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U.S. policies make more terrorists, stoke fear, authors argue

By [Paul J. Nyden](#)

Terrorizing Ourselves: Why U.S. Counterterrorism Policy Is Failing and How To Fix It by Benjamin H. Friedman, Jim Harper and Christopher Preble, eds., Cato Institute, 320 + viii pages. Hardcover, \$24.95.

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The ways our government and political leaders try to counter terrorism is imposing significantly greater costs on citizens than terrorist attacks themselves.

Military actions are critically useful in certain circumstances, but not always.

Military attacks on many targets -- particularly in the Middle East --- routinely fuel the wrath of civilian populations against the attackers.

"Collateral damage," which involves killing civilians, is an inevitable result of dropping bombs from planes or unmanned drones. Today, it is one of the most effective recruitment tools for our opponents in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Terrorizing Ourselves," a book just published by the Cato Institute, makes powerful arguments against the security policies pursued by U.S. government leaders in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy.

Benjamin H. Friedman, Jim Harper and Christopher Preble edited the volume, which includes essays by 12 different political analysts.

(The book's seven-page introduction, which should be required reading for all Americans, is available at: <http://bit.ly/dbmTtK>)

"Infiltrating terror cells, disrupting terror networks, frustrating planning and interdicting attackers are all essential activities," it states.

But the "flawed, reactive approach that began on 9/11 and that largely continues today is often counterproductive, and it should be abandoned."

The tremendous financial costs of our anti-terrorism policies should also become subject to much greater government and public scrutiny. But critics of those spending policies are routinely criticized for being "unpatriotic."

Part of the problem arises from the sources of our information.

Benjamin H. Friedman, a Cato research fellow, observes, "U.S. citizens' information about terrorism comes largely from politicians and government organizations with an interest in reinforcing excessive fears."

Inflated fears create an environment "where the public will overpay for counterterrorism policies."

The Department of Home Security, created and expanded in the aftermath of 9/11, should view itself "not just as a risk manager but also as a fear manager," he adds.

But Homeland Security groups are not the primary forces promoting fears of terrorist threats.

"That distinction belongs to the military-industrial complex," adds Friedman, echoing the warnings President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave during his 1961 Farewell Address.

The Cato Institute, a leading libertarian think tank, is critical of government spending on a wide variety of domestic social programs.

But unlike so many critics of excessive government spending on domestic programs, Cato applies the same principles to government spending sprees on foreign wars and counter-terrorism at home.

As a Libertarian Party statement pointed out last week, "The purpose of the U.S. armed forces is to

