UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
WINTER SESSION 2013-2014, FIRST TERM

POLI 433 A03 – ISSUES IN POLITICS (SEMINAR COURSE) (CRN 12702)

“POLITICS OF THE MIDDLE EAST”

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., and by appointment. Requests for individual consultation are welcomed and encouraged.

Course Meetings: Fridays, 11:30 a.m. to 2:20 p.m., in MacLaurin D107

Outline of Course Content

It may be useful to open POLI 433, “Politics of the Middle East,” by underscoring that which is evident: we are collaborating together on this seminar during an historical epoch of extraordinary flux, convulsion, and complexity throughout the region of the world that can be broadly (although not without contestation) conceptualized as the Middle East. Travel across the map from North African states such as Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, to the Levantine (i.e., eastern Mediterranean) areas of Israel/Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon, through the Iraqi portion of the Fertile Crescent, and on into the Persian Gulf (e.g., Bahrain, Qatar), Arabian Peninsula (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Yemen), and Afghanistan/Pakistan, and then incorporate the regional powers Iran and Turkey, engaged as they are in long-running rivalries over what occurs in the foregoing locales—and this is not even to have yet mentioned key non-state actors like Hezbollah, Hamas, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban: it is difficult to think of a political entity within the Middle East that is not today enmeshed in upheavals marked by varying manifestations of violence. Moreover, these upheavals exhibit an array of ideological and geo-strategic interests and ramifications extending across the region, and indeed around the world, while holding potential outcomes that seem to be not only unknowable, but impervious to attempts at predictable manipulation and management (all of which is exemplified, at the present moment, by the ever-intensifying, multi-sided proxy war in Syria).

Guided by a principle of intellectual and ethical humility, our chief objective in POLI 433 is neither to formulate ill-advised “expert” forecasts, or even policy recommendations, that promise to soon be outstripped by new developments, nor to
necessarily ascribe designations of normative right and wrong (although seminar participants are welcome to advance reflective and well-supported normative judgments). Nor should we feel as if it is incumbent upon us to race around the region’s topographical and the electronic universe’s virtual landscapes, minute-to-minute, as internet-clicking political storm chasers (an analytic approach that some commentators might say is all too much reflected in the current, crisis-to-crisis posture of a government like the United States’). Not least, while we will range broadly in our discussions of Middle Eastern sub-regions and political scenarios, any pretense of exhaustive coverage concerning this irreducibly complex portion of the globe would fall far beyond our grasp.

Above all, the seminar’s aim is to help participants build a deep, nuanced base of conceptual knowledge and perceptual awareness, with the aid of which we can assimilate our ongoing, detailed engagement with emerging political (as well as other relevant) developments and commentary concerning the Middle East. This approach will entail our thinking, at each turn, about how events and processes occurring within, or impinging on the region signify fundamental, overlapping political motifs and dilemmas that lie beyond, and may yet be affected in unforeseeable ways by fluid occurrences of the day.

From the outset, one such motif or dilemma with which we will grapple might be termed “conceptualizing the politics of the Middle East.” Within this context, we will address guiding questions like, when we speak of the Middle East and its politics, to what peoples, locations, and phenomena are we referring?; and what is the significance of the radically diverse, often-contending standpoints from which Middle East politics is assessed and practiced? In the process, such key, subsidiary questions as the following will arise: is the Middle East itself a discernable geographic, cultural, or other sort of place, or is it an abstraction in the mind, and if so, within whose mind(s)? Which actors predominate in shaping perceptions about the political importance of the Middle East, and about the forms of policy, power, and resistance to power that should be exerted, and interests that should be pursued, within the region; and what forms of discourse are employed in constructing these perceptions? What species of current and historical influence—geographic, geo-strategic, religious, ideological, socio-cultural, economic, technological, and more—act to animate politics within the Middle East, and in the political calculations employed by outside actors with respect to the region?

Connected with the foregoing questions, and leading into others, two further, pivotal political motifs or dilemmas that we will explore through the prism of contemporary Middle East politics include: “changing models of sovereignty” (e.g., what paradigms of governance, on the whole—and, more specifically, what kinds of relation among religious authority, state power, and other spheres of political power, from global to local—are unfolding in the region, and with what consequences for human lives?); and “transformations of political identity” (e.g., what are the relative significances of national, religious, ethnic, tribal, class-based, gender, and other sources and dimensions of identity, at the state, as well as sub-state and transnational levels?).
As we proceed through the term, the seminar will move through two distinct phases. During approximately the first eleven weeks of class (September 6-November 15), we will explore varying dimensions of how Middle East politics sheds unique light on profound political questions, in discussions structured around five assigned books, some assigned articles, and additional resources that you might like (and are encouraged) to bring in and contribute to our analyses. The capstone of the seminar comprises participants’ presentations of independent research projects (November 22-29, and likely at least the second half of the November 15 class), each of which will involve inquiry into a topic of the participant’s choosing, undertaken in a way that is informed by the seminar’s core themes.

As a seminar course, POLI 433 will be conducted as a collaborative effort among all participants. While some of our time together will involve presentations by the instructor, discussion among, and presentations by student participants are preeminent in driving the seminar. Therefore, please be sure to attend diligently, and be actively engaged; this will also be essential in enabling you to keep abreast of which issues we are covering on given days.

**Course Texts**


Because we’re concerned in POLI 433 with analyzing ever-developing aspects of Middle East politics—and, especially, with critically assessing how this realm of politics is conceived of and represented—please also consider regular, thoughtful engagement with relevant news and commentary resources to comprise a vital, supplementary text. In addition to significant North American and international newspapers like *The Globe and Mail, The New York Times,* and *The Guardian,* examples of apt online resources include [http://www.haaretz.com/](http://www.haaretz.com/), [http://aljazeera.com/](http://aljazeera.com/), and [http://tehrantimes.com/](http://tehrantimes.com/) (respectively, the English-language websites for the Israeli newspaper *Ha’aretz*, the Qatari news source *Al-Jazeera*, and the Iranian newspaper the *Tehran Times*); [http://merip.org](http://merip.org) (Middle East Report Online); and [http://www.jadaliyya.com/](http://www.jadaliyya.com/) (a website that offers independent commentary, as well as worldwide, Middle East-related press and social media...
roundups). In addition, it is recommended that you regularly explore (through, e.g., the UVic Libraries catalog) such online-accessible journals as *Middle East Policy*, *The National Interest*, and the *New Left Review*. Valuable, as well, are the numerous, relevant essays in such book-review periodicals as *The New York Review of Books* and the *London Review of Books*. Therefore, each Friday, please come prepared to enrich our discussion with those news, analysis, and commentary resources that you have been finding especially useful during the preceding week.

**Methods of Evaluation**

Your performance in POLI 433 will be evaluated and weighted in the following fashion:

* A critical analysis examining how the politics of the Middle East is conceptualized in scholarly and popular sources: 15% of your final grade.

* A proposal and brief bibliographic essay outlining the thesis of, and prospective sources for your independent research project: 15% of final grade.

* Seminar presentation on research: 15% of final grade.

* Research paper: 45% of final grade.

* Participation in seminar discussion: 10% of final grade.

A few words on each of the methods of evaluation:

**In General:**

Failure to complete all assignments will result in a grade of “N” for the course.

None of the written assignments for the seminar will be accepted by any electronic means of submission (for example, e-mail attachment, or fax). Therefore, the only acceptable means of submission for either of these assignments is in hard copy, please.

None of the assignments may be handwritten, in the absence of a documented medical reason for why typing is not feasible.

No assignments will be accepted without penalty after the relevant due dates that are stated below for each assignment. The only exceptions will be for documented medical (physical or psychological) reasons or family emergencies. Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 5% per day.
We will employ the UVic Undergraduate Grading system described on p. 37 of the 2013-2014 UVic Calendar.

Further details will be discussed about the assignments below as we get deeper into the term.

**Statement on Plagiarism (Please Read with Care):**

Please avoid plagiarism at all costs, as it is a violation of the ethical code of the University, and will result in a failing grade for the plagiarized assignment (while foreclosing the possibility of resubmitting the assignment). Course participants should familiarize themselves with the statement concerning plagiarism in the current UVic Calendar, pp. 32-34.

**Comments About Specific Assignments (Subject to Adjustment):**

**Critical Analysis Exercise:** This exercise, due in class on Friday, October 11, should result in a paper of approximately 1000-1250 words/4-5 double-spaced, numbered, twelve-point type pages, in addition to title page, and bibliography or list of works consulted. Its purpose is to give you the opportunity to build on the first few weeks of our seminar by critically examining at least one scholarly source, and one popular source (e.g., a newspaper article or opinion piece, an article from a magazine like The Economist, a book, or a political speech) concerning any aspect(s) of Middle East politics.

The two (or more) sources may be on the same, related, or different topics, and they may be from similar or divergent intellectual standpoints: whatever you select, the basic objective is to assess (and, if you wish, compare) how the sources conceptualize the Middle East and its politics. Some examples of questions to consider, in the process: what are the sources’ standpoints, with respect to, e.g., their intellectual, doctrinal, or ideological orientation, and how does this affect their depiction of Middle East politics? Whatever the sources’ biases, are they implicit or explicit? What is the significance for your assessment of the specific topical issue(s) with which the sources deal? How does each of the source’s being scholarly or popular, as the case may be, affect the way in which it conceives of the material that it treats? Do the sources appear well-informed by relevant ideas and analytic perspectives?

Please bolster your critical analysis with the use of at least three further scholarly sources, whether from among our course readings up to this point in the curriculum, or otherwise.

As will also be the case with your further writing for the seminar, you should strive in this paper for clear and incisive writing that is grammatically and syntactically sound, and that has correct spelling. Structural aspects will count significantly in the grading of all writing in POLI 433. Moreover, all written
assignments must cite every source upon which you rely for quotations, or specific factual material. Either a humanities (i.e., Chicago Manual of Style) or social sciences means of citation is acceptable for your writing in this course, but whichever of these methods you choose to employ within a given assignment, please be sure to maintain consistency throughout the paper.

**Research Project Proposal and Brief Bibliographic Essay/Annotated Bibliography:**
This assignment, due in class on Friday, November 1, should result in a proposal of no fewer than 500 words/2 double-spaced, numbered, twelve-point type pages, and a bibliographic essay or annotated bibliography (as per your choice) integrating no fewer than eight sources. The proposal should outline the prospective thesis for your upcoming research project, while the bibliographic component should include a few lines on each of your sources, envisioning how they will contribute to the development of your project. Thus, the entire assignment that you turn in is likely to run approximately 4-5 pages.

**Presentation on Research:** Over the last two to three sessions of POLI 433 (i.e., from approximately the second half of Friday, November 15 through Friday, November 29), each seminar participant will deliver a presentation of around ten minutes, and engage around five minutes’ worth of questions and discussion on the research in progress for his or her essay. The presentation schedule will be drawn up according to such criteria as topical consistency allowing for efficient question and discussion periods, so please be prepared to present on any of these dates. Of course it is understood that presentations falling earlier on the calendar than later ones may come at a more germinal stage of project development; in all instances, it is hoped that the opportunity to present will be of benefit to wherever you are in your writing process. I will let you know of the presentation schedule, with as much finality as possible, by Friday, November 8.

**Research Paper:** This paper, due during office hours, or to my Department mailbox on Wednesday, December 4, should be approximately 4500-5000 words/18-20 double-spaced, numbered, twelve-point type pages, in addition to title page, and bibliography or list of works consulted. Building on your proposal, bibliographic essay or annotated bibliography, and presentation, the paper should develop an analytic thesis that is relevant to POLI 433, and manifests an awareness of the seminar’s core themes. Papers should integrate no fewer than twelve scholarly sources (i.e., at least half again as many sources as appeared in your bibliographic essay).

**Participation in Seminar Discussion:** Contributions to seminar discussion will be judged primarily on the basis of their insightfulness and critical attention to the course curriculum, rather than their frequency. Therefore, please do not monopolize discussion time. Key criteria that will be employed in evaluating contributions to discussion are the extent to which they help to advance other students’ understanding of the material being studied; and whether the contributions are not only intellectually fruitful, but congenial, and committed to a spirit of open, friendly, and respectful inquiry. Regular, engaged attendance of the seminar will count for a portion of this element of your grade.
List of Topics and Associated Readings

(Subject to Adjustment; Further Readings May Be Added on Reserve, Electronically, or via Handouts)

Please note: so that we can maintain flexibility throughout the term with respect to setting the dates on which specific topics are treated, it is crucial that you maintain regular attendance, so that you are aware of our seminar schedule, as it unfolds. All National Interest, Middle East Policy, and New Left Review articles are intended to be accessed through the Library catalog.


CONCEPTUALIZING THE POLITICS OF THE MIDDLE EAST (tentatively September 13-October 4)

(2) Exploring Foundational Questions, together with the Potency of History and Geography: What is the “Middle East?” What is the “Middle East’s” (and the “West’s”) Historical Relationship to Islam? What is “Orientalism?”: Lockman, pp. 8-99; Bonine, et al., pp. 11-35, 56-99, 119-187.

(3) “Orientalism” in the United Kingdom’s and United States’ Historical Conceptualizations of, and Policies Towards the Middle East: Lockman, pp. 100-215; Bonine, et al., pp. 36-55.


CHANGING MODELS OF SOVEREIGNTY, PART I (tentatively October 11-October 18)


POLI 433 A03 Syllabus, Seminar in Politics of the Middle East/Winter Session 2013-2014, First Term/Page 7 of 8

TRANSFORMATIONS OF POLITICAL IDENTITY (tentatively October 25-November 1)


CHANGING MODELS OF SOVEREIGNTY, PART II (tentatively November 8-November 15)


RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS (tentatively November 15-November 29)