

Reading the Map of the Middle East

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Syllabus 1.0

BOUNDARY, n. In political geography, an imaginary line between two nations, separating the imaginary rights of one from the imaginary rights of the other (Ambrose Bierce, 1911).

This is an experimental course, exploring the Middle East through the study and reading of maps. It combines history, geography, geopolitics, and cartography, all in an effort to answer this question: Why does the map appear as it does? For while there may appear to be something inevitable about the appearance of the iconic map of the Middle East — something familiar and comfortable — it is in fact (like any map) an artifice emerging from specific circumstances. Many of those circumstances date back to the First World War: in particular, a map drawn up by a British and a French diplomat, named Sykes and Picot, in 1916. The map of the Middle East as we know it today is a direct descendent of that map.

But soon, 100 years will have passed since it was drawn, and so the second question we will seek to answer is this: What changes in politics might lead to changes in the map? This is not an idle pursuit. The political changes that resulted from the fall of the Soviet Empire produced dramatic changes in the maps of Europe and Asia. Might the events we are witnessing now in the Middle East produce similarly dramatic changes?

In addition to reading texts, we will also read maps. We have in our minds the image of the iconic map of the Middle East, with its clearly demarcated borders, the names of states neatly tucked within them, capital cities marked by a five-point star. We will learn together how this map came into being. But we will also read different kinds of maps, purporting to depict different realities: linguistic maps, ethnic maps, maps that show division by religion and sect, electoral maps, even maps that show the operation of oil companies, foreign military forces, and the Internet. These maps also strive to represent realities — sometimes ones so powerful that they overpower the political map. These are often the mental maps that the people of the Middle East carry in their minds. Their borders are not marked, but people know where they run, and they know the risks of crossing them.

In addition, you will be expected to look actively for unusual maps, which might be integrated into a database of maps which I administer on behalf of Middle East Strategy at Harvard. This is a kind of online atlas, which I began several years ago, and which now contains some 300 maps. This will be an important resource for the class, and additionally the class will help to expand and annotate the collection. Access the database at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mideaststrategy/sets>.

Grading:

- 15 percent of the grade is determined by class and online participation. In addition to active participation in class, students are expected to respond to readings via Blackboard, and contribute annotations to maps in the database.
- 20 percent of the grade is determined by a short mid-term, comparing three maps that purport to represent approximately the same thing. The emphasis should be on differences and similarities, with an eye to the ways mapmakers and their maps compress realities in different ways.

This short paper, no more than 1500 words in length, will be due on Monday, March 11.

- 65 percent of the grade is determined by a final paper, the topic of which you will choose in consultation with me, and which will be due on the date nominally scheduled for the final exam.

Syllabus and Logistics:

This is a course-in-evolution, so the syllabus will almost certainly be revised as we progress. I have provided URLs for the articles, but you should be able to access these items via electronic reserves or on our Blackboard site. The URL is for future reference, should you want to revisit the readings after the course.

I will hold an office hour immediately before class, or you may make an appointment if you have something else in that slot.

1. Introduction

2. The Land Before Borders

We begin by going back in history, to a time before Europe had the power to draw borders — to a time of great Muslim empires. What were their mental maps of the world, and of their own domain? At this time, Europe invented the idea of the territorial state. Did this have a parallel in Muslim lands?

Ralph W. Brauer, “Boundaries and Frontiers in Medieval Muslim Geography,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, Vol. 85, No. 6 (1995), pp. 1-73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1006658>

Michael Bonner, “The Naming of the Frontier: Awāṣim, Thughūr, and

the Arab Geographers,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (1994), pp. 17-24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/619490>

“al-Thughūr.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2013. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-thughur-COM_1214

Rifaat A. Abou-el-Haj, “The Formal Closure of the Ottoman Frontier in Europe: 1699-1703,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1969), pp. 467-475. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/596616>

“Iranian Boundaries i. With the Ottoman Empire,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/boundaries-i>

3. Names on a Map

We look at the map of the Middle East, and we see the names of states: Palestine, Iran, Syria, Turkey, etc. What are the origins of these names? What did they signify in past, and how effectively do they serve the present?

Bernard Lewis, “The Map of the Middle East: A Guide for the Perplexed,” *The American Scholar*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Winter 1989), pp. 19-38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41211641>

Bernard Lewis, “Palestine: On the History and Geography of a Name,” *International History Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan., 1980), pp. 1-12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40105058>

Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, “The Name of Syria in Ancient and Modern Usage,” in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood*, ed. Adel Beshara (New York : Routledge, 2011), pp. 17-29. https://catalyst.library.jhu.edu/catalog/bib_4242444 (online access)

Tetz Rooke, “Tracing the Boundaries [of Syria]: From Colonial Dream

to National Propaganda,” in *State Frontiers: Borders and Boundaries in the Middle East*, ed. Inga Brandell (London: Tauris, 2006), pp. 123-39.

Nabil Al-Tikriti, “Was there an Iraq before there was an Iraq?,” *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (2009), pp. 133-42. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/ijcis.3.2.133/1>

Ehsan Yarshater, “Communication [on Persia vs. Iran],” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1989), pp. 62-65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4310640>

4. Gentlemen with Rulers

During and after the First World War, European powers divided the region into states. On what basis did they draw lines? What were their considerations? How much does the map they drew conform to identities? And how much did it reflect their own interests?

Sykes-Picot Agreement, text, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/232358BACBEB7B55852571100078477C>

David Fromkin, “How the Modern Middle East Map Came to Be Drawn,” *Smithsonian*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (May 1991), pp. 132-ff. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9105273229&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Gideon Biger, “Takḥtīṭ al-Ḥudūd,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2013. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/takhttit-al-hudud-SIM_7335

Ayse Tekdal Fildis, “The Troubles in Syria: Spawned by French Divide and Rule,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2011), pp. 129-39. <http://www.syria-wide.com/7.pdf>

Gideon Biger, “Where Was Palestine? Pre-World War I Perception,” *Area*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1981), pp. 153-160. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20001705>

5. Why the Middle East?

When someone says Middle East, we immediately conjure up a region in our minds. But a century ago, if you had used it even in educated circles, you would have drawn a blank. We will consider how the term Middle East came into usage — what preceded it through the nineteenth century (such as Near East), why the term gained currency in the twentieth, and what could replace it in this century.

Roderic H. Davison, “Where Is the Middle East?,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (July 1960), pp. 665-675. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20029452>

James Renton, “Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient: Britain and the Invention of the Middle East, 1917-1918,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Sep. 2007), pp. 645-67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X07006292>

Karen Culcasi. “Constructing and Naturalizing the Middle East,” *Geographical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 4 (2010), pp. 583-97.

Huseyin Yilmaz, “The Eastern Question and the Ottoman Empire: The Genesis of the Near and Middle East in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*, eds. Michael E. Bonine et al. (Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 11-35.

Roger Adelson, “British and U.S. Use and Misuse of the Term ‘Middle East’,” in *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*, eds. Michael E. Bonine et al. (Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 36-55.

6. Territorial State, Border Disputes

As new states emerged under Europe’s tutelage, some tried to build a sense of territorial nationhood, and they tested one another’s borders.

Did the idea of the territorial nation-state take hold?

Abbas Kelidar, "States without Foundations: The Political Evolution of State and Society in the Arab East," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 28 (1993), pp. 315-39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260713>

Amatzia Baram, "Territorial nationalism in the Middle East," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (1990), pp. 425-448. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283392>

George Joffé, "Territory, state and nation in the Middle East and North Africa," in *Middle East and North Africa: World Boundaries*, eds. Clive H. Schofield and Richard N. Schofield (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1-20.

George Joffé, "Concepts of sovereignty in the Gulf region," in *Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States*, ed. Richard Schofield (London : UCL Press, 1994), pp. 78-93.

7. Fantasy Maps

Many forces, especially Arab nationalism and pan-Islam, have resented the partition of the region into states, and have actively tried to erase borders through unification schemes, some of them voluntary, some of them forced (and sometimes in reaction to a supposed Israeli plan to dominate the region).

Efraim Karsh, "Why the Middle East Is So Volatile," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Dec. 2000), pp. 13-22. <http://www.meforum.org/51/why-the-middle-east-is-so-volatile>

Martin Kramer, "Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity," *Daedalus*, Vol. 122, No. 3 (1993), pp. 171-206. http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/arabnationalism_0.pdf

Karen Culcasi, "Cartographies of supranationalism: Creating and silencing territories in the 'Arab Homeland'," *Political Geography*, 30

(2011), pp. 417-28. http://www.geo.wvu.edu/~kculcasi/in%20print_cartographies%20of%20supranationalism.pdf

Joseph J. Hobbs, "The Geographical Dimensions of Al-Qa'ida Rhetoric," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (Jul., 2005), pp. 301-27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30034241>

Daniel Pipes, "Imperial Israel: The Nile-to-Euphrates Calumny," *Middle East Quarterly* (March 1994). <http://www.danielpipes.org/247/imperial-israel-the-nile-to-euphrates-calumny>

Mid-Term Break

8. Case Study: Iraq

What has held Iraq together for so long, why did it invade its neighbors, and why might it still come undone?

Peter Sluglett, "The Resilience of a Frontier: Ottoman and Iraqi Claims to Kuwait, 1871-1990," *International History Review*, Vol. 24, no. 4 (Dec. 2002), pp. 783-816. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40111134>

Richard N. Schofield, "The Historical Problem of Iraqi Access to the Persian Gulf," in *Middle East and North Africa: World Boundaries*, eds. Clive H. Schofield and Richard N. Schofield (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 158-72.

Edward P. Joseph and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *The Case for Soft Partition in Iraq* (Washington: Brookings Institution, June 2007). http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/analysis/june2007iraq_partition.pdf

Alexander B. Downes, "More Borders, Less Conflict? Partition as a Solution to Ethnic Civil Wars," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2006), pp. 49-61. <http://home.gwu.edu/~downes/26.1downes.pdf>

F. S. Naiden, "Lines in the Sand," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1

(Winter, 2007), pp. 52-63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40262176>

Reider Visser, “Other People’s Maps,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Winter, 2007), pp. 64-68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40262177>

Larry Hanauer, Laurel E. Miller, *Resolving Kirkuk* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012). http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2012/RAND_MG1198.pdf

9. Case Study: Israel and Palestine

Palestine appeared on the map, then disappeared; Israel then appeared, (largely) without borders, and so it remains. What are the dynamics that explain the gap between the two-state solution and its implementation?

Gideon Biger, “The Boundaries of Israel—Palestine Past, Present, and Future: A Critical Geographical View,” *Israel Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), pp. 68-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30245820>

Nadav G. Shelef, “From ‘Both Banks of the Jordan’ to the ‘Whole Land of Israel:’ Ideological Change in Revisionist Zionism,” *Israel Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 2004), pp. 125-148. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/is/summary/v009/9.1shelef.html>

Christine Leuenberger and Izhak Schnell, “The politics of maps: Constructing national territories in Israel,” *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 40, No. 6 (Dec. 2010), pp. 803-42. <http://sss.sagepub.com/content/40/6/803.short>

Yair Wallach, “Trapped in mirror-images: The rhetoric of maps in Israel/Palestine,” *Political Geography*, Vol. 30, No. 7 (Sep. 2011), pp. 358-69. <http://www.sciencedirect.com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/science/article/pii/S0962629811001089>

Marc Lynch, “Right-Sizing Over the Jordan: The Politics of Down-Sizing Borders,” in *Right-Sizing the State*, ed. Brendan O’Leary et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 318-57. <https://>

catalyst.library.jhu.edu/catalog/bib_3649107 (access online).

10. Case Study: Syria

Is Syria truncated? (A mere part of a 'Greater Syria' carved up by imperialism?) Or is its present configuration a small empire, destined to break up?

Robert D. Kaplan, "Syria: Identity Crisis," *The Atlantic* (Feb. 1993). <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/02/syria-identity-crisis/303860/>

Stefan Wild, "East of Lebanon: colonial borders?" in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2004), pp. 145-62.

Shmuel Bar, "Syria—What Next," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2012), pp. 9-14. <http://www.israelcfr.com/documents/6-3/6-3-2-ShmuelBar.pdf>

Franck Salameh, "An Alawite State in Syria?," *The National Interest*, July 10, 2012. <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/alawite-state-syria-7173>

11. Case Study: Kurds

The Kurds are the missing presence on the map of the Middle East. How have Kurds drawn Kurdistan, and how have others (especially the Republic of Turkey) pushed back?

Maria T. O'Shea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan* (Routledge: New York, 2004), pp. 165-88.

Karen Culcasi, "Locating Kurdistan: Contextualizing Kurdistan's Ambiguous Boundaries," in *Borderlines and Borderlands: Political*

Oddities at the Edge of the Nation-State, eds. Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), pp. 107-120.

Bülent Batuman, “The shape of the nation: Visual production of nationalism through maps in Turkey,” *Political Geography*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (May 2010), pp. 220-34. [http://](http://www.sciencedirect.com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/science/article/pii/S0962629810001034)

www.sciencedirect.com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/science/article/pii/S0962629810001034

12. Blank Spaces, Microstates, Quasi-States

Perhaps the next phase in the Middle East is the emergence of micro-states, quasi-states, and ungoverned zones? If so, how do the existing ones now function?

J.E. Peterson, “Qatar and the world: Branding for a micro-state,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (2006), pp. 732-48. [http://](http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Peterson_-_Qatar_and_the_World.pdf)
www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Peterson_-_Qatar_and_the_World.pdf

Matan Chorev, “Iraqi Kurdistan: The Internal Dynamics and Statecraft of a Semistate,” *Al Nakhlah* (2007), pp. 1-11. http://ui04e.moit.tufts.edu/al_nakhlah/archives/Fall2007/Matan_Chorev_AN.pdf

Ehud Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2012). <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyNote09.pdf>

13. Blood Borders and Lines in the Sand

The events of the past few years have led to open speculation, especially among journalists, on how the map might be redrawn, with predictable reactions from within the Middle East. What do these proposals have in common?

Ralph Peters, "Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look," *Armed Forces Journal* (June 2006). <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/06/1833899> accompanying map: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mideaststrategy/3309917142/>

Joseph E. Fallon, "Mapping new wars: A rebuttal to 'Blood borders'," *Armed Forces Journal* (Jan. 2007). <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2007/01/2146244>

Christopher Dickey, "Bordering on Insanity," *Newsweek*, Oct. 4, 2006. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2006/10/04/bordering-on-insanity.html>

Jeffrey Goldberg, "After Iraq," *The Atlantic* (Jan.-Feb. 2008). http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/01/after-iraq/306577/?single_page=true

Cullen Murphy, "Lines in the Sand," *Vanity Fair* (Jan. 2008). <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mideaststrategy/3309098023/>