

United States - Trump Seeks to Consolidate His Power

Thursday 9 February 2017, by [SHEPPARD Barry](#) (Date first published: 9 February 2017).

Trump came roaring out of the starting gate after his inauguration, doubling down on the main themes of his election campaign. In two and a half weeks, he has initiated a slew of executive orders, tweets, insults and rulings that deserve further comment.

Here I want to focus on one aspect he is hammering on, his drive to progressively concentrate more and more power in his own hands. Ever since he first decided to run for President, he has consistently maintained that the establishments of both the Democratic and Republican parties have failed to deal with the problems facing workers and the middle class at home, and the growing crisis of the decline of U.S. power in the world.

He consistently projected that what is needed is a strongman to set things right, and he is that person. No one else can do it – all the others are “losers” and weaklings.

Part of his drive is to attack and belittle anyone who criticizes him in any way, even on small matters. An example was his denunciation of sections of the capitalist media who had the temerity to assert that the crowd at his inauguration numbered less than the one for Obama in 2009. When challenged, he stuck to his claim, even in the face of photographic proof to the contrary.

His counselor, Kellyanne Conway, when publicly challenged on the question, famously said that Trump has “alternative facts.” One aspect of his self-aggrandizement is his own version of reality, and he rides roughshod over all who question it.

A major example of his drive to concentrate more and more power is his ban on Muslims from entering the U.S., and the ongoing court battle over it.

He issued his fiat stopping anyone from seven majority Muslim countries – Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia and Yemen — from coming to the U.S. He did this without consulting with his own State Department and other agencies. It was hatched in secret by a small group of his closest advisors, that included the sinister white nationalist Steve Bannon, and maybe Trump’s son-in-law, but no one knows for sure. Thus U.S. embassies, the immigration service, airlines, etc. were suddenly instructed to implement the ban, causing turmoil and hardship for tens of thousands.

When a federal judge, ruling on a challenge to the ban brought by the Attorney General of Washington state, overturned it, Trump denounced the “so-called judge.”

During his campaign, Trump promised to ban all Muslims from entering. What happened next was explained on Fox News by former New York City mayor and Trump toady Rudy Giuliani. “So when he first announced it, he said ‘Muslim ban.’ He called me up. He said ‘Put a commission together. Show me the right way to do it legally.’” They came up with the idea of the ban on people from certain countries, instead of all Muslims, which Trump put into effect.

That this was just legalize to avoid the charge of religious discrimination is obvious. It is indeed a ban on Muslims, and everyone knows that.

Many in the capitalist press have said the ban was done poorly. Trump should have gone through the “proper channels and procedures.” But from Trump’s and Bannon’s point of view it was not done poorly at all. Trump deliberately did not consult widely or go through the “proper procedures” because he was testing the waters on his ability to issue rulings by fiat, himself, without getting anyone else’s approval beforehand.

He also fulfilled one of his campaign promises to seek a ban on entry by Muslims.

Trump has tamed the Republican Party, which now controls both houses of Congress. With the executive and legislative branches under his control, that leaves the judiciary. That’s why he is going after judges who rule against him.

The administration appealed the ruling to a federal district court. The government’s lawyer referred to a law which did authorize the President “to suspend entry of classes of aliens when it is necessary or when otherwise it would be detrimental to the interests of the United States.” That this law is on the books is one demonstration of how more and more authority has been given the President by both Democrats and Republicans since the Second World War. Trump does like these precedents, and pushes them further.

The counter argument is that this ban is based on religion, which it is. Trump made this clearer in tweeting about his fiat, saying that Christians in these countries could enter the U.S.

August Flentje, the administration lawyer, further said, “The reason we sought immediate relief and a stay is because the court’s decision overrides the President’s national security judgment about the level of risk....[I]t should be acknowledged that the President is the official that is charged with making those judgments.”

One of the appeal court’s judges then asked, “I mean, are you saying that the President’s decision in that regard is unreviewable?”

Flentje answered, “Uh, yes.”

Another judge asked, “Could the President simply say in the order, ‘We’re not going to let any Muslim’s in?’”

After trying to avoid answering, Flentje finally said that there would be a “route to make a constitutional challenge if there were such an order. It would be by a U.S. citizen with a connection to someone seeking entry.”

The next day, Trump denounced the appeals court judges as “disgraceful.”

It’s clear that Trump wants to limit any judicial review of his fiats. It is probable that he would fight any review by the courts of laws passed by his congress.

The case will eventually go to the Supreme Court. Will it be the new Supreme Court with Trump’s nominee, with a right wing majority?

Trump’s direction is clear, and we aren’t even past the first month of his administration.

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