
Politics Priorities Concerning Freedom or Security: Critical Analysis

Should politics priorities freedom or security?

The last decades have been marked by democratisation and a significant increase in the level of education and freedom of the press (Huntington, 1991). This is the argument made in Huntington's 'waves theory' which illustrates the shift of most nations towards a democratic model and common social changes (ibid.). Therefore, one can assert that freedom, one of the cornerstones of democracy, has incrementally become a necessary value for the proper functioning of the society. However, the world's population has also witnessed the rise of international terrorism, the transformations in communications technology, and mass movements of people, making it easier for terrorists to coordinate their campaign (Azar, 2003). Consequently, it is harder for governments to protect their citizens since they face a new dilemma in deciding whether they have to reinforce their national security forces sometimes at the expense of the freedom of the citizens. As a matter of fact, there exist few words more hazardously misleading in their meaning than 'liberty' and 'security' (Gearty, 2010). Indeed, 'the first has a range which takes it across a spectrum from the essence of human freedom at one end to a far narrower statement about the need for unrestrained movement at the other' while the second term 'has historically been taken to refer to 'national' security, to the protection from external and perhaps even internal threat of particular lands organised as states' (ibid.: 2). That is why this essay argues that politics should find a balance between security and freedom. Firstly, the following paper explores how security is crucial to human survival. Then, it is shown that, with the new threats to be countered, security might represent a threat to freedom. Finally, it is examined how the two have a symbiotic relationship since neither one can exist without the other.

To begin with, it is undeniable that security is becoming an increasingly crucial aspect in guaranteeing the human survival. As a matter of fact, Hobbes demonstrates in his *Leviathan* that freedom, that he considers as 'pure negative' (expressing the power to do as one wishes thanks to the absence of constraints) is dependent upon security (van Mill, 1995). Indeed, without the existence of a government and society, one lives in a state of nature in which each person is able to do whatever he or she pleases (Hobbes, Tuck, 1991). Nevertheless, although individuals would have plenty of liberty, they would live in constant fear since, without rules and laws, it would be very difficult to survive and life would be, according to Hobbes, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' (ibid.: 89). Furthermore, as H.L. Mencken states, 'the average man does not want to be free, he simply wants to be safe' (Phillips, McCreadie, 2009: 181). That is why, one requires the implementation of a social contract in order to put a strong sovereign or government in power over individuals to maintain peace (Pettit, 2005). As a result, people could survive together by handing over most of their freedoms, however, this arrangement is worthwhile since they would gain security and would escape the 'war of all against all' (Kavka, 1983).

Nonetheless, it should be recognised that, in this case, there is a substantial transfer of individual liberty to a frightfully powerful state that has an unlimited authority (Thomas, 1929). Thus, this can be very problematic since the power placed directly in the hands of a hypothetical

abusive sovereign may represent a serious threat to the citizens' survival (Steinberger, 2008). Moreover, for Hobbes, the best kind of regime is the absolute monarchy in which 'the sovereign cannot be disobeyed under any circumstances' (ibid.: 604). That is why, Rousseau regards this Hobbesian schema as equivalent to slavery and thus unsafe for individuals living under this social contract (ibid.: 604). Furthermore, in Hobbes, the sovereign does not seem to be accountable at all (Wood, 1971). Indeed, whereas it has complete authority over the citizens, nothing it does to a subject "on what pretence soever, can properly be called Injustice, or Injury" (Hobbes, Tuck, 1991: 148); therefore, if the sovereign can do no wrong, it certainly seems impossible to imagine what holding the sovereign accountable means (Wood, 1971).

But it has to be borne in mind that, as Machiavelli argues, one needs laws and institutions so as to safeguard security, therefore promoting the 'liberty of necessity' by constraining the predatory human behaviour (Skinner, 2007). This form of liberty is introduced in his Discourses and represents an equilibrium between freedom and enslavement (1970). Unlike Hobbes, he considers republic as the best form of government to practice two types of liberty: on the one hand, there is an 'ambitious minority' of people who desire liberty to exercise authority (liberty of choice), and, on the other hand, the vast majority, desiring liberty to live in safety and security (liberty of necessity) (Del Águila, 2001). Machiavelli's preference for the liberty of the necessity for the majority can be explained by the aspect of human nature, indeed, 'men can only secure themselves by building up power' and adopt a proper conduct only under coercion (1970: 102). Still, both Machiavelli and Hobbes agree on the fact that laws establish restrictions on human behaviour, for which the motivation to optimise its freedom at the expense of jeopardising others' liberty is indissoluble (Salzborn, 2015). Consequently, one can infer that this is a good example of balance since security being the most important component of human survival, it can be considered as a source of freedom.

Secondly, it is interesting to recall that, with the new threats to human safety in the era of globalisation, the increasingly restrictive security measures may represent a danger to freedom. As a matter of fact, in modern governance, there exists an 'impossible trinity' of security, freedom, and privacy (Hajnal, 2016). With regard to security, initiatives to tackle terrorism – which is 'commonly understood to refer to acts of violence that target civilians in the pursuit of political or ideological aims' – sometimes contravene international conventions such as international human rights law (UNCHR.: 5). For instance, the National Security Agency scandal leaked by Edward Snowden in 2013 is certainly 'the biggest cache of top-secret documents in history' and has proved that the agency had been spying the phone data of millions of Americans therefore infringing their liberty (MacAskill, Hern, 2018). This enabled the world's population to heighten its awareness of the tremendous surveillance system that violates, among others, the Right to Privacy reaffirmed in the resolution 68/167 made by the United Nations (2014). Furthermore, the 'war on terrorism', undertaken in 2001 by President Bush after the 9/11 attacks, is a good example of violation of international conventions (Flaherty, 2011). Indeed, the NGO Amnesty International has documented and exposed hundreds of cases of torture and other serious human rights violations such as the habeas corpus (guaranteeing the principle of individual liberty) in Guantanamo Bay detention camp (Evans, 2006). It thus shows, once more, that politics needs to find a balance between security and freedom in order to eradicate these problems.

Nevertheless, one must admit that terrorism has been a long-standing issue for many years and it still continues to threaten innocent people around the world. That is why, states must act to protect their citizens from terrorist attacks since it is one of their primary duties (Heyman, 1991).

Although the number of deaths caused by terrorism is ‘considerably smaller than many other mortality risks’, what makes them different from the deaths either from cigarette smoking or automobile accidents is that ‘these risks contain a voluntary element’ (Viscusi, Zeckhauser, 2003: 99). Indeed, ‘consumers of these products obtain some valued attribute such as increased mobility or satisfaction from smoking, thus compensating for the dangers associated with the activity’, nevertheless, ‘there is no voluntary market transaction involved with risks of terrorism and no form of compensatory benefit’ (Viscusi, Zeckhauser, 2003: 99-100). For that reason, governments may take serious security measures such as the state of emergency implemented after Paris terror attacks in 2015 even though some human rights groups argue that it could ‘harm citizens’ rights to liberty, security, freedom of assembly and religion’ (Osborne, 2017).

However, by trying to protect their people, states not only disrespect human rights as mentioned above, but also written international norms. Indeed, according to the findings of the Davids report, the war on terrorism leading to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 constitutes a violation of international law (Hirsch, 2010). This is due to the fact that during the preparation of the war, in 2003, the United States ‘abandoned an attempt to get a UN security council resolution approving the invasion when it became apparent it would not be granted’ (ibid.). Moreover, the USA is being investigated by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Afghanistan from 2001 onwards, which is an ICC member (Bowcott, 2018). Indeed, once again, in order to protect the nation, the US government has restricted fundamental freedoms and thus has not respected the international conventions in place to guarantee them. Therefore, this proves that politics must find a better balance between security and freedom.

Lastly, by taking the above into account, one can argue that, overall, neither one can exist without the other since they are complementary.

On the one hand, from a neorealist stance, ‘the first duty of the community is to protect itself through government and personal initiative’ (McCrie, 2006: 28). Security ensures a safe freedom that all can enjoy, indeed, ‘throughout human progress, new values are acquired by the possibilities offered through freedom, for keeping these values however, humankind needs security’ (Hajnal, 2016: 134). Therefore, security ‘is a requisite for human society’ since it is designed to ensure that one can practice basic freedoms (McCrie, 2006: 21). This thus explains why, in Middle Eastern countries, there are street riots and violence because of the rights the people cannot obtain such as physical safety, economic security, employment security, and low corruption (BBC, 2018). If the Middle East took the initiative to secure both its people and policies, then freedom would be reached. Additionally, according to the 2018 Freedom House’s annual report, ‘improved security has helped create space for competition among newly registered parties and candidates ahead of the 2018 elections’ in Iraq, which will assess the tenacity of the country’s political system. (Freedom House, 2018). Furthermore, freedom is worthless for individuals who live in an unsafe country where they risk their lives on a daily basis. As a matter of fact, freedom can only be maintained in an ordered society where regulation has been implemented so as to avoid the state of anarchy and instability (Tang, 2009). In fact, one can say that security creates freedom since, as it has previously been seen, the latter can only be enjoyed within a framework of security provided by law. Consequently, this shows that the existence of a harmonious balance between freedom and security is essential.

On the other hand, Benjamin Franklin states that ‘those that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety’ (Oleksy, 2017: 4). Indeed, for

conservatives who argue that securing the nation requires sacrificing some of our rights, the price of living in safety is allowing the government to violate our freedom if it deems necessary (The Guardian, 2006). Yet, one has to bear in mind that freedom also creates security since it is the cause of people's greater prosperity and wealth, of human development, and of security from violence and totalitarianism (Hajnal, 2016). First, the greater the individuals' freedom, the more their purchasing power compared to other nations, the less their poverty, and consequently the greater their human development (Sprading, 2015). This may be explained by the fact that when citizens are free to run their own business, they put their creativity and ingenuity in the service of all by looking for ways to satisfy the population's needs and wants (De Schweinitz, 1953). For instance, in a democratically free country like the United States, farmers produce a large amount of food in order to create a surplus which is subsequently bought, stored, and granted in aid to poor countries by the government (ibid.). Concomitantly, in other countries such as China and the former Soviet Union, where the rulers allow no freedom to the farmers, famines have killed tens of millions of people (ibid.). It is no coincidence that unfree people have suffered from mass famine. Secondly, as mentioned above, freedom is a necessary condition to inhibit totalitarian tendencies. According to Hannah Arendt, the essence of totalitarianism is not despotic rule over individuals but its effort to 'organise the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual' (1968: 438). Therefore, it may be inferred that liberty is the complete opposite of this destruction of plurality and spontaneity since it allows people to enjoy 'their power to begin something new out of their own resources' and to act individually as they please (Axtmann, 2006: 102). This demonstrates, yet again, that politics should try to find an appropriate balance between security and freedom.

By considering the impact of security on human survival, then regarding it as a danger to freedom in an evolving world characterised by new threats, and, finally, examining the symbiotic relationship between security and freedom, it therefore seems that politics must find a lasting balance between security and freedom in order to make the most of them. Indeed, men are free to act as long as they are left unthreatened and unrestrained by others. One has to bear in mind that it is only in the presence of insecurity that a man loses his freedom. In this broad sense, security and freedom are synonymous. To be secure is to be free. To be free is to be secure. It would thus be of great interest to see if, in the future, governments will be able to eradicate their current trade-off between the security of some and the liberty of others by finding a compromise despite today's unstable international political climate.

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