Course Description:
This course will explore selected aspects of contemporary Middle-East politics by focusing on three “case studies”: Egypt, Syria, and Israel/Palestine. Part of the course will consist in introducing and understanding key historical background and concepts regarding the political actors, struggles, practices, ideologies, and processes. The course will also explore various approaches and theories that seek to explain these dynamics. In terms of its organization, the course is designed to provoke the students to think critically about past and recent events, political violence, as well as other key concepts such as nationalism, ‘orientalism’, ‘terrorism’, and the politics of writing about Middle-East itself. Among other things, the course treats various approaches used by other scholars to ‘frame’ the region’s political events as well as less explored sites in order to interrogate the practices, the identities that produce or are produced by such practices and encounters, as well as the spaces and practices of contestation. By the end of the semester, students should have a general understanding of the main factors and actors behind the unfolding of contemporary political events we witness in our everyday news reports. Students should also have developed a set of critical analytical skills for questioning what are often problematic over simplifications of the region’s complex dynamics.

Course Objectives and Organization
The objectives of this course are both subject-specific and general. General objectives include the development of oral, written and research skills as the course requires students to read and critically assess a significant amount of complex (and possibly
contradictory) material. The subject-specific objectives include developing the ability to critically assess the categories, concepts, and sites and practices around which the Middle-Eastern events and sites are actualized and analysed. Among other things, the course seeks to (re) politicize the concepts, identities, narratives, and perspectives by asking how and why they have acquired a certain meaning and significance and their implications for how we respond to and think about the Middle-East, Syria, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jews, Muslims, Christians, Arabs, sovereignty, nationalism, and terrorism amongst others. The three case studies will allow students to compare various processes of state formation, state-society relations, as well as the various role foreign policy and interstate relations have played in the consolidation of authoritarianism, elites, and sovereignty.

**Teaching and Assessment:**

I conceptualize the classroom as a shared space and I see my role as facilitating critical thinking through dialogue, provocation to thought, experimentation and discussion. This mode of active learning places upon you the obligation to read and attend class regularly, to explore alternative venues and to share your views, thoughts and assessments with others.

Due to the organization of the course, sessions on occasion may include lectures and debates as well as the exploration of various aesthetic representations the conflict. Amongst others, these may include films and photography. I use the latter to introduce and contextualize the material at hand and to generate a discussion based on issues arising from our assessments of the assigned texts or reflection on our experiences, mediated or not.

*Assessment:* **20 %** of your assessment will be based on in-class participation. This will take the form of participating in class discussions/group presentations. You are expected to demonstrate evidence of having read and thought about the class topic.

**20 %** of your course mark will be based on a critical review or appraisal of a text (or set of texts), aesthetic representation, or practice. We will further discuss this during first
day of class.

60% of your assessment will be based on a longer essay/research project that engages a political site (its actors and practices) of your choice. (12-18 pages)

Paper topics, advice on structuring your essays and related issues will be covered in class. Please read carefully the Writing Guidelines at the end of this syllabus. We will discuss these in class at the very outset.

Readings:

The reading material for this course is organised into a series of topics that stage a conceptual and contextual interplay between sites and practices related to the selected contemporary events we explore. Together, the texts present a space for creative engagement with the case studies and problematics such as violence, identities, nationalism, terrorism, and revolution. For they draw on a wide range of cultural contexts and genres of expressions that will provoke an experience of the conflicts and subjectivities that exceeds the conventional stories and practices represented in large audience media. The following list is by no means exhaustive. In the pages that follow, you will find a list of required and recommended readings for each session. Our discussions will be based mostly on the required readings. The lists of recommended texts are included to provide a broader context as well as more detail, which may provide a useful starting point and additional references for written assignments or future studies. You are advised to do your readings in the order they are presented.

All readings will be available online via Laulima.

Week 1 (8-12 July): The Politics of Area Studies and Introduction to the M-E


**Week 2 (15-19 July): Theoretical Explorations and Confrontations**

1. Migdal, Joel. S. *Strong Societies and Weak States*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) – Prologue (pp. xiii-xxi) and Part I (pp. 1-51)


**Week 3 (22-26 July): Egypt**


**Week 4 (29 July – 2 August): Syria**

((Submission of Review Essays ))


5. Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) – Chapter 1 (pp. 1-31) and Chapter 4 (pp. 87-142, don’t worry about number of pages, there are lots of images) Read chapter 4 with Mbembe’s chapter (see below)


**Week 5 (5-9 August): Israel/Palestine**


**Week 6 (12-16 August): Israel/Palestine**

*(Submission of Research Papers)*


**Writing Guidelines**

All papers should be:

- Double spaced
- Typewritten
- Spell-checked, proof-read, edited for punctuation, grammar and coherence
- Turned in by the dead-line; late papers will be assessed a grade cut

**Plagiarism**

An important consideration when writing papers is plagiarism. For your information, the University of Hawai‘i Student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as follows:

*Plagiarism includes but is not limited to submitting, in fulfilment of an academic requirement, any work that has been copied in whole or in part from another individual’s work without attributing that borrowed portion to the individual; neglecting to identify as a quotation another’s idea and particular phrasing that was not assimilated into the student’s language and style or paraphrasing a passage so that the reader is misled as to the source; submitting the same written or oral or artistic material in more than one course without obtaining the*
authorization from the instructors involved; or "drylabbing", which includes obtaining and using experimental data and laboratory write-ups from other sections of a course or from previous terms.

Any student found guilty of plagiarism in this course will immediately receive a failing grade and will be referred to the Dean of Students. One easy rule of thumb to keep out of harm’s way in this area: if you’re not sure, cite it! (More on citations below).

Citations

Given the importance of supporting your work, here are some guidelines. When you quote from a text, you must indicate that you have done so (failure to do so constitutes plagiarism). In addition to placing cited material within quotation marks, you must also make some kind of note as to the title of the quoted work and the page number. For our purposes, this can be as simple as: (Madison, Federalist 10:65) or (Marx and Engels, 1848: 21) – with the full bibliography appearing at the end of the paper. Or, references can be put into footnotes where the full citation resides. Additionally, anything you paraphrase, or any idea you borrow, should be attributed to the author and cited in the very same manner. For more examples and information on how to cite different kinds of sources, consult the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers or the Chicago Manual of Style. Cite World Wide Web sources with the appropriate URL and the date when you contacted the site. With web citations, the rule is the same as with other citations: using the information provided in your citation, I should be able to access the exact same material that you claim to have accessed.