Syllabus

The United States in the Middle East and North Africa

FK 6070

2013 | 2014

Course leader: Dr. Hilde E. Restad
This course will examine the historic and current clash – or not - of interests, cultures and ideologies taking place between the United States and Middle Eastern and North African countries. Taking a chronological approach to the U.S.-Mideast relationship, the class will begin by looking at the colonial history of the region and early U.S. involvement, and end by looking at the Arab Spring and the Obama administration’s reactions. The course will incorporate topics such as “orientalism,” the Cold War, the importance of oil, the “war on terror”, the Arab-Israeli peace process and the significance of ideas such as “American exceptionalism” for understanding the American approach to the region.

This class will seek to understand the current U.S.-Middle Eastern/North African relationship through both a historical and theoretical lens. How has U.S. involvement in the region evolved over time? More importantly what are the causes of the United States’ presence in the Middle East: is it security? Is it to secure natural resources such as oil? Is it the influence of domestic groups? Is it ideology and culture? We will also look at how to study U.S. foreign policy and evaluate different variables and their explanatory value. Finally, we will ask some big picture questions, such as: seen from the region’s own perspective, Has the United States played a constructive or destructive role since becoming decisively involved after the Second World War? In other words, this course seeks to understand one of the most conflict ridden regions in the world by illumining the role played by the world’s most powerful state.
Goals of the course:
The student will...

✓ Gain knowledge of the history of the U.S. role in the Middle East
✓ Be able to evaluate different explanations for U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East
✓ Be able to define and evaluate the main theoretical concepts introduced in class
✓ Evaluate various state and non-state actors’ roles in U.S.-Middle East politics
✓ Critically evaluate current research on U.S.-Middle East relations

Required readings:
1. Reader (“kompendium”) (free)

Recommended books:

Recommended blogs:
4. Mahir Zeynalov, one of the few English language blogs by a Turkish journalist: http://mahirzeynalov.blogspot.no/
5. The Wael Abbas Daily, the site of a young Egyptian blogger: http://paper.li/waelabbas
6. The Arabist, an Egyptian blog about Egyptian and Middle Eastern politics. [http://arabist.net/](http://arabist.net/)

**Academic integrity:**
Handing in someone else's work or ideas as your own constitutes plagiarism. PLEASE NOTE, this also applies to using someone's ideas without attribution. You MUST give a citation when you use an author's ideas in your written work, even if you do not quote the text word-for-word. Please see our guidelines in the pamphlet “Skriveveiledning” and ASK your professors/seminar leaders if you have any questions.

*Plagiarism will be punished severely, and can result in expulsion.*

**Requirements:**
There will be one midterm exam, one response paper, and one research essay to complete in this course. I highly recommend attending ALL lectures. Seminar participation is **obligatory**.

*The United States in the Middle East and North Africa* equals 10 “studiepoeng”. The course requires that the students take the **midterm exam** to be held **Friday October 11** at 09:00-12:00. This will be 40% of your final grade. Furthermore, the students are to hand in **one research essay** of 3500 words (+/-10%, excluding bibliography). This essay makes up 50% of the total grade and must be handed in by **Friday December 6 before midnight in Qybele**. Late essays are not accepted unless the student has a valid reason. Late essays will be penalized **one letter grade per day**. Finally, students are obliged to participate in all four seminars, including writing one response paper and presenting it. This counts for 10% of your total grade.

**Seminars:** Seminar participation is obligatory, and will be graded. The seminars – four total- will take place on irregular Wednesdays. At the beginning of each seminar those students who have written response papers for that seminar will be asked to present their paper. Everybody will be expected to contribute to seminar discussion after the presentations of the response papers. A grade for participation will take account of attendance as well as the student’s contributions to the classroom discussion, especially when called upon to comment. The course leader, along with Øystein Nedrebø, will conduct the seminars. Øystein’s email is: oystein.nedrebo@bjorkneshoyskole.no.

**Course leader**
You can reach me at the following email address: [hilde.restad@bjorkneshoyskole.no](mailto:hilde.restad@bjorkneshoyskole.no). I am happy to schedule an informal chat or office hours for advising students on how to do well in the class. Specific office hours for essay guidance will also be scheduled. Non-resident students can email me for guidance. Good luck!
Lectures*:

Lecture 1  Thursday 22/8  Introduction: The Colonial History of the Middle East and Early U.S. Involvement
Lecture 2  Tuesday 27/8  Stereotyping and «Orientalism»
Lecture 3  Thursday 5/9  The Middle East, the United States and the Beginning of the Cold War
Lecture 4  Wednesday 11/9  The Freezing of the Cold War
Lecture 5  Wednesday 18/9  The 1967 War and the Altering of the Strategic and Psychological Landscape of the Middle East
Lecture 6  Thursday 26/9  The War of 1973 and the Oil Shock

MIDTERM  Friday October 11  09:00-12:00

Lecture 7  17/10  How to Study U.S. Foreign Policy
Lecture 8  24/10  The «Catastrophic» Year of 1979: The Iranian Revolution and the Hostage Crisis
Lecture 9  31/10  The End of the Cold War: American Exceptionalism and the «Clash of Civilizations»
Lecture 10 (obs!) 11/11  The United States and the «Peace Process»
Lecture 11  14/11  George W. Bush, American Exceptionalism and the «war on terror»
Lecture 12  28/11  Reassessments and Retrospectives

Essay  Friday December 6  Hand in essay

* Times and details may be subject to change.
## Seminar program*

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* Times may be subject to change. Check Qybele.
LECTURES

LECTURE 1
Thursday August 22

Introduction: The colonial history of the Middle East and early U.S. involvement

We will discuss the syllabus for the class, and go over our planned semester. Then we will quickly survey the colonial history of the Middle East and then cover the early U.S. involvement in the region during First World War. We will also take a brief look at Woodrow Wilson, the League of Nations and the Mandates system.

Questions
- What was the colonial legacy in the Middle East when the United States first got involved?
- How was the United States first perceived in the Middle East?
- What was the significance of Woodrow Wilson, the League of Nations, and the Mandates system?

Read:

Avi Shlaim, Introduction, chapter 1 ("The Post-Ottoman Syndrome") & chapter 2 ("Succeeding John Bull"), War and Peace in the Middle East, pp. 1-37.

Recommended:

LECTURE 2
Tuesday August 27

Stereotyping and “Orientalism”

NB! Hilde away at conference, Øystein Nedrebø will step in.

Instead of a lecture, you will watch a video documentary about Arab stereotypes in Hollywood: “Reel Bad Arabs,” based on the book by Jack Shaheen. You will then discuss this documentary in light of the reading for the seminar.

Questions:
• What is “Orientalism”?
• Can we detect a pattern in the way Hollywood has depicted Arabs/Muslims?
• Do you yourself hold stereotypes about Arabs or Muslims? Why/why not?
• What about positive stereotypes? Can we find examples of these in Hollywood?

Read:

Recommended:


Rashid Khalidi, Chapter 1, “The Legacy of the Western Encounter with the Middle East,” Resurrecting Empire (Boston, Beacon Press, 2004): pp. 9-36.


LECTURE 3  
Thursday September 5

The Middle East, the United States and the Beginning of the Cold War

We will discuss the geostrategic importance of Iran, Greece and Turkey and their role in the beginning of the Cold War. We will also discuss the United States, President Harry S. Truman and the creation of Israel.

Questions

- What role did the United States play in the creation of Israel?
- What role did Great Britain’s relationship with Greece play in the United States’ early involvement in the Cold War?
- What was the significance of the Soviet Union’s presence in Iran for the beginning of the Cold War?
- What was the significance of Turkey after the Second World War?

Read:


Recommended:

Patrick Tyler, A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East—from the Cold War to the War on Terror (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2009).


Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain Speech.” Delivered in Fulton, Missouri on 5 March 1946. URL: http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/churchill-iron.asp
LECTURE 4
Wednesday September 11

The Freezing of the Cold War

We will cover the freezing of the Cold War by looking at President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s relationship with Iran after Mohammad Mossadegh’s overthrow in 1953 and the installment of the Shah. Further we will discuss Eisenhower and Egypt (Gamal Abdel Nasser and Arab nationalism), and discuss whether the Suez crisis was the real end of British colonialism in the Middle East. Finally we will look at Eisenhower, President Kennedy and the evolving U.S.-Israeli relationship.

Questions:
- What was “Operation AJAX”?
- What was the state of U.S.-Iranian relations in the 1950s, and how did they change?
- How important was the role of oil in the U.S.-Iranian relationship at this time?
- What is “Arab nationalism”?
- What role did Egypt play in the Cold War?

Read:
Douglas Little, Chapter 3, pp. 87-103 (from “Years of Estrangement” to “Strategic Asset or Liability?”).


**Recommended:**

National Security Council (NSC) Report 68 (NSC-68) (1950)
Url: [http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm](http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm)

The CIA’s long-classified study of the 1953 coup (released in 2000), see George Washington University’s National Security Archives for details: [http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28/](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28/)


The 1967 War and the Altering of the Strategic and Psychological Landscape of the Middle East

We will review the important Six-Day War of 1967 and its aftermath. We shall also cover the “Nixon Doctrine,” détente, and the consequences for regional allies such as Iran, Israel, and Saudi-Arabia.

Questions:
- What was the significance of the 1967 war?
- Who won this war?
- What was the “Nixon Doctrine”?
- What was the significance of détente for the Cold War in the Middle East?

Read:

Avi Shlaim, chap. 3, “America between Arabs and Israelis” in War and Peace in the Middle East, pp. 37-60.

Douglas Little, chapter 4, (From “Nixon Doctrine” to “Carter Doctrine”), pp. 137-146.


Recommended:

**LECTURE 6**

*Thursday 26 September*

**The War of 1973 and the Oil Shock**

We will discuss whether the Yom Kippur War of 1973 entailed the cementing of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, further we will look at the importance of oil and the consequences of the 1970s “oil shock” for U.S. policy toward the Middle East.

**Questions:**

- What caused the 1973 War? Who “won” the war?
- What were the consequences of this war?
- How did oil impact U.S.-Middle East relations in the 1970s?

**Read:**

Douglas Little, Chapter 2 “Opening the Door: Business, Diplomacy, and America’s Stake in Middle East Oil,” pp. 43-77.

Douglas Little, rest of chapter 3, pp. 103-115.

For background information, *browse* this collection of historical information based on declassified material:


http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/#6

**Recommended:**


On how to study U.S. Foreign Policy

This lecture will take a time out from the historical chronology in order to focus on theories of how to study and understand U.S. foreign policy. We look at different variables (explanatory factors) at different levels of explanation (individual, state and international levels), focusing on three specific theses on what causes U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East: domestic lobby groups (the Israel Lobby), strategic interests, and American public opinion.

Questions:

• How do we decide which factors “cause” U.S. foreign policy?
• Should we look at domestic factors, such as lobby groups, oil interests or culture, or “systemic” (international) factors such as the geostrategic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union?

Read:

• Lobby Groups?

- **Strategic Interests?**

- **American Public Opinion?**

**Recommended:**


LECTURE 8  
THURSDAY OCTOBER 24

The “Catastrophic Year” of 1979: Iran’s revolution and the hostage crisis

As we transition from President Carter to Ronald Reagan, we will cover the end of détente and the fracturing of relations between the United States and Iran. Two momentous events – the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis – cemented the image of Iran as one of the most threatening enemies of the United States in the Middle East.

Questions:
- How does 1953 echo in 1979 in the U.S.-Iranian relationship?
- What was the significance of the Iranian revolution for the rest of the region?
- What was the Iranian hostage crisis?
- What was the significance of the hostage crisis for American politics?

Read:

Douglas Little, chapter 4, pp. 146-155 (rest of chapter).

Douglas Little, chapter 6 “Modernizing the Middle East,” ONLY pp. 215-227 (From “Reform from Above” till end of chapter).


Recommended:

The movie “Argo” (2012), directed by Ben Affleck, which chronicles the hostage crisis – and the rescue of a few of the hostages - as seen from the American perspective.

Al Jazeera’s three-part documentary on the Iranian revolution (12 minutes each). Found here:

  Part I: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDifaCVanaM
  Part II: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DRTgtGR84Q
  Part III: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRsBGnh2T-M


**LECTURE 9**  
*Thursday October 31*

**The End of the Cold War:**  
American Exceptionalism and the Clash of Cultures?

The end of the Cold War removed the superpower rivalry from the Middle East, and opened up for regional powers to assert themselves, as we saw with Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. What would organize international politics after the Soviet Union was gone – a clash of civilizations, as Huntington predicted, or purely domestic U.S. concerns, now that the “unipolar moment” had arrived?

**Questions:**

- What was the “unipolar moment” and what was its significance?
- What is the “clash of civilizations” thesis?
- What is “American exceptionalism” and what was its significance for post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy?

**Read:**


**Recommended:**


LECTURE 10  
NB! Monday November 11

The U.S. and Arab-Israeli Peacemaking:  
The Rise and Fall (?) of the “Peace Process”

We begin our review of the “peace process” by looking at one of the earliest attempts, in 1982, when Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin laid the foundation for all later Israeli negotiations (as Rashid Khalidi argues). We then look at an overview by William Quandt, who himself was part of the peace process in the Carter administration, before we examine a conservative perspective on the peace process. The Shlaim and Little chapters will give a more general overview. Finally, in light of the ongoing (or perhaps by the time this lecture comes around, aborted) peace talks in Washington, D.C. between Israel and Palestine, we will read a current analysis that will be emailed out/put up on Qybele.

Questions:

- What is the “peace process”?
- How did it start, and has it already ended, before peace has been achieved?
- What has been the role of the United States in this process?
- Should the United States be involved in peacemaking in the Middle East?

Read:


Avi Shlaim, chapter 7, “Madrid and After” in *War and Peace in the Middle East*, pp. 104-132.

Douglas Little, chapter 8, “Opportunities Lost and Found: The United States and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process”

**Article X: To Be Announced (TBA).**

**Recommended:**


LECTURE 11  
Thursday November 14

**George W. Bush, American Exceptionalism and the “War on Terror”**

**Questions:**
- How is American exceptionalism connected to the war on terror?
- What is “neoconservatism”?
- What events transpired that made the invasion of Iraq possible, despite tenuous evidence of Saddam Hussein’s stockpiles of WMD?
- How did Iraq connect to the war on terror?
- How was Islam/Arabs/the Middle East portrayed in the United States during the “war on terror”?

**Read:**
Reader

Reader


Reader

**Recommended:**
Reader

***highly recommended***


Bergen, Peter. “**What were the causes of 9/11?**” *Prospect Magazine* (U.K) Issue 126, September 2006.  
URL: [http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/whatwerethecausesof911/#.UefRVVOet8s](http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/whatwerethecausesof911/#.UefRVVOet8s)

Obama has faced a lot of criticism for the way he has handled – or not handled – events in the Middle East since the beginning of the “Arab Spring” or “Arab Awakening.” This criticism has included accusing Obama of not believing in American exceptionalism, arguing that Obama’s strategy of “leading from behind” in Libya amounts to giving up on U.S. leadership in the world (which means giving up on American exceptionalism, to some). From the left, on the other hand, the United States is seen as not having been supportive enough of the democratization process happening across the Middle East.

Questions:
- What has characterized the Obama administration’s overall strategy toward the Arab Spring?
- Has there been a coherent strategy?
- How does this strategy comport with Obama’s speech in Cairo in June 2009?
- Does the Obama administration’s handling of the Arab Spring fall in line, or break with, earlier U.S. strategy toward the region?
- How has the region reacted to the U.S. response (or lack thereof)?
Read:

President Obama’s Cairo speech (June 2009):


David Aaron Miller, “Why Obama Has Failed in the Middle East”
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/02/Why_Obama_Has_Failed_in_the_Middle_East Reader

Recommended:


LECTURE 13  
Thursday November 28

Reassessments and Retrospective – and the way forward

We will look back and try to peek into the future in this last lecture, where we will summarize and take stock of what we have learnt this semester.

Questions:

- Where does the United States and the Middle East go from here?
- How do peoples in the Middle East view the United States?
- How (if at all) can the two world views – one seeing the United States as a force for democracy, peace and liberal values; the other, seeing the United States as an imperial power more concerned with stability and access to oil than democratic development – meet?

Read:


Recommended:

Avi Shlaim, “Pax Americana,” in War and Peace in the Middle East, pp. 132-147.

