

PEPPERDINE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

COURSE SYLLABUS

MMEP 600. THE MAKING OF THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST
Martin Kramer, Fall 2026

Class Meeting Information:

Tuesday 8:30-11:30, Thursday 8:30-11:30

Instructor Contact Information:

Martin.Kramer@pepperdine.edu or sandbox@martinkramer.org
Office Hours: After each class.

Introduction

"And the nature of the case first compelled us to advance our empire to its present height; fear being our principal motive, though honor and self-interest came in afterwards."

— Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

This course traces Western policymaking in the Middle East from the late eighteenth century to the present, showing how major powers have strategized, formulated, and executed policies to advance their interests in the region. Each session examines three pivotal decisions and spotlights the motives, calculations, and historical contexts that produced both intended and unintended outcomes. The instructor will provide general historical background for each case study, serving as a refresher for those who have studied Middle Eastern history or as essential context for those new to the subject. Classes will include simulations and dramatic reenactments.

The thirty-five case studies span a wide range of policy choices—colonial ventures, military interventions, strategic alliances, diplomatic initiatives, arms and aid transfers—from Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt through the Anglo-French partition of Ottoman territories (1916), U.S. support for Israel's founding (1947–48), the Western-backed coup against Iran's Mossadegh (1953), the U.S. airlift to Israel during the 1973 war, and culminating in post-Cold War decisions on regime change in Iraq, Libya, and Egypt.

Throughout the course, the emphasis is on the logic, rhetoric, and argumentation behind policy formation. Using *only* primary documents—diplomatic records, memoranda, contemporary analyses, and memoirs—students will explore both immediate motivations and enduring patterns in Western strategic thinking.

A major theme is how powerful states deploy their political, economic, and military resources to pursue their goals in the face of opposition from other powerful states and the sometimes stubborn “realities on the ground.” By examining diverse examples, students will gain nuanced insights into policy successes and failures, as well as the intended and unintended consequences that arise from deeply rooted concerns about security, interests, and power.

Finally, students will build practical analytical skills by learning to identify recurring policy arguments, critique strategic reasoning, and weigh the interplay among policy, context, and outcome. Students will finish the course with sharpened analytical tools, valuable for work in diplomacy, policy analysis, journalism, strategic advising, or academia.

Official Course Description

This course offers an in-depth exploration of the modern Middle East, from the late 18th century to the present, following a chronological approach. It seeks to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the key developments that have shaped the Middle East over the last two centuries, beginning with Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt, moving through 19th-century reform efforts in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, and addressing the collapse of the Ottoman state. From there, the course examines the confrontations between colonialism and rising nationalist movements after World War I, the formation of the modern state system, the military’s role in regional politics, the resurgence of Islam in its varied forms, the Arab Spring, and 21st-century sectarian and ethnic civil conflicts. In addition, the course aims to provide students with a foundational understanding of how historians approach sources, examining various schools of thought within Middle Eastern history and the use of historical analogies. The goal is not to train historians but to cultivate the historical awareness necessary for any educated individual consuming information about the Middle East.

Course Objectives

This course emphasizes the region’s historical development and provides a deep dive into the first two of the program’s desired educational outcomes, while introducing how intent and decision-making have unfolded throughout the region’s dynamic history. The Program Educational Outcomes for the MMEPS include:

- Understand political, historical, cultural, ideological, and religious factors in Middle East;
- Appreciate American engagement, role and influence in the region;
- Apply policy designs and decision frameworks prudently balancing tradeoffs;
- Develop the analytical, executive and decision-making skills necessary to formulate and lead solutions.

Texts and Course Materials

REQUIRED:

- Students will receive, *gratis*, a printed binder containing FAQs, timelines, and original documents for each case study. Students must bring the printed materials to every class. Open laptops or tablets will not be permitted in class.

Course Requirements and Grading Policy

Students will write a 20- to 25-page paper on a topic proposed by the student and confirmed by the instructor. To support this work, students will compile a folder of research materials in Gemini Notebook and query its contents via chat. Students will submit the paper and the link to the folder at the end of the semester. This is a research paper: both the underlying research and the paper will be assessed.

A comprehensive open-book examination using the provided binder will be administered during the last class session. This will be a handwritten blue-book examination. Bring your binder, as there will be no open laptops or tablets.

Grading:

- Paper: – 50%
- Exam: – 50%

Total – 100%

Course Policies and Disclosures

This course adheres to Pepperdine's policies regarding student privacy, intellectual property, plagiarism detection (Turnitin), accommodations for students with disabilities, and academic integrity. Full details will be provided in class.

Course Timeline

"History is a strange teacher. It never repeats itself exactly, but you ignore its general lessons at your peril."

— Madeleine Albright

Session 1: Bonaparte and America's First Intervention

- 1798: French Invasion of Egypt
- 1801: U.S. and the Barbary War

Session 2: Britain, France, and the Eastern Question

- 1821-1830: Britain and the Greek Revolt
- 1830: The French Invade Algeria
- 1840: Britain Saves the Ottomans

Session 3: Great Power War and Financial Leverage

- 1854: Britain's Entry into the Crimean War
- 1860: French Intervention in Lebanon
- 1850's-1876: British Debate over the Suez Canal

Session 4: Protectorates and Mandates

- 1882: British Occupation of Egypt
- 1916: Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement
- 1917: The Balfour Declaration

Session 5: Managing British Promises

- 1919-1922: The Allies Between Greece and Turkey
- 1921: Britain Makes a Monarchy in Iraq
- 1939: Britain Retreats from a Jewish State

Session 6: U.S. Cold War Calculations in Palestine, Iran and Egypt

- 1947-1948: U.S. Support for Creation of Israel
- 1953: Overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran
- 1955-1956: The U.S. Denies Nasser the Aswan Dam

Session 7: Western Military Interventions and Withdrawals

- 1956: Britain's Suez Adventure
- 1958: U.S. Military Intervention in Lebanon
- 1962: French Withdrawal from Algeria

Session 8: Bolstering Allies

- 1962: First U.S. Weapons to Israel
- 1971: British Withdrawal from Persian Gulf
- 1972: U.S. Arms Sales to Iran

Session 9: American Strategic Decisions in the 1970s

- 1973: U.S. Airlift to Israel
- 1974: U.S. Decision on Cyprus
- 1978: Carter's Pivot to Camp David

Session 10: Credibility, Arms Sales, and Recognition

- 1979: U.S. Admission of the Shah
- 1981: AWACS to Saudi Arabia
- 1982-1988: The U.S. Meets the PLO

Session 11: Entangled in the Gulf

- 1985: Iran-Contra Mishap
- 1991: Saving Kuwait
- 2003: The U.S. Brings Down Saddam

Session 12: The Arab Spring

- 2010: Between Mubarak and the Brotherhood

- 2011: Regime Change in Libya
- 2013: Broken Red Line in Syria

Session 13: Examination

Session 14: Workshop: Preparing your research paper.

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Course Policies and Disclosures

In the modern classroom, several legal and procedural issues arise that require clarification. Below are the statements about the policies for this class around some of these important issues.

- ❑ **Student privacy.** Our classrooms are a laboratory of ideas and students are encouraged to take intellectual risks and explore ideas within this setting. In order to safeguard the privacy of all our students and faculty in modern learning environments, no individual may record, reproduce, screenshot, photograph or distribute any video, audio, or visual content from the course without the permission of the persons involved in the exchange or conversation and the professor.
- ❑ **Intellectual property rights.** All class lectures and materials herein, including but not limited to, pre-recorded and live lectures, live discussions and discussion boards (and recordings thereof), posted course materials, visual materials that accompany lectures/discussions, and virtual whiteboard notes (collectively “Course Intellectual Property”) remain the intellectual property of the faculty member or their authors. No individual may record, reproduce, screenshot, photograph, or distribute any Course Intellectual Property in partial or full-format without the permission of the professor. Any violation of this policy may subject the individual to disciplinary and/or legal action.
- ❑ **Use of TurnItIn.com.** This course may require electronic submission of essays, papers, or other written assignments through the plagiarism detection service Turnitin (<http://www.turnitin.com>). Turnitin is an online plagiarism detection service that conducts textual similarity reviews of submitted papers. When papers are submitted to Turnitin, the service will retain a copy of the submitted work in the Turnitin database for the sole purpose of detecting plagiarism in future submitted works. Students retain copyright on their original course work. The use of Turnitin is subject to the Terms of Use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com website. You may request, in writing, to not have your papers submitted through Turnitin. If you choose to opt out of the Turnitin submission process, you will need to provide additional research documentation and attach additional materials (to be clarified by the instructor) to help the instructor assess the originality of your work.
- ❑ **Accommodations for Students.** Pepperdine University provides services and accommodations in accordance with the ADA and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Pepperdine recognizes that each student is a unique individual and that the effect of a particular disability can vary from student to student. As a result, accommodations are determined through an interactive process with the student, the Office of Student Accessibility, and medical/mental health professionals.

Any student with a documented disability (physical, learning, or psychological) needing academic accommodations should contact the Office of Student Accessibility [located at Student Assistance Center #105, phone: (310) 506-6500] , email: student.accessibility@pepperdine.edu] as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit <http://www.pepperdine.edu/disabilityservices/> for additional information.

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- ❑ **Right to Revise Syllabus.** The professor reserves the right to modify the syllabus as the semester progresses in response to external events, University directives, or to advance the progress of learning in the course.

Course Rules and Procedures

- ❑ Students will generally be expected to be present and prepared in each class session.
- ❑ Cell phones should not be used in a manner that disrupts the classroom learning environment.
- ❑ Students are expected to complete the assignments and activities by the timelines and deadlines specified in the syllabus. Responsibility lies with the student to review these materials and deadlines on a regular and timely basis. All times in all assignments will be in the Eastern time zone.
- ❑ Students should allow adequate time for a response by the professor. Generally, I will try to answer all communications within 24 hours, but there may be occasions when this is not possible. Email is preferred for communications. If you need to reach my cell (either through text or a call), please be mindful of the time and reserve cell phone interactions between the hours of 9pm and 7am Eastern for matters of some urgency.
- ❑ Some written assignments must be submitted electronically via the attachment feature on the courses digital platform for the designated assignment. Presentations should be submitted in Microsoft PowerPoint format while memoranda should be submitted in Microsoft Word format. All presentations and written assignments should be prepared using the templates provided by the instructor. Other formats are not acceptable and will be returned to the student or group for resubmission (with a late penalty). Assignments submissions are expected on time and welcomed early.

Student Conduct

Students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the policies set forth in the School of Public Policy's Academic Catalog.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

The issue of academic honesty has become a serious issue for universities and colleges throughout the world. Not only are students expected to conduct themselves in the manner prescribed in the Academic Catalog, but special attention should be paid to issues of academic honesty. Students are expected to properly cite all materials from which they borrow ideas and information (citations should comply with the standards set forth in the Chicago Manual of Style or a comparable style sheet). Violations of the principles of academic integrity will be treated very seriously and aggressively.
