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Trends. Confessions on Confessions in a War on Terrorism with Global Reach

Editor

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses the role of confessions in terrorism interrogations.

Just the facts are demanded by many participants in the global discourse on whether to effect military intervention against Iraq and how to best prioritize targets in the war against terrorism with global reach. Some facts are unknown and, perhaps, unknowable as to the nature and quantity of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Other facts just turn out to be less than facts.

A case in point of the latter pertains to confessions of misbehavior by prisoners incarcerated by the United States Government (USG) in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Such confessions concerning the self and others bear on USG threat assessment related to impending terrorist attacks. Yet such confessions, with their seeming implication of a lack of self-interest related to formal findings of guilt even with a concurrent self-interest as to ultimate disposition (less severe disposition for cooperation), may be derived from many spurious sources beyond the intentions of confusing USG threat assessment or of obtaining less severe disposition.

Interrogatees may feel guilty of something but confess to something else; may have lost confidence in their own memories; may say anything to terminate the interrogation including what they think interrogators want to hear; or may say what is perceived as necessary for affection, forgiveness, or yet other need-based consequences.

In today's supercharged world of seemingly impending war and global terrorism threat, confessions may be held high as proof validating or subverting the need for hostile action and the need to implement hostility against specific targets. As the sight of Medusa's head would instantaneously stop one's activity, the perception of such confessions should at least not impel precipitous action.

(See Brooks, P. (2000). *Troubling confessions: Speaking guilt in law and literature*. The University of Chicago Press; Gudjonsson, G. (1999). *The making of a serial false confessor: The confessions of Henry Lee Lucas*. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 10, 416-426; Perske, R. (2000). *Deception in the interrogation room: Sometimes tragic for persons with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities*. *Mental Retardation*, 38, 532-537; Talmadge, S.A. (2001). *Possible false confession in a military court-martial: A case study*. (2001). *Military Psychology*. 2001, 13, 235-241.) (Keywords: Cuba, Guantanamo Bay, Interrogation, Terrorism.)