POLITICS and INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, Part II / Part IIB, 2019-20

POL12: The Politics of the Middle East

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Please note that this paper guide will be updated from time to time over the year, up to January 2020.

This version was last updated on 7th October 2019. The latest updates are to the Turkey mini-subject, and to some reading lists, particularly the case study on Algeria in lecture 2.6.
1. Introduction

This paper on the politics and international relations of the modern Middle East is built around three thematic sections. The first section is on the nature and causes of political change in the region, exploring themes such as state formation, political economy, identity and democratisation. The second section focuses on the multiple forms of Islamism that occur within the Middle East, but also engage populations outside of the region. The third section is on security and international relations, developing an approach to understanding the Arab-Israeli conflict, regional rivalry in the Gulf region, and the force and limits of external influence in the region. Students taking the paper through the regular supervision route should do 5 supervisions across these sections.

There are also three separate mini-subjects within the paper. These are on Turkish politics and foreign policy since 2002; on Yemeni politics in and around the ongoing conflict; and on the politics of the ‘everyday’ in the Middle East, exploring how citizens in the Middle East navigate the structures of repressive governments. These three mini-subjects are taught in Lent term, either by lectures or by a seminar, followed in each case by a supervision. Students are encouraged to choose one of these on which to have a supervision, though they may attend as many of the lectures/seminars as they choose.

It is important to attend the introductory lecture on Thursday 10th October, 4pm, in week 1 in the Alison Richard Building room S1, as structures for potential supervision arrangements during the year will be presented at that lecture. Any specific preferences that you have will be taken in to account when arranging supervisors and supervision topics. Typically, though, students will have six supervisions, three in each term, comprising:

- 1 supervision on the historical emergence of modern politics in the region;
- 2 supervisions on one of comparative politics, Islamism or international politics; and one each on the others, making 4 supervisions in total;
- 1 supervision on the ‘mini-subject’ (Turkey, Yemen, the everyday).

The exam paper is undivided, and a mock exam paper is contained in the section 6 of this paper guide. There will be one questions on each of the three mini-subjects.

To benefit from this paper, it is important to have a sense of the overall contours of the modern history of the region. Students who took the POL4 option on Saudi Arabia and Iran will already have this sense from studying these two crucial countries; that prior knowledge is presupposed on this paper, and it will not be repeated in this year’s lectures. Nevertheless, it is well worth returning to one of the standard histories of the region at the start of the year to refamiliarise yourself with key events, historical processes and core terminology:


These seven texts are all quite different: Owen’s straight historical account is only of the modern period and is fairly short, but has separate thematic accounts that develop the history. It is still useful, even though it is now rather dated. Cleveland takes in a longer sweep of history, and is more detailed, but excludes North Africa west of Egypt from its account; it’s perhaps better to use as a reference text than a book to read through. Anderson also excludes North Africa, but it is a lively and readable text, although it doesn’t engage with academic literature. Hourani is a celebrated classic, with the longer historical sweep, but only of the Arab world (so excluding Turkey, Iran and Israel), and is fairly brief on the post-1939 era; Rogan’s is more up to date, and is focused more heavily on the 20th Century. The account from Milton-Edwards is that of an accessible textbook. Gelvin incorporates a social history within the political narrative to a considerably greater degree than the others. It’s generally better to flick through each, and purchase the one you prefer as it will come in useful throughout the year.

The reading lists that follow in this paper guide contain items that are marked [OL] to include works that can be found on-line (including through electronic journals or ebooks), and [M] to indicate that they are held as scanned articles on the Moodle system. If there are problems in connecting to the relevant Moodle site, then speak to the library. But if you find that specific pieces are not available electronically at the sites listed below, please do contact the lecturer: URLs change and pieces are taken down, and it’s helpful to inform us if that happens. Many of the reading lists below include works that are often quite dated, and which provide judgements and prognoses that are no longer relevant. (Some of them, needless to say, you will rightly find to be deeply flawed in their analysis). They are on the list sometimes because they were influential texts that shaped how particular regions or themes were studied – and sometimes to give you something to react against. You should also make sure you keep up to speed with the contemporary politics of the region, not least because of the widespread sense (which may of course be inaccurate) that the Middle East is currently in a period of flux. Some on-line sources are recommended in section 8 of this course guide.
1.2 POL12 lecture list in brief

Introduction: Thursday 10th October, 4pm, ARB S1. Most of the lectures for this paper will be in the ARB, but in different rooms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Michaelmas</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Series 1: Politics</strong>&lt;br&gt;ARB SG1</td>
<td><strong>Series 2: Islamism</strong>&lt;br&gt;ARB S1</td>
<td><strong>Series 3: IR &amp; conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;ARB SG1</td>
<td><strong>Series X: the mini-subjects</strong>&lt;br&gt;Rooms vary – see below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-formation: Syria&lt;br&gt;Wed 16 Oct, 10am</td>
<td>The concept of political Islam&lt;br&gt;Tues 15 Oct, 4pm</td>
<td>(i) IR; (ii) AI conflict&lt;br&gt;Wed 22 Jan, 10am</td>
<td>Political development of Turkey&lt;br&gt;Tues 21 Jan, 4pm. ARB S1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationalism: Israel&lt;br&gt;Wed 23 Oct, 10am</td>
<td>Contemporary forms&lt;br&gt;Tues 22 Oct, 4pm</td>
<td>Israel-Palestine – land&lt;br&gt;Wed 29 Jan, 10am</td>
<td>The AKP years&lt;br&gt;Tues 28 Jan, 4pm. ARB S1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity: Jordan&lt;br&gt;Wed 30 Oct, 10am</td>
<td>Islam &amp; the state&lt;br&gt;Tues 29 Oct, 4pm</td>
<td>Israel-Palestine – peace&lt;br&gt;Wed 5 Feb, 10am</td>
<td>Erdoğanism and its discontents&lt;br&gt;Tues 4 Feb, 4pm. ARB S1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sect: Iraq&lt;br&gt;Wed 6 Nov, 10am</td>
<td>Al-Afghani&lt;br&gt;Tues 5 Nov, 4pm</td>
<td>Gulf politics&lt;br&gt;Wed 12 Feb, 10am</td>
<td>Turkish foreign policy&lt;br&gt;Tues 11 Feb, 4pm. ARB S1</td>
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<td>Economic change: Egypt&lt;br&gt;Wed 13 Nov, 10am</td>
<td>Al-Banna and the Ikhwan&lt;br&gt;Tues 12 Nov, 4pm</td>
<td>Maghreb’s international politics&lt;br&gt;Wed 19 Feb, 10am</td>
<td>Yemen: crisis to conflict&lt;br&gt;Thurs 13 Feb, 3pm. ARB SG2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratisation? I: Algeria&lt;br&gt;Wed 20 Nov, 10am</td>
<td>Mawdudi and the Jamaat&lt;br&gt;Tues 19 Nov, 4pm</td>
<td>Unity and division&lt;br&gt;Wed 26 Feb, 10am</td>
<td>Politics of the everyday&lt;br&gt;Thur 20 Feb, 3pm. ARB SG2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratisation? II: Kuwait&lt;br&gt;Wed 27 Nov, 10am</td>
<td>Qutb and Jihad&lt;br&gt;Tues 26 Nov, 4pm</td>
<td>External powers&lt;br&gt;Wed 4 Mar, 10am</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender: Tunisia&lt;br&gt;Wed 4 Dec, 10am</td>
<td>Some conclusions&lt;br&gt;Tues 3 Dec, 4pm</td>
<td>Change&lt;br&gt;Wed 11 Mar, 10am</td>
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You may also be interested in the lectures by Burcu Ozelik on Kurdish politics in POL16 scheduled for 12, 19 and 26 November: see that course guide for further information. Details of revision teaching in Easter term will be circulated nearer to then.
2. The Politics of the Middle East

Lectures (Glen Rangwala): Michaelmas weeks 1-8, Wednesdays @ 10am. SG1

This series of lectures is intended to cover three purposes. First, they are to provide an introduction to the modern history of the region, particularly in lectures 1-3. Secondly, they provide a series of themes or lenses through which the politics of the region have been interpreted. These are explored through a series of tensions: between ideology and identity, economic development and patrimonialism, democratisation and liberalisation, and gender and claims on citizenship. The lectures present arguments (captured in the subtitles to the lectures), which students are welcome to interrogate, criticise or ignore in engaging themselves with the topic. Thirdly, they direct attention to the specific constellation of politics in particular countries or regions. With each theme, the lecture draws heavily upon the experience of one place, both in order to illustrate general processes at work, and to draw attention to the contingencies and exceptionalities of those places.

The reading list for each lecture comes in two parts. There are general texts that cover the politics of a number of countries or regions of the Middle East. Then there is a secondary reading list focusing on the politics of one place, to provide a detailed example. This place-specific reading list is not exclusively on the topic of the lecture; it will also intersect with themes from other lectures. So when studying for a particular topic, it is useful to draw in detail on examples from particular countries or regions, but do not feel that you need to read up on the example that goes with the corresponding lecture. You could equally choose another place or places, and draw upon the reading list that comes with a separate lecture in this or another section of the paper (or, for Saudi Arabia and Iran, the separate reading lists in last year’s POL4 paper guide).

2.1 The formation of states, or How Middle Eastern states are continually being reinvented

The first four texts set up the context for the formation of modern states in the Middle East, Hourani in terms of intellectual context and Fromkin, Provence and Rogan in military/political context. Perhaps the most useful is Provence, especially chapter 3, on the takeover by colonial powers and their attempts to suppress rebellion. The central theme in the remaining works is the character of the Middle Eastern state. Anderson provides an introduction to the field. Tripp in Hakimian/Moshaver presents three themes through which to understand that character, and Owen discusses change. Ayubi’s broad text is worth reading in its entirety, but those pressed for time should concentrate on Chapters 1, 3, 8 and 12. Beblawi (listed with lecture 2.5) draws out an influential characterisation of many Middle Eastern states. Gongora, Heydemann, Cronin (see the introduction and chapter 1) and Gaub (particularly chapter 2) look to the centrality of the institutions of violence to the Middle Eastern state, though in different ways. Saouli usefully shifts the focus to the international position of Middle Eastern states: chapters 2 and 6 give you the core argument. Fortna’s short article provides a useful way of thinking about the different trajectories of state-formation after the end of the Ottoman Empire. Gelvin, Neep and Mufti provide complementary accounts of state formation in Syria, with Gelvin’s approach more centred on beliefs, symbols and social practices in the first Arab republic (1920), Neep’s more on coercive institutions under the French mandate (1920-1946; see particularly chapter 2), and Mufti (especially chapter 3 and 5) taking the account through to the 1950s. Thompson’s book looks at the creation of citizenship through understanding the state’s approach to gender; chapter 5 is perhaps most
relevant here. Provence’s *Great Syrian Revolt* provides the historical narrative if the other texts are found wanting in that respect.


* Hassan Hakimian and Ziba Moshaver (eds.), *The State and Global Change: The Political Economy of Transition in the Middle East and North Africa* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001) – see especially the chapters by Charles Tripp (‘States, elites and the “management of change”’) [M] and Roger Owen (‘The Middle Eastern state: repositioning not retreat?’)


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

Ben Fortna, ‘Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire and After’, in Sally Cummings and Ray Hinnebusch, eds., *Sovereignty after Empire: Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.91-103 [OL]


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

**Case study – state-formation in Syria**

* James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) (conclusions on [M])


2.2 The formation of nations, or Misunderstanding the Middle East through the category of nationalism

The first major analyses of the modern politics of the Middle East were on the development of the idea of a pan-Arab nation, portrayed as emerging out of the Ottoman Empire and in tense relations with Western imperial powers. This is a literature that continues to shape studies of the Middle East. Tibi’s volume to a large extent reflects this tradition of analysis, in Parts II-IV of the book; Choueiri (especially chapter 3 and 6) is an alternative. The critique is presented by the articles in Gershoni/Jankowski volume (essays 1, 4, 5, 8 and 12 especially), and also Bromley (chapter 3). A second literature then traces the decline of Arab nationalism after 1967; it is represented here by Ajami and Salem. The critique is from Gelvin.

The case study, seemingly anachronistically, is from Israel. Zionism and pan-Arabism are products of the late nineteenth century, and the lecture will compare their trajectories. Smith’s short article, as a framing piece, explores the extent to which Zionism is a form of nationalism. Out of the reading listed, Halpern and Avineri represent the orthodox account of the development of Zionism, whilst Sternhall and Kimmerling (especially chapters 3 and 7) provide the critical account. Pappe (see especially chapters 1 and 11) traces the rise of ‘post-Zionism’ in the 1990s, and its rapid decline from 2000 to be replaced with what he calls ‘neo-Zionism’. Liebman/Don-Yehiya trace the multiple forms of Zionism. Shohat shows, critically, how a unified category of the ‘Mizrahi’ was created over time out of diverse populations.


Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, ed., Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East (Columbia University Press, New York, 1997) (chapter 1 on [M])

Simon Bromley, Rethinking Middle East Politics (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) (chapter 3 on [M])


R. Stephen Humphreys, Between Memory and Desire (University of California Press, revd ed, 2005), chapter 3: ‘The strange career of pan-Arabism’
Case study – nationalism in Israel


* Baruch Kimmerling, The Invention and Decline of Israeliiness: State, Society, and the Military (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) (chapter 7 on [M])


Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)

2.3 The politics of identity, or Why identity crops up so often in seeking political legitimacy

The main topic of the lecture is the multiple identities that animate political argument and contestation in the Middle East. The introduction and the article by Tibi in the Khoury/Kostiner volume, and chapter 1 of the Christie/Masad volume provide a way of thinking about identity politics in the region. Alongside Arabism (lecture 2.2), political identity is most frequently framed in the literature in religious terms. On Islam in politics, probably the best place to begin is the Eickelman/Piscatori volume, which covers the range of ways in which religion comes in to politics, not specific to ‘political Islam’ or the Middle East. Ayubi, though dated, is still a good text that works through the beliefs and movements in a systematic way. This can be complemented with Ismail, which explores the different types of Islamism principally in Egypt. Zubaida links Islam back to nationalism. Bayat’s book (esp chapter 10) provides an alternative frame of reference: by looking at ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’ in the Middle East, it challenges the literature which focuses on the political significance of particularistic identity claims.

Jordan provides the case study, due to the complex interlinkage of identity claims at work in this country. Robins provides the general history. It’s useful to have a good sense of the colonial heritage: see especially Massad’s chapter 2 and, in a different register, Alon. Anderson and Köprülü explore the complexity of national identity. The main works in exploring the particular position of religious movements in politics are Wiktorowicz (especially chapter 3) and the Moaddel article.

Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, ed., Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East (London: IB Tauris, 1992) [OL], introduction and article by Tibi (pp.127-152)
Kenneth Christie and Mohammad Masad, eds, *State Formation and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), chapter 1 on \[M\]

* Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010) [OL], chapter 10


Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001), especially chapters 4 and 5

**Case study – religion, nation and tribe in Jordan**


Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood and State Power in Jordan* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), chapter 3 on \[M\]


**2.4 The politics of sect, or How claims to sectarian loyalties are losing their credibility**

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, explanations for prolonged violence in the Middle East have come to centre on the rivalry that is purported to exist between those of different sectarian affiliations. These explanations are presented at both the region-wide level, such as in accounts of a “Shi’a crescent”, or at the sub-national level, such as in analysis of Sunni vs Shi’a in Iraq, or Alawite vs Sunni in Syria, or Sunni vs Zaydi Shi’a in Yemen. While it is certainly worth critically interrogating essentialist claims of sectarian conflict, it is also necessary to take on board how many of the actors
themselves have organised politically into forms that are bound specifically to one sect, and use a
language of avowal and denigration that bolster a sense of sectarian identity.

The reading listed below, while sometimes about a particular country, makes general arguments
about the causes and character of sectarianism in the Middle East. It’s useful first to think about
how sectarianism is differently charted and explained within the wider politics of the Middle East:
for this, a series of short articles or chapters have been recommended due to their different
approaches. Makdisi, with Lebanon as his case study, links sectarianism to the trajectory of a
particular form of nationalism (for greater detail, see the author’s book The Culture of Sectarianism,
2000 – especially the epilogue). To explain the rise of sectarianism, Nasr (see chapter 6) focuses on
renewed political agency from Shia movements, while Matthiesen (especially chapter 2)
concentrates on the push from Sunni political authorities. Salloukh and Norton both connect
sectarianism to geopolitical rivalry, but in subtly different ways. Byman provides a broad regional
survey. Zelin and Smyth provide an account of the terms used to denigrate opponents in sectarian
terms, but don’t contextualise it in the broader vocabulary of struggle. Hashemi/Postel (pp.1-14) by
contrast look to the limits of sectarianism as a political explanation.

The more developed pieces are those on Iraq. Al-Ali provides a generally useful background text.
Haddad explores when and how this sense of political Shi’ism became incorporated into Iraqi
popular action (chapter 6 is crucial for the argument, with the consequences demonstrated in
chapter 7). The different perspectives on the nature of sectarianism in Iraq are brought out by the
articles in the collection edited by Davis in the International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies:
see in particular those by Rizk Khoury, Ismael & Ismael, and Yousif. Zubaida, briefly but usefully, sets
this discussion within the wider scope of Iraqi history. Dodge highlight the scale of contemporary
problems. The pieces by Hasan and the long (and well-researched) piece by Taub are commentary
on current events, and should be supplemented by keeping an eye on the news.

Ussama Makdisi, ‘The modernity of sectarianism in Lebanon’, Middle East Report, 200 (1996), at:
http://www.merip.org/mer/mer200/modernity-sectarianism-lebanon

Vali Nasr, The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape its Future (New York: W.W. Norton

Bassel F. Salloukh, ‘Sectarianism and the search for new political orders in the Arab World’, Middle
East Institute, web article (July 2015), at: http://www.mei.edu/content/map/sectarianism-
and-search-new-political-orders-arab-world

Toby Matthiesen, Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn’t (Stanford:

Augustus Richard Norton, ‘The geopolitics of the Sunni-Shi‘i rift’ in Elizabeth Monier, ed.,
Regional Insecurity After the Arab Uprisings: Narratives of Security and Threat (Basingstoke:
Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

Daniel Byman, ‘Sectarianism afflicts the new Middle East’, Survival, vol. 56/1 (2014), pp.79-100 [OL]


**Case study – Iraq, the rise, and maybe the decline, of sectarianism**


**2.5 The politics of economic change, or Why everyone talks of economic liberalisation but few practice it**

The two major interlocking approaches to the study of economic change in the Middle East are on the ‘rentier’ character that is imputed to many Middle Eastern states; and on the process and problems of economic liberalisation; and They are brought together helpfully in two volumes that provide general overviews: the Henry/Springborg and the Cammett et al. The second of those is more advanced, although there are different focuses to the two texts, and so both are worth dipping into as need be, as is the Owen/Pamuk. The literature on rentierism begins with Beblawi’s classic article, and the literature on the politics of Saudi Arabia in POL4 expands upon these themes, often critically (Okruilik and Chaudhry are listed here as well, for reminders). Bellin provides a further extension of the argument through the case of Tunisia. Mitchell works best as a critique of many of the assumptions behind this literature. The interaction of oil wealth with international politics is covered in lecture 4.4, and it may be useful to make connections between these topics.

On economic liberalisation, Heydemann’s introduction to his edited collection gives an advanced account of the interaction of politics and economic decision-making, with the articles spanning across six Middle Eastern countries. The essays in Barkey usefully complement this text (although some have dated poorly); do also look at chapters 6 and 13 of the Cammett et al. The case for this
lecture is Egypt, which is the subject of a number of the most influential texts that look at the politics of economic liberalisation. Although these texts are dated, they are worth revisiting. Kienle (the final chapter summarises the argument) draws out well how authoritarian government serves the process of economic reform, and in so doing works as a critique of the supposed relationship between political and economic liberalisation. Mitchell (especially chapter 9) looks at the costs and conceits of the project of ‘development’ that Egypt has undergone.

These ‘classics’ should be read in conjunction with the more recent literature on economic governance and its opponents in Egypt. Abdelrahman brings together well economic discontent and political protest; Marfleet gives an updated version of a similar argument. Marshall looks at the significance of economic interests for the Egyptian military; Roll and Springborg provides political and historical context to this theme. Joya and Stacher provide interesting different critical accounts of the level of control exercised by the Egyptian government over domestic ‘reforms’.


Case study – Egypt


Philip Marfleet, Egypt: Contested Revolution (London: Pluto Press, 2016), chapter 10 and afterword

http://carnegieendowment.org/files/egyptian_armeD_forces.pdf [OL]


Joshua Stacher, ‘Egypt running on empty’, MERIP online, 8th March 2016, at:
http://www.merip.org/mero/mero030816 [OL]

2.6 Experiments in democratisation I, or When protest movements matter (and when they don’t)

The next two lectures are on processes, problems and pitfalls of democratisation in the Middle East. The two reading lists go together; the difference is of emphasis, but the subject matter is the same. There was a substantial literature before 2010 on the resilience of authoritarianism in the region, particularly in the Arab states, and the first lecture will look at the arguments made in the context of recent changes. The best places to start are the collections by Posusney/Angrist (especially the articles by Bellin, Langohr and Lust-Okar) and Schlumberger (chapters 1, 2 and 10). Many of the other country-specific articles are worth dipping in to as well. The Albrecht/Schlumberger article gives the core argument behind the latter collection. Stacher and Brown are on how authoritarian regimes reinvent themselves; many of the articles in Middle East report look at this through the prism of elections. Filiu and Cook focus on the role of the military and in Filiu’s case, intelligence and paramilitary organisations, whilst Herb and the Kostiner collection look at the specific forms and features of monarchy.
The case study is from Algeria, in light of the movement that started in February 2019. The main texts, for now, are older: Lowi is centrally on economic governance, but also provides a general history, and so is a good place to start (and see especially chapter 6). Werenfels is the most detailed account of how the state works. Entelis and Henry provide updates, questioning the durability of the model. The two listed essays in the Bonner collection look at specific features of the Algerian state that the other texts miss. This list will be supplemented with texts on the 2019 movement, although Wolf and Serres are here for starters.

* 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, vol. 36/2 (2004) [OL]

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


Middle East Report, No. 209: Behind the Ballot Box: Authoritarian Elections and Oppositional Strategies in the Middle East (Winter 1998) [OL]


Case study - Algerian politics after the civil war


William Quandt, ‘Algeria’s transition to what?’ and Mohammed Akacem, ‘The role of external actors in Algeria’s transition’, in Michael Bonner, Megan Reif and Mark Tessler, eds., Islam,


Thomas Serres, ‘Understanding Algeria’s 2019 revolutionary movement’, Middle East Brief (Brandeis University, 2019), at: https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/meb129.pdf [OL]

2.7 Experiments in democratisation II, or Why dominant governments sometimes invite argumentative politics

The Middle East makes us question binary characterisations of democracy and authoritarianism, and a number of texts in this list look at features that problematise simple distinctions or notions of staged transitions. The Selvik/Stenslie volume may be a useful starting point: it’s introductory, but has a useful overview of themes and places, particularly in the Gulf region. The other texts are all making specific arguments: in the Salamé collection, see particularly the opening article by Waterbury. The Robinson article is about Jordan, but its argument has wider application. The Norton article, chapters 1-3 of Baaklini et al., and the collection by Korany et al. (especially chapters 1, 4 and 5 of vol. 1) may be old, but they are still worth reading for exploring the arguments they make (or the assumptions they take). Bayat and Sadiki are on protest and political change, and serve as a useful precursor to reading on the Arab uprisings. See the Gerges collection on this, and for a later evaluation, Anderson.

The case is Kuwait. Tétreault is core, for appreciating how democratic ideas are not new to the region: see particularly chapters 3 and 4. Salem and Kinninmont make their assessment based on reviews of the vigorous operation of the Kuwaiti parliament. Herb, Willis and Beaugrand point to significant limitations in approaching democratisation solely through understanding political institutions.


Abdo Baaklini, Guilain Denoeux, and Robert Springborg, Legislative Politics in the Arab World: The Resurgence of Democratic Institutions (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999)


**Case study – parliamentarism in Kuwait**


### 2.8 Gender and political change, or The difference women make

The Ehteshami/Murphy article provides the starting point for the lecture, which covers a wide range of topics: it is their characterisation of the Middle Eastern state as a corporatist one that is useful as a framing device. The first three texts listed cover labour movements, but the main focus in the lecture is on gender politics and the role of women in politics. Section 2 of Keddie provides a starting point, though the Joseph/Slyomovics collection will be more relevant (especially the articles by Graham-Brown, Jospeh and Kandiyoti). The Chatty/Rabo volume (chapters 1, 6 and 9) and the Doumato/Posusney collection are also useful for the general overview. On the 2011 protest movements, a variety of the short articles in the special issue of the *Journal of International Women’s Studies* will be useful: see especially Sika and Khodary (on Egypt) and Salime (on Morocco). The attention to women in political parties and state-sponsored programmes of empowerment
provides particular interest: see Clark/Schwedler, Hatem, Browers and Joseph for different takes. Al-Ali (perhaps especially chapter 6) and Mahmood (chapter 2 for the descriptive basis, chapter 5 for the most relevant arguments) look at the interplay of religion and gender: both are about Egypt, but they have wider resonance. Al-Rasheed (perhaps especially the introduction) speaks to how women figure within Saudi Arabia’s religious nationalism. Massad is an innovative exploration of thinking about sexuality in the Arab world: chapter 3 tends to draw the most attention.

The case study is from Tunisia, looking at state empowerment and the consequences of the 2011 revolution for women. Murphy’s 1999 book gives the general historical background, but the 2003 article will be most relevant here. Charrad explores the changing role of women in state policy. Marks looks at the effect of the revolution, and can be compared with Coleman. On this, see also the piece by Zlitni and Touati in the *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, referenced earlier.


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


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


Michaëlle Browers, ‘The centrality and marginalization of women in the political discourse of Arab Nationalists and Islamists’, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, vol. 2/2 (June 2006), pp.8-34 [OL], at: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_middle_east_womens_studies/v002/2.2browsers.pdf

Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) [OL]


Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Marsha Pripstein Posusney, eds., *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy and Society* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003)


**Case study – the Tunisian state and gender relations**

Emma Murphy, *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia* (London: Macmillan, 1999)


Isobel Coleman, ‘Why the Arab spring hasn’t been better for women’, *The Atlantic*, 8 March 2012, at: [http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/why-the-arab-spring-hasnt-been-better-for-women/254150/][1] [OL]

**Suggested supervision questions:**

- Are the origins of the Middle Eastern state to be found in the Ottoman Empire, Western imperialism or post-independence politics?
- Does nationalism remain a key political frame of reference within the Middle East?
- Are nationalism and religion opposing or complementary forces in Arab politics?
- To what extent and in what ways is sect an important category for understanding Middle Eastern politics?
- Does rentierism provide a compelling explanation for the political form of oil-rich Middle Eastern states?
- Are there key characteristics to authoritarian forms of rule that are found in the Arab world, and if so, what are they?
- Are many Arab states making a ‘transition’ to democracy?
- Does ‘state feminism’ meaningfully empower women in the Middle East?
3. The Politics of Islamism

Lectures (Dr Faiz Sheikh): Michaelmas weeks 1-8, Tuesday@ 4pm.

These lectures present four key thinkers of political Islam from the 19th and 20th century. These thinkers represent the ‘origins’ (Al-Afghani), Arab-Sunni (Al-Banna), Pakistani-Sunni (Mawdudi) and Sunni-Jihadist (Qutb) foundations of Sunni Islamic political thought. The thinking of these individuals, and the movements and ideas they have articulated, has had a lasting and profound impact on the political direction of Muslim majority countries after their experience and interaction with European colonialism. As such, these lectures will ask you to critically engage with not only theological and political arguments about the function of Islam in politics, but also the historical context and position of such thought as a search for post-colonial identity.

The lectures aim to introduce students to key non-Anglo/American political thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. The module will show the innovative nature of the ‘Islamic state’, and the interaction of European colonialism on intellectual history of political Islam. In addition, students will be asked to engage with history and theology to gain a broad and deep understanding of political Islam and its intersections with various academic disciplines.

3.1 What is ‘political Islam’?

Essential Reading:
Mandaville, P: Global Political Islam, (London: Routledge, 2007), chapter 2


Waines, D: An Introduction to Islam. (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1995). Chapter 6

Further Reading:


Nasr, S: Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), chapter 11


### 3.2 Contemporary manifestations: Violent rejection and peaceful elections

This week, the readings are varied, covering a few different topics. While the lecture will cover all of these briefly, you need not read everything. Read based on your interests, either one from each section, or all from one section.

**On the Arab Uprisings of 2011 and their aftermath:**


**On al-Qaeda and global jihad:**


**On social welfare:**


**On Feminism:**


On ISIS/Daesh:


### 3.3 Islam and the state: End of the Caliphate and beginnings of colonial rule

**Essential Reading:**


**Further Reading:**


### 3.4 Al-Afghani: Reform or Apology?
Essential Reading:


Further Reading:

Al-Azmeh, A: Islam and Modernities. 3rd ed, (London: Verso, 2009), Chapter 4


3.5 Al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the bottom-up state

Essential Reading:


Further Reading:


Mitchell, R: The Society of the Muslim Brothers, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Chapters 1 and 11

Marechal, B: *The Muslim Brothers in Europe: roots and discourse*. (Boston: Brill, 2008), Chapter 1


### 3.6 Mawdudi, Jamaat-e-Islami, and the top-down state

**Essential Reading:**


**Further Reading:**


Jackson, R: *Mawlana Mawdudi and Political Islam: Authority and the Islamic State*, (London: Routledge, 2008), Introduction, chapters 6, 8 and 9


### 3.7 Qutb and jihad

**Essential Reading:**


Qutb, Sayyid. *Milestones*

**Further Reading:**


**3.8 Some conclusions**

**Essential Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**

Chapter 2.


Hurd, E: “Iran, in search of a nonsecular and nontheocratic Politics” *(Public Culture, 22*(1), 2010): 25-32

*Suggested supervision questions:*

1. Is political Islam a ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ phenomenon?
2. In what ways does the decline and abolition of the Caliphate impact political Islam?
3. Is there such a thing as Muslim politics?
4. International politics and conflict

Lectures (Glen Rangwala): Lent weeks 1-8, Wednesdays @ 10am. ARB SG1.

The lectures in this series are organised to cover two themes. After a short introduction to the conceptual field of the International Relations of the Middle East, the first three lectures are on the Arab-Israeli conflict, with emphasis on exploring the multiple different ways in which this conflict has been studied. That is followed by two lectures on the international politics of the Persian Gulf region, and two lectures on the question of how external powers affect domestic politics. The final lecture reverses that question, exploring if and how changing structures of national politics will change the international politics of the region.

4.1a. The balance of power in the Middle East

The first half of this lecture sets out the themes of this lecture series. The texts in the list below are mostly introductory books on the international politics of the region. They first four text serve as useful places to start reading around the topics in this section; Brown is included for historical interest. Barnett and Lawson are slightly different, in that they provide historical accounts of the formation and possible disintegration of the system of Arab states. Kerr and Walt are perhaps the two main ‘classics’ in this field of study. Kerr provides an historical account of a period of intense international rivalry in the Arab world. Walt nests an explanation of how outside powers form alliances with Middle Eastern states within a theory of alliance formation.


4.1b. The Arab-Israeli conflict, or A case study in how international & domestic politics collide
The remainder of the first lecture, and the two subsequent lectures, each approach the Arab-Israeli conflict through one of the major prisms for studying it: first, as an international conflict that crucially involves major external powers; second, as a struggle between two national groups within the same small territory; and third as a venue for a hitherto unfulfilled peacemaking process.

This lecture provides some background, but concentrates on the 1967 war, its origins and its aftermath, as a way to explore the range of international factors that are implicated in war. The first three texts all provide general histories of the international politics of the conflict, structured around the major cross-border wars (1947-1949, 1967, 1973 and 1982). Reading one of them should be sufficient. Rabinovich and Shlaim, differently, look at the diplomacy between the parties before 1967, to explore collusion as well as violent conflict (Shlaim’s book is a revised version of *Collusion Across the Jordan*, originally published in 1988).

On the 1967 war, Bowen is a well-researched journalist’s account which also contains new information on the discussions between Israel's leaders at the time (pp.84-93). Laron gives a lively and richly contextual account, emphasising prior political and economic change as crucial for the war’s inception. Oren, Israel’s ambassador to the US until 2013, attempts to show how competitive relations within Egypt’s political elite led to a confrontation; Popp’s critique of Oren should be read in conjunction with this account. Gerges (esp pp.205-44) looks at the role of the US and USSR. On the Soviet Union, the text edited by Ro’i and Morozov is useful; chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 in particular are worth reading. Gat examines the attempts by the United States to contain, resolve or extricate itself from the conflict. Neff portrays the US as heavily partisan; the accounts from Little and Shannon offer a more nuanced (though not necessarily more accurate) portrait. The two articles in the Louis/Shlaim collection look at the consequences of the 1967 war for regional politics.

Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics* (Boulder CO: Westview, 1994)
Yaacov Ro’i and Boris Morozov, eds., The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War (Stanford University Press, 2008)


4.2 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or Land as resource, land as symbol

Pappe, in approaching relations historically between Jews and Palestinians as moving from limited co-existing to hostility, provides a good starting point for this theme; Gelvin and Milton-Edwards are alternative introductions. The remaining literature looks at how the domestic politics of each side interacts with the trajectory of the conflict. Shlaim, Peri and Newman all look at different aspects of how Israeli politics interact with their relations with the Palestinians – ideology, military and land respectively. This is to complement the literature on Israel listed with section 2.2 above, particularly the book by Kimmerling. On the Palestinian side, it is useful to consider how Palestinian nationalism is often presented through the narrative of a dispossessed peasantry: Khalidi chapter 5 is here perhaps the best starting point. Sayigh is a thorough account of the development of the PLO, and Hroub, Legrain and Robinson provide contrasting interpretations of Hamas.


James L. Gelvin, The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War (Cambridge University Press, 2007)


4.3 The Israeli-Palestinian peace system, or A thirty year process without an outcome

These are analyses of externally mediated attempts to bring a peace settlement between Israeli and Palestinian leaderships. They provide little political context; the reading lists with 4.2 are for that. Quandt is the overarching account of the various attempts since 1967; Podeh is a good reference book, and is more up to date (chapter 23 on the Annapolis process and after is perhaps most useful). Thrall serves as the critique of those who think that peace is brought by mediation. The remainder are on the post-1993 period, from the Oslo accords onwards. The essays in the collections edited by Rothstein and Peleg provide a range of perspectives on what the negotiations achieved, and (for the Rothstein collection) why they failed. See also the different explanations for failure from Sayigh and Pundak by 2000. Parsons looks at the creation of the Palestinian Authority and its failings, both structural and personal. Broader explanations are provided by Pearlman and Slater, with the former focused on spoiler actions by Palestinian groups, and the latter on Israeli unilateral actions. For a bit more colour, Enderlin and Bregman provide detailed journalists’ accounts of how peace processes fell apart: Enderlin on the 1995-2002 period, Bregman on 1999-2004.


Elie Podeh, Chances for Peace: Missed Opportunities in the Arab-Israeli Conflict (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015)


Nigel Parsons, From Oslo to Al-Aqsa: The Politics of the Palestinian Authority (London: Routledge, 2003).


**4.4 The international politics of the Gulf, or From Cooperation to Qatarstrophe**

This lecture approaches the Persian Gulf region (encompassing Iran, Iraq and the GCC States) as a zone in which there is a high level of international engagement, across a number of economic, political and military spheres. The first lecture maps out the general contours of Gulf policy as it has developed from 1979. The following lecture is focused on the growing sense of crisis in inter-Gulf politics, especially from 2017.

For the first lecture, the collections by Potter/Sick and Kamrava are good texts with which to begin: in Potter/Sick, see particularly chapters 3 and 4 (and also, for country specific arguments, 11 and 12), and chapters 1, 5 and 7 in Kamrava. The Bronson, Vitalis and Yergin texts are long but are all very readable, with different takes on the relationship of the US (and major US corporations) with Saudi Arabia; Yergin’s is broadest in focus, Vitalis is most narrow, and Bronson’s is most relevant to understanding Saudi Arabia. All three have a somewhat sensationalist style to them, but are well researched. Peterson’s short text connects that discussion to Saudi Arabia’s security in regional and national spheres. Fawcett is useful on the effect of the Iraq invasion on Gulf politics. Matthiesen’s *Sectarian Gulf* touches upon the extent to which the international politics of the Gulf have taken on a strongly sectarian hue. For Qatar’s role in regional policy, see the contrasting short accounts of Cooper/ Momeni and Roberts. Elements of competition between Gulf States are brought out in Phillips: although the book may appear to be about Syria, chapter 6 in particular is about rivalry between GCC States and its wider effects. The three articles in the Hudson/Kirk collection situate the international relations of the Gulf in a ‘post-American’ order, not uncontroversially so. On the post-2017 ‘Qatarstrophe’, see Fuller, but also Matthiesen’s ‘domestic sources’ article and Al-Rasheed locate growing Gulf tension in different aspects of changing Saudi foreign policy.

This is also a theme for which it is very worthwhile to recall the reading of Iranian foreign policy from last year’s POL4.


Louise Fawcett, ‘The Iraq war ten years on: assessing the fallout’, *International Affairs*, vol. 89/2 (2013), pp.325-343 [OL]


Andrew Cooper and Bessma Momani, ‘Qatar and expanded contours of small state diplomacy’, *International Spectator*, vol. 46/3 (2011), pp.113-128 [OL]


Madawi Al-Rasheed, ‘King Salman and his son: winning the US, losing the rest’, LSE Middle East Centre Report (September 2017), at: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2017/09/18/king-salman-and-his-son-winning-the-us-losing-the-rest/

Graham E. Fuller, ‘Does Qatar really threaten the Gulf?’, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, vol.36/5 (2017)

### 4.5 The international politics of North Africa, or The Unravelling of Libya

From the Gulf to the Maghreb (North Africa), the Middle East is characterised by a highly internationalised process of political competition which often has highly destructive consequences. This lecture explores this theme through the case of Libya. The reading list sets up the topic first within the Maghreb more generally, in which focus is usually placed on competition between Morocco and Algeria. Willis provides a general introduction to the international politics of North Africa, from post-independence ties to France to competition for influence in the aftermath of the 2011 protests. Hernando brings this up to date.

From there, the focus is Libya. Anderson provides an innovative comparison between three different eras of external intervention into Libya. Wehrey provides what is currently the best book-length account of the post-2011 conflict; for the purposes of this lecture, chapter 11 is probably the most useful, and usefully complements Lutterbeck. Sánchez-Mateos focuses particularly on Libyan foreign policy, but provides broader themes. Libya is usefully positioned within four different international arenas: global, European borderlands, Middle Eastern and African, and de Waal fills in
the last of those. Although this lecture is predicated on the sense that Libya’s unravelling since 2011 has been a heavily transnationalised issue, it is worth being aware of the counter-argument, which is provided by Toaldo, who instead argues that international intervention has had little effect on local Libyan politics. As this lecture is looking at an ongoing conflict, further suggestions of reading will be given in the lecture.


Mattia Toaldo, ‘Decentralising authoritarianism? The international intervention, the new “revolutionaries” and the involution of Post-Qadhafi Libya’, Small Wars & Insurgencies, vol.27/1 (2016), pp.39-58

**4.6 Unity and division in the Arab states system, or Regional order without regional organisers**

The lecture is on the discrepancy between the high extent of transnationalism within regional politics, and the very limited scope of regional institutions. It draws particularly on the extent to which political movements are, or are seen to be, proxy forces for external powers. On regional organisation, Aarts sets up the question. The article by Fawcett (chapter 9) in the collection edited by her with 4.1 above is also a good place to start. The Laanatza and Tripp articles provide an historical review. For contrasting perspectives on the effect of regional institutions on recent crises, compare Maddy-Weitzman with Ryan. For the material on ‘proxy politics’, the lectures draws upon texts from Gulf politics, but see also Lynch on the region-wide effects of a Qatari television station.


4.7 External powers in the Middle East, or Always declining, ever present

The last two lectures are future-looking. This one explores the extent to which the Middle East will remain a significant focus of global affairs over coming years. Ehteshami is the best place to begin, arguing that it is a region that has largely been left behind much of the rest of the world in economic and social development. Hinnebusch provides an associated structural perspective.

After that, the reading list divides up by foreign power. Most of it is about the United States. Oren and the pair of books by Khalidi historically situate the significance of the region in terms of US policy, in opposing ways. Walt/Meirsheimer and Spiegel, though now quite dated, provide different interpretations of how politics within the US has affected its Middle East policy. For recent accounts, there are opposing analyses from Gerges and Rangwala of the direction in which US policy went during the Obama administration. Due to the new US administration that will be coming into place earlier during this term, a few additional texts may be suggested dependent upon the outcome of the November US election. The Dodge/Hokayem collection has a useful piece by Allin (on the Obama administration), but is perhaps more useful for the articles by Noël (on oil interests) and Neill (on Chinese policy). The Journal of European Integration collection is on European responses to the Arab Uprisings, and the pieces by Noutcheva and Dandashly are perhaps most useful in there. Heisbourg looks at lasting effects of the 2015 refugee movements on European policy to the region. The last three articles give interestingly different readings of Russian policy in the region.

Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Globalization and Geopolitics in the Middle East: Old Games, New Rules (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007)


Michael Oren, Power, Faith and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present (New York: WW Norton, 2007)


4.8 A democratic peace in the Middle East? Some concluding themes

The final lecture asks how changing structure of rule within Middle Eastern states would alter international dynamics. The relevant reading will be largely on the international consequences of the 2010-11 Arab uprisings. The topic serves as a way to tie issues of contemporary debate back to material taught throughout the course on the changing nature of governmental rule, the role of political Islam and sectarian affiliation, the Arab states system, and the mode of external mediation and intervention. As well as the articles listed below, see Maddy-Weitzman and Ryan listed with lecture 4.6 above, which can be compared with Carpenter (below).


https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233578647_The_Middle_East_in_the_world_hierarchy_Imperialism_and_resistance


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

Crystal Ennis and Bessma Momani, ‘Shaping the Middle East in the midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies’, Third World Quarterly, vol. 34/6 (2013), pp.1127-1144 [OL]


Suggested supervision questions:

- Is the Arab-Israeli conflict in essence no more than a dispute over the status of territory?
- Has US engagement taken the Israeli and Palestinian sides to the brink of peace, or has it reinforced the state of conflict?
- Do the foreign policies of Arab Gulf states amount to anything more than Western alliances and personal whims?
- Is Libya the victim of rivalry between other Middle Eastern states?
- Why has the Middle East seen little so lasting success in projects of regional union?
- Is the ‘American moment’ in the Middle East now over?
- Have the Arab uprisings from 2010 reinforced or disrupted international relationships of power in the Middle East?
5. The mini-subjects

A. Turkey: A ‘model’ or an exception?

Lectures (Ayşe Zarakol)

Note: Most of these lectures deal with recent or contemporary events. The reading list therefore consists mostly of news articles (as opposed to academic articles or books). The information they present may be incomplete and subject to revision (and in some cases polemical). Read widely to get a fuller picture. More readings may be added as events unfold; check online for the latest version of the reading list before you revise.

Readings are listed in chronological order to give you a sense of how writing about Turkey also evolved over the years. This will be most apparent with news and magazine articles. Read the most recent publications first, especially if you have limited time, but look over the entire reading list if you are revising.

5(a).1 Historical Background - The political development of modern Turkey

This lecture will locate Turkey within the modern international order and give a brief summary of Turkish history from the years of the Ottoman Empire to the 21st century.

Recommended Readings:
Ayşe Zarakol. 2011. *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West*. Cambridge University Press. [See the Introduction, Chapter One and Chapter Three especially].

Novels/Memoirs:
Orhan Pamuk. 2006. *Istanbul: Memories of a City*. Faber & Faber. [Memoir]

5(a).2 A ‘Turkish Model’? The AKP Years

This lecture will explain the rise of Erdoğan and the AKP in the first decade of the 21st century and why the AKP enjoyed so much international support until 2013.

Recommended Readings:
http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/events/2006/5/23turkey/20060523sabanci_1.pdf


Novels/Memoirs:

Orhan Pamuk. 2004. Snow. Faber and Faber. [Novel]

Alev Scott. 2014. Turkish Awakening. Faber and Faber. [Memoir/Journalism]


5(a).3 Erdoganism and Its Discontents

This lecture will try to make sense of ‘Erdoganism’: e.g. Erdogan a populist? Why and when did he turn authoritarian? How should we characterise the current regime in Turkey? What does the opposition look like under such a regime? Does Erdogan’s loss in the 2019 municipal elections mean anything?


Novels/Memoirs:

5(a).4 “Who Lost Turkey?” & Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century
In this lecture we will discuss where Turkey’s headed, focusing also on Turkey’s foreign policy, especially vis-à-vis the Middle East.


Bilgin Ayata. 2015. ‘Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing Arab World: Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor?’ Journal of European Integration. 37.1: 95-112.


Kamran Matin. 2015. ‘Why is Turkey bombing the Kurds?’ openDemocracy August 4 [https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/kamran-matin/why-is-turkey-bombing-kurds]

Michael M. Gunter. 2015. ‘Iraq, Syria, ISIS and the Kurds: Geostrategic Concerns for the U.S. and Turkey’. Middle East Policy. 22.1: 102-111.


Suggested supervision questions:

Lectures 1 & 2
1. What were the main features of Kemalism as an ideology and how was this reflected in the state structure of the Turkish Republic?
2. What are some of the continuities between the Ottoman and Republican periods of Turkey?
3. What best explains AKP’s electoral successes after 2001? What role did the international community play in consolidating Erdoğan’s power?
4. What was the general attitude of the Turkish state towards ethnic and/or religious minorities in the twentieth century?

Lectures 3 & 4
1. When and why did Erdogan take a decisive turn towards authoritarianism? Is he a populist?
2. Does the opposition in Turkey stand a chance? Why or why not?
3. Given recent developments, will Turkey abandon its long-standing alliance with the West?
4. To what extent is the EU and/or the US to blame for Turkey’s current state?
B. Yemen: crisis turns to conflict

Seminar (Glen Rangwala): Thursday 13th February, 3pm. Room SG2.

This seminar looks at the specific example of the Yemen conflict(s) within the hostile politics of the Gulf region. The literature below is divided between texts about regional politics around Yemen in the aftermath of the 2011-12 uprising, which focuses heavily on the efforts of Arab Gulf states to constitute a new government; and those on the politics of the Saudi-led military effort to defeat the Houthi movement which has controlled the capital city and much of the western part of the country since 2014.

For the first of those, Phillips is a useful starting point because it embeds Yemen’s politics closely in international dynamics. On the 2011-12 revolt and stalled transition, the short pieces by Durac, Alley, Transfeld (2014; with Hill/Nonneman as a contrast) and Knights are all informative on different themes and are worth reading, perhaps in that order. On the post-2015 conflict, Transfeld (2016) locates the breakdown of political order within elite Yemeni politics, while Hokayem/Roberts look at GCC decision-making. Hill’s narrative account is readable: chapters 14 and 15 are most relevant here. The two pieces by Sons/Matthiesen and Aryani look critically at Saudi Arabia’s role. Hellmich is on what may be dubbed Yemen’s other war – though the connection between them is worth considering. The southern secessionist movement has also been growing in influence and control, and this will be discussed in the seminar. The seminar will give the historical background on Yemen, but the enthusiastic may also want to look at Day.


Vincent Durac, ‘Yemen’s Arab Spring – democratic opening or regime maintenance?’, *Mediterranean Politics* vol. 17/2 (2012), pp.161-178


Mareike Transfeld, ‘Political bargaining and violent conflict: shifting elite alliances as the decisive factor in Yemen’s transformation’, *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 21/1 (2016), pp.150-169

Emile Hokayem and David Roberts, ‘The war in Yemen’, *Survival*, vol. 58/6 (2016), 157-186

Sebastian Sons and Toby Matthiesen, ‘The Yemen war in Saudi media’ (2016), Muftah.org, via: https://muftah.org/yemen-war-saudi-media/#.WTe_AGjyuUI


Suggested supervision question:

Why has the conflict in Yemen persisted, when there seems to be no prospect of any side emerging victorious?
**C. Politics of/and the everyday**

_Seminar (José Ciro Martínez): Thursday 20th February, 3pm. Room SG2._

How do ordinary people respond to repressive conditions? In what ways is meaningful change made through seemingly unexceptional acts? We will examine how scholars working on the Middle East have conceptualized the realm of the ordinary—everyday life. The seminar will consider how and whether seemingly mundane actions can make meaningful change by focusing on activities and undertakings of citizens in times of constraint. By considering the relationship of politics to the everyday, the seminar seeks to hone in on the often neglected ways in which citizens of the Middle East navigate the strictures of authoritarian rule.

Asef Bayat, _Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East_ (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010) [OL]


**Suggested supervision question:**

1. To what extent is everyday life a platform for politics in the Middle East?
2. How do forms of authoritarian government and rule deployed by Middle Eastern states shape modes of oppositional action?
3. Must oppositional politics or resistance come in the form of a social movement in the Middle East?
6. Examination

6.1 Mock exam paper

The mock paper is structured in a format that will apply with the 2019 exam. There are four questions on the first thematic section of the paper (Middle Eastern politics), three on the International Relations section, and two on the Islamism section. There is one question that can be answered from a variety of perspectives; and one question on each of the three mini-subjects. The exam paper will be undivided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POL12: The Politics of the Middle East</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Candidates should answer three questions.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Is nationalism in the Middle East primarily explained as a reaction to imperial rule?</td>
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<td>2. Has authoritarianism survived in the Middle East by learning how to be flexible?</td>
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<td>3. Are the economies of Arab states stuck in a rut of rent-seeking and clientelism?</td>
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<td>4. How is citizenship in Middle Eastern states gendered?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Is the Arab-Israeli conflict a clash of incompatible nationalisms?</td>
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<td>6. Why has politics in the Gulf region become increasingly conflictual over the course of the late 2010s?</td>
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<td>7. To what extent are key decisions about the politics of the Middle East taken by agents from outside that region?</td>
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<td>8. Is political Islam a project of Islamic apology, or Muslim ‘self-strengthening’? Discuss with reference to 2 key thinkers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. To what extent what ways is Islam a tool of state legitimacy?</td>
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<td>10. To what extent have the ‘Arab uprisings’ from 2010 reshaped the politics of the Middle East?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. How do Turkey’s domestic dynamics influence its foreign policy towards the Middle East and vice versa?</td>
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<td>12. What is missed if the conflict in Yemen is conceived of in sectarian terms?</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. In what ways do mass mobilization and everyday resistance differ as modes of political action in the Middle East?</td>
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6.2 Past exam papers and reports

The past four exam papers are below; this paper was first taught in 2015. They had significantly differently content from this year’s version (in particular, qq.4, 11 and 13 of the 2019 paper; q.11, 12 and 14 of the 2018 paper, qq.6-8 in the 2016 and 2017 papers, and qq.5-7 in the 2015 paper relate to content that has not been part of this year’s course). While the mock paper, above, remains the most definitive guide to the structure of the 2020 exam paper, the questions in the past papers may also be helpful for revision practice.

2019.

1. Is the propensity towards unaccountable government in the Middle East a colonial legacy?
2. Is all politics in the Middle East closely connected with issues of identity?
3. How significant has activism by Middle Eastern women been in reforming gender relations within their societies?
4. How have minorities in Middle Eastern states responded to the prospect of persecution or discrimination?
5. Why have attempts to negotiate a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict failed?
6. Do members of the Gulf Cooperation Council need a common enemy in order to work together?
7. To what extent and why have all recent US military interventions in the Middle East been unsuccessful?
8. Have projects of Islamic revivalism necessarily involved confrontation with prevailing power structures?
9. Does contemporary jihadism originate in the writings of Islamist political thinkers?
10. What are the political consequences of the high levels of economic inequality between Middle Eastern states?
11. Do Iraq’s experiences since 2003 demonstrate that democracy without a functioning state has no value?
12. What does the study of the politics of everyday life reveal about authoritarianism in the Middle East?
13. What general lessons should we draw from the 2010-11 Arab Uprisings for the study of social movements?

2018.
1. Is the legacy of European rule in the Middle East more one of ideas than of institutions?
2. What, if anything, remains of Arab nationalism?
3. Why are there so few liberal market economies in the Middle East?
4. How has authoritarianism within the Middle East shaped the context for struggles for gender equality?
5. Does international political involvement in the conflict between Israel and its neighbours restrain local animosities or exacerbate them?
6. What explains the breakdown in relations between many of the states of the Arabian Peninsula from 2015?
7. Does it make any sense to characterise US relations with Middle Eastern states as a form of imperialism?
8. Do groups like al-Qa’ida and the self-styled Islamic State draw upon an older strain of militant Islam to mobilise their supporters?
9. Is modern Shi’á Islamism inextricably bound up with the ideas and policies of the Iranian government?
10. Do the North African states share a distinctive form of politics with the other parts of the Middle East?
11. EITHER (a): Does Turkey’s policy on the Syrian war represent a fundamental discontinuity with its earlier approach to foreign affairs? OR (b): Is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a new type of leader for Turkey?
12. What social or political processes have driven the ‘sectarianisation’ of conflict within the Middle East?
13. What effect has the refugee crisis since c.2015 had on the politics of the Middle East?
14. Have parties with their origins in political Islam had a distinctive effect when they have taken a role in governance within the Arab Middle East?

2017.
1. To what extent are the varying characteristics of Middle Eastern states today attributable to the different circumstances of their creation?
2. Does the plurality of identities within most Middle Eastern states serve as an impediment to democratisation?
3. What are the political consequences of the state’s domination of the economy in most Middle Eastern countries?
4. What explains the vulnerability of many ethnic and religious minorities within the Middle East to persecution?
5. Are Middle Eastern states distinctively ‘masculine’?
6. To what extent can state legislation deliver the shari’a?
7. Has the ambiguity of the Qur’an been more an asset or a liability for Muslim politics?
8. What factors explain the impetus for projects of reform of Islamic law in Muslim states, and what explains their success or failure?
9. Why does the Israeli-Palestinian conflict draw so much political attention from outside the Middle East?
10. What explains the stridency of expressions of mutual hostility across the Persian Gulf over recent years?
11. To what extent do Middle Eastern states look to the United States for regional leadership, and what are the prospects for change in this regard?
12. Does competition or cooperation prevail in relations between Arab states today?
13. Is today’s sectarianism in the Middle East no more than an uninhibited expression of pre-existing divisions?
14. In what ways, if any, is the current Turkish regime fundamentally different from its predecessors since 1923?
15. Is the self-styled ‘Islamic State’ group the intellectual and political legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood?

2016.

1. What consequences did the unresolved legacies of colonialism have for the politics of the modern Middle East?
2. Is political Islam to be understood as a response to the failure of nationalist projects in the Arab Middle East?
3. Have the Arab uprisings from 2010 set back the course of democratisation in most of the region?
4. How useful is the concept of rentierism for explaining the political characteristics of oil-rich Middle Eastern states?
5. What explains the different approaches taken by Middle Eastern states in upholding or challenging discrimination? Answer with respect to EITHER the politics of gender OR the status of ethno-religious minorities.
6. Can the shari’ah be codified? What might be lost, or gained, in the process?
7. What explains the diversity of approaches to the implementation of the idea of an Islamic state, in the contemporary period or the past?
8. To what extent, and in what way, do Islamic institutions check the power of the state?
9. In what respects do the understandings of the past held differently by Palestinians and Israelis serve to perpetuate the conflict between them?
10. Does hostility across the Persian Gulf come primarily from domestic politics or geostrategic ambitions? Answer with respect to one or more countries.

11. In accounting for the reasons for the close involvement of major external powers in the Middle East, what if anything do explanations that focus solely on the role of oil interests miss?

12. How is the mass movement of refugees from, within and through the Middle East reshaping the politics of the region?

13. EITHER: Was Erdoğan’s authoritarian turn inevitable? OR: What accounts for the failure of the Kurdish peace process, and what is the effect of this failure on Turkish foreign policy?

14. Are the reasons for the prominence of sectarian divisions in the Syrian conflict from 2011 similar to those in the Iraq conflict after 2003?

2015.

1. To what extent did France and Britain create the modern Middle East?
2. Does the Middle East show any sign of taking a ‘post-Islamist’ turn?
3. Does democratisation imperil ethnic and religious minorities in Arab countries?
4. Do Arab countries share common themes in their gender politics?
5. How should calls for the application of shari’ah in the Muslim World today be understood?
6. How do Islamic institutions mediate between the Muslim and the state?
7. Do Islam and authoritarianism go hand in hand?
8. How does domestic US politics affect the Arab-Israeli conflict? Answer with respect to either the origins of the 1967 war in the Middle East, or the Oslo process from 1993.
9. Has the security system in the Persian Gulf region moved decisively under the control of local states?
10. Do the Arab Uprisings from 2010 demonstrate that the idea of an ‘Arab states system’ is still useful?
11. Why has the programme of economic liberalisation faltered in many Middle Eastern countries?
12. Was Iran’s ‘Green Movement’ opposing a leader or a system?
13. Have the processes of state-building and nation-building taken very different paths in the Middle East? Answer with respect to either the Palestinians or the Kurds.
14. What lessons can be drawn for other contexts from Turkey’s political trajectory about either (a) how to reconcile Islam and modern politics, or (b) the role of a strong state as an obstacle or a boon to democracy?
15. Have the experiences of Iraq since 2003 and Syria since 2011 demonstrated that there is a ‘Shi’a crescent’ after all?

Examiner’s report 2019

There were 19 candidates who took this paper by examination, and 16 by long essay. Out of the candidates taking the paper by examination, five candidates received first class marks, one candidate received a 2.2, and the other candidates received marks of 2.1.

There were some very good scripts. Many candidates were good at developing their own arguments, and providing evidence for the claims they were making. We were impressed by the range of examples in many exam scripts. The stronger scripts took time to justify their choice of factors/cases. Some questions were more popular than others, with ten candidates answering a question on the Gulf Cooperation Council (Q6) and ten candidates answering a question on the state and democracy in Iraq.
(Q11). All other questions were attempted by at least two candidates, except Q4, which was not chosen by any candidate.

Weaker answers received low 2.1 or 2.2 scores. Often these did not develop a clear argument, or did not use examples to support the main points being made. Sometimes these answers were imprecise or contained material that was superfluous or incorrect. Weaker answers showed an over-reliance on sweeping claims about the international environment (US does or does not want to engage, Russia as a spoiler), taken as self-evident, while avoiding engagement with domestic or regional factors.

The best scripts were notable for their ability to use examples effectively, for their range of references and for their ability to provide critical reflection on aspects of the politics of the Middle East.

**Examiner’s report 2018**

POL12 this year featured 23 students who took the paper by examination and 8 who took it by long essays. Six students overall received a mark of 70 or above, and only one (taking the paper by long essays) received a mark lower than 59. That leaves 24 who received a mark in the 60-69 range, 14 of whom were in the 65-69 range. Put differently, almost two-thirds of students (20/31) received an overall mark of 65 or above.

This mark distribution reflects how essays and exams were generally of a quite high standard this year, more so than in previous years. The large majority of students wrote accurate, well-focused essays that engaged suitably with the academic literature and constructed a coherent argument.

With the assessed essays, the best essays were those which brought out a range of themes and theories, and demonstrated good knowledge of broader debates about the politics of the Middle East – but which then found a way to focus their essays on a particular situation, era or contrast. The less successful essays either kept too narrowly to specific descriptive accounts without framing it within a broader conception of what the question was asking; or, for other essays, didn’t find a clear focus for the discussion, for example by not conveying a clear enough idea of what the question was asking. In 2018-19, the questions will be phrased more broadly than they were this year, so the first issue is less likely to arise, but the second issue becomes even more pertinent to consider.

For the exams, it was striking that students wrote with greater authority, subtlety and sense of judgement when they were addressing events and processes in the twentieth century than when they were writing about contemporary issues. This no doubt reflects the academic literature, for which there is an accumulated sense of debate for issues that are now older. But it does entail that students who choose to write about contemporary affairs – as we hope they do – should be looking more to develop a more rounded, multi-faceted appreciation of current debates, rather than accepting any one interpretation as valid. It was striking how students who wrote about imperial legacies and the force of Arab nationalism drew upon multiple sources, ideas, interpretations and theories, and formulated their own distinctive judgements on the back of them; while those who wrote about post-2015 refugees in the Middle East simply regurgitated the substance of two or three articles.

In terms of subject matter of exam answers, the most popular questions were on the drivers of sectarianism (q.12, 10 responses), the legacy of European rule (q.1, 9 responses) and Gulf crises (q.6,
8 responses). It was disappointing that only one student took the question on gender struggles, although that student did it well: very few other exam essays brought in issues related explicitly to the politics of gender.

Those points aside, most students taking this paper by examination this year have a well-developed sense of how to write a good essay – and equally the pitfalls to avoid. Few students wrote descriptive narratives instead of structured arguments, for example. And the best scripts were able to develop critical insights into influential academic texts while not losing sight of the need to develop a coherent, sustained argument of their own. The large majority of scripts were able to relate general arguments well to specific national and regional contexts. Many of the more common problems in previous years weren’t apparent in this set of scripts, and future students may want to look back at earlier examiners’ reports to have a sense of the ways in which their less illustrious predecessors have sometimes struggled with the POL12 exam.

Examiners’ report 2017
This year’s paper had 36 students. Six of the exam candidates received an average mark of 70+ from both examiners, 23 received an average mark in the 60-69 range, and seven received an average mark in the 50-59 range. No-one received an overall mark lower than 52.

There was a fairly heavy bunching of answers in response to the questions on sectarianism (21 answers), the creation of states in the Middle East (17 answers) and international attention on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (16 answers). The questions about pluralism in democratisation, US regional leadership and the legacies of the Muslim Brotherhood each drew 7-10 responses, and all remaining questions received 5 or fewer responses. For a course that is taught broadly about the region, and which is designed to stimulate a range of new interests among its students, this bunching was surprising and somewhat disappointing for the examiners.

The relatively low number of firsts – lower as a proportion than in previous years – was primarily a consequence of a large number of candidates not structuring their essays around answering the question. The better answers devised an essay framework that was centrally about the question, and deployed suitable empirical material as part of the process of reasoning towards a conclusion. By contrast, too many students wrote long narratives or explanations that were not directly relevant to the question.

An example is question 1, for which many students wrote a general history of the formation of states in the Middle East, without attention to differences in the circumstances of their creation (which is the starting point for the question) and often with only a few words in the conclusion about how this does or does not explain their varying characteristics today (which is the central issue at stake in it). It would have been much better to think first about what those relevant ‘varying characteristics’ today are, and then to structure an essay around how state-formation can or cannot explain them.

In general, there were too many students who resorted to long historical narratives which didn’t have an underlying argument. These generally began with something along the lines of ‘To understand Topic X, we must first appreciate the historical background...’, thus beginning a simple chronologically-plotted account which in many cases accounted for over half the essay. The Israeli-Palestinian question (q.9), for instance, drew a number of general histories of the conflict, going
back to the 19th Century, even though the question was about the international attention paid to it. These essays were mostly taken as unfocused, and therefore not eligible to receive a mark higher than 59 according to the marking criteria.

It was also rather curious to see many students seem to have learned lots of data – such as percentages who affirmed something in an opinion poll, or where a particular country stands in some league tables (which, incidentally, are of dubious intellectual value). In a number of essays, the structure seemed to have been designed to take us to this factoid, even though its relevance to the question was marginal at best. This is a poor trade-off: the deployment of knowledge only contributes to the essay if it is relevant to the question.

The sectarianism question generally drew essays that were relevant to answering the question, but a number of students took it to demand a critique of ‘primordialism’ rather than explore whether any sectarian identity existed before the current conflicts in Syria and Iraq. A false contrast was created between those who see an unchanging division from the schism in the 7th Century to the present (a perspective that was readily dismissed) and those who look solely at elite manipulation during the current conflicts.

As always, the best essays didn’t stick to some narrow formula for essay writing, but tackled the topic in a focused and often innovative way – aware of the arguments in the literature, but able to think independently of them. Many also put to good use specific and detailed examples of places, periods or political movements. The examiners weren’t reluctant to give marks of 80+ to such essays. They would have happily given more if a greater number of students had been willing to be more adventurous in their essays.

Examiners’ report 2016
34 students took this paper, and the quality was generally encouraging. Six students received average marks of 70 or more, and a further ten students received average marks of 65-69. Five students were in the 55-59 range, but no-one was below it. All the questions on the exam paper were taken by at least two students. The most popular questions were on sectarianism (q.14, 20 answers) and the politics of the Persian Gulf (q.10, 10 answers).

The best essays, as always, retained a close focus on the question while demonstrating awareness of a broad range of relevant arguments. The less successful answers, by contrast, were let down by the mismatch between the topic of the question and their actual discussion. An example of this is the question on how Israelis’ and Palestinians’ understandings of the past served to perpetuate the conflict (q.9). This was a difficult question, but those candidates who thought seriously about what sorts of arguments could be made for how the historical understandings of the participants informed their conflictual actions were rewarded with some of the highest marks awarded for single essays this year. By contrast, those who provided simple descriptive narratives of the modern history of the conflict without regard for what the question was asking received some of the lowest marks. A number of students answered the question as if it were asking ‘to what extent do...’, weighing its influence up against other factors, but the question was ‘in what ways do..’, which requires a different sort of answer. It has to be assumed that the two students who just wrote about how territorial ambitions perpetuate the conflict, the subject of the supervision question during the year,
didn’t know anything about the conflict aside from their own supervision essays, and were marked down accordingly.

This year most students demonstrated good knowledge of the range of arguments made by relevant authors. The question on the codification of the shari’ah (q.6) prompted most students who answered that question to reflect closely and carefully on the extent to which arguments from authors such as Vikor and Hallaq worked, identifying what they could be seen to have missed, and comparing their approaches. Some questions, such as this, can be usefully answered through engaging in careful critical analysis of key texts, as it leads to a nuanced answer to the exam question.

Other questions prompted essays which combined textual analysis with the deployment of detailed empirical examples. The question on the usefulness of the concept of rentierism (q.4) required an explanation of that concept, which most students taking the question were able to provide; the distinguishing factor from there was how closely the conceptual account could be made to fit with examples. In this, a pleasing number of students were able to convey substantive information accurately about a range of cases, from Algeria to Kuwait, in order to interrogate the concept.

There were two specific issues that problematised a number of essays this year. The first was that three questions specifically asked for a comparative understanding: qq.5 and 7, which asked candidates to explain the diversity of approaches to discrimination and the implementation of the idea of an Islamic state respectively; and q.14, which asked for a comparison between the reasons for sectarian polarisation in Syria and Iraq. Many students answering these questions were able to make comparisons, but a significant minority only discussed one case at length, typically Tunisia for the sub-question on gender discrimination, and Iraq for the question on sectarianism. Clearly comparison between cases is not possible if candidates only know about and discuss one case.

The second issue comes from candidates avoiding key terms in the question. The question on the effect of the ‘unresolved legacies of colonialism’ (q.1) does require answers that impute meaning to that term: there isn’t a single answer to what those ‘unresolved legacies’ might be, but essays which just wrote generally on the effects of colonialism in the region were missing a trick. Similarly, those who wrote on ‘Islamic institutions’ (q.8) without providing a clear understanding of what was meant by that term retained a level of ambiguity that hindered their clarity.

One pleasing aspect of this year’s scripts was the extent to which students were able to relate established debates to contemporary events. An example of this was the ways in which the question on hostility across the Persian Gulf (q.10) was answered by using contending approaches to understanding Iranian foreign policy in order to discuss the Vienna deal of July 2015. The number of students who used recent examples, and did so usually well, provides encouragement to the course’s aspiration that a historically and theoretically grounded approach can usefully inform our understanding of the contemporary Middle East.
Examiners’ report 2015
This was the first year of the Middle East paper, and it drew a good number of students. 26 students took the exam, and a further 2 students took the paper by long essay.

In general, the quality of exam scripts and long essays was high: there were quite a few scripts demonstrating an outstanding level of understanding, and two thoroughly researched and innovative long essays. Three scripts were judged by the both examiners to fall below the 2.1 standard, but there were none below the 2.2 level.

The best scripts and long essays for this paper drew upon detailed knowledge to make their arguments, whilst recognising and evaluating critically contrasting arguments. The very best ranged across material from the different reading lists within the same essay, demonstrating independent thinking and well-structured writing intentions.

The most significant limitations were as follows. First, quite a few exam essays did not demonstrate a good understanding of key concepts in the questions (eg ‘post-Islamist’, ‘Arab states system’): this indicates a limited extent of careful reading. Secondly, a few students adopted a strategy of giving a straightforward answer to the question in the opening section of the essay, and filling the rest of the essay with factual information to back up their starting assertion. Even if the information is entirely correct, this is an approach that cannot reach a 2.1 standard: it’s not making an argument. It’d be much better to recognise different real or plausible potential answers, and evaluate between them. Thirdly, there was a surprisingly large number of basic factual inaccuracies, often quite trivial in form (such as in stating the years of particular events), but which cumulatively within the same script led to a sense of carelessness.

In general, most students showed they could combine broader thematic analysis with attention to the politics of particular places. It was good to see that the empirical material drawn upon by students ranged across the region, from detailed discussions of the place of Islam in Morocco through to engaging accounts of gender politics in Oman. There was useful attention to the particularities of politics in Iran, Turkey and Israel, alongside the more ‘standard’ reference points in Middle Eastern studies (Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq). It was particularly encouraging to read close, critical engagement with the two case studies of Turkey and the ‘new sectarianism’. One pleasing aspect of the exam scripts was that all the questions were attempted by at least one student, and no question received more than ten responses: one hopes that this reflects the diversity of interests and approaches that the course was intending to stimulate.
7. Other approaches to understanding Middle Eastern politics

In order to develop a more rounded understanding of Middle Eastern politics, going beyond traditional academic sources is necessary. This section provides a few suggestions of websites, literary fiction and cinema that will help fill out your thinking. Tastes and inclinations vary, and there is no claim to exhaustiveness in the lists below; they do however provide some potential starting points for those beginning to engage with these topics. Suggestions of items to add to any of these lists would always be appreciated.

7.1 Websites
Aside from the standard Anglo-American news sources, you may want to dip in to some of the following on-line sources:

www.merip.org
- The Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) regularly produces short online articles on its website from leading scholars on contemporary problems or issues, alongside its established academic journal, Middle East Report. Although it doesn’t try to be a systematic source of information, these interventions are worth reading for the new insights and attention they give on particular themes, usually those which are underreported. It tends to have a critical approach to Western policy in the region.

www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/
- Qatar-based al-Jazeera news has a slick English-language news website that has a level of detail in promptly reporting on Middle Eastern politics that others lack. The video and documentary content is also generally of high quality. It has though increasingly come to follow a Western news agenda that limits its distinctiveness.

www.al-monitor.com
- Al-Monitor is a news website, drawing largely upon local journalists in the Middle East to provide more detailed coverage of and commentary on contemporary stories. Quality is variable, but the range of issues and perspectives and the promptness of the reporting makes this source often particularly useful.

- The International Crisis Group (ICG) produces well-researched and often quite original reports on contemporary problem-areas. It always makes policy prescriptions, and so the style of writing isn’t really appropriate for follow for this paper. Try also not to approach the region simply as an arena for various ‘crises’. Nevertheless, the reports on the Middle East are usually well worth reading. The ICG takes a liberal interventionist approach to most issues.

www.project-syndicate.org/world-affairs
- Hosts commentary pieces from journalists, politicians and analysts around the world. It is not specific to the Middle East, but it has articles taken (and translated) from a fairly significant number of Middle Eastern publications.

www.arabist.net
- The consistently engaging and sometimes quite offbeat blog run by Cairo-based Issandr El Amrani.
The entries are mostly on Egyptian politics, but the blog also contains lots of helpful links to other articles on the wider politics of the region.

www.Jadaliyya.com
- This is the e-zine of the Washington-based Arab Studies Institute. At its best, it hosts engaging reflections from scholars on contemporary developments in the Arab world. At its worst, it produces turgid and posturing social theory.

7.2 Literary fiction (either in English translation or originally in English)
For those interested in the modern classics of Middle Eastern literature, attention will readily be drawn to Naguib Mahfouz’ monumental Cairo Trilogy (1956-57), Ghassan Kanafani’s story of Palestinian refugee life, Men in the Sun (1962), Emile Habibi’sdarkly comic Secret Life of Saeed, The Pessoptimist (1974), Amos Oz’s mysterious tales of memory and disillusion in Israel, My Michael (1968) and A Perfect Peace (1982), and Elias Khoury’s fractured story of Beirut during the Lebanese civil war, Little Mountain (1977). The list below is not of such ‘classics’, but of more recent and perhaps idiosyncratic works that bring out themes, debates or struggles in contemporary political life in the region.

- Hassan Blasim, The Iraqi Christ (2013). As a series of short – some very short – stories, this is a great starting point for thinking about how literary responses to war can inform one’s understanding of politics. Some of the stories are shockingly macabre.

- Jokha al-Harthi, Celestial Bodies (2018). A beguiling account of an Omani family, bringing out well the disruptions, jealousies and miscomprehensions that surround the transformation of life amidst the country’s new wealth over the past 50 years.


- Kanan Makiya, The Rope (2016). A rather lightly fictionalised account of the experience of a Shi’a militiaman in Najaf, through which to tell the account of the early years of the US occupation of Iraq. Makiya uses the narrator to ventriloquise his own political views, but still the novel has its value.

- Abdo Khal, Throwing Sparks (2009). A powerful sustained account of living in the shadow of ruthless personalised (but also, illuminatingly, anonymous) authority, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

- Orly Castel-Bloom, Human Parts (2002). Perhaps the most realistic of Castel-Bloom’s works, it engages with how Israelis understand and respond to ‘violence’. The early Dolly City (1992), set in a lightly fictionalised Tel Aviv, portrayed as gruesome and nihilistic, may also be of interest.

- Susan Abulhawa, The Blue Between Sky and Water (2015). Of the many Palestinians in exile who write stories about returning to Palestine, this is perhaps the best contemporary example: an American-born girl returning to live in the Gaza Strip with her family, and so opening up the character of the place.
- Khairy Shalaby, *The Lodging House* (2003). Set within the Egyptian urban underclass, seen through the eyes of a student drop-out, the book engages with the multiple stories and struggles that rarely capture wider attention. The later novel, *The Time-Travels of the Man who Sold Pickles and Sweets*, is uproarious funny, albeit less obviously politically relevant.

- Hanan al-Shaykh, *I Sweep the Sun off Rooftops* (1998). Perhaps the most widely read female Arab author in English, this is a diverse collection of 17 stories set around the region and in diasporas. The novels are more popular and may also be of interest.

- Elif Shafak, *The Architect’s Apprentice* (2014). Although it’s set in 16th Century Istanbul, and so doesn’t quite match the objective of engaging you with contemporary politics, the novel brings out a resilient sense of the diversity, social divisions and self-conceptions of the Ottoman Empire, for those drawn to sweeping historical epics.

- Alaa al-Aswany, *The Yacoubian Building* (2002). One of the most highly regarded novels of recent years, it is the story of the residents of one apartment bloc in central Cairo, drawing in the many sides of the modern city.


### 7.3 Films

These are listed with a few suggestions per country. The films listed are not necessarily the best representatives of national cinematic traditions, but are on here because of the ways in which they link up with political themes in the course (and because subtitled versions are readily available).


**Iran**: *Offside* (2006) is a comic take on Iran’s gender restrictions. *Secret Ballot* (2001) is an engaging and surreal if slowly-paced story of an election day that explores the ways in which different understandings of Iran’s politics are brought out. *Persepolis* (2007), based on the graphic novel of Marjane Satrapi, was widely acclaimed; quite a bit of it is about life in exile, rather than Iran itself.

**Palestine**: *Divine Intervention* (2002) is a dark comedy set mostly in Nazareth; as a series of sketches, it works like a short story collection. *The Time that Remains* (2009), also directed by Elia Suleiman, charts an eventful life across four episodes.

**Syria**: *The Night* (1993), a complex epic spanning three generations of a family from the Golan Heights.

**Israel**: *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) revolves around an Israeli soldier’s memories of the Lebanon war. *Lemon Tree* (2008) uses the struggle between two neighbours – the family of an Israeli defence minister and a Palestinian widow – to illustrate how interpersonal and political connections interact.
Turkey: *Breath* (2009) is an anti-war film about a unit of Turkish soldiers based in the southeast. *On the Way to School* (2008) is a documentary about a young Turkish teacher who struggles to communicate with his Kurdish pupils.