



## Inducing Terrorist Paranoia

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President Donald Trump has taken the position that Americans have a great deal to fear from terrorism. Fear is the backbone of all his statements. Every time there is a terrorist event anywhere in the world, we get tweets and other White House media coverage that constantly remind us how vulnerable we are to this so-called “terrorist threat,” even though the event in question may have had nothing to do with America. Additionally, the “terrorist threat” is the basis for incredible amounts of “alternative facts” being circulated out of the White House and its employees. Some “true facts” are in order here.

According to Life Insurance Quotes, a business that focuses on educating consumers on the various aspects of life insurance, the chances of being killed in a terrorist attack are about one in 20 million. A person is as likely to be killed by his or her own furniture, and more likely to die in a car accident, or in a building fire, or drown in a bathtub than from a terrorist attack.

The libertarian Cato Institute has arrived at its own finding: Nationals of the seven countries singled out by Trump in his travel ban have killed zero people in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil between 1975 and 2015. Zero. Six Iranians, six Sudanese, two Somalis, two Iraqis and one Yemeni have been convicted of attempting or executing terrorist attacks on U.S. soil during that time period. Zero Libyans and zero Syrians. “Foreign-born terrorism is a hazard,” the Cato Institute argues, “but it is manageable given the huge economic benefits of immigration and the small costs of terrorism.” The study concludes that “the chance of an American being murdered in a terrorist attack caused by a refugee is 1 in 3.64 billion per year.”

Business Insider states that Americans are six times more likely to die from a shark attack (one of the rarest forms of death on Earth), 29 times more likely to die from an asteroid strike, 260 times more likely to be struck and killed by lightning, 4,700 times more likely to die in an airplane or spaceship accident, 129,000 times more likely to die in a gun assault, 407,000 times more likely to die in a motor vehicle incident and 6.9 million times more likely to die from cancer or heart disease than they are to die in a terrorist incident.

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Finally, the National Safety Council states simply that the odds of Americans dying at the hands of refugee tourists are one in 46,192,893 and at the hands of immigrant tourists, one in 138,324,873.

There is no reputable source in this country that says anything different about the terrorist threat. It is anything but real. In fact, the threat is so miniscule that we are forced to wonder precisely what motivates the administration to tout it so forcefully. What are their goals in distorting the truth so ceaselessly? Why are they trying, so obviously, to turn America into a land of “terrorist paranoia”?

People who succumb to the “alternative facts” on the “threat of terrorism” that are now being put out by the Trump administration are creating a new and different world for themselves. It will become more important to them that they be “safe” than that they be “free.” Benjamin Franklin said appropriately in 1755, “Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.” That could not be more true today.

It seems therefore likely that the administration is trying to create and then expand an environment of fear and terrorist paranoia. Why they would be doing that is a far more difficult question. Do they seek additional power or wealth? It is difficult to construct any theory that is benign toward our people or our democracy. It does seem however, that the promotion of “terrorist paranoia” is likely designed to create a situation in which the population will be prepared to give up freedoms to the central government in return for “safety” provided by that same government.

Heightened fear in populations has often led to the end of existing forms of government, largely because a fearful population is relatively easy to manipulate. Fear is a vehicle that despots often try to ride into far more restrictive models of government. History is rife with examples of this and whatever the motivation, there is absolutely no reason to think that American democracy is immune.