Department of International History  
Academic year 2020-2021

Understanding Terrorism:  
History, Contexts and New Challenges

HI063 - Spring - 6 ECTS  
Monday 10:15-12:00  
Room P3-506

Course Description

This course examines the evolution of the phenomenon of terrorism, which has (re)emerged as a lead feature of contemporary international relations. It addresses the questions of definition of terrorism, history of the concept, perspectives on causes, structure and organization of terrorist groups, relationship to the debate on the changing face of warfare, and the consequences of terrorism. The approach blends historical and comparative perspectives and a practical outlook on international policies, seeking to differentiate between varying forms of terrorism in relation to the political and societal context from which they originate and the differing domestic, regional, and international responses they generate. The course’s aim is to enhance the critical ability of the students to understand and analyze cogently the issue(s) of terrorism, and their overall ability to assess the novel transnational challenges associated with terrorism and their implication for policy.

Syllabus

This course delves comparatively into the variegated historical manifestations of terrorism seeking to unpack its discernible features and consistent consequences in relation to international history and politics.

The participation of students in class discussion is expected.

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The main assignment is an individual research paper which counts for 80% of the grade. The term paper should be approximately 4,000 words or 20 pages long (12 point Times New Roman font, double-spaced), with proper citations and a bibliography (additional to the text page length). The paper should put forth a cogent argument or examine analytically, comparatively and historically an issue, rather than summarize the literature. The paper may discuss any particular aspect of the course themes. The topic of the research paper should be thematic. If the student opts for a case-study, the paper must nonetheless cast the analysis against thematic questions, historically and comparatively.

Students are invited to select a topic for their paper and submit an outline of their paper no later than Session Six (March 29). Please make an appointment with me if you have questions or would like to discuss research topics. The completed term paper is due at the course’s last session (May 24).

The grade received in this class will be distributed as follows:

- Research paper: 80%
- Class participation: 20%

Readings

For each session, there will be three (3) required readings. Students are expected to familiarize themselves ahead of the class with all the readings and be prepared to discuss them critically in the context of the session’s scheduled issues and the course’s overall themes.

Please note that this syllabus is subject to change, and that specific sessions may be rescheduled to meet unavoidable commitments on the part of the professor. Should that be the case, students will be informed ahead of time and proper class rescheduling arrangements made promptly.

If you have a personal condition that requires accommodation in this course, let me know after class or in office hours during the first week of class. I will be happy to consider appropriate accommodations provided timely notice is received and the arrangement is consistent with the Graduate Institute’s policies.

Session One (February 22):

- **Introduction: The Problem of Definition**

  **Issues:**
  - What is terrorism?
  - Why are there persistent difficulties in defining terrorism?
  - What is the relationship between terrorism and state terrorism?

  **Readings:**

Session Two (March 1):

- **Causes and Roots of Terrorism**

  **Issues:**
  - Are terrorists irrational?
  - Does poverty or poor education cause terrorism?
  - Is there a particular relationship between religion and terrorism?

Session Three (March 8):

**NATIONALISM, SEPARATISM AND TERRORISM**

Issues: □ The “one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” conundrum
□ The rise of security concerns
□ The impact of nationalist insurrections

❖ Case study: Algiers 1957


Session Four (March 15):

**SUICIDE TERRORISM**

Issues: □ What do we know about suicide terrorists?
□ What strategic, social, and individual factors motivate suicide terrorists?
□ When are groups/individuals more likely to resort to suicide terrorism than others?


Session Five (March 22):

**THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF TERRORISM**

Issues: □ The 1970s and the first wave of transnational terrorism
□ The logic of high-profile operations
□ The inversion of asymmetry

❖ Case study: Munich 1972
Movie: *One Day in September* (1999) documentary by Kevin McDonald, 97 minutes.

**Session Six (March 29): Techniques and Strategies of Terrorism**

**PAPER TOPICS AND OUTLINE DUE**

**Issues:**
- The targeting of civilians
- Disadvantages and advantages of asymmetry
- The use of modern technology

**Readings:**

*April 5, no class (Easter break)*

**Session Seven (April 12): The ‘New Terrorism’**

**Issues:**
- What is the significance of the new transnational groups in modern terrorism?
- ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Terrorism
- The Impact of Globalisation

**Readings:**

**Session Eight (April 19): The Economics of Terrorism**

**Issues:**
- How do economics and terrorism relate?
- How is terrorism financed?
- How have these trends evolved?

**Readings:**
**Session Nine (April 26):**  
**Al Qaeda**

**Issues:**
- What is Al Qaeda?
- How did it impact the history of terrorism?
- What is its legacy?

**Readings:**

**Session Ten (May 3):**  
**THE ISLAMIC STATE**

**Issues:**
- What is the Islamic State?
- How did it impact the history of terrorism?
- What is its legacy?

**Readings:**

**Session Eleven (May 10):**  
**RIGHT-WING TERRORISM**

**Issues:**
- What is right-wing/white supremacist/nationalist terrorism?
- How has it evolved?
- What forms does it take contemporaneously?

**Readings:**
Session Twelve (May 17): **CONFRONTING TERRORISM**

**Issues:**
- Counter-terrorism
- Terrorism and the threat to democracy
- Engagement/non-engagement with terrorists

**Readings:**

Session Thirteen (May 24): **DOES TERRORISM END?**

**Issues:**
- Do terrorist campaigns come to an end and if so how?
- What future trends of terrorism can we discern?
- What can be done to mitigate the lasting impact of terrorism?

**Readings:**

Session Fourteen (May 31): **Conclusions**

**FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS DUE**

*Course review, conclusions, and wrap-up*

**Further Reading and Research Resources**

The following sources of print and electronic information can be useful to the students in the preparation of their research papers, and for further reflection on the issues to be discussed in class.

**Books**


**Journals**

*Terrorism and Political Violence*
*Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*
*Terrorism: An International Journal*
*Perspectives on Terrorism*
*Foreign Affairs*
*Security Studies*
*International Security*

**Websites**

- Patterns of Global Terrorism: www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/
- Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence: www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~wwwir/research/cstpv/
- Global Terrorism Analysis: www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/

**Literature**

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Possessed* (1872). (Also known as *The Devils* or *The Demons*.)

**Films**

*The Siege* (1998) by Edward Zwick
*Munich* (2005) by Steven Spielberg
*The Baader-Meinhof Complex* (2009) by Uli Edel
*Carlos* (2010) by Olivier Assayas