

Govt4304
Modern Terrorism
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Course Objective:

The overall objective or “learning outcome” of Govt4304 is to provide students with a solid understanding of the context and nature of terrorist threats to the security of constitutional democracies. To meet this objective, students will have to master both the conventional understanding of terrorism as a mode of asymmetric warfare and examine the self-understanding of terrorists from the perspective of political philosophy. This latter perspective aims to grasp the structure of political reality as well as the deviations from it, which we conventionally call “ideological” –or, to use the term of Eric Voegelin, the “Gnostic” and spiritually disordered aspect of terrorism.

We proceed upon the assumption, therefore, that terrorism is a form of asymmetric warfare and that, therefore, it, too, falls under the Clausewitzian dictum that war is politics carried on with an admixture of other means. Second, because terrorists are political actors, it is possible, using the approaches provided by political philosophy, to understand and judge the reasonableness of the political purposes they espouse much in the same way as we can understand and judge the purposes of Communists, Nazis, or any other ideologically informed and armed political movement. Third, and implicit in this approach, is the assumption that it is necessary to analyze the self-understanding of terrorists and the spiritual perversity of terrorist political goals in order effectively to oppose them and eventually to defeat them. That is, conventional counterterrorism measures, however necessary they are, need to be supplemented with the insights provided by political philosophy in much the same way that the Cold War was won not simply by force of arms but also by force of insight into the structure of political reality.

Overview: Modern Terrorism

The course is divided into parts.

Part One: Introduction (Session One),

Part Two: Conventional accounts of terrorism (Sessions Two, Three, and Four).

Part Three: Self-Understanding of Terrorists (Sessions Five, Six, and Seven).

Part Four: Counterterrorism. Session eight deals with conventional counterterrorism; session nine deals with counterterrorism from the perspective of the self-understanding of the state; Session Ten deals with the application of counterterrorism in terms of the self-understanding of terrorists (Islamist terrorists in particular).

Assessment

You will be graded on the basis of:

1. Seven short (500-1000 word) contributions to discussions posted in the "Discussion" area of Iziio.

Contributions to Discussions are valued at 5% each for 35% of your final grade.

Contributions to Discussions are expected to be posted as follows:

At the end of Session One.

At the end of Session Two.

At the end of Session Three.

At the end of Session Five.

At the end of Session Six.
At the end of Session Eight.
At the end of Session Nine.

2. Three medium-length (2500-5000 word) writing assignments undertaken after sessions four, seven, and ten (10% of final grade each; 30% of total). Writing Assignments are found at the "Assignments" page and are due as follows:

Writing Assignment 1: Due at the end of Session Four.

Writing Assignment 2: Due at the end of Session Seven.

Writing Assignment 3: Due at the end of Session at the end of Session Ten.

3. Final exam (35% of final grade).

Session One: Context: The End of the Cold War

Reading: Please read Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, New York, Vintage

Learning outcomes: Kagan has provided a concise, if controversial, account of the post-Cold War context within which recent terrorist attacks have taken place. The first writing assignment, to be completed after you have read Kagan's short book, is intended to help you focus on (1) his argument; and (2) the novel historical context within which America today is conducting foreign policy, including counterterrorism. Please complete it before session two.

First Discussion Assignment: After reading Robert Kagan's book, *Of Paradise and Power*, please write a short paper (no more than 1,000 words) that analyzes the basic premises of his argument as expressed, for example, in the title of the book, and discuss the applicability of his argument to the post-Cold War and post-9/11 world.

Session Two: What is terrorism?

Reading: Please read: Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, ch. 1, 6. The first chapter is reprinted in Howard & Sawyer, *Terrorism & Counterterrorism*. Please also read pp. 24-52 in Howard and Sawyer; ch. 6 is optional.

Learning outcomes: We begin the first part of the course on "external" or conventional accounts of terrorism by dealing with the problem of conceptual delimitation. The objective of this session is less to provide a stipulative "definition" of terrorism than to indicate the range of definitions available and the problem of conceptual refinement.

Session Three: What are the causes of terrorism?

Please read ch. 2 of Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* and ch. 2 of Howard & Sawyer.

Learning outcomes: The purpose of this session is to provide students with additional information regarding the strategic significance of traditional terrorist acts and to consider the so-called "root causes" problem.

Session Four: Traditional Terrorism

Please read Hoffman's, *Inside Terrorism*, ch. 3, 5, 7.

Learning outcomes: The readings from the main chapters of Hoffman's classic treatment of traditional terrorism conclude this section of the course. Please review the materials covered in the previous two sessions and then complete and submit the second writing assignment. By now you should have a solid

grasp of the major issues involved in “terrorism-studies.” The first writing assignment is designed to allow you to pull together several of these themes before we undertake as “second sailing,” as Socrates said, and consider these materials and events from the perspective of political philosophy.

Session Five: A change in Perspective

Please read Cooper, *New Political Religions*, ch. 1-2.

Learning outcomes: In this next part of the course we will shift the perspective from looking at terrorist activity as a form of asymmetric war or a variety of large-scale criminal killing to a critical or analytical examination of the self-understanding of terrorists. Within the discipline of political science, as noted above, this amounts to a change from the perspective of IR and strategic studies to political philosophy.

Session Six: Salafism

Please read ch. 3, Cooper, *New Political Religions*. Please also read Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, ch. 4 and Howard & Sawyer, ch. 4.

Learning outcomes: In order to understand contemporary radical Islamist thinking and activity, familiarity with the main outlines of the history of this strand of Muslim political thinking is necessary. There is no consensus on how to describe this thread of thinking; we have adopted the widely used term “salafism.” The objective, however the history of radical Islamist thinking is identified, is to provide students with an understanding of the major constituent elements of the contemporary ideology.

Session Seven: Islamism

Please read Cooper, *New Political Religions*, ch. 4. You might also wish to read the account of the 9/11 Commission, ch. 2. This is available on-line at:

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/911/>

Other websites that have useful information are located in “Links.”

Learning outcomes: Session 7 concludes the third part of the course. After having completed the reading in the last three sessions please complete the third writing assignment, and submit it. At this point in the course, you should have an understanding not only of the recent history of terrorism but of the major aspects of terrorist consciousness. More specifically, students by this point ought to be able to account for: (1) the moral perversity of terrorism; (2) the necessity of constructing an imaginary world where terrorist activity is both justified and effective; and (3) the connection between the imaginary world and the very real terrorist acts.

Session Eight: Counterterrorism I

Please read Howard & Sawyer, ch. 7, pp. 384-407; 416-32, ch. 8., pp. 435-83; ch. 9. Other selections from these chapters are optional.

Learning outcomes: In this section we look at the problem of counterterrorism again from the external or conventional perspective of terrorist activities. As in the previous part of the course, it is necessary to have a grasp of the basic materials before considering the contribution made by political philosophy and other unconventional approaches to our understanding of terrorism.

Session Nine: Counterterrorism II

Please read *Codevilla's No Victory, No Peace*.

Learning outcomes: In this section we will gain an understanding of the problem of counterterrorism in

terms of the self-understanding of the state, with Codevilla's *No Victory, No Peace*. It is in some respects a conventional approach, inasmuch as the author assumes the existence and importance of the state and of state action against non-state actors. The implications for dealing with terrorists are, however, far from conventional.

Session Ten: Counterterrorism III

Please read Cooper, *New Political Religions*, ch. 5 and Appendix.

Learning Outcome: In this session we look at the question of counterterrorism with respect to Islamists such as the al-Qaeda network and its affiliates in terms of the self-understanding of the organization. Students will gain an understanding of the special problems involved in dealing with a terrorist network and they will understand the importance of an animating narrative—in this instance one based on the text of the Koran—both for terrorist operations and for counterterrorist ones.