

Safeguarding human rights in prosecuting counter-terrorism policies

The US Department of Defence defines terrorism as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.” Terrorism is a world-wide occurrence that inflicts great harm generally on innocent citizens. Extremist ideals are often the basis of terrorist acts, because unfortunately violence seems to be the only way to clearly get their message across. When terrorism affects you and your country, what actions need to take place to tighten security and strengthen protection? On what terms is the government able to restrict your civil liberties to provide this protection? How much are you willing to give up in order to be “safe” from terrorism?

Various countries have developed counter-terrorism policies to add extra security for its citizens. Yet terrorism is a global issue that must be dealt with internationally, because different countries have different levels of protection, and efforts must be made by all to eliminate terrorist crimes. Agreements and treaties have been made to combat terrorism from regional, national, and international organizations, such as the United Nations. Eighteen universal instruments (fourteen instruments and four amendments) against international terrorism have been elaborated within the framework of the United Nations system relating to specific terrorist activities.¹ With vast diversity and cultures, how do we work together to decrease and ultimately eliminate terrorism globally?

The events that occurred on September 11th, 2001 have amplified the severity of terrorism, when the World Trade Center collapsed due to the hi-jacked planes flown into the towers. Immediate precautionary action was taken after this tragic event. Airport security has since been improved, with more intensive security checkpoints, some now containing full-body scans, and pat downs. This has resulted in extended waiting periods that can take hours to go through. Also former president G.W. Bush initiated the Patriot Act, which essentially allowed the US government unrestricted access to its citizens’ personal information. Extreme paranoia was experienced by many Americans out of fear of another terrorist attack, and it is understandable that when in such circumstances, we are willing to give up some of our rights in order to the State to keep us safe. Yet, how far are we willing to be stripped of our fundamental rights? Freedom of speech for example was even limited in the US post 9/11 because anyone caught talking about terrorism or Al queda or even anything that was deemed “suspicious” could be taken in for questioning from US authorities. How do you determine when national security becomes more important than justice itself?

According to the US Department of State a country is a State Sponsor of Terrorism when they have been considered "to have repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism." These countries currently include: Cuba, Iran, Sudan, and Syria.

How do we protect individual human rights when trying to keep a nation safe from the outside threat of terrorism? Is it necessary to suspend civil liberties in order to increase security for all? To what extreme do counter-terrorism policies need to restrict our basic human rights?

US Department of State

<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/enemy/index.htm>

Canadian Foreign Affairs Department

<http://www.international.gc.ca/crime/terrorism-terrorisme.aspx?view=d>

UN

¹<http://www.un.org/terrorism/>

Countries

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Sponsors_of_Terrorism