

White House to issue executive order on “safe zones” in Syria, ban on Muslim immigrants and refugees

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US President Donald Trump declared in an extended interview with ABC News broadcast Wednesday that he will sign an executive order directing authorities to implement US-controlled “safe zones” in Syria. The order would also block the entry of refugees and immigrants from a number of majority-Muslim countries, including Syria.

During the presidential campaign, Trump called for a complete ban on Muslim immigration into the US. He played up fears over the admittance of a few thousand Syrian refugees displaced by the years-long civil war in that country fueled by the Obama administration.

In the interview with David Muir, during which the president adopted the tone of a mafia boss, Trump expounded on his planned immigration restrictions. “It’s going to be very hard to come in. Right now, it’s very easy to come in. It’s gonna be very, very hard.” Trump also declared that he plans to “absolutely do safe zones in Syria for the people.”

Coinciding with Trump’s interview, a draft of the draconian and unconstitutional executive order, billed as a measure for “protecting the nation from terrorist attacks by foreign nationals,” was leaked to the media.

The order would suspend immigration to the US from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Libya, Sudan and Somalia for 30 days and suspend the admittance of individuals under the US Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days. The admission of refugees from Syria into the US will be suspended indefinitely.

Several caveats would allow for the entry of refugees from Syria and the other countries on a case-by-case basis as well as allow the processing and admittance of religious minorities, i.e., non-Muslims.

Other restrictive measures spelled out in the

document include the full implementation of a biometric entry-exit tracking system and new restrictions on the granting of non-immigrant travelers’ visas.

In line with Trump’s remarks, the draft order outlines a process for the establishment of “safe zones,” justified by the indefinite suspension of the admission of immigrants and refugees from Syria into the US: “Pursuant to the cessation of refugee processing for Syrian nationals, the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Secretary of Defense, is directed within 90 days of the date of this order to produce a plan to provide safe areas in Syria and in the surrounding region in which Syrian nationals displaced from their homeland can await firm settlement, such as repatriation or potential third-country resettlement.”

Moscow, which has intervened in the Syrian civil war to prop up President Bashar al-Assad, responded to Trump’s announcement of his plan to implement “safe zones” by denying that it had any input on the decision and warned of potential consequences.

“Our American partners did not consult with Russia [regarding the ‘safe zones’]. It is their sovereign decision,” Dimitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, told reporters on Thursday. “It’s important to make sure that this does not further aggravate the situation with refugees. Evidently, all the possible consequences should be taken into account,” he warned.

Former President Barack Obama had resisted the imposition of safe zones in Syria, a policy fiercely advocated by Democratic advisers and war hawks such as former Secretary of State and Trump rival Hillary Clinton. The protection of such areas with a no-fly zone could spark a clash between US and Russian jet

fighters, leading to all-out war between the nuclear-armed powers.

However, DEBKAFfile, a website with ties to Israeli military intelligence, reported that an agreement has been worked out between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin to carve up Syria into three separate spheres of influence divided between the US, Russia and Turkey. The deal reportedly requires all Iranian military forces as well as associated forces belonging to Shiite militias and Hezbollah to leave the country.

The plan outlined by DEBKAFfile would involve the US taking military control over the area of the country east of the Euphrates River, as well as a portion of the south bordering the Golan Heights and northern Jordan. Approximately 7,500 US Special Forces currently based in Jordan would reportedly deploy to southeast Syria.

The rest of the country would be divided between Russia and Turkey, with Moscow controlling all territory west of the Euphrates except for a narrow stretch in northern Syria administered by Ankara.

While the alleged plan has not been confirmed by the Trump administration, it does line up with previous proposals made by Trump's national security adviser, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, to deploy large numbers of US troops to Syria under the pretense of defeating ISIS and other Islamist militia groups.

In a 2015 interview with *Der Spiegel*, Flynn, the former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, outlined his vision for an expanded US intervention in Syria and a Balkanization of the Middle East, carving the region into spheres of influence and military control.

"We can learn some lessons from the Balkans. Strategically, I envision a breakup of the Middle East crisis area into sectors in the way we did back then, with certain nations taking responsibility for these sectors," Flynn stated. "The United States could take one sector, Russia as well and the Europeans another one. The Arabs must be involved in that sort of military operation, as well, and must be part of every sector."



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