The late 19th c. adventurer Ferdinand von Richthofen coined the evocative term “Silk Road” to describe the old trans-Asian trade networks which had once connected the Mediterranean to China. Richthofen was but one of many European explorers and entrepreneurs, philologists and ethnographers, army officers, surveyors and civil officials engaged in a multifaceted imperialist venture in Central Asia. Although it was described by Richthofen in exotic terms, most Europeans had come to view this region as “backward” and “stagnant,” ripe for the “civilizing missions” of Westerners. George Nathaniel Curzon framed the region in somewhat different terms: “Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia … To me, I confess, they are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world.” Often sensationalized as the “Great Game,” the principle “players” in this deadly serious 19th c. colonial enterprise were Imperial Russia and Great Britain. This course will explore the “game” in its 19th and 20th century variants: the pursuit of power and territory engaged by imperial powers in the 19th c.; the discourses that have sought to ‘normalize’ imperial interventions; the construction of artificial nation-states and republics in the region in the post-World War I period; the 20th c. variant of the “game” between the Soviet Union and the United States in Afghanistan in the period of the Cold War; and an examination of the legacies of conflicts in Central Asia in the late 20th c. Throughout the semester we will be exploring the relationship between local political and economic structures and belief systems, and the ways imperial powers and modernizing “imperatives” have interacted. Toward the end of the semester we will discuss the emergence of Islam as a powerful political force and some of the social and economic consequences of the instability in the region over the last few decades.

In looking variously at the social, political, economic and cultural conflicts in the region in the 19th and 20th c. this seminar seeks to develop a range of skills fundamental to historical thinking and the project of liberal education more generally: learning to think in context – that is, making relevant comparisons, excluding extraneous information or anachronistic concepts, evaluating long-term continuities; becoming accustomed to gray areas; dealing with complexity; testing generalizations. The seminar also seeks to develop critical thinking skills through a close reading of primary texts and secondary works; the regular exchange of ideas in oral form; the practice of various types of exploratory writing; and the process of defining a research topic and finding appropriate materials to conduct research.

**Course Format, Policies, Requirements, Grading**

The fundamental project of the seminar will be the development of an intellectual community in which we all work together to reach an understanding of an historical problem with important contemporary resonance. It will be the responsibility of each member of the seminar to bring his/her ideas and perspectives to the metaphorical table. Attendance is mandatory and active participation in discussion is expected.

We will have several different types of short writing assignments:
- For most sessions (indicated on the syllabus) I will ask you to submit 2-3 questions focused on the reading assigned for that day. These will be due in my office by 11am before the class meets at 1:30 (you may e-mail them or put them under my office door). I will return the questions at the start of the seminar so you may draw on them for discussion. These questions should be of an interpretative nature, rather than ask simple questions of fact. They should be questions that you really do intend to pose in class. What is interesting, or confusing, or problematic in the author’s presentation of information and assertion; what is his/her point of view? What does s/he want you to believe about a particular issue? These questions should help you participate in the discussion and should also focus your reading so as to develop close and critical reading skills.
- At the end of many of our classes, I will ask that you take a few minutes to write up the key points in our discussion. These, together with the questions, will prove helpful in your more formal written assignments.

-Class participation and questions = 40% of the grade.
- Geography Quiz = 5% of the grade.
- Primary Document Analysis = 5% of the grade.
  - Due Monday, Sept. 25 in class
- Essays #1 and #2 = 15% each.
  - Essay #1 due Friday, Oct. 13 by noon;
  - Essay #2 due Friday, Nov. 10 by noon
- Annotated bibliography and short oral presentation = 20% of the grade.
  - Oral presentations: Dec. 11 and 13
  - Final due date: Dec 13.

Credit for the course will not be given if all written work is not turned in.
Attendance is mandatory. Students must attend every session of the seminar or present a valid excuse to the instructor.

I have ordered three books for purchase at the College Bookstore (they are also on regular reserve).
  - O. Roy, The New Central Asia
  - D. Edwards, Heroes of the Age
  - B. Rubin, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan
All other materials will be available on ERES or as handouts.

The syllabus and various assignments are posted on the course Blackboard site. To get started with Blackboard go to: http://www.oberlin.edu/OCTET/Bb/FAQ_Students.htm

Your written assignments and analytic bibliography are governed by the Honor code. Please read the honor code, found at: http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html
Remember to sign the Honor pledge on your assignments: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.

A final note: Please turn off cell phones, pagers, beeping watches and the like for the entire class period; please get to class on time and once class has begun refrain from taking breaks and leaving the room.

Wed., Sept. 6 Introduction

I. Getting Oriented

Mon., Sept. 11 Where are we? The Natural Setting and the Subjectivities of Geography

Read and prepare questions on:
  - McChesney, Central Asia: Foundations of Change, pp. 15-37 [Eres]
  - Roy, The New Central Asia, pp. 1-2

Spend some time working with the maps and getting comfortable with the geography
http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/maps/maps.html
Go to “ Cultures and Empires” then India and Central Asia then Timur’s empire I and II
Go to “Physical Geography” then Topography of Western Asia

http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/maps/mapquiz/mapquiz.html
Do the interactive quizzes:
  - Regions
  - Cities of the Silk Road
  - Water and Mountains - West
Wed., Sept. 13 Central Asian Political Traditions

Read and prepare questions on:
   Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 2-10
   Manz, “Historical Background” in *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, pp. 4-12.
   McChesney, *Central Asia: Foundations of Change*, pp. 119-141 [Eres]

II. Global changes and the “Great Game”

Mon., Sept. 18
Readings for Sept 18 and 20 call attention to the differences between popular and scholarly sources. What are some of the things that distinguish these different secondary sources?

Read and prepare questions on:
   Hopkirk “Prologue” and “The Beginnings” in *The Great Game, The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, p.1-23 [handout]
   Meyer, “Prologue” *Tournament of shadows: the great game and race for empire In Central Asia*, vii-xxv [Handout]
   Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace*, pp. 26-32 [eres]

Wed., Sept. 20
These readings are quite disparate and cover a long period of time and a huge expanse of territory; as you work through them try to pick out broad ideas, useful generalizations, and connecting themes.

Read and prepare questions on:
   Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East, A History*, pp. 9-12, 69-71 [eres]
   Bayly, *Imperial Meridian* pp. 16-24; 54-60 [handout]
   Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, pp. 45-52

I will pass out Assignment #1 which will be due in class on Monday, Sept. 25.

Mon, Sept. 25
Assessing primary documents

   The 1864 Gorchakov Memorandum [handout]

   Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian question*, pp. 313-322 [Eres]

Primary document analysis due in class

Wed., Sept. 27
Read and prepare questions on:
Mon., Oct. 2  No class: Yom Kippur

Wed., Oct. 4
Read and prepare questions on:
   Edwards, Heroes of the Age pp. 1-77

Mon., Oct. 9
Read and prepare questions on:
   Edwards, Heroes of the Age pp.78-171

Wed., Oct. 11
Read and prepare questions on:
   Edwards, Heroes of the Age pp.172-291

Essay #1 due Friday, Oct. 13 by noon

BREAK WEEK

III. The chaos of World War I and its complicated aftermath: imperial collapse, revolution, state-making, reconstituting empire

Mon., Oct. 23
State-building by decree in the middle east
Read and prepare questions on:
   Gelvin, The Modern Middle East, A History, p. 171-185
   Fromkin, A Peace To End All Peace, pp 415-16, 421-23, 455-62

Wed., Oct. 25
Bolshevism and Anti-Colonialism
Assessing primary documents. Please recall the first primary document assignment and the questions you should think about when closely reading a text.

   Dmytryshyn, The Soviet Union and the Middle East, A Documentary Record of Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey, 1917-1985, pp. 3-15. [eres]

   I will pass out Essay#2 to guide your reading of Hirsch

IV. Modernizing Imperatives

Mon., Oct. 30
Assessing difficult and contradictory arguments: Hirsch vs. Roy


Wed., Nov. 1
**Film: Turksib**

**Essay #2 due Friday, Nov. 10 by noon**

**Mon., Nov. 6**
Define the major interpretive differences between Hirsch and Roy
Roy _The New Central Asia_, Ch 4

**Wed., Nov. 8**
Read and prepare questions on:
Rubin, _The Fragmentation of Afghanistan_, pp. 1-15, 53-121

**Mon., Nov. 13**
Individual consultations on topics for analytic bibliography

**Wed., Nov. 15**
Library session in Science library computer lab with Ms. Grim

[Write up one paragraph statement of research topic/problem to be explored – due no later than noon, Nov. 22]

**V. Missions: Socialism, Liberal Democracy, Jihad**

**Mon., Nov. 20**
Assessing the causes of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. What do the documents assigned for today reveal about Soviet motives? Did the Soviet pursue a ‘grand’ strategy?

Assessing primary documents:
Dobrynin, _In Confidence_, pp. 434-454

-- Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan, 17-19 March 1979

[http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=library.print_this&id=878&stoplayout=true](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=library.print_this&id=878&stoplayout=true)


**Wed. Nov 22** -- Thanksgiving is the next day/ let’s celebrate a tad early

Please remember that a one paragraph write up of your research topic/problem to be explored is due no later than noon, Nov. 22.

**Mon., Nov 27** [You should be working on the analytic bibliography this week]
Assessing primary documents. Again, please recall the first primary document assignment and the questions you should think about when closely reading a text. What were the motivations for the US response? In what ways do Vance and Brzezinski differ in their arguments and assertions?

Brzezinski, _Power and Principle_, pp. 426-437

Video: CNN’s Cold War
Wed. Nov. 29

The Ugly Aftermath: Civil War and the Taliban
Read and prepare questions on:

Mon. Dec 4 [We will take some class time for you to talk with each other about your research topics and problems/successes in finding materials]

Impact of Sovietization on Central Asia
Read and prepare questions on:

Wed., Dec. 6

Islam and Oil and the new states of Central Asia
Readings tba

Mon., Dec 11
Research presentations

Wed., Dec. 13 – last class
Research presentations

**Annotated bibliography assignment due Dec. 13**