

Kelly Brownell:

Hello, and welcome to Policy 360. I'm Kelly Brownell, the dean of the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. Last week, President Donald Trump signed a controversial executive action related to immigration. The action implements a number of changes to our current policies. Refugees won't be admitted to the United States for 120 days, for example. It also limits immigration from seven predominantly Muslim countries: Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen, and the action blocks Syrian refugees indefinitely.

The executive action is called Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorists' Entry Into The United States, and it has led to protests at many airports around the country. We can think of no one better to discuss this with than our own David Schanzer. David is the director of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security and associate professor of the practice here at Sanford. Prior to his academic appointments, Professor Schanzer served in a number of positions in Washington, including that of Democratic Staff Director for the House of Representative's Committee on Homeland Security. Welcome, David.

David Schanzer:

Well, thank you, Kelly.

Kelly Brownell:

What are your initial thoughts on this executive action?

David Schanzer:

First, I think if we put it in the context of other things that happened in the first week of the Trump administration, I think it really marks a real turning point, really, from US leadership on global issues and literally the post-World War II era. If you look at us not withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Trade partnership in Asia, the really explosive things that have happened to the US-Mexico relationship, then on top of this, which although it's only seven countries, it really is about our relationships with the entire Muslim world, 20% of the globe's population, it's really marking a withdrawal of America from saying we're going to be the leaders of the world, that we're going to advance our interests together with a web of alliances.

And with this particular action, the example is this refugee crisis is a major global issue. And since World War II, there have been really very few important global crises that were not solved, or at least strongly addressed by American leadership in partnership with our alliances.

And I'll just give one example. Look at what happened with the Ebola crisis in Africa a year and a half, two years ago. You literally had three countries that were on the verge of becoming failed states. And in the United States, you had fears of this virus coming into the United States, and people were saying, "We have an Ebola crisis." Even though we had one or two cases, all of which were controlled, you had mass hysteria.

I see this very similar. President Obama, I think, rightly said, "No, we're going to follow the science. We're not going to cut off these countries from the global system. We're going to continue travel and trade with them, but we're going to do a mass intervention. We're going to solve ..." And we did it together with our allies and the cooperation of African nations, Europe.

Now, what are we saying with respect to the Syrian refugee crisis? I'm not going to sit here and say that is it possible that a Syrian refugee could use the migration or refugee system, immigration system, to come in and surreptitiously engage in a terrorist attack, just like the virus could have gotten

through? No, there's always some possibility. There's no foolproof security in this world, but as Americans, we take risks. We make sacrifices to deal with crises for the betterment of society.

And to me, what this order says with indefinitely banning Syrian refugees to shut down our entire refugee program, women, children who are escaping the horrors of war, so much part of our culture, our history, our DNA as a nation to be a refuge is striking, and it's creating such a crisis for Europe. What are we saying our contribution to dealing with this crisis? Nothing. Zero. How can we say that to our best friends, Europe? To me, it's striking and very, very sad.

Kelly Brownell:

So President Trump is saying that he needed to do this suddenly so that people who wish to do us harm couldn't get a headstart. What do you think about that?

David Schanzer:

Well, we have tightened and made appropriate adjustments to our immigration refugee program since 9/11, and all the evidence is that that has worked quite substantially. Now, of course, he was elected president, has every right to try to make additional improvements, fill holes where they have been proven to be, but I don't see this action as doing that. Matter of fact, it's against all evidence. If you look at the seven countries, there has not been a single refugee or immigrant from those countries that has engaged in violence within the United States since 9/11. Almost all of the people who've engaged in violence since 9/11 have actually been people who either immigrated here as young children and have been living in the United States for over a decade or people who were born here.

So the bottom line is that the immigration vetting, refugee vetting system has actually worked quite well for 15 years. And I think if the president wanted to put in some tighter regulations, all of which he had certainly the power and the right to do, it should have been done in the normal course of business where we go to the agencies, we see what the problems are, we consult with experts, we work with our allies. We do all of these things in a mature, coordinated function and then make some decisions.

This was done haphazardly, I would say irrationally in many regards, politically, and most unfortunate, I'm sure we're going to get to this, is without a consideration of what the costs were to our own security. And I think those costs are actually quite substantial.

Kelly Brownell:

You wrote an op-ed that President Trump is dangerously wrong on how to counter the Islamic State. Tell us a little bit about that.

David Schanzer:

Well, the opening line of that op-ed says if you're going to become the leader of the free world, that you have to understand that terrorism is really based on psychology, the psychology of fear. Some people label it as psychological warfare. Terrorist organizations by definition are quite weak. They generally represent very small sliver of people's views. If they had a broader basis, we would call them things like insurgencies or insurrections or guerrilla warfare. Terrorist groups are very small. They can't inflict existential damage on the United States.

But what they can do is, and they can do it quite effectively, especially through use of elaboration in the media, they can make themselves to be seen much more powerful than they are, and they can induce fear that can generate public policies that are actually far more damaging to us than

anything that the terrorist organizations could actually inflict. And I see that is what is happening now here in the United States, is that our policies are being governed by fear of the other, fear of the outsider, fear of foreign concepts like Sharia law, which is totally misunderstood. And that is pushing these types of policies, like in this executive order, that are very, very damaging to the United States and our stature in the world, our relationships with other people.

They're far more damaging than anything Al-Qaeda could have inflicted on us. And indeed, if you look at the amount of damage Al-Qaeda has inflicted on us since 9/11, now 15 and a half years, we're looking at 123 homicides over 15 years that were connected or inspired by ISIS and Al-Qaeda's ideology, and those were 123 absolute tragedies. But that is one out of every 2,000 homicides that has taken place inside the United States. So Al-Qaeda/ISIS extremism is attributable to 0.05% of all the mass violence that we've seen in the United States over 15 years. So I think ISIS is actually being able to achieve their objectives. They're able to use fear to get us to do things that we couldn't do otherwise. They couldn't do otherwise.

Kelly Brownell:

So you say that governments are often duped into overreacting to terrorism. Is it because of the perceived fear that you're talking about? Is the fear being fueled by the government? Is it happening in the population and the government's just responding?

David Schanzer:

I think so. And I think they're responding in the election. The people who are now in power, either they are fearful or they are responding to the constituency that I think is very much motivated by fear. And we rely on our leaders to try to make a sober assessment of interests rather than reacting on the basis of public fear or trying to put fear in context. Nobody is saying that there's not some threat. Of course there's a threat, and we've done many, many things to respond to that threat. But this is, to my mind, such an overreaction that, again, is going to have tragic consequences.

Let's just look at the Middle East right now. We're engaged in a military operation to try to degrade and ultimately defeat the Islamic State to liberate people that are living in this so-called caliphate both in Iraq and in Syria. We are supporting that effort greatly, but who is fighting and dying on the battlefield? It's Iraqis, one of the seven targeted countries. It is Kurds from both Syria and Iraq, also Muslims. So how can we maintain our effort in a strong way if these countries feel like we think that their citizens who are fleeing danger are unfit to enter America?

I know that the administration is saying, "Well, this is not a Muslim ban," and yeah, I agree with that. Technically it is not, but it's certainly perceived as an anti-Muslim action by many, many people and governments around the world. It's going to be much more difficult for those governments to work with us to solve problems, whether they be in the Middle East or elsewhere, when their citizens feel as if the United States through both its actions and the rhetoric of key leaders ... The current national security advisor said during the campaign that Islam is not a religion, that it's a movement or an ideology. That's deeply insulting to one-fifth of the world's population. How can we be the leader of the world if we're insulting one-fifth of the people who live on this planet with us?

Kelly Brownell:

Recently your center released a report documenting Muslim-American involvement with violent extremism in 2016. Tell us what the report covered and what you found.

David Schanzer:

Well, first of all, we've been doing this now for eight years. It started out by there's this notion propagated by some that radical Islamic terrorism had infiltrated the United States, that there were sleeper cells throughout the country that were waiting for instructions for Al-Qaeda to trigger interaction. There were hundreds, maybe thousands of radicalized individuals who were propagating Al-Qaeda's ideology. And this was just taken as a given. And so we tried to start collecting data to try to ... You can never know, do a survey of what's in the thoughts of people's minds, but we thought if you look at the tip of the iceberg, people who have actually been arrested or have engaged in some sort of violent activity or who have traveled, tried to travel and to engage in violence outside of the US, if you put that tip, well, that would give you a sense of maybe how wide and vast this problem actually was.

And so what we found when we started collecting data, that the number of perpetrators, and again, we count that as people who have traveled abroad to engage in violence, people who engage in violence in the United States, or people who were arrested on a terrorism offense that had some element of violence as opposed to writing a check to Hamas, which is bad ... It's illegal, but we didn't see it as being violent ... that the numbers were in the tens per year. Not the hundreds, not the thousands. And so we've been looking at the trend lines, and on average, we've seen between 20 and 30 perpetrators per year. There was a spike in 2009 with a lot of young Somalis traveling to Somalia or trying to travel to Somalia to participate in the civil war there. Question, was that going to continue upward? But it was really a spike. It went down very quickly.

And then in 2015, we saw another spike. The number of perpetrators went over 80. Definitely a cause for concern. A lot of them wanting to travel to Syria to fight with ISIS and who were arrested at airports or successfully left the country. And again, the question was in 2015, was that going to be an upward trend that was heading that way? And what our report this year found that the number in 2016 reduced by 40% down to 46. Still above the historical average since 9/11, but I think good news, because I don't think the FBI has reduced the amount of resources that it has put towards this issue. So that means that there are fewer people that are inspired in that regard.

Of those 46, 23 were arrested for trying to travel abroad to fight. 23 were intending to try to engage in violence here in the United States. Of those 23, there were nine successful violent instances, but the worst news about 2016, of course, was the horrible Orlando attack, which killed 49 people were killed, plus the perpetrator themselves. And interestingly, that almost increased by 50% the number of homicides that have been attributable to Al-Qaeda/ISIS in just one instance.

So there's no doubt that small numbers of terrorists can do very, very large amounts of damage. But the purpose of this project is to try to place this violence in some context. So even of those, with those 49 murders, there were 15 and a half thousand other homicides in the United States last year. There were 188 other people killed in mass shootings besides the Orlando mass shooting. So is this a problem that needs a lot of attention? I would say, "Sure," but I think it's a manageable problem and one that we have to think of in context.

Kelly Brownell:

So what do you think the country should be focusing on when it comes to having good foreign policy and dealing simultaneously with the immigration issue?

David Schanzer:

Well, first of all, let me say that the question of how much immigration that we should have in the United States is something that I think we can have a healthy debate on. And of the immigration that we

want to allow from a legal, what kinds of people should we be allowing, whether it be people from what parts of the world or what kinds of skills that they have? A question of should we be allowing more people in who have relations because they have relatives who are in the United States or attracting people because we think that they're going to be entrepreneurs and produce more jobs? People who graduate from places like Duke. Tom Friedman, of course, once said, "We should be stapling a green card on top of every graduate degree that we issue or PhD from our fine universities like this one."

And I have to say, I'm attracted to trying to tilt our immigration policies more towards allowing more people with those advanced qualifications to come here to help us grow our economy than maybe bringing in fewer lower skilled, but that's a debate that's been going on for 20, 30 years and we should continue to have that.

In terms of security, I don't think we should ever be complacent and say, "Well, we have all the answers," just because we've been so successful. We could do more. We could put more resources into visa review, consular review. I have absolutely no problem with those things. But if you look at where the source of violence comes from, what we should really be doing is looking inside the US and making sure that people who are here are resettling well, that they are getting sufficient support in their first two or three years while they're here, to help them learn English, to help them get jobs and be successful, learning about our customs that are so different from where they came from.

And the one thing that I've studied a lot is understanding that the police are really there to protect them and help them and not something to be fearful of. We talk about when you see something, say something. I don't think that should be seen as a pernicious thing. And we need to teach people who come here that if they have concerns about their children, that they're showing indications that they're absorbed with violence on the internet and they seem to be attracted to the garbage that Al-Qaeda and ISIS are espousing, that they need to seek help for their kids. I got a lot of pushback because I advocate for these kinds of programs, which we call countering violent extremism. I get pushback when I criticize some of these immigration things. I get push back from one direction. I get push back from the other who say, "Well, this should be none of the government's business."

And I think we can really do more. And I believe that what we should do is try to intervene at an early stage in this process and get people to understand, whether it's by setting up counseling relationships with them with really learned Islamic scholars as to what Islam is really about so they can learn how to reject these arguments, or if there's mental health issues, or if there's really integration and identity issues among young people to make them feel more comfortable and more American. And you can be American and Muslim. It's not about rejecting your Muslim background, but that you can feel comfortable and proud to be here and integrated. And people who are, they're not interested in traveling to Syria or engaging in violence or promoting ISIS.

So I think we can deal with any of our violent extremism problems in the US not by trying to close ourselves off to try to find that one needle in the haystack, but rather trying to make our society in the United States healthier, more integrated, more unified. And that's actually the way to fight terrorism.

Kelly Brownell:

Well, thank you, David. I appreciate you joining us and helping expand on this really important and timely issue. So thank you again.

David Schanzer:

Well, I'm thrilled to be part of Policy 360. Thank you, Kelly.

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Kelly Brownell:

So David Schanzer is director of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, an associate professor of the practice at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. And until next time, I'm Kelly Brownell.