



# Course program and reading list

Semester 1 Year 2024

**School:** Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy M.A

## The New Theater of Terror: Online Terrorism

### Lecturer:

Prof. Gabriel Weimann [gabriel.weimann@post.runi.ac.il](mailto:gabriel.weimann@post.runi.ac.il)

### Teaching Assistant:

Mr. Alexander Pack [alexander.pack02@post.runi.ac.il](mailto:alexander.pack02@post.runi.ac.il)

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Course No.:	Course Type :	Weekly Hours :	Credit:
2639	Lecture	2	2

Course Requirements :	Group Code :	Language:
Final Paper	241263900	English

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## Course Description

### Introduction

Terrorists have always relied on the mass media for publicity, psychological warfare, propaganda and political achievements. But then came the Internet and social media. As it burgeoned, the Internet was hailed as an integrator of cultures and a medium for businesses, consumers, and governments to communicate with one another. It appeared to offer unparalleled opportunities for the creation of a forum in which the "global village" could meet and exchange ideas, stimulating and sustaining democracy throughout the world. However, with the enormous growth in the size and use of the Internet, utopian visions of the promise of the online media were challenged by the proliferation of pornographic and violent content on the web and by the use of the Internet and online platforms by extremist organizations of various kinds. Terrorist groups started using online platforms to distribute their propaganda, to communicate with their supporters, to foster

public awareness of and sympathy for their causes, and even to execute operations. After appearing with their own websites, terrorists and extremists added social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Telegram, 8Chan, TikTok and more to spread their messages, recruit members and gather intelligence. Recently the Dark Net, Cloud storage services and even the emerging Metaverse were added to their online arsenal. This course examines, from communications research perspective, the relationships between modern terrorists and the new media, how terrorists use the online platforms, how democracies can respond to the challenge, and what are the prices of various measures.

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## Course Goals

This course is focused on online terrorism from the communication perspective and theory, thus applying concepts, theories, and methods from communication studies to achieve these goals:

1. To understand the emergence of online terrorism on the Internet and social media including the most recent platforms.
  2. To enhance understanding of the strategies, tactics, appeals and platforms used by cyber-savvy terrorists, applying concepts and methods from the studies on psychological warfare, propaganda, digital marketing and more.
  3. To introduce and examine some of the possible counter measures, examining the effectiveness of various counter campaigns.
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## Grading

Student grades are based on one mid-term assignment (30%) and final exam (70%). Detailed instructions for the assignment will be given during the course.

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## Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this course, the students will:

1. Have become aware that online terrorism is a new mode of global conflict, in a new arena, presenting new challenges to counterterrorism and global security.
2. Have developed an understanding of the various strategies, tactics and appeals used by online terrorism for radicalization, recruitment, propaganda, psychological warfare, etc., as well as the various optional counter measures.
3. Be able to analyze terrorist online campaigns by applying theories and methods

from the growing literature on terrorism and communication.

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## Lecturer Office Hours

After Class, Fridays 1 pm.

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## Teaching Assistant

Teaching Assistant: Mr. Alexander Pack, [alexander.pack01@post.runi.ac.il](mailto:alexander.pack01@post.runi.ac.il)

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## Additional Notes

This course involves multimedia presentations and discussions in class including live surfing onto online contents (terrorist websites, social media, online archives, etc.). Thus, attendance in class is required and will be monitored every lesson. All the required material including the PowerPoint presentations, video clips, reading material – will be posted online.

**Please note this warning:** Due to its subject, this course involves viewing hateful and violent videos, images, and texts. Some of these unpleasant and even gruesome contents will also be discussed in class.

### \* About the Lecturer:

Dr. Gabriel Weimann is a Full Professor of Communication at ICT, Reichman University, Professor (Emeritus) at the Department of Communication at Haifa University, Israel and a Visiting Professor at the University of Georgetown. His research interests include the study of media effects, political campaigns, persuasion and influence, modern terrorism and the mass media. He published nine books: *Communicating Unreality* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2000); *The Influentials: People Who Influence People* (State University of New York Press, 1995); *The Theater of Terror* (New York: Longman, 1994); *Hate on Trial* (Toronto: Mosaic, 1986); *The Singaporean Enigma* (Jerusalem: Tzivonim, 2001); *Terror in the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2006), *Freedom and Terror* (London: Routledge, 2011); *Social Research in Israel* (Jerusalem: Tzivonim, 2015), and *Terrorism in Cyberspace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). His papers and research reports, about 210 publications, have been published in scientific journals such as *Journal of Communication*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Communication Research*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *American Sociological Review* and others. He received numerous grants and awards from international foundations, including the Fulbright Foundation, the Canadian-Israeli Foundation, the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, the German National Research Foundation (D.F.G.), the Sasakawa Foundation, United States Institute for Peace (USIP), The Woodrow Wilson Center, the Australian Research Council and others. Prof. Weimann was a Visiting Professor at various

universities including the University of Pennsylvania, Stanford University, American University (DC), Hofstra University, Lehigh University, Georgetown University (in USA), University of Mainz and University of Munich (in Germany), Carleton University (in Canada), NYU branch in Shanghai, China, and the National University of Singapore.

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## Reading List

### **Course Outline**

**(The reading items for each chapter will be provided)**

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**Class 1: Opening, The Theater of Terror Conceptualization**

**Class 2: Terrorism Enters Cyberspace**

**Class 3: Terrorist Online Psychological Warfare**

**Class 4: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Rhetoric**

**Class 6: When New Terrorism Met the New Media**

**Class 7: Lone Wolves and Virtual Packs**

**Class 8: Going Darker: Dark Net and Terrorism**

**Class 9: New Trends in Online Violent Extremism**

**Class 10: Cyberterrorism: A Digital Pearl Harbor?**

**Class 11: Fighting Back: Countering Online Extremism and Terrorism**

**Class 12: Conclusion and a Look at the Future (Metaverse, Artificial Intelligence).**