



Did Low Oil Prices Just Land Chad on Trump's Travel Ban List?

No one can quite figure out why Chadians are no longer allowed to travel to the United States, but some people are blaming Chad's fiscal woes brought on by historically low oil prices.

Donald Trump promised repeatedly on the campaign trail to ban Muslims from travelling to the United States. Upon being sworn in as U.S. president earlier this year he made good on the promise, at least partially, by restricting travel for citizens of six Muslim-majority countries to the United States.

In September, with the original travel ban set to expire, Trump reissued the ban with some notable changes. The president added North Korea to the list, stopping all immigrant and non-immigrant entry to the U.S. for North Korean nationals. The new order also bans certain Venezuelan government officials from travelling to the United States.

Clearly the new list differs greatly from the pledges Trump made on the campaign trail, and it seems the president is using the new travel ban to send messages to international foes rather than simply throw political red meat to his more xenophobic supporters.

The political, rather than religious, aspect of the new travel ban has many observers scratching their heads as to why Chad is now on the list. While the central African country is overwhelmingly Muslim, it has been a staunch ally to the United States in the fight against Islamic extremism.

The ban, which suspends Chadian citizens' ability to enter the United States on some tourist and business visas, seemed to catch the government in N'Djamena by surprise. The Chadians asked the United States to reconsider its decision, complaining that the move "seriously undermines the image of Chad and the good relations between the two countries."

However, a statement released by the president when he announced the travel ban suggested that the United States has been disappointed in its relations with Chad for some time. Though Trump praised Chad as "an important and valuable counter-terrorism partner," he noted that there are "several terrorist groups... active within Chad... including elements of Boko Haram, ISIS-West Africa, and al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb."

Missing from the statement was any mention that these groups are also active in several other countries in West and Central Africa, and that these countries were left off the travel ban list. In fact, Iraq, which likely still has far more Islamist militants than Chad, had been included in the previous travel ban but was removed from the list this time around. Even more insulting was that Chad's neighbor Sudan, which



had also been included in Trump's previous travel ban, is also not included on the new travel ban list.

What likely earned Chad a spot on the new list was its perceived unwillingness to share intelligence with Washington. Trump's statement noted that "Chad does not adequately share public-safety and terrorism related information."

The statement left many scratching their heads, especially because Chad has set itself up as a regional hub for combatting terrorism. Earlier this year 2,000 American soldiers conducted military exercises in Chad as part of a move to strengthen the U.S.' local and international capacity to deal with terrorist threats. N'Djamena also hosts France's regional counterterrorism mission, a 4,000-person strong force charged with keeping an eye on the groups Trump specifically cited.

Perhaps most importantly, Chad has contributed troops to anti-terrorism activity in neighboring countries like Mali, Nigeria, and the Central African Republic. Chadian soldiers have even drawn praise from their international counterparts for their fighting ability.

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However, in recent years some observers have worried that Chad's capacity to fight terror both at home and abroad could be declining along with the price of oil. The country's GDP grew by 6.9% in 2014, but contracted in 2016 and is on pace for anemic growth this year. Ballooning budget deficits led the government to cut spending by over 40%, crippling many social programs.

While many domestic critics complain the government still spends too much on security and defense, a report released last year by the U.S. Department of State suggested that budget shortfalls were causing a deterioration in Chad's security forces. While this has certainly not kept the U.S. or European partners from using the country as a staging ground for security operations, a decline in the quality of Chad's military makes the country less important as a regional ally.

The budget shortfalls caused by slumping oil prices also raise the question of whether N'Djamena even has the ability to provide Washington with the information it wants. While Trump's statement seemed to suggest that better information sharing could be Chad's ticket off the travel ban list, if Chadian intelligence has declined along with the military, then N'Djamena may not have the capacity to give the U.S. what it wants.

However, while low oil prices mean money is tight in N'Djamena, foreign governments continue to show that they are willing to help Chad out with cash if it suits their interests. Earlier this year Chadian

President Idriss Deby announced that he would be postponing parliamentary elections indefinitely because his country did not have the resources to spend on setting up polls. International donors, led by France, began pledging money to finance elections, and have been urging Deby to get the parliamentary contests back on the calendar.



President Idriss Deby

If foreign money can get Chad to hold elections, then it may get Deby to give Washington what it wants as well. It seems likely that, with a little bit of diplomacy on the part of Deby and some cash on the part of Washington, the two sides could potentially come to a meeting of the minds when it comes to sharing information about security. However, until that happens, Chad will likely remain on Trump's travel ban list.

Still, while Chad's inclusion on the list has left some observers wondering, it appears that the list is evolving from campaign pledge meant to bolster Trump's domestic standing to a foreign policy tool designed to serve as a stick to motivate international partners. With Sudan somehow off the list and Chad somehow on, one has to wonder if the Trump administration will use the travel ban in the future to wring security concessions from other African countries. 