

Chapter 9

Teaching About Terrorism Through Simulations

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ABSTRACT

Creating positive learning outcomes regarding terrorism can be challenging. The nature of the topic offers several obstacles to learner understanding, not least of which is how to enable students to transcend their own cultural perspectives and develop deeper and more objective insights regarding the groups and causes that foster terrorism. Following an exploration of the growth in terrorism as an academic subject and the challenges posed to teaching in this area, this chapter presents a possible solution by describing an online role play exercise that has proven learning results over more than 25 years of usage. This tool, grounded in an experiential learning approach, can assist in easing some of the stresses faced by teachers and institutions, while also offering deeper and more insightful discoveries for participants.

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INTRODUCTION

The burgeoning growth of radical groups and ideologies around the world has seen a related expansion of terrorism as a 'subject' to be delivered in an educational context. The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror spurred rapid development in higher education courses that either focus wholly on terrorism or include component modules on the topic. Today the need for students and teachers to grasp this phenomenon has not abated and educational providers are increasingly required to offer learning aimed at preparing graduates for careers in security and counter-terrorism.

Despite all this activity and demand, creating effective learning outcomes regarding terrorism can be challenging (Pinar Alakoc, 2018). The nature of the topic offers several obstacles to learner understanding, not least of which is how to enable students to transcend their own cultural perspectives and develop deeper and more objective insights regarding the groups and causes that foster terrorism. Achieving such comprehension by climbing the dry mountain of scholarly literature on terrorism is not likely, yet neither can traditional 'hands-on' experiences such as field trips be offered. At the same time, the emotive aspects of terrorism can be challenging for teachers to deal with, particularly in a political and legal environment that reacts strongly and punitively to perceived 'sympathy' for terrorists.

How then can educators best impart a multifaceted understanding of terrorism as a form of political violence? Following an exploration of the growth in terrorism as an academic subject and the challenges posed to teaching in this area, this chapter presents a possible solution by describing an online role play exercise that has learning results proven over more than 25 years of usage. This tool, grounded in an experiential learning approach, can assist in easing some of the stresses faced by teachers and institutions, while also offering deeper and more insightful discoveries for participants.

The growth in scholarly publication on terrorism after 9/11 is staggering. An audit of book titles available via *Amazon* carried out by Silke (2009) noted that prior to the attacks 1,310 non-fiction works had been published containing the word 'terrorism' in their title. But within the subsequent seven years, another 2,281 titles had been added. Dolnik (2015) reports that a new book on terrorism is released roughly every six hours! Similar studies on journal outputs covering terrorism offer comparable results: within four or five years after 9/11, the volume of scholarly articles produced on terrorism had exceeded the entire number produced in all the decades prior. Whole new journals devoted to terrorism studies were created and

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