Politics 122
First- and Second-Year Colloquium
Palestine-Israel Conflict

Course Syllabus

Why, if majorities of Palestinians and Israelis individually want peace, endorse a two-state solution and favor negotiations, are peace, the two-state solution and negotiations so problematic? Is there any way out of the current impasse?

This course proceeds from an evaluation of the current situation to seek historical and other kinds of answers to this question at the individual, national, and international levels.

Requirements

The class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-10:45 a.m., in King 335.

Students are expected to have read the assigned materials prior to class date for which they are scheduled. Classes will proceed primarily through discussion of the readings.

Books


Assignments and grades

There are five components to the grade for Politics 122: three papers, one journal, and discussion participation. Participation requires attendance, so this will be a component of the discussion grade. The proportions of the final grade constituted by these components will be approximately:

Papers: 20% each
Journal: 20%
Discussion and attendance: 20%

Application of honor code

The Oberlin College Honor Code applies to all work in this class. Questions about how this applies should be raised with the instructor.
Electronic and Reserve Readings

Are embedded in the syllabus and available either on Blackboard or by direct link.

Mideastweb.org brief history part I http://www.mideastweb.org/briefhistory.htm
Mideastweb.org brief history part II http://www.mideastweb.org/briefhistory-oslo.htm

This syllabus may be updated during the semester, readings may be added and/or subtracted.

Current events, useful and incendiary web sites

There are many web sites about current events and commentary on the conflict that might interest you. In addition to standard news sources (New York Times, Washington Post, BBC, Reuters, CNN, ABC, here are a few slightly more exotic ones:

World News (picks up from other sources worldwide)

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Palestine National Authority Ministry of Planning (the Ministry of Information site is not updated)
Hamas English Website

Ha’aretz one of Israel’s largest newspapers, generally considered more sympathetic to the labor (left) side of Israeli politics than the right.
Jerusalem Post, a generally right-wing Israeli newspaper.
Ynet news, from Yedioth Group, publisher of “Yedioth Ahronoth,” Israel’s largest newspaper

Palestine News Agency, official site
Palestine News Network independent journalists and radio station
Dar Al Hayat Lebanon-based Arab newspaper
Al Manar Lebanese website of Hizb’allah TV station
Al Jazeera Arab TV English feed
Al Ahram Weekly Web site of Cairo newspaper

Robert Fisk in the Guardian Long-time Middle East correspondent, war weary, skeptical of political poseurs and militarists, sympathetic to civilians caught in war (on all sides).

Bitterlemons “Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints on prominent issues of concern . . .”
Helen Cobban’s blog, US Middle East journalist, sympathetic to the Palestinians.
Mideastweb.org peace-oriented news and analysis with LOTS of links
Peace Now, Israeli peace organization

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (Gaza)
B’Tselem Israeli human rights organization headed by Oberlin alumna (1990) Jessica Montell
Badil Palestinian Refugee Rights organization
Norman Finkelstein, critic of Israel and the “Holocaust Industry,” son of Holocaust survivors
Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, generally leftist, critical of Israel and US policy
Tikkun journal and movement of Rabbi Michael Lerner, liberal social activist
Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics and Economics - peace-oriented, joint Israeli-Palestinian journal
AIPAC, American Israel Public Affairs Committee – best known pro-Israel lobby in Washington
J-Street, new, peace-oriented Jewish counter-lobby to AIPAC

Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, supports US support for Israel
CAMERA Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (Israel defender)
Masada2000.org, pro-Israeli, anti-Palestinian
FrontPage Magazine, David Horowitz, scourge of US academia, pro-Israel
Daniel Pipes, head of the Middle East Forum, avid defender of Israel
Steven Plaut, sociologist, Israel defender
Zionist Organization of America “...works to strengthen US-Israeli relations, through educational
activities, public affairs programs, working every day on Capitol Hill, and by combating anti-Israel bias
in the media, textbooks, and on campuses.”

Palestine Al-Awda Right to Return Coalition
New Jersey Solidarity.org, pro-Palestinian articles, a useful set of pro-Palestinian links
Electronic Intifada, pro-Palestinian site
Institute for Palestine Studies, publishes Journal of Palestine Studies, current materials and links.

American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Anti-Defamation League – “to stop the defamations of the Jewish people”

Global Security.org Palestinian security links

Chaim Simons, A Historical Survey of Proposals to Transfer Arabs from Palestine 1895 - 1947
http://www.geocities.com/capitolhill/senate/7854/transfer.html

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)

United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), with recent UN resolutions
and reports. For history, see in particular the “origins and evolution” summary, with useful maps (way
down in the annexes). This has been reformatted and posted also at Palestine Remembered, especially
see the maps in the annexes.

Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research polling organization
Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, see in particular its “peace index” series.
Class sessions and readings

Week 1: Introduction. Feb. 9, 11.

2/9  Course outline, introductions.

For Thursday, each student will pick a topic and prepare to present a very short description of what’s going on (3-4 minutes each).

Class current events topics: pick one to follow until further notice.

1. Hamas v. Fatah/PLO
2. (Cancelled) upcoming Palestinian election
3. Ongoing Israeli settlement activity
   - Claims about the Gaza war (Goldstone report to UN Human Rights Council)
4. Accusations against Hamas and Hamas’s response
5. Accusations against Israel and Israel’s response
   - U.S. diplomacy in the Israel-Palestine context
6. Obama Administration relations with Netanyahu government
7. Obama Administration relations with Abbas Palestinian authority
   - Conditions in Gaza
   - Reconstruction (housing, public facilities)
   - Infrastructure conditions (water, sewage, electricity)
8. Conditions in West Bank
   - Settlement activity
   - Construction/demolition in Jerusalem
   - Economic conditions
9. U.S. lobby groups
10. AIPAC
11. J-Street
12. Egypt role in Gaza and Hamas-Fatah conflict
13. The security fence (otherwise known as The Wall)
14. Palestinian weapons and other smuggling (by sea, under Gaza border, etc.)
15. Claims of Palestinian connections to outsiders (Iran, Hezbollah, Gulf States, Al Qaeda)
16. Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on prisoners (Gilad Shalit, et al)
17. Natural resource and environmental issues in Israel/Palestine
2/11 **Current events round-up** based on topics assigned Tuesday

**Read:** Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research, *Poll 34*, at least the “Main Findings” paragraph, read on down for interesting details;

*Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research,* “War and Peace Index, December 2009,” click on English (down at the bottom left), then “War and Peace Index 2009” from among the top horizontal list, and then click on December; or on the “New” rolling header on the right. Note that the Arab population to which the poll refers are Arab citizens of Israel (not the occupied territories).

**Israeli-Palestinian Conflict as a “two-level game,”** including the diplomacy between the two sides, on the one hand, and for each, the relationship between leaders and the public.

*Jacob Shamir,* *Public Opinion in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pages 1-26 (Blackboard [Bb]).

Recent piece arguing that a big decision confronts the Palestinians:


And purported Israeli ambivalence:


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**Week 2: Contemporary politics (1). Feb. 16, 18.**

2/16 **Israeli political system:** parliamentary, low threshold for Knesset participation, coalition governments and the political spectrum; bureaucracy of occupation.

*Gregory Mahler,* *Politics and Government in Israel*, ch. 5, “The Prime Minister and the Knesset,” 141-165; ch. 6, “Political Parties and Interest Groups,” 171-186 (Bb);


2/18 **Video presentation:**

One of the following:

“Death in Gaza” – 80 minutes, film crew follows people in Rafah, Gaza, including a young potential recruit for the fighters. What was originally planned to include children from the Israeli side ends when the film’s director was shot and killed in Gaza.

“To See if I’m Smiling” – 60 minutes, film of interviews of women Israeli soldiers and their reactions to serving in the Occupied Territories, primarily West Bank. One woman
in particular is devastated by the memory of her own actions.

“Until when . . .” – 76 minute film of interviews with four families who are residents of Dheisheh Palestinian refugee camp. includes memories of the pre-1948 situation, attitudes of children and their parents including one man who was repeatedly imprisoned during the first intifada. In contrast to “Death in Gaza,” the subjects of the film are living relatively comfortably.


2/23 Trends in the two-level game (?)

Jacob Shamir, *Public Opinion in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pages 27-53 (Bb);


2/25 Current Palestinian politics (is an election is coming soon?)


3/2 Nationalism and Zionism


Be sure to read document extracts 1.3 (*Der Judenstaat*) (even better, read Herzl as recommended below), 1.5 (The Basel Program).
3/4 Arab nationalism


Recommended:


Week 5: Background(1): “Britain, WWI and the inter-war period.” March 9, 11.


3/11 Smith, Chapter 3: “Palestine Between the Wars.” Be sure to read documents 3.2 (Peel Commission Report) and 3.3 (1939 White Paper).

***Start reading Tolan, The Lemon Tree***

Highly Recommended

A complicated tale and description of the “father” of Israel, Chaim Weizman, and his crucial role in negotiating the Balfour Declaration: Jehuda Reinharz,"The Balfour Declaration and its Maker" *Journal of Modern History* Vol. 64, No. 3 (Sept. 1992), 455-499 (Bb).
Week 6: Background to the State (2): League Mandate, WWII, and the war of 1948. 
March 16, 18

3/16 Smith, ch. 4, “WWII and the Creation of the State of Israel.” Be sure to read these crucial documents! 4.1 – the Final Solution; 4.2 – UNSCOP partition proposal; 4.3 – Jamal Al Husseini on the Palestinian reaction to UNSCOP; 4.5 – Israel Declaration of Independence; 4.6 – King Abdullah’s Offer to the Zionists.

3/18 Continue from Tuesday.

Smith chapter 4 and


*** Nationalism paper due March 19 ***


3/23 Sandy Tolan, The Lemon Tree to page 122.

3/24 Sandy Tolan, The Lemon Tree to page 191.

***** Break March 27-April 4 *****

Week 8: Wars and negotiation (1), April 6, 8.

4/6 Sandy Tolan, The Lemon Tree to end.


Recommended:


Week 9: Wars and negotiation (2). April 13, 15.


Be sure to read documents 7.1 – UNSC Res. 242; 7.3 – UNSC Res. 338; 7.4 – Arafat at the UN; 7.5 – Yosef Tekoah’s response to Arafat; 8.2 – Sadat’s speech to the Knesset; 8.4 – Camp David Agreed Framework for Peace, 1978.


Ian Lustick, (Bb) "Israel’s Dangerous Fundamentalists," Foreign Policy No. 68 (Autumn 1987), 118-139.

Week 10: Wars and negotiation (3) Intifada I, Oslo. April 20, 22.

4/20 Smith, ch. 9, “From Pariah to Partner . . . 1984-1993.”

Be sure to read Documents 9.1 – Communiqué No. 1 of the Intifada; 9.2 – Leaflet No. 1 of HAMAS.


Documents 10.1 – Declaration of Principles; 10.2 – Interim Agreement.

Ziad Abu Amr, (Bb) "Hamas, a Historical and Political Background," Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 22, No. 4. (Summer, 1993), pp. 5-19.

Recommended:


*** Historical Responsibility Paper Due April 23***

Week 11: Political economy of occupation. April 27, 29.


Sara Roy, (Bb) "De-Development Revisited: Palestinian Economy and Society since Oslo," Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Spring, 1999) 64-82.


Recommended, more on water:


**Week 12: Camp David, Intifada II and Separation. May 4, 6.**

5/4 Camp David and after. Who was to blame?


Recommended:


5/6 **Current situation**

Readings to be announced.

**Week 13: After the Gaza War? May 11, 13.**

5/11 To be announced

5/13 Final wrap up, course evaluations.

* * * * * MAY 14: Causes of peace and conflict paper due * * * * *
Written Assignments

1. Journal

1. Pick one of the 20 topics listed at the beginning of the syllabus. For at least two weeks, check every day for information on your topic. When you have something, print it or take notes, and bring it to class! If you tire of the topic, or it isn’t making news, switch to another topic (for two weeks minimum).

2. Aside from normal reading notes, write a few lines about each reading: what was striking to you in the reading? Did the reading challenge or inform any convictions with which you came to them or stimulate any new ideas or perspectives for you? If the piece was pushing an argument of some sort, what was the overall argument and did you find it convincing, or do you doubt it? Why?

3. Discussions:

Immediately after class, write down a brief note on your impressions and feelings about the class. Note ideas or perspectives that you thought were particularly worthy or particularly controversial.

What points did you make in class about which you are (a) pleased or (b) that you’d change, upon reflection?

What would you like to have said that you didn’t? Why didn’t you? What role are you playing in discussion?

What did you think about how people interacted in class?

Were there moments when you thought you or someone else was being misunderstood? What caused the misunderstanding?

2. Papers

Three papers are due in the plastic box next to my office door (Rice 213) by 4:30 p.m. on the date indicated. They are to be printed (typed), double-spaced with at least 11 point type, with reasonable (at least 1 inch) margins and within the page limit. Endnotes and/or bibliography can be in addition to the page limit. The first two papers can be rewritten in consultation with me if you are unhappy with the result. These are expository essays. Refer to the style sheet for some format recommendations.

1. Nationalism

Due: March 19; page limit: Five.

Based on the class readings, describe the phenomenon of nationalism using the Jewish and Palestinian cases as examples.
2. Historical responsibility

Due: April 23. Page limit: Seven.

Israelis and Palestinians make claims about the historical responsibilities that should impel others to help them, or at least to recognize their legitimacy, as they seek to establish independent existences in the Middle East. For example, Israelis frequently point to the Holocaust as a reason that Europeans should support Israel. Palestinians point to their lack of voice in the U.N. decisions that partitioned Palestine and led to the 1948 war as a reason that leaders within the U.N. of 1948 (particularly the U.S. and Britain) should help them to obtain, develop, and protect their state.

Discuss the idea of historical responsibility. Do historical events create lasting international obligations of a state, society, or people to another group or state? Use the Israeli and Palestinian cases to argue either in favor of, or against, the principle of such obligation, but be sure to structure your paper around a clearly stated position on this question. Remember that effective arguments take into account the strongest form of the counter-arguments.

3. Causes of peace and conflict


Isolate a small number (say 1-4) of basic causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, argue what short- and longer-term actions could lead toward peace, and evaluate the likelihood of these actions being implemented.
The Expository Essay
Schiff's Curmudgeonly Stylistic advice

1. Expository essays need arguments. Arguments must be introduced at the beginning, argued and substantiated in the middle, concluded at the essay's end.

**Introductions** say more than only the topic to be discussed. They indicate the outcome and the course of the argument to follow. So somewhere in the introduction there MUST be two sentences that say something like:

“This paper will argue that, . . . .”
“To reach this conclusion, the paper first . . . , and then . . . , and finally, . . . .”

**Middles** combine empirical information (facts) with discussion and logic (arguments) to lead the reader toward conclusions. They are constructed in the order outlined in the introduction. It is very effective if the middle is divided into sections that correspond to the points you indicated in your introductory sentence that indicated the course of the argument.

**Conclusions** should not open up new territory. They follow logically from, or summarize, what has gone before. If you find yourself inspired with new ideas in your conclusion, GO BACK and fit the ideas into your text where they belong. These ideas should be familiar when they appear in the conclusion.

**NOTE:** **Rewriting** is the key to good writing (for most of us). Rewriting requires **TIME.** So start early, write a draft and study your draft to find out what it is you really want to say. Then go back, reorganize, smooth and polish to make your argument and evidence hang together convincingly for your reader.

2. Short words and sentences are as valuable as long ones. As Mark Twain said, “eschew surplussage.”

3. Make sentences direct, verbs active, attribute effects to causes. It's not that "International insecurity has been exacerbated by the increasing propensity of formerly weak recipients to threaten to use or actually to employ endogenously developed or exogenously sourced military technologies." Rather, "Formerly weak states often threaten their neighbors by brandishing weapons."

4. Eliminate the double (or multiple) negative. Do not say, for instance, that "the risk of failure was not inconsiderable."

5. Long sentences with many qualifying dependent clauses frequently indicate indecision. Pare sentences down to their essential meanings. Divide separate points into separate sentences.

6. Paragraphs are units of argumentation. If a paragraph can't be summarized in one sentence, it is probably confused. Either it contains too many arguments, or it has no point. Very long paragraphs and one sentence paragraphs are danger signs.

7. Avoid the fallacious quantity. Don't say something happened "a number of times." The word "several" is concise and equivalent. More than several might be “often.” A few times might be . . . “a few times.”
8. **Be brave.** Good writing requires decisiveness. If something "seems" or "appears," consider instead whether it "is."

9. **If you have to say "clearly", you probably haven't been clear.** "Clearly," "obviously," "thus," "moreover," "therefore," and similar words are not always bad. Mostly, however, writers use them to assert a logical connection when one hasn't been made successfully in the text.

10. **Use first person pronouns ("I", "we", "our", etc.) sparingly.** They can weaken your argument. Unless discussing a personal view, it is more powerful impersonally to convince with logic and evidence than to depend on personal credibility (at least for those of us who aren't famous). First person pronouns are appropriate when writing about your own view or approach. "My approach to this question is based on . . ." On the other hand, you can just as well say, "This paper approaches this question based on . . . ."

11. **Singular nouns, even if they represent collectives, are considered singular in American English.** The British use plurals. For example, in American: "The U.S. government has its interests . . ." But in British: "The U.K. government have their interests . . ." (Note: we are in the U.S., speaking American English.)

12. **It's = it is or it has.** There is no other correct use of an apostrophe with its. There is no possessive form — if an its is possessive, it's an its. (I know I'm a curmudgeon, but it's the rule.)

13. **References (footnotes, endnotes) of some sort should be used whenever you are using information or arguments that you've gotten from another source.** Any standard form is acceptable (to me). The rule of thumb is that the reference should enable a reader to find the exact material that you are using.

14. **Rescue “affects” from “impacts upon,” and “effect” from “impact.”** Affect(s) and effect(s) are tough but rewarding.

Examples:

- "The water shortage has grievous effects upon crop fertility." (Effects as a plural noun.)
  Poor alternative: "The water shortage has grievous impacts upon crop fertility."

- "The explosion affected my hearing." (Affected as a verb – past tense).
  Poor alternative: "The explosion impacted my hearing."

More examples, other uses:

- "Shirley’s affect is straight-forward and blunt." (Affect as a noun, meaning the way Shirley interacts with other people.)
  Poor alternative: "Shirley’s impact upon others is straight forward and blunt."

- "Shirley is a very effective debater." (Effective as an adjective.)
  Poor alternative: "Shirley has great impact as a debater."

15. **Other random (curmudgeonly) stylistic advice:**

- Proactive = active, aggressive, vigorous, etc.

- Time frame, timeframe and point in time are mixed metaphors (spacial and temporal). Time frame = period, time, or duration. Point in time = moment, instant, now, then.
Prioritize, perhaps unfortunately, made it into the dictionary. Still, consider whether it might be felicitous to rank, or set priorities.

Forward planning and future planning are both redundant. Planning always refers to the future (just try planning the past!).

Avoid cliches.

Move forward (progress)
The bottom line (conclusion)
At the end of the day (finally)
Having said that (never necessary)
That said (never necessary)
Arguably (never necessary, could perhaps be perhaps)
By and large (mostly)

Speaking of cliches, “all intents and purposes” is the correct formulation (not all intensive purposes).

Evict tenants when you mean tenets.