

**Geography of the Middle East**  
4 Credits- Fall Term: 2015 (GEOG 209)  
M,W,F: 10-10:50 am

Instructor: Zackery Thill  
Email: zackeryt@uoregon.edu  
Office: Condon Hall  
Office Hours: T & Th: 11-12:30 (or by appointment)  
McKenzie Hall  
GTF: TBA  
Lab time: TBA

In 2011, a series of progressive mass-uprisings, known as the Arab Spring, led to the overthrow of many dictatorships in the region. 2011 also witnessed instability in many countries like Syria and Yemen, which have had protracted conflicts. On top of this, last year, the regressive political movement, ISIS, took control over large swaths of Syria and Iraq; we have yet to see how the political reality will unfold.

Is the Middle East unraveling as we know it? How is the nation state, a foundation of the modern world, challenged by political forces in the region? What does this mean for the peoples of the region and the broader world?

In this class, we will investigate:

- How the region “the Middle East” came to be
- Major geopolitical events that have helped to shape the region
- The diversity of cultures, religions and identities within the region
- The origins of Fundamentalist Islam
- The changing role of the US in the Middle East
- Recent political and cultural developments in the region

The media is perhaps the primary source that shapes our perceptions and beliefs of the region and its peoples, cultures, religions. Therefore, the course will have a particular emphasis on the media. We will spend time deconstructing how news outlets, books, and film influence our understanding of the Middle East. On another level, this class will attempt to bridge the metanarratives of the region with a finer resolution in order to hone our perspectives on the diversity of beliefs, cultures, and identities within the Middle East.

**Reading requirements**

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The following texts are required for the course and are available at the book store:

- Reza Aslan, Beyond Fundamentalism 2009
- Alaa Al Aswany, The Yacoubian Building 2004

**All other readings will be available on Canvas under “Modules”**

## **Grading**

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**30% Response papers**  
**20% Midterm**  
**20% Final reflection paper**  
**20% Final**  
**10% Lab & Attendance**

## **Assignments**

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**Response papers:** 3 @ 10% each = 30%. 450-500 words (not including Bibliography)  
These short papers are meant to 1) demonstrate mastery and comprehension of course materials and readings and 2) provide space for your critical analysis. The heart of a critical analysis requires that you go beyond the established arguments to explore the politics behind particular arguments. More on this will be explained in a handout.

Response 1- Due Friday Oct. 9  
Response 2- Due Friday Oct. 30  
Response 3- Due Friday Nov. 20

**Midterm:** 20%

The midterm will be a combination of mapping, short answer and long answer questions  
Held on: Nov. 2

**Final reflection paper:** 20% 1200-1500 words (not including Bibliography)

The objective of the final reflection paper is to synthesize broader themes from the course and demonstrate your comprehension and ability to build a critical analysis on a topic of your choice. More on this will be explained in a handout.

Due Friday Dec. 4

**Final:** 20%

The final will be a combination of mapping, short answer and long answer questions.  
Held on: TBA

**Lab & Attendance:** 10%

Attendance is mandatory for both lecture and lab section. If you have a documented emergency, please let me or the GTF know.

## **Learning environment**

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Some of the topics we cover in class and discussion sections may, at times, be contentious or challenge your established ways of thinking about the world and the Middle East. It is important to respect difference of opinion while understanding that this does not warrant discrimination or hate speech. We must all work to respect one another. I will do my best to promote an inclusive learning environment. If you have any questions or concerns, please come talk to me.

## **Academic integrity**

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The GTF(s) and I will not tolerate violations of academic integrity, including plagiarism, cheating or any other form of academic misconduct. For full details see: <http://www.libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/> Violators will be reported to the Director of Student Judicial Affairs. Students found in violation may fail the course (i.e. receive an F).

## **Accessibility**

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I will do my best to foster an open and accessible learning environment. If you have special needs or a disability that impairs your learning related to the structure, content or methods of this class, please come talk to me. You can also reach the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu)

## **Schedule**

### **Week 1: Introduction to the region and its origins**

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Monday, September 28-  
Introduction  
Reading: Bonine, Amanat & Gasper 2012  
pp. 1-7 & 13-35

Wednesday, September 30-  
How do we know the Middle East?  
Reading: Sorenson  
Chapter 1, pp. 11-40

Friday, October 2-  
Media & representation  
Said: 1-15

Documentary: Said & Orientalism

### **Week 2: Pre and Post Ottoman era**

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Monday, October 5-  
Pre-Ottoman and Ottoman  
Reading: Gelvin: pp. 9-56

Wednesday, October 7-  
Ottomans continued

Friday, October 9-  
WWI & the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire  
**Due: Response paper 1**

### **Week 3: Colonialism**

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Monday, October 12-  
State building & the M.E.  
Gelvin pp. 184-207

Wednesday, October 14-  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25299553>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32930004>

Friday, October 16-  
Focus on Egypt-

**Documentary:** on the Suez canal Egypt and Colonialism  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETOUALw2EIs>

**Film:** (1966) Battle for Algiers

#### **Week 4: A focus on Religion & identity politics**

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Monday, October 19-  
Religions in the M.E.  
Diversity within Islam  
Sorenson pp. 42-70  
Aslan pp. 3-22

Wednesday, October 21-  
Gender in the M.E.

Friday, October 23-  
Partitions, states & territories  
A focus on the Kurds

#### **Week 5: States, nations, stateless nations and refugees**

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Monday, October 26-  
**Mid Term**

Wednesday, October 28-  
Israel as nation-state  
Palestine as territory

Friday, October 30-  
PLO & Israel  
Film: 5 Broken Cameras

## **Due: Response paper 2**

### **Week 6: Social movements**

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Monday, November 2-  
Roots of social movements  
Wahhabism  
Aslan pp. 220-248 & 259-266.

Wednesday, November 4-  
Muslim Brotherhood & Ba'thists etc.

Friday, November 6-  
Movements continued  
Movements less explored (climate, environment, social justice etc.)

### **Begin Al Aswany: The Yacoubian Building**

### **Week 7: Countries focus**

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Monday, November 9-  
Focus on Iran

Wednesday, November 11-  
Focus on Jordan

Friday, November 13-  
Continued.

### **Week 8: Revolutions and their wake**

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Monday, November 16-  
The Arab Spring's beginnings  
A focus on the economics/ geopolitics

Wednesday, November 18-  
The Arab Spring  
Development stalled?

Friday, November 20-  
The Arab Spring today  
**Due: Response paper 3**

Film: The Square

### **Week 9: How to Win a Cosmic War**

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Monday, November 23-  
Discuss the Yacoubian Building  
**Begin Aslan: How to Win a Cosmic War**

Wednesday, November 25-  
**No Class- Thanksgiving break**  
**Film assignment: TBA**

Friday, November 27-  
**No Class- Thanksgiving break**

**Week 10: Current and future directions for the M.E.**

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Monday, November 30-  
ISIS and the Nation-State

Wednesday, December 2-  
The Contemporary Middle East  
Refugees  
NY times article September 6, 2015.

Friday, December 4-  
Discuss How to Win a Cosmic War  
**Due: Final Reflection Paper**

**December 7-11 Finals week-**

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Final TBA