News

U.S. President Donald Trump leaves the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2020. Trump's two-day stay in Davos is a test of his ability to balance anger over being impeached with a desire to project leadership on the world stage. (AP/Markus Schreiber)

Colleen Long

View Author Profile

Matthew Lee

View Author Profile

Jonathan Lemire

View Author Profile

The Associated Press

View Author Profile

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President Donald Trump said Jan.22 the U.S. would soon be imposing visa restrictions on more countries — though it's not clear yet how many nations will be affected by his expansion of the travel ban.

Seven additional nations were listed in a draft of the proposed restrictions — but the countries were notified by Homeland Security officials that they could avoid being included if they make changes before the announcement is made, according to two administration officials who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing negotiations.

The tentative list featured Belarus, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania, according to the officials and a person familiar with the draft proposal. But several countries are believed to have taken action or demonstrated good faith efforts to comply in order to avoid inclusion, the officials said. The steps include better border security, better sharing of identification information among nations and better travel document security, one official said. It's not clear how many nations will wind up on the final list.

Trump told reporters at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that he's doing it to protect the United States.

"We're adding a couple of countries to it," he said. "We have to be safe. Our country has to be safe. You see what's going on in the world. Our country has to be safe. So we have a very strong travel ban and we'll be adding a few countries to it."

Five of the countries on the draft list have either Muslim majorities or substantial Muslim minorities.

The current ban suspends immigrant and non-immigrant visas to applicants from five majority-Muslim nations: Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, as well as Venezuela and North Korea.

But it allows exceptions, including for students and those who have established "significant contacts" in the U.S.. And it represents a significant softening from Trump's initial order, which had suspended travel from Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen for 90 days, blocked refugee admissions for 120 days and suspended travel from Syria.

That order was immediately blocked by the courts, prompting a months-long effort by the administration to develop clear standards and federal review processes to try to pass legal muster. Under the current system, restrictions are targeted at countries that Homeland Security says fail to share sufficient information with the U.S. or haven't taken necessary security precautions, such as issuing electronic passports with biometric information and sharing information about travelers' terror-related and criminal histories.

Iraq, Sudan and Chad had been affected by the original order, which the Supreme Court upheld in a 5-4 vote after the administration released a watered-down version intended to withstand legal scrutiny. They were not part of the pared-down version.

During his 2016 campaign, Trump had floated the idea of a ban to keep all Muslims from entering the country and he criticized his Justice Department for the subsequent changes.

Several of the people said they expected the announcement to be timed to coincide with Monday's third anniversary of the first, explosive travel ban, announced without warning on Jan. 27, 2017, just days after Trump took office. That order sparked an uproar, with massive protests across the nation and chaos at airports where passengers were detained.

(Associated Press Writer Darlene Superville contributed to this report from Davos.)