Chapter 18

Comparing the Socio-Political Ethics of Fighting Terrorism With Extreme Self-Defense in USA:
An Exploratory Insight

Maximiliano E. Korstanje
University of Palermo, Argentina & University of Leeds, UK

Kenneth David Strang
SUNY Plattsburgh – Queensbury, USA & APPC Research Australia, Australia

ABSTRACT

In this study the authors adopted a post-positivist research design philosophy to explore the likelihood that Americans would support extreme self-defense policies like torture, reducing human rights or banning Muslims to fight against global terrorism, especially after 9/11 and in light of the Trump conservative government. The authors grounded their research questions into the literature to form hypotheses in a correlational design strategy which they tested using nonparametric statistics. They collected opinions from 3213 Americans during 2016-2017 about applying extreme self-defense tactics to combat global terrorism and how these opinions contrasted between those holding a conservative versus liberal or other individualistic socio-political ideology. The surprising results were that American citizens did not unanimously endorse banning Muslims (only 30% supported the policy and 6% were undecided) but the majority (51%) of participants sanctioned torture as a self-defense to combat global terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

During 2016-2017 we witnessed a surge of terrorist attacks on countries like Belgium, England, France, and USA while terrorism continued in the Middle East and Northeast African regions. Terrorist organizations such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and others kill and torture even innocent bystanders

on a massive scale to further their ideology and goals (Strang, 2015a). The evidence is clear that most terrorists are associated with the Islam religion but since almost a quarter of the people in the world are Muslims this fact may be probability driven (Strang & Alamieyeseigha, 2017). Certain countries and their government possess a socio-political ideology such as extreme conservatism where torture and banning people based on their religion may be acceptable techniques to combat global terrorism. The arrival of Donald Trump to the presidency of USA and his promises of legalizing water boarding to fight terrorism triggered a hot debate. Given that future terrorist attacks are imminent but since the dates and places are unknown, will racial-banning and torture become legitimate practices to save innocent lives?

Philosophy scholars have failed to reach agreement about whether torture and racial-banning are sanctioned in certain situations such as fighting terrorism (Sunstein, 2005). Torture and racial-banning are condemned in modern legal jurisprudence but there are some interesting socio-political controversies about these techniques in the philosophy of ethics. There are many studies in the literature focused on understanding the terrorist´s motivations - the theoretical platform rests on two contrasting poles. Some voices focus on the negative effects of terrorism as special crimes which warrant extreme defensive responses (Huntington, 1997; Kagan, 2004b; Staub, 2011; Chester at al., 2007), whereas other writers allude to terrorism as an ideological construction no different than modern crime which has already received too much attention in society (Chomsky, 1987; Bernstein, 2005; Skoll, 2016; Korstanje, 2017).

Some psychologists view terrorism as an ideological disease that targets organizations and society. Jacques Derrida defines terrorism as a form of autoimmune syndrome that affects the functionality of institutions, while Habermas delves on the semiotic nature of terrorism as a derived pathology in the communicative process (Borradori, 2013). Philosophers and psychologists tend to agree that terrorists are not demons or maniacs but instead they are lay-persons who gradually experience a process of radicalization which leads them towards extreme behavior (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, 2011).

When it comes to global terrorism researchers disagree whether ethics theories clarifying what is right versus wrong could be used to validate extreme retaliation such as torture or racial-banning. This dilemma may arise because people in society are educated to think that terrorists' act beyond the borders of ethics therefore a majority vote would be all this needed to authorize such tactics. Secondly, some researchers assert that the degree of defense instrumentality should be in proportion to degree of evilness and in the case of terrorism there should be no ethical constraints to struggle against that evilness. Although torture and racial-banning are not accepted by any formal international convention or legislation, some governments sanction a degree of torture and racial-profiling when a terrorist attack seems imminent.

This raises some interesting questions about why killing in war is accepted but banning high risk people or torturing terrorists is unacceptable? The fact is that using extreme defenses against global terrorism appears to be justified in some socio-political ideologies otherwise why are we debating it? In one of the few the seminal texts in the field Coons and Weber (2016) discuss the ethical dilemmas of extreme self-defenses against global terrorism.

The controversy in the literature about how to address global terrorism raises three socio-political ethics dilemmas which underpin our research:

1. Despite terrorists being deemed evildoers the liberal democratic view is that every human ought to have the same freedoms so racial-banning and torture are condemned;
2. Since terrorists exploit the vulnerability of the others through sudden attacks against innocent civilians a conservative view is that extreme self-defense tactics are necessary such as torture and racial-banning;

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