

Why Evolution Is True

Lawrence Krauss on terrorism and statistics

How scared should we be about terrorism? Every terrorist killing in a Western land—be it France, Britain, Denmark, or the U.S.—makes us more and more uncomfortable and frightened. Sometimes people go into full panic mode, or prey on those who do, like the odious Donald Trump.

But, in a new piece in *The New Yorker*, “[Thinking rationally about terror](#)” (free online), physicist Lawrence Krauss says we shouldn’t be so worried. The statistics, he argues, show that terrorist violence in Western countries is negligible compared to the normal background levels of violence, and we’re getting all worked up about very little. His argument includes these paragraphs:

There are about two and a quarter million people in Paris. This means that, if you were living in Paris on the day of the recent attacks, there was roughly a one-in-twenty-thousand chance of being a victim. While that may seem high, the annual likelihood of getting killed by a car in France is almost exactly the same. (Last year, there were three thousand two hundred and fifty traffic fatalities in a population of sixty-four million.)

Murder rates offer another window onto the question. In France as a whole, the annual murder rate over the past five years peaked at around eight hundred and forty—which means that the recent terrorist attacks raised the national murder rate by about fifteen per cent. In Paris, the annual murder rate in previous years has been as high as 2.6 per hundred thousand people; by that measure, the terrorist attacks this year were a significant perturbation, more than doubling the average murder rate. Even so, it’s worth noting that this makes Paris about as dangerous as New York City, where the murder rate has been as high as seven per hundred thousand in recent years. New York is generally considered a very safe city. So, while terrorism has made life in France more dangerous, the new level of danger is one we tolerate—even celebrate—in the United States.

and

As far as the U.S. is concerned, it has been pointed out already—by the President, in fact—that about thirty-three thousand people die each year from gunshot wounds. That’s about four hundred thousand people since 2001. By contrast, setting aside 9/11, and even including the San Bernardino shootings, only fifty-four deaths have occurred because of domestic acts of terrorism during that time. Even if you include 9/11, the total death toll from terrorism amounts to less than one per cent of the death toll from gun violence. Just before San Bernardino, the Washington Post [reported](#) that, in the first three hundred and thirty-four days of 2015, there had been three hundred and fifty-one mass shootings in the United States—that is, shootings in which four or more people were killed or injured by gunfire. That is more than one per day. It is sobering to recognize that this month’s attack in California, as horrific as it was, does not skew the statistics at all; sadly, December 2nd in San Bernardino was just another average day in the United States. In fact, with over a hundred and eighty people shot each day in this country, even a mass killing like that which occurred in Paris would not significantly affect the death toll from guns in the U.S.

. . . the risks of falling prey to terrorism are nevertheless very small for most Americans. Terrorists have forced us to accept that any activity associated with living in a free society now carries with it a finite, and microscopically small, chance of tragic horror. Still, it’s up to us to choose how to react to this minuscule possibility.

Krauss’s solution is to chill out about the problem, realize the small scale of terrorist violence, and put our energies into problems that can really make us safer, like controlling the rampant proliferation of firearms in the U.S.

In general I agree with Lawrence, especially about gun control. But I’m not sure he’s completely apprehended both the motives of Islamic terrorism or why we’re so scared of it.

The smaller quibble rests on Krauss’s characterization of terrorist motives:

Needless to say, it is terrifying to know that there are individuals living

among us with the express intent of killing randomly, for effect. But we must recognize that that's the point of terrorism: it aims to scare us, thereby disrupting normal life. More than that, terrorism is designed drive a wedge between segments of a community which otherwise might have coexisted peacefully, both politically and socially.

That may be true in part, but the avowed aim of organizations like ISIS goes further: not only to disrupt our societies, but to *take them over*: make them part of the Caliphate, spreading oppression and sharia law and dismantling democracy. Or, at least, to initiate the Big Battle that will bring on Armageddon. That, and not just random killing, is what we're scared of: that we'll lose a democratic society dedicated to equality and Enlightenment values.

More important, although the probability of an attack may be low, it may get higher. If you think of car accidents or the background rate of murder in the U.S. as a chronic disease, you can think of terrorism as the Ebola virus. Yes, the chances such a virus will infect any of us in the U.S. are small, but if it gets established, things could get very bad. When someone with Ebola manages to get to the U.S., we don't dismiss it by saying, "Look, a lot more people die of cancer!" The alarms go off and stringent health measures are taken.

There's a reason why people panic about Ebola but not about the statistics on cancer. Our concern doesn't rest only on current statistics, but about what could come. I'm pretty confident that we can keep things under control, but we don't know; and that ignorance is what breeds our fear.

Share this:



9 bloggers like this.

Related

Once again, Scott Atran exculpates religion as a cause of terrorism
With 139 comments

Krauss on the Chapel Hill murders
In "crime and punishment"

Lawrence Krauss on Ben Carson (it's not pretty)
In "Intelligent Design Creationism Watch"

January 3, 2016

[< Previous](#)

[Next >](#)



Gasper on [January 3, 2016 at 11:41 am](#)

Jerry, I am completely in agreement with you on the ultimate aims of ISIS. Our uninformed left and certainly our media have yet to realize this.



Torbjörn Larsson on [January 3, 2016 at 2:12 pm](#)

What says these groups don't realize it? In fact media has often described their 'ultimate' aims in great detail.

It is another matter if you are worried that they aren't bothered by it at this point in time. Media (and at a guess even some individuals in political groups) are mostly realists after all.



eric on [January 4, 2016 at 8:51 am](#)

Jerry's point is also more or less analogously correct for other groups: McVeigh and other right-wing terrorists don't kill *randomly* either. They have a specific goal and they target people who they believe are preventing that goal. Today's right-wingers very often target Federal or State government workers

or other people/places they think represent government. Anti-abortion terrorists target clinics and clinic workers. The previous generation's environmentalist and animal-rights extremists targeted corporations or laboratories they thought were doing bad things. Al Qaeda did not target randomly either; the WTC had been a target of attack for years because it represented US financial power. And the Pentagon is, well, the Pentagon.

Separatist groups like ISIS or ETA or Hamas sometimes target randomly. My sense is that Krauss' comment about terrorists attacking randomly to bring fear to a population is really only true of these types of groups (separatists), and is not true of other forms of terrorism.



Ant (@antallan) on January 3, 2016 at 11:46 am



\$G on January 3, 2016 at 11:47 am

I think another difference is between being caught as a bystander and being a sort of "target". Accidental deaths are both unfortunate and unlucky, but terrorist killings are perpetrated by individuals who are not only *looking to get you* but who are also working to increase the number of killings they can make happen.

The issue I have with comparing car accidents to mass shootings and terrorist attacks is that the former is mostly unavoidable and subject to human errors since they're a result of day-to-day functioning of our society. It's an accepted risk, for the most part. The latter two are mostly preventable and, frankly, have no reason for happening. They're almost completely superfluous and I'd argue that if the likelihood of either (or both) of those things is as high as a car accident, then it's a good reason to be a little bit edgy.



Lou Jost on January 3, 2016 at 12:08 pm

Yes, "preventability" can and should play an important role in these mental calculations. We've beaten our heads against the wall on the gun control issue, and we've become resigned to the fact that this can't be changed (for now). On the other hand, we often set food and drug and car safety regulations that have very small real effects. We do so because the risks, though small, are easily preventable by simple changes. We weigh the cost against the benefits.



Jonathan Wallace on January 3, 2016 at 11:49 am

I think the ebola comparison is a telling one. It may be human nature to panic about something dramatic like ebola but in a country like the US there is very little chance of catching it even if a US citizen is diagnosed with it. When there is an epidemic of ebola going on somewhere in the world that US citizens might travel to (or meet people who have travelled from that region) it makes sense to introduce simple precautions to reduce the risk of infection but not to so constrain our lives with precautions that we cannot go about our business in a fairly normal way. I think the terrorism risk is very similar but we have tended to over react and some of the precautions introduced to address the risk are excessive and the costs are not justified by the risk. In the UK for example the government has shown itself to be very ready to curtail ancient and important freedoms in the name of the 'war on terror'.



jerrold12 on January 3, 2016 at 11:54 am

Jerry,

You are correct. ISIS has steadily expanded its terrorist capabilities and actions in furtherance of its goal of imposing its religious rule worldwide. To say that we should not worry because at the moment it can only kill a couple of hundred people at a time is absurd and stupid. What level of violence should trigger our concern? Suicide bombs that kill 5,000 instead of 50? 100 gunmen instead of 10? Missiles instead of RPG's? Poison gas in subways? Nukes?

"Today, however, we have to say that a state is a human community

that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.” – Max Weber, 1919

“And then what are you prepared to do? If you open the can on these worms you must be prepared to go all the way. Because they’re not gonna give up the fight, until one of you is dead.” Malone (Sean Connery), *The Untouchables*, 1987



Torbjörn Larsson on January 3, 2016 at 2:16 pm

“To say that we should not worry because at the moment it can only kill a couple of hundred people at a time is absurd and stupid. What level of violence should trigger our concern?”

=D To use a slippery slope argument on Jerry’s rationalist site is “absurd and stupid”. [

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slippery_slope]



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 2:42 pm

What level of violence should trigger our concern? Suicide bombs that kill 5,000 instead of 50?

Short of the mythical “suitcase nuke”, I can’t think of a technology short of the truck bomb that could achieve that. What was McVeigh’s score? 170. The two bombs in Dar and Nairobi scored similarly. The Beirut barracks bombs scored about 300. You know, I don’t think you’re going to get above a few hundred with a truck bomb. That’s a week or so of car-crash levels of risk. To get 5000 ... you’re going to have to crash an airplane into a crowded sports stadium. (My “SEP” field kicks in – not a problem I have any worry about. In an alternative take, while watching the London New Year fireworks from an unofficial site a couple of km from the official site, I noticed – no searching of people ; crowd of around 50 thousand, with perhaps 10,000 rucksacks ; definitely a target. I couldn’t estimate the likelihood of there being an attack, but what are the likely effects. A pressure-cooker bomb – score of 3 people and 20-odd amputations for a cost of around 5kg of explosive. Effective blast radius was in the order of 10m (from news photos). I looked around me, counted about 30 people within 10m of us, and decided that the odds (around 1 in 2000) of being dangerously close to a (hypothetical) attacker were acceptable ... and concentrated on my photography (and keeping an ear open for disturbances, in particular “pickpocket!”).

Rational risk assessment is a calming technique. Like humming “Deepak Chopra is an oxygen thief” as a mantra, but more useful (than either Chopra, or the mantra-humming).

100 gunmen instead of 10?

You know how to keep a secret? Yes? So do I. The more people involved in a conspiracy, the greater the chance of leaks. This is not a secret.

Missiles instead of RPG’s?

Already happening – the MH-17 massacre. It was a credible (for a time) consideration in the Metrojet 9268 investigation too. You know what – flying over the IS fighters in Tunisia and Libya is a straw-gripper for me. Doesn’t stop me getting to work though.

Poison gas in subways?

Aum Shinryko. 1995. That and the amplification of blast effects by confinement in subway walls was sufficient reason for me to walk to and from the car for the New Year’s Eve fireworks display. Probability of being significantly involved in any event reduced to a relaxation-worthy level. I still kept an ear open for “pickpocket!” though.

Nukes?

If they’re going to be used by a non-state actor, then they’re probably already in a shipping container near the target, and there’s damned-all you or I can do about it. Apart from avoiding port cities.

As far as state actors go – yes, it is really worrying the way that

Pakistan and India are squared-off against each other. Damned good reason to not go to Pakistan without requiring danger pay. India, OTOH, is so much larger that the risk is diluted. I'd still get danger pay, but that's for food poisoning, not terrorism. But hey, it's just terrorism. We had a decade or so without having to worry too much about it, between the decline of the IRA and the rise of Al Quadea. It's just getting back into harness.



Jonathan Wallace on January 3, 2016 at 2:57 pm

Well said.



DrBrydon on January 3, 2016 at 11:57 am

I think we do need to take a hard look at our approach to terrorist violence. We can't ignore it on the principle that you can't ignore any murder or violent crime, especially one that is premeditated. I think that that means a strong international effort. Domestically, though, I am afraid that our freedoms and way of life are under a greater threat from our elected officials and their minions than from terrorism. If we can survive all the deaths from cancer, automobile accidents, and guns, then we can survive even a lot more than the terrorists, based on the last fourteen years, seem to be able to throw at us. The measures adopted for our security, even assuming they are effective, which is not at all obvious, seem to be disproportionate.

As the fictional Judge Heywood said in *Judgement at Nuremberg*:

There are those in our own country, too, who today speak of the "protection of country" — of "survival." A decision must be made in the life of every nation at the very moment when the grasp of the enemy is at its throat. Then it seems that the only way to survive is to use the means of the enemy, to rest survival upon what is expedient — to look the other way.

Well, the answer to that is "survival as what?" A country isn't a rock. It's not an extension of one's self. It's what it stands for. It's what it stands for when standing for something is the most difficult!



Jonathan Livengood on January 3, 2016 at 12:01 pm

When you say that Krauss hasn't apprehended why "we" are so scared of Islamic terrorism, who are you counting among the "we"? I personally have no fear that Islamic terrorists will succeed in taking over the U.S. or France or Germany or any other Western democracy. And I seriously doubt that average people who are scared of terrorists are afraid of a take-over.

I think your disease analogy is interesting and apt. But I'm not sure it runs counter to Krauss's argument. The analogy seems to me to be good reason to worry about the establishment and growth of ISIS or of similar extremist "states" around the world. Such "states" could cause lots of harm if left to fester. But what should the attitude of typical Westerners be with respect to terrorist attacks *in Western nations*? Should we regard *those attacks* as serious threats to our way of life? As military invasions meant to overthrow our governments? Those aims seem laughably out of reach. Do you think it helps efforts to contain extremism abroad to be fearful at home?

Finally, taking up your disease analogy again, I'm much more worried that a minor irritant (e.g., a terrorist attack) has caused a massive over-reaction (e.g., widespread state surveillance, militarized police, warrant-less wiretapping) that acts like an allergic reaction or a serious auto-immune disease. I think that our ill-considered reaction to the threat of terrorism has done much more to undermine our way of life (and especially our enlightenment values) than the attacks themselves did or would do. Does that seem crazy to you? If not, how do you think we should balance our response to terrorism so that it doesn't spiral out of control and eat the things we love?



Torbjörn Larsson on January 3, 2016 at 2:24 pm

Reputedly Daesh is too poor to become a state if it was

contained this moment. (Which it de facto is, since its' territory is shrinking.) The army takes half the money.

But what if it was? Add on the Catholic state and we would have *two* theocratic states those only goal are to practice magic. One of them is fairly peaceful, but by some measures causing far more deaths globally *every year*. [HIV et cetera.]

What state should we be most aghast at?



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 2:55 pm

What state should we be most aghast at?

Well, in a rational world, we'd be aghast at the state of ignorance. But the state of iggorance being what it is, the media are more likely to be aghast at \$CELEBRITY's state of disarray in the hair or underwear department.



mayamarkov on January 4, 2016 at 7:13 am

Catholicism can be confronted peacefully, and it is shrinking. Islam cannot be confronted peacefully, and it is expanding.



John O'Neill on January 3, 2016 at 12:02 pm

On Ebola, check out Robert Sapolsky's reply to this year's Edge question. His conclusion:

"As the most scientifically significant moment of 2015, a 28-author team publishes in Lancet about the results of a Phase II clinical trial of an Ebola vaccine. Nearly 8,000 Guinean subjects, careful experimental design, 100 percent effectiveness at preventing disease occurrence when administered immediately after exposure to someone with Ebola. Yes, this isn't the end of the disease, and the research started long before the West African epidemic. But this is a rough approximation of scientists, with lightning speed, saving us. It would be nice if the general public thought the same."

I think we can all cheer for that.



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 3:03 pm

We should not forget last year's terrible Science paper "Genomic surveillance elucidates Ebola virus origin and transmission during the 2014 outbreak" (Vol. 345 pp. 1369-1372) with 9% of the authorship group dead of the disease before publication.



Les on January 3, 2016 at 7:55 pm

Ebola and other hemorrhagic fever viruses were thought as possible terrorist weapons post 9/11 2001 so lots of research was done many years before. Yes, gene sequencing and stuff to edit DNA like CRISPR/CAD9 are breakthroughs but there was earlier research, too.



Diane G. on January 7, 2016 at 8:19 pm

Thanks for that.



Michael Michaels on January 3, 2016 at 12:15 pm

I too am concerned about ideologies that threaten our societies. But it's not just Islam, in the US the largest threat is sovereign citizen groups (according to a 2014 poll of state and local police by the Maryland University).

Right wing groups have been a target of the FBI in the US, many groups have been caught building or trying to buy bombs with the

aim of targeting government and police. They don't get the same level of coverage that Islam does.

The nutters are not just Islamic. There are also plenty of Republicans who are dominionists, they want America to be a theocracy and would happily toss out anyone who didn't attend church regularly. They too are trying to out breed the more sane portion of the public and ensure their children are properly indoctrinated.

Right now I'm concerned about Western Europe and the UK. While many have ridiculed concerns that Islam is encroaching on rights in democratic countries, the reality is because of the deference and respect given to religion citizens rights are being curtailed. Women are being forced to accept substandard divorce agreements. Girls are being subjected to female genital mutilation. Women are being harassed as they walk down the street, called sluts and whores for wearing Western clothing by small groups of Islamic men who have taken it on themselves to be morality police.

We can also point to what really woke up many people, the rioting, assaults and murders that occurred after the Danish cartoons. This is nothing less than one religion forcing their religious beliefs on everyone else.

It's wrong, and it's growing. It's not surprising it's growing since that is the plan. It's what most religions do.



Kurt Lewis Helf on January 3, 2016 at 12:50 pm

+1



Mark R. on January 3, 2016 at 1:37 pm

I'm in agreement here. That old bumper sticker comes to mind: Jesus, save me from your followers.



Randy Schenck on January 3, 2016 at 12:19 pm

The ultimate actions taken by the U.S. after 9/11 should help us in understanding the folly of doing the wrong thing and going in the worst direction. We mainly went the wrong way and have continued to make bad decisions since. Staying in Afghanistan after the initial goal of driving the Taliban and more importantly, the terrorists out was very wrong, just as the decision to go into Iraq was simply stupid and probably caused by the big lie invention of the Bush party.

ISIS currently is not going to come to America in any sizable way. We are currently doing the right thing by assisting the locals in Syria and Iraq to wipe out this next version of Islamist Terrorist. We already spend massive amounts of money here in the homeland as they say, protecting people. Maybe we need to spend more time and money educating our own poorly educated and more effort in protecting our computer systems and resources.

Prof. Krauss simply reminds us that many have over-reacted to the reality because of that old problem...fear.



darwinwins on January 3, 2016 at 12:34 pm

+1



Tim Harris on January 4, 2016 at 5:41 am

+1



Historian on January 3, 2016 at 12:23 pm

I think Professor Coyne's statement that the country is dedicated to equality needs some refinement. In the economic sense this country has never been dedicated to equality. As a capitalist society, by definition it is dedicated to inequality. It is expected, indeed cheered, that some people will be better off economically than

others. Today, the degree of inequality between the very rich and everybody else has grown so great that social turmoil is growing and the white working class, which has suffered greatly during the past several decades, finds appealing the rants of demagogues.

One may think of equality as meaning equality of opportunity and that this is what the country stands for. In recent decades this ideal has been sorely strained. Social mobility in this country has become very limited and scapegoats are needed to explain this condition – immigrants being the one of current choice.

Another meaning of equality is social equality. Here some limited progress has been made, especially for gays and lesbians. But racism is still rampant and partially explains the appeal to some of Donald Trump. Discrimination against immigrants is also rising.

Then there is political equality – one person, one vote. Voter suppression and gerrymandering make this ideal questionable in many places.

Finally, equality may mean equality under the law, that is, when people use the legal system they are treated the same regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, economic status, sexual orientation, etc. To some degree the system does work here, but it is far from imperfect. Corporations get special legislation passed all the time and they can easily overwhelm the "little man" in any legal proceeding. And, of course, the religious and religious institutions have many legal privileges.

So, equality in the United States, to the limited extent it ever existed in its many facets, is probably weaker than it has been since the culmination of democratic reforms starting with universal white male suffrage during the so-called Age of Jackson, followed by the abolition of slavery and the 14th amendment, and then the passage of the 19th amendment in 1920 that granted female suffrage. One could also add the civil rights legislation of the 1960s.

So, yes, fear of terrorism and the curtailment of democratic liberties as a result is one element in the threat to democracy in this country. But, there are several others that are equally as important as described above. Unless all the threats are addressed, the future of this country as a democratic society and its supposed commitment to equality is in jeopardy.



Randy Schenck on [January 3, 2016 at 12:53 pm](#)

Very much agree with the assessment on equality. Believe I saw some stats recently that show the U.S. as one of the most, if not the most, unequal country. One comparison said that the top 20 richest people in American hold as much wealth as nearly half the total population...about 147 million. Most folks cannot comprehend this kind of inequality.



Mike on [January 4, 2016 at 7:03 am](#)

I read a piece that stated the 80 richest Families in the World have more wealth than half the Worlds Population.



Mark R. on [January 3, 2016 at 1:44 pm](#)

+1



gravelinspector-Aidan on [January 3, 2016 at 3:13 pm](#)

Look, if you go around drawing attention to real issues that have been long in the development and will take real effort to change, then you're going to get in the way of populist demagogues attempts to win election by appealing to people's baser instincts.
That's like getting Bruce Banner angry. You don't want to get him angry.



Diane G. on [January 7, 2016 at 8:24 pm](#)

Very well said!



sedgequeen on January 3, 2016 at 12:31 pm

While it's true some in ISIS would like to take us over, they won't. I'm much more worried that we will lose our "democratic society dedicated to equality and Enlightenment values" (to the imperfect extent that we have one) to ourselves as a result of our fear.



Heather Hastie on January 3, 2016 at 1:16 pm

I would agree. I think the US is in far greater danger from those who wish to make it a Christian theocracy than a Muslim one. Almost every GOP candidate for president, for example, has some form of right-wing Christian doctrine that they plan to enforce. They have a chance of taking the White House and they already have the Congress, Senate, and SCOTUS.

Ted Cruz (and others, but he has a chance of winning) is going to abolish the IRS. There are constant state laws being introduced that make abortion more and more difficult, and which also preclude effective education on sex and contraception. Several candidates plan to reverse the SCOTUS same-sex marriage ruling. Many have Middle East policy plans that would increase the likelihood of terrorism at home.

While making analogies between car accidents and deliberate acts of murder annoys me (I think it's stupid), I think Krauss has got it right. There isn't nearly as much to be scared of from Islamist terrorism as many think. Indeed, the overreaction and fear-mongering are likely to create social conditions that increase domestic terrorism because of the rifts they create.



abeastwood on January 3, 2016 at 2:32 pm

I quite agree with you Heather. I'm quite concerned about the probability of some Christian theocratic psychopath being elected president. Can I apply for refugee status in New Zealand if that happens?



Heather Hastie on January 3, 2016 at 2:52 pm

I'm not sure a weirdo for a president would be grounds, but it's easier to become a citizen of NZ than the US as long as there's something you've got that we want (money or skills). 😊



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 3:21 pm

Ted Cruz (and others, but he has a chance of winning) is going to abolish the IRS.

Huh? Did I miss that one over Xmas – or is it just not making the press for being literally incredible? How the hell are they going to get the money out of the Little Man's pocket without the IRS? Or ... is it coming clear to me ... they're going to farm out tax-collecting to private companies. Well, it worked for the Sun King, so I'm sure it'll work for the Toupee King.



Heather Hastie on January 3, 2016 at 3:28 pm

I've no idea how he's going to do it, but check it out: <http://crooksandliars.com/2016/01/ted-cruz-creepy-mean-spirited-new-year-s>



Randy Schenck on January 3, 2016 at 4:43 pm

Makes me really glad I don't watch Fox. Actually I was wishing I had not clicked on it just now.



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 4:45 pm

I feel the need to wash my computer no
\$%”&\$%&&* ... NO CARRIER



noghostnomachine on January 4, 2016 at 1:10 pm

I once wrote a few “you might be a Republican” jokes (riffing on Jeff Foxworthy’s “you might be a redneck”). One of them was: if you think the American Revolution slogan “no taxation without representation!” was too wordy by half ... you might be a Republican.

Not so funny any more.



Diane G. on January 7, 2016 at 8:26 pm

Great joke, though! 😊



Michael Michaels on January 3, 2016 at 4:05 pm

The thought of Republicans taking the white house scares the hell out of me, and I’m not even an American. If they get the presidency this time they will almost certainly be able to stack SCOTUS for decades to come. Those few liberal judges can’t live forever. Ginsberg is 82, Breyer is 77.

Never mind many other appointments that are currently empty that they won’t let Obama fill so they can fill them with their own ideologues.

I would also say I too am not concerned about ISIS or other terrorist organizations here in Canada, but I am concerned for the many Muslim people who are the majority of their victims. Just as I’m concerned for the hundreds of millions of Muslim women, girls and men who are denied basic human rights.



Heather Hastie on January 3, 2016 at 4:22 pm

That’s pretty much how I feel. The US president has such an influence on the rest of us, I really worry about one of the current crop of Republicans in the White House too.

Dana Perino, former press secretary to GW Bush has a really good record at making accurate New Year predictions. Her’s for this year is that there will be a SCOTUS vacancy before the election. Cat among the pigeons and all that.



rickflick on January 3, 2016 at 6:53 pm

Don’t worry too much. The chances of a republican being elected to the presidency in the next election is pretty remote. Most Americans have at least enough common sense to avoid an obvious debacle.



Michael Michaels on January 4, 2016 at 10:27 am

I generally vacillate between two thoughts, one, Republicans are mostly not suitable for the white house which the majority of Americans can plainly see, as well as Republicans have been losing their supporters to old age. And thought two, I

never believed GW Bush would get a second term, or win the SCOTUS case, but Republicans (and their supporters/financiers) are willing to do almost anything to get them into power.

Republicans will do anything to get and keep power, including using voting machines in many red states that have no ability to check fraud and at the same time disenfranchise many Americans where Republicans hold state power.

At least two Republicans committed treason to gain the presidency. Richard Nixon ordered Anna Chennault, his liaison to the South Vietnam government, to persuade them to refuse a cease-fire being brokered by President Lyndon Johnson.

<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2014/08/12/george-will-confirms-nixons-vietnam-treason>

Ronald Reagan's campaign worked out a deal with the leader of Iran's radical faction – Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini – to keep the hostages in captivity until after the 1980 Presidential election.

<http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/20287-without-reagans-treason-iran-would-not-be-a-problem>

We can see recent Republicans deliberately sabotaging the economy during Obama's terms in order to make him look bad, their trying to crash the economy by defaulting on US debt, and their willful acts of obstruction against Obama from the day he took office even when it meant hurting the American people. One might think no sensible human being would ever vote for them after these events. Except some clearly do, and even some liberals believe and repeat many of the Republican/Fox News lies. Like Obama didn't keep his promise to close Guantanamo Bay. He tried but was blocked by Congress.

So I'm always at least a little concerned Republicans may find a new way to con, lie, cheat or steal their way into the white house.



sedgequeen on January 4, 2016 at 12:04 pm

"Most Americans have at least enough common sense to avoid an obvious debacle." This gives me no comfort. I used to think that, but then Ronald Reagan was elected president. And worse things have followed.



Diane G. on January 7, 2016 at 8:29 pm

Ain't that the truth!



phoffman56 on January 3, 2016 at 12:45 pm

One might wonder which of the following would elicit the greater panicky, over-the-top reaction from Faux News, or even from CNN in the U.S:

Scenario 1: Some 'average' guy, definitely no religious motivation, manages to kill over 100 innocent people with his legitimately obtained military weapon.

Scenario 2: The same, except exactly one person is killed, and the

motivation is definitely from ISIS.

It might be the second. And it is perhaps that kind of reaction which Krauss is pointing out, a reaction which has been leading to reduction of civil liberties in U.S., and to worries about fascist takeovers of democratic societies, whether Christian fascist, as seems to be occurring in Poland, or some other kinds of superstitious ideological nonsense.



Heather Hastie on January 3, 2016 at 1:19 pm

While the number 100 is far too high imo, I think you're otherwise correct.



Ralph on January 3, 2016 at 12:49 pm

If prior mortality statistics are a reliable guide to future risk, then the Cuban Missile Crisis, in fact the whole of the Cold War, was a storm in a teacup.

If we were discussing IRA terrorism, or Basque separatists, then a historic statistical risk analysis might indeed be a good guide to future risk. Those were/are groups of sane people pursuing specific political aims by strategic murder.

But Islamist terrorists are not carrying out attacks like Paris because they think that's the optimum strategy. They are doing the worst possible things they can do, constrained not by strategy but by the weapons they can get hold of.

Radical Islamism is a death cult that wants to destroy our civilization. Does anyone doubt that they would detonate a nuclear weapon in a major Western city if they could get hold of one? Or release literal weaponized Ebola, if there were such a thing?

It's the virus that has taken over their minds that's the frightening thing, it's what they are willing to do without conscience or hesitation. I find little comfort from their limited impact when it's solely because we have managed to keep more destructive weapons out of their hands thus far.



jerrold12 on January 3, 2016 at 12:52 pm

Ralph, Amen.



Randy Schenck on January 3, 2016 at 1:04 pm

Keeping the really dangerous weapons from the terrorist is important and so to is a logical and reasoned way to eliminate them, which I think we will over time. I think that, just as most of their victims have also been Muslim, it will be Muslims that put an end to these mad men. With us supporting them all the way.



Michael Michaels on January 4, 2016 at 10:42 am

I have a concern about nukes but I'm far more concerned that they will eventually find a virologist, breed a deadly pathogen and release it into the world.

It's hard getting a nuke, it's even harder to build one but relatively recent articles have shown it's easy to selectively breed extremely dangerous viruses.

"Scientists have created a life-threatening virus that closely resembles the 1918 Spanish flu strain that killed an estimated 50m people in an experiment labelled as "crazy" by opponents."

<http://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/jun/11/crazy-dangerous-creation-deadly-airborne-flu-virus>

We have seen education is no deterrent to extremism, and biological laboratories can be setup quite cheaply. Especially if your not overly concerned about containment.



rickflick on January 3, 2016 at 1:39 pm

I agree. This is Sam Harris's nightmare. He has fretted about Islamic Terrorists obtaining nuclear weapons – the ultimate terror weapon. He points out there nothing that would be a constraint on their use of such a weapon based on their fanaticism and literal interpretation of the Quran. I think it is unlikely in the short term since being an effective nuclear power is a complicated business, but in 10, 20, or 50 years if they are still around, the chances of a catastrophe become much higher.



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 3:38 pm

I agree. This is Sam Harris's nightmare. He has fretted about Islamic Terrorists obtaining nuclear weapons

... which is most likely to occur through the ballot box, in Pakistan.

To misquote (unjustly) Gerry Adams, "With the ballot box in one hand and the 20kt boosted fission nuke in the other."



Mike Paps on January 3, 2016 at 1:26 pm

It's not the individual terrorists events that worry me, but the potential, for example, of an ISIS eventually gaining access to nuclear weapons.



Steve Gerrard on January 3, 2016 at 1:32 pm

We can be scared "that we'll lose a democratic society," without giving up our sense of how likely that is to happen. Our response should be based on a realistic view of probable outcomes, not the worst and least likely outcome.

ISIS will have a hard time taking over Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. We should focus on containing them, and on establishing a bit more order and stability in the region.



Scott Draper on January 3, 2016 at 1:43 pm

"show that terrorist violence in Western countries is negligible"

True, but a small nuke could change that.



Torbjörn Larsson on January 3, 2016 at 2:29 pm

Luckily the market has been shown to be virtually zero. And that was when Russia was more leaky than today.



Keith Douglas on January 4, 2016 at 12:01 pm

I actually find it incredible that given the poverty and such in Russia these days that there hasn't been a "loose nuke" there – not to mention all the craziness in Pakistan.



Diana MacPherson on January 4, 2016 at 5:43 pm

After the cops war I think it was discovered that many were in bad shape. There have been some that have gone missing too and there have been near misses all over the world. [Look here to scare yourself.](#)



rickflick on January 4, 2016 at 6:41 pm

You've got to stop worrying and love the bomb.



Diana MacPherson on January 5, 2016 at

5:11 pm

That was also supposed to say "Cold War".



Torbjörn Larsson on January 3, 2016 at 2:08 pm

Good analysis from Krauss. I discovered the same thing this weekend but from a different perspective.

Pulling down the recently released European anti-terrorist agency report from 2014 and back based on legal findings, I found [taking this from memory as I write]:

- Terrorism has been decreasing in Europe over time. There is a recent fluctuation due to Ireland/UK violence, but the trend is clear.

- Religious terrorism account for ~ 1 % of terrorist violence. The majority is still based on nationalism/separatism, but it seems the major hot spot Spain now has got a grip. (Remaining reactions on the long history of the non-democratic fascist government, no doubt.)

- Religious terrorists suck at what they do. They account for ~ 40 % of arrests, despite being ~ 1 % of the activity.

The 2015 cases will change the picture somewhat, but as Krauss notes terrorism is a minor matter.

That may be true in part, but the avowed aim of organizations like ISIS goes further: not only to disrupt our societies, but to take them over: make them part of the Caliphate, spreading oppression and sharia law and dismantling democracy. Or, at least, to initiate the Big Battle that will bring on Armageddon. That, and not just random killing, is what we're scared of: that we'll lose a democratic society dedicated to equality and Enlightenment values.

I worried too until 2015 arrived with Daesh defeat by first Kurdish and now Iraq armies. Their heyday is over, and that was even before they met the Israeli army that Daesh openly claimed is the army they can't beat.



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 3:50 pm

Religious terrorists suck at what they do. They account for ~ 40 % of arrests, despite being ~ 1 % of the activity.

Maybe ... thinking that the Invisible Sky Fairy has "got your back" and approves of what you're doing (and is omnipotent and omniscient) ... is a tad detrimental to the maintenance of sensible operational security (I'm thinking of the couple that got sentenced on New Years Eve after the hilariously stupid Tw*ting looking for target ideas - is that the guy's IQ, or his shoe size?). Or synthetic chemistry protocols (cooling your TATP mix while preparing it). Or not giving the neighbours grounds for suspicion (e.g. testing detonation systems in your own back garden).

I mean. FFS. I'm aghast that people who share 99%+ of their DNA with me can be so jaw-grittingly moronic. I apologise in advance to any chimpanzees, no matter how moronic they are considered by their peers, who feel offended by the realisation that they too share a good 98% of their DNA with these dribbling idiots.

How far down the phylogenetic tree do I need to go? Sharks? Tunicates? Starfish? Corals? YEAST?

Come on, Daesh - please get some better quality cannon-fodder. I really don't want to have to apologise to YEAST again!



zl84841g on January 3, 2016 at 2:36 pm

John Mueller, a professor of political science at OSU, published a book on this topic ten years ago:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overblown_\(book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overblown_(book)). In the book, Mueller argues that the threat from terrorism is the US is almost nonexistent.

Mueller was right in 2006. Our fear of terrorism is overblown. When I hear someone going on about the threat of ISIS, I ask them how

many of our navy's ships they think ISIS could sink in an all-out attack. I know what my estimate is (zero). ISIS is a midge; we're a colossus.



DiscoveredJoys on January 3, 2016 at 3:08 pm

The weakness of the argument about the low probability of becoming a victim of a terrorist act is that the events are not isolated but part of a series.

It is probably fair to say that being a victim of a school/workplace shooting is very rare and a matter of chance, but a *series* of terrorist acts exposes the underlying agency – and that is what causes concern. It calls for a different response.

A quote from the Global Terrorism Index:

In 2013, 66% of all fatalities from claimed terrorist attacks were caused by four terrorist groups: the Taliban, Boko Haram, ISIL and al-Qa'ida. The primary targets of terrorist attacks are citizens and private property.

There seems to be a pattern...



Tim Harding on January 3, 2016 at 3:35 pm

Jerry, I agree with your concerns about ISIS's dangerous ambitions rather than just its current level of violence, as appalling as that may be.

I would also take issue with Krauss' false equivalence between terrorist acts and car accidents. The difference is that we choose to take the risk of driving cars – we do not choose to live amongst terrorists.



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 4:04 pm

we do not choose to live amongst terrorists.

Incorrect.

I chose to not emigrate when I first became aware of the terrorist threat in my home country (which was in the mid 1970s as the IRA bombing campaign ramped up). I still don't choose to emigrate. I continue travelling around the world for work in face of non-trivial terrorist threats (as well as plain old criminal threats ; and biological ones ; and the low chance of plane crash). Meanwhile, the flood of refugees from the US after McVeigh stepped up the terrorist threat from the levels of the UnaBomber ...

The terrorist (and other) threats have always been there. You might not have noticed them, but that doesn't make them not-exist.

My light relief reading over the holiday season has included an entertaining book called "*Incoming*," and sub-titled "or, Why We Should Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Meteorite". Yes, the Dr Strangelove reference is deliberate. If you read it tomorrow, would that make the existential threat to you from meteorite impact any the less? No. Same with "terrorist threats".



Tim Harding on January 3, 2016 at 4:10 pm

Emigrating to another country is much more difficult than simply moving to another suburb or choosing not to drive a car. The choices are not equivalent.



gravelinspector-Aidan on January 3, 2016 at 4:49 pm

Well, I already speak the language (adequately, for several values of "another country". So all I need to do is sell the house (which I'll need to do to move to another suburb), convince the wife (which I'll need to do to move to another suburb), and get up and go.

I mean, it's not like we don't have free movement of goods services and people in these countries. And it literally doesn't matter where I live as long

as I'm within an hour of an international airport. Of course, moving to another country wouldn't solve the problem of living with a threat of terrorism. Moving to another planet might do. Temporarily.



plingar on January 4, 2016 at 12:43 pm

Arguably you do not "speak the language adequately, for several values of another country" if you persist in describing your spouse as "the wife". Does your wife fall into the same category as the car? or maybe the house?
Shame on you, particularly on this site!



Ralph on January 4, 2016 at 1:03 pm

I suspect that you say "the children".

Even if you were not aware of the common non-pejorative British idiom "the wife", why on earth would you suppose that replacing "my" with "the" implies treating a spouse as property?



Diane G. on January 7, 2016 at 8:41 pm

Good point--just such a common usage that we never think of it. Of course, "my husband" is also common.

I sometimes comment on a Japanese bird webcam site where the proprietor's English is a bit clunky (while still 100% better than my Japanese, of course). He refers to his mate as "a wife," when I know he has just one. 😊



abeastwood on January 7, 2016 at 8:59 pm

I think that's partly a limitation of language. I briefly studied Russian many years ago and I think I recall that it has several possessive cases so that "my" inanimate object is clearly different from "my" spouse and "my" friend.



Diane G. on January 7, 2016 at 9:05 pm

I'd need both cases for my husband...



Tim Harding on January 3, 2016 at 3:37 pm

Reblogged this on [The Logical Place](#) and commented:
I agree with Prof. Coyne's concerns about ISIS's dangerous ambitions rather than just its current level of violence, as appalling as that may be.

I would also take issue with Krauss' false equivalence between terrorist acts and car accidents. The difference is that we choose to

take the risk of driving cars – we do not choose to live amongst terrorists.



compuholio on January 4, 2016 at 2:46 am

Actually I think the analogy is quite fitting. We choose to drive cars. A few people getting killed each year is (among other things) the price we pay for being a mobile society. In a way we choose to have car accidents: If we would ban all cars, there would not be any car accidents.

The same thing applies to terrorism (and crime in general): We are a (mostly) free society. In a free society we impose certain limits on the powers that governments and police forces have. In exchange we have to accept that some criminals might walk free. But that is the price we pay for living in a free society.

Now we live in a time where all government agencies tell us: "If you'll allow us to have even more power and if you'll allow us to operate with even less oversight we can protect you" and the general consensus seems to be: "Let's give it to them".

Not only do I think that sooner or later this will come back to bite us, I also question the very premise: Even with the great and largely unchecked powers the security agencies have today they have been close to useless.



Tim Harding on January 4, 2016 at 5:11 am

Then how do you account for the lack of any successful Islamist terrorist attack on US homeland since 9/11, despite ample intent? Sheer good luck? I don't think so.



compuholio on January 5, 2016 at 12:51 am

I think you are falling prey to a common fallacy: The number of successful attacks is not really meaningful to assess the impact of security agencies. You need to talk about the ratio of successful attacks vs. the number of attempted attacks. And this is where you run into a problem: Getting meaningful statistics is hard when the interesting events are rare in the first place and its certainly not going to be addressed by such a simplistic question.

You are selecting a rare event as a reference point for comparison. It is like saying "I won the jackpot in 2001 but I have never won it since then. The odds must have been getting worse."

I could just as well ask: Why are you starting to count at 9/11? What about all the decades before that? Why do you limit yourself to Islamic terrorism? Acts of terrorism are rare events by themselves. Only looking at a subset of those rare events makes it even more difficult to get meaningful data.



Tim Harding on January 5, 2016 at 4:48 am

Which particular fallacy are you referring to? Here is a selection to choose from. But choose carefully, because I am I'm likely to challenge you on it.



Tim Harding on January 5, 2016 at 4:50 am

Fallacies | The Logical Place
<https://yandoo.wordpress.com/fallacies-2/>



Ant (@antallan) on January 5, 2016 at 5:15 am

Well, you've just fallen prey to another fallacy: Assuming that any fallacy is a logical fallacy.

/@



rickflick on January 5, 2016 at 8:54 am

I'm not sure, but I would guess anything worthy of the name fallacy is fundamentally a logical fallacy, or perhaps a combination of more than one fallacy.

The "statistical" fallacy mentioned, could consist of the fallacy of Faulty risk assessment, but perhaps conjoined with another fallacy type.



compuhlio on January 5, 2016 at 5:15 am

I don't know if what I described is a logical fallacy. It is more a statistical fallacy (if that is actually a thing). I have explained in great detail why your challenge makes little sense.

If you have anything of substance to say I'll be happy to respond. But I am certainly not interested in playing word games.



Matt Jenkins on January 3, 2016 at 4:44 pm

Professor Coyne has identified the big picture; that religion, in this case Islam, is placing at risk the future existence of the society we want to live in. I'm writing from the UK, where the writing is very much on the wall.



Ken Kukec on January 3, 2016 at 5:15 pm

Krauss offers a much-needed antidote to the paranoia sweeping this nation.

To hear the Republicans running for president tell it, the two biggest threats to American life and limb are political correctness and ISIS-sponsored domestic terrorist attacks. When in fact, the first is a problem among privileged youth on scattered campuses across the country, and the San Berdoo attack bore only an attenuated relationship to the soi-disant "caliphate" straddling the Syria-Iraq frontier.



compuhlio on January 4, 2016 at 3:08 am

I am also with Krauss on this one. But I take issue with his statistics. It is misleading, but it is misleading in a way that argues against him:

He compares the probability of being killed in the attacks in Paris on that day with the probability of getting killed in a car crash over the period of a year. That means he has picked the day of a rare event as a baseline. It completely disregards how rare such an attack is in the first place. He would need to compare the number of people killed in terrorist attacks and car accidents in a much larger period of time and that means that terrorism is much less of an issue than a glance at his numbers would lead you to believe.

It also shows how ridiculous this whole security theater is: You

are trying to address an incredibly rare event. Whatever your process to address this is. You either have to have predictor of incredible quality, live with a large false positive ratio or you have to make it incredibly obtrusive. So this whole thing is an exercise in futility.



Diana MacPherson on January 3, 2016 at 5:49 pm

People don't like it when they feel that they have no control. Of course, most of the time, we don't, but we like to kid ourselves into believing that we do.

So, it scares us if we don't have a means to stop ISIS or if it seems like we could be targeted because we feel scared and can't think rationally. It's the same reason we feel afraid to fly in an airplane but happy to drive our cars down a busy highway hugging the bumper of the car in front of us.

Thank goodness for statistics, but most of us won't pay any attention to them anyway. We like feeling good not thinking well.



abeastwood on January 3, 2016 at 7:38 pm

"...drive our cars down a busy highway hugging the bumper of the car in front of us". It bothers me when people do that. I've been to the BMW Performance Driving School several times and one of the major tips the instructors always emphasize is "leave a BIG space between you and the car ahead". One time someone in the class said "but when you watch races, the cars are very close." The instructor said that's because professional drivers know there's only one way to go through a curve, so you can pretty much count on what the other drivers are going to do. On the turnpike, you can be sure most of the people haven't a clue, so leave a long space between you and them. If something unexpected happens right in front of you, you WILL hit it.



Ken Kukec on January 3, 2016 at 11:53 pm

Yeah, the masses react to what's scary, and aren't able to distinguish the scary from the dangerous. (e.g., Sharks are scary; bathtubs are dangerous. Terrorists are scary; automobiles are dangerous. Ebola's scary; not chewing before you swallow is dangerous.)



Tim Harding on January 4, 2016 at 12:05 am

I must say that I am surprised at the lack of importance attached to personal choice regarding risks in some of the comments here. Are they hard determinists who don't believe in free will anyway?



Diane G. on January 7, 2016 at 8:46 pm

Now that you mention it... 😊



Rasmo Carena on January 4, 2016 at 2:47 am

I am a bit disappointed by Kraus on this issue. And him citing a Dean Obeidallah piece on twitter doesn't help much. Just my opinion.



Tim Harris on January 4, 2016 at 3:23 am

Were I American, I should be much more exercised by the dangers posed to America's 'democratic society dedicated to equality and Enlightenment values' by the poisonous mixture of neo-liberal economics, business corruption, growing inequality, the Tea Party and its Last Trump, institutionalised racialism, the cult of violence that's encouraged by the NRA and expressed both in the violence visited by police on citizens, particularly if they are black, and in the infantile 'break out your guns, we're gonna be fucked over by the Feds' of Clive Bundy and his ilk, not to mention the contemptible

hysteria that passes for talking about the new on Fox and right-wing talk radio – I should be much more worried about such things (and perhaps I should add the spying on citizens that Edward Snowden brought to our attention) than about ISIS and its pathetic aspirations.



Joona Tena on January 4, 2016 at 4:51 am

I'm afraid I'll have to agree with Krauss on this one, Jerry. You raise good theoretical points, but in practice, it's the ISIS strategy of emotional terror, i.e. inciting fear and hatred, which seems to be horribly effective in Europe at the moment. Many countries, Finland in particular, are being torn apart by this totally irrational fear of a muslim takeover, fed by far-right propaganda spreading fake news about gang rapes and pedophilia. For example, during the holidays two horrid stories of rape became first page news on the tabloids, both allegedly committed by asylum seekers or "immigrant men of dark complexion". To add to the horror, one of the victims was supposed to be a three-year-old. However, a few days later both of stories were revealed to be completely fabricated. No such crimes had ever taken place. And yet, the far right keeps spreading these two fake stories in social media, spreading more fear and hatred.

So far, the muslim immigrants in Finland have shown no sign of disrespect towards this country. They have been paying their taxes and enjoying the benefits of our highly secular society with free medical care and free education from daycare to universities, where their children seem to mix with their classmates with no regard to creed or color. There's clearly no desire to replace this comfortable Scandinavian society with any kind of medieval and dysfunctional caliphate.

But lately, even the second generation of immigrants say they are afraid of walking outside, in fear of being attacked. This abuse is mostly just verbal racism, but to some, it has become a very real and painful daily experience. While most kids of color seem to brush it off, some will be emotionally damaged by this hatred and seek refuge in an in-group, where their ethnicity, traditions and cultural background are not depreciated.

There is no chance that any ISIS army could attack Europe and cause more than a dent to our armor. A terrorist WMD attack would be a nightmare, but not a way to conquer anything or take over a culture. But the ISIS terror tactics have managed to manipulate the far right to do their work for them, so the racist terrorist attacks against the asylum centers are now a real problem. Likewise, it's utterly nonsensical to fear islamization in Finland, but it is very realistic to see a wedge being driven between the darker skinned muslim teenagers and their blue-eyed blonde friends. And this is what ISIS has proclaimed as its goal, spreading fear and racism and separating the European muslims from the secular societies. And it's working. My wife was in Paris only a few blocks away from the terrorist attacks, and to me that was scary as hell, creating the illusion that terrorism is everywhere — until I started to run the numbers and probabilities just like Krauss has done.



noghostnomachine on January 4, 2016 at 1:26 pm

Bingo. Terrorism is a low-probability event without much growth potential, *provided* that we don't aggravate the problem (and that we keep the nukes safe). Creating ethnic "us" vs "them" divisions in Western countries is a great way to aggravate the problem.



anoNY on January 4, 2016 at 5:31 am

While I agree that gun violence is a problem, I never like to see someone as smart as Krauss conflating gun homicides with suicides. Suicides have nothing to do with terrorism deaths and should have been left out of the analysis, dropping the annual death toll from gun violence to around 10,000 (in America).



Tim Harding on January 4, 2016 at 5:44 am

For reasons I have already given, car accidents should have been left out of the analysis too.



Tim Harris on January 4, 2016 at 7:41 am

'... the avowed aim of organizations like ISIS goes further: not only to disrupt our societies, but to take them over: make them part of the Caliphate, spreading oppression and sharia law and dismantling democracy.'

I honestly find the feeling that seems to underlie or inform this statement not proportionate to the reality. Were it voiced by a European, I should still find it excessive though rather more understandable. It doesn't seem far different from the 'full panic mode' that is criticised elsewhere. And now we have mayamarkov elsewhere conflating Islam with Daesh.

From the London Review of Books:

"A former senior adviser to the Joint Chiefs told me that the document was an 'all-source' appraisal, drawing on information from signals, satellite and human intelligence, and took a dim view of the Obama administration's insistence on continuing to finance and arm the so-called moderate rebel groups. By then, the CIA had been conspiring for more than a year with allies in the UK, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to ship guns and goods – to be used for the overthrow of Assad – from Libya, via Turkey, into Syria. The new intelligence estimate singled out Turkey as a major impediment to Obama's Syria policy. The document showed, the adviser said, 'that what was started as a covert US programme to arm and support the moderate rebels fighting Assad had been co-opted by Turkey, and had morphed into an across-the-board technical, arms and logistical programme for all of the opposition, including Jabhat al-Nusra and Islamic State. The so-called moderates had evaporated and the Free Syrian Army was a rump group stationed at an airbase in Turkey.' The assessment was bleak: there was no viable 'moderate' opposition to Assad, and the US was arming extremists."

It seems that, contrary to what many people want to believe, it is not only Islam that is to blame for the rise of Daesh. And now the 'full panic mode' is going to make matters worse unless more sober thinking prevails.



colnago80 on January 4, 2016 at 8:25 am

Here's another slant on the issue of the ISIL. The meat of the article is that the ISIL has been steadily increasing its capabilities in the face of the military campaigns against it in Iraq, Syria and the Sinai peninsula in Egypt. In particular, the situation in the Sinai hasn't received much coverage in the lamestream media in the US, mostly because no US forces are involved (yet). However, if the Egyptian Government should collapse, the outlook for US interests in the Middle East will become dire indeed.

By the way, the bad mouthing campaign against Egyptian President al-Sisi by leftists in the US, particularly by Glenn Greenwald's Intercept web site, is an example of the double standard exercised by the Left (one doesn't see much about the human rights abuses of Hamas, Hizbollah, and the mad mullahs that run Iran).

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4744257,00.html>



Scientifik on January 4, 2016 at 9:01 am

Krauss's article strikes me as a capitulation to Muslim terrorism which in his misguided view can't be controlled.

To suggest that we should accept terrorist attacks from the Boston Marathon bombings to San Bernardino massacre, to the Westgate Mall shooting in Kenya, Islamist attacks on atheists in Bangladesh, on journalists in France, on tourists in Tunisia, etc, etc as the new normal is irresponsible.

And I am glad the European countries are beginning to treat the islamist threat seriously, and are unmoved by Krauss's argument that this level of violence is tolerated and celebrated in the US.

German police raid Stuttgart mosque linked to 'Islamic State'
<http://www.dw.com/en/german-police-raid-stuttgart-mosque-linked-to-islamic-state/a-18924893>

Brussels police detain three over 'New Year terror plot'
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35199793>



peepuk on [January 5, 2016 at 2:27 pm](#)

Good piece from Lawrence Krauss. Some minor and late squabbles:

"we need to distinguish policies that can realistically improve the safety of the public from those that only appear to do so"

yes, we shouldn't over-react and not under-estimate.

"nation's fixation on terror may be the opportunity cost in time and energy that could instead be spent on"

A bit of a straw-man; don't we already spent billions on these other issues? Terror has a big potential, and it's a real threat.

"Perhaps the biggest defense against terrorism isn't just to demonstrate that we can go on with business as usual"

Really? Is this advice he gives to Yazeedies? Has it ever been tried? Did it work?

"In fact, the murder rate in Israel, excluding the occupied territories, has been, on average, less than half the murder rate in the U.S.—even including terrorist attacks."

I don't consider Israel as an example how I want to live my life. I still would prefer the U.S. if I had to choose.

Email Subscription

Enter your email address to subscribe to this blog and receive notifications of new posts by email.

Join 45,563 other followers

Sign me up!

RSS Feeds

[All Posts](#)

[All Comments](#)



FEATURED ON
Freshly Pressed

Twitter Updates

Figure skating in the mountains of British Columbia [whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2017/01/30/fig... 5 hours ago](#)

Follow @evolutionistrue

The Archive

[Da Roolz! \(Commenting Guidelines\)](#)

[Cat Confessions Contest: all entries](#)

[Halloween Black Cat Parade](#)



FEATURED ON
Freshly Pressed

[View Full Site](#)

[Blog at WordPress.com.](#)

