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US Sen. Murphy: fear of attacks by terrorists in America outstrips reality

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U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy told Muslim leaders in a recent meeting that the fear of being attacked by terrorists has far outstripped the reality of that happening in the United States.

Murphy, in a meeting at Yale Law School, covered a number of topics, including bullying of Muslim children in schools and the ban on immigration from seven majority-Muslim countries.

The discussion was led by Farhan Memon, interim chairman of the Connecticut chapter of the Council of American-Islamic Relations.

“All of us in government have been guilty of stirring people’s fear of terrorism to the point where it is disconnected from reality. On average, since Sept. 11, (2001) about 3 people every year in this country have been killed by terrorists,” he told the several dozen people in attendance.

“You are more likely to be killed, and I don’t mean this jokingly ... in an elevator accident or by a falling object or by lightning, than you are by terrorism. You are not going to die in a terrorist attack, if you are an American, with, on average, three exceptions every year,” Murphy said.

Trump’s executive order notes that his concern is about protecting Americans.

The state’s junior senator said that doesn’t mean that you don’t take the threat seriously or understand that some people want to hurt Americans.

“But it doesn’t mean that you have to violate every best tradition of this country in basic civil rights in order to protect against a threat which we have been doing a pretty good job of buttressing this country from,” Murphy said.

He said it is his job to “right-size” people’s fear of terrorism.

An article in Business Insider, based on data crunched by the conservative Cato Institute, determined that since 9/11, “foreign-born terrorists have killed roughly one American per year. Six Americans have died per year at the hands, guns, and bombs of Islamic terrorists (foreign and domestic).”

Cato found the odds of dying from all forms of terrorism are 1 in 45,808; from refugee terrorism it is 1 in 46,192,893; by an illegal immigrant, it is 1 in 138,324,873. The chances of dying from a heart attack are 1 in 7.

A second study by Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration expert at Cato, determined that nationals from the seven countries barred by President Trump from entering the country for 90 days have not killed anyone on U.S. soil from 1975 to 2015.

Those countries are Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

The president's executive order cuts the refugee program in half to 50,000 a year, stops all refugees from coming here for four months and indefinitely blocks Syrian refugees.

"This is a response to a phantom menace. From 1975 to the end of 2015, 20 refugees have been convicted of attempting or committing terrorism on U.S. soil, and only three Americans have been killed in attacks committed by refugees — all in the 1970s," Nowrasteh wrote.

The statistics used by Cato go through 2015. Missing would have been the killing of 49 people at Pulse, a gay club in Orlando, Florida, in June 2016 by Omar Mateen, an American citizen, who told officials during the shooting that he had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq.

Memon said he was concerned with a definition of terrorism that excludes self-identified white supremacist Dylann Roof, who killed nine people in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2015.

"We very rarely hear politicians or others frame it in that way. When we talk about terrorist attacks, we talk about attacks with Muslim perpetrators, whether or not they are politically connected or not. Some people are just crazy, because they are crazy," Memon said.

He compared it with the response of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who called the killing last month of six people and the wounding of 18 others at a mosque in Quebec City a "terrorist attack."

Murphy said he hopes the Justice Department does not tear down its domestic terrorism operation, which "goes after white nationalists." He said it will be more important going forward to "adequately define terrorism."

One of the invited guests said she has gotten reports of Muslim students being called terrorists by their classmates.

Murphy said now that the ban on people coming to the U.S. has opened up a conversation about discrimination, "It is an opportunity to try to bring this conversation to the schools and you can do it in a truly interfaith way."