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GENERIC: Terrorism Not A Significant Threat

By Nicholas Bruno and Vance Trefethen

The Political Incentives for Exaggerating Terrorist Threats

False logic: Something must be done, this is something, therefore we must do it.

Bruce Schneier 2013. (masters degree in computer science;  [cryptographer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cryptographer), [computer security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer_security) and privacy specialist; author of several books on general [security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Security) topics, [computer security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer_security) and [cryptography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cryptography).  Fellow at the [Berkman Center for Internet & Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkman_Center_for_Internet_%26_Society) at [Harvard Law School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_Law_School)) CNN 20 May 2013 ”It's smart politics to exaggerate terrorist threats“ <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/20/opinion/schneier-security-politics/>

But aside from basic psychology, there are other reasons that it's smart politics to exaggerate terrorist threats, and security threats in general. The first is that we respond to a strong leader. Bill Clinton famously said: "When people feel uncertain, they'd rather have somebody that's strong and wrong than somebody who's weak and right." He's right. The second is that doing something -- anything -- is good politics. A politician wants to be seen as taking charge, demanding answers, fixing things. It just doesn't look as good to sit back and claim that there's nothing to do. The logic is along the lines of: "Something must be done. This is something. Therefore, we must do it."

Politicians, police and security companies have every reason to exaggerate: It grows their budgets and their power

David Anderson 2013. (*Queen's Counsel*: a *British* lawyer with a high position, who can argue cases in higher law courts; UK Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation) quoted by Tom Whitehead (journalist) THE TELEGRAPH 17 July 2013 Terror threat must not be exaggerated, warns watchdog <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10186015/Terror-threat-must-not-be-exaggerated-warns-watchdog.html>

“Terrorism swells the budgets of military, security, intelligence and police forces, universities, publishers and film studios. “It provides the ideal reason – or excuse – for the introduction of repressive laws. It makes the careers of politicians, police officers, civil servants, academics, analysts, lawyers and demagogues. “It sells security fences, armoured cars and CCTV cameras; and it attracts readers and viewers to the media, to the mutual benefit of the terrorist seeking publicity, the expert called upon to opine and the media seeking an audience. “When so many people have a vested interest (whether they acknowledge it or not) in the seriousness of the threat, one must remain constantly open to the possibility that the threat is being exaggerated.

Risk of Terrorism Low

Today’s Islamic fundamentalism doesn’t threaten the West: They’re focused on killing fellow Muslims in the Middle East

Richard Norton Taylor 2014. (journalist) Islamist terror threat to west blown out of proportion - former MI6 chief THE GUARDIAN 7 July 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jul/07/islamist-terror-threat-out-proportion-former-mi6-chief-richard-dearlove> (brackets added)

Richard Dearlove, chief of [British intelligence service] MI6 at the time of the Iraq invasion, said that Britons spreading "blood-curdling" messages on the internet should be ignored. He told an audience in London on Monday there had been a fundamental change in the nature of Islamist extremism since the Arab spring. It had created a major political problem in the Middle East but the west, including Britain, was only "marginally affected". Unlike the threat posed by al-Qaida before and in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks 13 years ago, the west was not the main target of the radical fundamentalism that created Isis, (the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), Dearlove said. Addressing the Royal United Services Institute, the London-based security and defence thinktank, he said the conflict was "essentially one of Muslim on Muslim".

Chance of being killed by a terrorist: one in 3.5 million per year

Prof. John Mueller 2014. (political science, Ohio State Univ) Has the threat from terrorism been exaggerated? 8 Jan 2014 THE COMMENTATOR <http://www.thecommentator.com/article/4579/has_the_threat_from_terrorism_been_exaggerated>

At current rates, an American’s chance of becoming a victim of terrorism in the U.S., even with 9/11 in the calculation, is about 1 in 3.5 million per year. In comparison, that same American stands a 1 in 22,000 yearly chance of becoming a homicide victim, a 1 in 8,000 chance of perishing in an auto accident, and a 1 in 500 chance of dying from cancer. These calculations are based, of course, on historical data. However, alarmists who would reject such history need to explain why they think terrorists will suddenly become vastly more competent in the future.

Threat of terrorist attack is almost zero: many other more likely causes of death in US

Prof. Paul Campos 2010 (professor of law at the University of Colorado) January 9, 2010. “Undressing the Terror Threat”, Wall Street Journal. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704130904574644651587677752?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052748704130904574644651587677752.html>

(1) America is a country of 310 million people, in which thousands of horrible things happen every single day; and (2) The chances that one of those horrible things will be that you're subjected to a terrorist attack can, for all practical purposes, be calculated as zero. Consider that on this very day about 6,700 Americans will die.

Threat from organized terror groups in the US was much higher in the 1970s

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Before Boston, some 16 people had been killed by Islamist terrorists in the United States in the years since 2001, and all of these were murdered by people who were essentially acting alone. By contrast, in the 1970s, organized terrorists inflicted hundreds of attacks, mostly bombings, in the United States, killing 72.

Deaths from terrorism are about the same as deaths from drowning in bathtubs

John Mueller 2007 (Woody Hayes Chair of National Security Studies, Mershon Center Professor of Political Science at Ohio State University), February 6, 2007, “Reacting to Terrorism: Probabilities, Consequences, and the Persistence of Fear,” National Convention of the International Studies Association. <http://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller//isa2007t.pdf>

Even with the September 11 attacks included in the count, however, the number of Americans killed by international terrorism over the period is not a great deal more than the number killed by lightning--or by accident-causing deer or by severe allergic reactions to peanuts over the same period. In almost all years the total number of people worldwide who die at the hands of international terrorists is not much more than the number who drown in bathtubs in the United States--some 300-400.

Bathtubs are more deadly than terrorists

John Mueller 2007 (Woody Hayes Chair of National Security Studies, Mershon Center Professor of Political Science at Ohio State University), February 6, 2007, “Reacting to Terrorism: Probabilities, Consequences, and the Persistence of Fear,” National Convention of the International Studies Association. <http://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller//isa2007t.pdf>

Two publications from Washington think tanks have independently provided lists of such incidents--one authored by Anthony Cordesman of CSIS, the other by Brian Jenkins of RAND. Although these tallies make for grim reading, the total number of people killed in the five years since 9/11 in such incidents comes to about 1000--that is, some 200 per year. That, of course, is 1000 too many, but it hardly constitutes a major threat, much less an existential one, to countries in Europe and North America. For comparison: over the same period far more people have drown in bathtubs in the United States alone.

Risk of Nuclear Terrorism Exaggerated

Threat of Nuclear Terrorism not based in reality

James Kitfield 2008. (National Journal Staff Correspondent) October 20, 2008, “Expert says nuclear terrorism is not a major threat,” National Journal. <http://www.govexec.com/defense/2008/10/expert-says-nuclear-terrorism-is-not-a-major-threat/27888/>

Seven years after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, experts and presidential candidates continue to put nuclear terrorism atop their lists of the gravest threats to the United States. Yet Brian Michael Jenkins, a longtime terrorism expert with the Rand Corp., says that the threat lies more in the realms of Hollywood dramas and terrorist dreams than in reality. There has never been an act of nuclear terrorism, he notes, yet the threat is so potentially catastrophic that it incites fear -- and that fear fulfills a terrorist's primary goal.

Don’t panic: Nuclear Weapons very difficult to acquire

Gene Healy2010. (vice president at the Cato Institute), April 6, 2010, “Gene Healy: Terrorism isn't an 'existential threat”, Washington Examiner**.** <http://washingtonexaminer.com/gene-healy-terrorism-isnt-an-existential-threat/article/32521>

When the enemy's best recent shot involves lighting his pants on fire, we shouldn't torture ourselves with nightmarish visions of weapons of mass destruction. Such weapons are exceedingly hard to come by. As political scientist John Mueller notes in his recent book "Atomic Obsession," "no state has ever given another state -- even a close ally, much less a terrorist group -- a nuclear weapon (or chemical, biological, or radiological one either)." And home-grown WMD tend to be ineffective.

DISADVANTAGES

1. The Only Thing to Fear is Fear Itself. Overreaction to terrorism hurts life, liberty and the economy

Impact 1. Loss of Life. 1,000 American died because of fear of terrorism

John Mueller 2008 (Woody Hayes Chair of National Security Studies, Mershon Center Professor of Political Science at Ohio State University), May 1, 2008. “Terrorphobia,” The American Interest Online. <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2008/05/01/terrorphobia/>

That conclusion probably holds for present concerns about domestic terrorism, too—at least outside of cable news shows. True enough, there was a lot of pseudo-rational evasive behavior after the 9/11 attacks. Indeed, several studies conclude that more than 1,000 Americans died between September 11, 2001 and the end of that year because, out of fear of terrorism, they avoided airplanes in favor of much more dangerous automobiles.

Impact 2. Loss of liberty and terrorists win. Overreacting causes a loss of liberty and accomplishes the goals of the terrorists

Gene Healy 2010. (vice president at the Cato Institute), April 6, 2010, “Gene Healy: Terrorism isn't an 'existential threat”, Washington Examiner**.** <http://washingtonexaminer.com/gene-healy-terrorism-isnt-an-existential-threat/article/32521>

None of this should be taken as a counsel of complacency. The low risk of terrorist WMD doesn't make guarding against it a waste of time. It makes sense, for example, to boost funding for international efforts to prevent nuclear smuggling, as the Obama administration has done. But when we overreact, we're doing terrorists' job for them. Conservatives understand that exaggerated fears of environmental threats make government grow and liberty shrink. They'd do well to recognize that the same dynamic applies to homeland security.

Impact 3. Economic Damage. Terrorists rely on overreaction to cause economic harm

Gene Healy 2010. (vice president at the Cato Institute), April 6, 2010, “Gene Healy: Terrorism isn't an 'existential threat”, Washington Examiner**.** <http://washingtonexaminer.com/gene-healy-terrorism-isnt-an-existential-threat/article/32521>

Terrorists bank on overreaction. As Osama bin Laden put it in 2004, "All that we have to do is to send two mujahedeen to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al Qaeda, in order to make the generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses." Adam Gadahn, the U.S.-born al Qaeda spokesman, recently called for more "lone-wolf" strikes, because "even apparently unsuccessful attacks on Western mass transportation systems can bring major cities to a halt [and] cost the enemy billions."

2. Fear of terrorism leads to bad policy-making

Irrational fear and emotion lead to illogical and counterproductive decision-making

John Mueller 2007 (Woody Hayes Chair of National Security Studies, Mershon Center Professor of Political Science at Ohio State University), February 6, 2007, “Reacting to Terrorism: Probabilities, Consequences, and the Persistence of Fear,” National Convention of the International Studies Association. <http://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller//isa2007t.pdf>

Third, fears about terrorism tend to create a political atmosphere that makes it be, or appear to be, politically unwise, or even politically impossible, to adopt temperate, measured policies. "Fearful people," notes a county official in mid-America, "demand more laws and harsher penalties, regardless of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of such efforts." Or, in Cass Sunstein's words, "When strong emotions are involved," as in a terrorist attack, "even if the likelihood of an attack is extremely low, people will be willing to pay a great deal to avoid it." Indeed, one study conducted a decade before 9/11 appears to have found that people would be willing to pay more for flight insurance against terrorism than for flight insurance against all causes including terrorism. Most destructively, the reaction to 9/11 has included two wars that are yet ongoing--one in Afghanistan, the other in Iraq--neither of which would have been politically possible without 9/11, and the number of Americans who have died in those ventures considerably surpasses the number who perished on September 11.

Fear of terrorism can make constructive policies impossible

Dr. Amy Zalman 2007. (senior research strategist in a private sector consulting firm; has testified to the U.S. Congress ; PhD from the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at New York University, and has served on the faculties of The New School, New York University, and Cornell University) 8 Jan 2007, “What Threat of Terrorist Attack?”, About.com <http://terrorism.about.com/od/counterterrorism/a/TerroristThreat.htm>

The growth of jihadist sympathies can endanger global security. But panic about their imminent danger on U.S. soil both simplifies and obscures the nature of the threat, making it impossible to understand, evaluate or create constructive policies and strategies.

Unwarranted fear leads to unneeded bureaucracy and draconian police powers

Bruce Schneier 2013. (masters degree in computer science;  [cryptographer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cryptographer), [computer security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer_security) and privacy specialist; author of several books on general [security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Security) topics, [computer security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer_security) and [cryptography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cryptography).  Fellow at the [Berkman Center for Internet & Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkman_Center_for_Internet_%26_Society) at [Harvard Law School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_Law_School)) CNN 20 May 2013 ”It's smart politics to exaggerate terrorist threats“ <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/20/opinion/schneier-security-politics/>

Lots of unneeded and ineffective security measures are perpetrated by a government bureaucracy that is primarily concerned about the security of its members' careers. They know the voters are more likely to punish them more if they fail to secure against a repetition of the last attack, and less if they fail to anticipate the next one. What can we do? Well, the first step toward solving a problem is recognizing that you have one. These are not iron-clad rules; they're tendencies. If we can keep these tendencies and their causes in mind, we're more likely to end up with sensible security measures that are commensurate with the threat, instead of a lot of security theater and draconian police powers that are not. Our leaders' job is to resist these tendencies. Our job is to support politicians who do resist.

3. Overreacting to terrorism means terrorists win

Only victory terrorists can achieve: over-reaction by US

Prof. Paul Campos 2010 (professor of law at the University of Colorado) January 9, 2010. “Undressing the Terror Threat”, Wall Street Journal. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704130904574644651587677752?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052748704130904574644651587677752.html>

Unfortunately, the politics of cowardice can also make it rational to spend otherwise irrational amounts of resources on further minimizing already minimal risks. Given the current climate of fear, any terrorist incident involving Islamic radicals generates huge social costs, so it may make more economic sense, in the short term, to spend X dollars to avoid 10 deaths caused by terrorism than it does to spend X dollars to avoid 1,000 ordinary homicides. Any long-term acceptance of such trade-offs hands terrorists the only real victory they can ever achieve.

Continued focus on terrorism guarantees success for terrorism – makes it easy for them to achieve their objectives

Prof. Paul Campos 2010 (professor of law at the University of Colorado) January 9, 2010. “Undressing the Terror Threat”, Wall Street Journal. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704130904574644651587677752?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052748704130904574644651587677752.html>

“What then is to be done? A little intelligence and a few drops of courage remind us that life is full of risk, and that of all the risks we confront in America every day, terrorism is a very minor one. Taking prudent steps to reasonably minimize the tiny threat we face from a few fanatic criminals need not grant them the attention they crave. Continuing to play Terrorball, on the other hand, guarantees that the terrorists will always win, since it places the bar for what counts as success for them practically on the ground.”

4. Wasted money

Link: Unwise and irresponsible to spend money on an exaggerated threat

Prof. John Mueller 2014. (political science, Ohio State Univ) Has the threat from terrorism been exaggerated? 8 Jan 2014 THE COMMENTATOR <http://www.thecommentator.com/article/4579/has_the_threat_from_terrorism_been_exaggerated>

Terrorists do, of course, exist -- as they have throughout history. They may even get lucky again sometime. Thus, concern and watchfulness about terrorism is justified. But counterterrorism expenditures that are wildly disproportionate to the limited hazard terrorism presents are neither wise nor responsible.

Impact: Every increase in the deficit hurts the economy

Dr William Gale and Benjamin Harris 2011. (Gale - PhD in economics, Stanford Univ.; senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and co-director of the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center; former assistant professor in the Department of Economics at UCLA, and a senior economist for the Council of Economic Advisers under President George H.W. Bush; Harris - master’s degree in economics from Cornell University and a master’s degree in quantitative methods from Columbia University; senior research associate with the Economics Studies Program at the Brookings Institution) “A VAT for the United States: Part of the Solution” <http://www.taxanalysts.com/www/freefiles.nsf/Files/GALE-HARRIS-5.pdf/$file/GALE-HARRIS-5.pdf>

But even in the absence of a crisis, sustained deficits have deleterious effects, as they translate into lower national savings, higher interest rates, and increased indebtedness to foreign investors, all of which serve to reduce future national income. Gale and Orszag (2004a) estimate that a 1 percent of GDP increase in the deficit will raise interest rates by 25 to 35 basis points and reduce national saving by 0.5 to 0.8 percentage points of GDP. Engen and Hubbard (2004) obtain similar results regarding interest rates.