



Senators to Mattis: President Trump's Muslim ban degrades our ability to defeat ISIS, undermines our national security

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WASHINGTON – As Secretary of Defense James Mattis begins a thirty-day, government-wide review of the United States' existing strategy to defeat ISIS, U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Jack Reed (D-RI), Mark Warner (D-VA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) pressed him to assess the impact of President Trump's Muslim ban on the U.S. strategy to defeat ISIS and our broader national security interests. Prior to this executive order, the sixty-six nation coalition dedicated to defeating ISIS had been making progress. But ISIS supporters have applauded the ban because it appears to validate their claim that they are at war with a hostile, anti-Muslim West, damaging our nation's credibility and impacting U.S. military personnel around the world.

“This executive order provides ISIS and other enemies with a propaganda coup of unimaginable proportions; sows distrust among our local campaign partners; risks restricting the Department's flexibility in conducting this campaign; and increases the risk to our service members on the ground. In short, it is currently a significant impediment to defeating ISIS,” stated the members in a letter to Secretary Mattis.

“According to press reports, the Department was not consulted on the national security implications of the executive order, which, if true, is a disturbing lapse. It is incumbent upon you to take every opportunity—including this review—to provide your most candid advice to the President on every threat to our anti-ISIS campaign and our national security.”

Full text of the senators' letter to Secretary Mattis:

February 3, 2017

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis:

As you begin a thirty-day, government-wide review of the United States' existing strategy to defeat ISIS, we urge you to assess the impact of the President's Executive Order entitled, "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" on our strategy to defeat ISIS and broader national security interests. We believe the President's Executive Order is antithetical to a successful counterterrorism campaign. This executive order provides ISIS and other enemies with a propaganda coup of unimaginable proportions; sows distrust among our local campaign partners; risks restricting the Department's flexibility in conducting this campaign; and increases the risk to our service members on the ground. In short, it is currently a significant impediment to defeating ISIS.

The existing U.S. strategy for defeating ISIS has focused on government-wide efforts in three areas: (1) taking the fight to ISIS in Syria and Iraq by working with our allies and local partners on the ground to hold and govern the recaptured territory; (2) dismantling the group's international network to make sure that it and other such groups cannot reach the United States or our closest allies; and (3) preventing terrorist threats at home by strengthening our homeland defenses and those of our allies.

The sixty-six nation coalition dedicated to these tasks had been making progress. Foreign fighter flow has plummeted, ISIS' funds are dwindling, and it has lost half its territory in Iraq and twenty percent in Syria. In different circumstances, a review of this strategy could very responsibly seek to build upon and accelerate these successes, including ways to "isolate and delegitimize ISIS," as the President's review requires.

But these are not normal circumstances. ISIS supporters have applauded the ban because it appears to validate their perverse claim that they are at war with a hostile, anti-Muslim West. It has increased the cost of standing with the United States to every country in the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. The Iraqi parliament has reportedly passed a reciprocal resolution related to American citizens coming to its country, which may impact U.S. military personnel. There are serious questions about whether coalition military partners can continue to train in the United States. The executive order has damaged our nation's credibility to thousands of Iraqi military translators that stood with our service members on the ground.

An honest assessment of the situation requires a comprehensive analysis of the executive order's impact on U.S. strategy and efforts to counter ISIS.

According to press reports, the Department was not consulted on the national security implications of the executive order, which, if true, is a disturbing lapse. It is incumbent upon you to take every opportunity—including this review—to provide your most candid advice to the President on every threat to our anti-ISIS campaign and our national security.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to your reply and to discussing this in further detail in the near future.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin

United States Senator

Jack Reed

United States Senator

Mark Warner

United States Senator

Ben Cardin

United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen

United States Senator