MEDIA, TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY

Online Course Syllabus

Prof. Dr. Victoria Fontan
vfontan@upeace.org

Overview of the Course

1. General description

As early as in 1996, Usama bin Laden declared that his aim was to directly affect the lives of ordinary Americans in terms of human and economic costs, as well as to initiate a global insurgency against infidel regimes. More than 10 years later, and in light of the current global economic recession, this goal seems to be finally in reach. While the number of acts of terrorism has slightly diminished since September 11th 2001, their intensity and scope throughout the world have become unprecedented. Whether through taking a flight or filling their gas tanks, citizens of the United States are being affected daily by the specter of a global insurgency. In the last 10 years, international “terrorism” has mutated from a being a cluster of exclusive organizations to a grass-root dogma that possesses a global reach. How did it come to this and what role did mass communication play in all this? How did al-Qaeda become ‘al-Qaedaism’, an ideological franchise that Usama bin Laden himself would have been unable to stop from spreading if he ever had chosen to?

This online course will assess the systemic nature and globalization of insurgencies in terms of the mass communication used by groups to grow, self-sustain, recruit militants, spread their identity and elicit support from their target audience. This will be facilitated by the analysis of five political insurgency networks: the Lebanese Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, the Iraqi insurgency, and several State zionist groups that contributed to the creation of the State of Israel. The course will prepare students to think analytically about terrorism and insurgency, and use various models of mass communication to understand their dynamics and processes. At the end of the course, the students are expected to have a sound knowledge of the field of mass communication applied to terrorism and insurgency.

2. Intended Participants

UPEACE Online MA Program

3. Pre- or Co-requisites

None
4. **Class format**

3.1 **Number of credits:** 2

3.2 **Number of sessions and length of course:** 6 sessions, 6 weeks

3.3 **Methodology**

This course is a seminar and will run as a class forum with limited lecturing by the facilitator. Emphasis will be placed on careful reading of the assigned texts and informed participation in class forums. It is an understatement to express that the reading load for this course is heavy. This is intentional, as this will create a need for student co-operation in reading and sharing information throughout the class.

To this effect, student-reading groups of four to five students will be established at the beginning of the course. It is intended that every week, before responding to the class forum, reading groups will have shared all materials and each student will have debriefed their peers on the readings that he or she chose to cover as part of that week’s reading load. This will enhance trust and co-operation among students.

Students should have read the assigned texts carefully during each week’s session in order to understand the main concepts and arguments put forth by the authors and to discuss these in class. In a forum format, students will debrief one another in relation to each reading that was carried out. Questions to be answered in the debriefing note, which should be no more than 500 words, ought to cover the following questions:

- what is the overall argument/point of the author?
- how is this author’s argument connected to this week’s session?

If for some reason there are more students than readings in a group for a given week, extra readings can be found in the “supplementary readings” section. Students with time and inclination can of course read all assigned readings for one given week. For each session, please see the forum called “Reading Exchange,” where you will add your contribution.

A movie will be showed in the first week of the course. The aim of this is to immerse students in their topic for the length of the course as well as to form a class cohesion that will enable debates to go deeper than in a traditional setting.

For the sake of establishing and maintaining a safe space for interaction, rules of engagement for dialogue will be established by the class in a forum at the beginning of the first week session. These should be followed throughout the course.

5. **Teacher role and student role**

Recognizing that adults are self-directed learners, the methodology for this course assumes a partnership between students and teachers. It assigns to students a central role in the construction of new knowledge aiming to nurture their capacities for
learning autonomously, i.e., critical reflection, self-management of, and willingness to take responsibility for, their learning, and to the teacher, the task of facilitating their learning and providing the expert knowledge that is the basis of this learning. It further recognizes that co-operative learning contributes to nurturing autonomy in learning, allowing students to participate more actively in the learning process and to benefit from the knowledge and experience of their peers. Praxis is also an essential part of the course, and students are expected to participate in various learning activities.

6. **Course requirements**

This course requires a substantial amount of reading, writing and participation. Students are expected to complete the assigned readings and written assignments on time, and participate in forum discussions. Its success depends upon the participation of all students.

7. **Assessment**

→ 40% Discussion and Participation

**Attendance and participation to forum questions**

Attendance is required of all students. Students will be graded on their class participation. Students should actively participate in class forum questions, demonstrating that they have read the assigned materials, thought through the arguments of the authors and related their analyses in the form of informed reflections. A poor attendance record will adversely affect your grade.

→ 60% Written Assignments: please make sure you respect required format as explained below

- 30% Paper #1;
- 30% Paper #2 (journal);

Both papers should be 5 pages, and should follow these guidelines: typed, standard plain letter size paper, double-spaced, 1.0-inch margins, 12pt Times New Roman font.

1- **The first paper will answer the following question:**

Using course material, discuss the following quote from Reg in *The Life of Brian*, Terry Jones, 1979:

“All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, pubic order, irrigation, roads, a fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?”

It should be analytical in nature. The goal is for students to begin to formulate informed positions on these issues and to make coherent and supported arguments in favor of these positions. Outside research is optional.
2. The second paper will be a journal where the students will have to personally reflect on their experience in the course, with regards to insurgency, terrorism, and the media. This exercise is designed as a daily debriefing for students, to allow them to relate their daily experience to the theoretical material covered in class.

Both papers should be submitted at the end of session 6. You will be able to upload your papers under the “Paper Submission” resource found in Session 6.

No late submissions will be accepted unless discussed with the Professor 48 hours prior to due date. This is non-negotiable.

8. General Objectives

The goal of this course is to provide students with a strong foundation to understand the formation of insurgencies, and the role of mass communication in relation to it. This class intends to help its students:

▪ Ban the word “terrorism” from their academic vocabulary
▪ Develop an understanding of “terrorism” and insurgency and how can we study them
▪ Establish an understanding of the main sources of insurgency and political violence
▪ Conduct their own research on how insurgencies have become globalised
▪ Create a dialogue on systems thinking as a means to address the globalization of insurgencies
▪ Analyze the role of the media in the conflict opposing a group and its opponent

The goal is for students to begin to think critically about these issues. At the end of this course, students will be able to read newspapers and journals and identify potential hot spots for conflict as well as devise recommendations for preventing such crises.

9. Facilitator’s Biographical Information:

Victoria Fontan, Head, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University for Peace, Costa Rica.
PhD in Peace and Development Studies, University of Limerick, Ireland (2003)
PhD Candidate in Education, Universidad De La Salle, Costa Rica
BA in Politics, University of Sussex, UK.
Disciplines: post-liberal peace, terrorism and insurgency studies.
## Detailed outline of instructional sessions and readings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Week 1:</strong></td>
<td>Defining terrorism, insurgency and communication strategies&lt;br&gt;Understanding the normative foundations of violence in relation to the three concepts above&lt;br&gt;Self-showing of “The Battle of Algiers” (1966) by Gillo Pontecorvo</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Week 2:</strong></td>
<td>Structural and cultural dimensions&lt;br&gt;Case study: al-Jazeera&lt;br&gt;Understanding the struggle over access within the arena of political violence</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Week 3:</strong></td>
<td>Media Influence and Systemic Political Outcomes&lt;br&gt;Case study: the role of the internet as a systemic agent of change&lt;br&gt;Assess the media’s role in the political outcome of violence: CNN effect, etc.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Week 4:</strong></td>
<td>Insurgencies in post-Saddam Iraq</td>
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<td>Week 5:</td>
<td>Hezbollah (Lebanon)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Week 6:</td>
<td>Israel-Palestine, theological dimensions of State Zionism</td>
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