The Politics and International Relations of the Middle East

Course organiser:
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Office hours (no appointment necessary): Wednesday 11.05am-12.05pm, in term time only.

The course is based around a weekly 2-hour seminar, for fourteen weeks. Students on the course submit one shorter essay on Section A of the course at the start of Lent term (in January) and one longer essay on Section B of the course at the end of Lent term (in March). Full details of the requirements are listed with each section of the course.

Students taking this course will come from a variety of intellectual and national backgrounds. Those who have studied the history and politics of the Middle East before may find that preparation for and participation in the seminars is sufficient work through which to take their understanding of the region on to a higher level. Those who have not studied the modern politics of the Middle East are invited to attend some of the following lectures, depending on interests and gaps in prior knowledge. They are in the ARB unless otherwise stated.

1) The politics of the Middle East, an 8-lecture series from the standpoint of comparative politics. Michaelmas term: Wednesdays, 10am, room SG1. Lecturer: Dr Glen Rangwala.

2) The politics of Islamism, an 8-lecture series on key ideas and thinkers within political Islam. 8 lectures in Michaelmas term: Tuesdays, 4pm, room S1. Lecturer: Dr Faiz Sheikh.

3) Conflict and the international relations of the Middle East, an 8-lecture series on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the politics of the Gulf region, North Africa, and international powers. Lent term: Wednesdays, 10am, room SG1. Lecturer: Dr Glen Rangwala.

4) The Kurds in Syria and Iraq, a 3-lecture series in Michaelmas term: Tuesdays 11am, 12th November onwards. Sidgwick Lecture Block, room 8.

5) The politics of Saudi Arabia and Iran, a 6-lecture series in Michaelmas term, Fridays, 11am, starting 25th October. Usually in SG1, but the first and third lectures are in the Little Hall Sidgwick Site. Lecturer: Dr Glen Rangwala.

Full details of series 1-3, including lecture topics and reading lists, are at:
https://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/Undergrad/Current/POL12

Full details of series 4 and 5 are at, respectively:
https://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/Undergrad/Current/POL16
https://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/Undergrad/Current/POL4A
Although there is much more here than you can reasonably expect to attend – and more reading that you can reasonably hope to complete – it would be useful to look through these lists and to choose specific topics and series that will best aid the development of your knowledge.

**Section A**

This section is based around six classic political texts written from (or about) the Middle East. Each is paired with a more modern counterpart. The seminar will discuss the ideas and arguments in the classic text and their influence, why those ideas proved significant, and how to evaluate their legacy.

The aim with this section of the paper is not to convey an all-embracing intellectual history of the region, but instead, first, to encourage you to take seriously how residents of the Middle East have thought in and about their own pasts; and secondly to appreciate the continued significance of those intellectual pasts for debates today about what can bring about a better future.

The **assessment** of this section is by an essay of up to 2,000 words (including titles and footnotes, not including the bibliography). The essay should look at one of the six classic texts, and should explain two or more of the following about it: the key ideas and arguments in that text; its historical context; the significance of the text, intellectually and/or politically; the legacy of the text in contemporary politics; and an evaluation of the text’s key arguments or mode of reasoning.

There will be an opportunity for discussion of the requirements for this essay at the end of the sixth seminar. The **deadline** for the essay is 12 noon on 15th January. The mark for the essay will constitute 30% of the entire mark for the course, and you will receive written feedback on its content during Lent term.

The texts are as follows. Dates, somewhat anachronistically in places, are from the Gregorian calendar. The length of the recommended sections of the classic text and the paired text have, together, been kept relatively short – around 100 pages – so everyone should have chance to read them carefully in full. Further depth can be gained by reading beyond the recommended section of the classic text, and by looking at the suggestion material on historical context.


**Historical context**: Part I of Newman’s *An Imam in Paris*, mentioned above.

Seminar A3: Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (Der Judenstaat), 1896

Recommended sections: chapters 2 and 5. The official translation of this pamphlet was by Sylvie d’Avigdor in 1896, and has been widely reprinted. An on-line version is at: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25282/25282-h/25282-h.htm#The_Jewish_State

It is 25,000 words long, so can be read in full.


Recommended sections: Chapters 9 and 16, pp.164-183, 350-412. Antonius’s history, written for an English-speaking audience, perhaps represents best the orthodox account of the development of Arab nationalism, in the context of revolution, war and purported betrayal. There are multiple copies in Cambridge libraries, and a scanned copy via: https://tinyurl.com/ydcrbg2e


An alternative, which contrasts well with Antonius’s focuses and omissions, is Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), especially chapter 3.


Recommended: chapters 2 and 3. The text is taken from Khomeini lectures in Najaf, Iraq, in 1970, which were collected and translated under Khomeini’s overall guidance. The official translator was Hamid Algar, and the translation is widely available on-line, including at: http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/books/velayat_faqeeh.pdf


Recommended section: chapter 3, part IV, ‘The latest phase’, pp.284-328. The book has gone through a large number of editions. Those who have access to one of the post-1995 Penguin editions may find it useful to read the 25-page afterword as well.


**Section B**

The seminars in this section of the course are organised thematically, rather than by country. For each, one or two volunteers will prepare in advance a few notes on how the themes are relevant or not to a specific place or group in the region, and will speak to those points in the seminar. The seminar leader will try ensure a broad choices of cases across the eight seminars, and will make initial reading suggestions in advance about that place or group. With each seminar, there is a list of suggested cases to pick, as there is reading material available that clearly engages the case with that theme; the volunteers for those seminars are welcome to choose other possible cases, but should be aware that they might need to find their own sources.

The aim of this section is to develop a range of ways to understand the politics and international relations of the Middle East, while also cultivating a sense of the particularities of different parts of the broader region. The reading list recommended with each seminar is split between starred core items, which everyone should aim to look at, and additional reading to encourage you to develop a more detailed understanding.

The **assessment** of this section is by an essay of up to 3,500 words (again including titles and footnotes, not including the bibliography). The essay should be in response to, and should answer, a question from a list to be circulated in the Christmas vacation. The questions will be broadly focused, and you are strongly encouraged to use examples through which to develop your argument. You are also very much encouraged to draw upon a range of themes for the essay, and not stick narrowly to the seminar reading list below that seems closest to the topic of the question.

There will be an opportunity for discussion of the requirements for this essay at the end of the last
seminar. The **deadline** for the essay is noon on 13th March. The mark for the essay will constitute 70% of the entire mark for the course, and you will receive written feedback on its content during Easter term.

**Seminar B1: Political agency in the Middle East: states, nations and beyond**

- *Do the states of the Middle East have similar or diverse origins, and how have those origins shaped their subsequent experiences?*
- *How does the state relate to the 'nation' within the Middle East?*
- *Does it make sense to think of the Middle Eastern state today as retreating, declining, failing?*


  *Lisa Anderson, ‘The State in the Middle East and North Africa’, *Comparative Politics*, 20/1 (October 1987), pp.1-18*

  Adham Saouli, *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation* (London: Routledge, 2012), chapters 2 and 6


  Steven Heydemann, ed., *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000) – chapters 1 (by Heydemann) and 11 (by Owen)

  Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, ed., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 1992), introduction and the article by Tibi

  Kenneth Christie and Mohammad Masad, eds, *State Formation and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), chapter 1

  Ariel I. Ahram & Ellen Lust, 'The decline and fall of the Arab state', *Survival*, 58/2 (April/May 2016), pp.7-34

  *Suggested cases: Lebanon, Turkey, Oman*

**Seminar B2: Democratisation: process and pretence**

- *What explains the long history of authoritarianism in the Arab Middle East?*
- *How has the ‘Arab spring’ of 2010-11 transformed politics, and what has it left unchanged?*
- *Is it helpful to understand Middle Eastern states within processes of democratization and de-democratisation?*

  *Democratization*, special issue, vol.22/2 (2015), ‘From Arab Spring to Arab Winter: Explaining the limits of post-uprising democratisation’. See in particular the introduction by Hinnebusch
(pp.205-17) and the articles by Saouli (pp.315-34) and Hinnebusch (pp.335-57).


Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist, eds., *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* ( Lynne Rienner, 2005); originally published as a special edition of *Comparative Politics*, 36/2 (2004)

Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), especially chapters 1, 2 and 10


*Suggested cases: Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain*

**Seminar B3: The politics of inequality**

- Does rentierism offer a useful framework for the analysis of the politics of the Middle East? What are its limitations?
- How are we to understand the programmes of economic liberalisation in the region, in particular their extent and their social effects?
- Which groups have been left out of the process of economic development, and what are the political consequences?


*Suggested cases: Saudi Arabia, Algeria*

**Seminar B4: Social divisions, old and new – class, gender, sect**

- Does it make sense to think of Middle Eastern societies as deeply divided?
- When do social, economic and religious divisions become politicised?
- What explains the different policies of Middle Eastern states towards gender inequalities, and how consequential are these policy differences?
- Does education lead to empowerment for women in the Arab Middle East?


Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)


* Janine Astrid Clark and Jillian Schwedler, ‘Who opened the window? Women's activism in Islamist parties’, *Comparative Politics*, 35/3 (April 2003), pp.293-312


*Suggested cases: Tunisia, Iraq*

**Seminar B5: Islam and Islamism in modern politics**

- Are there shared features to political movements commonly referred to as ‘Islamist’?
- What explains the seeming proliferation of movements over the past 40 years who speak in the name of an Islamic revival?
- How have movements thought of Islamist integrated themselves into, or been excluded from, political systems within the Middle East since 2011?

* Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2014), chapter 2 – the earlier edition was entitled Global Political Islam, and the relevant chapter from that is similar enough


*Suggested cases: Morocco, Yemen, Iran*

**Seminar B6: The revolution – ideas, movements, legacies**

- What are the political legacies of the republican revolutions that happened across many Middle Eastern states?
- When does popular protest bring political change in the region?
- How do post-revolutionary governments relate to the regional and international order?

* Fawaz Gerges, ed., *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) – particularly the introductory article by Gerges and the article by Tripp


Suggested cases: Egypt, Syria

Seminar B7: The changing character of violence
- How is it that many of the leading actors within civic violence within the Middle East affiliate to a notion of jihadism?
- What does a focus on jihadism omit when considering Middle Eastern conflicts?
- What explains the persistence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?


Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Suggested cases: Libya, Israel-Palestine

Seminar B8: The inside and the outside
- Does the US provide the overarching political role in the region? Did it ever, and how has this changed since 2009?
- Why and how do Middle Eastern states compete for international influence?
- To what extent are Middle Eastern states embedded within alliances with outside actors that shape their foreign and security policies?

Paul Salem, ‘The Middle East’s troubled relationship with the liberal international order’, *The International Spectator*, vol. 53/1 (2018),


Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics* (Boulder CO: Westview, 1994)


Pavel K. Baev, ‘Russia as opportunist or spoiler in the Middle East?’, *The International Spectator*, 50/2 (2015), pp. 8-21.


*Suggested cases: Qatar, United Arab Emirates*