

Prosecuting the War



Many of us at the Cato Institute find ourselves in an unusual position these days. In the first place, starting early last year, we found ourselves harboring generally positive thoughts about the incumbent president, a feeling we had rarely known. Despite his unfortunate initiatives on education centralization, energy subsidies, and some other areas, President Bush strongly advocated tax reduction, rejected the Kyoto agreement on global warming, and stuck to his guns on Social Security reform.

And then came September 11. Now we find ourselves not just supporting a president but supporting an American war. We have, of course, long criticized the United States' interventionist foreign policy. We warned that military intervention around the world was dangerous. We even warned that it could lead to terrorist attacks on the United States. But we always said that the United States would have to respond, and respond vigorously, to an attack.

Now we have been attacked. On September 11, Ted Galen Carpenter wrote: "The president should immediately seek the full authorization of Congress to use whatever military force is necessary against the guilty parties. If the perpetrator is a government, the objective of the United States should be nothing less than the removal of that government. If the perpetrator is a terrorist organization without government sponsorship, the objective of the United States should be to track down and eliminate the members of that organization."

We also sought to define the nature of the conflict. As Ed Crane wrote in the last issue of *Cato Policy Report*: "Those attacks were attacks on the essence of America. They were not attacks on the 'mixed economy' or on the 'Third Way.' They were attacks on true liberalism—the idea that individual human life is important and that social institutions should reflect that fact."

President Bush and his team have made a good start in eliminating those who attacked us. The president offered a vigorous but measured response, carefully planned and focused on the perpetrators of the September 11 atrocities and those who harbored them.

Cato scholars will be offering several recommendations as we continue the war against the terrorists who attacked America, including the following:

Improve Civil Defense. Administration officials tell us that "there is a clear, present danger" of worse attacks than we have experienced, a point that government reports have made over the past decade. Yet, as a November 2000 Cato study warned, the federal government has done little to educate Americans about how to respond to nuclear, biological, or chemical attacks or to stockpile antidotes and anti-viruses. It's time to do so.

Round Up al-Qaeda Operatives in the United States. Our leaders are right to warn us against hate crimes directed at Muslims and at people who "look like Arabs." We must not forget the kind of country we are. But when we find people living in this country who are involved in a terror network, we need to move forcefully. No one has the right to come to this country for the purpose of mayhem and murder.

Spend Our Defense Dollars Wisely. Advocates of increased military spending have seized on the atrocities of September 11 as an excuse to spend "hundreds of billions more" on the military. But we don't need another million men, or more tanks and cruise missiles, to fight this war. Instead of throwing money at the problem, we should take a close look at the Pentagon's budget and reallocate resources to real needs such as civil defense, missile defense, and human intelligence. We should close obsolete military bases, terminate wasteful and unnecessary weapons programs, and withdraw our troops from Korea.

Reorient Drug War Resources to the War on Terrorism. Some officials have compared the new war on terrorists with the war on drugs. That's a depressing thought: we've been fighting the drug war for 87 years, and drug use is as high as ever. A better tack is to take the \$40 billion we spend annually on the futile drug war and reallocate it to the war on terrorism.

Protect Civil Liberties. Cato scholars Robert Levy and Timothy Lynch have been among the most forceful critics of President Bush's executive order empowering himself to order military trials of non-U.S. citizens—even if they are arrested here, are tried here, and reside here legally. People legally residing in the United States have rights that must be protected. We should also be very concerned about the expansion of federal search and surveillance powers—involving bank accounts, e-mail, business records, and so on—in the name of fighting terrorism.

Protect the Taxpayers. The federal government will need to increase spending in some areas to fight terrorism. But since September 11 we have seen everything from peanut subsidies to steel protectionism justified in the name of national security. A more sensible approach would be to cut low-priority spending in order to fund higher-priority needs.

Usually, libertarians enter public debates to call for restrictions on government activity. In the wake of September 11, we have all been reminded of the proper purpose of government: to protect our lives, liberties, and property from violence. Now would be a good time for the federal government to do its job with vigor and determination.

—David Boaz