Draft Syllabus

The Middle East: Security Challenges and U.S. Responses

Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:30 p.m. to 7:10 p.m., summer session B

June 4 through July 25, 2018

Instructor: Professor Gregory Aftandilian

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Office Hours: Wednesday evenings immediately after class or by appointment in room ARLFH 656

Course Description:

This class is an elective in the Master’s program in International Security. Drawing on current and historical cases, the course provides a deep understanding of major developments in the Middle East from the immediate post-World War II period to the present day, and how the United States responded to these events. Students will come to understand the political, ideological and social contexts of these regional events and crises, why and how they posed a challenge to U.S. security interests, and how U.S. policymakers responded to them. The last class will deal with an unfolding crisis—the conflict in Syria—and examine the Trump administration’s response to it as well as the dilemmas of keeping a limited U.S. military force in the country.

Course Goals:

Effective participation in international security analysis and policy action requires a range of skills. Individuals must be able to assess and evaluate the threat environment in the Middle East region since 1945 and the drivers of security challenges and crises. They must understand why these developments and crises came about, and what were the constraints on decision makers from domestic and international sources. They also need to address how strategies are developed, and what mechanisms monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of various strategies. The course is intended to provide a solid foundation for further study of specific security challenges in the Middle East, why regional actors pursued certain policies, and why and how U.S. policymakers responded to those challenges.
Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, students should have acquired:

- fundamental knowledge about major crises that have affected the Middle East region since 1945, why that region has been so important to U.S. security interests, and why and how U.S. policymakers have responded to these crises.

- improved understanding of the evolution of the Middle East threat environment that sets the international security policy agenda

- improved critical reasoning skills regarding the decision making process and the motivations and behavior of participants in domestic and international security forums

- expanded skills in communicating in written and oral formats about major international security issues

Course Materials

The course will draw on academic literature, think tank studies, and pertinent press reports involving major events in the modern Middle East.

Required Books:


Other readings, such as journal articles or chapters in books, are available on the Internet or will be placed on reserve in the library. Students are also expected to keep up with current Middle Eastern developments by reading one major newspaper (in print or online) every day.

Student Requirements:

Students are required to complete all assigned readings prior to class. They are expected to engage constructively in class discussions, and to complete their research paper on time. Failure to do the readings and hand in their research paper on time will result in a lower grade. Students are expected to attend all classes and will only be excused because of illness or a genuine family or work emergency.
Grading for the class will break down as follows:

Participation in class discussions: 25 percent

Mid-term exam: 25 percent

Research paper: 25 percent

Final exam: 25 percent

Course grading is not on a curve; class members are not competing with each other for marks.

Academic Accommodations for a Disability:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

Schar School Policy on Plagiarism:

The following is Schar School policy on plagiarism:

“The faculty of the Schar School takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of F. This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student’s transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g., F-1, J-1, J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the Schar School policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student’s work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The Schar School policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Codes; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it. (http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook)"

Preliminary Class Schedule (subject to change; more readings to be added for some topics):

June 4: Introduction. Wartime rivalries and the importance of Middle East oil for the United States. Overview of the course and student responsibilities. Lecture on the importance of the Middle East and the strategic asset of oil during World War
II. The discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia by American oil companies, the building of the Dhahran air base near the oil fields, and the forging of the U.S.-Saudi alliance during the war. U.S. participation in the occupation of Iran during the war to send war supplies to the Soviet Union, suspicions of Soviet and British interests in Iran, and the wartime pledge to withdraw all troops and restore full Iranian sovereignty after the war.


June 11: The emergence of nationalist movements and leaders in the Middle East. The ideological appeal of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism among the peoples of the Middle East, and the initial, favorable views towards the U.S.


June 13: U.S. covert interventions in Iran and Syria in the 1950s and the differences between the Truman and Eisenhower administrations


Hahn book documents, pp. 143-144.

**June 18: The Suez War of 1956, the U.S. Response, and the aftermath**

Viewing in class of the BBC documentary, “The Other Side of Suez”


Mohammed H. Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail. Suez Through Egyptian Eyes* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1986), pp. 177-217


Hahn book, pp. 35-46.

**June 20: Attempts by the Kennedy Administration to reach a rapprochement with Nasser and why it failed, and efforts to press reforms on the Shah of Iran**


**June 25: Mid-term exam in the first half of class. The Johnson Administration, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and viewing the region through U.S.-Soviet rivalry**


Hahn book, pp. 47-57; 147-154


Hahn book, pp. 69-71; 155-157

July 2: The Iranian revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Carter Doctrine.


Hahn book, pp. 72-78; 144-146.

July 4: no class because of holiday

July 9: The Reagan administration and the pursuit of ‘Strategic Consensus’ with Israel and some Arab states, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the George H.W. Bush decision to protect Saudi Arabia and push back Iraqi forces out of Kuwait (but not go to Baghdad), and dual containment of Iraq and Iran.


Hahn book, pp. 78-91; pp. 158-159


Hahn book documents, pp. 170-175.

July 11: The Iraq war of 2003 and its ramifications for U.S. security policy


July 16: The Iran nuclear program, the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1, and the Obama administration’s attempt to mollify Gulf Arab states


https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal


https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/

July 18: Research papers due. The GCC crisis and the future of Gulf security


“Joint Statement of the Inaugural United States-Qatar Strategic Dialogue,” U.S. Department of State, Media Note, January 30, 2018


July 23: The Syrian crisis and policy dilemmas for the Trump Administration

Readings: Secretary of State Tillerson’s policy speech on Syria at the Hoover Institution, January 17, 2018

https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/01/277493.htm

July 25: Final Exam in class