Overview

This course critically examines the nature, diversity, and application of discourses on terrorism, with a focus on US foreign policy, orientalism as a corollary/complementary discourse, and the Syrian war/case, which brings together Middle Eastern, American, and European states’ discourses on terrorism in relation to ISIS and other groups.

Beyond a focus on contemporary events, the course proceeds from the historical definition and practice of terrorism/terror that associates acts of terror with states in the 18th century, and traces the transformation of the application of this label from states to strictly individuals and groups in the late 20th century. Thus, the dominant discourse on terrorism today in virtually all states, including those in conflict with one another, relegates the more substantial state violence to the realms of repression and war crimes. This transformation reflects a maturing form of international relations in which states are the key constituents that determine culpability. The course will address the implications of having the institutions most capable of large-scale violence arbitrate on its legitimate/illegitimate uses as well as on designating a nomenclature—notwithstanding the potential culpability of all sorts of actors, including non-state actors.

Focusing on the Middle East and the “global war on terror” after the attacks of September the 11th, 2001, the course examines overlaps between discourses of orientalism, terrorism, and islamophobia in the context of authoritarianism, colonization, occupation, and external intervention. It emphasizes both the horrific nature of terror (by individuals, groups, and states) as well as discourses of decontextualization and masculinization adopted by Middle Eastern, European, and Western states engaged in counter-terrorism. Case-studies will include varieties of groups accused of terrorism (From Al-Qa‘idah to ISIS, and from HAMAS to ETA and IRA), whether in the context of struggles for national liberation or of attempts to create new kinds of states and/or orders. The course will engage with contemporary events that animate current discourses of terrorism, with emphasis on the Syrian war/uprising as it intersects with other conflicts in the region and the rise of the so-called Islamic State.

The purpose of this course is not to elucidate any truths (with either a capital or lower-case “t”). Nor is this course concerned with “bashing” orientalist, Islamophobic, and neoliberal writings or facile proclamations regarding the topic/problematic of “terrorism.” Rather, we will trace the construction of these discourses and identify their basic theoretical assumptions and practical implications for the world in which we live. As such, the course will ultimately transcend the current “war on terrorism” to address the factors and dynamics that reproduce these and other discourses in a charged political context in which power relations are not symmetric. Understanding the relationship between “power” and “knowledge,” between construction(s) of the “self” and perceptions of the “other,” are corollary objectives of the course. The question(s) that guide the normative thrust of this course revolve around the conditions of possibility of discourses where the unproductive/destructive dimensions of power are either restrained or reduced. These analytical journeys will involve extensive empirical observation/research and work conducted in the field by the instructor. Thus, this is a reading-, viewing-, and research-intensive course.
The word discourse refers to the way we discuss things, write about them, produce them, create them, and construct seemingly internal consistency about them, etc. It is also the language we use, the terms and idioms therein, and even the syntax/grammar involved. Put simply, a given discourse is largely, though not exclusively, reflective of a dominant power of sorts, a hegemonic force within a particular context or cosmos. We will study such power and such context as well. Practically speaking, in the realm of policy, discourses are often used to justify a given action and/or status quo. In turn, action, response, and further action shape the development of a given discourse. One avenue for understanding this dialectic is to examine the relationship between power and knowledge and the instances where perceptions of “particularist interest” and “universal values” are conflated, deliberately or inadvertently, and where notions of masculinity color most available approaches.

The course will be divided into three basic, though overlapping, sections: the first deals with the emergence of discourses of orientalism and terrorism; the second with the history and practice of the discourse of terrorism; and the third section deals with empirical challenges to these discourses. The empirical dimension of the course deals with (a) post-colonial development, (b) the advent of political Islam, (c) US foreign policy in the Middle East, (d) the US led Global War on Terror (under President Bush and Obama), and (e) the Arab Uprisings (Syria in particular).

The pre-requisites include knowledge of 20th century Middle Eastern history and politics, as well as US foreign policy, including items (a), (b), (c), (d), and (e), above. If you do not have such knowledge or background, you are strongly advised to speak with the instructor at the outset of the course.

**Requirements**

This is an upper level course, so expect heavy reading assignments and an extensive research paper. The course will have both an academic and a current events dimension. Beyond assigned readings, you are therefore expected to be critically reading/following the news. A list of relevant news sources and blogs will be made available on the class website. Class presentations, participation, and commentary/critique by students is a cornerstone of this engagement, so come to class prepared to discuss and/or present the readings, as well as taking turns leading class discussions. The key to succeed in this course is to do a close reading of the assignments and keep a log of summaries of what you read.

There will be a midterm, short writing/media assignments (TBA) and a final paper/project (the Midterm exam will be announced in class). The instructor does not rule out the possibility of a collective or group-oriented final project as substitute or corollary to a final paper.

Because participation may be hindered by class size, you might have periodic “beginning of class pop questions” (PQs). You will be asked one question based on the reading for that day at the beginning of some classes, for which you’ll have 3-5 minutes to furnish an answer. Your answers will not be graded formally (you’ll get a check mark for correct answers, or nothing for incorrect answers), but will serve as an additional indicator for your participation grade: they can help you if your answers reveal a consistent strong familiarity with the reading. Students who wish to maintain a B+ or above are encouraged to take these questions seriously as a way of boosting their participation grade. Further specification regarding reading assignments will be announced in class.

**Research Paper**

The research paper is the most significant project you’ll work on in this course, and it is due on the last day of class. You should submit a paper proposal after five weeks from the beginning of class (exact date TBA). The final paper should be 6000 words (approximately 20-25 double-spaced pages), and based on extensive research with a clear methodology. The paper topic must deal with the themes of the course and involve one case study. Comparative work is encouraged but not necessary). More information will be provided in class and on the course website.

**Grade Distribution [to be amended based on class size]**

- Midterm: 30%
- Presentations/Assignments: 25%
- Research Paper/Project: 45%
Course Website [CW]
All the information related to the course will be on the Course Website that I have designed for this class. The URL and password will be given in class. Students are expected to check the website regularly for information and updates.

Attendance
Class participation will be essential in this course, the more so because we meet only once a week. Therefore, class attendance is a must. Multiple absences undermine your participation and therefore your final grade. Class presentations are essential.

Logistics
All written work is to be turned in through the course website. If for any reason you can’t access required readings, or you have any serious problems, feel free to drop by my office, make an appointment, email me, or call my direct mobile number which I give out at the outset of the course. Do not wait until last minute to report a problem or a failure to access readings, etc.

Services for Students with Difference
If you have a documented difference (learning, physical, psychological) for which you are or may be requesting reasonable academic adjustments, you are encouraged to inform me as early as possible in the semester. I, personally, would be happy to accommodate all your legitimate requests regarding such matters, with or without documentation. Please feel free to talk to me about such matters.

Academic Honesty
“The pursuit of knowledge can only take place in an atmosphere of honesty, integrity, and mutual trust.” In order to accomplish this, we must all be “committed to a policy that regards the highest degree of academic honesty as the norm.” Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at George Mason University, nor is it in this course. Based on University policy, such acts of dishonesty may result in a failing grade for the relevant assignment or a failing grade for the course. If you are not sure what constitutes academic dishonesty, please inquire in or outside class (http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#Anchor12). If you are writing an essay or a paper and you neglected to footnote the source of a statement or an idea, you are committing academic dishonesty. This is called plagiarism, and it is subject to punitive measures. Should you need more time or have a legitimate concern, the best course of action is to speak with me directly. Shortcuts do not benefit anyone and may harm your standing.
Required Texts
The reading for this course will be drawn both from the required text below and articles that will be supplied by the instructor, either electronically or as a hand out. (A select list of the below will be required for purchase. Other excerpts will be provided from the remainder of the books)


Adam Hodges and Chad Nilep, *Discourse, War, and Terrorism* (Carnegie Mellon University, 2007)


Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House, 2005)


Optional Texts
Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (New York: Pantheon Books, c2004), ISBN 0375422854

*(really fun bathroom or elevator reading)*

The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus.
**COURSE THEMES**

1. Discourse of Orientalism
2. Methods and Methodology of Studying the “Orient”
3. History of Orientalism and Orientalist Writing
4. 20th Century Literature on the “Orient/East”
5. The Notion of Discourse and Discourse Analysis
6. The History of Terrorism
7. Post-2001 Discourse on Terrorism: Government, Media, Academia, Popular Culture
8. State Terrorism
9. Terrorism and Resistance
10. Suicide Bombing
11. The War on Terrorism Under President Bush and Obama
12. Individual Violence, Structural Violence, Discrimination, Patriotism
13. Women, Islam, Sexuality, Desire and The War On Terrorism
14. The Invasion of Iraq, The Syrian Uprising, and the Case of ISIS
15. Convergence Between Discourses of “Terrorism” and “Orientalism?”

**ORIENTALISM AND TERRORISM**

**WEEKLY READINGS**

[TBA]

Field-Trip to Aleppo and Mosul