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Pretend Answers on Terror

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December 17, 2015

I wish I were as confident as many politicians and news commentators. They *know* what America should do about ISIS and terrorism.

Donald Trump, who says he can feel terrorism "like I feel a good location ... I have an instinct for this kind of thing," says he would "bomb the s—" out of ISIS strongholds, ban Muslim immigration and shutter American mosques.

America should "stop pussy-footing around!" according to Fox News host Jeanine Pirro. "Bomb them. Keep bombing them. Bomb them again and again. And I don't care how long it takes!"

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Tex., agrees. If he's elected, he says, "We will utterly destroy them. We will carpet bomb them into oblivion."

Cruz is at least skeptical about nation-building and sending in American soldiers, but Hillary Clinton and some of Cruz's fellow Republicans are not. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., says there's "no middle ground" because "radical terrorists want to kill us, because we let women drive, because we let girls go to school!"

This is reckless. There probably is, as the Cato Institute's Ted Galen Carpenter puts it, "a jihadist somewhere who is so unhinged that he would want to slaughter Americans simply because of a virulent hatred of Western culture. But even the bipartisan commission that investigated the 9/11 attacks conceded that the primary driving force for Islamist terrorism was anger at U.S.-led foreign policy in the Middle East."

In other words, terrorists don't come here because we let girls attend school but mainly because we meddle in their countries.

Osama bin Laden *said* he attacked the World Trade Center because our forces are "too near to Mecca" and "occupy our countries."

A University of Chicago study concluded the central objective of 95 percent of terrorist incidents was to compel a Western state to withdraw from territory the terrorists view as theirs. It's not just to make a religious point.

Even Iraq War proponent Paul Wolfowitz admitted that America's presence in the Middle East was "a huge recruiting device for al-Qaida."

Now Hillary Clinton and Marco Rubio want to do *more* of that? We will create *new* terrorists while killing current ones (plus innocent people).

I don't see how that makes us safer.

Commentator Mark Steyn says letting in immigrants without somehow screening out radical Muslims "will cost you your world and everything you love." He wrote an article titled "The Barbarians Are Inside, and There Are No Gates."

Well, I worry about those immigrants, too, but there are more than 2 million Muslims in the U.S. already and have been for decades. Terrorist incidents are rare (so far). Even if we include the horrible attack on the World Trade Center, many more Americans die riding bikes, swimming or driving.

When there is terrorism, most has been committed by non-Muslims. In 2012 alone, non-Muslim mass shootings caused "twice as many fatalities as from Muslim-American terrorism in all 11 years since 9/11," says Charles Kurzman, writing for the Triangle Center on Terrorism and National Security. Kurzman's researchers report that Islamic terrorism "doesn't even count for 1 percent" of 180,000 murders in the U.S. since 9/11.

Of course, that could change tomorrow. But even then, there's no guarantee that keeping desperate Syrian refugees out of America will make much difference.

On my TV show, Steyn pointed out that there are many authoritarians among Muslims, so libertarians like me should worry about that. I do worry about that, but I still don't think he or the current crop of loud politicians have answers. Most not only want to undo America's tradition of immigration but also increase military interventions. These are not actions with good track records.

Every subset of the U.S. population brings benefits and risks. It's much easier to talk about banning less familiar ones, like newcomers. But until we can reliably tell the innocent from the guilty, I side with Keith, a viewer who in response to my question about security versus liberty tweeted, "If there's a choice to be made, liberty needs to win."