

Political Science 156

Spring, 2005

TOPICS IN TERRORISM

Faculty: Professor Stephen Gale

Place: D28 Caster

Time: Tuesday 3:00 to 6:00

Contact: sgale@sas.upenn.edu (N.B. Always include PSCI 156 in the "Subject")

Office: 554 McNeil

Background

This seminar is designed to: (1) stimulate an interest in the philosophy and methods of terrorism; (2) illustrate the varieties of conditions under which these methods are used; (3) outline the institutional conditions which permit and support the use of terrorism; and (4) understand the problems involved in "solving" the terrorism dilemma.

Terrorism is ill-defined and politically charged. Understanding the motivations of terrorist groups and their actions poses not only serious challenges to social scientists, but to public officials as well. For example, whereas the social sciences typically emphasize the collection and analysis of detailed data, in the case of terrorism even finding appropriate data is often difficult. Historical analyses usually require detailed materials about the contexts and circumstances of events and the motivations of the actors -- which, again, are usually unavailable to those studying terrorism. Public officials, on the other hand, see terrorism as the ultimate threat to society: terrorists actions are, in most cases, incompatible with (and exogenous to) institutional rules and procedures and are, in general, not capable of being regulated and controlled through standard legal procedures and/or military actions

In order to avoid (at least some of) these difficulties, this course will use a framework for the analysis of terrorism and terrorist events in which a form of "practical reasoning" and "case studies" based on the analysis of the relationships among the goals, strategies, and tactics of the actors in events is the basis for inference and understanding. The core concept is "leverage" and, by analyzing the relationships among the goals, strategies, and tactics of the actors involved in terrorism and those responsible for providing security, the idea is to provide a basis for understanding terrorism and what can be done to prevent such actions.

Readings

D. Benjamin and S. Simon, The Age of Sacred Terror

S. Coll, Ghost Wars

G. Kepel, The War for Muslim Minds

W. Laqueur, Voices of Terror

B. Rubin and J. C. Rubin, Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East

M. Scheuer, Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terrorism

Requirements

- (1) Participation in class discussions. In order to participate one has to be in attendance and be prepared. Although attendance and preparedness will not be measured directly, they will be assessed in less direct ways. For example, success in this course is a function of how well a student understands the conceptual framework, the relationships among goals, strategies, and tactics of events, and the methods of practical reasoning and case study analysis.
2. There will be a take-home final. It will be handed out on the last day of class (Tuesday 19 April 2005) and is due in my office (554 McNeil) on Thursday 5 May 2005 by 5:00 PM. The answers to the exam questions will be turned in typed (double-space) and with all spelling and grammar checked.
3. Those who wish to earn extra credit can submit a paper on any of the topics related to the course. Proposals for the papers will be submitted by 15 February 2005. For those who wish to act on the Proposal by actually writing the paper, two conferences with the instructor are required in order to discuss the topic, organization of the paper, and suggested readings, The paper is due on the last day of class (19 April 2005) typed (double space) with full reference to all sources, and with spelling and grammar checked.