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U.S. Weighs Massive Visa Restrictions, Targeting Caribbean CBI Nations and 33 More Countries

Leaked State Department memo proposes tiered visa restrictions on Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia—citing CBI programs—and 33 African, Asian, Pacific nations, triggering economic alarm for tourism-dependent economies.

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Antigua & Barbuda is among four Caribbean nations named in a leaked U.S. State Department memo considering expanded travel restrictions.

The United States is weighing a major expansion of its travel ban policy, potentially targeting four Caribbean nations—Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia—along with 33 other countries across Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, according to a leaked

State Department memo. The proposed restrictions, which could mark the largest single expansion of U.S. visa limitations in recent history, have sparked alarm among affected nations, travelers, and advocacy groups, while raising questions about diplomatic fallout and economic impacts.

The memo, first reported by outlets including The Washington Post and Reuters on Saturday and Sunday, respectively, outlines a tiered system of restrictions aimed at addressing perceived national security risks, inadequate identity documentation, high visa overstay rates, and lack of cooperation on deportation agreements.

The 36 countries under consideration include Angola, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, South Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Tonga, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, alongside the Caribbean nations. Notably, the Dominican Republic is not included, despite earlier confusion with Dominica in some reports.

The inclusion of these Caribbean nations, all of which operate CBI programs, has drawn scrutiny. The U.S. reportedly views these programs as potential loopholes for individuals from already-banned countries to gain entry using secondary passports, a concern that has fueled the proposed restrictions.

Caribbean leaders have expressed surprise and concern, noting a lack of formal communication from the U.S. government. Antigua and Barbuda's embassy in Washington sent a diplomatic note on March 15, stating, "The Embassy expresses its deep concern about these reports and respectfully requests clarification regarding whether the Department of State has, in fact, drawn up such a list naming Antigua and Barbuda." The note stressed the country's alignment with U.S. Treasury sanctions policies and rigorous vetting for its Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program, which includes checks through international agencies like INTERPOL.

Prime Minister Gaston Browne of Antigua and Barbuda voiced cautious optimism, saying, "Upon any objective analysis, it will be found that there is no reason to restrict travel from our country." Similarly, Saint Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Dr. Terrance Drew highlighted ongoing reforms to the country's CBI program, noting a January meeting with U.S. officials to discuss a sub-regional regulatory framework. Saint Lucia's Prime Minister Philip Pierre and Dominica's leadership echoed these sentiments.

The proposed expansion builds on a June 4, 2025, presidential proclamation that imposed full or partial travel bans on 19 countries, including Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan, and Venezuela. The Supreme Court has already voted in favor of the president's ability to execute such authority. The new list, detailed in a State Department cable reportedly signed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, gives the 36 countries a 60-day window to meet stringent U.S. vetting and cooperation standards or face full or partial entry bans.

Africa dominates the list, with 25 nations under review, including economically significant countries like Nigeria, Egypt, and Ghana. The inclusion of these nations has raised fears of disrupted trade, tourism, and diaspora remittances, particularly in tourism-dependent Caribbean economies. Pacific Island nations like Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, along with Cambodia and Kyrgyzstan, face similar uncertainties. Syria's inclusion, despite existing restrictions, suggests a potential tightening of already stringent measures.

The proposal has ignited debate over its implications. Caribbean leaders worry that restrictions could devastate tourism, a lifeline for their economies. The global travel industry is also bracing for impact, with airlines and visa agencies anticipating disruptions in route planning and travel demand. “The proposed expansion of the U.S. travel ban isn’t just a policy memo—it’s a ticking clock,” one industry analyst noted, highlighting potential chaos at airports and embassies.

Critics, including civil rights organizations, argue the policy disproportionately targets African and Caribbean nations, echoing criticisms of the 2017 Trump-era travel ban, which faced legal challenges before being upheld by the Supreme Court in 2018.

Some affected nations have signaled willingness to cooperate. Somalia’s ambassador to the U.S., Dahir Hassan Abdi, stated, “The country stands ready to engage in dialogue to address the concerns raised.” In contrast, Chad’s President Mahamat Idriss Deby announced a suspension of visas for U.S. citizens, citing national dignity.

The State Department has noted that the list is a draft, subject to change before reaching the White House. A March 17 statement from spokeswoman Tammy Bruce disputed claims of a finalized list, calling the process a review rather than a confirmed ban. “A review is not a ban,” said Antigua and Barbuda’s ambassador, Ronald Sanders, reflecting hope that diplomatic efforts could avert restrictions.

For travelers, the uncertainty is palpable. Dual nationals and those with U.S. ties face potential visa rejections or delays, while businesses worry about restricted global mobility.