

## **Eight Reasons Why Trump's Start on the Middle East is Frightening**

**By Seyed Hossein Mousavian**

Donald Trump's Middle East policies began with two major decisions, one to ban entire Muslim populations and another to impose sanctions on Iran. Both threaten to undo the Iran nuclear deal. His [new sanctions](#) over a recent Iranian missile test targeting Iranian and non-Iranian individuals and entities, including some from Lebanon, the UAE, and China. The international impact of these sanctions is clearly meant to instill more fear into global firms from doing business with Iran.

Trump's executive order, erroneously titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," exposes not just the Islamophobia and incompetence of Trump's inner circle, but also their disregard for basic human rights and international norms. By deliberately targeting roughly [220 million](#) men, women and children based solely on a single aspect of their identity, the order evokes not just the darkest moments of human history, but also the dangerous lengths the Trump White House is willing to go to achieve its—potentially extremely [nefarious](#)—political agenda.

While enforcement of the order has temporarily been blocked after a federal judge in Seattle [ruled](#) there was "no support" for the argument that U.S. federal government has to "protect the U.S. from individuals from these countries," the Trump White House is seeking to an emergency stay of the ruling. Trump has personally [lambasted](#) the "so-called judge" who overruled his ban.

A hope had emerged for U.S.-Iran peace in recent years that Trump's actions are set to destroy. The United States and Iran and both regional heavyweights, and a confrontation between them would be severely destabilizing for the entire region. The extent to which Trump's order runs counter to international values and laws, the fight against terrorism and the cause of international peace and stability, can be encapsulated in eight points:

1. Trump seeks to completely undo Barack Obama's engagement policy towards Iran and revert to a policy of threats and coercion. He has [condemned](#) Obama for being "kind" to Iran, which he says Iran did not "appreciate," and as the new sanctions indicate, is bent on dangerous escalation. However, the reality is that this policy approach towards Iran has already been tried and been a proven failure. From the 1979 revolution until the start Obama's second term, the United States [pursued](#) roughly every tactic of pressure on Iran, with the aim of regime change. Not only have they failed, but Iran has emerged as the most stable and powerful regional country.

The only productive U.S. approach towards Iran was under Obama from 2013-2016. By choosing to engage Iran based on mutual respect, the United States and Iran managed during this period to resolve the nuclear crisis and establish a bilateral channel that secured the [speedy](#) release of U.S. sailors who had drifted into Iranian waters, exchange of some prisoners and [resolve](#) decades-old financial disputes.

2. The Muslim Ban order sharply raises U.S.-Iran tensions, with Trump starting off his presidency by targeting the Iranian people, who form the [biggest](#) share of the populations banned (roughly one-third). It has validated opponents of President Hassan Rouhani in Iran who argue America can never be trusted, and fostered resentment against the U.S. government across Iranian society.

For its part, the Iranian government has responded by stating it is “[considering](#)” taking reciprocal measures. Rouhani has also declared that the order exposes America’s duplicity in claiming it is only against the Iranian government, not people. “Because this person (Trump) is a special character, he has removed the mask of hypocrisy and he is showing what they have in their hearts,” Rouhani [stated](#).

The specter of a permanent ban on Iranians is also likely, with a State Department dissent memo [noting](#) how the ban can only be lifted “under conditions which will be difficult or impossible for countries to meet.”

3. The Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is directly challenged by the executive order, given it specifically [requires](#) the United States to “sustain this JCPOA and to prevent interference with the realization of the full benefit by Iran of the sanctions lifting.”

Last year’s changes in the U.S. visa waiver law already [undermined](#) the JCPOA by creating obstacles to trade with Iran. By outright [banning](#) many Iranian dual nationals, Trump’s executive order further sabotages JCPOA-ordained sanctions relief. It also prevents Iranian businessmen from selling JCPOA-allowed goods to the United States, [such as](#) pistachios and Persian carpets.

4. [No one](#) from the seven targeted countries—Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan and Somalia—has killed anyone in a terrorist attack on American soil. This is in contrast to countries like Saudi Arabia, which actively proselytize Wahhabi Salafism, the [main](#) source of international terrorism.

Trump himself [decried](#) during the campaign that the Saudis were the “biggest funders of terrorism” and [studies](#) have shown how Saudi Arabia, along with the UAE, Egypt and Lebanon have produced by far the highest numbers of individuals who have committed terrorist attacks in America. Surprisingly, after his election, Trump phoned Saudi King Salman and the two leaders reportedly [affirmed](#) the depth of their “strategic relationship.”

Furthermore Trump’s conflict of interests were again highlighted by this executive order, with the ban [excluding](#) countries where Trump has business ties.

5. By spontaneously banning visitors and immigrants from these countries—including individuals with work or student visas and initially even green cards—[tens of thousands](#) of lives have been [tragically](#) upended. Families have been torn apart from loved ones, with [countless](#) students and others now unable to visit their home countries.

6. Terrorist groups such as ISIS will [benefit](#) the most from this order, which alienates whole Muslim societies and collectively punishes them. Both U.S. and regional security in the Middle East will deteriorate as a result. Furthermore, three of the targeted countries—Iran, Iraq, and Syria—are leading the on-the-ground fight against ISIS. In the case of Iraq, its ability to combat the group in coordination with United States will be significantly [hindered](#).

7. Trump's executive order deeply erodes international good will towards the United States. That the United States would ban travelers and even refugees, from countries such as Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, where it has intervened militarily in recent years, signals an astounding level of callousness. World leaders such as Germany's Angela Merkel have even had to [explain](#) to Trump his obligations under the Geneva refugee convention after the ban.

8. By issuing a blanket ban on individuals for simply who they are and what they believe, a strong message is sent to the world that the Trump administration is against the religion of Islam—a pluralistic faith with a rich history dating back 1,400 years and with over 1.5 billion adherents.

President Trump approach will make the United States more unpopular in the Muslim world, promoting a culture of hate that has proven a threat to US foreign relations in parts of the world and international peace and security. Such a conflict would guarantee strategically self-defeating quagmires in the Muslim world for decades, as other global powers march well ahead of America.