and business visas.

As Alex Nowrasteh from the Cato Institute notes, there is little evidence people from the travel-ban countries are a particular threat to Americans. The average incarceration rate for those born in the countries is 0.32 percent, compared to 0.59 percent for all non-travel ban countries and 1.54 percent for American citizens.

Additionally, from 1975-2015, not a single American was killed on American soil in an act of terrorism by someone from the countries in the travel bans. In contrast, people from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt account for over 94 percent of all Americans deaths by foreign-born terrorists on American soil, yet none of those countries are subject to it.

The arbitrariness, the adjustments for chiefly political purposes and the lack of evidence it's actually needed raise questions about the legitimacy of the policy as a necessary tool to keep Americans safe.