

3-14-2003

Political Authority and Social Cognitions on the War on Terrorism with Global Reach: Airport Security, Terrorism Contingent on a United States-Led Attack on Iraq, Smallpox Vaccinations

Editor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>

 Part of the [Aviation Safety and Security Commons](#), [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Epidemiology Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other Psychology Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), [Social Psychology Commons](#), and the [Terrorism Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor (2003) "Political Authority and Social Cognitions on the War on Terrorism with Global Reach: Airport Security, Terrorism Contingent on a United States-Led Attack on Iraq, Smallpox Vaccinations," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 8 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol14/iss8/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu, wolfe309@erau.edu.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Political Authority and Social Cognitions on the War on Terrorism with Global Reach: Airport Security, Terrorism Contingent on a United States-Led Attack on Iraq, Smallpox Vaccinations

Author: Editor

Volume: 14

Issue: 8

Date: 2003-03-14

Keywords: Social Cognitions, Terrorism

Abstract. This article presents analyses of three common social cognitions embraced by many representatives of political authority concerning aspects of the war on terrorism with global reach.

Assuming thought informs and even impels action, we might also assume that what representatives of formal political authority think about what works in the war on terrorism with global reach merits attention. If what they think appears to be problematic concerning how the world works, then what they do in the war may be as well. The following are three examples.

Airport Security. Airport workers arrested for lying on employment applications or for making or for using forged identity or even security documents are being trotted out as examples of success in the war on terrorism. The thinking of political authority's representatives behind this linkage of arrest and success against terrorism is ultimately that anyone who engages in any misbehavior is more likely to be a terrorist threat or exploited by terrorists towards the exploitation of terrorist operations. A recent quote cited by Glaberson (2003) exemplifies this thinking--viz., "When it comes to airport security, we shouldn't even tolerate the littlest lie."

But all people lie. All people engage in misbehavior. And almost all of them do not engage in terrorism or become exploited by terrorists. Furthermore, a look at the individuals caught up in the arrests suggests that they may be even less likely than non-arrestees to become terrorist threats. Many of them are seeking to improve themselves and their families economically, view their employment as a significant step up, and are loath to endanger this step. Arrest and associated noxious treatment might even exacerbate their terrorist potential. In addition, a related social cognition of political authority's representatives that goes back to the 2001 Aviation Security and Transportation Act is that individuals who are not United States (US) citizens are more likely to be security risks than citizens who are--a cognition that belies the appreciation of most non-citizens for what the US has to offer and the phenomenon of many citizens taking what the US has to offer for granted.

Terrorism Contingent on a United States-Led Attack on Iraq. One social cognition undergirding arguments used by representatives of political authority who are opponents of a US-led military intervention against Iraq is that a consequence will be increased terrorism against the US and its allies domestically and internationally. A recent quote by the French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, and cited in *The New York Times* (March 8, 2003) exemplifies this--viz., "Is it a matter of fighting terrorism? War would only increase it. And we would then be faced with a new wave of violence."

Unfortunately, one well-validated terrorism-related cognition is that acting in accordance with terrorist desires--especially when the rationale for such action is made explicit--increases the probability that terrorism will occur again. In de Villepin's quote, a United Nations (UN) initiative should not occur because of what terrorist might do--a high probability maneuver to condition future UN decision making within terrorist desire and to help ensure a very long war against terrorism.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Smallpox Vaccinations. In December 2002, US federal representatives directed that 500,000 health-care workers be administered a smallpox vaccine within 30 days to help care for victims of a posited bioterrorism attack with smallpox. To mitigate against fears that medical complications from the vaccine would be handled appropriately, these representatives have proposed about a quarter of a million dollars payment for each person who dies or is completely disabled from the vaccine. Other casualties from the vaccination would receive up to \$50,000. In this way, health-care workers would comply and receive their vaccinations.

Yet, according to Pear (2003), only about 12,400 health-care workers have been vaccinated after about 7 weeks. A partial explanation for this may be that cognitions crucial to vaccination compliance have not been adequately addressed by representatives of political authority. Such cognitions would include perceptions of being coerced that induce reactance towards directives; of there being insufficient threat of smallpox bioterrorism; of there being no assurance of full financial coverage of medical complications; and of many idiosyncratic beliefs that population segments harbor about vaccinations, smallpox, terrorism, and myriad aspects of the contemporary world--body, mind, and soul.

An observation related to the above three analyses is that public policy in the war on terrorism with global reach must have a significant psychological basis to facilitate success. (See Glaberson, W. (March 7, 2003). Mixed record in prosecuting airport security violations. *The New York Times*, pp.A1, A14; In the delegates' words: Hawks and doves debate at the Security Council. *The New York Times*, p. A9; Liberman, J.D. (1999). Terror management, illusory correlation, and perceptions of minority groups. *Basic & Applied Social Psychology*, 21, 13-23; McGregor, I., & Zanna, M. P., Holmes, J. G., & Spencer, S. J. (2001). Compensatory conviction in the face of personal uncertainty: Going to extremes and being oneself. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 80, 472-488; Montiel, C. J., & Anuar, M. K. (2002). Other terrorisms, psychology, and media. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 8, 201-206; Pear, R. (March 7, 2003). Officials seek smallpox compensation fund. *The New York Times*, p. A13.) (Keywords: Social Cognitions, Terrorism.)