

## Knowledge of and Opposition to War

Just nine days after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, former President Bush declared that the United States was in a “Global War on Terror” which led to the creation of the Office of Homeland Security and an extensive military response both domestically and abroad.<sup>1</sup> Nine years later, former President Obama discontinued official governmental use of the “War on Terror” phrase, and yet it remains part of the American public’s vocabulary. What is unclear is to what extent American citizens recognize the consequences of the United States’ contemporary involvement in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world? Even for those who are knowledgeable, are they largely in support or opposition to these seemingly unending conflicts?

A Pew Research survey conducted in April 2024 shows that among younger Americans, there is a greater distrust in the efficacy and safety of the U.S. military around the globe than for older generations. Fifty-four percent of the 18-34 age group overall believe that the U.S. military makes the world “more safe;” this increases steadily to sixty-two percent for the 35-49 age group, seventy-seven percent for those 50-64, and eighty-seven percent for those 65+.<sup>2</sup> Even when split along party lines, young Americans are more likely to be skeptical of the U.S. military in comparison to their older Democrat or Republican counterparts.

This growing skepticism can be attributed to a number of factors, among them the rise of social media and the amount of taxpayer’s money spent on military defense. Social media has been instrumental in the American public’s knowledge of recent conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war and Israel-Palestine conflict. This new technology has allowed independent participants to share information online to an international audience without the regulation of mainstream news outlets. On platforms such as X/Twitter, algorithms were manipulated by users in order to avoid digital censorship.<sup>3</sup> On the ground footage from war zones, as well as information about defense finances were extracted by individuals, some of them lawyers and journalists to share in an easily accessible, visual format with the general public.

As of 2022, about a sixth of the federal budget was slated for defense to maintain troops in eight hundred military bases across eighty-five countries engaged in “counter-terrorism missions.”<sup>4</sup> For the current fiscal year 2025, the U.S. Department of Defense has requested almost \$850 billion to pay for personnel, procurement, research, development, and testing.<sup>5</sup> While social media and alternative news organization have been valuable sources of information

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<sup>1</sup> “Timeline: How 9/11 Reshaped Foreign Policy,” Council on Foreign Relations (<https://www.cfr.org/timeline/how-911-reshaped-foreign-policy>)

<sup>2</sup> “The economy is the top issue for voters in the 2024 election,” Pew Research Center ([https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/09/09/issues-and-the-2024-election/pp\\_2024-9-9\\_harris-trump\\_2-01/](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/09/09/issues-and-the-2024-election/pp_2024-9-9_harris-trump_2-01/))

<sup>3</sup> Zilia Iskoujina et. al “Social media as an information warfare tool in the Russia-Ukraine war, 2024

<sup>4</sup> Phil Klay’s *Uncertain Ground: Citizenship in an Age of Endless, Invisible War* (Penguin Press, 2022)

<sup>5</sup> “U.S. Defense Spending in Historical and International Context,” EconoFact (<https://econofact.org/u-s-defense-spending-in-historical-and-international-context>)

for those seeking it, a majority of Americans have still been able to look away from war. How do citizens of the United States reckon this privilege with their inherent complicity, being a member of this nation?