



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 23, 2016

Obama Scrapping Registration of Aliens From Mostly Muslim Nations

The Obama administration announced on December 22 that it is dismantling an alien registration program created in 2002 as part of the Bush administration's "war on terrorism" program in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The program — National Security Entry-Exit Registration Systems, or NSEERS — was started to increase screening of travelers from specific countries where terrorist organizations were strong. Since a majority of these countries were predominantly Muslim, civil liberties activists claimed the program unjustly targeted individuals based on religion.



U.S. Department of Homeland Security spokesman Neema Hakim stated on the 22nd that the DHS is "removing outdated regulations pertaining to the National Security Entry-Exit Registration Systems program, with an immediate effective date." NSEERS is "not only obsolete," said Hakim, "its use would divert limited personnel and resources from more effective measures."

Though the Obama administration's DHS has not actively utilized NSEERS since 2011, it allowed its regulatory framework to remain in place. This was the reason offered by Hakim to declare the program obsolete and to dismantle it. Since President-elect Donald Trump has advocated continuing, or even increasing, regulations on allowing immigration from areas of the world where terrorism is rampant, the move to dismantle NSEERS entirely might be seen as a pre-emptive move to make that process more difficult.

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DHS formally ended NSEERS by means of a rule change that it submitted for public posting on December 22, to be published in the *Federal Register* the following day.

The *New York Times* reported that when he was asked in Florida on December 21, in the aftermath of the Berlin Christmas market attack two days earlier, whether he still intended to set up a registry for Muslims and impose a temporary ban on Muslim immigrants, Trump said simply, "You know my plans."

Hours later, a spokesman said Trump was not reaffirming his earlier calls for a ban on immigration from Muslim countries, but was referring to his more recent clarification that he would bar people from countries with a history of Islamist extremism.

The *Times* also reported that a spokesman did not immediately respond to requests for a comment on the Obama administration's ending of NSEERS.

When the United States began NSEERS in 2002, the federal government required special registration of aliens arriving from Iraq, Iran, Libya, Sudan, and Syria. By 2003, the list of nations had expanded to



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25, most of which were majority countries. An exception was communist North Korea.

Because of some of his strong statements during the presidential campaign, including one a year ago calling for “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on,” there is naturally concern in many quarters that the Trump administration will follow through on this rhetoric. The point has been raised that the very constitutionality of such a ban is in question.

However, an ABC News report last month, among others, indicated that Trump has moderated his position over the past year. The report quoted a statement from Jason Miller, communications director of the Presidential Transition Team, who wrote:

President-elect Trump has never advocated for any registry or system that tracks individuals based on their religion, and to imply otherwise is completely false. The national registry of foreign visitors from countries with high terrorism activity that was in place during the Bush and Obama Administrations gave intelligence and law enforcement communities additional tools to keep our country safe. The President-elect will release his own vetting policies after he is sworn in.

It is possible that this statement indicating that Trump intends to put his own vetting policies in place hastened the decision by the DHS to completely dismantle NSEERS — forcing Trump to build a program from the ground up instead of using the previous program as a foundation.

Photo of President Obama: AP Images

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