

The Roots of the Refugee Situation and “Muslim Terrorist Problem”: The Geopolitical U.S. Foreign Policy Landscape

Rising above the Trees to See the Forest

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This post is a follow-up to my [previous article](#) on the refugee situation in the United States. For me, this is not about Trump. The fact that I even have to say this shows how anti-intellectual and devoid of rational dialogue our society has become, especially among the so-called left. Accusing someone of being a “Trump supporter” simply for being analytical is not a PC scare tactic I respond to.

It is because the majority of so-called progressives were *sleep walking* in an identity politics, feel good *la la* land during the foreign policy disasters of the Obama administration—which the mainstream media was completely silent on—that the current situation has come as such a rude awakening to so many.

But for those of us that have a political memory longer than nine weeks, the refugee situation can be interpreted within the context of a much broader geopolitical and foreign policy landscape that includes *several* previous administrations, including and most notably the Obama administration.

At the risk of feeding into the false and diversionary duality of good administration/bad administration, I wish to point out the following two things. First, in the wake of the arrest of two Iraqis in Kentucky on terrorism charges in May 2011, the FBI suggested that dozens of terrorists might have entered the US posing as refugees. This led the Obama administration to reexamine the records of 58,000 Iraqis that had been settled in the US and to impose more extensive background checks on Iraqi refugees, limiting intake for up to six months, according to the [Washington Post](#). I do not mention this simply to point out that previous administrations were already scrutinizing and limiting refugees from certain Muslim countries—that is just a side note and something that has already been noted by others.

The larger point I wish to make—and this is the second point—is that US officials and agencies are likely aware that US misadventures abroad, which includes arming and supporting terrorist groups, could come back to affect them at home (blowback). This is probably why the Obama administration restricted Iraqi refugees in 2011 and why the current administration has temporarily banned all refugees (for 120 days) and is calling for “extreme vetting” in the future.

If there is a “Muslim terrorist problem” it is reasonable to say that the US is largely contributing to, if not creating, it. Following a recent four-day fact finding mission to Syria,

U.S. congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard told the US media that the United States is arming and supporting terrorists in the country and urged for it to stop. Speaking to CNN, Rep. Gabbard said:

“We must stop directly and indirectly supporting terrorists—directly by providing weapons, training and logistical support to rebel groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and ISIS; and indirectly through Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and Turkey, who, in turn, support these terrorist groups.... From Iraq to Libya and now in Syria, the U.S. has waged wars of regime change, each resulting in unimaginable suffering, devastating loss of life, and the strengthening of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.”^[1]

All this from a state that claims to be fighting a ‘global war on terrorism.’ Interesting.

Connecting the Dots/Seeing the Bigger Picture

To understand what is happening today we should be cognizant and critical of the decades-long [imperial agenda](#) in the Middle East and how that has shaped, for better or worse, the present reality. In 2007 retired US general Wesley Clark [stated](#) that the US was planning to take out seven countries in five years in that region. Six of these seven countries (with the addition Yemen) are now the objects of Donald Trump’s executive order on Muslim entry to the US: Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Libya, Sudan, Iran and Yemen. ^[2] Most of these countries are ones in which the US (and its NATO and Middle Eastern allies and proxies) has unleashed its imperial agenda—through invasion, intervention, regime change, destabilization, proxy wars and/or funding and arming of terrorists and ‘rebels.’ If US officials are calling for stricter refugee controls on individuals from these Muslim counties—whether it’s under the Trump administration presently or as has happened with the Obama administration in the past—it may be largely because they know that those countries are crawling with terrorist mercenaries that the US has, and continues to, assist in creating. It is this issue that ought to be at the centre of the present protest movement.

Perhaps the FBI currently has “inside information,” as it did back in May 2011 during the Obama administration, about terrorists from certain countries—that may or may not have worked *for* the US in these countries—currently entering or trying to enter or planning to enter the US. If so, then perhaps the new administration is trying to undo some of the blowback created by previous administrations.

But “banning” Muslim refugees from countries that the US meddled in, destroyed, and/or fostered terrorism in, in the first place, is not a long-term solution. The current executive order does not ban Muslims. It suspends all refugees for 120 days, Syrian refugees indefinitely, and restricts US-bound travel from the aforementioned countries for 90 days. ^[3] It is similar to but more extensive than the Obama administration’s restriction of Iraqi refugees in 2011. Still, whether it is under Obama or Trump, refugee-vetting measures that do not address the *larger and far greater* problem of US foreign policy in the Middle East, miss the mark. What is needed is a drastic change of course in US Middle East policy as well as the cessation of the western fostering of terrorism, globally. While the Trump administration seems intent on changing course in the areas of international trade (with the recent withdraw from the TPP), and while Trump continues to make claims about improving US-Russia relations, his administration’s Middle East policy intentions are not clear or fully known at this time.

While it remains to be seen how the current administration's Mid East policy will play out, ^[4] limiting refugees from war-torn countries is not a comprehensive solution to the (US-facilitated) problem of terrorism. The US should be willing to address its role in creating this problem as well as move towards ending its policy of endless wars, imperial interventions and meddling in the region. I do not believe that any US administration is prepared to do this, though some may be more willing to take basic steps. To begin to solve the current crisis, the US must acknowledge and alter the deeply flawed foreign policy trajectory that helped to create it in the first place.

The Failure of the Contemporary "Left"

And the people have to be willing to both *recognize it* and call it out. While so-called progressives are up in arms over the current executive order, where was this "left" flank of the establishment during the eight years of the brutal escalation of the imperial war and devastation machine during the previous administration? They were supporting this agenda in the name of 'humanitarian intervention.' The sad reality is that the US-imperial project has been able to successfully exploit and/or co-opt liberal progressives' concerns for human rights in order to gain "left-wing" support for self-serving western interventions and wars aboard—in Libya, Syria; places where the *Arab Spring* went rogue—by presenting it as a "duty to intervene" in the name of so-called human rights.

This co-optation is possible because the contemporary "left" lacks a basis in anti-imperialist politics and a broader, historical critique of Empire that properly situates such interventions within the larger agenda and interests of militarized neoliberal/economic imperialism, ^[5] which was never more robust than under the previous administration.

Ironically, what passes for the Left these days (i.e., identity politics-based reactionaries), actively contributed to a problem they are now reacting to. As I have argued elsewhere, US-led 'humanitarian interventions' often involve western backing of and collusion with Islamic extremists and terrorists against *secular* Muslim regimes and leaders. Supporting these so-called humanitarian interventions ironically indirectly throws liberal social justice warriors—that back initiatives such as western intervention and 'regime change' in states like Syria—in bed with violent Muslim extremists and terrorists like ISIS, in that they both support the ouster of Bashar al-Assad, albeit for different reasons.

The modern "Left" is too caught up in clichés and feel good sound bites (i.e., "Assad must go") and also lacks the traditional-left analytical /ideological faculties to see the irony and contradictions of their actions. ^[6] The naïve notion that all power is bad everywhere lacks a critical awareness of proportionality; meaning in politics, size absolutely matters. Not all powers/governments exist on par, and are equally able to abuse their power on a global scale, effectively terrorizing the rest of the planet.

If one takes all of the above into consideration, and understands the larger regional and geopolitical contexts, then we begin to see that the current refugee restriction is not an indiscriminate ban generally targeting Muslims. It is a tragic, ironic and predictable outcome of the US' never ending war on terror—that later morphed into the R2P (right to protect) narrative—which seems to have ultimately and ironically created and/or inflated the phenomenon of global terrorism. For instance, in the not too distant past, Afghanistan and Somalia were two of the few—if not only—terrorist hotbeds that anyone may have had to be concerned about. But since the inception of the US-led global war on terror, and more so

since the “humanitarian” interventionist policies of the Obama administration, there seems today to be an ISIS terror cell in every corner of the world. This includes *secular* Muslim countries such as Iraq, Libya and Syria, where there was no substantial Islamist or terrorist presence prior to western interventions.

In closing, current and previous US refugee restrictions might reflect efforts to try and contain a situation that has gotten completely out of hand. But the bigger monster that should be contained is US foreign policy and imperial wars and meddling abroad, which analysis shows to be the true *root* of the problem. Thus, efforts to protest the current refugee ban and vilify its proponents would, ironically, be totally unnecessary if *as much effort* had gone into protesting US foreign policy under the previous two administrations.

And I say all of this as a Muslim immigrant in North America that is clearly *not* a proponent of banning Muslims.

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Notes

[1]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/syria-why-is-the-us-helping-al-qaeda-and-other-terrorist-groups-rep-tulsi-gabbard/5571358>

[2]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/we-re-going-to-take-out-7-countries-in-5-years-iraq-syria-lebanon-libya-somalia-sudan-iran/5166>

[3]

<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/28/trump-immigration-ban-syria-muslims-reaction-lawsuits>

[4] Trump’s renewed commitment to countries like Israel does not bode well. As Chandra Muzaffar states: “his endorsement of the expansion of illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank; his stated intention to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; and his opposition to the Iran six power nuclear deal, all indicate that Trump is strongly wedded to the Israeli agenda”.

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/trumps-entry-ban-against-muslims-linked-to-global-warfare-and-the-neo-con-agenda/5571905>

[5] In reality the neo-con and neo-liberal agenda are two face of the same coin and are symptomatically related (i.e., interventionist, sanctioning, war mongering, boosting the military industrial complex, lop-sided trade agreements, etc.)

[6] For instance, the “left” focuses on human rights abuses in countries/by governments that just so happen to be targeted by the US—such as Syria or Libya—while *ignoring* abuses perpetrated by countries that are allied with and/or benefiting from US policy, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia and their attacks on the people of Palestine and Yemen, respectively.

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