PLSC 417B: SENIOR SEMINAR
TERRORISM: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOURCES, THREATS AND RESPONSES
WINTER 2007
SYLLABUS

Instructor: Professor Bidisha Biswas
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Class time and location: Thursday 9-11:20AM
CF 23
Office hours and location: Tuesdays, 2:30pm-3:30pm
Wednesdays, 10am-11am
Arntzen Hall 411

In this class, we will explore different facets of terrorism, with an emphasis on ethnically-motivated, transnational actors. We begin by asking ourselves: “What is terrorism?” and “Who is a terrorist?” The answers to these questions underline the rest of the class, as we try to understand some of the motivations, sources and responses to terrorism. In addition to discussing Islamist militancy and US responses to the same, we also situate this form of violence historically and globally. Case studies are used throughout the course to illuminate our understanding of the subject. We will also watch some films, which highlight some of the moral and strategic dilemmas of dealing with terrorism. A critical approach and active discussion is encouraged throughout the class.

Course Materials
The following books are required for the course:


The following book is recommended. You do not have to purchase it, but we will refer to in the initial sessions of the class. A copy of the book is available on library reserve.


Additional reading assignments are either available online or at library reserve. Please note that you are expected to be familiar with the use of online library resources available at Wilson Library. If you are unfamiliar with the use of these resources, please see a librarian immediately.

Course Requirements
Your final grade in this course will be based on:

45% Reaction papers (3)
40% Terrorist Group Briefing
15% Class participation

Reaction paper
You will be asked to submit written reaction papers for three of the class sessions. The paper should provide a brief summary of readings. You do not have to refer to all the prescribed articles, but you are
expected to discuss a minimum of two of them. The bulk of the paper should provide analyses and criticisms of the readings and include references to class discussions and films, where applicable. You should conclude with your own reaction and opinion. Your position must be argued with reference to the readings and class discussion. Bonus points will be awarded if you draw from external readings that are not on the assigned list. These papers should be 4-6 pages long (12 point font, double spaced). Only those class sessions which are marked with an asterisk (*) are applicable for reaction papers. Due dates for each reaction paper are marked in the syllabus. All papers must be submitted in hard copy by the due date, in class. **Late submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances.**

**Group Intelligence Brief**
The group intelligence brief consists of two components: a 5-7 page report and a formal power point presentation (with a brief Q&A session). The assignment is to research a current terrorist/guerrilla group and report on such things as ideology, goals, tactics, membership and recent events/history. The presenter **must** offer some policy prescriptions (counterterrorism/counterinsurgency tactics) for combating such a group. Each group has to type up the report and give a PowerPoint presentation (5-10 minutes) on the main points/policy prescriptions in the report. No duplicates are permitted. Assignments will be made on a first come, first serve basis. The briefing should preferably be made in groups of two, although I will consider requests for individual assignments.

Leads on potential groups for research can be found on the MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base and on the US State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), both available online.

**Class participation**
Your class participation will be based on active engagement with the discussions. For each topic under discussion, you are required to **have a set of three to five analytical questions about the arguments, concepts, themes and issues raised by the readings.** These questions should be critical and thought-provoking. In other words, ask how and why questions. Raise questions about the arguments, the nature of the evidence, possible bias and implications for public policy. Compare the conclusions, evidence or concepts of one author with that of another. You must post these questions on Blackboard on by midnight of the Monday before each class. Be prepared to ask and discuss your questions in class. The questions posed by the students will be the basis of class discussion. You may opt out of any two of the topics. You will lose participation points for additional misses.

**Discussion**: In-class discussion will be encouraged throughout the class. You are required to do your reading assignments before each class session. You are also expected to be aware of current world events. Possible news sources include (but are not limited to) [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com). The MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base ([http://www.tkb.org/Home.jsp](http://www.tkb.org/Home.jsp)) is a good source of information.

Students are expected to respect the opinions of other students and to engage in discussion and debates in a sensitive and respectful manner.

**Additional points:**
Students are responsible for following the academic honesty guidelines provided in the WWU Academic Dishonesty Policy and Procedure. The penalty for academic dishonesty can and will include a failure in the course.

Students with disabilities should inform the instructor of their needs at the beginning of the semester. Students will be given the opportunity to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. **It is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor, in advance, of any intended absences for religious observances.**
Course schedule
Session 1: January 11, 2007
Introduction
- General introduction.
- Discuss syllabus
- What is terrorism? How is it different from other forms of political violence?
- In-class viewing: Battle of Algiers (partial)
- Viewing assignment: Remainder of film (available at the library)

Session 2*: January 18, 2006
History of Terrorism: What is Terrorism? What are its Origins? What’s New?
- BH, Chapters 1-2
- MJ, Chapters 1-3
- In-class viewing: War Within
- Reaction paper due date: January 25

Session 3*: January 25, 2007
The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism
- MJ, Chapters 4, 5, 7
- Reaction paper due date: February 1

Session 4*: February 1, 2007
Why do They Hate Us? The (American) State as the Target. Spotlight on the Middle East.
- MJ, Chapters 8, 9
- In-class viewing: Control Room
- Reaction paper due date: February 8

Session 5*: February 8, 2007
Islamist Militancy. Spotlight on Al-Qaeda
- MJ, Chapter 10
- Wedeen, Lisa. 2003. Beyond the Crusades: Why Huntington, and Bin Ladin, are Wrong. Middle East Policy 10 (Summer).
• Reaction paper due date: February 15

Session 6*: February 15, 2007

The Palestine Predicament

• Assigned Film: *Paradise Now* (Available in Library Reserves)

• Reaction paper due date: February 22

Session 7 : February 22, 2007

Terrorism in South Asia

• MJ, Chapter 5
• Assigned film: *The Return of the Taliban* (Available online at the PBS Frontline website)
• In-class presentations

March 1

No class meeting. Prepare for terrorist group briefing.

Session 8*: March 8, 2007

Counterterrorism Efforts

• 9/11 Report. Executive Summary only
• Reaction paper due date: March 15
• In-class presentations

Session 9: March 15, 2006

Al Qaeda in Europe

• Leiken, Robert S. 2005. Europe’s Angry Muslims. *Foreign Affairs* 84():
• In-class viewing: *Al Qaeda’s New Front*
• In-class presentations

All final papers are due, in hard copy, by noon on March 19. Papers must be placed in my mailbox in the Department main office or handed to me in my office by that time. **Late papers will not be accepted under any circumstances whatsoever.**