

## Some Quick Thoughts on the Muslim Ban, the United States, and Terrorism

*The old expression, "to the victor belong the spoils" -- you remember. I always used to say, keep the oil ... So we should have kept the oil ... Maybe you'll have another chance. But the fact is, should have kept the oil.*

(Donald Trump, January 21, 2017)

As a citizen of the United States (US), and a thinking person, I believe we have a responsibility to be at least minimally informed about the role of the United States in global affairs. We cannot simply accept the pronouncements of our government leaders or the reporting of the news media. An educated citizenry must ask critical question, be clear-eyed about the US role in the world, and accept that this country has shaped global affairs to its interest through overt and covert action. These actions have included overthrowing governments,<sup>1</sup> creating partnerships with oppressive regimes, and subjecting US citizens of various groups to human and civil rights violations.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore our patriotic duty to critically assess what we are being told and how we are being represented on the world stage.

### The Muslim Ban & the US Role in the Middle East

Notwithstanding its questionable constitutionality,<sup>3</sup> the recent executive order banning travel from seven predominantly Muslim Middle Eastern countries (countries that collectively have produced exactly zero terrorist deaths in the US since 1975)<sup>4</sup> must be viewed with a wider lens that includes the checkered history of the US in the Middle East (as well as the growing Islamophobia and hate crimes that have surged post 9/11 and over the past year in the US).<sup>5</sup>

A few examples of the historic role of the US in the Middle East include specific relationships with the countries on the banned list and the role of the US is supporting the development of global jihadist networks. First, consider the relationship between the US, Iran, and Iraq.

#### Iran

Basic knowledge of the historic relationship between the United States and other countries can be helpful in understanding current tensions. For example, the Iranian government was overthrown by the CIA and U.S. government (Operation Ajax) and the UK (Operation Boot) in 1953. Following the coup, both countries supported a monarch who was beholden to the U.S./British interests. The 1979 revolution was to overthrow this U.S. supported leader by the Iranian people. The relationship between the U.S. (and Britain) and Iran has been built on the Anglo-American investment in extracting the oil resources (and the wealth they generated) in Iran (BP anyone?). Understanding this should help make the absurdity of the U.S. trying to profess some fictitious moral high-ground clear.

#### Iraq

In 2003 the U.S. invaded Iraq under false pretenses leading to the overthrow of the Iraqi government. This began with a "shock and awe" campaign that was shown nightly on U.S. television. This war has resulted in between 150,000 and over 1,000,000 deaths depending on the various estimates. While the argument was made that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, U.S. policy had been to overthrow the Iraqi leadership since 1998 when the *Iraqi Liberation Act* was signed by Bill Clinton. It read in part that *"It should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq..."*<sup>6</sup> So the official policy of the U.S. was to overthrow a foreign government.

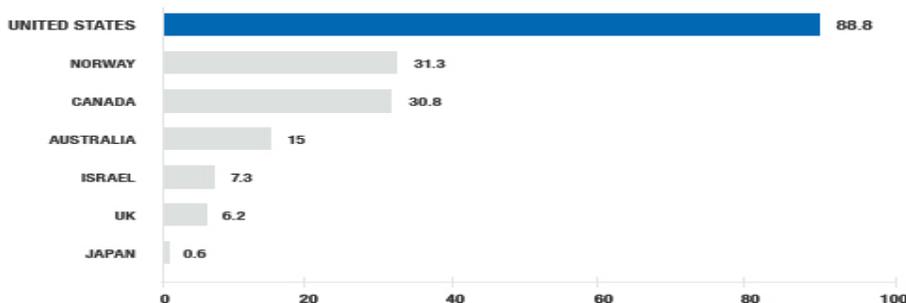
## The US Role in Global Jihadist Networks

The US also played a major role in the creation of the very jihadist networks that the US is fighting now. Covert US operations designed in part to combat the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 were critical to the development and training of the Mujahideen (Operation Cyclone).<sup>7</sup> The US engaged in a long term relationship (1979-1989) with and support for the fighters who formed part of the foundation of global terrorist networks.<sup>8</sup>

## Larger Threats to the US – Gun Violence & White Supremacist Terrorism

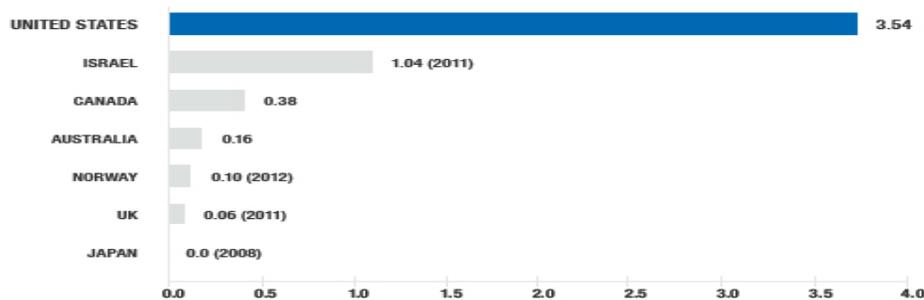
The US has many threats other than “Islamic Terrorism” to contend with. For instance, the US is among the most violent wealthy countries in the world. Gun ownership levels in the US are exceptionally high in comparison to other countries because of our gun laws.<sup>9</sup> Some estimates suggest there is a gun for every man, woman, and child currently living in the US.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps as a result of these lenient gun laws, and high levels of gun ownership, gun violence in the US far outpaces other comparable countries. For example, the Council on Foreign Relations provides a useful overview of how the US compares in global perspective.<sup>11</sup>

**FIREARMS PER 100 PEOPLE (2007)**



Source: Small Arms Survey

**FIREARM HOMICIDES PER 100,000 PEOPLE (2013)**

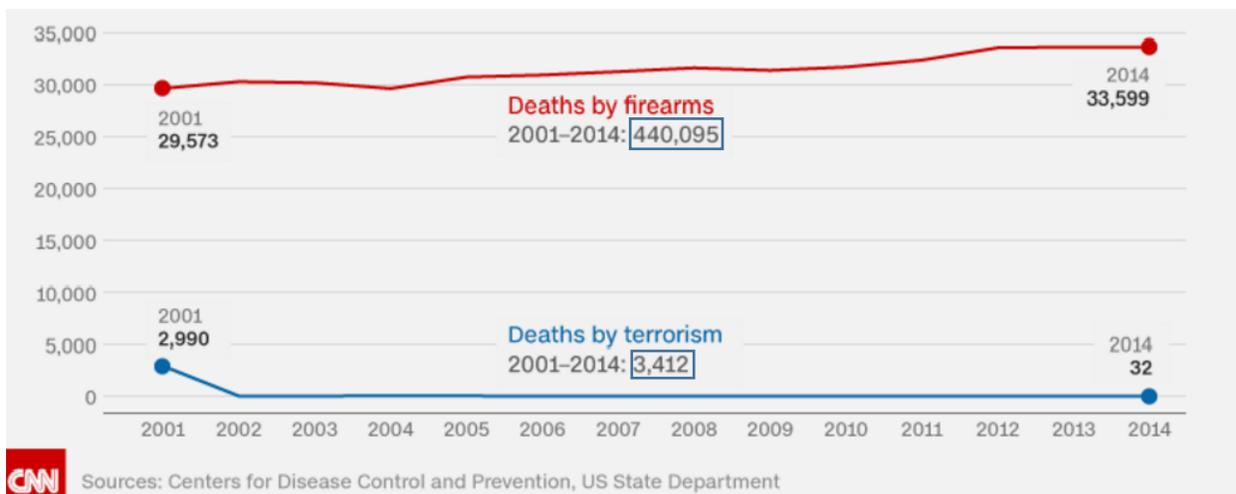


Sources: gunpolicy.org, University of Sydney

Credits: Jonathan Masters, Julia Ro

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For a useful comparison, CNN compiled global terrorism related deaths of US citizens and US deaths by gun violence between 2001 and 2013. The results show that US citizens are **1000 times** more likely to die from gun violence than terrorism (406,496 to 3,380).<sup>12</sup>



US mass shootings are also a critical problem. In 2015 alone, there were 372 mass shootings (defined as one shooter killing or wounding 4 or more people) in the US killing 472 people and injuring 1,870 people.<sup>13</sup> Despite the clear challenges associated with gun violence in the US, there has been much partisan arguing but little meaningful effort to address this issue at a federal level.

Even with this high level of violence, the US homicide rate is at a 50 year low.<sup>14</sup> Yes, despite Donald Trump’s rhetoric in his “American Carnage” Inauguration Address,<sup>15</sup> the US is the safest it has been since the middle 1960s. Still, if we listen to Trump’s words we see a world overrun with gangs, and crime, and of course “Radical Islamic” Terrorism. The idea that foreign born radical jihadists are *the* major threat to the US population is ***not supported by the evidence***.

If we are really serious about rooting out threats, we need to pay close attention to white supremacist hate groups. The Southern Poverty Law Center documented well over 850 Anti-Black, Anti-Muslim, Anti-LGBTQ, Anti-woman, and Anti-Immigrant, Anti-Semitic, and White Nationalist incidents in just the first 10 days after the 2017 presidential election.<sup>16</sup> More generally, white nationalists represent a major internal threat to the security of millions of US residents who are the target of their hatred. This says nothing about the fact that one of their own, Steve Bannon, is Chief Strategist for the POTUS and a member of the National Security Council.<sup>17</sup> His role reduces the likelihood that anything will be done about the violent white supremacist threat to the US.

### Final Thoughts

All of this information is freely available to the public, however it is overlooked through ahistorical thinking by US citizens as well as uncritical discussions in the media. We need to be thoughtful consumers of information, bring historical and sociopolitical perspectives to everyday events, and stop falling for the politics of symbolism over substance and false patriotism over critical engagement.

JBD

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<sup>1</sup> Since WWII the list of countries in which the US has attempted to cause or support “regime change” includes Cuba, Iran, Guatemala, Chile, Dominican Republic, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Grenada, Panama, Haiti, Iraq, Syria, among others.

<sup>2</sup> UN experts statement on US treatment of its citizens of color

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53124#.WJYH21MrJ0w>, Department of Justice reports on Police mistreatment in Ferguson, MO <https://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/national/department-of-justice-report-on-the-ferguson-mo-police-department/1435/>, Chicago <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/925846/download>, and other cities.

<sup>3</sup> I have a long list of issues with this executive order. I find it morally reprehensible, strategically wrong-headed, and indefensible. However, that is not my primary point here. <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/federal-judge-in-seattle-halts-trumps-immigration-order/>; <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/01/28/512158238/arrivals-to-u-s-blocked-and-detained-as-trumps-immigration-freeze-sets-in>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/no-terror-attacks-muslim-ban-7-countries-trump\\_us\\_588b5a1fe4b0230ce61b4b93](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/no-terror-attacks-muslim-ban-7-countries-trump_us_588b5a1fe4b0230ce61b4b93)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/30/us/islamerica-excerpt-hate-crimes/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-105publ338/html/PLAW-105publ338.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Hoodbhoy, Pervez. (2005). “Afghanistan and Genesis of Global Jihad.” *Peace Research* 37:1: 15-30. Wright, Robin. (2015). “The Genesis and Growth of Jihad.” *The New Yorker*. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-genesis-and-growth-of-global-jihad>. Wright connects the growth of this global jihad to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution of 1979. Of course, the US was ultimately deeply implicated on both sides of these events in 1979. The US apparently provided at least \$3 Billion to the Mujahideen fighters in Afghanistan. Operation cyclone predates the Soviet invasion.

<sup>8</sup> Hoodbhoy, Pervez. (2005). “Afghanistan and Genesis of Global Jihad.” *Peace Research* 37:1: 15-30.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/gun-policy/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34996604>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.cfr.org/society-and-culture/us-gun-policy-global-comparisons/p29735>

<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34996604>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/04/us/gun-violence-graphics/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2017/01/american-carnage>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/20161129/ten-days-after-harassment-and-intimidation-aftermath-election>. The Southern Poverty Law Center also documents 892 currently active hate groups in the US.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/29/politics/susan-rice-steve-bannon/>