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Another Example of Dissent Being Equated With Terrorism

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A question on a Department of Defense (DoD) training exam states that the exercise of First Amendment rights in the U.S. is an "example of low level terrorism". New DoD employees are being trained to select "Protests" as the answer to a question about identifying an act of terror. This is one of several examples of when dissent and protest is being equated with terrorism. Civil liberty advocates, like the ACLU, and political activists, are outraged at these "deeply disturbing" assertions.

On June 10, 2009, the ACLU filed a [letter of complaint](#) ^[1] with the DoD about the question. They asked the DoD to "take immediate steps to remedy the situation both by correcting the materials before they are used further and by sending out corrective materials to all DoD employees who received the erroneous training". Days later, DoD [removed the question](#) ^[2] from the exam.

In recent years, several agencies in the federal government and state and local law enforcement agencies have identified protestors as risks in their threat assessments. From [released fusion center reports](#) ^[3] to local police training manuals, anti-war protesters, [veterans](#) ^[4], [anti-death penalty groups](#) ^[5], and [Ron Paul supporters](#) ^[6] are some of the groups and individuals who are compared to violent extremists by the U.S. government.

"It's part of a pattern of equating dissent and protest with terrorism," said Ann Brick, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, which obtained a copy of the question after a Defense Department employee who was taking the test printed the screen on his or her computer terminal.

Ben Friedman, a research fellow at the Cato Institute, said the U.S. government has a long history of infringing upon citizens' civil liberties in the name of domestic security. "It's the kind of thing that happens when you have large security bureaucracies, which is why they need to be kept in check," Friedman said. "These things tend to occur in times of panic, like after Sept. 11."

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Links:

- [1] http://www.aclu.org/images/general/asset_upload_file89_39820.pdf
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