This course is experimental in its orientation, content and approach. The course is intended, first of all, for students in public diplomacy, but is open to all graduate students in journalism, public policy, strategic public relations, international relations and communications. A great deal of the learning in this course will come in classroom discussions and presentations, and full participation in every class session is expected. The discussions, by their nature, will require political maturity and a readiness to understand and learn from different points of view.

Description:

Through the use of violence against civilian populations, terrorists seek to intimidate them and coerce their governments. As such, terrorism has been an element of politics, national and international, for centuries, and it has frequently shaped the course of history. Today, terrorists depend heavily on media coverage of their actions to intensify the impact—to terrorize. Often, that media coverage is almost instantaneous and live, increasing the impact of any attack. At the same time, the development of new weapons of enormous destructive power makes terrorism one of the gravest concerns facing democratic societies.

This course will focus on terrorism in the 21st Century, the ways in which it affects decision-making in democratic societies and the role and responsibility of the news media. It will include
the origins and history of terrorism, the dimensions of terrorism today, its globalization and its impact on government and public policy. Through case studies of recent terrorist attacks around the world, we will critically examine the role of the news media in covering terrorism and discuss ways to improve it. We will also examine the challenges posed by terrorists’ use of new media to assure wide dissemination and increase the impact of their attacks. And we will explore ways that political leaders and their public affairs advisers can respond so that they preserve the democratic decision-making. This course is not simply about terrorism or the news media’s coverage of terrorist attacks, but about the impact of terrorism on democratic societies and the important role that the news media play in framing and mediating the issues.

The outcomes we are seeking include—

1. Knowledge and understanding of terrorism, its origins and history, its objectives and methods.

2. Understanding of the impact of terrorist attacks on democratic societies, the ways in which they influence public opinion and in which they affect governmental decision-making.

3. Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which news media cover terrorist incidents and how this expands, or reduces, the impact of the attacks.

4. Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which public officials and their communications advisers anticipate and respond to terrorist attacks.

5. Development of ideas for improved news coverage of terrorism and for improved communications strategies for public officials confronted with terrorism.

Students will write one research paper analyzing a terrorist campaign, the news coverage of it, efforts by political leaders to manage the impact on democratic decision-making and the ultimate results.

Students will also have a series of workplace assignments – an op-ed article on terrorism, drafting a media strategy in response to a terrorist campaign, preparing a briefing paper for a cabinet member and a team assignment examining ways in which terrorists might attempt to maximize the impact of their attacks and then the ways in which political leaders might counter those efforts.

There is no final exam; instead, the research paper will be due at 4 p.m. on the University-set date for the final exam.

Given the nature of the course, we may depart from this syllabus to examine the coverage of terrorist attacks and their impact on democratic societies as news events warrant. In any case, this syllabus is more of a road map than a blueprint, and we may adapt it as the course unfolds.

The very nature of terrorism, the violence done to so many innocent victims and the motives of terrorists will most likely lead to classroom debate—and that is not only positive, but necessary.
What we must preserve, however heated those discussions become, is respect for others and their opinions and a civility in tone.

Organization:

This course meets once a week (Monday, 12.30-3.20 p.m.) in LOCATION TO COME.

The first part of the course will focus on terrorism, the strategies, propaganda goals and tactics of terrorists, news coverage of terrorist attacks and their impact on public opinion and subsequent decisions. The course will then shift to case studies of a variety of terrorist attacks and to examination of the ways in which they are covered. The final classes will provide wrap-up discussions.

Requirements and Grading:

1) Three workplace assignments 45%
2) Team assignment, presentations and papers 15%
3) Research paper 30%
4) Class participation 10%

Class discussion is an essential part of this course. Please advise the instructor in advance of any absence.

Academic Integrity:

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University’s Academic Integrity code as detailed in the Scampus, the Student Guidebook, which contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00. It is the policy of the school to refer violations of the academic code, including plagiarism, to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for review.

Disability Accommodation:

Students requesting academic accommodations based on disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The office is in STU 301, and its phone number is 213-740-0776.
Required Readings:


Additional readings will be distributed as handouts in class and others on Blackboard through the semester and will be integral to the course.

Recommended Readings:


Students should also consult the listings in the excellent “Bibliographical Essay” at the end of Walter Laquer’s *The New Terrorism* (Oxford, 1999) for additional readings and as a starting point for research. Laquer’s *Voices of Terror* provides a compendium of writings by revolutionaries, guerrilla leaders and terrorists over the centuries along with very informed introductory notes.

Three other starting points for research are *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, a journal edited by Bruce Hoffman of RAND Corp., *Critical Studies on Terrorism* and *Terrorism and Political Violence*, both British journals. All are available at the USC Libraries.
Web Resources:

Students are expected to browse the World Wide Web to search for supplemental material. Good research will inform the analysis that is the key to both strong class participation and insightful position papers. Here are some sites that may prove helpful:

- Foreign Affairs: http://www.foreignaffairs.org
- Foreign Policy: http://www.foreignpolicy.com
- The White House: http://www.whitehouse.gov
- State Department: http://www.state.gov
- Defense Department: http://www.defenselink.mil
- CIA: http://www.cia.gov
- CIA Fact Book: http://odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook
- Council on Foreign Relations: http://www.cfr.org
- U.S. Military Academy: http://www.ctc.usma.edu

Several of these Web sites, notably those of the State Department, U.S. Military Academy and the Council on Foreign Relations, have excellent subsites dealing specifically with terrorism.

Introduction, Theory and History

August 27: Introduction

Initial discussion of terrorism, democracy and the news media. Outline of the course and its goals. The news media constitute the principal battleground for terrorists and the democratic governments they oppose; it is here the terrorists seek their greatest victory, and consequently it is here that democratic governments will try to protect their ability to make decisions in the public interest free of coercion. We will examine the resulting professional, political and ethical dilemmas for the news media, all of which are complicated by the growth in technical abilities and by the intensification of competition. We will discuss, as well, the challenges in crisis management posed by terrorism to public officials committed to democratic politics and to their media advisers. For immediacy, we will start with the recent attacks in Mumbai, India.

For Next Class:

September 3: Labor Day – University Holiday

September 10: Defining Terrorism

Terrorism, more than one might expect, is often a matter of definition. Understanding the various definitions, the long and often sharp debate behind them, is essential for serious study of terrorism. The lack of clear and widely accepted definitions complicates both political discourse and the work of journalists. This is also an introduction to the wide range of terrorist groups, their goals and tactics.

Although terrorism often is perceived or portrayed as the work of irrational fanatics, it is more typically a strategic choice, the result of a cost-benefit calculation with political goals. An examination of the motives of terrorists, of the planning that goes into terrorist attacks, the emphasis on the propaganda value in attacks, the proximate and ultimate goals of terrorists. How the limited impact of the first attacks on the World Trade Center led to the 9/11 attacks, how Al Qaida views the relationship between the United States and of conservative-to-moderate Arab regimes in its overall strategy, how suicide bombers are recruited.

For Next Class:

September 17: Terrorism in a Network Society—The 21st Century Model

The globalization of the world economy and of the new media and the increased political interdependence has spread terrorism, even in the name of purely domestic causes, ever more widely. The development of Al Qaida as an international terrorist network far outstrips the reach of any previous group. The challenge to Western governments posed by foreign groups and the issues Western news media must deal with as a result. The role and uses of the Internet. The international financing of terrorism.

For Next Class:
1) Bruce Hoffman, “Religion and Terrorism” and “Suicide Terrorism,” Inside Terrorism, pp 81-172.
2) Robert A. Pape, Dying to Win.

Assignment No. 1 – Op-ed piece on terrorism for newspaper publication. Themes to be discussed and agreed. 700 words in length. Due at the start of October 1 class.

September 24: Religious Fundamentalism and Terror

Terrorism moved from predominantly political or nationalist goals three decades ago to radical religious motivations, making its adherents more dedicated and its tactics more severe. Although terrorism has long been an element for some religious extremists, giving us the words in English of assassins, thugs and zealots, religious-based terrorism is now widely present in much of the Middle East, Africa and East and South Asia and spreading outward from there. News media and governments alike are challenged to differentiate the core religion and its believers from radicals and extremists.

For Next Class:
October 1: Shrinking the Space for Democratic Decision-Making; Terrorism as a Policy Driver

Democracies have struggled to cope with the terrorists, to protect their citizens, to safeguard civil liberties and to preserve the political “space” for making decisions. Terrorism within the triangle of political communication. The train bombing in Madrid, the Spanish parliamentary election and Spain’s withdrawal of troops from Iraq—compared with the Spanish responses to Basque terrorism. The conflict over Northern Ireland—the use of terrorism by the Irish Republican Army, both in the province and in London, and the British government’s efforts to fight it. Other examples from Western Europe in the 20th Century.

With a 24-hour cycle, news coverage of terrorism has become more than an opinion shaper; it is frequently a policy driver—the “CNN effect.” Whether a terrorist attack is small, even far away or on the monumental scale as the 9/11 attacks were, political leaders feel bound to respond, often immediately, usually in time for the evening news. Debate is thus joined quickly, perhaps precipitously, depriving policy-makers and citizens alike the time to analyze and debate responses. We will examine a number of examples where terrorism shaped governmental decisions, including counter-terrorist policies.

For Next Class:


Assignment No. 2 – Two-page outline of a strategic media plan to respond to an ongoing but low-level terrorist campaign. Themes to be discussed and agreed. Due at the start of class October 15.

October 8: How Do News Organizations Cover Terrorism? The Dilemmas for Journalists

Why are terrorist attacks news? How do news organizations deploy to cover them? What does a reporter actually do? What does a broadcast crew do? When do you go live with broadcast coverage? What images do you choose? What is on the “story lists,” who does the analysis, who
is a source? How much time, how much space? To understand the political implications of coverage, we will look at the mechanics of that coverage and the way news decisions are made.

In covering a terrorist attack, journalists are faced with the dilemma of providing good news coverage or augmenting terrorism’s propaganda value. What does the public need to know? We will continue the discussion that takes place within newsrooms and the debate between journalists and political leaders, asking what values journalists bring to the discussions and looking at censorship and legal restrictions as counter-terrorist measures.

For Next Class:


October 15: Issues of Approach, Image and Language in Covering Terrorism

A survey of news coverage of a variety of terrorist attacks in the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Russia, Israel and beyond to understand the different approaches taken by different news organizations within a medium and in different socio-political systems. What name to give those who carry out terrorist attacks? What pictures to print? What scenes to broadcast? And how to treat political leaders and public officials in the wake of an attack?

For Next Class:


October 22: Crisis Communication during Terrorist Attacks

In the wake of 9/11, the U.S. and other governments have put greater efforts into homeland security, the prevention of terrorism and improving the gathering of intelligence on organizations likely to launch terrorist attacks on civilian targets. Yet, there is a strong likelihood of new attacks. What model of crisis management would minimize the impact of such attacks and thus
preserve, even enhance, the space for democratic decision-making? What constitutes effective “perception management” following terrorist attacks? We also look at the acute, multiple-level challenges for political leaders and their public affairs advisers. Where to get reliable information, how to evaluate it in a global context, how to respond? Minute-to-minute tactics with an eye always on the horizon. The role of the public affairs officer in counter-terrorism. A discussion with former government officials and public relations professionals in crisis management.

For Next Class:

4) Background materials on coverage of 9/11 attacks.

**Assignment No. 3** -- Two-page briefing paper for cabinet-level government official on a recent terrorist attack, analyzing the goals of the attackers, providing background on the group and its issues, assessing the response of the government and providing advice to the official. Due at the start of class November 5.

**Case Studies in Media Coverage of Terrorism and Their Impact**

**October 29: The 9/11 Attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon**

Case presentation: The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon became a defining event in the spread of global terrorism—and in its coverage in the news media. We review and discuss major coverage by broadcast television, newspaper and newsmagazine outlets, analyzing the propaganda goals of Al Qaida terrorists, the character and quality of the coverage by different media and the responses of political leaders and government officials.

**For Next Class:**

Background materials on Chechen terrorism in Russia

**November 5: Chechen Terrorist Attacks in Moscow and Beslan**
Chechen nationalists, seeking independence from Russian rule, have taken their struggle from their embattled homeland to the heart of Moscow with the bombing of apartment buildings and later the taking of hundreds of hostages at a Moscow theater; last year, they took over a school in the Russian city of Beslan, holding children, parents and teachers hostage, until overwhelmed. In each case, the scenes were horrendous—burning apartment buildings, paralyzing gas pumped into the theater, a school turned into a free-fire zone, hundreds of victims. Were the attacks successful? Did the terrorism weaken, or harden, Russian will? Did they strengthen Chechen resolve? How did coverage change? How did the response of Russian authorities change? Did their crisis management come to include “perception management” as an element of counter-terrorism?

For Next Class:

Background materials on the train bombings in Madrid and their political consequences.

**November 12: The Madrid Train Bombings Change an Election**

Spaniards had resisted the terrorist campaigns of Basque separatists for decades, but the coordinated bombings of commuter trains going into Madrid a few days before parliamentary elections in 2004 led to the ouster of the government—and the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. What made the train bombings so effective? We examine the government’s initial response—and the public reaction.

For Next Class:

Background materials on Israel’s 1996 election and its approach to news coverage.

**November 19: News Media Coverage of Terrorism—The Israeli Case**

No country lives with more terrorism, day to day, than Israel. The issue is self-defense, through the news media as well as on the street. The question seems truly existential—one of survival for the nation as well as for individuals. What do the news media publish and broadcast, and what do they withhold lest they enhance the impact of the terrorist attacks? What is state or military censorship, and when should it be used? What is self-censorship or editorial restraint, and when is its use responsible? How does the Israeli news media’s report compare with that of foreign media? The big issue: The impact of terrorism on Israeli politics and, ultimately, on peace, and the role of the news media. Cases to be examined: How terrorist attacks have changed Israeli elections in 1992 and 1996.
Summing Up

November 26: Team Assignments — Class Presentations

With two partners, put yourself in the mind of a terrorist to plan the maximization of a terrorist attack for political ends. What elements should be enhanced to coerce government action? How can “effective” news coverage be ensured? What follow-up measures with a view again to the news media would the terrorist group take? What language would terrorists use, what images would they project? Then, take the position of a public affairs adviser to the government whose people have been attacked. What should be done to minimize the impact of the attack, to prevent the terrorization of the population despite the severity of the attack? Each team will make presentations for class discussion.

December 3: Doing It Better: You Find Better Ways to Respond to Terrorism and Reduce Its Political Impact

Wrap-up discussions. We imagine ourselves as members of a news bureau of a major news organization in a city hit by a terrorist attack. What is our coverage plan? What stories will we do? Whom will we seek interviews with? What will be the framework for our analysis? How will we endeavor to be “factual and accurate, truthful and fair – and compassion”? And beat the competition?

Assume the roles of top news executives who must have a national perspective, who must balance the public’s need and right to know against enhancing the impact of the terrorists’ attack. What will you put on the air, on the Internet, into the newspaper? From whom in the government will you seek guidance about what is “safe”? What do you decide to leave out as a matter of responsible journalism or self-censorship?

We switch roles and imagine ourselves as officials in the government whose citizens have just been attacked. What are our priorities? What will we tell the public – and how and when? What guidance will we give the news media on what they should, and should not, publish? How can we minimize the impact of the terrorists’ attack? What cooperation can we expect from our political opponents, from the news media? What do we want on the air, on the Internet, in the newspaper?

The Instructor:

Prof. Michael Parks, former director of the USC Annenberg School of Journalism, came to USC Annenberg in 2000 following his retirement as editor of the Los Angeles Times after 38 years in journalism, 25 of them as a foreign correspondent. He reported for The Times and for the Baltimore Sun from more than 110 countries, including China, Israel, Russia, South Africa and
Vietnam; he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting in 1987 for his coverage of the struggle against apartheid