Transnational Violence: Terrorism, Piracy, and Crime in Global and Historical Context
University of Cambridge
MPhil in International Relations and Politics

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Teaching: 2 hour weekly seminar (3pm – 5pm Mondays)

Course Overview

The 21st century has seen a revival of interest in transnational or ‘non-state’ violence by scholars and practitioners. Piracy, rebellion, private security, drug networks, and especially terrorism have increasingly become the subject of scholarly research and the focus of foreign policy. Much of this work tends to look at the weeds to ask policy relevant questions. While this is important, fewer observers take a step back to place these ‘new’ types of violence into a larger context in order to gain needed perspective on more policy relevant action. That is the aim of this course.

We will begin this course by looking at some major conceptual issues. In the first five meetings we will critically examine the definitions of terrorism, piracy, crime, private, public, etc. We will evaluate religious and secular motivations for violence, the rise of networks, and whether ‘state’ and ‘non-state’ are even useful categories. Starting with our sixth meeting until the end of the course, we will then look more closely at 9 historical and/or contemporary ‘case studies’ (loosely defined) ranging from 18th century piracy to ISIS. This will give us a chance to apply conceptual frameworks.

Learning Aims

This course aims to give students a historical and theoretical background upon which to evaluate violence in international relations. The goal is to critically examine popular conceptions and categorizations of violence ranging from terrorism and crime to war. Doing so should give students the tools to understand not only violence prevalent today but what may come in future decades. This is the reason why there is an emphasis on history. Historical episodes and the genealogies of current types of violence can give students a background to make judgements on what is happening around them in real time.

Teaching and Assessment

Paper
Students will write a 5000 word essay on one of 8 questions provided by the Instructor. There is also a non-assessed 2000 word practice essay, for which students will receive comments.
Presentations
Students will be responsible, with 1 or 2 others, for presenting and leading discussion for two seminars per term. This means coming up with questions and being a prominent part of the discussion for this week. Schedule will be developed after the beginning of term.

Class and Readings
All listed readings are required. You are also required to come to class ready to participate, even if it is not your week to lead discussion. However, learning to skim readings and extract the important points is a skill that is encouraged.

All readings are available through the library. Those for which the university has as an ebook are available on Moodle, as are those for which the professor was able to provide a PDF. All other books are available either through Seely Library or the Main University library as hard copies. Journal articles should be easily retrievable through the library.

If you have trouble getting a hold of readings please let me know ASAP.

Michaelmas Term

Week 1: State and Non-state, Public and Private Violence


Colas, Alejandro, and Bryan Mabee, eds. Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits, and Empires: Private Violence in Historical Context. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011. Ch. 2 (Patricia Owens) and Ch. 3 (Tarak Barkawi)


Week 2: Defining Terrorism, Piracy, and Crime


Week 3: Networks and Hierarchies


Week 4: Ideology and Violence


Week 5: The Role of Context


Week 6: Piracy and Privateering in the Caribbean 1650-1730


Ritchie, Robert C. Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986. Ch. 2,6,9


Week 7: Propaganda of the Deed, 1880-1930


Week 8: Algerian War of Independence


Week 9: The Philippines: The Moro National Liberation Front and Abu Sayyaf


Week 10: Private Military Companies


Avant, Deborah D. “Pragmatic Networks and Transnational Governance of Private Military and Security Services.” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 330–42.


Week 11: 21st Century Piracy


Jethro Norman, TBD


Week 12: al Qaeda, ISIS, and the Global Jihad


Week 13: US ‘War on Terror’


Week 14: Right Wing Violence


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