Course Description
This course introduces students to major dynamics and issues in the history of the Middle East in the past two centuries and seeks to nurture critical historical thinking about the region. We will touch on a wide range of topics, from different forms of colonial intervention, to modernizing reforms and reforming elites, the move from empire to a new state order, the politics and culture of nationalism, post-colonial states and authoritarian regimes, Islamist mobilization, and recent neo-liberal politics. Proceeding in a roughly chronological order, we will weave thematic discussions related to women and gender, environmental history, urban history, history of consumption, etc. into that framework. All along, a central arching theme of the course will be modernity: what shape it took at different times and places, how it was perceived and experienced, what challenges and tensions it engendered, who were the beneficiaries and losers.

Class discussions will be guided by reading questions posted below, one of which students will answer in writing before class. For example, we might ask: To what extent was Ottoman reform founded upon emulation of the West? How was WWI a watershed in ME political culture? How were women and gender deployed in nationalist and modernizing projects? What best explains the resilience of post-colonial ME authoritarian regimes? What has given Islamist movements (of different kinds) their purchase? Has globalization been primarily destabilizing in the ME and why?

Readings
Course readings (journal articles, book chapters, etc.) are posted on the course Blackboard page under Content or available as CUNY electronic resources (marked ER on the syllabus). All are listed below under the sessions for which they are assigned. You are expected to read at least a number of these critical pieces for each session.


Note, however, that reading these basic narratives is just a beginning—you must proceed from these to the critical readings posted on Blackboard or available as CUNY electronic resources.
Course Learning Objectives
1) Students will build a strong grasp of key issues and dynamics in modern ME history.
2) Students will develop an appreciation of scholarly debates and changing historiographical approaches to the ME and will be able to engage critically with relevant scholarly literature.
3) Students will be able to present effectively (orally and in writing) their analysis of various issues in ME history.

Coursework and Assessment
1) Regular and punctual attendance and active class participation based on reading carefully the assigned literature are a critical component of this course (30% of grade).
2) In preparation for class, students will submit electronically by class time a careful 2-page answer (with a proper apparatus) to one of the reading questions for that class (at least 8 pieces; 40% of grade).
3) The final assignment is a 6-8 pages argument-based analytical essay (on one of a number of topics I will provide) (due electronically 11/27 or 12/18 depending on topic; 30% of grade).

CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

Week 1 (8/26): Introduction

Week 2 (9/2): Approaches to the Study of the Modern Middle East

Readings:
Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, Ch. 4-7 (ER).

Gelvin, Introductions to Parts I and II and Ch. 3-4.

1) Based on Lockman, discuss the premises and the merits and/or weaknesses of at least two paradigmatic approaches to the study of the modern Middle East.
2) How does Gelvin’s book fit into existing paradigmatic approaches to the study of the modern Middle East?

Week 3 (9/9): Nineteenth Century Egypt: New Political Economy and Social Change

Readings:
Cleveland, Ch. 4-6 (relevant parts); Gelvin, Ch. 5-6 (relevant parts).


1) What are the premises, arguments, and fallacies of the modernizing/nationalist paradigm according to which Mehmet Ali’s project was one of transforming Egypt from a backward Ottoman province to a prosperous modern state?

2) How did the process of Egypt’s 19th-century incorporation into the modern world economy play out? How did it affect state and society? How does it bear out the dependency theory’s thesis about subordination and peripheralization?

3) Some historians put at the center of Egypt’s 19th-century transformation the imposition of a brutal and oppressive modern regime of knowledge, practice, and managing material and human resources. Explain and illustrate their arguments.

Week 4 (9/23): Nineteenth-Century Bureaucratic Reforms and Ottoman Modernity

Readings:
Cleveland, Ch. 4-5 (relevant parts); Gelvin, Introduction to Part II, Ch. 5, 6 (section on Lebanon).

Şükrü Hanioğlu, A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire, introduction and Ch. 4.


Joel Beinin, “Ottoman Reform and European Imperialism, 1839-1907,” in Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East, 44-70.

1) What did the Tanzimat reformers set out to do? What were the principal thrusts of their project (in military organization, governance, the economy, education, etc.) and how do these compare with the changes introduced by Mehmet Ali and his descendants in Egypt?

2) How do Hanioğlu, Wallerstein & Kasaba, and Makdisi differ in their assessment of the Tanzimat?

3) How did the Tanzimat project affect state and society, center and periphery? Who were the winners and losers? Were local economies decimated? Was society re-ordered, and how?

Readings:
Cleveland, Ch. 7-8.

Hanioğlu, Ch. 5, 6.


Elizabeth Frierson, “Gender, Consumption and Patriotism: The Emergence of an Ottoman Public Sphere,” in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. Dale Eickelman and Armando Salvatore, 99-125.


1) How was the Hamidian regime a continuation of the Tanzimat or a break from it?
2) How was Iran’s Constitutional Revolution different in its makeup and goals from the Young Turk Revolution?
3) What ties together the diverse intellectual stirrings, practices, protests, and revolutionary politics of this period? How do they represent something new? Why now?
4) How do studies of consumption help broaden or refine our understanding of turn-of-the-century Ottoman/Muslim modernity?

Week 6 (10/7): Post-WWI: A New State Order and Colonial/Mandatory Regimes

Readings:
Cleveland, Ch. 9, 11-12 (or Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, Ch. 6-8, available as ER)

Roger Owen, “End of Empires,” Ch. 1 in *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern ME*.


1) How did the European Powers go about drawing the post-war map of the Middle East and what kinds of states and problems emerged?
2) How did the British and French exercise power in their Mandatory states? Did the Mandates represent no more than disguised colonialism, and how?
3) How did British and French rule shape local politics, economies, and societies in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt (consider short- and long-term effects on local elites, parliamentary politics, industrial development, national cohesion, etc.)?

Week 7 (10/14): State/Nation Building in Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia

Readings:
Cleveland, Ch. 10, 12 (section on Saudi Arabia).

Eric Zurcher, Turkey: A Modern History, Ch. 10-11.


Ervand Abrahamian, A History of Modern Iran, Ch. 3.


1) Assess the Kemalist project of nation building and modernization (you may explore its premises, ask whom it benefitted and harmed or how it transformed center and periphery, evaluate its legacy in light of Turkey’s recent history, etc.)
2) Compare the Kemalist project with the changes enacted under Reza Shah in Iran. How were they similar and dissimilar? What factors explain the difference?

3) How were women deployed in projects of modernization and nation building in Atatürk’s Turkey and Reza Shah’s Iran?

4) How was the process of state/nation-building in Saudi Arabia different from those enacted in other Arab states? Does it resemble more Reza Shah’s project of state building in Iran?

Week 8 (10/21): British Mandate Palestine and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Readings:
Cleveland, Ch.13.

Relevant chapters from Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, The Palestinian People: A History (posted on Blackboard), or James Gelvin, The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War (ER), or Eugene Rogan, The Arabs: A History, Ch. 7, pp. 197-207, and Ch. 9 (ER).


Joel Beinin and Lisa Hajjar, Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Primer, Middle East Research and Information Project, 2014 (relevant parts).


1) Was Britain’s Palestine Mandate “doomed from the outset”? How so?
2) Discuss the workings of the “Arab Revolt” of 1936-1939 and its significance in the evolution of the conflict.
3) After close to three decades of British Mandatory rule over Palestine, in 1948 the Zionists established an independent state while the Palestinian Arabs became stateless and largely refugees. Considering the whole period from 1917, how would you best account for this outcome (make sure you pay attention to alternative explanations)?
4) How unique were Britain’s conduct, and failure, as mandatory power in Palestine? Or did they epitomize mandatory policies everywhere and the Mandates system itself—and how?
5) What kinds of recent interventions have shaped the historiography of Jews and Arabs under the British mandate, and how?

Week 9 (10/28): Nationalism and Political Culture in the Inter-War Middle East

Readings (draw also on readings from the last four classes as needed):
Gelvin, Ch. 13 (“The Invention and Spread of Nationalisms”).


Beth Baron, “Constructing Egyptian Honor,” Ch. 2 of Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics.


1) How was WWI a watershed in ME political culture, or was it?
2) Did subaltern actors participate in political life in the inter-war ME, and how?
3) How and why were women and gender deployed in nationalist and modernizing projects?
4) How does the League of National Action exemplify the transformation of Arab nationalist culture in the 1930s? What distinguished the new nationalist culture, how did it come about, and whom did it represent?
5) In forging the nation, were nationalist elites of the period by necessity illiberal or exclusionary?

**Week 10 (11/4): Nasser-Era Revolutionary Regimes**

**Readings:**
Cleveland, Ch. 15, 16, 17; Gelvin, Ch. 15.


Joel Gordon, Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation (all).


Beinin and Hajjar, Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Primer (relevant parts).

1) How have scholars grappled with the Nasser regime? What kind of state and society have they portrayed? What was the mainstay of the regime? How was society transformed? Consider El-Shakry’s arguments along with other views.
2) Assess Nasser’s role in the Arab world: What were his goals, successes, and failures in this arena? What kind of inter-Arab system emerged? How did Nasserism affect the Arab world? Were regional politics Nasser’s undoing?

3) How did the 1967 war and its aftermath transform the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of Arab, Palestinian, and Israeli politics?

Week 11 (11/11): Islamist Politics

Readings:
Cleveland, Ch. 18; Gelvin, “Political Islam” (Ch. 20 in 3rd edition, posted on BB).


Asef Bayat, “Does Radical Islam Have an Urban Ecology,” Ch. 9 in Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East.


1) What kinds of explanations have scholars offered for the emergence and spread of late 20th century Islamist politics?

2) How might we categorize Islamism into distinct strands? How useful is this exercise?

3) What gives Islamist groups (of different strands) their purchase? How have they captured imaginations and built followings?

4) Have Islamists been anti-modern? Or have they been modern in their genesis and conduct, and can they be agents of socializing modernity in Muslim societies?

5) What lessons can be drawn from Islamists’ participation in electoral politics since the 1980s?

Week 12 (11/18): Post-Colonial Authoritarian Regimes
Readings:
Cleveland, Ch. 21, 26; Gelvin, Ch. 15, 19.

Roger Owen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life*, Ch. 1-3 (Ch. 4-5 optional) (ER).


1) How have authoritarian regimes entrenched themselves in power in the post-colonial ME? What explains their resiliency?
2) How were the Ba’th regimes of Saddam Hussein and Hafiz al-Assad similar and dissimilar? What did they share with Nasser’s regime, or did they?
3) According to Wedeen, how did Hafiz al-Assad’s regime use cultural production, rhetoric, and public rituals? How does her inquiry broaden our understanding of the workings of authoritarianism?

**Week 13 (12/2): Saudi Arabia and Post-Revolutionary Iran: Contesting Regional Powers, Contesting Islams**

Readings:
Cleveland, Ch. 20


Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, Ch. 5-6 (“The Battle of Islamic Fundamentalisms” and “The Tide Turns”).

1) How have the Saudis deployed Wahhabi Islam as an instrument of rule and handled the public role of Islam and the relations between state and ‘ulama’?
2) What accounts for the emergence of Islamist opposition in Saudi Arabia, ostensibly the Islamic state par excellence? What kinds of tensions have been at work? What strands of Islamist opposition have emerged in the kingdom since 1979?
3) How is Iran’s Islamic Republic an Islamic state, or is it? How is it a unique political creature, or is it?
4) What is the “Shia Revival” posited by Nasr’s book? How has it evolved since 1979 and what kind of Sunni backlash has it generated? How would you critique Nasr’s arguments?

5) Discuss the paradox of a Saudi regime preoccupied with maintaining domestic political stability while nurturing a global network of Wahhabi-supported institutions that have spread potentially destabilizing Wahhabi-Salafi activism throughout the Muslim world.

**Week 14 (12/9): In the Wake of the “Arab-Spring” Uprisings**

**Readings:**
- Gelvin, Conclusion
- Roger Owen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life* (reread relevant chapters).
- *Islamism after the Arab Spring: Between the Islamic State and the Nation State* (Brookings Institution Report, January 2017).
- Joel Beinin and Lisa Hajjar, *Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Primer* (relevant parts).

1) What did the Arab uprisings of 2011 share with each other (or not)? How does their legacy reflect on the present state of the Arab world and on previous assessments of Arab politics?

2) Has Islamism been defeated? Is ISIS to blame?

3) Is a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still feasible given the developments of the past two decades and before? Is there an alternative and what might it look like?

4) Is Ideology in Middle Eastern politics dead? Have neo-liberalism, kleptocracy, and survival in power taken over? What do you make of Arsan’s argument that such realities, as exhibited in Lebanon, are far from uniquely Middle Eastern?
FURTHER READINGS/BOOKS OF INTEREST

Week 3:


Week 4:


Week 5:


**Week 6:**


**Week 7:**


**Week 8:**


**Week 9:**


**Week 10:**


**Week 11:**


**Week 12:**


**Week 13:**


Week 14:


