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## 'Science Under Siege'

Throughout the Bush administration, the president's policies have been criticized by many scientists. On Tuesday, the American Civil Liberties Union issued a new and harsh analysis of those policies.

["Science Under Siege"](#) says that the administration has used the attacks of September 11 to undermine the rights of researchers. "Spurred by misguided and often disingenuous security concerns, the Bush administration has sought to impose growing restrictions on the free flow of scientific information, unreasonable barriers to the use of scientific materials, and increased monitoring of and restrictions on foreign university students," the report says.

The report says that there is no debate about the fact that there is some information that is so potentially dangerous that it shouldn't be widely circulated, and that there are some terrorists who need to be kept out of the United States. But the report says that the Bush administration has gone way beyond reasonable measures — and that in doing so, the president is endangering security.

"Hamstringing the free exchange of scientific ideas and information will do little if anything to prevent terrorist attacks, but will certainly diminish the capacity of the scientific community to address threats to public health and safety," the report says.

At a news conference to release the report, Anthony D. Romero, the ACLU's executive director, said that the war against terrorism is "a war of ideas" and that American values of preserving an open and free society must be protected to win that war.

Most of the details in the report do not raise new issues, but are in fact concerns that scientists and others have been talking about for several years now, such as the Bush administration's tightening of rules on classified documents, new systems for granting visas to foreign students, and new rules on what research can be conducted by foreign students.

While much of the report focused on issues related to post-9/11 policies, the ACLU study also says that the Bush administration has "stacked" scientific advisory committees, granted the White House Office of Management and Budget too much control over science policy, and appointed political ideologues to key science positions.

The American Association of University Professors endorsed the ACLU report. Mark Smith, director of government relations for the AAUP, said at the press conference that the president's science policies "are bad for science, bad for freedom and fundamentally flawed." The AAUP's Committee on Government Relations this month issued its own [statement](#) on science policy that was also critical of the administration.

Speakers at the news conference agreed that the administration has made some progress recently at improving the student visa system. Policy changes in the wake of 9/11 led to declines in foreign students enrollments in the United States, and many students who were admitted to American universities said that they could not actually enroll. But recent improvement “are not enough,” Smith said, citing continued difficulties faced by many foreign students. While complaints about the visa rules and science policy generally have been growing, ACLU officials said that they believed the timing was good to see actual changes in policy. They cited a vote by the House of Representatives last week to scale back Patriot Act provisions that required librarians to share information about people’s reading habits with law enforcement officials. Romero noted that the measure couldn’t have passed on Democratic votes alone, and said that the vote demonstrated that lawmakers and the public are willing to challenge the Bush administration — even on issues related to security. “The Bush administration misjudged public sentiment” on the library provision and some of the issues discussed in the report, Romero said. Not surprisingly, the Bush administration doesn’t see it that way. “It’s a shame that the ACLU has politicized science,” said Bob Hopkins, a spokesman for the White House science office. He acknowledged that there have been differences between researchers and the White House, but said that the administration was committed to “good faith” discussions with scientists to work through issues. “We have an ongoing and healthy dialogue,” he said.

The ACLU report, he said, failed to understand that the administration was trying to advance science “without providing terrorists with the means to achieve their ends.”

— [Scott Jaschik](#)