

SA.555 (THE MIDDLE EAST)

Courses

SA.555.100. Geostrategy of the Middle East. 4 Credits.

The Middle East has long played a strategic role in the world order. For centuries, its location and complex history has made the region a central concern for strategists. In recent decades, no other world region has been subject to the sustained internal rivalry and great power intervention than the Middle East. The region has produced a series of crises, abiding rivalries, and devastating conflicts including the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran-Iraq war, the rise of Islamism, U.S. war in Iraq, and the Iranian nuclear program. Over the past six decades American involvement in the region has steadily increased to contend with (and contribute to) these events, and in the process, influence the direction of regional politics. The Middle East remains among the most strategically consequential and geopolitically fluid regions of the world. The recent interest of both Russia and China in the region attests to its relevance to global politics today. Despite long running involvement with the Middle East, understanding its shifting geopolitics remains a challenge for academics and policymakers. This course will examine the historical background to the region's rivalries, examine the reasons for the shifts in balance of power between Arabs, Israelis, Turks, and Iranians. The course will discuss the main cultural and religious axes of conflict and territorial disputes, and how they have become entwined with great power interests. We will examine the main trends, identify the main actors and episodes that have shaped the region's geopolitics. The course will rely on theories of international relations as analytical tools for interpreting patterns of rivalry, conflict, and alliances. The course will also examine how American foreign policy thinking has grappled with the Middle East.

Prerequisite(s): Students may not register for this class if they have already received credit for SA.860.822[C]

SA.555.101. Islam and Politics: Religion and Power in World Affairs. 4 Credits.

The rise of Islamism and the role Islam has played in politics constitutes one of the most important and consequential developments of our time. In recent decades Islamic ideas have become embedded in society, economics and politics of large numbers of Muslim countries in Asia and Africa but have also become part of domestic politics in the West, China, India and Russia. Since 9/11 Islamic activism has also been integral to discussion of international security, deeply influencing ebbs and flows of global conflict. It has dominated news and foreign policy thinking from one major global event to another over the past four decades. In the process it has posed significant foreign policy challenges, but also raised important questions for historians and political scientists. This course will explain the origins and development of this important historical phenomenon. It will examine how and why Islam has become so politically influential, trace the origins and development of core ideas of Islamism, and how it has shaped global politics in recent decades. The course will examine the life and works of key thinkers and leaders and discuss those events that have defined Islam's role in politics such as the Iranian Revolution, the Afghan Jihad, and the rise of Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Prerequisite(s): Students may not register for this class if they have already received credit for SA.860.818[C]

SA.555.102. Political Economy of the Middle East. 4 Credits.

The Middle East plays a prominent role in global politics. The focus is often on the region's security challenges. The Middle East is however a vast region that is home to over 400 million people. States, economies, and societies across the region make for complex patterns of political and economic development that are of importance to theoretical understandings of comparative political economy, but also provide insights into the region's security situation, internal rivalries, and the region's place in the global economy and relations with the world's great powers. This course will provide a basis for understanding that dynamic by examining its patterns of economic and political developments, state formation, and relations between the economy, the state and society. The course will trace the historical foundations of modern states and look to theories of comparative political economy that discuss state formation and state-society relations in late-industrializing societies to analyze them. The course will discuss the impact of history and the colonial experience on Middle East politics, and the role of oil in its economic development. We will look at how economics and politics have entwined to shape states and their relations with societies, and the different trajectories of state formation pursued across the region—from secular modernizing states to tribal monarchies and an Islamic Republic in Iran. We will examine the reasons for and nature of authoritarianism, the characteristics of rentier states and patrimonial state-society relations, and the impact of security issues on state formation and behavior. We will also examine social structures in the region, and the way they have reacted to state formation. The course will provide explanations for emergence of strong states, weak and failed ones, as well as particularities of the region's economies.

Prerequisite(s): Students may not register for this class if they have already received credit for SA.860.759[C]

SA.555.103. Washington, Israel and the Arabs. 4 Credits.

Explores history of the Arab-Israel conflict and its evolution. Looks at the trajectory of Arab-Israeli diplomacy, its practice and history. Examines the role of outside powers, with case studies selectively chosen: the Egypt-Israel and Jordan-Israel peace treaties, the aborted Syria peace track and the Israel-Palestine process, from Madrid and Oslo to the present. Examines the role of unilateralism and impact of recent regional Arab upheaval on Israel-Palestine. Discusses the achievements and limitations of diplomatic settlements with implications for the future.

Prerequisite(s): Students may not register for this class if they have already received credit for SA.860.719[C]

SA.555.104. Political Leadership in the Middle East. 4 Credits.

Change in the Middle East has often been attributed to charismatic and powerful leaders, whose influence has been magnified by crisis, wars, and authoritarian traditions. This course combines biography with politics to ask whether, how, and in which circumstances, individual leaders have changed the course of modern Middle Eastern history. Special attention is paid to the interaction of leaders and mass movements, and leadership dynamics in the unfolding "Arab Spring."

SA.555.105. History and Politics of the Middle East & North Africa. 4 Credits.

The course aims at introducing students to the history and politics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with a focus on the Mediterranean Middle East/Mashreq and Maghreb. Starting with the exploration of the emergence of the modern state system in the region, the course will examine the post-colonial politics of MENA countries and the current state of affairs. In this context, a number of key issues will be addressed, such as state-society relations, authoritarianism and reform, the role of the military, regional dynamics, conflicts, the strategic importance of the region, political Islam, and democracy and human rights. The course will conclude with a discussion of the Arab uprisings and their outcome, along with the implications for the politics and international relations of the MENA region.

SA.555.106. The Politics of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. 4 Credits.

Today the Gulf region faces numerous challenges: generational change, information wars, climate change and the global energy transition; ongoing competition from regional powers Iran and Turkey, and a US partner less attuned to their security dilemmas. But Gulf countries also see new opportunities: in partnerships with alternative powers like Russia, India, China, old foes like Israel; and in nationalist appeals to their own publics. This course will examine these transformative global economic forces, and domestic and international political pressures in order to assess the current trajectory of the Gulf states and the implications for the United States. By taking advantage of the new scholarship on the Gulf region, and accessing new media and artistic production from the region, students will gain a deep understanding of the challenges as well as the forces for change, both from the international context and the Gulf peoples themselves.

SA.555.108. The Iranian Revolution. 4 Credits.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 marked a watershed moment in world politics. Coined "the last great revolution," the mass movements of the late 1970s led to the toppling of the U.S.' greatest ally in the region, Mohammad Reza Shah, and the birth of the first modern Islamic Republic. In essence, the events of 1979 in Iran shifted the global geopolitical terrain, which have had profound repercussions to this day. In this course, we will consider the factors that led to the Revolution and study how the political struggles after the fall of the Shah played out. We will delve into the dynamic political formations of the Islamic Republic and the emergence of the regime's political economy in both the war and post-war years. We will study the impact of the Iran-Iraq war on Iranian domestic and foreign relations and will read and discuss the suppression of opposition groups in the 1980s, looking at how oppositional politics reemerged from the prisons after the ceasefire with Iraq in 1988. We will cover the women's movement, the labor movement, the teacher's movement, and the student movement, in an effort to more fully understand state-society relations in contemporary Iran. Along this vein, we will carefully examine social developments in urban and non-urban centers of the country. Throughout the course, we focus on how the Iranian Revolution has been framed in the past four decades, especially in the west, and what this framing either elucidates or obfuscates in regards to politics, social organization, citizenship, identity, nationalism, and religion.

SA.555.109. Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Middle East. 4 Credits.

This course offers a comprehensive exploration of the intricate dynamics surrounding authoritarianism and democratization in the Middle East. Students will delve into a multidimensional analysis, considering historical, political, religious, cultural, and socio-economic factors that have profoundly influenced political structures in the region. Through critical examination, students will develop an understanding of the democratic deficit in the Middle East, probing into the reasons behind the persistence of autocratic and authoritarian regimes. They will also examine why the ME missed the waves of democratization witnessed in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa since the 1970s. Also, they will be able to scrutinize both regional and foreign factors influencing democratization in the Middle East. Special attention will be given to the analysis of the so-called Arab Spring uprisings and revolutions of the past decade. Students will assess why these movements, despite their initial momentum, fell short in establishing democracy in the region.

SA.555.111. Great Powers in the Middle East and North Africa. 4 Credits.

How have Great Powers shaped the history and politics of states in the Middle East and North Africa? For over a century, Great Powers have been extensively involved in the region: they established colonies, protectorates, and mandates during colonial period; afterward, they employed military force to constrain and shape regimes. Focusing primarily on Great Britain, France, and the United States, this course examines the causes and consequences of foreign military intervention from colonial conquest through the post-colonial period. Students will critically assess claims that link Great Power actions to current-day conditions in the region through evaluating contemporary scholarship and analyzing the history of selected cases.

SA.555.112. The Politics of Disaster in the Middle East and Beyond. 4 Credits.

This course examines the politics of natural and man-made disasters, including war, forced migration, drought, famine, earthquakes, tsunamis, storms, and epidemics. Focusing on the Middle East, it also presents comparative cases from Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and North America. In doing so, the class will examine the unique ways that different types of disasters interact with governance structures; social and economic inequalities; medical infrastructure; gender; race and ethnicity; and political cleavages. Throughout the course, students will learn basic elements of research design and methods in addition to welcoming experienced disaster response and analysis practitioners to class. Finally, the Politics of Disaster in the Middle East and Beyond addresses some of the philosophical aspects of working in and studying disaster-affected contexts, bringing an ethical sensibility to policy-relevant analysis.

Prerequisite(s): Students may not register for this class if they have already received credit for SA.500.139[C]

SA.555.113. Human Rights and US Middle East Policy. 4 Credits.

Over the past several decades, as part of its foreign policy doctrine, the United States has dedicated significant resources to the promotion of international human rights norms and discourse. However, its actions in many contexts, particularly in the Middle East, have often drawn criticism for being insufficient, inconsistent, or even detrimental to human rights. This course delves into the mechanisms through which the United States promotes international human rights and examines the tools at its disposal. It particularly examines how these mechanisms and human rights-related policies are enhanced or undermined in the face of other foreign policy decisions related to global peace and security concerns. The course explores cases to interrogate the successes and failures of US human rights policy in the region over the past two decades. Key questions to be explored include: What is the responsibility of the United States in addressing some of the most challenging human rights contexts in the region? Can the US approach human rights promotion in the Middle East differently?