

War and Peace in the Persian Gulf

Instructor: Dariush Zahedi

Course description:

This course will explore the complex dynamics of war and peace in the Persian Gulf region, focusing on the historical, political, economic, and strategic factors that have shaped conflict and cooperation among states in this critical area. Covering the period from the mid 20th century to the present, the course examines key events such as the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf Wars, the U.S. military presence, regional rivalries (notably between Iran and Saudi Arabia), and the role of international actors and institutions.

The course will analyze the causes and preconditions of conflict and some efforts at conflict resolution in the Gulf region, examining what has generated the major inter- and intra-state conflicts in the region. Sources of conflict (nationalist, ideological, ethnic/sectarian, economic, territorial, geopolitical, and foreign manipulation and intervention) will be delineated and scrutinized. Our task will be to identify and explain the factors and actors that have made conflict and conflict resolution more (or less) likely. Both endogenous and exogenous factors will be evaluated and assessed. We will also delve into the likelihood for more inter-state conflict and external intervention in the region, concluding with an assessment of the impact of Israeli and American attempts at reigning in Iran's nuclear program.

Through interdisciplinary readings and case studies, participants will be introduced to the causes and consequences of militarization, energy geopolitics, sectarian tensions, and the rise of non-state actors. The course also investigates diplomatic efforts, peace building initiatives, and the prospects for long-term regional stability in a rapidly changing global context. By the end of the course, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the geopolitical importance of the Persian Gulf, the interconnected nature of regional conflicts, and the challenges and opportunities for sustainable peace.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze the historical and contemporary causes of conflict in the Persian Gulf region.
- Evaluate the roles of regional and international actors in both exacerbating and mitigating tensions.
- Understand the interconnection between energy geopolitics and security.
- Assess the prospects and challenges for sustainable peace in the region.
- Develop informed policy recommendations for regional stability and conflict resolution.

Instructor bio:

Dariusz Zahedi is the Founding Director of the AMENA Center for Entrepreneurship & Development at UC Berkeley. Since 2001, he has taught a diverse array of courses for the Departments of Political Science, Political Economy, and Peace and Conflict Studies as well as the Law School at UC Berkeley. Zahedi has also taught for the College of Letters and Science's Discovery Courses Program. Teaching in the program is by invitation only, with invitations issued solely to instructors whose teaching record is stellar. He has published three books on the political economy of the Middle East. His articles have appeared in such publications as the New York Times, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, Christian Science Monitor, Los Angeles Times, International Journal of Middle East Studies, Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review, and Middle East Policy, among others. He is the co-editor of four book series for Palgrave Macmillan, including Institution Building in West Asia and North Africa, the Political Economy of Islam, Natural Resources Management in West Asia and North Africa, and Financial Institutions, Reforms, and Policies in West Asia and North Africa. His knowledge of political economy and business milieu of the Middle East and North Africa, however, is not purely academic. He has worked for a Middle Eastern investment bank and Iran's largest private mining corporation. In his capacity as an analyst for the investment bank, he traveled widely throughout the region and became intimately familiar with various sectors of the region's economies. Zahedi has also worked as an academic in Turkey.