

INST 4855.001/5500.012: International Relations and Politics of the Middle East Senior Seminar

Instructor: Dr. Dariga Abilova

Meeting time: TTh 3:30 – 4:50 PM in Wooten 322

Office Hours: Wed 2:00PM – 4:00PM or by appointment

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Course Description, Structure, and Objectives

This course introduces the students to the international relations and politics of the Middle East including critical security issues. The course consists of 3 broader parts:

- Part 1 gives a brief survey of the rise of the state system in the Middle East and examines the political regimes and alliances established within the region.
- Part 2 places the Middle East into the International System and analyzes participation in the global affairs.
- Part 3 focuses on ethnic, sectarian, religious threats, and interstate conflicts in the Middle East and the response of the great powers to these conflicts.

Due to the political nature of these topics, there is more than one side to each of these issues. I will make a determined effort to avoid the discussion of these issues from a single ideological perspective and will provide opportunities for informative and critical evaluation and discussion.

Required Materials

- Stein, E. (2021). *International relations in the Middle East: hegemonic strategies and regional order*. Cambridge University Press. This is our primary textbook.
- Additional required readings, which listed in the course schedule, will be posted on Canvas.

This course has digital components! To fully participate in this class, you will need internet access to reference content on the Canvas Learning Management System. The University is committed to providing a reliable online course system to all users. However, in the event of any unexpected server outage or any unusual technical difficulty which prevents students from completing a time sensitive assessment activity, I will extend the time windows and provide an appropriate accommodation based on the situation. Please immediately report any technical problems that are preventing you from accessing the course and contact the UNT Student Help Desk: helpdesk@unt.edu or 940.565.2324 and obtain a ticket number.

You are responsible for being aware of all the information on this syllabus, including all deadlines and assignments. You should check Canvas page for this course regularly, because I will post some of the materials and important announcements there. Please make sure that you have access to a computer and internet connection. Having internet connection issues is not an excuse for missed work.

How to Succeed in this Course

You should be prepared for a much bigger reading load and more challenging assignments in this capstone course. If you complete all readings before class, participate in the class and submit all assignments on time, *you will succeed in this class*. The goal of this class is to empower you with new knowledge and experience to do things you can't yet do. That means every week we will have challenges you don't yet know how to clear. The schedule and policies in this syllabus are all designed with the purpose of giving you the tools you need to succeed and motivating you to use them to pass each challenge. Every assignment is designed for your focused practice and palpable improvement. Every deadline is in place to support your pacing. Every grading policy is there to encourage and reward you for working up to your own high standards.

If you are struggling for any reason please send me an email, talk to me after class, text me on MS Teams or come by my office whether or not we have an appointment. I want to hear what you're experiencing with the course, and we will work together to fix it. Depending on your struggle, there might be immediate help from UNT's Office of Disability Accommodation (info and link below) and/or a medical note from a counselor or therapist that will authorize me to accommodate your needs. If your struggle doesn't match either of these, we will work to find another solution.

I am generally strict about enforcing everything in this syllabus because that strictness usually helps my students achieve their goals and they thank me later for the tough love. If for any reason you fall off the train and feel unable to catch up, talk to me right away and we'll get you back on board.

Academic Integrity:

We will have written assignments in the class. I am a big believer that each one of you is more than capable of coming up with your own thoughts and arguments. And if you happen to agree with someone else's – that is fine, too, but **you always need to give credits to the creators**. Stealing someone else's hard work or failing to give proper credits to respective authors will never help to pass the assignments and goes against the university's policy on academic integrity.

Academic integrity emanates from a culture that embraces the core values of trust and honesty necessary for full learning to occur. As a student-centered public research university, the University of North Texas promotes the integrity of the learning process by establishing and enforcing academic standards. Academic dishonesty breaches the mutual trust necessary in an academic environment and undermines all scholarship. The Student Standards of Academic Integrity are based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. ([UNT Policy 06.003 \[EXT LINK\]](#))

Acts academic dishonesty include **cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, forgery, sabotage of other's works, self-plagiarism, team plagiarism and patch-writing plagiarism** ([UNT Policy 06.003 \[EXT LINK\]](#)). Any attempt to engage in academic dishonesty will result in receiving zero for the assigned items and may get reported to the Dean of Students.

You can (and you should) use spellchecking tools like Grammarly to review your original writing. However, the use of AI tools to produce content for you **will result in an automatic zero for the assignment**. In other words, you must write all your assignments yourself and you should **ONLY** use AI for editing, proof-reading and checking for misspellings.

If you would like assistance with expressing your ideas in writing, or just want to refresh your knowledge about proper citation mechanisms (so that you can give proper credits to authors), consider visiting the UNT's Writing Studio. Also, check [these very helpful handouts on the Writing Center's website \[EXT LINK\]](#), which will assist you with organizing and citing your academic papers.

Recording in Class:

This course will encourage open and robust discussions on issues and ideas without fear that any statements made will be used for inappropriate or retaliatory purposes. To ensure the comfort and protection of everyone in our classroom, recording of any kind is prohibited in this space (this includes audio recordings, live-streaming, photographs of course materials, etc.) unless a student has an approved accommodation from the Office of Disability Access (ODA). In such cases, all students in the course will be notified whenever recording will be taking place.

ADA accommodation statement:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access \[EXT LINK\]](#). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Word on Communication:

For this course, I will check my email at least once per day Monday-Friday during regular business hours 9 AM – 5 PM, so please remember that you will not necessarily receive an instant reply from me, but I will answer your email within next 48 hours. **Make sure that you use your UNT email when contacting me.** When emailing me, please identify yourself by giving me your entire name, the class you are in, and your specific question. Try to be very specific with your questions, **as the more specific you are, the better I will be able to answer your question!**

Respectful Learning Environment

I value the many perspectives students bring to our campus. Please work with me to create a classroom culture of open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal attacks are unacceptable. Likewise, when others critique your points, don't take them personally but think about what about your and others' arguments could be presented in a more persuasive manner. Remember, you can disagree without becoming disagreeable and in addressing disagreements you will help your

own and the class’s learning. In return for your thoughtful engagement with the material and each other, I will work to provide a learning environment that allows you to take intellectual and emotional risks. Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please stop by my office and let me know. We are all learning together.

Every student in this class should have the right to learn and engage within an environment of respect and courtesy from others. We will discuss our classroom’s habits of engagement and I also encourage you to review UNT’s Student [Code of Conduct \[EXT LINK\]](#) so that we can all start with the same baseline civility understanding. Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the [Code of Conduct \[EXT LINK\]](#). The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (UNT Policy 16.004):

UNT prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Grading

A	B	C	D	F
90-99%	80-90%	70-80%	60-70%	0-60%

Grades are never rounded up. For example, if you have earned 89.99%, your grade is B+. There might be some opportunity for extra credit for attending events that are relevant to this class.

Late work is not accepted unless there is a valid documented reason for missing the original deadline. Also, if you have an important life event, or an emergency, or any other situation that is preventing you from submitting the work on time – please let me know as soon as possible. I reserve the right to reject last minute requests for deadline extensions without any proper documentation.

In the interest of academic fairness, all students are graded on same criteria for each assignment. Personal desires or needs to maintain a particular GPA for scholarships, athletics, or other reasons cannot be considered in grading the submitted material.

If you believe that the grade assigned should be reviewed again, I am more than happy to take another look. However, a granted grade review will require a full re-grade of the entire work and may discover that certain portions were graded too leniently.

Assignments

Attendance and participation – 15%

This course is an interactive seminar course, where you are expected to actively participate and contribute to class discussions. I know that speaking in the class sometimes causes anxiety, so I will do my best to maintain a focused environment by moderating the discussion and asking prompting questions. Each week, you have 1-3 required readings and book chapters on a specific topic. You should read them all and think about the author's main arguments before class and come prepared to discuss them. Strive to attend every class session to earn full credit for participation grade as each class attendance will amount to 0.5 percentage points out of possible 15. Classes canceled by the instructor will be credited to students. UNT will also notify through [Eagle Alert \[EXT LINK\]](#) of any emergencies or if there is a campus closing that will impact a class in accordance with the Emergency Notifications. Please try to arrive before class begins to find a seat, prepare your materials, and connect with your peers. The beginning of class is especially critical—just like the beginning of a movie or book. Being late to class is sometimes inevitable. *If you are late, know that you are welcome to join the class, but please do so without distracting others.*

Map Quiz – 5%

Once we move to the case studies, we will have a map quiz in class. The goal of this assignment is for you to know where main countries in the region are located, and which share critical borders. This is key to understanding conflict and cooperation in the region. The map of the Middle East (on which map quiz will be based) is posted on Canvas.

Midterm – 20%

In the midpoint of semester, we will have an in-class midterm exam, to assess your grasp of the key concepts and your ability to apply it to real world examples. The midterm will consist of four short essay questions and will be paper-based. You should expect your grade within a week of submission. We will have a review session on preceding Tuesday of the midterm week.

Emerging Security Threat Critical Essay – 20%

In this assignment you will identify and analyze an emerging security issue in the Middle East. Your task is to critically examine the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to this issue, drawing on a variety of academic sources, current events, and international relations theories we've reviewed in the class such as realism or constructivism. The issue you choose should be current and have significant implications for regional stability or even broader global security. Potential topics might include regional tribal or sectarian conflicts, terrorism, cyber-threats, nuclear proliferation, geopolitical rivalries, environmental degradation, food shortage or rising human rights violations. Your analysis should address key questions such as the underlying causes of the issue, how it has developed in recent years, its impact on regional and global security, and possible solutions. The essay should be between 5 to 7 pages in length, including proper references, and organized into a clear structure: an introduction providing an overview and context, a detailed analysis of the issue, and a conclusion offering potential solutions or recommendations. The essay must be submitted on Canvas by March 23rd.

The Scholar's Essential Middle East Politics Reader Assignment – 20%

Imagine that you were approached by the media to recommend the list of essential readings for the general broader public interested in learning more about the Middle East. For this assignment, you will

create a list of **5 essential readings** from our class materials (articles, movies or book chapters) that you found most insightful or engaging, explaining in one paragraph (5-8 sentences) why each article stood out to you. Along with this, include **5 more additional external materials** into your list that we did not cover in class, but you believe should have been included, offering a justification for your choice. Make sure to include the main arguments made in the readings you chose for the list. The goal is to reflect on the readings that resonated with you the most and to demonstrate an understanding of the topics we've discussed. Also, creating annotated bibliographies is an important skill that will help you prepare for writing academic literature reviews. Be sure to include the full citation for each reading followed by the one-paragraph explanation of how each article contributed to your understanding of the course material. The reader must be submitted on Canvas by April 20th.

Final Exam – 20%

During the last week of the semester, we will have a final exam. The exam will be open-book and you can bring your notes. The exam will contain four short essay questions, and you will have an entire class period to write your responses. You will be graded on the quality of your arguments, and your ability to use concepts and materials learned in the class to support them. We will have a review session on preceding Tuesday to prepare for the exam.

Course Schedule

** PLEASE NOTE: I reserve a right to make amendments to this schedule and should they become necessary – you will be notified well ahead of any deadlines.*

Part 1: The rise of the Modern State System in the Middle East

Week 1: Introduction: Realism

- Walt, S. M. (1998). International relations: One world, many theories. *Foreign Policy*, 110, 29–46.

No class on Thursday January 18th - Instructor is out of town for SPSA.

Week 2: Constructivism

- Wendt, Alexander. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, 46(2), 391-426.
- Introduction (or Chapter 1) in Stein book

Week 3: Alliances in the Middle East

- Walt, S. M. (1985). Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power. *International Security*, 9(4), 3–43.
- Jones, P. (2009). Structuring Middle East Security. *Survival*, 51(6), 105-122.

Map Quiz in class

Week 4: The rise of the modern state system post WWI

- Chapter 2 in Stein
- Zand, B. (2014). A Century of Violence: What World War I Did to the Middle East. Spiegel Online International.
- Kaufmann, C. D. (1998). When all else fails. *International Security*, 23(2), 120–156.
- Razi, G. H. (1990). Legitimacy, religion, and nationalism in the Middle East. *American Political Science Review*, 84(1), 69–91.

Week 5: The Middle East during the Cold War and beyond

- Chapter 3 in Stein
- Solingen, E. (2007). Pax Asiatica versus Bella Levantina: The Foundations of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East. *The American Political Science Review*, 101(4), 757–780.

Part 2: The Rivalries in the Middle East

Week 6: The Arab-Israeli Conflicts

- Chapter 4 in Stein
- Chapters 2-4 in Mitchell, G. J. (2016). A path to peace. Simon & Schuster.

Week 7: The 1979 Iranian Revolution and its impact

- Chapter 5 in Stein
- Cafiero, G. (2019). Iran and the Gulf states 40 years after the 1979 revolution. *Middle East Institute*, 8.
- Before the Revolution. (2013). Documentary film.
- Bitter Rivals: Iran and Saudi Arabia [PBS]

Week 8: Midterm will be on Thursday March 5th in class

Week 9: Spring Break (no classes!)

Week 10: The Soviet-Afghan War and the Gulf Wars

- Chapter 6 in Stein
- Hoodbhoy, P. (2005). Afghanistan and the genesis of global jihad. *Peace Research*, 37(1), 15-30.

Critical Essay DUE by Sunday March 22nd by 11:59 PM submitted on Canvas

Week 11: War on Terror

- Chapter 7 in Stein
- Williams, B. G. (2004). From "Secessionist Rebels" to "Al-Qaeda Shock Brigades": Assessing Russia's Efforts to Extend the Post-September 11th War on Terror to Chechnya. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24(1), 197-209.
- Brownfeld, P. (2003). The Afghanistanisation of Chechnya. *The International Spectator*, 38(3), 137–144.
- Roberts, S. R. (2018). The biopolitics of China's "war on terror" and the exclusion of the Uyghurs. *Critical Asian Studies*, 50(2), 232–258.

Week 12: Aftermath of the Arab Spring

- Chapter 8 in Stein
- Byman, D. (2013). Explaining the Western response to the Arab Spring. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 36(2), 289–320.
- Morris, J. (2013). Libya and Syria: R2P and the specter of the swinging pendulum. *International Affairs*, 89: 1265-1283.
- Putin, V. (2013, November 9). A plea for caution from Russia. *New York Times*, p. 13.

Part 3: Current security threats in the Middle East and the International Response

Week 13: The period of non-state actors

- Charountaki, M. (2018). State and non-state interactions in International Relations: An alternative theoretical outlook. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(4), 528–542.
- Pollard, S. E., Poplack, D. A., & Casey, K. C. (2017). Understanding the Islamic State's competitive advantages: Remaking state and nationhood in the Middle East and North Africa. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29(6), 1045–1065.
- Jensehaugen, J., & Tank, P. (2022). Palestinian and Kurdish nationalism: Understanding the 'politics of the possible'. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 22(3), 219–234.

Week 14: The Chinese economic neocolonialism and the Russian militarism in the Middle East

- Kofman, M., & Rojansky, M. (2018). What kind of victory for Russia in Syria? *Military Review*, 24(2), 6–23.
- Chang, P. H. (2011). China's policy toward Iran and the Middle East. *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 25(1), 1-14.
- Melkonian, S. (2024). The Syria Fiasco As Seen From Moscow. *Diwan*.

The Essential Middle East Politics Reader Assignment DUE on Sunday April 19th by 11:59 PM submitted via Canvas

Week 15: What's next?

- Chapter 9 in Stein

Week 16: Final Exam will be in class Thursday April 30th.

Additional UNT Policies

Retention of Student Records:

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See [UNT Records Management and Retention Policy \[EXT LINK\]](#) for additional information.

Access to Information - Eagle Connect:

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit [Eagle Connect website \[EXT LINK\]](#).

Student Evaluation Administration Dates:

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13-15 of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey, they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the [SPOT website \[EXT LINK\]](#) or email spot@unt.edu.

Survivor Advocacy:

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-5652648.

Use of Student Work:

A student owns the copyright for all work (e.g. software, photographs, reports, presentations, and email postings) he or she creates within a class and the University is not entitled to use any student work without the student's permission unless all of the following criteria are met:

- The work is used only once.
- The work is not used in its entirety.
- Use of the work does not affect any potential profits from the work.
- The student is not identified.
- The work is identified as student work.

If the use of the work does not meet all of the above criteria, then the University office or department using the work must obtain the student's written permission.

Transmission and Recording of Student Images in Electronically Delivered Courses:

No permission is needed from a student for his or her image or voice to be transmitted live via videoconference or streaming media, but all students should be informed when courses are to be conducted using either method of delivery. No notification is needed if only audio and slide capture is used or if the video only records the instructor's image.

Student Support Services:

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Counseling and Testing Services \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [UNT Care Team \[EXT LINK\]](#)

- [UNT Psychiatric Services \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Individual Counseling \[EXT LINK\]](#)

Additional Student Support Services:

- [Registrar \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Financial Aid \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Student Legal Services \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Career Center \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [UNT Food Pantry \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Academic Resource Center \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Academic Success Center \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [UNT Libraries \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Writing Lab \[EXT LINK\]](#)