

Revised Trump order on travel ban exempts Iraq from list: Officials

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Washington: President Donald Trump's new immigration order will remove Iraq from the list of countries whose citizens face a temporary U.S. travel ban, U.S. officials said Tuesday, citing the latest draft in circulation. Trump is expected to sign the executive order in the coming days.

Four officials told The Associated Press that the decision followed pressure from the Pentagon and State Department, which had urged the White House to reconsider Iraq's inclusion given its key role in fighting the Islamic State group.

Citizens of six other predominantly Muslim countries — Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen — will remain on the travel ban list, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the order before it is signed. Those bans are effective for 90 days.

The new order includes other changes as well. The officials said the 12-page document no longer singles out Syrian refugees for an indefinite ban and instead includes them as part of a general, 120-day suspension of new refugee admissions.

The officials also said the order won't include any explicit exemption for religious minorities in the countries targeted by the travel ban. Critics had accused the administration of adding such language to help Christians get into the United States while excluding Muslims.

Trump signed his original executive order in late January. It sparked immediate confusion, panic and outrage as some travelers were detained in U.S. airports before being sent back overseas and others were barred from boarding flights at foreign airports.

The government initially blocked U.S. green card holders before offering those legal residents special permission to come into the country. It finally decided the order didn't apply to them.

The State Department provisionally revoked roughly 60,000 valid visas in all, before a federal judge in Washington state blocked the government from carrying out the ban. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld that decision.

Under the revised order, officials said, all existing visas will be honored.

In his first address to a joint session of Congress, Trump on Tuesday evening defended his effort.

"We will shortly take new steps to keep our nation safe and to keep out those who would do us harm," he said.

The changes follow a report by intelligence analysts at the Homeland Security Department, which found insufficient evidence that citizens of the seven Muslim-majority countries posed a terror threat to the United States. A draft of the analysis was obtained last week by the AP.

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