

SAS Political Theory of the Modern Middle East

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What Did You Just Get Yourself Into?

Let me be upfront with you and clearly state for the record, I have an agenda.

As American Jews continue to disengage with Israel at a rapid clip and the world becomes increasingly more dangerous, young Zionist pioneers are desperately needed to build and secure a future worthy of our greatest hopes and dreams. So if you were planning on taking a course on Israel advocacy or learning some scripted talking points so you could feel good about your Israel engagement, as they say in the Middle East, “your drinking from the wrong well” (trust me, it sounds a lot cooler in Arabic). Hit the translation button, you’re in the wrong class.

This curriculum was carefully designed to deepen your skills in critical analysis and sharpen your logical reasoning to enable you to test the accuracy of data and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of differing policies. In short, this class is all about giving you the independence to form your own opinions and to formulate new ideas based on credible sources and well-reasoned political analysis. In that sense, this course really isn’t about Israel or the Middle East it is about you and your intellectual growth. But enough about you, let’s get back to my agenda...

Because of your upbringing, education, values and identity, you, my dear student, occupy a rare but important perspective in a global conversation of real consequence. As such, you have been enlisted in a learning process whose ultimate goal is lifelong engagement with Israel and the broader Middle East. The heart of this course aims to strengthen your knowledge of Israeli history, your appreciation for the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead and to foster a commitment from you to engage with the Zionist enterprise in whatever way you choose.

We desperately need a new generation of Jewish leaders who are equipped with the knowledge and wisdom to fearlessly pursue a future of peace and security. A new vanguard must emerge to realize the prophetic vision of a Jewish state worthy of being “a light unto the nations”. The task may seem daunting, but as we learn from those who came before us, “if you will it, it is no dream”.

In short, my agenda is for *you* to have an agenda!

Okay, But What is This Course Really About?

Political Theory of the Modern Middle East examines the strategic logic behind the news headlines. Over the course of the year, you will gain considerable experience in reading university level texts and writing persuasively with precision and accuracy. Over two semesters you will investigate major regional developments of the modern era including the foundations of political Islam, the colonial legacy, modern Zionism, Palestinian nationalism, the peace process and American foreign policy in the Middle East.

Objectives By the end of this course, you will:

1. Be able to articulate a long-term vision for the State of Israel and the modern Middle East.
2. Understand that various historical narratives—Israeli, Palestinian, “international community, etc.—have influenced how people today understand geo-political conflicts in the Middle East.
3. Have the ability to talk policy intelligently with anyone.
4. Understand the range of classic religious Zionist thinking and use that knowledge to ground your understanding of what it means to be a religious Zionist today.
5. Gain a certain familiarity and level of comfort with Palestinian and Arab culture in order to consider for themselves how Israel should best proceed in negotiating a settlement to the conflict.

Seriously Feld, Is This Course Really For Me?

Maybe, but that is a question that only you can answer. Before you do, it is worth keeping in mind that nothing in life is free and this course does earn you an extra point on your GPA. So what you *really* want to be asking yourself is, what is the true cost of taking this course and is it really worth it?

This is an advance level course that demands a great deal from you the learner. Anyone who does not want to read, grapple with a heavy load of material and accept the course expectations should not take this course. What really makes this class different from a normal high school class is the expectation from day one that *you* will take increasing responsibility for your development as an engaged and critical thinker, reader, and writer. For some, this can be a liberating way to learn but for others it can be a frustrating nightmare.

Obviously you will be expected to keep up with the assigned readings and come to class prepared to *actively* participate in discussion and *intelligent* debate. Independent of any

assignment, it is *essential* that you always keep up with international events by reading news sources with extensive regional coverage. If that isn't something you are willing to commit yourself to at the outset, I strongly recommend switching to one of the other sections and there will be no hard feelings, I promise.

Okay, if you're still reading this it means you're still interested. So here's the good news- you don't need to come into this course with a lot of prior knowledge about current events or the Middle East and you certainly don't need to have any particular political positions. In fact, you don't need to be a good test taker, you don't need to be a master memorizer of facts and details. In fact, you don't even need to be a "good student" in the traditional sense. Because I'm a really nice guy, I've spent my entire summer vacation putting together these tips that will help you ace this class.

WARNING: Use of traditional strategies for "doing school" in this course may be hazardous to your self-esteem and damaging to your GPA.

Class Survival TIPS:

- Know that you don't know what you don't know (got that?)
- Mastery requires knowing what, why (the underlying principles behind the knowledge), how and when to apply the underlying principles behind the knowledge you acquired.
- For each of the smaller tasks required of you in this course, focus on a limited set of skills, get good at them and then for larger assignments, integrate your skill set to showcase your knowledge.
- Take the skills, knowledge, strategies and habits from you learned in your other classes and use them to succeed in this course.

What character traits do you need to succeed in this class?

If you can consistently bring these characteristics to class, you will do very well with minimal stress: Curious, dependable, passionate, honest, adaptable, willing to embrace cognitive dissonance, willing to think outside of the box, you take pride in the quality of your work, you are respectful of yourself and others, you won't let fear get in the way of a solid learning experience.

Some Good Advice From Former Students

- Take this course more as a truly meaningful class than just another one on the schedule. It is not just AP Euro or math, it directly relates to some of the most important things in our lives and has a direct impact on us.

- Try and think about the issues of the course outside of the classroom. It will help you develop your own opinion on the issues, which is very important.
- Don't come into this class thinking that there is only one right opinion about Israel and Palestine, and that it's yours. You have to go into it with an open-mind.
- This should be the one course that you learn in not for the grade (even though grades matter for college so still try and do well in those!) because this applies THE MOST to our lives outside of the classroom.
- Participate in class - get your opinions out there, even if they're not fully developed.

“Difference of opinion leads to inquiry, and inquiry leads to truth.”

-Thomas Jefferson

Classroom Conduct

Your opinion matters!! Class participation is an integral part of this course and naturally, passions rise. SASPTMME students come from a wide variety of political and religious backgrounds and many of the topics discussed will lead to heated debate. As such, it is imperative that we create an environment where we can get the most out of the time and material we will explore together. Below, is a set of classroom policies, please review the policies carefully and let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Classroom Discussion is strongly encouraged and is an essential component of this course. Your opinion (no matter how unpopular), *matters*. However, it is essential that you understand that the purpose of this course is to teach you *how to think* and not to train you *what to think*. As you will discover, *how* you effectively articulate your positions is an art of particular importance to this course.

While advocacy skills will be developed throughout the semester, indoctrinating you with what I, Shalhevet, your community, or parents believes to be the right answers is *not* a goal of this course. Rather, our learning will highlight important questions and ideas and expose you to the main currents of debate about them. Please respect your classmates and act accordingly. Personal attacks or talking out of turn will not be tolerated and your participation grade will depend in part on how well you conducted yourself under such intense circumstances.

Coming on Time: How do you study a region where events of major significance have been taking place *virtually non-stop* for over 3,000 years? Add to that the *billions of people* who hold this land sacred and what you have is a major time management challenge. Therefore, It is imperative that you come to class on time.

Class Preparation: In order to participate fully in classroom discussions it's really important that all readings, homework and other outside work be completed on the due date. Failure to demonstrate consistent preparation can be devastating to your final grade.

Attendance: You are expected to attend class. Excessive absences may jeopardize class standing and eligibility for other programs. A school-sponsored absence shall be entered into the attendance system whenever a student misses class due to participation in sports or co-curricular activities in which the student is representing Shalhevet High School. A standard absence shall include all other types of absences (illness, family trip, orthodontist appointment, college visits, etc.). The cap for standard absences for each semester will be set at six. *Reaching or exceeding this cap will result in an automatic deduction of one letter grade.* If you reach three absences, expect me to notify you and your parent with a gentle reminder of this policy. If you are out for a school-related trip (e.g. Model Congress, Basketball Tournament or seniors visiting colleges), you must let me know via Schoology at least 48 hours in advance. It is your responsibility to remain current with any material they missed from the course.

Bathroom Breaks: Aside from the class time lost, the exit and return from the bathroom is disruptive to your classmates and interrupts the flow of our meetings. As young adults, I trust your judgment regarding leaving the room. As such, you do not have to ask permission to leave the classroom.

Homework: Most assignments consist of reading. Here's the tricky part; I am going to assume that you've read and understood the readings. So there may not be anything to hand in that "proves" that you keep up with the reading. Instead, I will be assessing how effectively you incorporate the ideas, language and implications found in the material already covered. In other words, I'm looking for you to be educated about the issues we are studying. The information will be available to you; it is your responsibility to keep up with the course material. Occasionally you will have written assignments. To earn full credit you must hand it in no later than the due date announced. Turn it in 2 days late and lose a letter grade, 3 days late earns no higher than a C+, 4 days or more a D+ (on that particular assignment only) and if you fail to turn in homework, you'll obviously get an F.

Having said all of that (and hopefully I've managed to scare you straight), I have no interest in making your life difficult. Rest assured, I know that life is tough enough without my meddling. Unless you are extremely lucky, there will be times when you'll be under the weather, overwhelmed with other obligations or dealing with personal matters. Sometimes, you'll just have to catch your breath or catch up on some sleep. If you know that you're going to miss a due date and/or you need some help to catch up on material, **just let me know** with enough advanced notice and be realistic about setting a new deadline and we'll work it out. There is no need to come up with "legitimate" excuses, I'm requiring you to be mature and serious about this class and that should have some benefit beyond a measly point on a stinking GPA. Just don't BS me and for crying out loud, don't make a habit of it **and we're all good!**

Questions About Grades: If you do not understand why you received a certain grade, you should absolutely seek clarification from me. Because I believe you have a legitimate right to

appeal a grade, under no circumstances will your grade be lowered.

If you want clarification however, you are required first to submit something in writing, explaining your question and, if you thought your answer was correct, you must document your belief with evidence from the course. If you bring your tests to me without following the above procedure, I will refuse to consider the issue until you have submitted something in writing. After receiving your written questions, I will review your documentation and test at my earliest convenience. After careful review, I will return your test with a written explanation. If a change in score is warranted, I will gladly change the score on Schoology.

Course Outline

Unit 1-Competing National Identities

Unit 2-Making of the Modern Middle East

Unit 3-War & Peace in the Middle East

Unit 4-Israel on the World Stage

Unit 5-Owning Your Zionism

By the end of the year, how will you be different?

You will have made significant and noticeable progress in the following areas:

- Critical thinking
- Independent learning
- Teamwork
- Producing *quality* work
- Problem solving
- Effective communications
- Principled approach to thinking about the Middle East.

In other words, your opinions and actions will align with some core values that you feel strongly about and not the other way around)

“Experience may well be the best teacher, but the tuition is very high.”

-B. Malkiel & C. Ellis

Self Directed Assignments

	Maximum points POSSIBLE
1) Quizzes	= 200 (+10 for doing all)
2) Final Exam	= 100
3) Film 4X10	= 40 (+35 for comparative review paper)
4) Beyond the Classroom	= 25 each/100 points max
5) News Curation	= 10 each/150 points max
6) Coalition Building	= 10 if you're in/5 if your out
7) Game of Risk	= 10 for hegemons/5 to survive
8) Writing Assignments	= 25 each / 250 points max
9) Independent Research Report	= 400 points
10) Oxford Style Debate	= 50 points to win/25 points to play
11) Project Infographic	= 50 points
12) Satirical News	= 50 points
13) Missions	= 100 points
14) Review of Books (and articles)	= 75 points

Final Grade Breakdown:

1450 points=A
1200 points=A-
990 points = B+
930 points = B
900 points = B-
870 points = C+
830 points = C
800 points = C-
770 points = D+
730 points = Are you kidding me?
Less than 729 = OUCH!

To achieve *mastery* you will need to acquire a set of key skills, practice integrating them and know when to apply what you have learned.

