

08 Is National Security an Issue?

Edward Renner

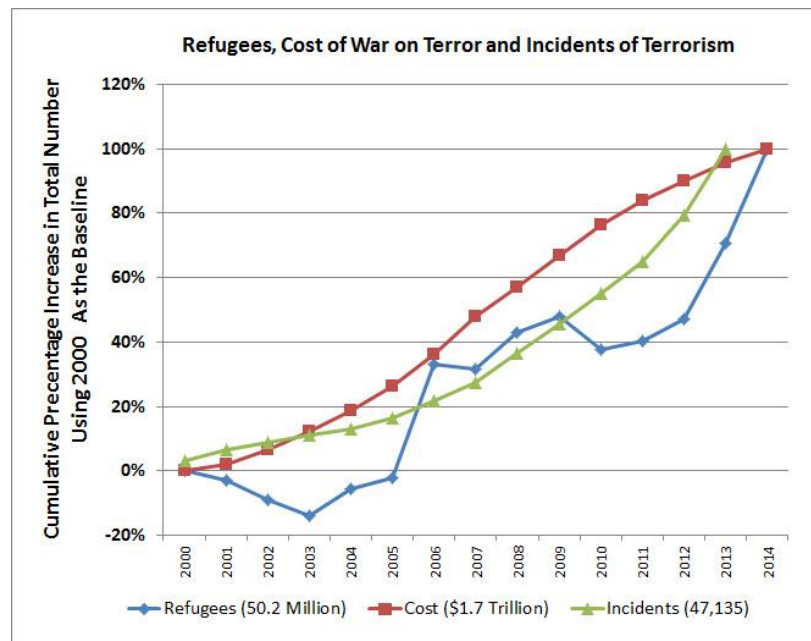
The number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people worldwide has, for the first time in the post-World War Two era exceeded 50 million people.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2014

Following the San Bernardino shootings by a Muslim couple there has been an increase in popular and political support for stronger and more effective armed attacks on ISIS, and other Muslim extremists.

The current foreign policy assumption is that a military response (the war on terror) can significantly reduce the number of terrorist incidents and thereby promote greater political stability, protect our national security and contain the increasing number of refugees, stateless and displaced persons.

Since 9/11, when the United States declared the war on terror, the special war funding authorizations by the US Congress reached \$1.7 trillion by 2015. These are direct war costs which are budgeted separately; they do not include base-line funding for the Pentagon, nor the costs for airport security, surveillance and other activities of homeland security. In total, the military receives about 60% annually of the US discretionary budget. During this period the number of terrorists incidents, organizations, and the geographic areas controlled by terrorists, have increased substantially since 9/11.



Sources: UN High Commission for Refugees, US Congressional Research Service And the Global Terrorist Data Base

Clearly, the War on Terror is not having its intended effect. The concurrent increase in refugees, financial costs and number of incidents does not establish which ones are causes or effects, or whether other factors are causing all three. Their joint upward trend, however, should raise the question of whether our heavy military presence in the Middle East is contributing to the very problem for which it is the intended solution.

The principle alternative to the current military assumption is that climate change (drought, migration), economic globalization (poverty, inequalities) and political instabilities (statelessness, oppression and warfare) have increased the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people. Desperate and hopeless people resort to violence, provoking counterproductive military responses that actually increase the number of refugees while incurring huge financial costs.

The implications of this alternative assumption is that if the war costs were redirected to deal with the underlying causes of migration, poverty and oppression, terrorism would be declining, not increasing.

Since we must choose how to best protect our national security, what are the ways to do so? Clearly there is not a simple answer, nor necessarily an either or choice, between military and economic, political and social strategies.

Reasonable people can recognize and respect the perspective of others, and try to find common ground for rational solutions. Such choices should be based on information and knowledge as much as possible. Now, is not the time for dogmatic ideological beliefs and values to dominate thoughtful debate over these two conflicting perspectives and their divergent implicit policies.



Policymakers should consider whether our heavy military presence in the Middle East, and the \$1.7 trillion allocated in war funding since 9/11, have created more problems than they have eliminated.



Edward Renner is a retired university professor who writes on the modern human challenge of how to live sustainably and peacefully on a crowded planet in the 21st Century. This essay is adapted from Chapter 8 of his forthcoming book; a prepublication working copy is available at www.livinginthefuturetense.org. He may be reached at erenner@livinginthefuturetense.org.