Introduction to Middle East Politics

AMYN B. SAJOO (asajoo@sfu.ca)
Harbour Centre 2260, Thurs, 5:30—9:20
Office Hrs: Thurs. 4-5 (HC 2148, appointments)

“Nothing about the region is simple – not its ‘ancient and dazzling cultures,’ not its ‘turbulent social upheaval,’ not even its ‘brutish violence’.”
Sarah Moawad, “Ancient and Dazzling Cultures,” Muftah.org, Dec 25, 2015

“In a speech laying out his plans to repay Egypt’s titanic debt, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi said, ‘By God, if it were possible for me to be sold, I would sell myself.’ An anonymous vender put Sisi up for sale on eBay. The President (free shipping, no returns) was ‘slightly used,’ the seller noted, by his previous owners — royals from the Gulf. Bidding reached more than one hundred thousand dollars…”

A century ago, the Sykes-Picot agreement began shaping the frontiers of today’s Middle East — while the 1917 Balfour Declaration came to frame the Palestine-Israeli clash. The region has been at the crossroads of 20th century global politics — through to “the last great revolution” (Iran’s in 1979), the Gulf and Iraq wars, the Arab Spring of 2011, and the ongoing turmoil in Syria and Iraq. Do oil and religion explain most of the region’s modern history and politics? What was the nationalist legacy of the Middle East’s long encounter with the West and the Ottoman Empire? Are Middle Eastern cultures inherently resistant to individual human rights, gender equality and civil society, as often suggested by scholars and journalists alike? These questions will receive close attention as part of our broad appraisal of the social and political dynamics of the Middle East. Multimedia resources will inform our sessions in class and on Canvas.

Texts

- Additional readings will be posted online.

Belzberg Reserves


Evaluation

Active participation is expected in all sessions; attendance is mandatory. Two reading reports (1500 words, by deadline) out of three assigned, a group presentation to the class, and a take-home exam, are required.

Reports: 30%  Participation: 10%  Class Presentation: 20%  Final Exam: 40%
CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Each group has **45 minutes** to present to the class on the designated topic. This will be followed by a **class discussion** of upto 30 minutes.

The **focus** of each group presentation should be on **key themes** selected from the designated reading(s). Formulate a “why” question at the outset, to which your group as a whole will respond. Begin the group presentation with a quick summary, and indicate what each member will address. Use maps and timelines to situate your material — and be creative with your format! Do ensure that group members have equal time. You may pose questions to the class for discussion.

The use of audio-visual tools such as PowerPoint and video-clips is strongly encouraged; handouts are also welcome. Do post your group presentation on the course site (“Discussions” tab) **after** the session.

Grading on the presentation is individual. However, this is obviously influenced by the overall quality of the group’s performance. Effective teamwork is therefore vital to success. Class members earn contribution marks for informed participation.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to read and understand the university’s policies with regard to academic dishonesty (T10.02-03), available at: [http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/teaching.html](http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/teaching.html)

Forms of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to the following:

- Submitting all or a portion of the same work for credit in more than one course.
- Representing another person’s work as your own for course assignments.
- Failure to acknowledge sources of facts, information, analyses, interpretations, and arguments that you incorporate in your work, whether from a source that is written, spoken communication, or the internet and whether it is published and unpublished. Appropriate documentation of your sources is necessary when you quote, paraphrase or incorporate information and ideas generated by others. In particular, please be aware that “patchwriting” is unacceptable.

All students in SIS classes are expected to read the SFU Library lesson on “What is Plagiarism?” and take the interactive tutorial, “Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism”

~ Weekly Outline ~

- Readings posted on the Canvas website are marked “{W}.”

1 **(Sept 7)** Framing this course: scope, objectives, approach, and expectations with regard to key themes and deliverables. Working groups formed for this semester.
**Background Readings:** Ilan Pappé, “Whose Modern Times?” — **TMME,** Intro {W}; Filali-Ansary, “Languages of the Arab Revolutions” — **JoD,** Apr 2012 {W}.

2 **(Sept 14)** Historical, Social and Political Landscape; Markers of Modern Identity. Orientalism as an overarching influence on how we perceive the Middle East today.
**Primary Doc:** The Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1916 {W}.

**Class Presentation:** Group 1
1st **Analytical Report assigned.**
**Read:** Moghadam & Decker, “Social Change in the Middle East” — **TME** 2; Cammet & Diwan, “The Political Economy of Development” — **TME** 3; Pappé, “The Rural History,” and “Urban History” — **TMME** 2 and 3.

4 **(Sept 28)** Civic Culture, Religion, and Governance 1: Foundations
1st **Analytical Report due. Class Presentation:** Group 2
**Read:** Lee & Shitrit, “Religion, Society, & Politics” — **TME** 5; Sajoo, “Civic Quests & Bequests” — CSMW 1 {W}; Lib E-Text; Al-Azm, “Arab Nationalism, Islamism & the Arab Uprisings,” The New Middle East-12 {W}; “Summer of Progress for Women,” **The Economist,** 24 Aug 2017 {W}.
**Primary Doc:** Marrakesh Declaration on Religious Minority Rights (2016).

5 **(Oct 5)** Civic Culture, Religion, and Governance 2: Institutions, Post 9/11 Fractures
2nd **Analytical Report assigned.**
**Class Presentation:** Group 3
6 (Oct 12) Regional Contexts 1: Turkey and Iran.

**2nd Analytical Report due. Presentation:** Group 4.


7 (Oct 19) Regional Contexts 2: The Arabian Gulf

**Presentation:** Group 5.

**3rd Analytical Report assigned**


8 (Oct 26) Regional Contexts 3: Egypt and the Maghreb

**3rd Analytical Report due. Presentation:** Group 6.


9 (Nov 2) Regional Contexts 5: Palestine — modern social & political dynamics.

**Class Presentation:** Group 7

**Read:** Tartir and Challand, “Palestine” — *TME* 20; Shitrit, “Israel” — *TME* 13; Brand, “Jordan” — *TME* 14; Salem, “Lebanon” — *TME* 16; Tessler, “Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” — *TME* 7; “Middle East Peace Process” — *Economist*, 16 Mar 2013 {W}.

**Primary Docs:** *The Balfour Declaration; UN Partition Resolution (181), 1947* {W}.

10 (Nov 9) Guest Lecture: Prof. Gershon Shafir, U California-S Diego: *Israel-Palestine*

11 (Nov 16) September 11 and Beyond: Iraq, Syria, and Libya


12 (Nov 23) Key Themes Revisited.


**Take-home exam:** due Nov 30, 3 pm {hardcopy, HC 2300, no late submissions}