ETHICS IN TERRORISM?

Iulia CRĂCIUN
Răzvan Alexandru ENACHE
“Ludan Blaga” University of Sibiu

ABSTRACT

We participated and are still taking part in the global war against terror. We generally see those who fight for their own causes as being terrorists but the question that emerges is “Are they really terrorists?” The answer is hard to discover but we must take into account that these people in the opinion of the masses which support them are the freedom fighters to whom they can look up to and can realize their dreams of independence, social justice or whatever their fighting for.

Somehow we must find a way to cover the gap between the lack of ethics on the side of the terrorists and on our side because the methods that the democracies are forced to use against them can sometimes lead to disaster.

Keywords: terrorism, ethics, islam, democracy, jihad, freedom fighter

“One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”

Gerald Seymour

The need for an ethical dimension of international relations was affirmed by British Foreign Minister, Robin Cook. In a speech delivered in office, in May 12, 1997, Cook said: “Our foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support other people's desires to have those democratic rights we want for ourselves. The Labour Government will put human rights at the heart of our foreign policy” [1].

Ethics in international relations isn’t a creation of the twentieth century, it has always existed, even in ancient times, this can be seen in much of the old religious texts, which in those times acted as legal rules between states.

Why has in this century ethical issues began to be so successful? The answer is simple, one reason that lead to this success is that it can impose itself at the moment when the great ideological barriers no longer meet the needs of the moment. Another reason has to do with the atrocities which took place during this century (The Two World Wars, The massacres in Rwanda or the Wars in Yugoslavia, to give just a few examples).

The modern age has managed to impose the idea of a separate moral life from faith, the equality principle in the moral issues, between believer and unbeliever, ethical life became accessible to all people, regardless of their opinions [2]. The true value, even religious, is not embodied by prayer and fasting but by obedience to the law of moral reason.
The word terrorism comes from Latin, from the words terror-terroris, and has military connotations. Terrorism was used by the Roman legions to enforce their law, frightening the population and thus forcing it into submission. Hitler also had a very positive attitude towards terrorism. One of the principles by which he guided himself and which was stated in “Mein Kampf” was that “the only way to win easily against reason is terror and force” [3].

When we try to answer the ethical question of terrorism, it is important to understand the ambiguity of the word itself. What exactly is terrorism? Although the meaning is a subjective term, terrorism is traditionally described as the use of force to inspire social and political changes randomly. The term terrorism has recently become a very popular word in politics and raises questions and debates about morality. Can terrorism ever be justified? [4]

**When Does Terrorism Fight for a Just Cause?**

Terrorism has remained unchanged for centuries, what is shocking today is the impact that media has on us. An impact that we can see on the people who have seen images of Nazi concentration camps, the massacres in Rwanda and of course the atrocities in former Yugoslavia, in other words the media began to show up what people can achieve when their ethics are perverted.

Certain acts may be considered terrorism or not it all depends on the moral and political prejudices of the observer. However, not wanting to expose a moral judgment, even within the democratic world examples exist (by definition) of the use of terrorism to achieve a greater good for society:

- The American Revolution – before and during the war, colonists used tactics of intimidation against British tax collectors, and British loyalists who were not on the side of the Revolution.
- The French Revolution was often dotted about by terrorist actions, but nevertheless it led to the end of absolute monarchy in France.
- The Maoist fighting in Nepal, were labeled by Westerners as “terrorists” but actually they were fighting against an oppressive monarch.
- North-Vietnamese were called “terrorists” in their struggles against the illegal occupation of their country [5].

The individuals who participated in these events can be categorized as terrorists? The common element is that violence was used as a last resort when all peaceful means have been exhausted and no longer considered useful for most people. If the “terrorist” act leads to the welfare of the entire population then surely it can be justified. While peaceful means must always be taken into consideration and used before the violent means, when these means don’t bring the desired result, then man is forced to become violent.

Before answering what is terrorism there are some questions to be answered:

First, is terrorism the most effective way to achieve the proposed goals? Often terrorism is not the most efficient way, like the time when your actions strengthen opposition to the use of violence, while passive resistance may create sympathy for your cause. Although this does not mean that terrorism does not lead to the desired result. Often, passive resistance can lead to violence from the opposition, when it does violence may be the last solution to the problem.

Second, is the goal so important to justify terrorist acts? This again depends on the social perspective. Irish reunification is a goal important enough so that IRA actions are justified? National sovereignty is a goal important enough so that the Iraqi resistance continues fighting against US occupation? The question whether or not the result, is worth violence, has no simple answer, so that all involved are taken into consideration before resorting to violence.
The problem of justifying terrorism is that the consequences of often are not taken into account, and the prejudices darken human judgment. If we can justify that the Iraqi resistance movement against the occupation was a just fight, we can also say that the Palestine Liberation Organization leads a just fight against Israeli occupation. These questions and consequences must be taken into account, when these effects are not taken into account events such as the massacre of Russian students by Chechen rebels can take place.

Terrorism is often considered not to be ethical. Indeed, the very label of “terrorism” has become a hostile judgment disguised as a description. In conventional Western stories about terrorism, a double standard is being used: only terrorism used by non-state groups or the one’s the US government labeled “failed states” are taken into account. There are also critics who adopt the definition that includes the terrorism practiced by the dominant states. The next step is to focus on oppressed groups such as the Palestinians. The main argument is that an oppressed group is so weak that it has no other solution than military action against civilians is justified the same way as an aggressor state violence occurring [6].

Another common problem of terrorism is the concern that violence is superior to non-violence, this being considered to be ineffective. From a pragmatic point of view, giving ethical consideration aside for the moment, it has few parts that can be recommended. As a technique, it frequently terrifies neutral observers and people from the target groups. Non-state terrorism, or in other words terrorism applied by the weak, is often counterproductive because this awful factor. Experts noted that state terrorism is also counterproductive because it aggravates the injustice which leads to increased non-state terrorism. Non-state terrorism is rarely taken into consideration, in a strategic sense, to lead to beneficial results.

There are many examples where non-violent actions have been effective in situations where violence may or may not have succeeded. The armed struggle of East Timor against Indonesia's military occupation was little known for many years, with a massive cost of lives. After the liberation movement moved from the armed struggle in rural areas to non-violent protests in the cities, it received greater support from the international community, which eventually led to their independence [7].

Just the fact that terrorism is sometimes justified does not mean that non-violent means can be ignored. Do states which abdicate from ethics and human rights, only to defeat terrorists, exist?

Do States Abdicate from Ethics in the Fight Against Terrorism?

The global war on terrorism has renewed the discussion about when and how societies – especially those who believe that are based on values more noble than the mere continuity of their own system of government – may use violence or restrictions (for security reasons) of freedoms of its citizens or people from other friendly states, hostile or neutral [8].

In today's society, Human Rights have entered the modern lexicon taking roots in such a way that their compliance has become if not synonymous with democracy at least considered a basic part of it.

The violation of Human Rights is very common. If until recently the breach of these rights was identified with totalitarian regimes, time has proved that even the great democracies like the US can also use such gestures when their interests are jeopardized. The most relevant, in my opinion, is the prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

I think we still have in our memory the humiliations to which the Iraqi prisoners were subjected, the so called terrorists from Abu Ghrai b, headgear, human pyramids, etc. But nothing is clearer in the minds of those who think about such abuses, because of the intense media coverage, than the prison at Guantanamo Bay.
Here the imagination of those applying the torture methods apparently knows no boundaries, one of the most interesting ways to torture prisoners is baptism by a Catholic priest or soldier or in breaking the Qur’an (we all know the importance of the Qur’an for a Muslim). Why should we use such methods against people for whom religion is still a moral value? If we put dirt on the robes of a priest, by using them in tortures, shouldn’t we ask ourselves if our morality is somewhere below that of the terrorist? Have we become so secularized that we do not believe in anything? Where are the rights to practice religion and freedom of choice for these people?

But if to defeat the terrorists, the West has to mutilate his own political philosophy, Western victory does not hide, in fact, a defeat? This defeat, even if it’s not military but a moral one, already started and this is confirmed by people who were detained there. Sami al-Haj, a Sudanese cameraman for the television station Al-Jazeera, released after six years of imprisonment in Guantanamo prison, denounced the very difficult conditions in which prisoners are kept.

Against the abuses at Guantanamo Bay, stood up many human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Civil Society for Human Rights Watch who have called for abolition of the detention center, but also figures such as Pope Benedict XVI, who demanded from President George W. Bush that human rights should be respected even in the fight against terrorism.

The greatest consequence of the existence of the Guantanamo detention center refers to a statement by Hassan Yousef, a prominent Hamas leader. He said in an interview that the treatment by U.S. troops of Taliban prisoners and Al Qaeda members detained in the detention center at the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, “will lead to a multiplication in the number of recruits” who will join Islamic terrorist groups. “US makes a mistake regarding the treatment of the prisoners. But ultimately this will be beneficial to Muslim groups like ours, because people will feel compassion and the number of followers will increase”, said Yousef in that interview.

What actions or policies are allowed to a country that was hit by terrorism like the one that hit the US in the last 10 years? Or Israel? Or Spain? Perhaps suffering a terrorist attack (or the existence of terrorist threats) has extended the range of options allowed to a state attacked or one who believes it will be attacked? Maybe the nature of terrorism itself may expand a set of moral and ethical options available to actual or potential targets? These questions and others like them have produced some striking responses, such as those that the use of torture is inevitable in counter-terrorism tactics. Some have argued that the problems on the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib are irrelevant, because the prisoners taken into discussion are not soldiers to whom you can apply standards and the treaties regarding the treatment of prisoners of war.

Barack Obama, was elected in 2008, largely because of the promise of “change”. He appealed to the feelings of hostility and revulsion that people had against the aggressive wars, sweeping attacks on fundamental democratic rights and the use of torture during the Bush administration. More than anything else Obama has tried to symbolize the supposed change that his administration will bring, promising to close Guantanamo in his first year in power. He said that Guantanamo is “a sad chapter in American history” that will be closed. In November 2009, the administration acknowledged that it will not meet the deadline proposed and postponed closing Guantanamo to an unspecified date in 2010 [9].

Amnesty International appreciated in 2010, in it’s annual report, that the American balance sheet on human rights is “tainted” by the cases of suspects detained without
trial at Guantanamo and in Afghanistan but also capital punishment system, which generates miscarriages of justice. The Human Rights organization said that, in 2010, the United States executed 46 prisoners whose defense, guilt or mental health, were doubtful, in many cases.

The terrorist phenomena, by its nature asymmetrical, forces the hand of policy and strategic makers out of the sphere of law and ethics so as to meet the challenge. In fact, the only universally valid definition of terrorism is to be placed outside any rules and without any hierarchy. Intelligence is, in essence, a high capacity to adapt. Terrorism has, above all, an amoral character, it represents human intelligence in the service of achieving goals through the speculation of weaknesses in supported social mechanisms [10].

However the phenomenon of counter-terrorism must not involve a violation of Human Rights in whose name this war on terrorism was started and also not an abdication from one’s own ethics because otherwise, what would be the difference between political leaders and terrorists.

Conclusions
Missing or not the ethics, terrorism remains a complex phenomenon which now and also in future will represent a both physical and moral threat, because fighting against a concept that you can not define, you never know to which values you can relate to.

Finally, terrorist acts are equally vague in their meaning as the word itself. Subjectivity and personal prejudices have always flawed moral outlook, but we must follow a route in answering objective questions of ethics. Is the terrorist act justified? Perhaps only when it’s in the interest of most people, when the goal is an ethical one and when all other means of resistance were exhausted. This is a boundary were everyone has an opinion to support.

Until then, we must face the challenges of today, to destroy outbreaks of genesis and proliferation of terrorist activities and prevent the causes of the manifestation of this phenomenon.

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