

How Trump Is Turning Asylum into a Tool of Political Blackmail



In yet another escalation consistent with his established approach, President Donald Trump's administration announced on Friday, November 28, 2025, the suspension of all asylum decisions following a shooting incident that targeted two National Guard members near the White House.

The decision reinforces the administration's increasingly hardline stance on immigration a hallmark of Trump's policy since his first term.

Trump declared that his administration would halt all immigration from the so-called "Third World" countries until "the American system is fully restored." He also hinted at the possibility of revoking millions of entry requests granted under President Joe Biden and vowed to "remove anyone who does not offer real value to the United States."

In a post on Truth Social, Trump took things even further, expressing his intent to eliminate all federal benefits and subsidies for non-citizens, threatening to strip immigrants of their citizenship if deemed a threat to internal security.

He also called for the deportation of any foreigner who, in his words, poses a burden on the state, threatens national security, or fails to align with "Western civilization."

These measures are hardly unprecedented under Trump, but they starkly reflect the trajectory of his policy on refugees and migrants during both his first and second terms.

Immigration has become a centerpiece of his political rhetoric and a tool he has skillfully wielded for electoral and political gain, backed by a populist narrative that amplifies public fears to consolidate his support base.

The Enemy of Refugees: A Torrent of Measures

Throughout both his first term and the current one, Trump has implemented what rights groups and analysts describe as the harshest policies on refugees and migrants in modern U.S. history. He is now widely referred to as "America's top enemy of refugees."

First Term (2017–2021): The Great Shift Begins

Trump launched his first term with actions that shocked the international community and human rights advocates. On January 27, 2017, he signed an executive order banning travelers, migrants, and refugees from seven Muslim-majority countries—a ban that later expanded to include 13 countries by 2020. This order gained legal cover after the Supreme Court upheld it in June 2018.

In November 2018, Trump doubled down by prohibiting anyone crossing the border outside of official ports of entry from seeking asylum, in a move meant to curb irregular migration. That same year, he introduced the "zero-tolerance" policy, which led to the forced separation of thousands of families at the southern border.

Second Term (2025): Escalation and Even Harsher Measures

After returning to the White House in 2025, Trump resumed his hardline immigration agenda with alarming speed. On January 20, 2025, he signed a set of executive orders that included declaring a national emergency on the Mexican border, effectively banning most asylum applications, ending the “catch and release” policy that allowed migrants to await court dates outside of detention, and suspending most refugee resettlement programs.

Just days later, on January 29, he signed the “Laken Riley Act,” which mandates the detention of migrants accused of certain crimes such as theft or assault even before a conviction.

The crackdown intensified in April 2025, when authorities carried out mass deportations of an estimated 140,000 to 207,000 individuals. The administration also expanded “expedited removal” processes and reactivated the “Remain in Mexico” protocols, forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their cases are processed in the U.S.

A Pattern of Human Rights Violations

Trump’s immigration policies have triggered widespread humanitarian abuses, affecting hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants. The initial travel bans on Muslim-majority countries separated families and denied them the right to asylum or reunification.

These were followed by the revocation of legal visas and disruption of regular immigration channels.

In 2018, the “zero-tolerance” policy worsened the humanitarian crisis by forcibly separating thousands of children from their parents in what many considered a flagrant violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and protections against arbitrary expulsion.

Trump’s 2025 return has seen a resurgence of similar emergency measures, leading to rapid deportations without due process and ending the “catch and release” policy, which significantly extended detention periods and resembled collective punishment.

The Laken Riley Act further deepened the crisis by mandating detention even for individuals charged with minor offenses.

The mass deportations reaching up to 207,000 people and the revival of the “Remain in Mexico” program have exposed asylum seekers to severe security and health risks, undermining the principle of non-refoulement.

Immigration as an Electoral Weapon

Since his 2016 campaign, Donald Trump has constructed a narrative rooted in

fear of the “other,” placing the slogan “America First” at the heart of his political vision. He has consistently portrayed himself as the defender of national security against “external threats,” presenting himself as a leader willing to prioritize safety over international law and democratic pluralism.

Trump has regularly used domestic economic and security challenges to scapegoat immigrants and refugees, drawing on isolated incidents to craft a bloated nationalist narrative.

This populist messaging has found strong resonance among segments of the American public particularly right-wing and white nationalist groups who see in Trump, himself of immigrant descent, a voice for their anxieties.

Thus, immigration has become a core pillar of his political project and a potent tool for mobilizing electoral support.

Whenever faced with a political or economic crisis, Trump has sought a “domestic enemy” to blame often targeting immigrant communities as the easiest and most exploitable scapegoat.

Through this tactic, he stirs nationalist sentiment and reinforces the belief that the country’s problems stem from previous administrations’ “leniency,” particularly that of Joe Biden.

Trump’s persistence with this strategy reflects his keen understanding that fearmongering about immigration remains one of the most effective tactics in a polarized political environment and under mounting economic pressure.

Whenever his popularity wanes or policies falter, he returns to this playbook in hopes it will deliver the results that balanced governance could not.

A Tool for Political Blackmail and Geopolitical Leverage

The recent shooting near the White House allegedly perpetrated by Afghan national Rahmanullah Lakanwal has reopened debate over how the Trump administration exploits incidents involving migrants or refugees to serve broader political agendas.

The murky circumstances surrounding the attack and the absence of official information about the suspect’s motives despite reports from The New York Times indicating that he was once a U.S. intelligence collaborator granted legal residency raise serious questions about the administration’s political use of such events to justify constitutionally dubious actions.

Trump wasted no time in leveraging the incident to resurrect his long-standing plan to halt immigration from “Third World” countries, linking it to pressure on the Taliban after their refusal to hand over Bagram Air Base a site Washington

sees as key to countering China's growing nuclear footprint.

Within hours of the attack, the administration bypassed judicial rulings including one from Federal Judge Jia Cobb that blocked the deployment of military forces in Washington when the Secretary of Defense announced the dispatch of 500 additional troops and signaled more could follow nationwide. This marked a dangerous precedent in defying the judiciary.

More significantly, the Afghan file has shifted from a diplomatic dispute to what the Trump administration now frames as a national security crisis, offering Trump a pretext to reengage in Central Asia.

This comes at a time when U.S. anxieties over China's nuclear expansion and growing tensions in the South China Sea especially around Taiwan are at an all-time high.

Ultimately, Trump continues to treat immigration not as a matter of governance, but as a tool of political extortion leveraging the plight of refugees and migrants for domestic and international gain with little regard for the human cost or America's global standing.

In this climate, migrants are no longer part of a humanitarian or legal discussion; they have become pawns in a game of power and influence sacrificed by the thousands at America's gates, while the nation's image as leader of the free world steadily erodes in the eyes of those who once saw it as a beacon of justice and human dignity.