

POLISCI 3329F: The Politics of the Middle East

İpek Ece Şener

Western University
Fall 2026

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Office Hours: Tuesday 12:15-1:15 pm 3:40-4:40 pm

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to equip students with the historical, theoretical, and empirical knowledge needed to better understand the international relations of the Middle East, with particular attention to state formation, borders, war, peace, and conflict. Through a chronological and thematic approach, we will examine key ideas, events, and conflicts that have shaped the Middle East from the early 20th century to the present. We begin by defining the Middle East as a region and tracing its modern state formation through the legacies of empire, colonialism, and decolonization. The course studies pivotal conflicts, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese Civil War, and the Gulf Wars, as well as the rise of political Islam, the Iranian Revolution, and the Arab Spring. In doing so, we address critical themes such as nationalism, identity, foreign intervention, and the role of non-state actors.

Expectations

Students are expected to complete all assigned readings before each class meeting (except those specifically marked as recommended). Class discussions and reading assignments are designed to complement one another and should not be treated as substitutes. Active participation is strongly encouraged: students should come prepared to raise questions, engage with the material, and contribute to discussion. Our course will provide space for the open and respectful expression of all perspectives and questions.

Prerequisite(s)

Political Science 2231E or Political Science 2531F/G, or Political Science 2245E or Political Science 2545F/G, or International Relations 2704F/G, or the former International Relations 2701E, or the former International Relations 2702E

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Methods of Evaluation

Attendance

Attendance is required and will be recorded at every class meeting. You may miss one class without penalty. After that, half a point will be deducted from your final course grade (out of 100) for each additional absence. Absences supported by a valid doctor's note will not count toward this penalty. To receive an exemption, you must bring a printed copy of the doctor's note to the next class meeting and submit it in person.

Discussion Participation

For this class to run best, the active contribution of students during the course hours is necessary. Students are expected to attend and participate in all class meetings. What I expect of you is to positively contribute to the class atmosphere. This means paying attention to when others are contributing, not being disruptive and offering your opinions and ideas when appropriate.

In-Class Poster Session

Each group of 3-4 students will prepare and use a poster (or only one-page slide) narrating the events that took place during the Arab Spring in a country of their choice. This session will take place during class hours on December 1st. Each presentation should be no longer than 5 minutes. Students should practice their presentations beforehand to ensure that they do not exceed five minutes. A class discussion will follow the presentations. Please think of this presentation as a group project where each participant contributes their strengths. Feel free to be creative!

Failure to attend the poster session without a valid doctor's note will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Students with a valid doctor's note must complete a one-on-one oral examination about their poster on December 8 to receive a grade for the assignment.

Midterm and Final Exams

The midterm exam will take place in class on **October 27** and will cover all material discussed up to that point. It is designed to assess your understanding of key concepts and themes introduced in the course. The final exam will be held on the date and place determined by the school administration and will be cumulative, focusing on your ability to synthesize and analyze the material covered throughout the semester. Further details about the format and content of both exams will be provided closer to the respective dates.

All wearable technology and smart glasses are banned from use for in-class exams and assignments. Students who need glasses must ensure that they have their regular prescription eyewear available for exam use.

Failure to attend the midterm exam without a valid doctor's note will result in a grade of zero for the exam. Students who provide a valid doctor's note must take a make-up exam on **November 3**.

Midterm exam is ineligible for accommodation without the submission to the SAP of a well-documented medical or compassionate considerations application.

Movie Review Paper

Each pair of students will write a movie review on their choice of movie from among the list of movies provided in the syllabus. Students should choose the movie together according to their common interests, and discuss the movie among themselves before starting to write. Students should form their thesis statement based on this discussion.

The paper should briefly summarize the movie (not longer than one long paragraph), then analyze the movie. In their analysis, students should present a clear thesis statement. The analysis should connect the movie to our course readings and content. Your analysis need not summarize readings but critically engage with sources, and develop your own argument supported by these sources.

Students should cite a minimum of 5 sources, from our syllabus or elsewhere. If students choose to use outside sources, they should only use university press books and articles from reputable academic social science journals. Unpublished theses, NGO reports, and news articles may be used; however, they will not count towards the mandatory 5 sources. While using a citation, students are required to note the exact page they are referring to. I will review these references in great detail. You may use your preferred citation method as long as you are consistent throughout your paper. Your paper should have an appropriate title.

Students are free to use AI and other technology tools for this exercise only. However, they are responsible for any analytical, factual, citation, etc. error that I may find in their review. Non-existent bibliography citations will lead to disciplinary action, and a cited page not matching its description in the paper will result in receiving a 0 on this exercise. If they choose to use AI, students are required to make sure their choice of AI detection tool does not detect the use of AI more than 20% (I will check).

5–6 pages not including bibliography. Double-spacing. Times New Roman. 12-point font. 1-inch margins.

Movie Review Paper is due on **November 17**. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Grading Policy

- 5% Attendance
- 5% Discussion Participation
- 15% In-class Poster Presentation
- 30% Midterm
- 30% Final
- 15% Movie Review Paper

Non-Medical and Medical Accommodation:

For work totalling 10% or more of the final course grade, you must provide valid medical or supporting documentation to the Academic Counselling Office of your Faculty of Registration as soon as possible. The exams are worth 10% of the course grade, therefore students must see their Academic Counsellor for all accommodations. Students should consult their Academic Counsellor and are not obligated to disclose confidential medical information to the professor.

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Unless otherwise instructed by the professor, the use of electronic devices (including laptops, tablets, and mobile phones) is prohibited during class meetings and examinations. All devices must be turned off or silenced and stored away. Students who require electronic devices for approved accommodations should contact the professor in advance.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken very seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences_26SEP.pdf

Plagiarism

Plagiarism involves reliance on the work of another author without attribution. Students must compose their own essays and assignments, in their own words. Whenever students incorporate an idea, or a passage, or data from another author, they must fully acknowledge this by using quotation marks where appropriate and by properly citing the borrowed material.

Plagiarism can be direct, involving straightforward copying of an author's work without providing both attribution and quotation marks. It can be less direct, involving lightly paraphrasing an author's work, rearranging their sentences while maintaining the same general structure and meaning, or stitching together material from two or more sources — these would count as plagiarism even with the source or sources identified, as they rely too heavily upon the way the author or authors chose to present their ideas. Take note that students may satisfactorily write up an author's ideas in their own words, but then neglect to cite the source or sources of the ideas, which also counts as plagiarism. And students may plagiarize themselves by submitting work they have previously submitted in other courses.

Plagiarism is a major academic offence, one which is taken seriously at Western.

See Scholastic Offence Policy (above) and Procedures in the Western Academic Calendar for more detail: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_scholastic_offence_procedure.pdf

Plagiarism Checking: All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Multiple-choice tests/exams: Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

When using AI, reliance on false citations (i.e., AI hallucinations) will also be considered as an academic offense. Although this doesn't involve plagiarizing from a specific author, it does involve inclusion of AI-generated material without proper attribution, and which simply may not exist to properly attribute.

Security and Confidentiality of Student Work

Submitting or Returning Student Assignments, Tests and Exams - All student assignments, tests and exams will be handled in a secure and confidential manner. Particularly in this respect, leaving student work unattended in public areas for pickup is not permitted.

Duplication of work

Undergraduate students who submit similar assignments on closely related topics in two different courses must obtain the consent of **both** instructors prior to the submission of the assignment. If prior approval is not obtained, each instructor reserves the right not to accept the assignment.

Grading and grade adjustments

The Department of Political Science has a policy that undergraduate final course grades will only be rounded to the next whole grade if they end at 0.5 or higher; otherwise, they will be rounded down.

Additional Support

Students registered in Social Science should refer to <https://www.advising.ssc.uwo.ca/index.html> for information on Medical Policy, Term Tests, Final Examinations, Late Assignments, Short Absences, Extended Absences, Documentation and other Academic Concerns. Non-Social Science students should refer to their home faculty's academic counselling office.

Accessibility at Western: Please contact accessibility@uwo.ca if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you. <https://accessibility.uwo.ca/index.html>

Support Services

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts on the Wellness and Wellbeing website <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/index.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. <https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Schedule

Week 1 - September 15: What/Where is the Middle East?

- Quiz: Map the Countries in the Middle East (Not Graded)
- Davison, R. H. 1960. "Where Is the Middle East?" *Foreign Affairs*. 38(4): 665-675.

Ottoman Millet System

- Abu Jaber, K.S. (1967), The Millet System in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire. *The Muslim World*, 57: 212-223

Week 2 - September 22: State Formation and the Foundations of Ethnic War

Armenian Genocide

- Suny, R. (2025). "Introduction." *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*.
- Suny, R. (2011). "Writing Genocide: The Fate of the Ottoman Armenians." *A Question of Genocide*. pp. 15-41

The Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey

- Clarke, Bruce (2006). "Introduction." *Twice A Stranger: The Mass Expulsions that Forged Modern Greece and Turkey*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. pp. 1-20.

Legacies of the Ottoman Empire

- Quartet, Donald. (2005). "Legacies of the Ottoman Empire." *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 195-201.
- *Movie Suggestion: The Promise (2016, Terry George)*

Week 3 - September 29: Borders and Their Consequences

Drawing Borders: Husayn-McMahon Correspondence, Sykes-Picot, and the Balfour Declaration

- Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024 "World War I and the End of the Ottoman Order" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. Chapter 9.
- Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024. "The Palestine Mandate and the Birth of the State of Israel" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. pp 185-191.

Nationalism and Identity

- Gelvin, J. L. 2011. "The Introduction and Spread of Nationalism" in *The Modern Middle East*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 13.
- Vali, Abbas. (1998). "The Kurds and Their 'Others': Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. 18 (2): 82–95.

- *Movie Suggestion: Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)

Week 4 - October 6: Colonialism and Decolonization

Colonial Rule & Independence

- *Recommended:* Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024 "The Arab Struggle for Independence ... from the Interwar Era to 1945" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. Chapters 11&12
- Owen, R. 2004. "The end of empires: The emergence of the modern Middle Eastern states" in *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge: NY. pp. 5-22.
- Gelvin, J. L. 2011. "Imperialism (Ch. 6)" in *The Modern Middle East*. Oxford University Press. pp. 87-99.

Algerian Civil War

- Franz Fanon, "On Violence," in *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- *Movie Suggestion: The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

Week 5 - October 13: Reading Week NO CLASS

Week 6 - October 20: Nasserism and the Arab-Israeli Conflict

The Birth of the State of Israel

- Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024. "The Palestine Mandate and the Birth of the State of Israel" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. Chapter 13

Arab Socialism, Suez Crisis, Six Day War, Yom Kippur War

- Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024. "The Middle East in the Age of Nasser ... " in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. Chapters 15&16
- Binder, L. 2006. "Gamal Abd al-Nasser: Iconology, Ideology, and Demonology" in *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*. Edited by Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler. University Press of Florida.
- *Recommended:* Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024. "Israel and the Palestinians from 1948 to the 1970s" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. Chapter 17
- Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024. "Egypt Under Sadat: Domestic and Diplomatic Re-alignments" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. pp. 308-316.
- *Movie Suggestion: Saladin the Victorious (Al-Nasser Salah Ad-Din)*, 1963, Youssef Chahine

Week 7 - October 27: Midterm

Week 8 - November 3: Iranian Revolution and the "Axis of Resistance"

- Cleveland and Bunton "Iran Under Reza Shah" Chapter 10. pp 144-149
- Cleveland and Bunton "Iran: The Re-establishment of Royal Autocracy" Chapter 14. pp 224-233.
- Rationality, Reality, and Iranian Grand Strategy. Going to Tehran. Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett
- Introduction, Resistance: The Essence of the Islamist Revolution. Alastair Crooke
- *Movie Suggestion: Persepolis (2007)*

Week 9 - November 10: Lebanese Civil War, Baath Party in Syria and Iraq

- Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024. "Changing Patterns of War and Peace: Egypt and Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. pp. 316-323.
- Parkinson, Sarah Elizabeth. 2013. "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review*. 107(3): 418–32.
- *Movie Suggestion: West Beirut (1998)*

Iran-Iraq War, Invasion of Kuwait & First Gulf War

- Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2024. "The Consolidation of Authoritarian Rule in Syria and Iraq: The Regimes of Hafiz al-Asad and Saddam Husayn" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. Chapter 21

Ba'thist State

- Blaydes, L. 2020. Rebuilding the Ba'thist State: Party, Tribe and Administrative Control in Authoritarian Iraq, 1991-96" *Comparative Politics*, 53 (October 2020)

Week 10 - November 17: Foreign Policy, Regional Conflicts and Political Islam Movie Review Paper Due

Foreign Policy

- Hinnebusch, R. 2014. "Foreign Policy in the Middle East." in (eds) Hinnebusch, R. and Ehteshami, A. *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. pp. 1-34.

Political Islam

- Gelvin, J. L. 2011. "Political Islam" in *The Modern Middle East*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 20
- *Recommended:* Schwedler, J. (2011). "Can Islamists Become Moderates?: Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis." *World Politics* 63(2), 347-376.

Week 11 - November 24: Iraq War

- Iraq and Islam Anxiety: How Fearmongering Got Up a War and Kept It Going. Juan Cole, Ch. 4
- Shaver A and Shapiro JN. 2021. "The Effect of Civilian Casualties on Wartime Informing: Evidence from the Iraq War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.
- Blaydes L, Linzer DA. 2012. "Elite Competition, Religiosity, and Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World." *American Political Science Review*. 106(2):225-243.
- *Movie Suggestion: Turtles Can Fly, Bahman Ghobadi, 2004*

Week 12 - December 1: Arab Spring – Student Poster Session

- 2-3 Students prepare a poster narrating a case study
- Each group chooses a country and discusses the trajectories of Arab Spring
- *Suggested: Anderson, L. 2011. "Demystifying the Arab Spring: Parsing the Differences Between Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya." Foreign Affairs. 90(3): 2-7.*

Week 13 - December 8: Kurdish Insurgency and the Syrian Civil War

- Blaydes, Lisa. 2018. "Collaboration and Resistance in Iraqi Kurdistan." in *States of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein*. Princeton University Press.
- Tezcur, GM. 2016. "Ordinary People, Extraordinary Risks: Participation in an Ethnic Rebellion." *American Political Science Review*.
- Sener, IE. (N.d.) "Let Activists Protest and Speak: How Activists Curb Militant Support."
- *Movie Suggestion: Kobane Film (2023) Özlem Yaşar*

Final Exam Date to be Announced by the Administration

Movie List for the Movie Review Paper

Egypt

- Cairo Station (1958) Youssef Chahine
- The Land (1969) Youssef Chahine
- Cairo Conspiracy (2022) Tarik Saleh
- The Nile Hilton Incident (2017) Tarik Saleh
- The Night of Counting the Years (Al-mummia) (1969) Shadi Abdel Salam
- Mawlana (The Preacher) (2016) Ahmed Magdy
- Scheherazade, Tell Me a Story (2009) Wael Mandour Yousry Nasrallah
- The Other (1999) Youssef Chahine
- After the Battle (2012) Yousry Nasrallah
- The Island (2007) Sherif Arafa

Jordan

- Inshallah a Boy (2024) Amjad Al Rasheed

Lebanon

- Capernaum (2018) Nadine Labaki
- Where Do We Go Now? (2011) Nadine Labaki
- Caramel (2007) Nadine Labaki

Tunisia

- Brotherhood (2018) Meryam Joobeur

Algeria

- I Still Hide to Smoke (2016) Rayhana Obermeyer

Morocco

- Adam (2019) Maryam Touzani

Palestine

- Omar (2013) Hany Abu-Assad
- Paradise Now (2005) Hany Abu-Assad

- Farha (2021) Darin J. Sallam
- No Other Land (2024) Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Yuval Abraham

Israel

- Waltz with Bashir (2008) Ari Folman
- Live and Become (2005) Radu Mihaileanu
- The Band's Visit (2007) Eran Kolirin
- Maktub (2017) Oded Raz
- Out in the Dark (2012) Michael Mayer

Iran

- Leila's Brothers (2022) Saeed Roustayi
- My Favorite Cake (2024) Maryam Moghadam, Behtash Sanaeeha
- Lizard (2004) Kamal Tabrizi
- Fireworks Wednesday (2006) Asghar Farhadi
- Where is the Friend's Home? (1987) Abbas Kiarostami
- Children of Heaven (1997) Majid Majidi
- A Separation (2011) Asghar Farhadi
- Taste of Cherry (1997) Abbas Kiarostami
- A Hero (2021) Asghar Farhadi
- Ballad of a White Cow (2020) Behtash Sanaeeha
- The Color of Paradise (1999) Majid Majidi
- Baran (2001) Majid Majidi
- The Song of Sparrows (2008) Majid Majidi

Kurdistan, Iran

- Niwemang – Half Moon (2006) Bahman Ghobadi
- A Time for Drunken Horses (2000) Bahman Ghobadi

Kurdistan, Iraq

- Turtles Can Fly (2004) Bahman Ghobadi

Kurdistan, Turkey

- Press (2010) Sedat Yılmaz
- Bahoz (The Storm) (2008) Kazım Öz
- Zer (2017) Kazım Öz
- Min Dit: The Children of Diyarbakir (2010) Miraz Bezar
- On the Way to School (2008) Orhan Eskiköy, Özgür Dogan
- Come to My Voice (2014) Hüseyin Karabey

Kurdistan, Syria

- Kobane Film (2023) Özlem Yaşar

Saudi Arabia

- The Perfect Candidate (2019) Haifaa al-Mansour
- Wadjda (2012) Haifaa al-Mansour

Bahrain

- Bahrain: Shouting in the dark (2011) (documentary)

Turkey

- Innocence (1997) Zeki Demirkubuz
- Big Man, Little Love (2001) Handan İpekçi
- Cholera Street (1997) Mustafa Altıoklar
- Beynelminel (2006) Muharrem Gulmez, Sirri Süreyya Önder
- The Road (1982) Serif Gören, Yılmaz Güney
- Takva: A Man's Fear of God (2006) Özer Kiziltan
- The Wall (1983) Yılmaz Güney
- The Herd (1978) Zeki Ökten
- Dry Summer (1963) Metin Erksan
- Cark (1987) Muzaffer Hıçdurmaz
- The Mine (1978) Yavuz Özkan
- Demiryol (1979) Yavuz Özkan