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REGULATION was first published in July 1977 "because the extension of regulation is piecemeal, the sources and targets diverse, the language complex and often opaque, and the volume overwhelming."

REGULATION is devoted to analyzing the implications of government regulatory policy and its effects on our public and private endeavors.

The Roots of Our Insecurity

I think the overall point of John Mueller's "A False Sense of Insecurity" (Fall 2004) is right on, but he left out some of the societal "hows" and "whys" that explain how we got to this state of insecurity. The new pop culture ideals that media must "shock and awe" the public and that the public must feel "shock and outrage" over public issues are both indirect reasons why society has crafted policies that focus so much energy on stopping terrorism.

It is a little depressing to realize that America's terrorism policy is made in about the same way that scriptwriters create plotlines. Scenarios on any television drama or action show (e.g., "24," "Alias," "CSI: Anytown," the list goes on) feed on and perpetuate fear in everyday living, along with the belief that we must "pay any price, and bear any burden" to protect ourselves from what we fear. In essence, policymakers are using the same three basic ingredients to implement policies that scriptwriters use to perpetuate plots: "love, fear, and laughter." Love of country is used to get the public to accept the USA Patriot Act, the fear of attack is used to justify invading Iraq to search for weapons of mass destruction, and laughter is directed at analysts who try to determine objectively if all of America's terrorism and foreign policies are worthwhile.

Mueller is right when he states that people are more alarmed by dramatic fatalities. As he notes, September 11 killed 3,000, but auto-related deaths have claimed 100,000 lives since then—yet people are far more conscious of the risk of terrorism than the risk of driving. Why the difference? Because the 100,000 auto-related deaths did not happen all at once, in front of TV cameras, and the

media does not repeat the auto deaths statistic day after day for months on end.

Many people simply accept, without question or analysis, the world that is presented to them on their TV screens. I cannot help but think of my own mother as a good example. She can tell you any day of the week what color the terrorism alert level is in America. A few months ago, she picked me up from the airport, which had construction underway for a new parking deck. Looking at the construction workers, my mom turns to me and says, "I bet some of those guys are actually with the FBI or CIA," in a very serious tone. My response: "I didn't know they got trained on using a cement mixer in the CIA."

Unfortunately, I do not think my mother is a glaringly uncommon case. She just wants to feel indirectly a part of something larger: protecting our country from terrorism.

Obviously, any act of terrorism that takes any lives, American or otherwise, is terrible and heartbreaking. But as Mueller states, to have our own government reinforce and invoke fear using the tragic deaths of 1/1,000 of one percent of the American population is to advance the terrorists' objectives.

There is little way around living life without the potential dangers that come regularly, brought on us by crime, disease, and Mother Nature. (How many magnitudes worse will be the tsunami death toll over that of September 11?)

We do not need to instill improbable fears. I am not saying that we should do nothing to prevent terrorism, but we do not need to duct tape ourselves inside our own homes either.

But how can we absorb that message if our fear of terrorism makes us feel invested in our country?

TIMOTHY SCHWANTES

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