

Cornell University
Cornell in Washington
The United States and the Middle East
NES 3687 (Pubpol 3687/AmSt 3687/Gov 3687/Hist 3687/JwSt 3687)
4 credits
Summer 2025
Professor Ross Brann

Course Syllabus

This class examines the history of the United States' involvement with Middle East beginning with evangelical efforts in the 19th century and President Wilson's engagement with the colonial powers in the early 20th century during and after WWI. The discovery of vast Middle Eastern oil reserves and the retreat of the colonial powers from the region following WWII drew successive US administrations ever deeper into Middle Eastern politics. In due course the US became entrenched in the post-colonial political imagination as heir to the British and the French especially as it challenged the Soviet Union for influence in the region during the Cold War. And that only takes the story to the mid-1950s and the Eisenhower administration. Our discussions will be based on secondary readings and primary sources as we interrogate the tension between realist and idealist policies toward the Middle East and trace how these tensions play out in subsequent developments including the origins and trajectory of the US strategic alliances with Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey and conflict with Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the two Gulf Wars, and recent events. The course also engages the pressing contemporary issues of racism and climate change as they pertain to the Middle East and the US.

Week

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| 1 | T 6/3 | Introductions: Course & Syllabus review |
| | Th 6/5 | The US and the Middle East in the 19 th century

President Wilson, WWI, & European Imperial-Colonial Designs on the Middle East

Reading: Lesch & Hass, <i>Middle East & United States</i> , 15-46
Cohen, <i>Beyond America's Grasp</i> , 3-32
Readings/Documents posted on CANVAS* |
| 2 | T 6/10 | The Allure of Oil: Roosevelt positions the US for the postwar Middle East

Reading: <i>Middle East & United States</i> , 289-295
<i>Beyond America's Grasp</i> , 75-105; 151-160; 190-200

The Problem of Palestine & Truman's Dilemma
Truman, the CIA, and Iran

Reading: <i>Middle East & United States</i> , 47-54
<i>Beyond America's Grasp</i> , 174-200 |

“Seeds of Doubt”* [CANVAS]

RESPONSE ESSAY 1 DUE

- Th 6/12** The Eisenhower-Dulles years: Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria
 & Iraq through the prism of anti-Communism
 how the Cold War impacted US policy toward the Middle East
- Reading:** *Middle East & United States*, 54-74; 77-127
 A World of Trouble, 19-63
 Beyond America's Grasp, 33-69; 106-124
- 3 T 6/17** “Support any Friend”?---the Kennedy balance
- Reading:** *Beyond America's Grasp*, 124-129
- Johnson and 1967: The Cold War intensifies over the Middle East
changes in US Middle Eastern policy from Eisenhower to Johnson
- Reading:** *A World of Trouble*, 64-106; 129-130
 Beyond America's Grasp, 203-207
 Middle East & United States, 139-157

RESPONSE ESSAY 2 DUE

- Th 6/19** **Juneteenth---NO CLASS**
- 4 T 6/24** Realpolitik with Nixon, Kissinger & Ford
 The Oil Crisis of 1973
- Reading:** *A World of Trouble*, 130-141
 Middle East & United States, 158-184
 Beyond America's Grasp, 129-141; 207-216
- Carter, The Iranian Revolution. and the Hostage Crisis
- Reading:** *Middle East & United States*, 237-241
 A World of Trouble, 210-248
- Th 6/26** Reagan: the US & the Iran-Iraq War
 The Iran-Contra Affair
 Another Crisis in Lebanon
- Reading:** *Middle East & United States*, 237-242
 Beyond America's Grasp, 69-76
 A World of Trouble, 249-307 308-351

RESPONSE ESSAY 3 DUE

- 5 T 7/1 George H.W. Bush, Secretary Baker & the 1st Gulf War
Pax Americana?
- reading: *A World of Trouble*, 352-401
- Th 7/3 Clinton, Oslo, & Camp David
- Reading:** *A World of Trouble*, 402-524
“The Clinton Administration in the Middle East”* [CANVAS]
“Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors”* [CANVAS]

RESPONSE ESSAY 4 DUE

- 6 T 7/8 George W. Bush & the response to 9/11
America and Islamist movements
- Reading:** *Beyond America’s Grasp*, 234-256
A World of Trouble, 525-554
Reign of Terror, 13-85
Middle East & United States, 313-335
“Al-Qaeda’s Inner Circle”* [Canvas]
S. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations” * [Canvas]
- the US, the 2nd Gulf War and its aftermath
The importance of Turkey in US policy
- Reading:** *Middle East & United States*, 253-288; 385-404
“Why did We Invade Iraq?”* [Canvas]
*The Iraq Study Group Report** [Canvas]
- Th 7/10 Obama goes to Cairo and the “Arab Spring”
Obama, Iran & the JCPOA
- Reading:** *Middle East & United States*, 336-364; 405-433
Reign of Terror, 155-256

RESPONSE ESSAY 5 DUE

- 7 T 7/15 Trump, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Israel
- Reading:** *Middle East & United States*, 434-435
Reign of Terror, 257-338
“Trump-Netanyahu Alliance”* [Canvas]

- Th 7/17** Biden and Trouble: Beyond realist & idealist policy toward the Middle East: radical & isolationist critiques
- Reading:** Fantappi and Nast, “The War that Remade the Middle East: How Washington Can Stabilize a Transformed Region”*
[Canvas]
- 8 T 7/22 America First?**
The Second Trump Administration and the Middle East
- Wrap-Up**
- FINAL ESSAY DUE**
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Required Texts

David W. Lesch and Mark Haas, *The Middle East and the United States*, 6th edition (Routledge pb 2018) 978-0813350585

Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux pb 2010) 978-0-374-53200-0

Stephen P. Cohen, *Beyond America’s Grasp* (Picador pb 2010) 978-0-312-65544-0

Spencer Ackerman *Reign of Terror* (Penguin pb) 978-1-9848-7979-0

Recommended if you want more general ME history:

Peter Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East* (fifth edition 2020 Penguin pb) 978-0-14-312190-9

Selected works for further study and research:

Elliot Abrams, *Tested By Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Andrew Arsan, *Lebanon: A Country in Fragments* (Hurst, 2020)

Andrew J. Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East* (New York: Random House, 2016)

Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy’s Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-*

- Israel Alliance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)
- Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Harvard University Press, 2013)
- Martin Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Andrew Scott Cooper, *The Oil Kings: How the U.S., Iran, and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001)
- Robert Draper, *To Start a War: How The Bush Administration Took America into Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2020)
- Fawaz Gerges, *America and Political Islam* (Cambridge U Press, 2009)
- Suzy Hansen, *Notes on a Foreign Country: An American Abroad in a Post-American World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017)
- John B. Judis, *Genesis: Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015)
- Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009)
- . *Brokers of Deceit: How the US has Undermined Peace in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013)
- Stephen Kinzer, *Reset: Iran, Turkey and America's Future* (New York: St. Martin's, 2010)
- Sandra Mackey, *Lebanon: A House Divided* (New York: Norton, 2006)
- Alia Malek, *The Home that was Our Country: A Memoir of Syria* (Boldtype Books, 2017)
- Aaron David Miller, *The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008)
- Carla Power, *If the Oceans Were Ink: An Unlikely Friendship and a Journey to the Heart of the Quran* (New York: Holt, 2015)
- William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) third edition pb
- Allis Radosh and Ronald Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding*

- of Israel* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009)
- David Rhode, *Beyond War: Reimagining America's Role and Ambitions in a New Middle East* (New York: Penguin, 2013)
- Josh Ruebner, *Shattered Hopes: Obama's Failure to Broker Israeli-Palestinian Peace* (London and New York: Verso, 2014)
- Jonathan Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Denise A. Spellberg, *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an* (New York: Vintage, 2013)
- Robert F. Worth, *A Rage for Order: The Middle East in Turmoil, from Tahrir Square to Isis* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016)
- Lawrence Wright, *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin, and Sadat at Camp David* (New York: Vintage, 2015)
- _____. *The Looming Towers. Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006)

Course Requirements

- 1) Regular attendance, preparation of readings, class participation (25%)**

A GUIDE TO THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH YOU MAY SATISFY THIS REQUIREMENT IS POSTED ON CANVAS

- 2) 5 response essays (2 pages) due as indicated on the syllabus (50%)**
- 3) Final Essay (5 pages) due last day of class (25%)**

A GUIDE FOR HOW WRITTEN WORK IS EVALUATED IS POSTED ON CANVAS

While we will not have a final exam students needing any special arrangements to be able to do your best work should speak with me as soon as possible so I can accommodate you.

**Professor Ross Brann
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office hours: Wednesday 5:30-7:00; and other times via appointment

ALL STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO ADHERE STRICTLY TO THE STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC CONDUCT OUTLINED IN CORNELL'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (INCLUDING USE OF ON-LINE RESOURCES)

<http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html>

Generative AI & ChatGPT may not be used under any circumstances