Overview

This course critically examines the Arab uprisings and knowledge production on the topic, with emphasis on both text and audio-visual production that characterized these particular uprisings, perhaps more than any similar events prior.

Contrary to prevailing arguments, the Arab Uprisings refer to six separate cases as opposed to a single event, erroneously referred to as the “Arab Spring,” a misnomer on analytical and empirical levels. This course acknowledges what is called the “demonstration effect” (i.e., domino effect) as well as some of the underlying commonalities across the six cases in which a sustained, and usually widely popular, mass uprising took place, but moves on to address the uprisings as separate cases.

We will examine the causes and dynamics of the uprising in six countries—Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, Syria—with particular emphasis on the Syrian and Egyptian cases. As per the title of this course, we will use as sources the vast expanse of literature produced as well as the films, documentaries, videos, and some of the other audio-visual products that animated the uprisings, and, indeed, helped shape their trajectory at particular junctures. Related to this phenomenon are the media battles that accompanied nearly every case, not simply via traditional media (local Television and Radio stations, Satellite TV, and newspapers), but also via what is called new media, encompassing various internet platforms and mechanisms, from YouTube and Facebook to more alternative forms of collective cyber-engagement.

The course will nonetheless proceed from the academic literature on the topic, starting with a critical examination of the literature on revolution and ending with addressing the regional prelude to the uprisings as well as the literature on various phases of the uprisings, including the post-euphoria period that was animated by what is commonly called “counter-revolution” (i.e., the efforts of a constellation of internal and external actors to restore the status quo). The approach will also take into account the literature and films on the history of the region, and place the uprisings within the context of post-colonial challenges and responses that helped produce the regimes against which the masses revolted.

Part of the consequences of the uprisings is an undue emphasis in some circles on the question of Islamism (reduced to “jihadism”) and terrorism as strictly local phenomena. The flipside of this undue emphasis often takes the form of emphasis on external conspiracies and designs by primarily imperial powers and their regional allies with an interest in maintaining dominance in the region. It is not that these observations and developments are not causes for some concern: rather, the profound extent of emphasis on such topics often occurs at a high opportunity cost: we fail fully to focus on and understand the constellation of underlying conditions, dynamics, and relations (internal and external) that have underwritten both the uprisings and much of their effects. Moreover, we fail to appreciate fully at this very moment the reproduction of power and of the status-quo-ante, along with their attendant development and political preferences that gave rise to the uprisings and animated them. As powerful as some of the literature we will come
The audio-visual representation of these realities and challenges provides a three-dimensional view that complements a sober reading and understanding of the uprisings.

The pre-requisites include knowledge of 20th century Middle Eastern history and politics, as well as US foreign policy. If you do not have such knowledge or background, you are strongly advised to speak with the instructor at the outset of the course, as additional literature will become required reading in these cases. This matter will also be addressed at the outset of class to better understand what the phrase “knowledge of 20th century Middle Eastern history and politics” mean.

Requirements
This is an upper level undergraduate course. Expect extensive reading and viewing assignments and a final research paper/project. The course will have both an academic and a current events dimension. Beyond assigned readings, you are therefore expected to be critically reading/following the news on developments in the region, not least the cases that have experienced an uprising. A list of relevant news sources and blogs will be made available on the class website. Class presentations, participation, and commentary/critique by students is a cornerstone of this engagement, so come to class prepared to discuss and/or present the readings, as well as taking turns leading class discussions. The key to succeed in this course is to do a close reading of the assignments and keep a log of summaries of what you read.

There will be a midterm, short writing/media assignments (TBA) and a final paper/project. the Midterm exam will be announced in class.

Because participation may be hindered by class size, you might have periodic “beginning of class pop questions” (PQs). You will be asked one question based on the reading for that day at the beginning of some classes, for which you’ll have 3-5 minutes to furnish an answer. Your answers will not be graded formally (you’ll get a check mark for correct answers, or nothing for incorrect answers), but will serve as an additional indicator for your participation grade: they can help you if your answers reveal a consistent strong familiarity with the reading. Students who wish to maintain a B+ or above are encouraged to take these questions seriously as a way of boosting their participation grade. Further specification regarding reading assignments will be announced in class.

Research Paper/Project
The research paper is the most significant project you’ll work on in this course, and it is due on the last day of class, before the final exam date. You should submit a paper/project proposal after five weeks from the beginning of class (exact date TBA). The final paper/project should be 6000 words (approximately 20-25 double-spaced pages), and based on extensive research with a clear methodology. The paper topic must deal with the themes of the course and involve one case study. Comparative work is encouraged but not necessary. More information will be provided in class and on the course website.

Grade Distribution [to be amended based on class size]
Midterm: 30%
Presentations/Assignments: 23%
Research Paper/Project: 40%

Course Website [CW]
All the information related to the course will be on the Course Website that I have designed for this class. The URL and password will be given in class. Students are expected to check the website regularly for information and updates.

Attendance
Class participation will be essential in this course, the more so because we meet only once a week. Therefore, class attendance is a must. Multiple absences undermine your participation and therefore your final grade. Class presentations are essential.

Logistics
All written work is to be turned in through the course website. If for any reason you can’t access required readings, or you have any serious problems, feel free to drop by my office, make an appointment, email me, or call my direct
mobile number which I give out at the outset of the course. Do not wait until last minute to report a problem or a failure to access readings, etc.

**Services for Students with Difference**
If you have a documented difference (learning, physical, psychological) for which you are or may be requesting reasonable academic adjustments, you are encouraged to inform me as early as possible in the semester. I, personally, would be happy to accommodate all your legitimate requests regarding such matters, with or without documentation. Please feel free to talk to me about such matters.

**Academic Honesty**
“The pursuit of knowledge can only take place in an atmosphere of honesty, integrity, and mutual trust.” In order to accomplish this, we must all be “committed to a policy that regards the highest degree of academic honesty as the norm.” Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at George Mason University, nor is it in this course. Based on University policy, such acts of dishonesty may result in a failing grade for the relevant assignment or a failing grade for the course. If you are not sure what constitutes academic dishonesty, please inquire in or outside class (http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#Anchor12). If you are writing an essay or a paper and you neglected to footnote the source of a statement or an idea, you are committing academic dishonesty. This is called plagiarism, and it is subject to punitive measures. Should you need more time or have a legitimate concern, the best course of action is to speak with me directly. Shortcuts do not benefit anyone and may harm your standing.
**Required Texts**
The reading for this course will be drawn both from the required text below and articles that will be supplied by the instructor, either electronically or as a hand out. (A select list of the below will be required for purchase. Other excerpts will be provided from the remainder of the books. So far, only the bolded ones are required. By the first week of February, the final list of required books will be determined)

TBA

*Optional Texts*

TBA

_The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus._
COURSE THEMES

1. Introduction to The Arab Uprisings | 2011 – Present
2. Modern History of the Middle East | The 20th Century
3. Post-Colonial Challenges and Development | Post-WWII
4. Authoritarian Rule and External Relations | Coups, Cold War, and Coercion
5. The Rise and Fall of the Public Sector | 1960s - 1980s
7. Revolutions, Rebellions, and Uprisings | Concepts and Paradigms
8. The Arab Uprisings: Euphoria 2011 Only!
9. The Arab Uprisings: Local Complications
10. The Arab Uprisings: Counter-Revolution
11. The Arab Uprisings: The Proxy Wars
12. The Arab Uprisings: Identity Politics and Political Islam(s)
13. The Syrian Case
14. The Egyptian Case

TEXT FILM AND THE ARAB UPRISINGS

WEEKLY READINGS

W1 Introduction to the Arab Uprisings
W2 Modern History of the Middle East
W3 Post-Colonial Challenges and Authoritarian Rule
W4 The Rise and Fall of the Public Sector and the Emergence of Neoliberalism
Midterm
W5 Revolution: The Paradigms
W6 The Arab Uprisings: Euphoria
W7 The Arab Uprisings: Causes and Dynamics, Part I
W8 The Arab Uprisings: Causes and Dynamics, Part II
W9 The Egyptian Uprising
W10 The Syrian Uprising: Part I
W11 The Syrian Uprising Part II
W12 Proxy Wars

Field-Trip to Aden and Raqqa