

Political Science 375: Middle East Politics

Fall 2017

Northern Illinois University

Online Course

Class Meetings: None

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Introduction

The Middle East is an important and often deeply misunderstood region of the world. Its significance emanates from a number of sources. For instance, it is the cradle of Western civilization. At various points in ancient times, Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian empires all flourished in this part of the world. Also, the Middle East is the birthplace of three major religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – as well as home to a variety of cultures and peoples including, but certainly not limited to, Arabs, Berbers, Armenians, Jews, Iranians, Turks and Kurds. This diversity has and will continue to serve as a source of conflict. Further, outside intervention has been a constant theme throughout Middle East history. While the region is not in danger of being overrun by Romans, Mongols, or Turks, it will continue to be of vital interest to the United States and other major powers. The Middle East is the world's largest source of petroleum, a major recipient of foreign aid, and of vital strategic importance. And now in the absence of a major communist threat, many Western states regard militant Islamic fundamentalism and certain Middle Eastern countries among their greatest threats. This perception has only been reinforced by the events of September 11, 2001, the religious justifications of some of the more extreme groups involved in insurgency/resistance in Iraq, and more recently initiated open repression in the region beginning with the Iranian reform movement, and continuing through the still current wave of uprisings popularly known as the Arab Spring.

Despite its significance, the Middle East is often confusing and, at times, inexplicable to the average American. Much of this mystery or complexity stems from the diversity of the region. Many individuals, for example, are unfamiliar with the various sects of Islam and the divisions within other regional faiths. In addition, the greater Middle East comprises of no less than twenty states, each with its own character and history. Moreover, these countries embrace a variety of political systems: authoritarian regimes, monarchies, parliamentary democracies, presidential democracies, theocracies and so forth. Last, there are significant distinctions among states in terms of wealth, population and territorial size, education levels, minority groups, internal politics, domestic policies and foreign relations.

The primary purpose of this course is to make sense of this significant but often confusing region of the world. While this investigation cannot ignore religion, culture, and social life, it is important to remember this is a political science course and these topics will not be the major emphasis. Rather, the vast majority of our time will be devoted to studying the politics, governments and foreign relations of several Middle Eastern states. This country-by-country examination will be preceded by background information, including political history since World War I. The first portion of the course will focus on the major trends movements and conflicts that have shaped the region.

It is important to note that this course is intended for students with little or no knowledge of the Middle East. While it will be taught in a way that corresponds to its 300-level classification, it is not likely to appeal to students who have studied or lived in the region for several years.

This course has three specific objectives, and one more general objective. The first is to facilitate a basic understanding of the leaders, events, and issues that have shaped Middle East history and politics since the First World War. The second aim is to help students develop a sound and realistic familiarity with the government, politics and foreign relations of specific nations and states. While we cannot study the entire region in 15 weeks, we will explore a number of countries at the core of the region. The country selection and the organization of the readings are designed to illustrate the true diversity of the region. Thus, the third objective is to help students truly appreciate that important reality. As the semester develops, the hope is that students will be able to see and draw comparisons between the countries under study. To assist in this effort, this course will examine and discuss individual countries through a common framework or set of factors. Finally, while not a formal objective, it is hoped that this course will instill or ignite an intellectual curiosity that will lead students to continue to seek information and knowledge about this most important region.

Class Format

This class is entirely online in format through Blackboard. As mentioned, the presumption is that students have little or no background in the subject matter. For that reason, there is a basic text for the course which will serve to provide a basis for comparison between states in the Middle East. In addition, however, and each module will also have a written lecture component which will provide supplemental, contextual material to enrich the text. Any materials provided by the instructor are fair game for exam questions. The final component of this class requires you to participate in ten discussion groups that will be opened periodically through the semester. You will be required to respond thoughtfully regarding ten articles, or questions concerning the class materials which will be posted with the weekly materials by the instructor during the semester. In those responses, you will be required to post a comment regarding the question or article itself, as well as to four other responses posted by other students. The intention is to foster discussion among the class in lieu of face-to-face meetings. It is very important to remember that *all opinions and interpretations are welcome, however, they must be presented in a dignified and respectful manner.*

Assigned Readings

The textbook (see below) and readings used for this course were selected to provide the most in-depth material as possible while keeping to the introductory level of the topic, as well as maintain a high quality of academic intellectualism. I would encourage students to have a personal copy of the book not only for use during the semester, but for future reference as well. Other readings assigned will be placed on Blackboard where students can retrieve them at will.

Textbook:

Gasiorowski and Yom. 2017. *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and Northern Africa*, 8th Edition. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Grade Requirements

There are two basic requirements. The first are two *online examinations*. The midterm exam will be available on between October 9-12. The final exam will be available from December 11-14. Exams will be online and timed. Both the midterm and the final will each account for 25% of the final course grade, for a total of 50% for Exams.

In order to pass this class, all exams and tests must be completed.

Secondly, in order to maintain a contemporary focus and facilitate a more interactive class setting, we will have discussion groups throughout the semester. At regular intervals, the instructor will post an article for which a response will be required. In that response, it will be necessary to do one of two things: offer an opinion on the article or topic being discussed and/or draw a connection between the facts of the report and the course material (e.g., a theory, concept, reading, previous news article, etc.) ***Again, all opinions and interpretations are welcome as long as they are presented in a dignified and respectful manner. Keep in mind, no late submissions will be accepted.*** Each comment for each discussion group is worth 1% of the final grade, so this component of the grade is worth 50% overall of the final grade.

Components of the Final Grade

- a. Midterm Exam =25%
- b. Final Exam =25%
- c. Discussion Groups =50%

Odds & Ends

- **Makeup Exams:** Makeup exams will only be given in extraordinary circumstances. If such circumstances arise, please contact the instructor as soon as possible *and* before the scheduled exam. To keep the process fair for everyone in the course, students may be asked to support requests for makeup exams with documentation. A missed examination without prior notification and a documented excuse will result in a zero and a course grade of “F” as opposed to an incomplete.
- **Late Assignments:** No late assignments will be allowed.
- **Submitting Written Work:** Please turn in all assignments to me at the beginning of the class period in which they are due. If you are not able to make class for any reason, your assignments must be emailed to me before the start of the class period in which it is due. Please do not leave assignments at the POLS office or anywhere else, and do not give them to a colleague to turn in for you.
- **Extra Credit:** There will be no extra credit offered.
- **Handouts:** Handouts are a privilege for those students who attend class on a regular basis. No student is entitled to supplemental materials simply because they are registered for the course.
- **Incomplete Requests:** Such petitions will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances. The instructor reserves the right to ask for documentation to verify the problem preventing completion of the course by the normal deadlines. If the student does not present documentation from a university office or official, the matter will be left to the instructor’s discretion.
- **Academic Dishonesty:** Regarding plagiarism, the NIU Undergraduate Catalog states: “students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books,

magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging them. Students guilty of or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university.” The above statement encompasses a paper written in whole or in part by another; a paper copied word-for-word or with only minor changes from another source; a paper copied in part from one or more sources without proper identification and acknowledgement of the sources; a paper that is merely a paraphrase of one or more sources, using ideas and/or logic without credit even though the actual words may be changed; and a paper that quotes, summarizes or paraphrases, or cuts and pastes words, phrases, or images from an Internet source without identification and the address of the web site. Please note that copies of papers written in previous years are retained by the instructor. Also, all papers will be checked within the SafeAssign system (discussed below). In short, students are advised to do their own work and learn the rules for proper quoting, paraphrasing, and footnoting.

- **Religious Observances:** The University asks instructors to make students aware of the following policy. “Northern Illinois University as a public institution of higher education in the State of Illinois does not observe religious holidays. It is the university’s policy, however, to reasonably accommodate the religious observances of individual students in regards to admissions, class attendance, scheduling examinations and work requirements. Such policies shall be made known to faculty and students. Religious observance includes all aspects of religious observance and practice as well as belief. Absence from classes or examinations for religious observance does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course work required during the period of absence. To request accommodation, students who expect to miss classes, examinations or other assignments as a consequence of their religious observance shall provide instructors with reasonable notice of the date or dates they will be absent.” The instructor is respectful and fully supportive of students who wish to participate in religious observances. Excused absences will be provided, but students must understand and follow the above policy with respect to reasonable notice and making up work.

Other statements:

Statement Concerning Students with Disabilities

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, NIU is committed to making reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Those students with disabilities that may have some impact on their coursework and for which they may require accommodations should notify the Disability Resource Center (DRC) on the fourth floor of the Health Services Building. DRC will assist students in making appropriate accommodations with course instructors. It is important that DRC and instructors be informed of any disability-related needs during the first two weeks of the semester.

Department of Political Science Web Site

Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to <http://polisci.niu.edu>

Important Dates

Midterm Examination: Thursday, October 11-13
Final Examination: Thursday, December 11-13

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Weeks 1 & 2

August 28-September 8 Knowledge, Media Bias, Basic IR Theories
Regional Background-Regional Characteristics
Readings: Supplemental Notes
Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 1-43

Week 3

September 11-15 Egypt
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 407-437
<http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/01/29/egypt-s-post-mubarak-predicament-pub-54328>

Week 4

September 18-22 Israel
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 137-171

Week 5

September 25-29 Palestinians
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 47-77
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/israel/palestine>

Week 6

October 2-6 Iraq
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 79-110

Week 7

October 9-13 **MIDTERM EXAM: No Readings**

Week 8:

October 16-20 Syria
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 47-77
<https://consortiumnews.com/2015/07/20/hidden-origins-of-syrias-civil-war/>

Week 8

October: 23-27 Lebanon
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 79-110

Week 9

October 30-November 3 Iran
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 271-306

<http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/irans-important-role-in-the-future-of-the-middle-east/>

Week 10
November 6-10

Turkey
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 203-232

Week 11
November 13-17

Saudi Arabia
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 307-336
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/16/trump-is-letting-america-get-pushed-around-by-saudi-arabia/>

Week 12 November 20-24

THANKSGIVING: No Readings

Week 14
November 27-December 1:

Yemen
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 377-403

Week 15
December 4-8

The Gulf States-Continued
Readings: Gasioroski and Yom, pp. 337-376

Week 16
December 11-13:

FINAL EXAM