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# The Flawed Logic of Trump's Executive Order

## How Not to Fight Terrorism

*By Jacob N. Shapiro*

**O**ver the weekend, U.S. President Donald Trump issued an executive order freezing entry into the United States for citizens from seven countries for 120 days. The action led to protests at airports in New York, Washington, D.C., and other cities, where refugees—including legal permanent residents—were detained. Later that day, a federal judge came to the aid of many of those trapped by issuing a ruling that blocked some of Trump's actions.

Politicians on both sides of the political divide have criticized the order as haphazardly implemented and chaos-inducing. And, indeed, poor execution on immigration reforms does put the United States very much at risk, especially its soldiers and citizens abroad. Its execution aside, the logic of the president's action was also flawed. The idea that keeping refugees and Muslim visitors out of the United States will decrease terrorist attacks ignores how many such attacks—here and abroad, where U.S. citizens are also killed—are actually prevented.

Perhaps the best way to identify terrorists before they strike is with information from the would-be attackers' family, friends, neighbors, and presumed co-conspirators. A recent [RAND Corporation paper](#) reviewed 150 successful and foiled attacks in the United States from 1995 to 2012. It found that in almost 30 percent of the foiled attacks, the initial tip to law enforcement came from someone not

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involved in the plot. Similar data show up in [research](#) by Ohio State University Professor John Mueller. He reviews all 92 attempted attacks in the United States since 2001. Informants brought most plots to the attention of law enforcement early on, and many of those cases posed little realistic threat in the first place.

Given such dynamics, police departments in the United States and elsewhere understand that community relations are a key to stopping terror. As New York City Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence John Miller [pointed out](#) in in 2014, “the vigilance of all New Yorkers serves as a force multiplier in keeping the city safe” and established a number of initiatives with “the goal of continually improving trust with communities most affected by issues of terrorism.”

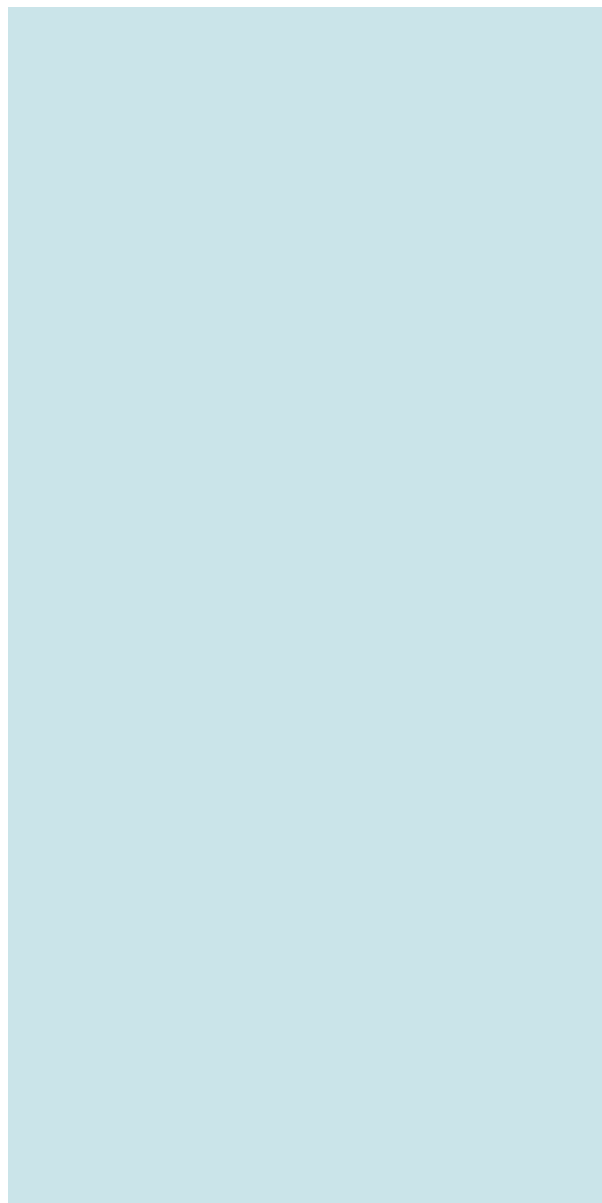
When the communities that surround terrorists view the United States and the West favorably, they are more motivated to help intelligence and law enforcement officials stop attacks. And when they view the United States in a negative light, the opposite will happen. Actions similar to the recent executive orders on immigration and refugees alienate these communities and make it less likely that their members will cooperate with police and law enforcement officials. And the damage to overseas intelligence and military operations may be even graver. It was not a positive message sent to interpreters, translators, and contractors supporting the U.S. military in combat zones when the first person detained under Trump’s order was a former translator entering the United States under the [Special Immigrant Visa \(SIV\) program](#), which rewards those who have risked life and limb working for our nation.

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**Further, even if Trump's order did somehow prevent attacks on American soil, it wouldn't necessarily make Americans safer. Decreasing attacks at home is not enough. Citizens are also vulnerable to attacks**

overseas (such as the three Americans killed in Nice last summer). According to research by the [National Center for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism](#), of the 80 Americans who died from terrorism between 2004 and 2013 excluding in Iraq and Afghanistan, only 36 were killed in attacks within the United States. The U.S. military is likewise stationed worldwide, including in the Middle East; these men and women are at heightened risk if they represent a country that is seen as having declared war on those they are ostensibly protecting. Further insecurity comes if their local supporters do not feel the United States will honor its commitments to them through the SIV program.

The nations that the United States currently works with on counterterrorism have choices. Those listed on the executive ban—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen—and other Muslim-majority countries with which the United States works—including Jordan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia—are surely outraged. They do not need to share intelligence with the United States; they do so voluntarily and sometimes despite political pressure to the contrary. Politicians in those countries could now find cooperating with the United States even less politically popular. In this, the case of Poland is instructive. Recently, it stopped allowing the CIA to use Polish facilities when it became public that those facilities had been part of the U.S. government's extraordinary rendition and torture programs. Private citizens around the globe will likewise be less likely to risk their own safety to pass information to U.S. agents.

The United States, then, has potentially lost a lot and gained little in return. Of the 92 attempted Islamist terrorist attacks in the United States since 2001, only two involved refugees in a key role, by my count. Individuals from countries on the recent list played important roles in only three others. The largest group of perpetrators were U.S. citizens, with the remainder coming from a range of countries, including most

notably Saudi Arabia, which provided 15 of the 19 hijackers for the 9/11 attack. It is bad counterterrorism policy to place a ban on refugees from Syria and on travelers from seven countries that, themselves, suffer from Islamist terrorism. It does little to protect the country; in fact, it puts American lives at risk. 🌐



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