Terrorism & Political Violence

Instructor: Ian Anderson  
Time/Place: Thursdays 5:45pm-9:25pm in Husted 202  
Office Hours: Thursdays 4:30pm-5:30pm in Husted Café or by appointment  
Email: iananderson1983@gmail.com & ianderson@albany.edu  
Phone: (518) 683-0855

Course Description
This course will provide an overview of a wide range of topics and theories dealing with political violence, with a particular focus on terrorism. Students will explore multiple theories on political violence, what the various forms of political violence are, why terrorism constitutes a distinct form of political violence, and how nations (particularly the United States) respond to terrorism. Students will gain insight through the review of research on the causes of political violence, its consequences, and major terrorist organizations background and threat today. There are no required prerequisites for this course.

Course Objectives
By the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:
1. Identify and explain the differences and similarities between various forms of political violence; including terrorism, insurgency, rebellion, revolution, and civil war.
2. Understand major theories and questions on political violence, especially terrorism.
3. Communicate informed opinions and discuss the facts on current issues and events related to political violence such as the Syrian Civil War and refugee crisis, the rise of the Islamic State, use of drones to target terrorists, and more through class discussion and the writing of position papers.
4. Critically assess both military and law enforcement responses to terrorism.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of social science research through participation in a terrorism research project.

Instructional Strategy
The instructional strategy for this class is facilitating thoughtful and informed discussion on that week’s topic. This class should NOT be straight lecturing for hours. Students must ensure they are properly prepared for class by doing the assignments prior to arriving for class. Many classes will also have group activities built in to facilitate further participation and engagement.

The philosophy behind this strategy is that students learn best from actively engaging in class and applying knowledge to real world problems related to the courses topics. Discussion and group-based class activities will reduce the amount of passive lecturing in the classroom by the instructor and increase the amount of student-to-student engagement. This shifts significant responsibility for learning to the students and requires students to arrive in class well prepared for applying knowledge from assigned readings and videos. If language or some other barrier inhibits you from participating actively in class, you should meet with the instructor during the first two weeks of class to devise a solution.

Education is about learning. This course is about material many in the classroom may have varying levels of familiarity with. If you have questions or things are unclear based on class lectures or discussions – please ask questions. I encourage you can ask them in lecture because if you have a question, it is likely someone else has the same or similar question. Such questions will help facilitate further discussion. However, feel free to ask or email the instructor whenever necessary for further clarification.

This course examines some topics which may be emotional, controversial, and graphically violent in nature. The goal is to foster a safe environment of learning for all those involved. We are in this course to understand terrorism, its causes, and the mindset of terrorists themselves. Remember that understanding terrorist actions should not be construed as condoning or legitimizing terrorist actions. The assigned readings may not represent the views of the instructor, but are provided as a framework for discussion and a lens through which to view different topics from multiple perspectives. As
the instructor, I will likely play “devil’s advocate” in classroom discussions to provide counterpoints and foster discussion amongst students.

Course Format
The course will be taught once a week on Thursday evenings during approximately a three hour block (average class likely should run from 5:45pm until 9:00pm). At the beginning of each class any initial administrative issues or questions will be addressed and any assignments due should be handed in hard copy (and posted into Blackboard before the start of class). Class will open with a discussion of any relevant current events related to the topics of the course (political violence, particularly terrorism), so students should make sure to read or watch major news sources (ie: NY Times, Washington Post, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, ABC News, etc) during the week to prepare for these discussions. The majority of each class will be guided discussion of the readings for the week with some lecture built in where necessary. Many classes will also use class exercises or group activities to facilitate learning and discussion. Students can expect one to two short breaks during each class (so please save the text messaging and social media scanning for then).

Assignments and Course Workload
The course workload is based on the assumption that you will devote at least six to eight hours per week engaging this class (with approximately three to three and half hours of participation during class meetings and up to four to four and a half hours of work outside of class). This may not include time on weeks in which you are doing extra research or writing papers. I assume that the average student can read about 30 pages per hour. Please budget your time accordingly, keeping in mind the assignments for this class, for your other classes, and other commitments.

Attendance and Participation
At the college level of education, the expectation is that students will attend every class session and actively participate in class discussion each week. **Attendance is not participation.** All students are allowed one unexcused absence (life happens); however, this unexcused absence cannot interfere with turning in assignments, such as papers, or to get out of a presentation or leading a discussion in an assigned class. Students missing a class session beyond one absence without prior approval of the instructor (or documentation of an emergency medical situation) will be penalized in their class participation grade per missed class (see grading in the following section). For more information on the University’s Medical Excuse Policy, see the following link: [http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml)

Course Requirements and Grading
This course will be graded using the standard UAAlbany grading system of A-E grading scale, including plusses and minuses. The following provides a breakdown of assignments and their weights for the student’s overall grade.

**Class Participation (40%)**
Participation is more than attendance; it includes active and thoughtful participation in all elements of the class. As outlined in the instructional strategy, this course will be taught around the class discussion and activities, which means that we will all be dependent on the efforts of others’ participation to determine the success of our learning experience. Active and thoughtful participation is dependent on a thorough reading of the material as well as preparation for any activities to be conducted in class. **Please silence your cell phones and refrain from checking text messages or social media during class as it distracts other students and detracts from your ability to actively participate in discussion.**

Each class session’s participation will be graded on the following scale:
- 3 points: Active and thoughtful participation that demonstrates understanding of the assigned material and current events. Full participation in classroom activities and discussion of position papers (if any).
- 2 points: Limited participation that demonstrates some understanding of the assigned material and current events. Limited participation in classroom activities and discussion of position papers (if any).
- 1 point: Attendance with little to no participation in the class.
- 0 points: Unexcused absence (beyond 1 allowable unexcused absence)

I suggest preparing some notes or talking points before class. In addition to your thoughts, opinion, and analysis of the week’s assigned materials, these talking points could include questions on a topic you find confusing and why you are
unclear on the matter so that these questions may be addressed in class. If you have a question or are confused, there is likely someone else in the same position.

**Position Papers (40%)**
You are required to write four (4) position papers throughout the semester, each worth 10% of your overall grade. The position paper topics are posted in the course schedule below in red the week they are due. Position papers should be no less than 3 full pages and no more than 4 full pages; Times New Roman, double space, 1” margins. Position papers should begin with a brief introduction that provides an overview or context for the topic. Position papers should then state its primary argument (either for or against the proposition assigned) and follow on with supporting arguments and evidence. Alternative arguments should be explored and refuted using evidence. A brief conclusion should briefly summarize the student’s position on the issue. All students should come prepared to class to actively discuss and debate the position paper topic each week they are due. A hard copy of position papers are due at the beginning of class, and a soft copy is required for submission via Blackboard prior to the start of class.

**Final Research Project (20%)**
There are two options for final research projects. The first is to write a traditional research paper exploring a key issue or question related to political violence. These traditional research papers should be similar to many of the academic articles we read in class, exploring a key research question, testing a hypothesis or set of hypotheses, and/or applying a theoretical lens to the topic. The second is to do a comprehensive historical paper on a terrorist, rebel, or insurgent organization or set of organizations. In addition to a historical time line of organizational behavior and government response this project will review the literature on the group and theoretical findings that have been made about this group. Both papers should be approximately 10-12 pages in length, Times New Roman, double space, 1” margins.

**Course Accommodations**
Students with **learning disabilities** must notify the instructor within the first two weeks of the course in order to make suitable arrangements. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the instructor and the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and can recommend appropriate accommodations.

As previously stated, this course will rely heavily on active participation in class discussion and activities. If a **language barrier** inhibits you from participating actively, you should meet with the instructor during the first two weeks of class to devise a solution.

In addition, the instructor will make every effort to accommodate difficulties arising from **religious or cultural observance**. You are asked to bring any possible conflicts to the instructor's attention as soon as possible. Students should not expect that, if they do poorly on an assignment, to claim at that time the need of an accommodation. This statement is to preclude that problem, and allow people with a need for accommodations to be treated fairly and appropriately.

**Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**
Every student has the responsibility to become familiar with the standards of academic integrity at UAlbany. Student claims of ignorance, unintentional error, or personal or academic pressures cannot be excuses for violation of academic integrity. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the standards, which can be found at [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html).

Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional use of another’s words or ideas without giving credit to that person. While this includes copying text word for word without the use of quotation marks, it also includes paraphrasing another person’s work without proper citation. Intellectual honesty is a core value of university and the foundation of faculty and student development. Plagiarism, therefore, undermines the entire university community. Plagiarism or cheating in any form will not be tolerated. If you are involved in plagiarism, the penalty will be failure in the course and you will be reported to judicial affairs. In this one regard there are no second chances. If you are not sure whether to cite or not to cite – cite.
In order to ensure all students in this course have the necessary knowledge on plagiarism, all students must complete the UAlbany Library’s tutorial on plagiarism entitled “Plagiarism 101” (http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1) by the third week of class.

**Ombudsperson**

“Usually appointed by the government or by parliament but with a significant degree of independence, who is charged with representing the interests of the public by investigating and addressing complaints of maladministration or violation of rights.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ombudsman). One student will be asked to volunteer to act as an ombudsperson and can offer the instructor anonymous feedback from students in terms of the direction the course is going and bring to my attention any problems with reading, assignments or other material.
Course Calendar

Week 1 (8/31)  Introduction

Week 2 (9/7)  Major Theoretical Lenses of Political Violence

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings

Week 3 (9/14)  Revolutions

Required Readings:
   a. A climate of change
   b. Revolutionary potential: How many more to go?
   c. Fertile Croissant
   d. Political Islam: The power of religion
   e. Youth: Give us a chance
   f. The economy: The have and the have-nots
   g. Constitution-building: The long march
   h. After Egypt’s double spring: Keep going
4. Ibib, Hussein. “Was the Arab Spring Worth It?” Foreign Policy. 17 June 2012.
5. Walt, Stephen M. “Are US Interests REALLY at Stake in Egypt, Syria, Etc?” Foreign Policy. 22 August 2013.
7. VIDEO – Frontline: “Egypt in Crisis” (53m41s)
8. VIDEO – “Turkey’s failed military coup, explained” by Vox (3m22s)

Suggested Readings:

NO CLASS ON 9/21 (classes suspended for Rosh Hashanah)
Rebellion, Insurgency, and Civil War: Syria Today

**Position Paper # 1:** The United States should close its borders to Syrian and Iraqi refugees due to the risk of terrorism.

**Required Readings**

2. VIDEO – “Syria’s War: Who is Fighting and Why?” by Vox (6m45s)

**Suggested Readings**


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**Week 5 (10/5)**

**Terrorism**

**Required Readings:**


**Suggested Readings:**

**Week 6 (10/12)**

**Domestic Terrorism**

**Position Paper #2:** The United States should designate domestic terrorist organizations and hate groups as illegal organizations in a similar manner to State Department designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs).

**Required Readings:**

   a. VIDEO – “The Shadow of Waco” – by NYT (14m52s)
7. Hersh, Joshua. “Extremism Experts are Starting to Worry About the Left.” VICE News. 15 June 2017.
8. VIDEO – Charlottesville: Race and Terror by VICE News (22m4s)

**Week 7 (10/19)**

**Al-Qa’ida: Origins, the 9/11 attacks, and Evolution Over Time**

**Required Readings**

1. 1996 an 1998 Osama bin Laden Fatwas:

**Suggested Readings**


**Week 8 (10/26)**

**Rise of the Islamic State**

**Position Paper #3:** The United States should utilize American ground troops, beyond the select use of Special Forces, in order to defeat the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

**Required Readings:**
1. VIDEO – Frontline: “The Rise of ISIS” (54m11s)

Week 9 (11/2)  
**Homegrown Violent Extremists & Foreign Fighters**

**Required Readings:**

**Suggested Readings:**

Week 10 (11/9)  
**State Sponsored Terrorism**

**Required Readings:**

Week 11 (11/16) Military & Diplomatic Responses to Terrorism & the Global War on Terror Position Paper #4: Targeted killing of terrorists, most prominently through the use of drone strikes, is an effective and ethical tool in combating terrorism that should continue to be used by the United States, including against American citizens who have joined foreign terrorist organizations overseas.

Required Readings

Suggested Readings
1. 9/11 Commission Report

NO CLASSES ON 11/23 (classes suspended for Thanksgiving)

Week 12 (11/30) Law Enforcement Responses to Terrorism Required Readings
1. VIDEO – Frontline: “Top Secret America” (53m54s)
4. “Validation of the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative.” National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).

Week 13 (12/7) How Terrorism Ends Required Readings:
   a. VIDEO – “*When Terror Gets Old*” by Global Post