

## 24 – Torture and the Ticking Time Bomb

### Recommended Level of Instruction:

The lesson was designed for an introduction to human rights class. The torture module was taught early on in the class after talking about foundations of human rights. The lesson is possible at any stage of the semester and can be included in any class dealing with media and human rights or torture as well as introductory human rights classes.

### Keywords:

TV, 24, torture, ticking time bomb, media and human rights

### Learning Objectives:

Students will interpret one or two episodes of a popular television show, investigate arguments used for torture within their show and recognize that torture can never be justified.

### Material:

One episode of 24. Recommended: Season 2, Episodes 12.

Green, Adam. "Normalizing Torture on '24'." *The New York Times*. 5/22/2005. Web.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/arts/television/22gree.html?pagewanted=1&r=1&ei=5090&en=38fb30c90ca92372&ex=1274414400&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&>.

Mayer, Jane. "Whatever it takes. The politics of the man behind '24'." *The New Yorker*. 2/19/2007. Web.

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/02/19/070219fa\\_fact\\_mayer?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/02/19/070219fa_fact_mayer?currentPage=all).

### Synopsis of Material:

Season 2, Episode 12: Jack Bauer captures assumed terrorist Ali. After torturing him physically, Jack threatens to kill Ali's family if he does not give up information. Eventually Jack stages the execution of one of Ali's sons and Ali gives up the wanted information.

The two articles put the usage of torture within 24 in perspective, quoting military personnel and FBI/CIA officials who do not only question the moral of torture but also its helpfulness.

**Recommended Background Information:**

Students should be familiar with the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment*. The following chapter introduces the Ticking Time Bomb Scenario (if the student have not read the chapter, you should briefly explain the concept):

Schulz, William F. "Torture." *Human Rights. Politics and Practice*. Ed. Michael Goodhart. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013. 310-27.

**Discussion Questions/Activity:**

The discussion was an online discussion, but can also be done as a small group discussion in class.

After watching the episode (outside of class, but can be done in class as well), students are given the following prompt:

Consider the TV show *24*: What justifications do the characters give for torture? Do they actually give reasons for it and if so are they reasonable? Remember the time bomb scenario as described by Goodhart. What is your opinion about it? Should torture be allowed in a ticking time bomb situation? Does picturing a case, even if it is fictional, change your opinion?

Discussion follows.

Students read one of the articles (*New Yorker* and *New York Times*) and compare the arguments to their discussion results, evaluating their own stands and discussing the topic further.

**Note:** If students tend to see torture as a reasonable means and put the cost-benefit analysis to the fore, stress that Human Rights does not allow for any torture or ask them to put themselves in the shoes of a Human Rights lawyer during the discussion. Possible addition: Abu Ghraib photographs that will usually change a positive evaluation of torture as well.

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