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Counterterrorism Priorities Are Proving Wasteful

By Bjorn Lomborg and Todd Sandler

Grim-faced border guards and tough security measures at international airports provide powerful reassurance that the developed world is spending hundreds of billions of dollars to protect against terrorism. But is it worth it?

Although citizens of rich countries regard terrorism as one of the world's greatest threats, transnational terrorists take, on average, just 420 lives each year. So, have the terrorists succeeded in getting the developed world to invest poorly in counterterrorism, while ignoring more pressing problems involving health, the environment, conflict and governance?

Recently, Copenhagen Consensus, whose purpose is to weigh the costs and benefits of different solutions to the world's biggest problems, commissioned new research into the merits of different methods of combating terrorism. The results are surprising and troubling.

Global annual spending on homeland security measures has increased by about \$70 billion since 2001. Unsurprisingly, this initially translated into a 34 percent drop in transnational terrorist attacks. What is surprising is that there have been 67 more deaths, on average, each year. The rise in the death toll is caused by terrorists responding rationally to the higher risks imposed by greater security measures. They have shifted to attacks that create more carnage to increase the impact of fewer attacks.

Mr. Lomborg and Mr. Sandler, both smart men, ignore one key, cost-effective anti-terrorism measure: raising the cost to terrorists by hunting them down. You can do that the more direct American way -- killing them -- or the softer European way, getting Interpol on them and then locking them up for a few years. Either way raises the 'cost' of terrorism by forcing them to consider the possibility of death and loss of freedom. As it turns out, many terrorists, and most of the big shots, turn out to be quite rational when confronted with this cost. It's why the Hamas bigs hide in Damascus, as one example.

There's no question that attacking terrorism on other fronts, such as their financial transactions, is useful, and we need to do more of it. But we have one key way to drive home the risk to the terrorists: hunt them down.

Increased counterterrorism measures simply transfer terrorists' attention elsewhere. Installing metal detectors in airports in 1973 decreased skyjackings but increased kidnappings; fortifying American embassies reduced the number of attacks on embassies but increased the number of assassinations of diplomats. Since counterterrorism measures were increased in Europe, the United States and Canada, there has been a clear shift in attacks against US interests to the Middle East and Asia.

Spending ever-more money making targets "harder" is actually a poor choice. Increasing defensive measures worldwide by 25 percent would cost at least \$75 billion over five years. Terrorists will inevitably shift to softer targets. In the extremely unlikely scenario that attacks dropped by 25 percent, the world would save about \$22 billion. Even then, the costs are three times higher than the benefits.

Put another way, each extra dollar spent increasing defensive measures will achieve - at most - about 30 cents of return. We could save about 105 lives a year in this best-case scenario. To put this into context, 30,000 lives are lost annually on US highways.

Contrary to the effect of increased defensive measures, fostering greater international

23:55 anymouse
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22:55 JosephMendiola
22:51 OldSpook
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22:41 ed
22:39 Galactic Coordinator
Speretng7009
22:34 ed
22:34 Abdominal Snowman
22:29 Frank G
22:25 ed
22:19 crazyhorse
22:11 lotp
22:09 crosspatch
22:09 DMFD
22:01 JosephMendiola
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For Military on the Move

cooperation to cut off terrorists' financing would be relatively cheap and quite effective. This would involve greater extradition of terrorists and clamping down on the charitable contributions, drug trafficking, counterfeit goods, commodity trading and illicit activities that allow them to carry out their activities.

While this approach would do little to reduce the number of small events, such as "routine" bombings or political assassinations, it would significantly impede the spectacular attacks that involve a large amount of planning and resources.

The increase in international cooperation that this approach requires would be difficult to achieve, because nations jealously guard their autonomy over police and security matters. A single non-cooperating nation could undo much of others' efforts.

The advantages, though, would be substantial. Doubling the Interpol budget and allocating one-tenth of the International Monetary Fund's yearly financial monitoring and capacity-building budget to tracing terrorist funds would cost about \$128 million annually. Stopping one catastrophic terrorist event would save the world at least \$1 billion. The benefits could be 10-times higher than the costs.

Another option is for target nations to think more laterally in their approach to counterterrorism. Some observers argue that the US - a key target - could do more to project a positive image and negate terrorist propaganda. This could be achieved in part by reallocating or increasing foreign assistance. Currently, the US gives only 0.17 percent of its gross net income as official development assistance - the second-smallest share among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries - and aid is highly skewed toward countries supporting the US foreign policy agenda. By expanding humanitarian aid with no strings attached, the US could do more to address hunger, disease and poverty, while reaping improving its standing and lowering terror risks.

However, we provide a lot of other benefits that should be taken into the equation: as one example, our military ensures open seas which contributes to trade, and trade does far more than direct foreign aid to assist poor countries.

We do not advocate conceding to terrorists' demands; rather, we recommend that foreign policy be smarter and more inspirational. There is no panacea for terrorism. That in itself is scary. However, we should not allow fear to distract us from the best ways to respond. Nor should fear stop us from saving many more lives by spending the money on less-publicized issues facing the planet.

Posted by Steve White 2008-03-11 00:00|| [E-Mail](#)|| [Front Page](#)|| [259 views] [Translate](#) [Top](#)

#1 ION,BIGNEWSNETWORK > GEN. JOHN KELLY > AL QAEDA IS PLANNING A NEW LARGE ATTACK: IRAQI, US TROOPS GETTING READY. A "LARGE MEDIA-STYLE/CENTRIC EVENT"???

Kelly indics in article that AQ is now going after SHEIKS, SUNNI Leaders, + lower-level public officials e.g. Mayors, NO LONGER AGZ US OR IRAQI SOLDIERS.

Also from BIGNEWSNETWORK > THE DESTRUCTION OF IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME IS "GOOD FOR ARABS".

Posted by JosephMendiola 2008-03-11 02:36|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#2 *By expanding humanitarian aid with no strings attached, the US could do more to address hunger, disease and poverty, while reaping improving its standing and lowering terror risks.*

Kumbaya, kumbaya

Posted by g(r)omgoru 2008-03-11 07:17|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#3 Translation:

If we were just good Dhimmi and pay the protection tax (Jizya) in humiliation,



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accept second class status, and let Hamas handle our children's education like we should - all will be better.

Posted by CrazyFool 2008-03-11 08:26|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#4 Leave it to the EU nicks to figure the cost of lives down to the cent, and then argue against spending those cents. Is there anything Europe wouldn't sell for MONEY? They have already traded away their national identities, ethnic consciousness, personal rights, and dignity all in the name of trade and money, can't they at least keep their lives?

Posted by bigjim-ky 2008-03-11 09:16|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#5 No muslims, no waste.

Posted by ed 2008-03-11 09:50|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#6 Given that the jihadis are going to attack anyway, we have a choice: submit completely or fight to the death. Either way we will pay whatever it costs. Any half measures are submission in slow motion, which is simply a more expensive way to achieve the same result.

But y'all go ahead and stop hardening your targets. I b'lieve our military people refer to that as the Flypaper Strategy. It's worked well for us in Iraq, although the natives aren't keen on the price they've paid.

Posted by [trailing wife](#) 2008-03-11 10:26|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#7 Yeah - I mean, just let a few attacks through every year. The cost in lives is much less than automobile accidents, and certainly this would result in a much more accommodating political environment (for the terrorists). Let's all listen to "Copenhagen Consensus" for our security needs from now on!

Posted by gromky 2008-03-11 10:43|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#8 Cost of a giant hole in lower Manhattan. The shut down of markets for weeks. The rerouting of airline traffic for weeks. Cost in lives. Impact upon the national economy. The cost of recovery. etc, etc, etc.

You can save all the hand wringing cost if you eradicate the environment [and all those in the environment] without mercy. It can actually be done cheaper than what we're doing now. However, this is the price of a 'Kinder Gentler' warfare. Lots of defense and hassle and limited offensive. Yes it is more expensive. Your alternative of surrender is not an option.

Posted by Procopius2k 2008-03-11 11:11|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#9 *Terrorists will inevitably shift to softer targets.*

Geebus, this one statement disqualifies these goons from any protection. Of course, terrorists strike "soft targets", ya moron. They do it, not because it's *just* easier, but it holds more psychological impact.

For example, just look at 9/11. More people were shocked by the WTC attack ("soft target") than the Pentagon ("hardened target"). Not that I agree with EITHER attack, but an attack on a nation's military is at least "quasi-legitimate". Intentionally targetting "soft targets" (e.g. civilians) is what the jihadis do best. They're not exactly standing in line to attack Ft. Knox (a "high cost" target), but find it more convenient to strike your neighborhood mall.

Currently, the US gives only 0.17 percent of its gross net income as official development assistance - the second-smallest share among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries - and aid is highly skewed toward countries supporting the US foreign policy agenda.

Ah, I was waiting for more U.N. claptrap. Of course, you can cite percentages 'til the cows come home, but when 0.17% of our income equals \$20 billion+ (assuming

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0.17% of a \$10 trillion/year GDP), that's still #1 worldwide and FAR outpaces the next closest "donor." And, as others noted, that doesn't even include all the "second-hand aid" we give these nations in terms of markets, trade, buying their cheap, lead-based paint toys, etc.

Posted by BA 2008-03-11 13:17|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#10 *Yeah - I mean, just let a few attacks through every year.*

Nothing new, really. The 'acceptable level of violence' school has been around for ages.

It's when it gets past the advocates' watchdogs and guards, and into their gated communities that it becomes a problem.

Posted by Pappy 2008-03-11 14:11|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#11 *Although citizens of rich countries regard terrorism as one of the world's greatest threats, transnational terrorists take, on average, just 420 lives each year.*

...and as long Bjorn and Todd aren't amongst them, they think that's...okay.

Posted by tu3031 2008-03-11 14:37|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#12 *This would involve greater extradition of terrorists and clamping down on the charitable contributions, drug trafficking, counterfeit goods, commodity trading and illicit activities that allow them to carry out their activities.*

It is both/and not either/or in my estimation.

Indeed, we seem to be doing both, AFAICT.

Posted by Guillibaldo Chusotle9664 2008-03-11 16:32|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#13 "No panacea for terrorism"? We haven't broken the seals off the napalm canisters yet. Some of us would like harsher measures taken.

As for an assessment of resource use in GWOT. They have NOT been well allocated because our leaders chose to indulge "political islam," with the expectation that Muslim voters would support counter terror measures, and respect non-Muslims. Can't happen for reasons stated in the koran, and applicable to ALL Muslims: "jihad is prescribed to you." Muslims want us dead; our leaders want them in our neighborhoods.

Posted by Pancho Phaling1080 2008-03-11 17:24|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#14 sad, because Lomborg's been doing yeoman's work as a Glowball Warming skeptic.

Posted by **Frank G** 2008-03-11 17:38|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#15 *By expanding humanitarian aid with no strings attached, the US could do more to address hunger, disease and poverty, while reaping improving its standing and lowering terror risks.*

Um... considering we already do and the US is the biggest giver of humanitarian aid in the world, and most of the terrorist leaders come from well-to-do families I would say your "root cause" argument is full of bullshit.

Fuck off and we will continue to kill the terrorists as we see fit.

Posted by **DarthVader** 2008-03-11 17:56|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#16 Time to charge the world for feeding them.

Posted by ed 2008-03-11 18:01|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)

#17 There is always that er problem in cost/benefit analysis--that of measuring the costs and the benefits.

Posted by JohnQC 2008-03-11 18:24|| [Front Page](#)|| [Top](#)