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Human Rights and the War on Terror Second Edition: Introduction

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Abstract

"9/11 changed everything." Not really. In fact, there has been far more continuity than change over the past six years in both international and domestic politics. Nonetheless, human rights often have been harmed—although not by terrorism but by "the war on terror."

Keywords

Human rights, War on terror, Middle East, United States foreign policy

Human Rights and the War on Terror

Second Edition

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Not really. In fact, there has been far more continuity than change over the past six years in both international and domestic politics. Nonetheless, human rights often have been harmed—although not by terrorism but by “the war on terror.”

War rarely is good for human rights. The American-led “global war on terror” has had predictably negative human rights consequences. In combating a tiny network of violent political extremists, human rights have been—both intentionally and unintentionally—restricted, infringed, violated, ignored, and trampled.

Civil liberties have been restricted or worse in numerous countries, including in the United States. Forces of repression have been emboldened, using the language of antiterrorism to justify violating the rights of ordinary political opponents. Actions directed against real terrorists have, as in Chechnya, been intensified in ways that have increased the suffering of innocent civilians. And the United States, although still a vocal and sometimes effective advocate for international human rights, has shown unfortunate tolerance for human rights violations by “partners” in the “war on terrorism.”

Consider Pakistan. It has been the world’s leading nuclear proliferator over the past two decades and was the leading supporter of the Taliban. Today it probably provides refuge for Osama bin Laden, and certainly offers safe haven for a variety of Islamist terrorists. It is ruled by a repressive military dictator, who was recently “re-elected” in a sham poll. Yet because General Musharraf provides limited assistance in the “war on terror,” Pakistan is America’s leading “friend” in the region.

As Thomas Friedman put it in his September 30, 2007 column in *The New York Times*, “9/11 has made us stupid ... [and] we can’t afford to keep being this stupid!” This bibliography documents some of the human rights stupidity arising from the “war on terror.”

Like the other *HRHW Research Digests*, it offers an introduction to a rapidly growing body of literature. The intended audience is those embarking on research. Each section includes an introduction that identifies some of the principal issues considered in the scholarly and policy literature and offers annotations of a generally representative selection of sources. There is no attempt to provide a complete or comprehensive bibliography. Within each topic we have emphasized instead careful selection and informative annotation.

Reflecting both the importance of the topic and the growing literature, this *Digest* is a “second edition”—a “first” for *HRHW*. It is presented in two parts.

The second, supplementary part was produced in the spring of 2007. It covers the human rights implications of the “war on terror” for Chechnya, Europe (post London and Madrid bombings), Georgia, Sudan, Uganda, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Uzbekistan.

The first part, which was produced in spring of 2005, covers a more extensive range of issues. Because of material constraints, however, it has not been possible to update all of these entries. Nonetheless, the Background section remains timely, particularly with regard to its discussions of the more general literature on terrorism and the national and international legal context.

Both globally and in literally dozens of countries, the “war on terror” has transformed the context of the struggle for human rights, usually for the worse. This bibliography aims to improve understanding of the nature and consequences of these transformations.

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