Introduction to the Middle East

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Description

The current popular uprisings in the Middle East underscore the dynamism and vitality of a region that has played an important role in human history since ancient times. This course introduces students to the major historical developments in this region from the rise of Islam to the present.

Images & Realities
Extreme violence, irrational hatred, never-ending conflict, oppression of women, political terrorists, Islamic militants: These are the dominant images of the Middle East since the late 1960s—and especially so after 9/11. But wait: Wasn’t that Anderson Cooper of CNN running around Cairo’s Tahrir Square in January 2011, rooting for the Egyptian Revolution against President Hosni Mubarak, erstwhile ally of the US? And wasn’t that President Obama celebrating the Arab peoples for setting an example to the rest of the world through their youth-led movements for democracy, freedom, self-determination and social justice?

Suddenly—and briefly?—from 2011, the word “Arab” became associated more frequently with “Spring” than it is with “terrorism”, as popular uprisings swept across the Arab world from Morocco to Yemen and from Egypt to Syria.

What happened? Did the peoples of the Middle East suddenly change, or just our image of them? How do images shape realities—and vice-versa? Will this positive image last, or will the tried-and-tested “US vs. Them”, clash-of-civilizations framework reassert itself? Is it already doing so?

100 years ago there was no Middle East. Neither the name nor the countries currently populating this region of the world existed. How did the Middle East come about? What would the history of this region look like if we tried to see it from the inside, through the eyes of the peoples who have long lived there? What are the competing frameworks of analysis and sources that historians have used to construct narratives about the region’s past? What is displayed and what is hidden in these histories? How can we separate fact from fiction, and distinguish persuasive, evidence-based explanations from fanciful, ideologically-driven ones?

These are not just academic questions. The US is knee-deep in the Middle East. The continuation of the US as a world power is in large part dependent on its control of the region’s energy resources. The US military has been waging overt and covert wars in several Middle Eastern countries; and political discourses, even about purely domestic issues, are filled with references to Islam, oil, Israel and other Middle East-related topics. In short, the
relationship between the US and the Middle East directly affects your life now, and will continue to do so for decades to come. Understanding the history of this region, therefore, is of vital importance. History 12 is a step in that direction.

**Goals**

This introductory course has four goals: it is designed to:

- Provide you with basic literacy in the field of Middle East history: Places, peoples, events and key personalities.
- Explore what it means to do history by making visible the diverse approaches and methodologies used to construct narratives about change over time.
- Supply you with tools to educate yourself, to contextualize current developments, and to prepare you for more advanced courses in the Dept. of History (such as 109C) or courses in other departments that require some background in the history of the Middle East.
- To augment, primarily through weekly assignments, the cultivation of a historical sensibility and the skills that you will need regardless of career path: training in critical thinking, writing, and thematic synthesis.

**Content**

The diverse peoples of Southwest Asia/North Africa (a region today known as “The Middle East”) have a rich and remarkable history. They established some of the earliest centers of agriculture-based civilizations and urban life, carried the messages of the world's three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), and served as the economic and cultural middlemen of the world system during the medieval and early modern periods. The brief Part I of this course provides an outline of these and other themes up to the 17th century, setting the stage for Part II: a sweeping overview of the intense social, economic and cultural transformations of the 18th and 19th centuries that produced the Middle East as we know it today.

Part III covers the formative colonial period from the late 19th century to mid-20th century. This era witnessed the demise of empires; the emergence of a new state system, most of it under the colonial domination of Britain and France; and the rise of nationalist, social and religious movements that are still with us today. This was also the era of the discovery of oil, of territorial partitions, and of massive demographic displacements that lie at the root of regional conflicts that are also still with us today. Part IV covers the post-colonial period from the Cold War to the present. This will be the most familiar and compelling to most of you, not least due to the increasing involvement of the US in the affairs of the region. The 1953 CIA overthrow of a democratically-elected government in Iran; the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979); the economic shift to a neoliberal economic order; the two invasions of Iraq in 1991 and 2003; and the current popular uprisings known as the “Arab Spring,” are some of the topics that will be covered. Throughout, the major themes will be illustrated through case studies of specific countries as well as through the study of the causes and consequences of broader historical trends.

**Framework**

Two organizing principles guide the presentation of information:

(i) “They” are not essentially different from “Us.” The Middle East is not an exotic and mysterious region intelligible only to the initiated: its historical developments can be understood using the same units of analysis commonly applied to the study of other regions.
(ii) Facts acquire meanings through interpretative frameworks. The arguments made in the assigned texts, lectures and films represent a wide range of approaches to this region’s history. It is essential that you maintain a critical perspective and carefully evaluate the merits of each argument.

Requirements

Readings

Required texts include academic books, primary documents, and in-depth scholarly articles that address the key developments in the history of this region. Material also includes social biographies of “ordinary” people, novels and films. The latter will help you to relate to the peoples of the Middle East on a human level, to recognize that their societies are far more diverse and complex than is generally assumed, and to understand the myriad ways in which ordinary people struggle for survival in a fast-changing world.

Grading

In addition to attending lectures, each student is responsible for participating in discussion sections and for completing weekly assignments. Your Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) will explain in detail what is expected in terms of participation and the assignments, and how they figure into the calculation of the discussion grade (20%). The remainder is covered by a take-home 2-3 page essay (10%) due February 10; a mid-semester take-home exam (30%) due March 10; and a final in-class exam (40%). Significant improvement in performance over the semester will be rewarded.

The weekly discussion assignments are not individually graded, but they must be turned in to your GSI prior to the meeting of the discussion section if they are to count. The small essay covers Part I of the course. The mid-term take-home exam will cover the first two parts of the course with emphasis on Part II. Both will be distributed a week prior to the due date. Unless prior arrangements are made, overdue papers will be penalized a one half-grade per day. The take-home essay and exam should have a cover page with a title, your name, section, date and course number in the lower right-hand corner. Pages should be double-spaced with 12 pt. Times New Roman font and one-inch margins. The final exam will cover the whole course, but with focus on Parts III & IV.

Readings

All readings are compulsory; primary source readings are marked *.
- If unable to find the cited latest version of a textbook, previous versions are authorized; online catalogs will provide respective tables of contents to identify the equivalent pp.
- The following books can be purchased or checked out from Library Reserve:


IMPORTANT: Any additional readings will be posted on bSpace at https://bspace.berkeley.edu
Resources

Lectures & Events – The Center for Middle Eastern Studies hosts a lecture series every semester, which attracts some of the best scholars on the Middle East. For information, check out the CMES web site at: www.ias.berkeley.edu/cmes

Films on the Middle East – In addition to the holdings at Moffitt & the Pacific Film Archives, take advantage of the Arab Film Festival (arabfilmfestival.org) and the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (sfjff.org)

News websites – News about the Middle East is reported by the corporate media in the US in ways that are strikingly different from the coverage in Europe, Asia or the Middle East itself. Check out the corporate media, such as the New York Times & CNN, but also try to become familiar with alternative media coverage. In addition, take a look at websites of news organizations in other country to get a taste of what the rest of the world reads about the Middle East. The following is but a small sample:

Britain: Guardian (guardian.co.uk), BBC (bbc.co.uk/news)
Egypt: Mada Masr (http://www.madamasr.com/), Al-Ahram Weekly (ahram.org.eg)
France: Le Monde Diplomatique in English (mondediplo.com)
Israel: Haaretz (haaretz.com)
Lebanon: Daily Star (dailystar.com.lb)

Additional sources:
Jadaliyya (jadaliyya.com)
MERIP (merip.org)
The Forward (forward.com)
Al-Jazeera (aljazeera.com)

COURSE SCHEDULE
All readings required; *=Primary document

Part I—Beginnings & Frames

Jan 22, 24: Is There a Middle East? What & Where is it?
Gelvin, Introduction & Ch. 1: pp.1-24; Burke, ch. 1: pp.1-32
Lockman, “Orientalism & Empire”

Jan 27, 29, 31: Muslim Civilizations Before European Hegemony
Eaton, “Islamic History as Global History”
Fazlullah, “The Mongol Conquest of Baghdad”

Feb 3, 5, 7: Gunpowder Empires & the Early Modern Age
Gelvin, Chs. 2-4: pp.25-56
Quataert, The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922, Chs. 2-3

FEB 10: SMALL TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS
Part II—Modernity & the Long 19th Century

Feb 10, 12, 14: The Great Transformation: Themes & Analytical Frames
Gelvin, Part II (in full): pp.69-109, 133-177 (pp.109-33 are a photograph section)
Owen, “Egypt & Europe: From French Expedition to British Occupation”

NO CLASS FEB 17: PRESIDENT’S DAY

Feb 19, 21, 24: Case Study: The Making of Modern Egypt
Burke, Ch. 3: pp.45-63
Fahmy, Ch.2, “The Birth of an Army: Conscription & Resistance”
* The Earl of Cromer, Modern Egypt

Feb 26: Case Study: From Persia to Iran
Burke, Chs. 7: pp.102-116
Abrahamian, “The Constitutional Revolution”
  * The Tobacco Concession, 1890

Feb 28, Mar 3, 5: Case Study: Bilad al-Sham
Burke, Chs. 2, 4: pp.35-47, 64-79

Mar 7: The Young Turks & the Armenian Genocide
Deniz Kandiyoti, “End of Empire: Islam, nationalism & women in Turkey”

MARCH 10: MID-TERM TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS

Part III—WW1 to the Cold War: Colonialism, Nationalism & State-Building

Mar 10, 12: WW1 & the New State System
Gelvin, Chs. 11-13: pp.184-216

Mar 14, 17: Independent State-Building in Turkey & Iran
Burke, Chs. 12, 15-16: pp.178-186, 223-252
* Mustapha Kemal, “Design for a Modern Secular Turkish State” (1925)

Mar 19, 21: The Arabian Peninsula Before & After the Discovery of Oil
Burke, Chs. 5, 25: pp.80-88, 405-420
Daniel Yergin, The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power, Ch. 15
* Aramco World, “The Telephone Service”

MARCH 24, 26, 28: SPRING BREAK

Mar 31, April 2, 4: Neo-Colonialism in Egypt & Iraq
Burke, Chs. 13-14: pp.187-202, 205-222
Salih, Season of Migration to the North
April 7, 9, 11, 14: *Shades of Colonialism*
Gelvin, Chs. 14, 18: pp.217-31, 283-93
Burke, Chs. 9-10, 18, 21: pp.137-63, 268-80, 319-38
Shlaim, “The Debate About 1948”
Shavit, “Lydda, 1948”
Morris, “Survival of the Fittest”
Kanafani, *Men in the Sun*

Part IV—From the Cold War to the Gulf Wars: Globalization, Regional Conflicts, & the Politics of Religion

April 16, 18: *From Statism to Infitah*
Gelvin, Chs. 15-16: pp.240-265
Burke, Ch. 20: pp.301-18
* Gamal Abd al-Nasser, “Speech on Arab Socialism” (1964)
Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, pp.92-134

April 21, 23: *The Iranian Revolution & the Gulf Wars*
Gelvin, Chs. 17, 19: pp.266-282, 294-306
Burke, Ch. 22: pp.339-365
Abrahamian, “The Islamic Revolution”
* George W. Bush, Graduation Speech at West Point, NY (2002)

April 25, 28: *Political Islam & 9/11*
Gelvin, Ch. 20: pp.307-318
* Barack Obama speech at Cairo University (2009)

April 30: *Neo-Liberalism & the “Arab Spring”*
Gelvin, “Conclusion”
Obama speech on Arab Spring (May 19, 2011)

May 2: Whither the Middle East?
Review & Discussion
Reader Table of Contents

1. Articles & Book Chapters


Abu-Lughod, Janet, “The World System in the 13th Century: Dead-end or precursor?” in Adas, 75-102

Quataert, Donald, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2005), 13-53


Yergin, Daniel, *The Prize: The epic quest for oil, money & power* (Free Press, 2008), Ch.15


2. Primary Documents

Fazlullah, Rashid al-Din (1247?–1318), “The Mongol Conquest of Baghdad” in Gettleman, Marvin E., & Schaar, Stuart, eds., The Middle East and Islamic World Reader, 3rd ed (Grove Press, 2011), Ch.2, §6b

The Earl of Cromer, Modern Egypt (New York, 1908), 146-61

Al-Afghani, Jamal al-Din, “Plan for Islamic Union (1884)” in Gettleman & Schaar, Ch.III, §12

The Husayn-McMahon Correspondence (July 1915-January 1916) in Smith, Charles D., Palestine & the Arab-Israeli Conflict 5th ed. (Boston, MA, 2004), Ch.IV, §13 (a) & (b)

Kemal, Mustapha, “Design for a Modern Secular Turkish State (1925) in Gettleman & Schaar, 125-27

Aramco World, “The Telephone Service”, December 1952

Abd al-Nasser, Gamal, “Speech on Arab Socialism (1964) in Gettleman & Schaar, Ch.VII, §31(a)

Bush, George W., Graduation Speech at West Point, NY (2002)

“President Obama’s Vision for New Beginnings in the Middle East: Cairo University, Egypt, June 4 2009” in Gettleman & Schaar, Ch. 8, §36

Obama, Barack, Speech on Arab Spring (May 19, 2011)