

Islam: Politics and Terrorism
Professor Meir Litvak
Spring Semester 2026

Professor Meir Litvak
Gilman 406
Tel: (w) 03-6406440
(cell) 054-7609115
E Mail: litvak@tauex.tau.ac.il
Office Hours: Appointment by mail or telephone
Course Credits: 3 TAU Semester Credits
Monday and Wednesday 12-2PM

Course Description

The course will deal with the interaction between Islam and politics in the modern Middle East (19th and 21st Centuries). It will analyze the formation of religious attitudes to politics and government from the pre-modern period until the present, with an emphasis on the modern period; it will discuss the impact of political processes on the evolution of religious ideologies, particularly the impact of western-dominated modernity on the Muslim countries of the Middle East; the use of religion for political mobilization and alternatively as a source of political identity. Among others, the course will discuss the Muslim Brothers movements in various countries; the rise of the radical Salafi-jihadist movement; relations between clergy and state in Iran; the attitude of Islamist movements towards gender issues; the role of religion in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the dilemma of religious movements and democracy.

Course Requirements and Expectations

Students are expected to read the course material ahead of classes in order to be able to take an active part in class discussions.

The use of cellphones in class is unwelcomed.

Learning Outcomes

Students will come out of the course with a better understanding of the complexity of social, political and cultural processes and developments in the Middle East in which religion often



serves as the medium through which the world is understood, society is organized and politics are conducted, .

Evaluation Criteria

Mid Term Exam: 30%

Take Home Exam 70%

Active participation in class discussion will grant a bonus.

Absence Policy

Attendance to class is mandatory. Students who will miss more than three classes without a valid excuse will not be allowed to take the exam.

Course Readings and/or Required Materials

1: Islam and Politics: Introduction

Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1-24.

Mansoor Moaddel, "The study of Islamic culture and politics: An overview and assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28.1 (2002): 359-386.

Antony Black, "Religion and politics in Western and Islamic political thought: A clash of epistemologies?." *The Political Quarterly* 81.1 (2010): 116-122..

2: Early Islamic Reformers

Ali Rahnema, *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (New York, 1994), 11-63.

Ana Belén Soage, "Rashid Ridā's Legacy." *The Muslim World* 98:1 (2008): 1-23.

Kounsar Sr, A. (2017). The Renaissance of Islamic Thought in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Sayyid Jamal Al-Din Afghani. *Global Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 6(7), 112-119.

3: Religion and State in Iran

Joanna de Groot. *Religion, Culture & Politics in Iran, From the Qajars to Khomeini* (New York, IB Tauris, 2007), pp. 13-32.

Janet Afary, "The place of Shi'i clerics in the first Iranian constitution," *Critical Research on Religion*, 1:3 (2013), pp. 327–346.



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4. The Muslim Brethren

Ana Belén Soage, "Ḥasan al-Bannā or the Politicisation of Islam," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 9:1 (2008), 21-42.

Munson, Ziad. "Islamic Mobilization." *The Sociological Quarterly* 42:4 (2001), pp. 487-510.

MIDTERM EXAM

5. What is Fundamentalism

Nikki Keddie, "The New Religious Politics: Where, When and Why Do Fundamentalisms' Appear?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 40, No. 4, (October 1998), pp. 696-723.

6. Sunni Radicalism

Guilain Denoeux, "The forgotten swamp: Navigating political Islam," *Middle East Policy* 9:2 (June 2002), pp. 56-81.

Sayed Khatab, "Hakimiyyah" and "Jahiliyyah" in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38, no. 3 (July, 2002), pp. 145-170.

7. Shi'i Radicalism and the Iranian Revolution

Shahrourkh Akhavi, "The Pahlavi Era," in S. H. Nasr et al. *Expectations of the Millenium* (Albani, 1989), pp. 218-229

Shahrourgh. Akhavi, "Ali Shariati." In John Esposito and Emad el-Din Shahn (eds), *Key Islamic Political Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 85-103.

Samir A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 91-133.

8: Hizballah: The Party of God in Lebanon

E. Zisser, "Hizballah: Between Armed Struggle and Domestic Politics," in Barry Rubin (ed.), *Revolutionaries and Reformers: Contemporary Islamic Movements in the Middle East* (Albany, 2003), pp. 91-104

Hilal Kashan, "Hizbullah's Jihad Concept," *Journal of Religion and Society* Vol. 9(2007), pp. 1-19.

9. Islam and the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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Meir Litvak, "The Islamization of the Israeli-Arab Conflict: the Case of Hamas," *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 23 No. 1(1998), pp. 148-163.

Matthew Levitt, "Hamas from cradle to grave." *Middle East Quarterly* (2004).

10. Al-Qaida and Trans-National Terrorism

Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad," *Middle East Policy* Vol. 8, No. 4 (2001), pp. 18–38.

Michael Doran, "The Pragmatic Fanaticism of al Qaeda: An Anatomy of Extremism in Middle Eastern Politics." *Political Science Quarterly* 117 (2), 2002: 177-190.

11. Islamism and Democracy: Compatibility or Conflict

Emmanuel Sivan, "Arabs and Democracy: Illusions of Change," *Journal of Democracy* 11:3 (July 2000)

Uriya Shavit, "Is Shura a Muslim Form of Democracy? Roots and Systemization of a Polemic," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46:3 (2010), 349-374.

J. Afary, "The War Against Feminism in the Name of the Almighty: Making Sense of Gender and Fundamentalism," *New Left Review* (July-August 1997): 89-110.

12. The Islamic Republic of Iran: Islamism or Populism

Mehran Tamadonfar, "Islam, Law, and Political Control in Contemporary Iran," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40:2 (Jun., 2001): 205-219

Walter Posch, *The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism: The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Research Paper, 2013.

13. Religion and Politics in Iraq

Søren Schmidt, "The role of religion in politics the case of Shia Islamism in Iraq." *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 22.2 (2009): 123-43.

Nimrod Raphaeli, "Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr," *Middle East Quarterly* Fall 2004, pp. 33-42

14. Islamism and the Arab Spring

Glenn E. Robinson, "The Four Waves of Global Jihad, 1979-2017," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, Fall 2017



Hassan Mneimneh, "The Spring of a New Political Salafism?" *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* no. 12(2011), pp. 21-36

Bunzel, Cole. "The Kingdom and the Caliphate." *Duel of the Islamic States*, Washington, Carnegie (2016).

Instructor Biography

Meir Litvak (Ph.D, Harvard 1991) is a Professor at the Department of Middle Eastern History and former Director of the Alliance Center at Tel Aviv University. He works on Modern Shi'i and Iranian History as well as on modern Islamic movements and anti-Semitism in the Arab world. Among his publications: *Know Thy Enemy: Evolving Attitudes towards "Others" in Modern Shi'i Thought and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth Century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Co-author with Moshe Aharonov, *Iran: From a Persian Empire to an Islamic Revolution* (Tel Aviv: Open University of Israel, 2014, Hebrew); Co-author with Esther Webman, *From Empathy to Denial: Arabic Responses to the Holocaust* (London: Hurst Publishers Co and New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, Hebrew edition Jerusalem: Magnes and Yad Vashem press, 2015). He is co-editor with Meir Hatina, *Concepts of Martyrdom in Modern Islam: Social and Political* (London: I.B Tauris, 2017) and editor of *Constructing Nationalism in Iran: From the Qajars to the Islamic Republic* (London: Routledge, 2017).

TAU International Academic Guidelines

Students may only attend classes which they are officially registered for. No auditing of courses is permitted. Students are responsible for reading and adhering to all policies and procedures in the TAU International Academic Handbook [posted here](#) at all times. Below is a summary of some of these relevant policies and procedures.

Learning Accommodations

In accordance to University guidelines, TAU International may be able to accommodate students with learning disabilities or accommodation requests if these requests are also honored at the student's home university or home school. To be considered, students must submit official documentation from their home school or university (if not in English, a notarized official copy translated into English is required) to TAU International in advance of arrival describing in detail any specific needs and how these

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are accommodated at the home school or university. Students must also bring a copy of this documentation with them on-site and give it to their faculty on the first day of class while introducing themselves so that the faculty know who they are and what sorts of needs or accommodations they may have. **Without official documentation from the home school submitted on or before the first day of courses, TAU will not be able to honor accommodation support.**

With supporting documentation and by following the correct procedure as outlined above, TAU International and its faculty will do the best it can to make any suitable accommodations possible. However, we cannot guarantee that all accommodations received at the home school can be similarly met at TAU. For example, TAU is usually not able to offer note-taking services in English, private testing rooms, or advance viewing of classroom presentations, exams, or assignments.

It may be an option to provide a student with additional tutoring or support outside the classroom as needed. Students should be aware that this additional support cannot be guaranteed and is based on teacher availability in the subject as well as the specific student level. If available, the cost of additional tutoring or support will be the sole responsibility of the student.

In-Class Exams

TAU does not permit, under any circumstances, taking any in-class (including mid or final) exams early or later than the scheduled exam day. When selecting courses, it is thus very important to note if there is an in-class midterm or final exam as this date/exam cannot be changed. It is also the student's responsibility to clarify exam dates with the professors at the beginning of a course, with the understanding that not all exam dates can be decided up front as it can sometimes depend on the pace of the course and class learning. It is the student responsibility to plan to be present for all courses including the final day of class for this reason. Early departures from the program are not approved, nor are early or exception in-class exams.

TAU International Absence Policy

Attendance is mandatory in all of the courses including Hebrew Ulpan. Faculty can and will take attendance regularly. Missing classes will be reflected in the final grade of the course. Up to three justified and properly documented absences from classes may be accepted (for example: emergency matter or illness, both of which will require a doctor's note). Such cases of absence should be reported to the faculty immediately and again, a doctor's note is required. Teachers are entitled to treat any lateness or absence without documentation as unexcused. Some of our courses such as Service Learning or the Internship Seminar require more practical in-class work; thus, attendance policies may be stricter in some courses and students then must adhere to the stricter attendance policy as outlined by the faculty/syllabus.



Students are required to arrive on time for classes. Teachers are entitled to treat any single case of lateness and/or repeated lateness as an unjustified absence.

Please note that according to official TAU Academic Policy, if a student's behavior or attendance during is disagreeable his/her course participation may be cancelled at the discretion of TAU with no due refund.

Grade Appeals

Students are responsible for checking grades once posted or distributed by faculty. The limited grade appeals window and the detailed procedure for appealing a grade – whether a graded assignment, exam or final grade – is outlined clearly in the policies and procedures in the TAU International Academic Handbook [posted here](#).

