COURSE CORRECTION

REDUCING MASS INCARCERATION THROUGH CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PAGE 6

FUTURE COPS: The promise and peril of new technology

REFUGEE crisis
Explore the most important topics of the day.

RAND’s research and analysis address issues that impact people around the world, including security, health, education, sustainability, growth, and development.
Putting a Human Face on the Refugee Crisis
One family’s escape from Afghanistan and search for the American Dream: “Thirty-five years ago, I was one of those refugees.”

Obaid Younossi was an Afghan refugee fleeing the Soviet invasion and waiting in Rome for a visa to the United States when he posed for this picture in June 1980. Younossi is now a senior management scientist at RAND.
Forget those high-speed Hollywood chases. A recent RAND survey of hundreds of police car crashes found that most occurred during routine patrol—no lights, no sirens, no zigzagging through traffic.

In fact, nearly a quarter of the crashes happened when the police vehicle was standing still.

The findings don’t discount the risks that officers face during chases and other emergency driving situations. But they underscore the fact that, with so much time on the road, officers face risks even during the most routine patrols.

The RAND study was the first to measure the risk factors that make police 17 times more likely to get hurt on the road than other workers. It reviewed more than 850 law-enforcement vehicle crashes and found that more than 70 percent of them occurred during routine, nonhazardous activities.

At least part of the reason: The driver of the other vehicle was to blame, in whole or in part, for three-quarters of the moving collisions.

Officers do face sharply higher risks of injury during emergency driving conditions, with their lights and sirens on, the study found—but not necessarily because of speed. They’re more likely to take risks in those situations, such as driving against traffic, and may have less opportunity to avoid crashes.

The study also found that officers on motorcycles face four to five times greater risk of injury in crashes than officers in cars. That should raise questions about whether the widespread use of motorcycles in police work is worth the risk, it noted.

The findings highlight the need for better practices to protect officers, even when they’re parked in their vehicles, the study concluded.

Those should range from requiring seatbelt use to re-considering the mobile computers that are standard equipment in most police cars and can pose a major distraction and injury hazard.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/EP50866
Soul Wounds

Religious congregations and other faith-based organizations play a critical role, often overlooked, in helping military veterans address the “soul wounds” of war and reintegrate into civilian society, RAND researchers found.

Faith-based organizations, or FBOs, are uniquely positioned to help veterans with a range of reintegration needs, the researchers found. They can provide links to services from housing to health care to social support, and are unique in their ability to serve as comforting sanctuaries for veterans in spiritual need.

That can make FBOs important safe havens for veterans struggling with “moral injury,” an inner conflict that stems from observing, failing to prevent, or committing acts during their military service that go against deeply held moral beliefs.

Yet FBOs may lack the resources or experience to help the veterans who turn to them, as the researchers found in more than two dozen interviews with FBO leaders. They also are not well-integrated into veterans’ resource directories, including a national directory maintained by federal agencies.

FBOs should be better tied into the web of support for veterans, the RAND researchers concluded. That means facilitating their veteran-outreach programs through training workshops or manuals; including them in resource directories; and promoting connections between chaplains and FBOs.

“There is a deep need for help,” one of the interviewees told the researchers, “but people don’t always know how to do it.”

Funding for this study was provided, in part, by donors and by the independent research and development provisions of RAND’s contracts for the operation of its U.S. Department of Defense federally funded research and development centers.

Disorder in the Court?

Courtroom justice is not always built on the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—as a growing body of research and overturned convictions has shown. Expert witnesses, whose testimony can make or break a case, have been caught shading the truth and letting their biases show when they take the stand.

Courtroom advocates and science groups alike have tried for years to raise the bar for such witness testimony, to make sure it stands up in fact as well as in court. A recent RAND experiment highlighted one possible way to do that: Use the analytic rigor of an expert panel, rather than the testimony of any single expert, to develop consensus answers to courtroom questions of science and forensics.

The experiment worked like this: A group of professional scientists was asked to imagine that a company had been robbed and surveillance cameras with facial-recognition software placed a suspect at the scene of the crime. The case hinged on how reliable that software was, given its past performance and known weaknesses.

It was a straightforward probability question at its core, but with enough potential pitfalls to give even an upper-level math student trouble. Nonetheless, it took the experts just two rounds of email back-and-forth to reach the mathematically correct answer: There was no more than a 50–50 chance that the defendant was actually the person caught on camera.

More research is needed before such a consensus approach is ready for trial; for one thing, not all questions in criminal justice are as clear-cut as a math problem. But the RAND results suggest that the approach “could help reduce biased expert testimony in criminal cases,” the researchers wrote.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/RR804-1

SOME FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

have fostered a reputation as safe havens for veterans, providing supportive, judgment-free environments

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/RR931
The challenge of health care reform didn’t get solved with the Affordable Care Act. In many ways, the challenges are just beginning.

Deborah Freund was appointed the Paul O’Neill–Alcoa Chair in Policy Analysis in September 2015. She is designing a RAND study on the effects of health care consolidation on cost, access, and quality outcomes. Here, she speaks with us about her background, and why her passion is examining managed health care, health disparities, and health outcomes.

Q How did you get interested in health disparities across populations?
A When I was an undergraduate at Washington University in St. Louis, I lived off campus and had an older, African-American neighbor. One day she rang on my door and asked me to take her to the hospital. Her arm was swollen to four times its size. I agreed, and as we drove toward the hospital I knew to be the best in the area, she asked, “Where are we going?” When I told her the hospital name, she said, “Oh no, we can’t go there. They don’t take black people. We have to go to City Hospital,” which was the only local hospital she knew to accept black people. That was the first time that I realized something was wrong.

You were an undergrad when you began working on health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and Medicaid.

I took a medical sociology class, and we had a guest speaker, a physician from the university’s medical school. He talked to us about the fascinating idea of a prepaid group practice. I asked if I could shadow him. He put me to work, and I ended up designing a computer program that would allow him to track patient encounters and patient visits to this prepaid group practice. The next year, those prepaid group practices became known as HMOs.

In 1974, while working on my master’s in health care administration at the University of Michigan, I shadowed a well-known graduate who was the director of the Medicaid program in New York state. She gave me a project: to negotiate contracts between New York State Medicaid and three HMOs. These were three of the very first Medicaid managed care contracts in the United States.

So there has been a theme in your career of examining and finding ways to optimize managed care and care delivery.

Yes. Years ago, I worked on a contract from what is now the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to evaluate how Medicaid managed care was working. Did it save money? What did utilization rates look like? They didn’t want to fund studies of quality of care. It just so happened that RAND’s very own Bob Brook was on the advisory board to this study. He helped me immeasurably. When I said at a CMS meeting that I wanted to study quality, they responded, “That’s not our highest priority.” But Bob helped to convey to them the urgency: That quality of care was truly a life-or-death matter. Ultimately, I got the funding.

How did your work on quality of care lead into your work on health outcomes?

As the conversation addressed quality, I realized I wanted to do more work in quality of care and related areas. Good health care outcomes do not come about without good quality of care, but people didn’t start talking about health outcomes until the early 1990s. The first agency to fund any work in this area is what is now the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). They put out a “request for proposal,” or RFP, for Patient Outcome Research Teams (PORTs). I was fascinated by the idea. I was able to organize a group of my colleagues, with diverse backgrounds, to bid on the RFP. We won. I was the only non-physician principal investigator of one of the first PORTs. We chose total knee replacement because it was a growing procedure, and nobody knew anything about outcomes. What we wanted to assess was, Did people’s function and quality of life improve? Did their pain go away? What did it cost to do these procedures? How many did Medicare pay for yearly? The articles we published, now 20 years old, continue to be cited in current research. It’s buoying to see how much our work remains relevant to policy and research discussions today.

What comes next for you?

I’m still interested in disparities—testing to find what works and bringing those ideas to other communities. And I love mentoring people—RAND is full of great mentoring opportunities.

The challenge of health care reform didn’t get solved with the Affordable Care Act. In many ways, the challenges are just beginning, and the need for objective, nonpartisan research and analysis has never been greater.
Setting Politics Aside

The conversation continues.

Proceeds from One Night with RAND support RAND’s Investment in People and Ideas program, our vehicle for funding research into critical but often underappreciated policy areas and attracting the world’s top talent to focus on these challenges.

This past Veterans Day, leaders in business, philanthropy, government, academia, and media gathered in Santa Monica, California, for One Night with RAND: Set Politics Aside and Join the Conversation. The fundraising event featured a panel discussion, moderated by journalist Soledad O’Brien, on America’s Role in the World. Panelists included Chuck Hagel, former U.S. Secretary of Defense; Michael Lynton, CEO of Sony Entertainment; and Michael Rich, president and CEO of RAND. The discussion touched on cybersecurity, political polarization, and the role of media and entertainment in international affairs.

The event also honored former defense secretary Harold Brown, whose career includes a 60-year affiliation with RAND, first as a client, and then as a trustee and a philanthropist.

Soledad O’Brien moderated the panel discussion, which included Chuck Hagel, Michael Rich, and Michael Lynton.

Learn more at www.rand.org/b151112onwr
Course Correction

The Case for Correctional Education in U.S. Prisons

By Doug Irving, Staff Writer
Donald Daniels passes beneath a wooden sign on his way to class every afternoon, its surface chipped and scratched with graffiti. Its message, in all-capital letters, could have been the title of a recent RAND report that helped shift the very foundation of criminal-justice reform efforts. “EDUCATION,” it says, “KEY TO THE FUTURE.”
Daniels is an inmate at the California Institution for Men, a sprawling prison complex about 35 miles east of Los Angeles. He’s 49 years old, a prison veteran with 14 felony convictions on his record. His latest offense, for making criminal threats, helped land him in one place where RAND’s study showed he stands a good chance of turning his life around: A prison classroom.

Inmates who participate in any kind of educational program behind bars—from remedial math to vocational auto shop to college-level courses—are up to 43 percent less likely to reoffend and return to prison, the study found. They also appear to be far more likely to find a job after their release, and the social stability that comes with it.

Every dollar invested in correctional education, RAND concluded, saves nearly five in reincarceration costs over three years.

For Daniels, something clicked in the basic-education prison classroom where he spends every afternoon; as evidence, he produces a red file folder stuffed with his schoolwork—“in which I’m getting A’s!” He speaks with the zeal of a new convert about finally getting his GED.

“I’m tired of society looking down at me,” he says. “I knew that I had to begin doing something different with my life. What I had been doing wasn’t working. Education was the peek in the door that opened up my mind.”

A few numbers underscore the impact and importance of RAND’s findings:

More than 2.2 million people were locked up in American prisons or jails in 2013, the most recent year for which data are available; that’s more than the state population of New Mexico. They are more likely to struggle with reading, to have learning disabilities, to have broken work histories and fewer job prospects. Around a third of all state prisoners never graduated from high school.

And every year, more than 700,000 state and federal prisoners are released back into their communities, often with no greater life skills than they had when they went in. The result: Around 40 percent of them commit new crimes or violate their parole, and find themselves back behind bars within three years of walking free.

Education, RAND showed, helps break that cycle.

RAND’s study, the largest of its kind ever undertaken, reviewed decades of research on correctional education and outcomes. It showed that education works regardless of the education level of the inmates, from those needing the most basic reading and math skills to those studying for college.

It also showed that it was education itself—rather than something inherently unique about the inmates who enrolled—that made the difference.

“It really, for the first time, dispelled the myths about whether or not education helps inmates when they get out,” said Lois Davis, a senior policy researcher at RAND who led the study. “Education is, by far, such a clear winner.”

“Regardless of what you think about inmates, what do you want for your community?” she added. “You have to understand that they all come back eventually. If you don’t rehabilitate them, how are they going to successfully rejoin society?”

**Reshaping the conversation**

RAND’s findings were so conclusive that they helped refocus the national debate over prison reform, from questions of whether correctional education could play a role, to how best to expand that role. State and federal correctional leaders, reform advocates, and editorial writers have since pointed to the RAND study as they call for more educational opportunities for inmates.

Arne Duncan, then U.S. Secretary of Education, cited the RAND research last year when he announced a pilot program to restore Pell college grants for some prisoners. Congress had
banned prisoners from receiving the grants during the get-tough prison reforms of the 1990s.

“The current system works for no one,” said Glenn E. Martin, who earned his associate’s degree while serving six years in New York state prisons for armed robbery. He became a national spokesman for prison-reform efforts when he got out, founded a group called JustLeadershipUSA that seeks to halve the national incarceration rate, and recently met with President Obama to discuss prison reform. “Government has a responsibility to do more of what works,” he said, “and less of what doesn’t.”

A second chance

Terry Keller just wants his GED. He sits near the front of the same basic-education classroom at the California Institution for Men where Donald Daniels spends his days. Keller—a wiry spark of a man, always quick with a hand when the teacher poses a question—is serving a three-year sentence for dealing cocaine.

“I chose as a grown man to sell dope,” he said during a recent class. “If I wait for someone to give me [something else] to do, I’m going to be here forever. I have to go within myself and say it’s time to start being a man. I take it upon myself.”

He boasts that he has never missed a class, that he’s one math test away from getting that GED. “It means strength, respect—self-respect, you know?” he says.

Keller is 51 years old. Until now, he barely had an eighth-grade education. His story is not at all unique inside the American prison system. Research has shown that minorities, and especially African-American men like him, are vastly overrepresented in underperforming schools, dropout rates, suspension and expulsion statistics—and prisons.
That puts prison education programs in a unique position to make up for some of those disparities, to offer a second chance to inmates like Keller. “We’ve kind of failed them on the education piece, on the front end,” RAND’s Davis said. “Once they’re in the system, let’s address that.”

America’s support for correctional education has historically climbed and crashed as society’s attitude toward prisoners swung between two extremes: reform-and-rehabilitate, or throw-away-the-key. Prison experts say we are in the midst of one such shift, as the tough-on-crime policies of the 1990s give way to a greater push for education and other programs to help prisoners reenter society. Yet challenges remain.

The recession squeezed prison budgets, and educational programs in particular. As part of its analysis, RAND surveyed correctional education directors in almost every state and found that most had cut their education budgets—in some cases, by more than 20 percent. A majority of the states had fewer teachers on prison payrolls, fewer courses on offer, and fewer students taking classes.

Even as the recession ebbs, financial concerns continue to haunt efforts to reform prison education. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo had to back away last year from a proposal to provide college courses in state prisons after legislators rebelled, in part over the cost. The Obama administration’s push to reintroduce Pell grants for some prisoners was met by a bill in Congress, the Kids Before Cons Act, to block it.

“This is spending money that we don’t have,” said New York Congressman Chris Collins, the bill’s sponsor. He said he supports GED classes and vocational training in prisons, but not “willy-nilly” college courses. “We don’t have enough money to pay today’s bills,” he added, “let alone the president’s trial program.”

### Human nature

Sara Spencer teaches basic adult education in Classroom 4 at the California Institution for Men, where both Donald Daniels and Terry Keller spend their afternoons. She considers the classroom sacred ground, a place apart from the tough realities all around it.

She knows that none of her students would likely choose to be there, learning algebra and social studies behind the walls of a prison. But she runs her classes with the passion of a true believer that education can open minds and change lives. “My job isn’t to punish them,” she says. “My job is to help empower them.”

She posed a question to the class on a recent afternoon: “What is human nature?” Donald Daniels sat up with an answer.

“Humans were born with choices,” he offered, as other students in the class nodded. “My choices have led me to this place for the past 29 years, in and out. Do I want to keep surviving, or do I want to live? Now I realize that I’m in a place to have that choice. If I want to keep going down a dead-end street, then I’m going to get to a dead end.”
RAND’s study showed that education worked regardless of the education level of the inmates, from those needing the most basic reading and math skills to those studying for college.

**Policy Impact**

Donor funding enabled researcher Lois Davis to expand the reach of her study on correctional education by engaging with policymakers, media, and others with a stake in prison reform. Based partly on RAND’s report, in late 2014, California adopted legislation that allows community colleges to receive funding for prison courses. The U.S. Department of Education also cited her findings when it launched a pilot program to extend Pell college grants to some prisoners.
Catching Up to the Future

Emerging technologies present an ongoing challenge to the criminal-justice community

RAND brought together law enforcement officers, academics, technology experts, and professional futurists and asked them to envision how crime, policing, and society itself might evolve in the coming years—and what technologies police would need to keep up.
In early April 1928, a couple of enterprising young patrol officers rigged some glass tubes and copper wire into the back seat of their Detroit squad car, and changed the very nature of police work forever.

From the first crackling crime bulletin it received, their “radio cruiser” represented the great promise of technology to make communities safer—as well as its potential for unintended consequences. The radio car freed police from their old callboxes and foot patrols, but it also put an end to a tradition of beat cops who knew every name in their neighborhood.

The lesson is not lost on RAND researchers who have been helping law-enforcement agencies think about the future, and about how technology will change both their jobs and the communities they serve. Their research is grounded in the realities of police work today—improving the conversation on social media has emerged as a critical need, for example—but tinged with such science-fiction visions as smart suits, robotic cars, and surveillance dust.

In perhaps no other field does society have as direct a stake in getting technology right as in policing—as the reaction to military-armed officers on the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014 showed.

“How do you get on, and stay on, the path you want to be on?” said Richard Silberglitt, a senior physical scientist at RAND who has led some of the research. The visioning project, he added, “gives you a way to think about where are we going, what are the signposts, what are the things we can do to make sure we get to where we want to be.”

**What police need**

These are not Robocop visions of a far-distant future. RAND brought together law enforcement officers, academics, technology experts, and professional futurists and asked them to envision how crime, policing, and society itself might evolve in the coming years—and what technologies police would need to keep up.

It was not an easy assignment. Consider: Ten years ago, nobody outside of a top-secret Apple test lab had even heard of an iPhone.

Ten years from now? Twenty?

The RAND panelists envisioned a future so saturated with data and information that police agencies will need new ways to tag, sort, and share what they know. Computers, for example, might be able to read a face and match it instantly to a national registry of Most Wanted mug shots.

The panelists imagined real-time language translators that police could hold in their hands; and biometric sensors embedded in their uniforms that could show where they are, even inside a building, and monitor their stress levels. Those future officers might also have mobile displays—like smart glasses, for example, one panelist said—that can feed them information in real time, from the registration of a car they’re chasing to the criminal history of someone they stop on the street.

At the farthest edge of that vision—the hazy “third horizon” in futures-speak—the RAND panelists imagined micro-drone surveillance dust, exoskeletons, and implanted “brain bots.” None of those ranked very highly in need, usefulness, or reality.

In fact, all of the ideas came with a very big asterisk: These were not predictions of what will happen, but wish lists of technologies that could help police keep up with an ever-innovating society and its criminals. Another asterisk: Some of the highest-ranked needs were not futuristic pieces of hardware at all, but information and training to help police make more effective use of the technology they have.

Social media, for example, was the top focus of one panel. It ranked as a need, not a want, a way to reconnect police to the communities they serve and to foster a future of mutual cooperation instead of mutual distrust. That would require more than just sunny Facebook posts and chirpy tweets—a real online give-and-take, with police sharing information and trends at the neighborhood level and engaging the community in solving problems as they occur.

“An electronic neighborhood watch,” said Chief Richard W. Myers of the Newport News Police Department in Virginia. He co-authored a textbook on the future of policing and served as the interim chief in Sanford, Florida, in the aftermath of the fatal shooting there of black teenager Trayvon Martin.

“We are at such a crossroads in policing,” he said. Police too often “circle the wagons,” he added—and none of that fosters the kind of dialogue we need to bridge that gap with the community, and we need to bridge that gap.”

**Warriors? Or guardians?**

The very purpose of RAND’s visioning exercises was not so much to dream up the most gee-whiz inventions, but to consider the consequences—
for police and for society—of such future technology. In other words: To see the potential of the next radio car to make police quicker and more effective, but also its potential to erode that community connection.

That means safeguarding civil liberties and personal privacy at every technological step, RAND cautioned. Many of the future technologies it identified could carry serious implications for both, and those will need to be addressed before those innovations hit the street. Is it a violation of privacy, for example, for officers to call up a data-tagged social history of a criminal suspect? How can police protect civil liberties when a computer is scanning faces and looking for mug-shot matches by algorithm?

“It’s a highly difficult balancing act. You have to implement [technologies] in a way that simultaneously protects civil liberties,” said Thomas Cowper, a 32-year law-enforcement veteran and longtime member of the FBI Futures Working Group, who participated in one of RAND’s panels. “We have to make sure one is serving the other. We have to start thinking about it.”

Those questions, more than any single piece of new equipment, will help determine what the future looks like for police and the people they serve. As academic reviews and news commentators put it during the months of passion and protest that followed police shootings and in-custody deaths in New York, Ferguson, North Charleston, and Baltimore: Will the police of the future be warriors, or guardians?

That future could take one of four broad directions, RAND’s research concluded: “Safe Streets,” in which advancements in technology and community collaboration give police a new edge against crime; “Mean Streets,” in which police have lost both a technological arms race against criminals and the support of society; “Tough Love,” in which police have the technology but not the support—an even more militarized version of Ferguson; and “Criminal’s Advantage,” in which police have the support of the people, but have been technologically outgunned by the criminals.

“What forces will bend the trajectory?” asks Brian A. Jackson, a senior physical scientist at RAND who helps lead the law enforcement visioning project.

“It’s about relationships between officers and people,” he added. “It comes down to: Do the forces that we see about people’s fears about technology continue to push police away from the community? Or do these technology trends make it possible to push police closer to the community, and do the things that good officers know need to happen better?”

Waving down a driverless car

A car careens down a city street, accelerating toward a police officer standing, calmly, in an intersection. The officer holds up a hand, and the car slows itself to a stop.

That may sound like a scene from a summer movie, but it appeared instead in a recent RAND research report. A future humming with cars that can drive themselves is coming, the report noted, and the implications for police agencies will be profound.

For starters, what kind of legal authority would that officer in the intersection need to wave down a car? What about to move a parked car blocking a fire hydrant? Or to ask a car to identify the people inside and where they had been?

Without human drivers running red lights or getting behind the wheel drunk, police agencies might no longer need the traffic divisions that currently make up such a large part of their forces. And without moving violations, most will have to scramble to find another funding source as stable and sizable as ticket revenue.

“A lot of law enforcement contacts are based on stopping people for moving violations,” said John Hollywood, a senior operations researcher at RAND who led a recent research panel on the future of police technology. “What happens in the future when self-driving cars, for the most part, don’t make mistakes?”

The panel of law enforcement officials and technology experts ranked developing policies and procedures for self-driving cars as a top law enforcement need. But it was in no hurry to give officers the power to stop or take control of self-driving cars; developing such an interface ranked at the very bottom of the panel’s list of priorities.
As the world watches—often with alarm—as the worst refugee crisis in a quarter-century unfolds, it’s important to view the potential immigrants for what they can be: productive members of their newly adopted countries.

Thirty-five years ago, I was one of those refugees, embarking on a harrowing journey as my family fled the horrors of the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan.
Now, like then, men, women, and children in desperate situations are gambling with their lives and using whatever means they can in an attempt to escape the misery of war-torn or impoverished countries in the hope of securing a better life in the West.

There is drama and heartache in the headlines. Last summer, 71 would-be refugees, most likely from Syria, were left to suffocate on the side of a road in Austria, abandoned and locked inside the back of an airless truck. Off the coast of Libya, 51 bodies were found in the hold of a ship and another 150 people were presumed drowned after two boats capsized.

The Mediterranean Sea has been called “the world’s deadliest border” because so many desperately seeking asylum have died trying to cross it—more than 2,600 in 2015, according to the International Organization for Migration. The mistreatment often begins with smugglers, who dangerously pack the refugees onto small boats that were likely not designed to cross any sea.

More than 300,000 refugees tried to cross the Mediterranean last year, the United Nations reports. The lucky ones make it to Europe, but often find no refuge. Instead, they are greeted by razor-wire fences like the one Hungary built to essentially close its borders. Or they receive a message that they are clearly unwanted, one that is telegraphed by states squabbling over how to handle the influx of immigrants and an absence of centers to help meet their needs and process them.

The United States had taken in fewer than 1,000 Syrian refugees as of June 2015. The sheer number of people fleeing war-torn countries can make the refugees seem faceless. More than 4 million in Syria have become homeless since civil war broke out in that country in 2010, according to media reports.

My family is a reminder of the human faces attached to those numbers. We were once as desperate as the Syrian refugees are today. We contemplated being smuggled across the border to Pakistan in our after-dinner conversations and whispered exchanges between my parents.

Every family we knew tried to get their kids out by any means possible. Families were broken apart, children sent in different directions—anywhere as long as they were out of immediate harm.

I was 18, a student and still too young for conscription, and applied for a passport under the pretense that I was accompanying a “sick” cousin to seek treatment abroad. I soon left Afghanistan and the “sick” cousin behind.

My older brother, then a medical student, walked for days with smugglers to make it across the Pakistan border. Upon arriving, he found out that our cousin Shahwali, a brilliant 20-year-old in his second year of medical school, had suffocated in the back of a truck while being smuggled out of Afghanistan. He died in the arms of his older brother in the border town of Peshawar. Their father had been shot dead months before while driving to an early antigovernment protest in Afghanistan.

The rest of my immediate family fled Afghanistan within months of my departure. They waited in India to receive asylum from the United States while my brother and I waited...
in Italy for our visas. By 1982, the seven members of my immediate family were reunited in America, bruised and facing an uncertain future in an unfamiliar place but buoyed by the hopes and dreams in a place that had been billed as the land of opportunity. And opportunity we found. Everyone in my family worked hard, seemingly harder than our American peers, to achieve our version of the American dream and make a lasting mark. When I see news photographs of bodies of refugees that have washed up on the shores of Europe, I often think of the stunning loss of my amazing cousin, whose dreams died along with him in that container truck. How much more air would he have needed to be able to continue his journey of hope? His siblings who made it to the United States became a physician, a computer scientist, a businessman, and a public servant.

As politicians in the West struggle with how to deal with this incredible surge in refugees, the world needs to remember to treat them humanely and with dignity. They are people, awaiting their fate. By welcoming and accepting them, the West can send their oppressors a message regarding what it means to be a free democratic society.

Obaid Younossi is a senior management scientist at the RAND Corporation.

A version of this commentary originally appeared on FoxNews.com on September 15, 2015, under the title "I Was a Political Refugee (from Afghanistan) and I Found New Life in America."
Hauser’s lifelong interest in international affairs is combined with an intense determination to encourage “out-of-the-box” thinking on almost any significant issue in foreign policy.

Rita Hauser is an international lawyer and philanthropist who, in 1988, met with Yasser Arafat to persuade him to recognize Israel and renounce violence.

Eleven years later, Hauser joined the RAND Board of Trustees. Her commitment to peace, diplomacy, and humanitarian efforts continue to drive her current work as the president of the Hauser Foundation, as the chair of the International Peace Institute, and as a member of the advisory board of the International Crisis Group.

Her interest in the experiences of Israelis and Palestinians led to her appointment as head of the American branch of the International Center for Peace in the Middle East (1984–1991). Hauser helped establish the RAND Center for Middle East Public Policy Advisory Board. More recently, she helped fund RAND’s Strategic Rethink project; one of its leaders is her longtime friend Richard Solomon, a senior fellow at RAND.

According to Solomon, “Rita’s lifelong interest in international affairs is combined with an intense determination to encourage ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking on almost any significant issue in foreign policy. This is evident in her support for Strategic Rethink. She sees how the world is changing, and wants RAND to be a creative voice as our country reconsider’s its role in the world.”

While no longer on the board, Hauser remains a committed supporter. “I’m very high on RAND,” she says. “The other think tanks are on the left or the right; there are very few that truly embrace objectivity as a core value, as does RAND.”

When asked what keeps her going, after so many years of setbacks in the Middle East and globally, Hauser says, “I’m an optimistic person. You find some answers to problems. You just can’t throw up your hands and say there are none.”
Don’t Have a Cow, RAND

The Simpsons writers irreverently doff (or is it Duff?) their caps to RAND’s research and the conspiracy theories it attracts.

RAND and The Simpsons have a love–fate relationship: The Simpsons loves to poke fun at RAND, and RAND good-naturedly accepts its fate. In this 1999 comic, Homer commissions RAND and the CIA to investigate the mystery of Marge’s towering blue hair. The probe uncovers a number of items in Marge’s coiffure, including emergency bathroom tissue (“Laugh if you want, but we’ll see who’s laughing on burrito night!”).

In hopes of receiving a print, RAND contacted the show. Relieved that RAND wasn’t calling to complain, creator Matt Groening sent along a signed copy to then president James Thomson.

In season 6, Milhouse and the kids concoct a crazy conspiracy theory: “The RAND Corporation, in conjunction with the saucer people, under the supervision of the reverse vampires, are forcing our parents to go to bed early in a fiendish plot to eliminate the meal of dinner. We’re through the looking glass here, people.”

Years later, writer Bill Oakley mused on Twitter, “I can’t believe the RAND Corporation never sent us any t-shirts or anything for mentioning them.”

D’oh! In response, RAND’s current president and CEO Michael Rich sent RAND’s classic page-turner A Million Random Digits with 100,000 Normal Deviates. Mmmmm, digits.
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