

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

MDES-3000 (3 credits)

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

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course 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. Based in Morocco, students examine these regional dynamics from a North African perspective while maintaining a strong focus on Jordan and the broader Middle East. Jordan, as a key regional actor and peace broker, remains an important case for examining. 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 paradigms in the Middle East and geopolitical discourse. The Morocco-based setting also provides opportunities to examine North Africa's connections with Middle Eastern, African, and European geopolitical dynamics. In Istanbul, students learn from local academics how Turkey has become a strong geopolitical regional player in Middle Eastern politics and international relations, and the extent to which Turkey is influencing the future political arena of the Middle East. 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.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify historical and contemporary factors influencing international relations, politics, and future trends of the Middle East and North Africa;
- Synthesize the 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;

- Assess Turkey's current geopolitical role and in the Middle East and impact in shaping regional politics;
- Compare and contrast Jordan, Morocco, and Turkey's roles and influences on regional geopolitics;
- 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 local vocabulary related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits.

Course Schedule

Students will be provided a detailed course schedule during orientation on the program. 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, Morocco and Middle East Structure, Politics, and International Relations

This module provides an analytical overview of Jordan's and Middle east political structure, international relations philosophy and approach, and the geopolitical factors impacting the country's relations with its neighbors and the international community, while drawing comparisons with Morocco and the broader Middle East.

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. Comparisons with Morocco's governing system and political structure will be introduced where relevant

Required Readings:

Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2026). *BTI 2026 country report: Morocco*. Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index.

Bertelsmann Stiffung's Transformation Index. (2024). Jordan Country Report. Retrieved from: [BTI 2024 Jordan Country Report: BTI 2024 \(bti-project.org\)](https://bti-project.org/en/publication/2024/01/bti-2024-jordan-country-report)

Sverre L. (2023). The Geopolitics of the Middle East. Policy Brief No. 155 Toda Peace Institute. Tokyo 160-0017, Japan

Alon, Y. (2009). *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1-12.

Session 2: Geopolitics of Jordan, Morocco and Middle East International Relations

This session addresses Jordanian, Moroccan, and Middle East international relations and regional politics. Students will learn factors affecting Jordanian, Moroccan, and Middle East geopolitics and their international relations approaches.

Required Readings

Traub, D., Cohen, R. A., & Kertcher, C. (2026). Morocco's dual realist and neoliberalism foreign policy: An examination of Morocco's decision to strengthen ties with Israel, 2009–2023. *Mediterranean Politics*, 31(1), 73–107.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2024.2420478>

Al-Rousan, N., Al-Najjar, D., & Al-Najjar, H.M. (2023). Assessing the Impact of Syrian Refugee Influx on the Jordanian Stock Exchange Market. *Risks*.

Zuntz, A-C. (2021). Refugees' Transnational Livelihoods and Remittances: Syrian Mobilities in the

Middle East Before and After 2011. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 34, Issue 2, PP. 1400–1422, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feab016>

Mansour, Y. M., Al-Khatib B. and Abu Anzeh W. (2019). Economic Policy in Jordan. *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*.

Module 2: Major Actors in a Changing MENA Region: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and External Influences

This module focuses on geopolitics and international relations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Sessions address contemporary regional and external factors which shape geopolitics and inform MENA international relations.

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

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

Required Readings:

Khatib, L. (2025). *How Saudi Arabia and the US might reset the Middle East*. Chatham House.

Faez, A. (2023). *A Struggle of Influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia: The Repercussions of Confrontation and the Likelihood of Peace A Case Study of Yemen*. Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, Qatar. [Linked here..](#)

Salamatian, L., Douzet, F., Salamatian, K. & Limonier, K. (2021). The geopolitics behind the routes data travel: a case study of Iran, *Journal of Cybersecurity*, Volume 7, Issue 1, PP.18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cybsec/tyab018>

Sedghi, H. (2017). "Trumpism: The Geopolitics of the United States, the Middle East and Iran." *Socialism and Democracy* 31, no. 3, 82-93.

Session 2: Regional and External Actors in MENA Geopolitics (USA, Russia, Turkey)

In this session, students will learn about major actors in the Middle East as well as key events that impact geopolitics in the region.

Required Readings

Pulat, A. (2025). Navigating foreign policy priorities: Leader diplomacy of Morocco in the period of King Mohammed VI. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*.

Meddeb, H. (2025). *Economic Statecraft as Geopolitical Strategy: New Dimensions of Moroccan-Algerian Rivalry*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Halawa, H. (2022). Nonstate Actors, Geopolitics, and Conflict in the Middle East 43. In: Global Civil Society in a Geopolitical Age: How Civic Activism Is Being Reshaped by Great Power Competition, editor: Youngs, R. Carnegie Europe. Page 34-49 .

Aras, B., Yorlmaztav, E. (2017). *The Struggle for New Order*. Middle East Policy, Vol 24, Issue 2.

Sedghi, H. (2017). "Trumpism: The Geopolitics of the United States, the Middle East and Iran." *Socialism and Democracy* 31, no. 3, 82-93.

Module 3: Regional Conflicts in the MENA Region

This module addresses the main regional conflicts which shape geopolitics in the MENA region. The focus is on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the upheavals of the Arab Spring, and the role of political Islam. The module will also discuss sectarian dynamics, extremist movements, and their impact on regional and international geopolitics and the future of the region.

Session 1: Palestine: Past, Present, and Future in the Context of Shifting American Foreign Policy

This session explores the history and evolving dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab conflict, focusing on the ongoing Gaza war and its regional impact. It examines recent U.S. support for Israel, the dismissal of international law, and the implications for peace, justice, and stability in the Middle East.

Required Readings:

United Nations. (2025). *New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution*

Rettig., E. (2021). Securitizing Energy Cooperation: Israel's Regional Shift in the East-Mediterranean, *Foreign Policy Analysis, Volume 17, Issue 3, PP. 6*,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orab006>

Zanotti, J. (2018). Israel: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief. Congressional Service.

Elgindy, K. (2018). *After Oslo: Rethinking the Two State Solution*. Foreign policy at Brookings.

Session 2: Political Islam, Sectarianism, and Regional Geopolitics

This session focuses the role of political Islam in the Middle East. Students will learn about the history, the buildup, and the current reflections of the conflicts between Sunnis and Shia's, Sunni/Shia'a and sectarian and terrorist acts in the Middle East, and the impact of Daesh (ISIS/ISIL) in the Middle East.

Required Readings:

Abu Rumman M. (2020). The Future of ISIS: Strengths and Weaknesses Dynamics of the "Virtual Caliphate" and the Gap in Counterterrorism Strategies. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Jordan.

Roussos, S. (2020). Introduction—Issues and Debates on Religion and International Relations in the Middle East. Religions, MDPI. Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of the Peloponnese, 20132 Tripoli, Greece.

Taneja K. (2017). Understanding ISIS: From Conception to Operations. *Observer Research Foundation*, ISBN : 978-81-935340-2-1.

Module 4: Refugees, Migration, and Displacement in Jordan and Morocco

This module focuses on refugee and migration dynamics in Jordan, Morocco, and the broader MENA region. Students learn about the roots and causes of successive refugee crises and migration flows in the region and compare their political, social, and geopolitical impacts on Jordan and Morocco.

Session 1: Palestine and Jordan: Jordan's Refugee Experience

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:

The Danish Immigration Service. (2020). Palestinian Refugees Access to registration and UNRWA services, documents, and entry to Jordan. Country Report, Country of origin Information (COI). Ministry of Immigration and Integration, Denmark.

Francis, A. (2015). *Jordan's refugee crisis* (Vol. 21). Washington, DC: Carnegie endowment for international peace.

El-Abed, O. (2014). The Discourse of Guesthood: Forced Migrants in Jordan. In: Fábos, A.H., Isotalo, R. (eds) *Managing Muslim Mobilities. Religion and Global Migrations*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137386410_5

Session 2: Refugees and Migration in Jordan and Morocco: A Comparative Perspective

This session examines contemporary refugee and migration dynamics in Jordan and Morocco. Students compare Jordan's experience hosting Syrian, Iraqi, and other refugees with Morocco's role as a host and transit country for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, and analyze the implications for national policy and regional geopolitics.

Required Readings:

Jordan Response Plan for The Syrian Crisis. (2015). Ministry of planning & UN.

Charlotte Guard, Bridget Chan. and Amy Lutterloh. (2015). Understanding the Syrian Refugee Crisis. World Affairs Council. <https://www.scoilnet.ie/uploads/resources/16188/15864.pdf>

Al-Qdah, T., & Lacroix, M. (2011). Iraqi refugees in Jordan: Lessons for practice with refugees globally. *International Social Work*, 54(4), 521-534.

Stevens, D. (2013). Legal status, labelling, and protection: the case of Iraqi 'Refugees' in Jordan. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 25(1), 1-38

Breulmann M., Müller R.A., Al-Subeh A. and van Afferden M. (2021). Influx of Syrian Refugees in Jordan – Effects on the Water Sector. Published by the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ with support from the Ministry of Water and Irrigation; Amman – Leipzig.

Zuntz, A-C. (2021). Refugees' Transnational Livelihoods and Remittances: Syrian Mobilities in the Middle East Before and After 2011. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 34, Issue 2, PP. 1400–1422, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feab016>

Rothe, D., Fröhlich, C., & Miguel, J. (2021). Digital Humanitarianism and the Visual Politics of the Refugee Camp: (Un)Seeing Control. *International Political Sociology*, Volume 15, Issue 1, PP. 41–62, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olaa021>

Module 5: Turkey and Geopolitics in the Middle East

The program includes a one-week excursion to Istanbul, Turkey, a city that offers a unique blend of East and West and complex geopolitical history. In the past 20 years, Turkey has emerged as a leading political, economic, and cultural power in the region and as a main regional geopolitically influential player. In Istanbul, students have a rich context to learn about a different perspective on international relations and the Turkish influence in shaping the future of the Middle East. Students also learn about sociopolitical minorities such as the Kurds, the Syrians, and international investors. Students also meet with peers from Istanbul University and visit Old Istanbul to discuss the role of Turkey in Syria and Turkey's relations with Iran, Israel, and world powers such as Russia, the US, and the EU. During this excursion, students will meet with peers from Istanbul University and visit Old Istanbul, the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sofia, Topkapi Palace, the Grand Bazaar, and Suleymaniye Library and Mosque. They also have the opportunity to enjoy a boat cruise on the Bosphorous reaching close to the black sea, a sea where the surrounding countries have a rich and complex history of geopolitics and international relations.

Session 1: International relations and the Turkish influence in shaping the future of the Middle East.

This session will examine Turkey's political, economic, and cultural power in the region, as well as its role as a key regional geopolitically influential player. Students will gain an understanding

of a different perspective on international relations as well as Turkey's role in shaping the Middle East's future.

Required Readings:

Seevan, S. (2023). An Illusory Unity Understanding the Construction of Kurdish Political Identity.

ALMontaqa, Vol. 6 | no. 1 |.

Hakkı Taş (2022) Erdoğan and the Muslim Brotherhood: an outside-in approach to Turkish foreign

policy in the Middle East, Turkish Studies, 23:5, 722-742, DOI:

10.1080/14683849.2022.2085096 To link to this article:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2085096>

Hatay, M., and Tziarras, Z. (2019). Kinship and Diasporas in Turkish Foreign Policy from Europe, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. Peace Research Institute Oslo

(PRIO), ISBN: 978-82-343-0023-3 (online). Chapter 7&8, page 89-118.

Session 2: Sociopolitical minorities in Turkish perspective

This session focuses on the sociopolitical minorities such as the Kurds, the Syrians, and international investors.

Required Readings:

Beylunioğlu, A.M., & Kaymak, Ö. (2021). The Perception of Minorities toward the Turkish State:

The Case of Ethno-religious Communities. *Poligrafi*.

Hoffman, M. (2019). The State of the Turkish-Kurdish Conflict. Centre for American Progress.

O'Grady, S., and Berger, M. (2019). Who are the Kurds, and why is Turkey attacking them.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/11/who-are-kurds-why-is-turkey-attacking-them/>

Gokarıksel, B. and Secor, A. (2018). Affective geopolitics: Anxiety, pain, and ethics in the encounter with Syrian refugees in Turkey. Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, (0) 1-19. sagepub.com/journals-permissions DOI: 10.1177/2399654418814257, journals.sagepub.com/home/epc.

Module 6: International Relations and the Future of the Middle East

Session 1: The Social and Political Future of Jordan, Morocco, and the Middle East

In this session, students will examine prospective geopolitical developments in Jordan and Morocco and explore potential changes in their regional and international relations.. Students will also analyze potential changes in MENA geopolitics and international relations in the context of changing social, political, and economic structures.

Required Reading:

Durand de Sanctis, J., & Ferrié, J.-N. (2026). Morocco–French relations and foreign policy in Africa: Postcolonial legacy and disruptions. *African Studies*, 61(1), 125–145.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00020397251388666>

Darwich, F. Gause, III, Hazbun, W. Ryan, C. and Valbjørn, M. (2023). International Relations and Regional (In)security In: The Political Science of the Middle East. Edited by: Marc Lynch, Jillian Schwedler, and Sean Yom, Oxford University Press.
DOI:10.1093/oso/9780197640043.003.0004.

Clark, J. H. (2017). Feminist geopolitics and the Middle East: Refuge, belief, and peace. *Geography compass*, 11(2), e12304.

Session 2: Economics and International Relations in Jordan, Morocco, and the MENA Region
In this session, students will examine the role of emerging economic actors and economic policies in shaping the future of Jordan, Morocco, and the MENA region in the context of international relations.

Required Readings:

Meddeb, H. (2025). *Economic Statecraft as Geopolitical Strategy: New Dimensions of Moroccan-Algerian Rivalry*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Al-Rousan, N., Al-Najjar, D., & Al-Najjar, H.M. (2023). Assessing the Impact of Syrian Refugee Influx on the Jordanian Stock Exchange Market. *Risks*.

Zuntz, A-C. (2021). Refugees' Transnational Livelihoods and Remittances: Syrian Mobilities in the Middle East Before and After 2011. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 34, Issue 2, PP. 1400–1422, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feab016>

Mansour, Y. M., Al-Khatib B. and Abu Anzeh W. (2019). Economic Policy in Jordan. *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*.

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 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 on-line in English (for example, *Ammon News* at <http://en.ammonnews.net/>)
Students will be assessed in this course through the following dimensions:

Group Discussion (30%) Assignment 1

Student-led discussion of a course module: including emphasis on assigned readings, preparation of discussion questions, and presentation of supplemental materials on the topic (interviews, articles, discussions with lecturers, etc.) After module ends, student will be engaged to discuss the thematic lectures and place emphasis on the readings and the main points made during the lecture and field visits. The students should connect the module discussion to the program theme and their learning experience in Jordan.

Lecture Analysis Paper (30%) - Due two days after module discussion, Assignment 2

This assignment follows the student-led discussion and should not exceed 3 pages. Students must work individually and turn this assignment individually three days after the module discussion that facilitated.

Comparative Case Study (30%), Assignment 3

In no more than 5 pages, write a comparative case study that critically examines and contrasts key aspects of geopolitics, international relations, and the future of the Middle East. Your analysis should draw directly on insights from both the Geopolitics Seminar and the International Excursion to Turkey, while also integrating information from lectures, readings, personal explorations, and homestays. Choose two of the following areas for your analysis, making sure to highlight both Jordanian and Turkish perspectives where relevant:

1. Geopolitics in the Middle East (link two topics from seminar and Turkey excursion)
2. International Relations in the Middle East (link two topics from seminar and Turkey excursion)
3. Regional Conflicts in the Middle East (compare Jordanian and Turkish perspectives)
4. Refugee Crisis in the Middle East (compare refugee responses in Jordan and Turkey)
5. The Future of the Middle East (analyze in the context of U.S. involvement and decisions)

Participation and Attendance (10%)

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

Assessment:

Group Work and Discussion	30%
Lecture Analysis Paper	30%
Case Study	30%
Participation and Attendance	10%

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and

participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

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.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.