Trump's travel order isn't a Muslim ban, it's a defence of freedom

A counter demonstrator holds a sign up as protesters gather in Battery Park in New York to protest
President Trump's immigration order. Picture: AFP
Melanie Phillips, The Times, 2:13PM January 31, 2017

President Trump's executive order suspending immigration from certain countries has taken
the hysteria over his arrival in the White House to an unprecedented level.

Thousands have been protesting in America. Here [in the UK] more than one million people
have signed a petition to stop his proposed state visit. He is being accused of racism, anti-
Muslim bigotry and discrimination, described as "prejudiced", "vicious", "a tinpot dictator",
"a megalomaniac", and likened to Hitler.

LIVE: Global reaction to Trump's travel ban

So what did he do to deserve this demonisation? He issued an order halting indefinitely the
admission of Syrian refugees, putting the general refugee programme on hold for 120 days,
and suspending for 90 days all visas to nationals of Iran, Sudan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Somalia
and Yemen, which are designated as "countries of concern".

For sure, the way this was introduced was dreadful. People already in transit were turned
away at airports. British citizens with ties of nationality or birth to any of these seven states
initially seemed to be caught up in the ban too. The whole thing looked like it had been
written on the back of an envelope by the president's closest advisers.

Mr Trump, however, is not being criticised for incompetence or failing to think through
policy detail. He is being treated like a monster who has committed a crime against
humanity.

This is ridiculous at every level. First, the measure is not a Muslim ban. Access to the US by the vast majority of the world's Muslims will remain unchanged. The order doesn't target people for their religion or nationality. It is aimed solely at countering the terrorist threat to America. The temporary seven-states ban allows for more rigorous vetting of individuals from those countries who are seeking entry to the US. The threat from these states is acute. Last November a radicalised Ohio State University student, Abdul Razak Ali Artan, ploughed a car into a campus crowd and stabbed people with a butcher's knife. He was a Somali refugee who came to the US in 2014.

Last June the CIA director John Brennan told a Congressional hearing that refugee flows were a route for terrorist infiltration. Last December, the chief of the defence staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, warned that Islamic State jihadists were "moving in migrant flows, hiding in plain sight".

So Mr Trump is merely heeding urgent, vital and informed advice. Moreover, the hypocrisy and historical amnesia among those baying for his head are quite extraordinary. The seven-state list was actually drawn up by the Obama administration to suspend the visa-waiver for travellers from those countries for the same reason: to keep America safe.

In 2011, Mr Obama all but stopped admitting Iraqi refugees for six months while vetting was drastically overhauled. This followed the discovery by the FBI of evidence that several dozen Iraqi terrorists had infiltrated the US via the refugee programme. Yet no one attacked Mr Obama as a disgusting anti-Muslim bigot. Other Democratic presidents have also banned migrants from the US. In 1980, during the Iranian hostage crisis, Jimmy Carter banned all Iranians from entering the US except for proven humanitarian reasons or where the American national interest required it.

In 1924 the Reed-Johnson Act, which almost totally cut off immigration to the US, was passed by the Republican president Calvin Coolidge to stop the flow of mainly Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland. Throughout the 1930s the Democrat Franklin D Roosevelt adamantly stuck to this policy, shutting the doors of America to Jews enduring Nazi persecution.

People use this shameful history to argue that it should not be repeated now and so the West should open its doors to the Syrian refugees. The analogy is a false one. The Jews of Europe posed no threat to anyone. FDR stopped them from coming to America simply because they were Jews. President Trump is stopping Syrian refugees because he fears they may harbour terrorists.

This fear is well-founded. All Mr Trump is doing, in fact, is returning to the Obama administration's practice from 2011 to 2014 when it admitted very few Syrian refugees.

Through the decades presidents from both sides of the aisle have banned groups of people from America. Some of these bans were motivated by prejudice; others sprang from security concerns identical to those behind President Trump's order. The uproar against him

is grounded in nothing more than a determination to delegitimise and destroy him, and to hell with the democratic process.

Those in the grip of this unbridled rage aren't even consistent or coherent. As punishment for his supposed offence of banning people from America, they want to ban him from Britain. Mr Trump wants to ban people because he fears they may murder American citizens. More than one million Britons want to ban Mr Trump just because they think he's a horrible person.

This is virtue signalling on steroids. The hypocrisy is nauseating. The flight from reason is terrifying. The great danger to the world isn't Donald Trump. It's the threat by Islamists - aided and abetted by those have appeased these enemies of the west for years, and who have been sent totally wild by a US president who dares to want to defend freedom instead.

Can everyone please calm down now?
The Times