THE MIDDLE EAST TODAY

CAS IR 511

Fall Semester 2014

Mr. Gregory Aftandilian

Wednesdays, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

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Course syllabus

The Middle East is in the midst of one its most unstable periods in its modern history. The so-called Arab Spring, which led to the ouster of several autocratic leaders, has led to new conflicts within the countries that have experienced revolutionary upheavals, sometimes between secularists and Islamists, and sometimes between sectarian and tribal forces. Hopes of a new democratic order emerging in the region have been largely dashed. Meanwhile, the ongoing Syrian civil war has exacerbated Sunni-Shia tensions in the region and has created conditions where extremist forces, as exemplified by the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant, threaten the regional political order, with this group now controlling not only large parts of eastern Syria but central and western parts of Iraq. Some commentators have even opined that the Sykes-Picot accord, drafted by Britain and France, and which served as the basis for the post-World War I mandates and eventual independent states in the Levant, may be unraveling. On top of these crises is the renewed military conflict between Israel and Hamas in the aftermath of another failed U.S. attempt to broker a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, and the protracted and uncertain negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 countries (members of the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) over Iran’s nuclear program.

The goal of the course is to expose students to the complexities of the region and help them understand the profound changes that are taking place. Students will learn about the development of the state system and the threats to this system, why authoritarianism has lasted so long, the causes of the Arab Spring, why democratization has failed to take root, ideological struggles between Islamists and secularists, and sectarian divisions and conflicts. In addition, the course will also examine gender and minorities issues. Finally, the course will examine the role of the United States in today’s Middle East, and the controversies surrounding the role it and other outside powers have played and are playing in the region.
Course requirements

Each student will prepare a graduate-quality research paper (15-20 pages double-spaced) on a subject of his or her choosing, with the approval of the instructor, related to a particular aspect of Middle East politics. A hard copy of the paper will be due on the last day of class (December 10). There will be a mid-term exam (October 22) and a final exam (December 17). Class participation will be mandatory. The basis for a student’s final grade is explained below:

- Mid-Term Exam: 30%
- Final Exam: 30%
- Research Paper: 30%
- Class Participation: 10%

All students are expected to complete reading assignments in the syllabus before each class and to hand in their research papers on time.

The instructor reserves the right to drop a student’s grade, for example, from a B+ to a B, if a student fails to complete the assignments on time.

Required texts


2) Nicola Pratt, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner Publishers)

3) James Glevin, *The Arab Uprisings* (Oxford University Press)


Other required readings: Some articles listed in the class readings are accessible via the Internet or through the e-journal libraries available for BU students. Others will be placed on reserve in the Mugar library and in a folder in the IR administrative office in 156 Bay State Road. Some press articles will be handed out in class.

In addition, as classroom participation is mandatory, and the title of this course is “The Middle East Today,” students will be expected to keep up with current Middle East developments by reading one major newspaper on a daily basis, such as the New York Times, Washington Post, International Herald Tribune, Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor, the Guardian, or the Financial Times.
Course weekly topics and reading assignments (subject to change)

**September 3:** Introduction. Review of course requirements and student responsibilities. Overview of the modern history of the Middle East. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, European colonialism in the Middle East, and the emergence of nationalist movements. An examination of the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the region.

**September 10:** The emergence of the state system in the Middle East, post-World War II. Conflicts with European countries, and the U.S.-Soviet rivalry in the region. The prevalence of authoritarianism, the development of the security state, the cooptation of civil society, and conflicts between revolutionary republican regimes and monarchies. Viewing of the BBC documentary film, “The Other Side of Suez, 1956.”


**September 17:** The political economy of the Middle East region. Demographic challenges in the region and youth unemployment. The implications of the “rentier state” on political development. Economic reform, crony capitalism, and their discontents.


**September 24:** Developments leading to the Arab Spring.


**October 1:** Conflicts within the Arab Spring countries, the role of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups and their opponents.


October 8: Bahrain, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the growing Sunni-Shia divide.


October 15: The rise of political Islam. Review of past and present Islamist trends in the region and the differences between violent and non-violent groups.

Readings: Ayoob book, chapters 1, 2, 4, and 7

October 22: Mid-term exam in first half of class. The rise of political Islam and the U.S. response. Analysis of the President Obama’s speech in Cairo in January 2009. U.S. efforts to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood and myths and realities surrounding this relationship.


November 5: Latest developments in the Israeli-Palestinian situation, the Gaza war, and the U.S. response.

November 12: Viewing of film, Elusive Peace

November 19: Fallout from the Iraq war, sectarian grievances, and the new threat from ISIL. Instability in Libya.


November 26: No class because of Thanksgiving recess.

December 3: Iran, the nuclear issue, Saudi Arabia, and U.S. Policy


December 10: Last day of class. Research papers due. Gender and minority issues.

December 17: Final Exam