The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Master of Social Science in Global Political Economy Programme  

GPEC 5421 Terrorism and Counterterrorism  
Period 4, 2014  

Course Outline  

Instructor: Seanon Wong  
Email: seanonwo@usc.edu  
Tuesday 6:45 – 9:30pm  
WMY 405  
Consultation hours: by appointment  

Course Description  

This course is designed for students interested in the subject of terrorism and counterterrorism. Students learn primarily through reading, analyzing and critiquing some of the most cutting-edge publications in the literature.  

The course begins by asking two basic yet all-important questions: what is terrorism, and how do we study it?  

Then, in Part I, we explore the causes of terrorism through six conceptually distinct approaches: 1) strategic; 2) socio-organizational; 3) ideological and cultural; 4) international and societal; 5) psychological; and 6) critical. Understanding these approaches is crucial because they often imply rather different (and sometimes contradictory) policies for counterterrorism.  

In Part II, we engage in some of the most heated debates among policymakers and scholars. These debates range from the normative (e.g. can terrorism ever be justified?) to the empirical (e.g. is the threat of terrorism being overstated?).  

Course Assessment  

40% **Participation:** To take advantage of the small class size (and since this is a postgraduate-level course), students are expected to learn from each other through lively discussions, debates and critiques of the readings, and the ideas of the instructor and other students (in a respectful manner, of course). Remember: mere presence in class is not participation.  

30% **Literature review and discussion leadership:** Students will each prepare one literature review in preparation for class discussion (on Mar 25, Apr 8 and 15). Assignment of dates will be made in the first and second meetings of the course.  

A review should be no longer than 1,500 words. It should contain a brief summary of the week’s required readings, how they speak and relate to each other, followed by a critique of their arguments, and 2-3 questions. These questions should be analytical and critical (e.g. “Author X argues that poverty is the root cause of terrorism. But how can we account for the fact that most of the perpetrators on 9/11 were relatively well-to-do?”), not factual (e.g. “When was Osama bin Laden killed?”). The review
should be circulated through eLearning at least 24 hours before class (i.e. Mon 6:45pm). This is to ensure that the instructor and other students have sufficient time to read, digest and prepare their responses.

In class, students should explain the content of their review (in no more than 10 minutes), and facilitate discussion along with the instructor.

30% Debate presentation: In Part II (Apr 22 and 29), students will each present one of the following debates in Stuart Gottlieb (ed.). 2014. Debating Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Conflicting Perspectives on Causes, Contexts, and Responses. CQ Press. 2nd ed.

- Can terrorism ever be justified? (Ch. 3)
- Is suicide terrorism and effective tactic? (Ch. 5)
- Is nuclear terrorism a real threat? (Ch. 6)
- Do we need bombs over bridges? (Ch. 7)
- Can spreading democracy help defeat terrorism? (Ch. 8)
- Can international organizations make a difference in fighting terrorism? (Ch. 9)
- Is an outright ban the best way to eliminate or constrain torture? (Ch. 10)
- Does providing security require a trade-off with civil liberties? (Ch. 11)
- Is the threat of terrorism being overstated? (Ch. 12)

Presentations should detail the arguments put forth by both sides of the debate. Students are expected to take a stance, and more importantly, explain their underlying reasons and provide supporting evidence. They are strongly encouraged to conduct additional bibliographic research to bolster their argument.

Presentations should not exceed 30 minutes, followed by 5-10 minutes of Q&A. The use of PowerPoint is optional.

Students should email the instructor their top three preferences of debates by Apr 1 (Tues). Topics will be assigned on a first-come-first-served basis.

Course Schedule and Readings

Those marked with a “*” are required readings, while the rest are recommended only. Students are expected to complete all required readings before class. They are available for download on eLearning.

Mar 11
Introduction and overview

Mar 18
What is terrorism?


How do we study it?


PART I: CAUSES OF TERRORISM

Mar 25

Strategic


**Socio-organizational**


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**Apr 1**

*No class*

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**Apr 8**

**Ideological and cultural**


**International and societal**

• **Gottlieb, Stuart.** 2009. *Debating Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Conflicting Perspectives on Causes, Contexts, and Responses*. CQ Press. Ch. 2


**Apr 15**

**Psychological**


Critical

PART II: MAJOR DEBATES ON TERRORISM

Apr 22
Debate presentations #1

Apr 29
Debate presentations #2

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University Policy and Regulations on Honesty in Academic Work

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and
to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign on the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.