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Trump's 'Muslim Ban' Will Only Lead to More Terrorist Attacks

PATRICK COCKBURN

JANUARY 30, 2017

Donald Trump's **travel ban** on refugees and visitors from seven Muslim countries entering the US makes a terrorist attack on Americans at home or abroad more rather than less likely. It does so because one of the main purposes of al-Qaeda and Isis in carrying out atrocities is to provoke an over-reaction directed against Muslim communities and states. Such communal punishments vastly increase sympathy for Salafi-jihadi movements among the 1.6 billion Muslims who make up a quarter of the world's population.

The Trump administration justifies its action by claiming that it is only following lessons learned from 9/11 and the destruction of the Twin Towers. But it has learned exactly the wrong lesson: the great success of Mohammed Atta and his eighteen hijackers was not on the day that they and 3,000 others died, but when President George W Bush responded by leading the US into wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that are still going on.

Al-Qaeda and its clones had been a small organisation with perhaps as few as a thousand militants in south east Afghanistan and north west Pakistan. But thanks to Bush's calamitous decisions after 9/11, it now has tens of thousands of fighters, billions of dollars in funds and cells in dozens of countries. Few wars have failed so demonstrably or so badly as "the war on terror". Isis and al-Qaeda activists are often supposed to be inspired simply by a demonic variant of Islam – and this is certainly how Trump has described their

motivation – but in practice it was the excesses of the counter-terrorism apparatus such as torture and rendition, Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib which acted as the recruiting sergeant for the Salafi-jihadi movements.

The Trump administration is now sending a message to al-Qaeda and Isis that Washington is easily provoked into mindless and counter-productive repression targeting Muslims in general. Those affected so far are limited in number and about the last people likely to be engaged in terrorist plots. But the political impact is already immense. Salafi-jihadi leaders may be monsters of cruelty and bigotry, but they are not stupid. They will see that if Trump, unprovoked by any terrorist outrage, will act with such self-defeating vigour, then a few bombs or shootings directed at American targets will lead to more scatter-gun persecution of Muslims.

Like leaders everywhere Isis commanders will wonder how unhinged Trump really is. The banning order may in part be a high profile way of assuring Trump voters that his pledges on the campaign trail will be fulfilled. But demagogues tend to become the creatures of their own rhetoric and certainly Trump's words and actions will be presented as a sectarian declaration of war by many Muslims around the world. Isis will also see that by pressing their attacks they will deepen divisions within American society.

Bush targeted Saddam Hussein and Iraq in response to 9/11, though it was self-evident that the Iraqi leader and his regime had no connection with it. It was notorious that 15 out of 19 of the hijackers were Saudis, Osama bin Laden was a Saudi and the money for the operation came from private Saudi donors, but Saudi Arabia was given a free pass regardless of strong evidence of its complicity.

Much the same bizarre mistargeting of Muslim countries least likely to be sending terrorists to the US is happening in 2017 as happened in 2001. Though 9/11 is cited as an explanation for Trump's executive order, none of the countries whose citizens were involved (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Lebanon) are facing any restrictions. The people who are being refused entry come from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Yemen and Somalia. Since the main targets of al-Qaeda and Isis are Shia Muslims primarily in Iraq but also in other parts of the world, Iran is the last place which is likely to be their base.

Since Isis's great victories in 2014 when it captured Mosul and conquered a vast area in Iraq and Syria, it has been beaten back by a myriad of enemies. Though it is fighting back hard, its eventual defeat has seemed inevitable, but with Trump fuelling the sectarian war between Muslims and non-Muslims which Isis and al-Qaeda always wanted to wage, their prospects look brighter today than they have for a long time past.