Next Steps in North Africa

- Post Reprint: “‘Muslim ban’ repeal brings thousands hope”
- Student Activity: In-Depth Study: One Country in Focus
- Student Activity: Be the United Nations Representative
- Story Caption: “Foundation for a Consulate in a Disputed Territory”
- Post Guest Commentary: “Trump’s Western Sahara action is a serious diplomatic blow”
- Letter to the Editor: “The U.S. cannot answer the question of Western Sahara”
- Student Activity: Biden’s Foreign Policy
Diplomacy in North Africa

The actions of one U.S. presidential administration weigh on or uplift the next. The role of the Department of State, foreign relations and policies are the focus of this resource guide.

In “‘Muslim ban’ repeal brings thousands hope” Post foreign correspondents report on the personal impact of the Trump administration’s 2017 ban on U.S. “entry of people from a group of Muslim-majority countries.” And what President Biden’s repeal of that regulation could mean for families separated and left in limbo.

Western Sahara is another focus presented in a guest commentary, extended news caption and letter to the editor. Use these to compare and contrast the content, background of the authors and points of view of the international action at the end of the Trump administration involving Morocco, Western Sahara, Algeria, Israel and the United Nations. What the Biden diplomatic action could and should be is open for your students to debate.

Activities ask students to conduct an in-depth study of a country — in North Africa or anywhere in the world. In the other activity students role play being an ambassador to the United Nations from another country. Through our suggested activities and reprints, your students will get a taste of diplomacy in North Africa.
THE WORLD | MIDDLE EAST

‘Muslim ban’ repeal brings thousands hope

Biden’s reversal of Trump travel restrictions offers a new chance for long-suffering families and would-be immigrants

BY KAREEM FAHIM, DURRIE BOUSCAREN AND LOUISA LOVELUCK

• Originally Published January 25, 2021

ISTANBUL — Danah Harbi went to another doctor’s appointment this past week without her fiancé, as she has for most of her six-month pregnancy, as she has for all manner of appointments and engagements during their long, forced separation. Maybe they will be together when the child is born this spring, but the past few years have been cruel and capricious, and the future has been hard to predict.

Harbi, 38, lives in Falls Church, Va. Her fiancé, Mashaal Hamoud, 34, a Syrian national who lives in Lebanon, has been unable to obtain a U.S. visa for several years because of the Trump administration’s 2017 ban on entry to people from a group of Muslim-majority countries, including Syria. The couple had done their best to work around the restrictions. Harbi, an optometrist, traveled to Lebanon several times but was forced to curtail those trips when she learned she was pregnant.

As one of his first acts, President Biden on Wednesday repealed what critics called the “Muslim ban,” offering hope to thousands of families affected by the Trump-era regulations, if not an immediate solution, given the enormous volume of visa and waiver cases that must be resolved.

But the ban’s legacy will remain. For many of those affected, there will be no regaining what was lost: the moments with loved ones, the money spent on visits to stranded partners or far-flung consulates, the opportunities to live in the United States that were dangled, then dashed or delayed.

“It takes a toll on you emotionally, financially to travel back and forth. Physically and mentally,” said Harbi, who took a leave of absence from her job last year to be with Hamoud in Lebanon and was unemployed for six months.

The ban initially applied to seven countries — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen — but Iraq and Sudan were taken off the list after a court challenge. (Six Asian and African countries, including Sudan again, were added to the list last year.) The Trump administration said the measure was needed to combat terrorism.

Refugees, their advocates and many others around the world saw something else: anti-Muslim bigotry. The ban heaped hardship on people who had already had their fill, including survivors of conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. For a time, many of the ban’s victims — doctoral students, professionals and blue-collar workers — were stranded around the world, their lives upended.

Harbi met Hamoud in 2016, when Harbi went to Lebanon to deliver donations to a nonprofit organization helping Syrian refugees. Hamoud worked for that group, and before long, their relationship developed, and Harbi began traveling to Lebanon regularly. In 2017, they decided to get married. As the fiancé of an American citizen, Hamoud was entitled to apply for a visa to enter the United States.

“I didn’t think the travel ban was going to impact us,” Harbi said in a telephone
interview this past week. But from the beginning, Hamoud’s application process was beset by delays. After delivering the required documents, the couple said they heard nothing.

Mashaal Hamoud, left, who lives in Lebanon, and his fiancée, Danah Harbi, right, who lives in Virginia, have been separated for several years because of a Trump administration travel ban that was repealed this week by President Biden.

“As time went by, I realized that this isn’t about keeping us safe,” Harbi said. “As an American, I felt like we were being discriminated against.”

Now she is more hopeful. “He’s such an incredible person,” Harbi said of her fiancé. “I can’t wait for him to prove that to everyone that prevented him from coming here because they thought he was a threat.”

‘Our country is at war’

Mohamed Abdo Ali Mohamed, a 49-year-old Yemeni, has ferried his family around the world trying to obtain a U.S. visa. His lawyers reckon he has spent tens of thousands of dollars trying to secure a U.S. visa that would allow him to leave war-ravaged Yemen and join his father and his siblings in Buffalo, where they had lived for decades, according to Ibrahim Qatabi, a senior legal worker at the Center for Constitutional Rights, which filed a lawsuit on Mohamed’s behalf.

Much of that money was spent during a fruitless trip from Mohamed’s home in Yemen’s capital, Sanaa, to the East African country of Djibouti after U.S. officials granted him an interview and then told him, at long last, that he and his family would be issued visas, said Omar Mohamed, one of Mohamed’s sons.

They had risked everything to get there — traveling 300 miles across the war’s front lines just to get to an airport, then spending more than a year in Djibouti and thousands of dollars every month waiting for an answer. But the visas never came, held up because of the travel ban, said Omar, 31, who now lives in Malaysia and is still waiting for a visa.

“We told them our country is at war. We have to reunite with our family. They didn’t do anything,” he said.

‘The most hideous feeling’

Rand Mubarak, a 25-year-old Iraqi refugee, recalled watching her father’s health deteriorate as her family waited in Egypt for the Trump administration to decide whether to admit them to the United States.

Her father, Mubarak Mubarak, had worked as a translator for the U.S. military in Iraq, she said. The family fled their country after receiving death threats during the violent era that followed the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. By 2017, they had reached Egypt’s coastal city of Alexandria and received news from the International Organization for Migration, or IOM, that they could soon travel to the United States.

Then came President Donald Trump’s announcement and, with the stroke of his pen, their dreams of a fresh start were in doubt. Mubarak developed a heart condition. The doctor said a simple operation would help him, but he would need to leave Egypt. Rand called the IOM weekly, telling them her father needed to be transferred to an American hospital.

“He worked for the Americans, after all,” she said. “They just told us that they had strict instructions not to process applications.” The freeze was in place even though Iraq had been officially removed from the travel and immigration ban.

Mubarak died in July. Now, Rand said, her mother is sick, too.

“It’s the most hideous feeling, a feeling of being let down, a feeling of being left behind,” Rand said.

‘I’m not as young as I was’

Days before Biden’s inauguration, Pamela Raghebi, who lives in Seattle, misplaced her driver’s license. It should not have been a big deal, she said, but she panicked. It was one of those ordinary moments when her Iranian-born husband, Afshin Raghebi, would have known exactly what to do.

“I’m not as young as I was,” said Pamela, 75. “Afshin would say to me, ‘Sit down, relax, think about it.’ He protects me. He recognizes that when I get flustered, I get frightened.”

But he had been gone since 2018, trapped overseas after traveling to the United Arab Emirates for an interview to finalize his petition for a green card, the couple said in separate interviews.

The two had met at the retirement home where she worked when he came to install windows. They’ve been married for a decade and now jointly own a window installation business. Afshin had entered the United States illegally in 2006 but was granted a legal waiver to apply for U.S. permanent residency after they were married. Following his interview at the U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi, the couple learned that Afshin would not be allowed to reenter the United States because of the travel ban.

Afshin, now 52, settled in southern Turkey, which was relatively inexpensive. He had some money in a bank account, and to help support him, Pamela sold her car. At the beginning, Afshin went to the beach to pass the time or socialized with other Iranian exiles, but both pastimes had become “boring,” he said.

When Biden took office on Wednesday, Afshin splurged on a bottle of wine to celebrate.

“The U.S., I loved that country, I still love it,” he said. “They’re playing with our lives.”

Loveluck reported from Baghdad. Mustafa Salim in Baghdad contributed to this report.
IN-DEPTH STUDY: One Country in Focus

Country ____________________________
Location in the world ____________________________

Select one of the following topics as your focus for an in-depth look at one country.
Read a minimum of five articles found in different kinds of sources — newspapers, international affairs journals, the country’s website and embassy, U.S. Department of State website and CIA World Factbook. Be sure to include the headline, author, publication and date of publication of your sources. If you interview a source, be sure to include the title and name of the individual and relation to the country.

Current Conditions and Culture

Read about the current political, economic and social conditions in one country. Compare and contrast the views presented in the five (or more) sources. On what political, economic and social issues do they agree? On which areas do they disagree? What is your conclusion?

Relation with Other Countries

Read about other countries in the region. Analyze the relation and interaction of the selected country with other countries in the region. What cultural, historic, economic and/or current conditions do they share? What makes your country of choice stand apart from the others?

From Here to the Next Decade

Read about the history and current issues facing the country. What pivotal events have taken place since World War II? With which countries does it share alliances? Involved in conflict? What health and economic conditions impact its stability? Form a prediction about the future of the country based on its past and present.
Be the Ambassador to the United Nations

In the United Nations there are 193 recognized sovereign states. Each country has an ambassador to the U.N. As diplomatic officials, they have a voice in the U.N. General Assembly, representing their countries’ interests and conveying their countries’ positions on major issues. Some are permanent members on councils and others may be elected to two-year nonpermanent terms, such as on the important U.N. Security Council.

You are to be the ambassador to the United Nations from your country of choice.

Know Who You Represent
Prepare a country profile. Read the Department of State Country reports, CIA World Factbook, your country’s official website and travel and history sources. Be able to talk to others about your country’s past and present, its land and people.

Learn More About Your Country in the United Nations
The Model UN program has many online resources to aid your understanding of the country you represent. You will find copies of your credentials to be the U.N. ambassador from your country, speeches and documents reflecting your country’s stands.
• View the Member States on the Record file for your country. (https://library.un.org/unms)
  In this section you have links to General Debate Statements, Speeches, Draft Resolutions Sponsored, Diplomatic Relations Between States and your credentials. You will learn about your United Nations membership and when/if your country has served on the Security Council, Economic and Social Council, and Human Rights Council.
• Check out Updates From the UN (https://www.un.org/en/mun/model-un-guide)
  What is happening now in the Security Council, Human Rights, General Assembly and Sustainable Development? Do any of these directly impact your country?

Is Your Country Affiliated With or a Member of Other Organizations?
With what regional, continental and international organizations is your country a member? For example, the African Union, African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the European Union, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, International Monetary Fund, Trans-Pacific Partnership, African Continental Free Trade Area, and World Trade Organization (WTO).

What have been the benefits of these memberships?

What Are the Concerns of Citizens of Your Country?
You may not agree with protesters, but you should know what they want changed. Or you may agree that one or more of these areas need help or require changes or financial assistance. Write a short summary of each of the following concerns as it exists now in all or part of your country.
  • Corrupt government
  • Economy
  • Employment/Unemployment
  • Freedom of religion
  • Health
  • Human rights
  • Refugees
  • Religious extremism
Communicate About United Nations Actions, Issues, Campaigns
You may have issues in your country to directly address in the U.N. Are affairs in other countries impacting the security, health or economic stability in your country? Are one of the identified U.N. campaigns or issues related to actions in or by your country? (See list on the U.N. official website (https://www.un.org/en/sections/general/documents/). Perhaps, the research you did before will direct your topic.

Write one of the following:
• a speech to present to one of the U.N. committees or commissions or councils
• a guest commentary to The New York Times or The Washington Post about events or conditions existing in your country
• an article about your country for an international publication
• a script for a U.N. video (See News and Media on U.N. official website)

Remember, you are writing as the U.N. representative of your country. You must include facts and specific information about your country. You might consider these questions as you decide on your topic:
• What conditions existed and what is the current situation?
• Has your country made progress in a certain area?
• In what area does your country (and maybe others) need assistance from the U.N.?
• If other countries have issued complaints or called for sanctions against your country, what is your defense of your country?
• What do you want officials of the U.N. or citizens of the world to know about your country?
Foundation for a Consulate in a Disputed Territory


This fishing port in southern Western Sahara, according to a U.S. Embassy statement, will become a “regional maritime hub.” This formal ceremony and intent to establish a consulate follows the Dec. 22 tripartite agreement by U.S., Israel and Morocco. The U.S. recognizes Rabat’s sovereignty over Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco normalizing relations with Israel.

In 1976 Morocco and Mauritania divided Western Sahara between them after Spain withdrew from its territory. The Polisario, mainly indigenous nomadic inhabitants supported by neighboring Algeria, want independence. United Nations’ efforts have been unsuccessful in resolving sovereignty.

For additional perspective, read “The U.S. recognized Moroccan sovereignty over disputed Western Sahara. Here’s what that means.”
GLOBAL OPINIONS

Trump’s Western Sahara action is a serious diplomatic blow

BY JAMES A. BAKER, III

• Originally Published December 18, 2020

President Trump’s recent proclamation recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara was an astounding retreat from the principles of international law and diplomacy that the United States has espoused and respected for many years. This rash move disguised as diplomacy will contribute to the existing deadlock in resolving the long-standing conflict between Morocco and the people of Western Sahara over the status of that territory. Further, it threatens to complicate our relations with Algeria, an important strategic partner, and has negative consequences on the overall situation in North Africa.

The Abraham Accords and efforts to widen them are, of course, laudable ways to promote peace in the Middle East by establishing formal relations between Israel and Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and now Morocco, especially if they would help in addressing the Palestinian dimension. Peace between Israelis and Arabs is critical to stability in that region. And so, Trump deserves credit for seeking to rearrange the chessboard in the Middle East.

But any success in this effort should never come at the price of abandoning the United States’ commitment to self-determination, the bedrock principle on which our country was founded and to which it should remain faithful. We should not simply turn our backs on the people of Western Sahara as we try to promote better relations between Israel and her Arab neighbors. Sadly, this cynical decision to recognize Morocco’s claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara in return for Morocco’s pledge to establish formal relations with Israel did just that.

Ever since 1975, when Morocco took control of Western Sahara by force following Spain’s withdrawal, the United States and most of the international community have refused to recognize this claim as legitimate. This began to change more than a year ago, when Israel and the Trump administration first approached Morocco to propose a trade-off of Moroccan resumption of formal relations with Israel in exchange for U.S. recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. At that time, Morocco refused, wisely calculating that bilateral recognition of its sovereignty, even by the United States, would not bring it any closer to its desired goal of international legitimacy. Nothing has changed since then.

The Trump administration’s recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara is a major and unfortunate change in long-standing U.S. policy
under both Democrat and Republican administrations. That policy has always taken a more or less neutral stance in support of the efforts by the United Nations to determine the future of that territory and its people, in a way that supports the principle of self-determination. Mixing the Abraham Accords with the Western Sahara conflict, clearly and unequivocally an issue of self-determination, will not strengthen or expand the accords.

The proponents of this move may not have thought through the possible repercussions of their reversal of that policy. But they could be very serious and far-reaching.

They could have an effect on future negotiations, questioning our commitment to a solution that provides for some form of self-determination for the people of Western Sahara, as stated in United Nations resolutions that we have supported.

There’s also the risk of sending a message to the rest of the world that the non-acquisition of territory by force and the right of self-determination are pick-and-choose principles for the United States.

There could also be an escalation of hostilities between Morocco and the Polisario Front, which represents the people of Western Sahara, or an opening for a Moroccan-Algerian confrontation.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other groups could exploit the growing tensions in the region. And the all-but-certain deterioration of our relations with Algeria, the principal supporter of Western Sahara’s right to self-determination, could also result in damage to the growth of our commercial relations, our anti-terrorist cooperation and our efforts to deepen military relations.

The United States has unwisely abandoned its principles for something that will make no difference to the position of the international community and to the resolution of the conflict. Many U.S. allies and others have already made statements to that effect. The upcoming Biden administration would do well to rescind this rash and cynical action. Doing so will not undermine the Abraham Accords.

James A. Baker III served as the 61st U.S. secretary of state from 1989 to 1992 and as the U.N. secretary-general’s personal envoy for Western Sahara from 1997 to 2004. For more information about the author, see “James Baker, master of bygone Washington.”
Opinion: The U.S. cannot answer the question of Western Sahara

President Trump’s “proclamation” by which he recognized Moroccan “sovereignty” over Western Sahara (in exchange for Morocco’s official recognition of Israel) does not alter the legal status of the non-self-governing territory as the secretary general of the United Nations stated unequivocally on Dec. 12: “We have said it very clearly — for us, in relation to Western Sahara, everything remains as it was. And the solution of Western Sahara does not depend on recognitions by individual states. [It] depends on the implementation of Security Council resolutions, of which we are the guardians.”

The question of the decolonization of Western Sahara, a territory larger than the United Kingdom, has been on the General Assembly agenda since the early 1960s and on the agenda of the Security Council since 1975, after Morocco’s military invasion and continuing partial occupation of Africa’s last colony. ■

Moncef Khane, Bethesda
The writer is a former senior political affairs officer of the United Nations.
Biden’s Foreign Policy

When a new president and vice president are elected, they have the opportunity and the challenge of establishing their administration’s foreign policy. Through the words and actions of the president and his Cabinet they express their view of national interests and values. They formulate goals and avenues for working with other nations and organizations.

The Department of State takes the lead in diplomatic relations through ambassadors, cultural exchanges and other programs. But all Cabinet departments have a place in the strategy to balance national objectives with international intentions. What forms will collaboration take? What trade and economic relationships will be valued? What alliances will be honored?

Challenges the Biden Administration May Face

Washington Post journalists Karen DeYoung, Paul Sonne, Joby Warrick, Dan Lamothe, Carol Morello and Anne Gearan wrote a series on “Biden’s challenges on foreign policy.” In the first article, they write:

“President-elect Joe Biden set out big principles on foreign policy — consult with allies, participate in international institutions, elevate climate to the top of the agenda — and plans to quickly reverse President Trump’s more egregious departures from historical norms on issues such as immigration.

But on a host of matters, he faces competing priorities, congressional hurdles and wary, if welcoming, allies. …”

The eight articles were written before Biden and Kamala Harris took the oaths of office. Read them for background. Summarize the focus and main ideas presented in each one. Have their predictions begun to take form?

1. A Changed World
2. Russia and China
3. Iran Nuclear Deal
4. Venezuela and Maduro
5. ‘The Forever Wars’
6. Strained TransAtlantic Ties
7. The North Korea Threat
8. A New Middle East

Focus on the First 100 Days

Read articles found on The Post’s front page and The World pages. Get acquainted with the bylines of The Post’s foreign correspondents who report from 21 bureaus around the world. Online at The Post read articles and blogs found in World and First 100 Days sections.