

The Indiana Gazette

indianagazette.com

Husbands Are Deadlier Than Terrorists

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February 13, 2017

With the President Trump Reality Show, it's easy to be distracted by ANGRY ALL-CAPITAL TWEETS or Oval Office tantrums. But resist, and stay focused on matters of life and death.

Consider two critical issues: refugees and guns. Trump is going berserk over the former, but wants to ease rules on the latter. So let's look at the relative risks.

In the four decades between 1975 and 2015, terrorists born in the seven nations in Trump's travel ban killed zero people in America, according to the Cato Institute. Zero.

In that same period, guns claimed 1.34 million lives in America, including murders, suicides and accidents. That's about as many people as live in Boston and Seattle combined.

It's also roughly as many Americans as died in all the wars in American history since the American Revolution, depending on the estimate used for Civil War dead.

It's true that Muslim Americans — both born in the United States and immigrants from countries other than those subject to Trump's restrictions — have carried out deadly terrorism in America. There have been 123 such murders since the 9/11 attacks — and 230,000 other murders.

Last year Americans were less likely to be killed *by* Muslim terrorists than *for* being Muslim, according to Charles Kurzman of the University of North Carolina. The former is a risk of approximately one in six million; the latter, one in one million.

The bottom line is that most years in the U.S., ladders kill far more Americans than Muslim terrorists do. Same with bathtubs. Ditto for stairs. And lightning.

Above all, fear spouses: Husbands are incomparably more deadly in America than jihadist terrorists.

And husbands are so deadly in part because in America they have ready access to firearms, even when they have a history of violence. In other countries, brutish husbands put wives in hospitals; in America, they put them in graves.

Yet Trump is raging about a risk from refugees that seems manageable, even as he talks about relaxing rules on another threat, guns, that is infinitely more lethal.

“I will get rid of gun-free zones on schools,” Trump said last year. “My first day, it gets signed, O.K., my first day.” Trump hasn’t in fact signed such an order, but his education secretary, Betsy DeVos, backed him up at her confirmation hearing last month, saying that guns might be necessary in schools because of “potential grizzlies.”

Then there’s Sebastian Gorka, a White House aide to Trump, who wrote a book in which he suggested that Americans engage in their own private counterterrorism strategy: “Consider applying for a concealed-carry permit.”

One reason to think that this isn’t great advice: Gorka was arrested at Reagan Airport in Washington last year for trying to bring a gun through security. This didn’t prevent him from getting a White House job.

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The House of Representatives this month voted to end a restriction on people with severe psychiatric disorders buying guns. Likewise, there is a strong push in Congress — backed by Donald Trump Jr., the president’s son — to end longstanding curbs on the purchase of silencers. The younger Trump and other advocates say that silencers would reduce the danger of hearing loss from gunfire.

“It’s about hearing protection,” Donald Jr. explained in a video for SilencerCo, a Utah company that makes silencers. “It’s a health issue, frankly.” He expressed admiration for silencer technology and frustration that “I don’t get to use it in the People’s Republic of New York.”

The truth is that we don’t have much evidence on the impact of silencers (partly because the gun lobby tries to block research on gun safety). But the sale of silencers has been restricted nationally since the 1930s because of fears that they help criminals avoid attention after shootings, and the National Rifle Association’s battle for them seems to be rooted in its broader campaign to eviscerate gun laws.

The evidence does suggest that if we really want to make Americans safer, then we should require universal background checks before gun purchases (22 percent of guns are purchased without background checks). We should work hard to get guns out of the hands of people subject to domestic violence restraining orders, or people with recent histories of crime or alcohol or drug abuse.

We should also require trigger locks or safe storage of guns, especially in houses with young children. We should crack down on gun trafficking and straw purchasers.

So let’s not be diverted by shiny things and furious tweets. With his travel ban, Trump is peddling an ineffective policy that is morally repugnant, even as he marches toward a looser policy on guns likely to result in more school shootings, more shattered families and more lives lost.

Those graves will last long after Trump's tweets are gone.

In other news, I'm delighted to announce that the winner of my 2017 win-a-trip contest is Aneri Pattani, a senior at Northeastern University and an ace student journalist. We will probably report together on global poverty issues in West Africa in June, focusing on Liberia, with a separate trip looking at America's own poverty. Congrats to Aneri and a special thanks to the Center for Global Development for helping sift through hundreds of applications.