POLS-Y 200 Terrorism of Old and New Generations

Shortly after the attacks on 9/11, the US Department of Defense reported that “we cannot and will not know precisely where and when America’s interests will be threatened [and] when America will come under attack.” Although 9/11 was formally regarded as an act of war, The Department of Defense promptly pointed out that “the weapon of terrorism” – although “brutal” and “faceless” – differed from “traditional armies waging traditional campaigns.” These citations well illustrate the unambiguous nature of terrorism: its unpredictability and destructiveness. Yet, they also highlight more ambiguous problems associated with conceptualizing the meaning of terrorism: although terrorism is viewed as an extension of politics, the means it employs escape definitions conventionally reserved for a war conflict. Said ambiguities have been further compounded in the last decade by attempts to connect the murky complexities of “terrorism” with a more straightforward understanding of “war.” The fashionable slogan “War on Terror” has been the prime example of obscuring the relation between war and terror: as our knowledge of the phenomenon of terrorism apparently increases, the connection between “war” and “terror” becomes less clear. The rationale behind this course is to analyze the strategies and tactics of terrorism throughout history and to: provide conceptual understanding of this phenomenon; examine political and societal aspects of modern and contemporary terrorism; and explore broader ramifications of the “War on Terror” in the American context.