

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.555.107. Conflicts and Cultures in Contemporary Turkey. 4 Credits.

This course takes a deep dive into many of Turkey's domestic and regional conflicts to understand the issues, actors, and power dynamics at play. We focus on cases since 2002, but draw from legacies including Ottoman collapse, Turkey's Cold War experiences, impacts of military coups, and spillover effects of the first Gulf War. While we examine so-called cultural conflicts within Turkey and in foreign policy – Kurdish issues, the role of Islam in politics, gender struggles, clashes with Egypt and Israel over Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas ties – we also gain unique perspective on these issues by viewing them through a pop culture lens. We acquire new tools for studying conflicts in various forms by analyzing films, TV, music, novels, and sports, as well as academic sources. By treating pop culture as a data source, we gain access to debates we otherwise wouldn't have, especially when studying in a US institution. In addition to providing an entertaining lens for considering how actors view conflicts in and around Turkey, pop culture is also a site of struggles among rivals. Take Gulf countries' responses to Turkish support of Qatar during the Gulf Cooperation Council crisis: Saudi Arabia banned wildly popular Turkish soap operas, and UAE produced a historical drama to "counter Ottoman tyranny." Or consider the Ministry of National Defense's use of music videos to sell Turkey's naval activity in the Eastern Mediterranean and military incursions in Syria to domestic publics. Or the role Istanbul soccer fans played in sustaining the 2013 Gezi Park Protests, using their highly mobilized networks and experience in clashing with rivals in the stands to defend protesters against police crackdown. Political actors at the highest levels clearly take the power of pop culture seriously. As students seeking deeply informed, multi-faceted, policy-relevant expertise in Turkey's internal and external conflicts, we will as well.