The Politics of the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf

CAS IR 504, Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University

Spring Semester 2017

Instructor: Mr. Gregory Aftandilian

2:30 p.m. to 5:15 p.m., Wednesdays

Classes held in CAS 318 (room equipped with AV)

Office hours: 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Wednesdays, room 204, 156 Bay State Road

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Course description

This course is designed to provide students with a deep understanding of the politics of the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf. Students will come to understand the major narratives about the Gulf by examining the region’s modern history, politics, economy and security, as well as the role of outside players in this region.

Much of the news about this region has focused on the Sunni-Shia rivalry and conflict, particularly between Iran and Saudi Arabia and elements allied with them. While there is no doubt that this sectarian conflict has intensified in recent years, there has also been times when such countries and peoples therein have cooperated politically, culturally and economically. Students will critically assess the relations between the Gulf countries, the role that nationalism and religion has played as legitimizing forces for these countries as well as factors dividing some of them, and the issue of transnational identities versus national loyalties.

The course will also critically examine the impact oil has had on the political development, demographics, and geopolitics of the region, as well as its importance to international security. Students will learn about the 1978-79 Iranian revolution and its impact, the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its aftermath. Students will also learn about the 2015 nuclear deal signed between Iran and the P5+1 countries (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) that remains controversial among most Gulf Arab states. Finally, the course will examine domestic pressures in these countries for political change and why such efforts have either failed or have been stymied.

The main objective of the course is to supply students with the theoretical skills and empirical evidence necessary to evaluate and develop their own arguments about contemporary politics in the Gulf.
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 the politics of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. A hard copy of the paper will be due in class on May 3. There will be a midterm exam on March 1 and a final exam during the week of May 7 (day and time to be determined). 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 before each class and 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. Because the course meets one day a week, class attendance is mandatory. Students will only be excused because of a religious holiday, illness or a family emergency. An unexcused absence from class will result in a lower, overall grade.

Required texts (all paperbacks)—available at Barnes and Noble, Kenmore Square


Frederick Wehry, Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings, Columbia University Press, 2014

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 hard copy in the Mugar library or through electronic library copy. Some press articles will be handed out in class. Students will be expected to keep up with current developments in the Gulf region by reading one major newspaper on a daily basis, in hard copy or online, such as: New York Times, Washington Post, International New York Times, Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor, the Guardian, or the Financial Times.
Academic Conduct Code

Boston University’s Academic Conduct Code is designed to assist in the development of a supportive and productive learning environment. It is both a description of the University’s ethical expectations of students as well as a guarantee of students’ rights and responsibilities as members of a learning community. The Code provides clarity related to policy and procedure regarding academic conduct.

For students, the Code establishes an environment of integrity and professionalism that helps to assure each individual of receiving appropriate recognition for his or her work. The ethical decisions that students face in an academic environment are similar to those they will encounter routinely in the professional world they will enter upon graduation or where they are currently employed. The Code allows faculty to conduct a fair and accurate evaluation of student performance and to maintain a supportive and just learning environment. Academic integrity is a critical component of such an environment, giving faculty the freedom to extend their role as educators to include serving as mentors and colleagues as well as instructors. For administrative staff, the Code gives them the ability to deal more effectively with students, and to work on a student’s behalf both within the University and outside it. This respect for universally recognized ethical values affects the University’s reputation in both the academic and professional communities of which it is a part. This reputation is essential to the success of not only the current generation of students, but previous and future generations as well.

All Boston University students are expected to maintain high standards of academic honesty and integrity. It is the responsibility of every undergraduate student to be aware of the Academic Conduct Code’s contents and to abide by its provisions. The Academic Conduct Committee of the individual School or College, which is composed of students, faculty and staff, has jurisdiction over all charges of academic misconduct brought against students.

In all charges of academic misconduct against a student, the student is entitled to full procedural fairness in any disciplinary proceedings. The Academic Conduct Code details the guidelines governing disciplinary proceedings. It also articulates the University’s philosophy of discipline, defines violations of the code, and enumerates penalties applicable under the code.

I. Philosophy of Discipline
The objective of Boston University in enforcing academic rules is to promote a community atmosphere in which learning can best take place. Such an atmosphere can be maintained only so long as every student believes that his or her academic competence is being judged fairly and that he or she will not be put at a disadvantage because of someone else’s dishonesty. Penalties should be carefully determined so as to be no more and no less than required to maintain the desired atmosphere. In defining violations of this code, the intent is to protect the integrity of the educational process.
II. Academic Misconduct
Academic misconduct is conduct by which a student misrepresents his or her academic accomplishments, or impedes other students’ opportunities of being judged fairly for their academic work. Knowingly allowing others to represent your work as their own is as serious an offense as submitting another’s work as your own.

III. Violations of This Code
Violations of this code comprise attempts to be dishonest or deceptive in the performance of academic work in or out of the classroom, alterations of academic records, alterations of official data on paper or electronic resumes, or unauthorized collaboration with another student or students. Violations include, but are not limited to:

A **Cheating on examination.** Any attempt by a student to alter his of her performance on an examination in violation of that examination’s stated or commonly understood ground rules.

B **Plagiarism.** Representing the work of another as one’s own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: copying the answers of another student on an examination, copying or restating the work or ideas of another person or persons in any oral or written work (printed or electronic) without citing the appropriate source, and collaborating with someone else in an academic endeavor without acknowledging his or her contribution. Plagiarism can consist of acts of commission-appropriating the words or ideas of another-or omission failing to acknowledge/document/credit the source or creator of words or ideas (see below for a detailed definition of plagiarism). It also includes colluding with someone else in an academic endeavor without acknowledging his or her contribution, using audio or video footage that comes from another source (including work done by another student) without permission and acknowledgement of that source.

C **Misrepresentation or falsification of data** presented for surveys, experiments, reports, etc., which includes but is not limited to: citing authors that do not exist; citing interviews that never took place, or field work that was not completed.

D **Theft of an examination.** Stealing or otherwise discovering and/or making known to others the contents of an examination that has not yet been administered.

E **Unauthorized communication during examinations.** Any unauthorized communication may be considered prima facie evidence of cheating.

F **Knowingly allowing another student to represent your work as his or her own.** This includes providing a copy of your paper or laboratory report to another student without the explicit permission of the instructor(s).

G **Forgery, alteration, or knowing misuse of graded examinations, quizzes, grade lists, or official records of documents,** including but not limited to transcripts from any institution, letters of recommendation, degree certificates, examinations, quizzes, or other work after submission.

H **Theft or destruction of examinations or papers** after submission.
I. Submitting the same work in more than one course without the consent of instructors.

J. Altering or destroying another student’s work or records, altering records of any kind, removing materials from libraries or offices without consent, or in any way interfering with the work of others so as to impede their academic performance.

K. Violation of the rules governing teamwork. Unless the instructor of a course otherwise specifically provides instructions to the contrary, the following rules apply to teamwork: 1. No team member shall intentionally restrict or inhibit another team member’s access to team meetings, team work-in-progress, or other team activities without the express authorization of the instructor. 2. All team members shall be held responsible for the content of all teamwork submitted for evaluation as if each team member had individually submitted the entire work product of their team as their own work.

L. Failure to sit in a specifically assigned seat during examinations.

M. Conduct in a professional field assignment that violates the policies and regulations of the host school or agency.

N. Conduct in violation of public law occurring outside the University that directly affects the academic and professional status of the student, after civil authorities have imposed sanctions.

O. Attempting improperly to influence the award of any credit, grade, or honor.

P. Intentionally making false statements to the Academic Conduct Committee or intentionally presenting false information to the committee.

Q. Failure to comply with the sanctions imposed under the authority of this code.

Course weekly topics and reading assignments (subject to change)

January 25: Introduction. Review of course requirements and student work responsibilities. An examination of the history of the region and the legacy of cooperation, rivalry, and conflict between Persians and Arabs.

February 1: British imperial interests in the Gulf region; the modern history of Iran to World War II and Reza Shah’s modernization project and dictatorship; the consolidation of power by Ibn Saud and the establishment of Saudi Arabia.

February 8: Iran during and immediately after World War II; U.S., Soviet, and British policies in Iran; the Mossadeq period; the 1953 coup and its legacy.


February 15: British withdrawal from the Gulf and the independence of the smaller Gulf states; the rise of Mohammad Reza Shah and his delusions of grandeur; the U.S. “Twin Pillar” strategy and reliance on Iran and Saudi Arabia to play policemen in the Gulf; the causes of the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war and their impact on the region; the theoretical construct of viewing the Gulf as a regional security complex.


February 22: The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and its rollback; the Saudi decision to allow massive numbers of U.S. forces into the kingdom; the change in U.S. security policy from “Over the Horizon” to the establishment of bases in the Gulf Arab states, and opposition to this policy from Osama Bin Laden and other radical Islamists.


March 1: Mid-term exam in first half of class. The Iraq war of 2003 and the motivations of the Bush administration.


March 8: No Class Because of Spring Break

March 15: The impact of the Iraq war on Iraqi and regional politics.


March 22: Recent Iranian politics and the nuclear issue.


March 29: Saudi internal developments and the political economy of oil


April 5: Sectarian conflicts in Bahrain and other Gulf states.


April 12: Sectarian conflicts in the region (continued)

April 19: The Yemeni conflict and outside intervention


April 26: Political and economic issues impacting the Gulf Cooperation Council


May 3: Last day of class. Research papers due in class. Gender and labor issues in the Gulf. Viewing of the BBC short documentary, “100 Women: The Saudi women challenging male guardianship.”


Week of May 8 –Final Exam—day and time to be determined