

The Regional Politics of the Middle East: From the Arab Spring uprisings to the Iran-Israel War

The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of the Humanities
Fall Semester 2026

Instructor: Brandon Friedman, PhD - brandon1@tauex.tau.ac.il

Office: The Gilman Building, Room 421

Office Hours: (TBA & by appointment)

Course Credits: 3 TAU Semester Credits

For course times/days and location, please visit the TAU International web site (Study Abroad Course Offerings and Schedules). Please note that all information below is subject to change and/or adjustment as necessary.

Course Description (Summary)

This course aims to examine the main drivers of political change in the Middle East from the Arab uprisings, which began in 2010 and 2011, through the Iran-Israel war in 2025. This course will examine (1) how the United States's effort to redefine its role in the region has influenced regional politics; (2) how the Arab Spring uprisings threatened to alter the regional balance of power between Sunnis and Shi'is; (3) how the intra-Sunni divide over the Muslim Brotherhood manifested itself across the region; (4) how the Coronavirus epidemic and the Ukraine War led to a process of regional de-escalation; and, (5) how Hamas's October 7 terror offensive can be seen as the opening salvo in the first Iran-Israel war. We will also examine how these processes contributed to the sidelining and marginalization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the Middle East regional agenda.

Course Requirements and Expectations

This course does not require you to memorize dates, names, or places. I will use PowerPoint throughout the semester, but you should *not* spend your time during class trying to summarize or copy what is in the PowerPoint slides. Instead, you should do the readings before class, engage with the instructor during the lecture, and actively take notes based on the issues raised or discussed in class. In that way, you will be engaging with the course materials three times: first, while **reading** the material at home; second, while **listening to** it in class; and, third, while summarizing (**synthesizing**) the discussion in class.

You are expected to attend each class, prepare yourself to participate in class discussions, and make a reasonable effort to join class discussions or ask questions. **If you are attending class on Zoom, you are required to have your camera on for the duration of each class. Please make sure you are sitting in front of your computer in an office, library, or quiet home setting. Please refrain from talking on the phone if you are attending on Zoom (even if you are muted). Please do not attend Zoom class while you are traveling, sitting or walking outside, or attending a conference or event.**

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You are also expected to actively **prepare readings before class meetings**. At a minimum, this means you are responsible for identifying each reading's main argument/hypothesis and assessing whether the author has convincingly supported his/her argument/hypothesis.

Learning Outcomes

This course will help us understand the complex socio-political processes of change in the relationships between state and society in the region. Some of the skills students will develop: (1) how to interpret statements of past political leaders; (2) how to integrate conflicting sources of information; (3) how to evaluate conflicting interpretations of the past; (4) how to analyze the magnitude and significance of change; and, (5) how to identify changes and continuities over time.

Evaluation Criteria

Attendance and Class Participation – 30%

Final Exam Assignment – 70%

Course Schedule and Readings

1. The Arab Uprisings of 2010-2011: The Weakening of the Arab State System?

- Michael C. Hudson, "Arab Politics after the Uprisings: Still Searching for Legitimacy," *The Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization* (Abingdon and London: Routledge, 2015), Larbi Sadiki, ed., pp. 28-38.
- Asher Susser, "The 'Arab Spring': Competing Analytical Paradigms," *Bustan* 3 (2012), 109-130.

2. The United States and the Middle East: Rebalancing?

- Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh, "Near Eastern Promises: Why Washington Should Focus on the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 93:3 (May/June 2014), 92-105
- Derek Chollet, Jake Sullivan, Dimitri Simes, and Mary Beth Long, "U.S. Commitments in the Middle East: Advice to the Trump Administration," *Middle East Policy* 24:1 (Spring 2017), 5-34.
- Dafna Hochman Rand and Andrew Miller, Eds., *Re-engaging the Middle East: A New Vision for U.S. Policy* (Brookings Institution Press, 2020), 1-25.
- Daniel Byman, "Why the Middle East Still Needs America," *Foreign Affairs*, March 12, 2024.



3. *The Sunni-Shi'i Struggle for Power: From Iraq to Syria and Beyond*

- Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and The Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 17-44.
- Brandon Friedman, "The Battle for Bahrain: What One Uprising Meant for the Gulf States and Iran," *World Affairs* 174:6 (March/April 2012), 74-84.

4. *The Rise and Fall of the Islamic State – (2006-2014)*

- Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts: 2015), 1-51.
- Uzi Rabi, *The Return of the Past* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), Chapter 4.
- Brandon Friedman, "Iran's Hezbollah Model in Iraq and Syria: Fait Accompli?" *Orbis*, Vol. 62, No. 3, 2018, pp. 438–453.
- Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, "Russian campaign in Syria – change and continuity in strategic culture," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43:1 (2020), 104-125, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2019.1668273
- Aaron Stein, *The US War Against ISIS* (IB Tauris, 2022), pp. 11-21, 69-102.

5. *The Israeli-Iranian Shadow War: Nuclear and Regional Politics*

- David Vielhaber & Philipp C. Bleek, "Shadow Wars," *The Nonproliferation Review*, 19 (2012), 481-491, DOI: 10.1080/10736700.2012.73419.
- Gawdat Bahgat, "The Brewing War Between Iran and Israel: Strategic Implications," *Middle East Policy* 25:3 (2018), 63-79.
- Dalia Dassa Kaye, "Israel's Dangerous Shadow War With Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, February 27, 2023.

6. *Kurdistan's Moment in the Middle East*

- Cengiz Gunes, *The Kurds in a New Middle East* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). 1-17, 99-114.
- Ofra Bengio, *Kurdistan's Moment in the Middle East* (Tel Aviv: MDC, 2018), 257-280.



7. *The Intra-Sunni Struggle: Qatar and Turkey vs. Egypt/Saudi Arabia/UAE*

- Birol Başkan, "The Arab Spring Erupts, Turkey and Qatar Respond," in *Turkey and Qatar in the Tangled Geopolitics of the Middle East* (Palgrave Pivot, New York, 2016), 83-122.
- Julie Dihstelhoff and Alexander Lohse, "Political Islam as an Ordering Factor? The Reconfiguration of the Regional Order in the Middle East Since the 'Arab Spring,'" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 29-59.
- Ali Bakir, "The Evolution of Turkey-Qatar Relations Amid a Growing Gulf Divide," in *Divided Gulf: The Anatomy of a Crisis*, Andreas Krieg, ed. (Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 197-215.

8. *Yemen War: Local and Regional Dimensions*

- Abdallah Hamiddadin, ed., *The Huthi Movement in Yemen* (IB Tauris, 2022), 199-216 (Chapter 10).
- Maria-Louise Clausen, "Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29: 3 (2018), 560-578, DOI: 10.1080/09592318.2018.1455792
- Michael Knights, "The Houthi War Machine," *CTC Sentinel* 11: 8 (September 2018), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/houthi-war-machine-guerrilla-war-state-capture/>
- Stephen W. Day and Noel Brehony, eds., *Global, Regional, and Local Dynamics in the Yemen Crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 115-164.
- Gregory D. Johnsen, "Seven Yemens," Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), October 8, 2021, <https://agsiw.org/seven-yemens-how-yemen-fractured-and-collapsed-and-what-comes-next/>

9. *Global Shocks and Regional De-escalation – Part 1*

- Barak Ravid, *Trump's Peace: The Abraham Accords and the Reshaping of the Middle East* (2022), translated by Sahar Zivan.
- Elham Fakhro, *The Abraham Accords: The Gulf States, Israel, and the Limits of Normalization* (Columbia University Press, 2024).



- Michael Singh, "Axis of Abraham: Arab-Israeli Normalization Could Remake the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2022.

10. Global Shocks and Regional De-escalation – Part 2

- Burhanettin Duran and Muhittin Ataman, "Turkiye and the Future of Normalization in the Middle East," *Insight* (Turkey), 2022 24:2, 161-180

11. Global Shocks and Regional De-escalation – Part 3

- Majed Mohammed Hassan Al-Ansari, Bulent Aras, and Emirhan Yorulmazlar, "The New Gulf Order: Crisis, Mediation, and Reconciliation," *Middle East Policy* 28 (2021), 23-35.
- Joost Hilterman, "Is the Middle East's Makeover a Mirage," *Foreign Affairs*, August 1, 2023

12. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: From Disengagement to October 7 – Part 1

- Itamar Rabinovich, *Middle East Maze: Israel, the Arabs, and the Region* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2023), 163-230.

13. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: From Disengagement to October 7 – Part 2

- Meir Litvak, "'Martyrdom is Life': Jihad and Martyrdom in the Ideology of Hamas," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33:8 (2010) 716-734.
- Tareq Baconi, *Hamas Contained* (Stanford University Press, 2018), Chapter 4.
- Raphael Cohen-Almog, "History of Track Two Peace Negotiations: Interview with Hussein Agha," *Israel Studies* 26: 1 (Spring 2021), pp. 47-72.

14. The October 7 War

- Jonathan Foreman, "The Untold Story of How Israel Failed on October 7," *Commentary*, May 2025.
- Nelly Lahoud, "A Catastrophic Success for Hamas?," *Foreign Affairs*, October 23, 2023.
- Brandon Friedman, "Iran-Saudi Normalization and the October 7 War: A Butterfly Effect?," June 2025.



15. *The Iran-Israel Wars*

- Mohammad Jamshidi & Mostafa Mohammadi, "Resetting Deterrence: The Evolution of Iran's Defense Doctrine Following the 12-Day War," *Middle East Critique*, 34:4 797-802, DOI: 10.1080/19436149.2025.2576348
- Fabinan Hinz, "Iran's Shattered Missile Strategy," *Survival* 67:4 (2025), 33-42.

Instructor Biography

Brandon Friedman, PhD, is the Director of Research at the Moshe Dayan Center (MDC) for Middle East and African Studies at Tel Aviv University. Brandon is also the Managing Editor of the Dayan Center's journal *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review*. He is the author of *The End of Pax Britannica in the Persian Gulf, 1968-1971*.

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 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](#).

