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Trump's ban on Muslims is a way to consolidate his power base

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On January 29, president Donald Trump signed an executive order that halted all refugee admissions and temporarily barred citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States. The "Muslim ban" has subsequently been overturned by a federal court order, but Mr Trump has appealed and vowed to reinstate it. It has sparked confusion and protests across America.

Writing in Aletihad, the Arabic-language sister publication of The National, Egyptian columnist Emile Ameen said Mr Trump had used the issue of Muslim presence in the US to his advantage during his electoral campaign.

"The then president-elect had skilfully, albeit negatively, played on the feelings of right-wing fundamentalists and radicals, going against the spirit and text of the US Constitution which enshrines freedom of belief and religion."

The writer saw in Mr Trump's apparent plans for a Muslim registry a catastrophic situation, more so for Americans than for Muslims. "It is a reenactment of Nazi Germany's imposition of compulsory registration for Jews just before the tragic Holocaust unfolded, and it is reminiscent of the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War," Amen wrote.

"Questions abound over the uncertain fate that awaits Muslims in America."

According to the writer, the ire of American Muslims goes beyond Mr Trump to the Americans who have voted for him in spite of his Islamophobia, racism and hate-filled speech.

"It is not only Donald Trump who is openly hostile to Muslims; roughly half the American voters feel this way. They have either accepted their new president's xenophobic message or have contributed in instigating xenophobic sentiments.

"During the primaries, a vast majority across the United States voiced their direct support for Mr Trump's proposal to ban Muslims from the country," Ameen said.

Such widespread support, he continued, is a telling indicator that the US had fallen into a trap of misunderstanding the nature of terrorism since the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, DC.

Ameen concluded that the current events are just a warning of unprecedented religious and sectarian strife in the US. "Even if Mr Trump fails to put into practice his intentions regarding American Muslims, the repercussions of his Islamophobic rhetoric are apparent in the rise in hate crimes," he said

Writing in the pan-Arab daily paper Al-Arab, Salam Al Saadi said the new US administration was adamant that the motives underlying the executive order were security-related – even though no terrorist attack had been perpetrated by nationals of the banned countries in the past four decades.

In fact, the writer argued, it is not unlikely that the Muslim ban would have the opposite effect, by heightening the conflict with a broad spectrum of Muslim individuals and groups to an unprecedented level and contributing to the recruitment of more young people to commit terrorist attacks.

Al Saadi gave another explanation for the controversial ban – the lack of experience of the new US administration.

"It comprises businessmen with zero experience in administrative work and its complexities," he wrote.

From this perspective, he considered that the executive order, the uproar it caused and its misapplication were the product of mere human error.

The writer added that Mr Trump's administration had deliberately escalated the situation with confrontational talk about "extremist Islamic terrorism".

"Mr Trump does not seek a security-based solution, nor does the United States – the biggest military and security country in the world – expect genius solutions from a businessman in the matter," the writer said.

Case in point: during the election campaign, Mr Trump called for a total ban on Muslims – all Muslims.

"Mr Trump had deliberately sought to be rash with all the ensuing repercussions, from minor errors up to total chaos," the writer said.

"Confrontational rhetoric, rashness and chaos are the three pillars underlying the strategy of Mr Trump's team to strengthen their authority. Mr Trump had to act quickly to give his voters what they wanted, knowing that these racist voters were capable of cementing his popularity even in light of the most powerful leaks and moral scandals."

Al Saadi concluded that Mr Trump's hostile speech and his speed of action were the main ingredients in strengthening his popularity, because he aspires to become a leader who stands above democracy and even above the law.