

Geopolitics, International Relations, and the Future of the Middle East

MDES 3000 (3 Credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Jordan: Geopolitics, International Relations,
and the Future of the Middle East

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Description

Over the last two decades, the Middle East has been the stage of some mega events that continue to reshape the geopolitical map of the region. As a peace broker in the region, Jordan provides an excellent site for the study of ways in which geography shapes politics, shifts power configurations, and impacts international relations. Issues of relevance to the theme of the seminar include territorial conflict and state sovereignty, international intervention and dominant paradigm of international relations, geopolitical imagining and refugee crisis, and the impact of political crises on social organization, economy, and human ecology. Students study the nature of dominant International Relations paradigm in the Middle East and geopolitical discourse. This seminar includes classroom activities (lectures and reading assignments) and incorporates educational excursions, visits to organizations, agencies, critical thinking exercises, voluntary work, and field-based assignments. The Geopolitics, International Relations, and the Future of the Middle East seminar has an interdisciplinary, integrative, and critical focus encompassing 45 academic hours (3 credits).

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify historical and contemporary factors influencing International Relations, Politics, and future trends of the Middle East;
- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of local, regional, and International-specific issues shaping the political map of the Middle East, regional and international relations, and the future of the Middle East;
- Compare and contrast Jordan's geopolitical status and stand, its international relations' philosophy, and Jordan's future to those in neighboring countries;
- Formulate a clear conceptualization of the geopolitics, International Relations, and the future of the Middle East from hands on experiential learning approach;

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English. Students are exposed to vocabulary related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits.

Course Schedule

*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module 1: Jordan's Structure, Politics, and International Relations

This module provides an analytical overview of Jordan's political structure, international relations philosophy and approach, and the geopolitical factors impacting the country's relations with its neighbors and the international community.

Session 1: Jordan: Governing System, Political Structure, and Contributing Factors

This session provides an overview of Jordan's governing body, the political structure of Jordan, and Jordan's Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal (PESTEL) Analysis.

Required Readings:

B. Stiffung. (2016). *Transformation Index*, Jordan Country Report. <http://www.bti-project.org>.
Sharp, J. M. (2014). Jordan: Background and U. S. Relations. *Congressional Research Service*.
Alon, Y. (2009). *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, pp. 1-p12.

Session 2: Geopolitics of Jordan

Students will discuss the factors influencing Jordan's geopolitical status. Recent internal developments in Jordan and in the surrounding environment that affects Jordan's geopolitics will be analyzed.

Required Readings:

Samaan, J. (2012). Jordan's New Geopolitics. *Survival*, 54:2, 15-26, DOI: 10.1080/00396338.2012.672700
Comolet, E. (2014). Jordan: The Geopolitical Service Provider. *Global Economy and Development*.

Session 3: Jordan's Middle East and International Relations

This session addresses the Jordanian International Relations and regional politics. Students will learn factors affecting Jordanian geopolitics and Jordan's International Relations philosophy and approach.

Required Readings

Sharp, J.M. (2016). Jordan: Background and US Relations. *Congressional Research Service*.
Ponizilova, M. (2013). The Regional Policy and Power Capabilities of Jordan as a Small State. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 1.
Lynch, M. (2015). International Relations Theory and a Changing Middle East. The Project on ME Political Science (POMEPS). Denmark: Aarhus University.
Fawcett, L. (2016). *International relations of the Middle East*. Oxford University Press. 239-258.

Module 2: Iran and Saudi Arabia Relations: Middle East Reformation

This module focuses on geopolitics and international relations in the Middle East. Session address regional and external factors which shape geopolitics and inform Middle Eastern international relations.

Session 1: Middle East Regional Power Dynamics and Shifts: Iran and Saudi Arabia

This session analyzes the current regional power of the Middle East focusing on Iran and Saudi. The focus is on the factors shaping contemporary Middle Eastern patterns in international relations.

Required Readings:

Sanders IV, L. (2017). *Iran's president signals 'good ties' possible with Saudi Arabia.*

Retrieved from: <http://www.dw.com/en/irans-president-signals-good-ties-possible-with-saudi-arabia/a-41731832>

Stephans, M. (2016). *Saudi Arabia and Iran and how we go here.* Retrieved from:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/01/saudi-arabia-iran-160105070027955.html>.

Session 2: Regional and External Actors in Middle Eastern Geopolitics (USA, Russia, Turkey, etc.)

In this session, students will learn about major external actors/international actors who influence and affect geopolitics in the regional Middle East.

Required Readings:

Kausch, K. (2015). *Geopolitics and Democracy in the Middle East.* Madrid: FRIDE (Part 1, Regional Actors and Part 2, External Actors). Retrieved from:

http://fride.org/download/Geopolitics_and_Democracy_in_the_Middle_East.pdf

Migdal, J. S. (2014). *Shifting Sands: the United States in the Middle East.* New York: Colombia

Kausch, K. (ed.) (2015). *Geopolitics and Democracy in the Middle East.* Madrid: FRIDE (Part II: External Actors, Part III: A Transformed Region: the Rise and Fall of the Arab Middle East, Part IV: the United States and the New Middle East in the Twenty-First Century). http://fride.org/download/Geopolitics_and_Democracy_in_the_Middle_East.pdf

Module 3: Regional Conflicts in the Middle East

This module addresses main regional conflicts which shape geopolitics in the Middle East. The focus is on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the upheavals of the Arab Spring, and the sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shiites. The module will also discuss the impact of Daesh on international geopolitics and the future of the region.

Session 1: Palestine and Israel

In this session, students will learn about and analyze the history, dynamics, and present contributors to the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab conflict. Also, this session will focus on recent US Administration decision to move their Embassy to Jerusalem.

Required Readings:

Beinin, J., Hajjar, L. (2014). *Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A primer.* Middle East Research and Information Project. http://web.stanford.edu/group/sper/images/Palestine-Israel_Primer_MERIP.pdf

Walid, A. (2011). *The Jordanian Role: An Israeli Perspective.* Al Jazeera Center for Studies.

<http://studies.aljazeera.net/mritems/Documents/2011/7/28/201172810343925734The%20Jordanian%20role-An%20Israeli%20perspective.pdf>

United Nations. (2008). *The Question of Palestine and the United Nations.* New York: United Nations.

Session 3: Sunni, Shiaa, and Daesh (ISIS/ISL) Conflicts

This session focuses on a discussion of Sunni-Shiaa-and sectarian and terrorist acts in the Middle East. Students will learn about the history, the buildup, and the current reflections of the conflicts between Sunnis and Shiaa as well as Daesh (ISIS/ISL) on the overall Middle Eastern scene.

Required Readings:

Blancherd, C. (2009). Islam: Sunnis and Shiites. Congressional Research Service.

<https://fas.org/irp/crs/RS21745.pdf>

Haddad, F. (2013). Sunni Shia Relations after the Iraq War. Washington: United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB160.pdf>

Center for Dialogues. (2014). The Growing Divide between the Sunni and Shia Worlds. New York: NYU Center for Dialogues. http://centerfordialogues.org/pdfs_Islam_and_the_West/The-Growing-Divide-between-the-Sunni-and-Shia-Worlds.pdf

Cleary, S. (2016). Identity Politics, Sectarian Conflict, and Regional Political Rivalry in the Middle East. *Trilogie Salzburg*. https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/Projekte/84_Salzburger_Triolog/Analysis_Triologie-Salzburg-2016_Identity-Politics_20160820.pdf

Mabon, S. and Ardovini, L. (2015). FPC Briefing: Daesh, Geopolitics and the Resurgence of Pan Arabism. The Foreign Policy Center. <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1691.pdf>

Shields, N. (2012). Unrest in the Middle East: Potential Implications for International Terrorism and Counterterrorism Policy. *Global Security Studies*, 3, 2.

Module 4: Refugee Crisis in the Middle East

This module is focused on the impact of refugee crisis on Jordan and on the geopolitical configuration in the Middle East. Students learn about the roots and causes of the successive refugee crises in the region and analyze their impact on Jordan and the future of the Middle East.

Session 1: Palestinian Refugees

This session will analyze the roots of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan. Students will discuss the Palestinian refugees' current status in Jordan and analyze their future.

Required Readings:

Al Hussein, J. and Bocco, R. (2010). The Status of the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28, 2 & 3.

UNRWA. (2006). The United Nations and the Palestinian Refugees. *UNRWA*.

Session 2: Syrian Refugees

This session will analyze the causes of the Syrian refugee crisis. Students examine the Syrian refugees' current status and analyze their future in Jordan.

Required Readings:

Ostrand, N. (2015). The Syrian Refugee Crisis. *Center for Migration Studies of New York*, 3:3.

Guard, C., Chan, B., Lutterloh, A. (2015). Understanding the Syrian Refugee Crisis. *World Affairs Council*.

Jordan Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. (2014). Jordan Response Plan 2015 for the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Jordan Response Platform for the Syrian Crisis. <http://www.io.undp.org/content/dam/jordan/docs/Publications/JRP+Final+Draft+2014.12.17.pdf>

Session 3: Iraqi and Other refugees

This session will investigate the causes of the Iraqi and other refugees in Jordan. Students will analyze the refugees' current status in Jordan and their future in Jordan.

Required Readings:

- O'Donnell, K. and Newland, K. (2008). *The Iraqi Refugee Crisis: The Need for Action*. Migration Policy Institute, Washington DC.
- Francis, A. (2015). *Jordan's Refugee Crisis*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/09/21/jordan-s-refugee-crisis-pub-61338>

Module 5: International Relations and the Future of the Middle East

This module maps possible geopolitical scenarios for the future of the Middle East. Regional conflicts, civil wars, and the scope of the displaced populations will have mid and long term impact on geopolitics in the Middle East and on international relations. The module will also analyze the impact of emerging future regional actors on international relations and Middle Eastern politics.

Session 1: The Future of Jordan

In this session, students will learn prospective and projected geopolitical structure of Jordan. Students will also study expected future changes in the Jordanian international relations' philosophy.

Required Reading:

- Nahar, G. and Lutfi abu humaidan, R. (2013). The Factors Affecting the Foreign Political Behaviors in Jordan on its Strategic Position in the Middle East, and Especially its Conflict and Peace Process with Israel during the 1990s. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3:4.

Session 2: The Future of the Middle East

In this student, students will analyze the expected changes in the Middle Eastern geopolitics and the future shape of this geopolitics. Students also will examine the future changes in the Middle Eastern international relations.

Required Readings:

- Joffé, G. (2013). *The Future of Middle East and North Africa*. Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center. http://noref.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/095d84161250381a35a11eda58169147.pdf
- Burrows, M. (2014). *Middle East 2020: Shaped by or Shaper of Global Trends*. Washington DC: The Atlantic Council of the United States. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/183196/ME2020.pdf>

Session 3: Future Actors and the Future of the Middle East

Students will examine in this session the possible main actors in the future of the Middle East.

Required Readings:

- Kausch, Kristina (2014) *Competitive Multipolarity in the Middle East*. Istituto Affari Internazionali. IAI Working Papers 14|10. <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1410.pdf>
- Gaub, Florence and Laban, Alexandra (eds.) (2015) *Arab Futures: Three Scenarios for 2025*. Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies. http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report_22_Arab_futures.pdf

Module 6: Geo-Economics and International Business in the Gulf

This module is delivered during the international excursion to the United Arab Emirates

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, and presentation of evidence.

Description of Assignments:

Students will be assessed in this course through the following dimensions:

Group Work and Discussion: 25%

Student-led discussion of a pre-assigned lecture topic including emphasis on assigned readings, preparation of discussion questions, and presentation of supplemental materials on the topic (interviews, articles, discussions with lecturers, etc.). After the lecture, students will be divided into groups to discuss the thematic lecture and place emphasis on the readings and the main points made during the lecture for 20 minutes. Each group will choose a presenter to present the work of the group. Each presenter has 5 minutes. The presenter will play the role of group facilitator and coordinator to lead the group discussion. The evaluation will be for the presenters. There will be different groups and different presenters for each lecture.

Lecture Analysis Paper: 25%

A 2-3 page paper completed by the presenters in tandem with the Group Work and discussion assignment and focused on the following:

1. Based on your readings and the lecture for which you led the discussion, identify the main themes and issues raised in the lecture.
2. In what way does the theme contribute to the concept of geopolitics, international relations, and the future of the Middle East?
3. What aspects of the lecture facilitated cross-cultural exchange or understanding?
4. What lessons can be learned and applied from this lecture and accompanying readings to your semester in Jordan and/or your ISP topic?

Comparative Case Study: 25%

In 5-8 pages, present a comparative analysis of the various aspects of geopolitics, international relations, and the future of the Middle East in both Jordan and the UAE following your weeklong stay in the latter. In your analysis, cover three of the following areas:

- Geopolitics in the Middle East
- Middle Eastern international relations
- Regional Conflicts in the Middle East
- Refugee Crisis in the Middle East
- The Future of the Middle East

Field Journal: %15

During your badia homestay experience, keep a journal analyzing Bedouins' perspectives on the themes of geopolitics, international relations, and the future of the Middle East. Compare the Bedouins' perspectives to urban perspectives (based on your experience with your host family in Amman), and compared to the UAE.

Participation and Attendance: 10%

Attendance during the thematic seminar is mandatory, and your grade will reflect your involvement in class and outside class.

Students are responsible for the timely reading of materials assigned for each session. In addition to readings, it is also your responsibility to keep up to date with current events. At a minimum, you are required to read the *Jordan Times* newspaper (in hardcopy form or online <http://www.jordantimes.com>). It is also recommended that you read a daily newspaper available online in English (for example, *Ammon News* at <http://en.ammonnews.net/>)

Assessment:

Discussion Leadership	25%
Lecture Analysis Paper	25%
Comparative Case Study	25%
Field Journal	15%
Participation and Attendance	10%

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

Expectations and Policies

- Show up prepared. Be on time. Have your Reading completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done according to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (those of classmates, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits, etc.). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process.

Disability Services: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at disabilityservices@sit.edu for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.