

Govt. 4304

Modern Terrorism

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Course Description:

Govt4304, Modern Terrorism, is designed to introduce graduate students not only to the conventional approaches to terrorist studies but to the contributions that political philosophy can make as well. Necessarily most of the materials are in book form rather than on the web. Where available I have provided web links to supplementary materials in the Links section of our course delivery system.

Govt4304, Modern Terrorism, is being taught within the Political Theory concentration in Yorktown University's MA in Government degree program. The theoretical work underlying this course is based on my book, *New Political Religions, or an Analysis of Modern Terrorism* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2004. ISBN: 0-8262-1621-8).

In *New Political Religions*, I examine the self-understanding of two major terrorist groups, the Japanese terrorists, Aum Shinrikyo and the so-called jihadists or Islamists, which includes the al-Qaeda network and its affiliates.

The conceptual vocabulary and analytical methods used in this analysis are borrowed from the political philosophy of Eric Voegelin and specifically Voegelin's early analysis of the Nazis. (See Manfred Henningsen, ed. Vol. 5, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000. ISBN: 0-8262-1245).

Indeed, the title of the book is meant to echo, *The Political Religions*, and this course on Modern Terrorism explores an aspect of this subject that does not concern most students of terrorism and terrorists. The usual approach that is taken in such studies is derived chiefly from the disciplines of International Relations or Strategic Studies.

Most of the studies done on the problem of terrorism and counterterrorism are, understandably, concerned with what terrorists do, how they do it, who supports them and how to stop them. Much of this work is very valuable and useful for understanding a great deal about terrorism.

Govt4304 asks students, however, to read a number of such studies, and, in addition—and this is my modest contribution to the study of terrorism and terrorists—we ask our students to consider the self-understanding of terrorists based on the intellectual rigor afforded by political philosophy and using the insights of Eric Voegelin.

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.

Required Texts:

Russell D. Howard & Reid L. Sawyer, eds., *Terrorism & Counterterrorism*. Guilford, McGraw-Hill, 2002. ISBN: 0-07-287307-8

Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1998. ISBN: 0-231-11469-9

Barry Cooper, *New Political Religions*. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2004. ISBN: 0-8262-1621-8

Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise & Power*. Required. New York: Vintage 2003. ISBN: 1-4000-3418-3

Angelo Codevilla, *No Victory, No Peace*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN: 0-7425-5003-6

Assessment:

You will be graded on the basis of:

1. Contributions to seven short (500-1000 word) discussions posted in the Discussion section of our course delivery system and are to be completed after each session (21% of final grade).

2. Three medium-length (2500-5000 word) writing assignments undertaken after sessions four, seven, and ten (15% of final grade each).
3. Final exam (34% of final grade).

Course Schedule:

Session One: End of the Cold War

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

After reading Kagan's book please complete the first discussion assignment

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. Writing Assignments are located in the Assignments section of our course delivery system.

Session Two: What is terrorism?

We begin the first part of the course on "external" accounts of terrorism by dealing with the problem of conceptual delimitation. Please read Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* ch. 1, 6. The first chapter is reprinted in Howard & Sawyer, *Terrorism & Counterterrorism*. You may also wish to read pp. 24-52 in Howard and Sawyer, as well as ch. 6, but these are 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, *Inside Terrorism*, ch. 3, 5, 7. After you have completed this section **please complete the second writing assignment**. This section concludes the second part of the course.

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

In this next part of the course we will shift the perspective from looking at terrorist activity as a form of asymmetric war or of large-scale criminal killing to a critical or analytical examination of the self-understanding of terrorists. 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*. You may also wish to read Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, ch. 4 and Howard & Sawyer, ch. 5. These are optional.

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. This concludes the third part of the course. After having completed the reading in the last three sections, please complete the third writing assignment.

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

In this session we look at the problem of counterterrorism again from the external perspective of terrorist activities. Please read Howard & Sawyer, ch. 7, pp. 339-44; 356-73, ch. 8, pp. 405-28; ch. 9, 470-95. 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

In this session we look at the problem of counterterrorism in terms of the self-understanding of the state, with 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

In this final session we look at counterterrorism in terms of the self-understanding, of a salafist network such as al-Qaeda, with Cooper, *New Political Religions*, ch. 5, and Appendix.

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.

Third Writing Assignment is due