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# Trends. Data Bases Bearing on Clemency for Terrorists

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United States (US) President Clinton has been "under the gun" for granting clemency to 16 Puerto Rican nationalists who were jailed for activities supporting terrorism that resulted in deaths, injuries, and destruction. The most salient controversy has entailed whether President Clinton made the decision to help his wife successfully run for a U.S. Senate seat in New York--a state in which voters of Puerto Rican ethnicity could be significant to a Democratic Party candidate.

Somewhat less salient, but more important is the Issue of the impact of clemency on terrorism. Two sorts of impact are at Issue--the activities of the group in question, the FALN, and the activities of terrorists who might engage US interests. Arguments for exacerbation of, attenuation of, or no effect on terrorism have been based largely on the intuition, wisdom, and anecdotes of law enforcement, investigative, and other criminal justice system personnel and of victims--all treating terrorism--in essence political violence--as one of many possible transgressions.

More profitable lines of argument might arise by looking at three other data bases. One, the various national commissions that have had the authority to grant forgiveness, clemency, and/or amnesty to perpetrators of serial political atrocities of great magnitude. The second, the four international tribunals--in Japan, Germany, Rwanda, and The Netherlands--that have been created to adjudicate variants of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. The third, negotiated agreements between warring factions that agree to release perpetrators of terrorism as in Northern Ireland. These three data bases are germane because they are totally directed at political violence--the essence of terrorism--and the overall consequences for nations and nation-states.

Another crucial similarity among the three data bases is that they share the notion of attenuating circumstances for political violence and resulting consequences such as forgiveness, clemency, no legal conviction, or a lesser sentence. These data bases suggest that the President cannot be attacked pro forma just for making a clemency decision. Instead, as with most serious ethical and moral deliberation, the devil is in the details. (See Pingleton, J.P. (1997). Why we don't forgive: A biblical and object relations theoretical model for understanding failure in the forgiveness process. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25, 403-413; Scobie, E.D., & Scobie, G.E.W. (1998). Damaging events: The perceived need for forgiveness. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 28, 373-401; Seelye, K.Q. (September 22, 1999). Director of F.B.I. opposed clemency for Puerto Ricans. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A22; Sells, J.N., & Hargrave, T.D. (1998). Forgiveness: A review of the theoretical and empirical literature. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 20, 21-36; Vitz, P.C., & Mango, P. (1997). Kernbergian psychodynamics and religious aspects of the forgiveness process. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25, 72-80.) (Keywords: Clemency, Terrorism.)