Non-State Actors
Insurgents and NGOs in the Islamic World

Professor Shaherzad Ahmadi
Office Hours: JRC 409, W/F 10:00-11:45, or by appointment

Course Description
As the Ottoman and Qajar empires showed signs of collapse in the late nineteenth century, Middle Eastern and North African intellectuals eagerly adopted western systems of finance, education, and governance. In fact, some burgeoning nation-states even copied, word-for-word, European constitutions. By the mid-twentieth century, however, despots ruled the Middle East and North Africa. The two questions that animate this course are: (1) Why do we see autocracies, and destructive non-state actors, dominating the Islamic world? (2) What role do non-state actors play in producing volatility or maintaining stability? Students address these complex questions for an understanding of the region’s conflicts and the role of the international community in resolving (or exacerbating) humanitarian crises.

Learning Objectives
Students learn to conduct research and write comprehensive papers about topics concerning Middle Eastern and North African state and non-state actors. As a baseline, students will learn about the various national communities in the region as well as their interconnected histories. Students will follow the rise of nationalism, the birth of Israel, the popularity of communism, and the reactionary politics of Islamism. Also critical is for students to understand the ethnic and religious composition of the region, with its Muslim, Arab majority and Kurdish, Turkish, Persian, Christian, Jewish, Alawite, and Zoroastrian minorities.

More broadly, the course emphasizes the rise of autocracies, especially after World War I, and the role of non-state actors in challenging states. Students will also learn about the contribution of international governing bodies to the region, beginning with the post-World War I period, where the League of Nations built the very nations that currently exist in the Middle East and North Africa. Students will produce papers and engage in discussions regarding the debates within the field of Middle Eastern and North African history and other disciplines that explain state violence, ethnic tensions, and the role of international organization.

Lectures, Readings, & Discussions
Our discussions complement readings and lectures. Please use Chicago Style Citation for all papers. Students lose 10 points for each day a paper is late. Articles and primary sources will be
provided by the instructor on Canvas. The “Thoughts and Questions” provided for each day of reading will guide you as you prepare for class discussion.

Course Topic Outline

I. Secular Foundations
II. Insurgents
III. Non-Governmental Organizations

Grades

1. Map Quiz: 15%, Sept 18
2. Blue Book Exam: 25%, Oct 16
3. Essay: 35% -- 10 pages, December 18
4. Participation: 25% -- updated Oct 23, final grade by Dec 18

Students must come prepared to contribute to discussions. This is critical for developing and maturing our ideas in preparation for papers. Our course may be split into two sections – the first section reviews the regional governments and the development of the modern Middle East while the second examines the role of non-governmental agencies in shaping society. These non-governmental agencies include (but are not limited to) underground political parties, terrorist cells, merchants and business networks, unions, and advocacy groups funded by international agencies like the United Nations. In order to appreciate how non-state activists function, we must first understand the historical and political circumstances in which they find themselves in the Middle East.

In keeping with the organization of this class, your blue book exam will ask several multiple-choice questions as well as short essay questions that will reveal your knowledge of Middle Eastern states. Your final paper, however, will delve into the politics of non-state organizations and their effects on politics in the region.

Absences
Students may be absent twice, but any subsequent absence will affect participation grades. (Of course, accommodations will be made if the issue is serious.) Missing five class sessions for any reason, including prolonged illness, may result in a failing grade or an incomplete in this course.

Paper Topic
I have selected the prompts for the first two papers; the final paper may be on a subject of the student’s own choosing. Students are required, however, to meet with me by November 13 so that I may approve their topics.

- Describe the role of international non-governmental organizations in the Middle East, especially during (but not limited to) humanitarian crises like wars or prolonged conflicts. Students may select one or two countries as case studies.
- Your choice.
Course Readings & Discussions

Part I. Secular Foundations

Sept 6. Introductions
Thoughts and Questions: We will discuss what we mean by state and non-state actors. What are the topics that we will discuss and why is charting the rise/decline of various types of non-state actors important in studying the modern Islamic world, in particular?

Sept 11. Lecture 1, Ottoman and Qajar Reforms
As the era of empires declined, Middle Eastern and North African peoples wondered what the proper role of government was. Did the government have a responsibility for the public’s health? for providing affordable education? for national security? And if these were the responsibilities of the government, then where did that leave tribes, religious institutions, and other non-state actors that had traditionally maintained some of those roles? How did the west contribute to the monopolization of state power and the disenfranchisement of non-state networks?
- Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East.* Chapter 4.

Sept 13. Discussion
The reforms initiated by the Ottoman Empire, about which we talked yesterday, revolutionized the Middle East. Systems of finance, military, education, and health transformed to more resemble Europe. There were, of course, cultural ramifications, as well. If the Middle East wished to mirror European performance, all aspects of European life became worthy of study and emulation. What were the consequences of the Tanzimat period for Ottoman culture, gender dynamics, voting rights, slavery, and imperialism? Why do Arabs now articulate frustration with their Turkic leaders and what form does this criticism of Istanbul take?
- C & B. Chapter 5.

Sept 18. Lecture 2, Christian Missionaries; Discussion of readings
Christian missionaries had been active in the Middle East for the greater part of two centuries. In fact, they not only influenced public discourse, they participated in political uprisings like the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, they formulated the borderlines of the Middle East, they founded institutions that attracted Muslim students, and they taught local Christians European languages that allowed them to prosper as they traded with European merchants. Christian missionaries, who often came of their own volition, were inextricably connected to state projects. How did Christian missionaries participate in the global colonial project, patronize learning, allow for international migration, and offer a religious infrastructure to “civilization” and “progress” as understood by Middle Easterners? What came of their evangelization efforts?
Sept 20. Lecture 3, Constitutional Government in Turkey and Iran & MAP QUIZ
Constitutional democracy was a slow-moving process, one that took over a century to mature in the minds of native intellectuals. These intellectuals informed local political actors, who implemented laws that transformed the nature of government. No longer did reform-minded people believe that the imperial apparatus could adjust to the will of the people; by the late-nineteenth century, the entire system was now under question. Constitutionalists emerged triumphant in the early twentieth century in both Iran and Turkey. What form of government did they adopt? What was the attitude of intellectuals and political actors toward religion and the responsibilities of secular government? How did they approach the problem of non-state actors, primarily the clerical establishment and tribes?
- C & B. Chapter 8.
- MAP QUIZ.

Sept 25. Lecture 4, Monarchies in the Arab World; Discussion
World War I irrevocably altered the political fabric of the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire collapsed and Arab leaders lobbied for political independence. Many of the states that emerged out of the rubble of the Sick Man of Europe are still with us today, although in altered form, like Transjordan (now Jordan), Palestine (not yet officially a state), Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and others. Israel was also slowly emerging as an identifiable community through informal military, kibbutzim, and tactical engagement with European diplomats. How did the Arab monarchies in the Middle East rise and establish close relationships with European states? How did missionaries, who traveled through the region in the late-nineteenth century of their own volition, profoundly influence the border lines? How did the League of Nations participate in the partition of the Middle East?
- C & B. Chapter 9.

Sept 27. Lecture 5, Monarchies in the Persian Gulf
Iraq represents an important case study to understand the complexities of the post-Ottoman period. A diverse community pieced together out of three distinct Ottoman provinces, the region of al-‘Iraq had existed in the minds of Middle Easterners since at least the tenth century. Nevertheless, nationalists struggled to invent a coherent community out of a loosely defined region (understood by Europeans as “Mesopotamia”) in the post-WWI era, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Many early Iraqi nationalists were first and foremost committed to pan-Arab unification. The conflict between narrow Iraq-first nationalism and wider Arab nationalism caused friction in early state-building. This experience was hardly unique to Iraq; many other Arab states, including Egypt, Jordan and Libya struggled to balance the dream of a unified Arab republic with the reality of nation-states. How did this problem manifest in early state building in Iraq, specifically?

Oct 2. Lecture 6, National Independence
The Ottoman Empire was not the only imperial force that the Arabs perceived as oppressing their ethnos from expressing its voice as a united political entity. The British and French were also highly invested in the Middle East as they insisted on the importance of “civilizing” the Islamic community and
protecting local Christians. These European powers exerted tremendous influence over the Levant, Persian Gulf, and Egypt. They dictated their finances as a result of accumulated debt, trained and weaponized their armies, shaped institutions of higher learning, stocked hospitals with supplies, and built infrastructure. The European presence, however, limited local independence and soon political parties that aligned with Europeans were perceived as traitors to national independence. What did secular monarchies demand of their people in order to escape the yoke of European imperialism? How did this period anticipate the Third World Movement of the postwar era?

- C & B. Chapter 11.

Oct 4, Lecture 7, The Effects of the 1948 War
The Israeli community, by the interwar years, had been transitioning from a non-state community of Jewish peoples to a quasi-state with international connections and a formalized military. As a result of World War II, Europe’s calculus regarding the Ashkenazim had changed; nevertheless, Britain remained uncomfortable with backing the Jewish claim to nationhood because of its intimate relationship with local Arab monarchies. 1945 not only ended Nazi Germany, however, but left the British empire in tatters and vulnerable to an expansionist United States. The United States supported the founding of an Israeli state and, with the international machine of the United Nations, brought the matter to a vote. Thus, the global community participated in founding a state, which had for decades operated in the shadows as a non-state. What were the consequences of the founding of Israel, particularly for Arab nations, Palestine, and the concept of pan-Arabism? Why did the failure of the Arab coalition to confront Israel inform Third World revolutionary politics?

- C & B. Chapter 13.

Oct 9, Lecture 8, Political Effects of Migration to Lebanon; Discussion
One of the most consequential effects of the formation of Israel was the massive emigration of Palestinian peoples from their ancestral homeland – according to Benny Morris, the renowned Israeli scholar, around 750,000 Palestinians became refugees as a result of the 1948 War of Independence/Nakba. This resulted in great tumult in countries like Jordan and Lebanon. In fact, the problem of refugees continues to plague these two countries, which are now majority non-native. What are the effects of migration on the social fabric of the Middle East? How do states deal with the influx of people who are often not allowed to vote, cannot own property, and do not enroll their children in local schools? What types of non-state networks do these disenfranchised communities produce and in what ways do these networks threaten the hegemony of the state?

- Benny Morris lecture, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=512_n6sd-Fo
- Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), Chapter 1 and/ or Conclusion.

Part II. Insurgents and Activists

Oct 11, Lecture 9, Iran and Non-state Opposition; Discussion (BLUE BOOK EXAM next week)
As we have established, the Middle East flirted with representational democracy but eventually gave way to totalitarian regimes. Leaders often ruled for extended periods of time, took advantage of laws that gave exclusive power to rulers in states of emergency, and enacted widespread reform quickly and enforced them in ways that were unpalatable to local populations. The Pahlavi monarchy in Iran represented one such example of this experience. Despite its profound experiment with democracy in the early twentieth century, and the establishment of a long-lasting parliamentary government, the Pahlavi monarchy began to rule Iran with an iron fist. During Reza Shah’s rule, he executed tribal leaders, forced women out of their hijabs, and mandated state-run educated. After his death, his son relaxed some of the more controversial policies but inherited his harsh reputation. The two sectors of society that offered Mohammad Reza Shah the most trouble were the clerical establishment and the bazaar class. Merchants and business interests believed that the Pahlavi monarchy did not favor the local economy and resented his intimate relationship with the west. Why did the state-business conflict ultimately cause a rift deep enough to make merchants the natural allies of the clerical elite?


**Oct 16.** Blue Book Exam

**Oct 18.** Lecture 10, The Muslim Brotherhood
Like Iran, Egypt experimented with liberal democracy in the early twentieth century only to discover, like Iran, that this system of governance has many faults. Reform and progress, the promise of late-Ottoman intellectuals, did not come soon enough and the relationship of political parties with Great Britain caused many people concern. After the failure of Egypt to confront Israel, there was an even greater sense of despair. Many felt that the Egyptian state could not perform its duties and a new system should emerge to take its place. Instead, the Egyptian military stepped into the fore and transformed Egyptian government but did not alter its mission of “modernization” and “progress.” The Muslim Brotherhood, which had emerged in the late-1920s during the interwar years, gained tremendous popularity before the Free Officers and Gamal Abdel Nasser took over the government. Why did the Muslim Brother find so much support? What function did they serve that the government did not? How did Nasser approach the threat of a slowly developing shadow state that had established social networks and actively influenced culture?

- C & B. Chapter 15.

**Oct 23.** Lecture 11, Communism; Discussion
Communism and socialism were hugely popular among Arabs and Persians in the Middle East. In fact, most grassroots movements were pan-Arab and left-wing. Nevertheless, communism was highly unpopular among state actors, despite the fact that most adopted socialist policies like land reform, universal basic education, and some access to health care. Furthermore, it is important to note that communism in the Middle East was deeply nationalistic and many left-wingers were sympathetic to Nazis and fascists. In fact, early communists were largely Christian Arabs who believed a deep commitment to their ethnic community would override religious divisions. What were the defining characteristics of Middle Eastern communism? What threat did they pose state actors and to what extent
could their values be assimilated into state policy (as compared to other types of non-state parties like the Muslim Brotherhood or tribal organizations)?


Oct 25. Lecture 12, Denominations of Islam

Thus far, we have discussed Sunnis and Shi’is. It is important to note both why they differ theological, how they developed historically, and where they live in the region. We will also focus on the different political trajectories of the two faiths. While Sunnis have democratized their faith, with most activists emerging from outside the clerical ranks, Shi’is have maintained traditional hierarchies and rarely have non-clerical activists. These differences are evident in Iran and Egypt, two national communities that have deep histories of religiosity (with Iran as the center of the Shi’i world and Egypt as the center of Sunni learning with al-Azhar) and produced Islamic thinkers from extremely different educational backgrounds. Nevertheless, both Sunnis and Shi’is came to similar political conclusions about “modernization”, Europeanization, gender roles, and the place of Israel. Why is this?


Oct 30. Lecture 13, Terrorism

The idea that terrorism could serve a useful function began to percolate in the Islamic world as a result of the Algerian War, which began in 1954. The National Liberation Front blended Islam with social justice to produce a potent political ideology that attracted adherents willing to risk their lives and kill many to achieve decolonization. While Gamal Abdel Nasser offered a secular state-based model, the FLN demonstrated that a band of militants could destabilize a European government and oust one million French colonizers from their land. With this model, many Muslims believed that violence, rather than a demand for equal participation in governance, would be the only means to achieve their ultimate aims. Franz Fanon, a French-educated Algerian, wrote about the utility of terrorism as well as its price. What are his final thoughts on the direction of the Algerian War?

- Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press), Preface (by Jean-Paul Sartre) and 181-233.

Nov 1. Lecture 14, Islamism as a Colonial Legacy

To continue last week’s discussion, we delve into terrorism as it concerns the Middle East. The Muslim Brotherhood and Seyyed Qutb condoned violence in order to bring about political change; they were not the first. After all, Muslims in the Middle East were building on the liberation of Algeria from French colonial rule in the 1950s. Several Muslim intellectuals began to meld the ideas of earlier Islamic modernists, like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Mohammad Abduh, with strident anti-imperialism. What do these thinkers have in common, despite being separated by national and historical bounds? How do they differ in their approach to the woman question? What ultimately undermines the feminist movement, especially to Islamist radicals?
With the spectacular failure of Nasser in 1967, as well as Egypt’s disinterest in the Palestinian question after the 1973 war, it became evident in Palestinians that they would have to organize themselves. No longer could they depend on secular states to champion their cause. As a result, non-state militias formed in regions populated by Palestinian refugees. These states within states cused tremendous problems for the regional nations, especially Jordan and Lebanon. How did the Palestinian Liberation Organization destabilize the myth of Arab unity?

Nov 8. Lecture 15, Feminist Activism
There was, from the beginning of the late-nineteenth century reform period, a rift among Middle Easterners regarding the proper role of the genders. Europeanization, many feared, would destabilize the family and force women to remove their hijabs. Traditional ways of life were publicly demeaned and leaders mocked the Islamic preoccupation with female subordination. Nevertheless, Middle Eastern leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser or Mohammad Reza Shah hardly believed in equality between the sexes. Feminist organization fought to establish connections with the state in order to influence policies like divorce laws, custody laws, and domestic abuse. In fact, the gains women’s organizations made were often piecemeal. Interestingly, in Iran, women became more literature, more college-educated (than even their male counterparts), and gained a more prominent position in the public sphere after the Islamic revolution, which had rolled back many of the legal gains they had made during the Pahlavi period. What were some of the conflicts between women’s rights organizations (few of which identified as “feminists”), state actors, and traditional Islamic society?
- Firing Line https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEzi0SMCu5A

How do we understand the variability of women’s rights in the Middle East, particularly when an outwardly Islamic government with some of the most draconian laws (Iran) has offered its women a comparatively higher status and standard of living than more secular governments, like that of Egypt? What role do women’s rights organizations play in society and when/why do they succeed/fail? Why do Muslims trust the clerical establishment to guide the nation toward higher female literacy rates as well as greater educational and educational opportunities than previous secular regimes? What are the limits to these kinds of social development for theological governments?
The PLO, despite its best efforts, did not ultimately capture the long-term support of the Palestinian people, largely because it transformed into a state actor. No longer a guerrilla force that advocated for the rights of Palestinians, many began to perceive the PLO as a self-interested organization that negotiated with the enemy, Israel. On the other hand, Israelis believed that Labor leaders were willing to concede too much to placate non-state entities, thus emboldening Palestinians. The First and Second Intifadas, although fundamentally different, proved to Palestinians that they did not need to depend on the PLO and could mobilize to great effect independently. How did the failure of the 1991 Oslo Peace Accords affect Palestinian activism and Israeli politics?

- C&B, 473-73 and Ch. 23.

Nov 20. Lecture 17, The Ramifications of 9/11
As a result of 9/11, the United States became a much more active participant in the war on terror, one that had troubled Europe since the 1980s. Due to Israel’s experience in the Second Intifada, Ariel Sharon and George W. Bush developed a connection akin to Bill Clinton’s with Yitzhak Rabin. Osama bin Laden transformed American politics and the United States became concerned with destroying non-state cells within national communities, like Al-Qaeda. The Bush doctrine also compelled the administration to invade Iraq, which, they insisted, had weapons of mass destruction. A potential state terrorist, Bush argued, was far more dangerous and required greater military engagement. What were the consequences of the War on Terror? How did the Iraq War shape the politics of the first decade of the century? In what ways did the American invasion heighten sectarianism in Iraq? Consider carefully the development of transnational terrorist organizations and the differences between Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.


- C&B, 561-73.

Part III. Non-Governmental Organizations

Nov 27. Lecture 18, The Politics of NGOs; Discussion of 11/15 readings
We have thus far discussed the role of the League of Nations is establishing mandates and the United Nations in helping Israel establish itself as an internationally accepted nation-state. What is the role of international NGOs, often affiliated with or funded by the United Nations, today? How have these organizations become politicized by taking actions usually in the purview of the state? What role do they play in accounting for casualties in violent conflicts or reporting on violations of human rights? Which countries do they not have access to and how does that influence the veracity of the information we have at our disposal? What are some ways that we may make NGOs more accountable?


Nov 29. Lecture 19, NGOs and Zionists
NGOs often intervene controversially in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Many Zionists claim that the United Nations and organizations like Amnesty International are politicized and do not treat Israel fairly. This has caused tension between NGOs and the Israeli government. Palestinians, on the other hand, believe that NGOs and the UN do not place enough pressure on the west to act on their plight. What are some of the major criticisms of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations? How do these problems manifest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?


Dec 4. Lecture 20, Private Contractors and the International Community
In terms of practical efforts to support national communities during times of crisis, the United Nations has struggled to prove its worth. Many criticize the United Nations for its ineffectual policies in Rwanda and Bosnia. Others point to the UN’s poor methods of selecting countries to represent issues like human rights or women’s rights on councils. The UN’s General Assembly is often deeply divided and many accuse the international organization as being partisan and a vehicle for protecting American interests. During the Iraq War, one that was deeply unpopular around the world, the UN attempted to support the Iraqi people and help the new nation reconstitute itself. What are some of the problems with the literature that the UN disseminated regarding their role in the war with Iraq? Aside from NGOs and international bodies, private military firms also participated in the Iraq War. For some time, Americans were not aware that mercenary armies were sent to Iraq and learned more about the “contractors”, like Blackwater, when Iraqi insurgents ambushed four American mercenaries in Fallujah. How did these paramilitary organizations, only nominally associated with the federal government, complicate the war effort?


Dec 6. Lecture 21, The Arab Spring and New Technologies
The Arab Spring represented a historical rupture as the amorphous masses challenged the ruling elites in the region. Many protests were organized online and, though the media played up the connection between protests and social media, Facebook mogul Mark Zuckerberg insisted that Arabs would have been able to articulate their resistance without the help of the Internet. Nevertheless, the Arab Spring demonstrated the ability of people to exert their voice, without the support of foreign agents or the state. There were many questions posed by the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring – namely, why did so many experts fail to predict this cataclysmic event? Why do scholars underestimate non-state actors and disorganized protests? How do groups who operate outside the confines of political acceptability influence their societies?

Dec 11. Lecture 22, NGOs in Libya; Discussion of readings
In Libya, predictably, the disorganized opposition only succeeded as a result of western support. A story of unique failure, Libya has remained nearly stateless, with a power vacuum no one can fill. Why did the United States participate in this civil conflict and why did the Hilary Clinton faction in the White House believe the intervention would be a success? In Muammar Ghaddafí’s absence, Libya has served as a passageway from Africa to Europe, propelling an immigration crisis and dangerous human smuggling. NGOs have stepped in to help refugees and European states have developed a more adversarial relationship with these NGOs, like Russia and Israel. Nevertheless, there are many questions that continue to trouble the United Nations and the west regarding Libya. Whose responsibility is it to address the obvious problem of a stateless nation not far from Europe? How can NGOs contribute to the region without stirring controversy in Europe?

- https://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/3/the_libya_gamble_inside_hillary_clinton
- Suggested:

Dec 13. Lecture 23, NGOs in Syria; Discussion of readings
One of the most pressing problems with human rights organizations is their inability to enter areas that suffer from the greatest human rights catastrophes. As a result, we often do not have accurate numbers. Most famously, for over a decade, many NGOs and human rights activists touted the “fact” that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children died by starvation as a result of American-led sanctions against Saddam Hussein in the 1990s. Jeremy Scahill, the great investigative reporter with extensive experience in the region, called it an “American genocide.” After the 2003 invasion of Iraq and extensive reporting by journalists and NGOs, now allowed in the country to account for the death toll, it became apparent that Saddam Hussein had fabricated the crisis in order to pressure the United Nations to drop the sanctions. These hoaxes cause many to question the numbers reported by prejudiced agencies that have ulterior motives. Nowhere is the interconnectedness of non-state actors, NGOs, and foreign states more apparent than in Syria. What issues do NGOs face in Syria? How can we gain accurate data? Which entities are unbiased enough to offer us neutral information?