

AN ETHICAL RESPONSE TO TERRORISM, COUNTER- TERRORISM AND THE WAR ON TERROR

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INTRODUCTION

- ✘ My interest in terrorism and the war on terror
- ✘ Three key questions I will try and answer:
 1. *What is terrorism?*
 2. *What is the war on terrorism?*
 3. *What is the ethical response to terrorism and war on terror?*

WHAT IS TERRORISM?

- ✘ There is no agreement – there are more than 200 legal and academic definitions
- ✘ A social fact, not a brute fact – the construction of terrorism through interpretation
- ✘ A growing academic consensus definition:

Terrorism is the use or threat of violence against some victims in order to communicate a political message to another group of people, the audience.

WHAT IS THE WAR ON TERRORISM?

- ✘ War on terror – a global counter-terrorism enterprise of massive proportions with both international and domestic dimensions
- ✘ Five key dimensions: military, legal, intelligence, diplomatic, counter-radicalisation and risk management
- ✘ It is a way of speaking and thinking, and acting towards the issue of terrorism and security

SPEAKING AND THINKING

- ✘ The war on terror is based on a number of key narratives, assumptions, metaphors and guiding principles which create ‘the counter-terrorist mindset’
- ✘ The counter-terrorist mindset has become embedded in governmental agencies and is the basis for action – and is now a widely accepted common sense in the media and academia too

TERRORISM NARRATIVES AND ASSUMPTIONS

- ✘ The threat of terrorism – massive, unpredictable, WMD, omnipresent, and ultimately unknowable and incalculable
- ✘ Terrorism as an unprecedented, exceptional phenomenon requiring exceptional, extra-normal responses from the authorities
- ✘ Terrorism is caused by hatred, deviance, fanaticism, extremism, and individual pathology, not politics
- ✘ Terrorism is irrational and non-negotiable
- ✘ A central narrative: ‘The enemy within’
- ✘ Terrorism is war and war on terror is necessary, legitimate and effective

METAPHORS AND PRINCIPLES

- ✘ Key metaphors: evil, savagery, infection/disease
- ✘ The precautionary principle
- ✘ Risk society/risk management – the new politics
- ✘ Collectively, these assumptions, narratives, metaphors, and principles form the logic and motivation for counter-terrorism action – they construct counter-terrorism practices and policies

ACTIONS AND POLICIES

- ✘ Military: wars, major operations, targeted killing programme, new bases, training programmes, R & D, military expansion
- ✘ Intelligence: expanded agencies, global interdiction programme, intelligence sharing, surveillance
- ✘ Legal: new international and domestic legal architecture
- ✘ Diplomatic: global public diplomacy programme, PR
- ✘ Domestic: security measures in all major areas of public life, risk management measures, counter-radicalisation programmes

A FEW INTERNATIONAL OUTCOMES

- ✘ Deaths due to war, military operations, drone attacks, and counter-terrorist raids
- ✘ Rendition, torture and preventive detention
- ✘ Repression and human rights abuses on a global scale – the return of state terror
- ✘ Militarisation – bases, training, arms trade
- ✘ Setbacks to peace processes and conflict resolution – the spread and intensification of local conflicts

A FEW DOMESTIC OUTCOMES

- ✘ The security colonisation of social life – immigration, higher education, social media, urban landscape, etc
- ✘ Institutionalisation of the state of exception, risk management, surveillance and governmentality
- ✘ The creation of ‘suspect communities’, loss of trust, increased racism and the destruction of social capital
- ✘ A growing war on dissent and protest
- ✘ The politics and culture of fear – the prominence of security in electoral politics
- ✘ The rise of the ‘Terrorism Industry’ – embedded material interests for individuals, institutions and companies
- ✘ Opportunity costs – trillions wasted, diverted aid, the lost opportunities of 9/11

ASSESSMENT

- ✘ The centrality of violence and militarism – the self-fulfilling prophecy
- ✘ The embrace of fear, distortion and paranoia
- ✘ The normalisation of lies, distortion and exaggeration – the ‘passion for ignorance’
- ✘ The sacrifice of justice and liberty for an illusionary sense of security
- ✘ The acceptance of the status quo and its moral hierarchy of victims

I'M NO THEOLOGIAN, BUT...

- ✘ All ethical people ought to oppose the war on terror
- ✘ The prophetic tradition:
 - ✘ Speaking the truth – about terrorism, counter-terrorism, war and human rights abuses
 - ✘ Holding the powerful to account for their misdeeds
 - ✘ Standing on the side of the vulnerable and oppressed
 - ✘ A fundamental concern for justice and structural violence – which helps us understand where terrorism comes from

I'M NO THEOLOGIAN, BUT...

- ✘ The Gospel tradition:

- ✘ Planks, specks and first stones – Western violence and oppression
 - ✘ Loving enemies and outcasts – rejecting dehumanisation, demonisation, and moral hierarchies of victims
 - ✘ Nonviolence as an alternative to violence – rejecting an eye for an eye and cycles of violence
- ✘ Any of these principles should put Christians and the church firmly against the war on terror

CONCLUSIONS

- × NZ is not immune – the Tūhoe Raids
- × Principles for evaluating counter-terrorism policies:
 - × Effectiveness
 - × Proportionality
 - × Legitimacy
- × The practical basis for an ethical response to terrorism and war on terror:
 - × Education
 - × Organising, networking and building coalitions
 - × Advocacy
 - × Protest and resistance
 - × Modeling alternatives

FURTHER READING

