

Share Your Thoughts: How Should We Balance Civil Liberties and National Security?



Increased security in front of the Louvre museum in Paris on Monday. Tomas Munita for The New York Times

The deadly [terrorist attacks](#) in Paris last week have reignited a debate in much of the world on the balance between civil liberties and national security.

We selected seven readers who left comments related to this subject on Times articles and who represent a range of viewpoints and backgrounds. The following segments are based on those comments and follow-up interviews. They have been condensed and edited.

Please add your own views by leaving a comment. Tell us how you wrestle with this debate, and how, if at all, the [attacks in Paris](#) changed your views. Please include where you live and information on your background or life experiences that may have influenced your opinion.

A Threat From 'Radicalized Muslim Citizens'

Rajeev Achari, 53 — *A physician who was raised in Calcutta and lives in Phoenix. He*

was working as an emergency room doctor in Brooklyn on Sept. 11, 2001. He now identifies as an atheist.

The greatest terrorist threat to European and American cities comes from radicalized Muslim citizens. The Islamic State needs to be defeated in time, but the major effort needs to be in intelligence gathering. The French and Belgian intelligence organizations seem to have been caught with their pants down. A much more robust monitoring of mosques, Muslim community centers and donor networks is needed. If this requires suspension of civil liberties, that bitter pill needs to be swallowed.

I have formed my views on religion and especially on religious fundamentalists a lot by what happened on 9/11. Now that this happened in Paris, the feeling of a sense of shock is repeated. This kind of brings back those memories. You feel anew the feelings of loss, of sadness.

'A Short Road to Tyranny'

Roger Schwarz, 65 — *A criminal lawyer in New York City. His grandmother was killed at Auschwitz during [World War II](#), and the rest of his family had to leave Germany and emigrate to the United States.*

As a lawyer, I suggest that amending or abrogating a constitution in the name of fighting terrorism is one of the greatest threats to a free society — almost as great as terrorism itself. When we permit greater government intrusion into our privacy, broader searches and fewer procedural safeguards, we travel on a short road to tyranny.

Elected representatives lack the courage and fortitude to live up to their oaths to preserve and protect the constitution and offer only shortsighted, get-tough rhetoric to fan the flames of fear. This is the greatest toll that the terrorists exact on all of us.

We know from past history, like in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, what happens when you suspend the constitution — the tremendous threat that poses to the entire country in the longer term.

I think the framers drafted the Constitution with great wisdom, and I think there is always a risk at times like this when people are fearful. It is exactly when we have to be most vigilant about protecting and defending the Constitution.

'Vengeance Felt Very Good to Me'

"Lilou" — *An American from Santa Monica, Calif., who comments under that name.*

She lives in Paris, where she teaches English. She lives about five miles from the Bataclan concert hall, where [89 people were killed](#). She said that she was in California on Sept. 11, and she didn't feel the same sadness and anger as she did after the attacks in Paris.

My beliefs have moved toward the right since Friday. I think having something in your own backyard makes a difference.

I do believe the Islamic State, or Daesh, has been an insidious enemy all along, and have written that they should be stopped. But I never, until now, advocated the very unpolitically correct view of military retaliation (versus negotiation).

I was very satisfied when [France](#) sent their jets. The vengeance felt very good to me. The idea of killing innocent civilians has never appealed to me. It is very bizarre for me to suddenly, after the events in Paris Friday night, be happy that someone went and bombed Syria. I know that civilians died, so within my happiness is some guilt. But I am not unhappy that we took a measure against Syria and actually Daesh.

While I preferred the Middle Eastern immigrant surge be limited to just those fleeing for their lives, based on cost and quality-of-life reasons, now there are such numbers of immigrants flowing through to Germany, that there is not enough border patrol staff to process their asylum applications.

After a Syrian passport was found with one of the suicide bombers at the Stade de France, it made me change my mind about the refugees. I have Muslim friends and clients who are not extremist, and I did not take seriously that the refugees could harbor jihadists. I was wrong.

As to deportation or house arrest of suspected terrorists, I have developed another very politically incorrect point of view, that is, selectively monitoring suspected terrorists — not everyone. Each country has a list of suspects, which I now believe should be acted on.

'Let Us Not Blame European Muslims'

Ghulam Faruki, 81 — *A retired psychiatrist from Ahmedabad, India, who lives in Queensbury, N.Y. He emigrated to the United States in 1964 for its better working conditions, employment opportunities and lack of discrimination against Muslims. "In 1964 there was no anti-Muslim discrimination in the United States," he said. "9/11 did change a lot of things."*

Let us not blame European Muslims for what are essentially failures of French intelligence.

I do not mean to criticize or blame French intelligence. It is just a fact that the intelligence failed.

When this incident occurred, the Muslim community has to go through a lot related to how we are looked upon. People are criticizing us, people are blaming us. The Muslim community, both in the United States and in Europe, has to go through a period of stress because these things happen — which is not their fault at all.

'Focus Our Attention on the Actual Enemies'

Valerie Natale, 50 — *A biomedical scientist who lives in Santa Clara, Calif., and has a degree in history.*

Better, focused intelligence is what we need, not wholesale spying on everyone from Joe the Plumber to Angela Merkel. We need to focus our attention on the actual enemies, not the imagined ones like ordinary Americans, allies, and even Saddam Hussein. The lies, the overly broad wiretapping, and the wars in the wrong places have all helped get us where we are.

What we need to do now is to assess our mistakes honestly so as to avoid making them again and again, so as to find a way out of this mess. Bomb a city, and you create a recruiting drive. Target the leaders, and you do everyone a favor.

I try to react using logic and rational thought rather than emotions. I understand it — you get hurt and you want to lash out. It is O.K. to feel that way, but I don't think it is a good idea to then go act on those feelings.

'Hard Questions for [François Hollande](#)'

"Vieillemontagne," 50 — *A Frenchman living in Britain who comments under that handle. He criticized the French president, François Hollande, for his handling of the terrorism threat.*

The hard questions for François Hollande are going to be: Why didn't he take some of these initiatives at the beginning of the year, after the [terrorist attack on the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo](#)? Why didn't he take them when it became clear, a few months ago, as he now says, that some big terrorist attacks were being prepared?

We have to continue to live, but to do this, we have to be convinced that governments have their act together and that there are no inefficiencies.

'Good of Many Must Outweigh Personal Freedom of Few'

"GMR," 62 — *A paralegal living in Atlanta who comments under those initials.*

Rather than taking away freedoms from the overwhelmingly compliant masses of citizens, why don't we focus on the noncompliant minority, for example those who travel to Syria for radicalization. And in an emergency state, which France is declared to be in, we should revoke their French citizenship when they leave for one of those countries without prior approval from the government.

I don't think it is unreasonable to ask citizens who seek to travel to war-torn countries for personal reasons to justify such reasons in advance. If one doesn't have evil intentions, this should not be a problem.

I believe the foremost job of a national government is to protect its citizens. The good of the many must outweigh the personal freedom of the few to advance their religious or other personal agenda when those few are seeking to do harm to fellow citizens.

A few freedoms of expression or personal freedoms might have to be suspended in an interim period when there are grave things going on. It is for the common good in an extreme situation.

Please join this debate by sharing your views in the comments. (iPhone and iPad app users can leave comments [here](#).)