

AIE255 Issues and Themes in Middle East Politics

Week 1 - Introduction

Staff

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Honours

4th year of studies

Research project of choice

Introduction and overview of the unit

- 19th May, 9am Essay (60%) due *or Simulation (5th May – 16th May)*
- 2nd June – 9th June Online Test
- Essay (3000 words)
- Topic: Briefing Paper outlining three policy options the USA could pursue to facilitate stability and security in Yemen over the next five years, make a recommendation of which of these options is most preferable including detailed reasoning of your choice
- Not essay, much more professional writing (more realistic writing for actual career job later on, to be able to write policy papers)
- 2nd assessment: online test (online exam, 40%) via CloudDeakin
- Timed attempt (only 1), almost all content is heavily related to lectures (some readings, but mostly lectures)

Ways of looking at the Middle East... and why it is so important

- Reflection of euro-centric outlook
- Definition of Middle East: 22 Arab League states, including north African states, Turkey, Iran, Israel, they share key attributes, shared religion (predominantly Islam (Muslims), Sunni/Shia)/**language** (vast majority of population speaks Arabic)/history (rise+ spread of Islam, Ottoman empire, independence after WW2, Arab spring)/ culture (Islamic culture+ heritage runs through most of countries, except Turkey, Iran, Israel), not Afghanistan though
- Predominately Muslim (about 90% of population, except Israel) but only 20% of world's Muslim population, Mecca birthplace of Islam
- All Arab, except Turkey, Iran, Israel
- ME stretches over three continents, cross-roads of civilisation
- Important: oil, cross-civilisation, hub of terrorism and counter-terrorism, history, birthplace of three great religions, modern day trade (Australia: grains, life-huddle, oil, tourism, education), geographic location: Indian Ocean and relationship to world, during Cold War era strategic location for proxy-wars, humanitarian issues (refugees, detention/processing centres, civil wars in Syria, Libya, ongoing issues in Iran, nuclear impasse),
- Geneva-Peace-Conference

Weekly Readings:

Roger Owen, State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East, 2004. Chapter 1:

The End of Empires: The Emergence of the Modern Middle Eastern State System

L. Carl Brown, International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game, 1984, Introduction

Week 2: Leadership & the role of religion in the ME

What is leadership?

- Its legitimacy/support
- ME leadership hard to characterise: Michael Hudson characterizes politics of ME as "mercurial, hyperbolic, irrational, mysterious, uncertain, and dangerous"
- Legitimacy and leadership closely intertwined, hard to separate -> legitimacy is prerequisite for leadership
- Traditional: eg in Jordan: Monarchy, King Abdullah II, legitimacy comes from his heritage
- Rational: eg in Israel: Prime Minister Netanyahu, legitimacy comes from bureaucratic system
- Charismatic: eg in Libya: Gaddafi, legitimacy comes from personality features but hard to define exactly -> can be good and bad

- Ideology: principles and ideals form basis of policies and political ideology – role is to answer who am I?
 - o **Zionism**: not necessarily a religious ideology, (re-)establishment of a homeland for Jews in Palestine, continues today as attempt for a modern state of Israel → most common one in ME today
 - o Ultra-orthodox groups: Haredim
- The Knesset (1948): is the Israeli parliament, has no upper-house -> religious parties can have a huge effect in policy-making, to get seat in 120 seats parliament only need 2% minimum in vote nationally -> even minor parties can get into Parliament and nobody ever holds the majority (only one government since establishment) -> dominated by COALITIONS
 - o All ultra-orthodox groups pretty much think that land was given to Israelis by god -> major political groups have to partner up w these groups -> small racial-extremist groups win influence and power
- Recent debate over conscription – only when you are enrolled in religious studies you can put on hold/defer National Service (ultra-orthodox Jews avoid regularly -> promotes tension within society, about 20-thousands/year avoid National Service)
- Netanyahu tries to get rid of loop-hole
- **Political Islam**: term used to encompass Islam in the political sphere -> Mohammed was political as well as religious figure, governed community of believers in Medina and Mekka very effectively, theologically and legally -> Political Islam not secular!
- **Koran**: equivalent to Christian bible, political system is based on Koran, together w Hadith (sayings of the prophet), Sunnah (ways of the prophet) → all three together make up Sharia (Holy Law), legal systems ‘Western style’ as outcome of Colonialism (British)
- Islam and politics are meant to mix! (opposed to Western bureaucratic system)
- Islamic Law affects all parts of life (personal, official, decision-making, execution of government) → leaders gain legitimacy by connection to prophet (eg Gaddafi, Hussein)
- **Theocracy**: ultimate goal for Political Islam
- Ummah: common concept, Muslim community/nation -> implicates ‘global-Muslim-nation’ (Pan-Arabism), idea that you stand/fight together (Saudi-Arabia biggest donor of aid)
- Great rift btw Sunni and Shia
- Iran - Iraq war: obvious issue, Iran predominantly Shia, Iraq also but ruled by Sunni dictator -> war for 8 years
- 2003 Invasion of Iraq, overthrow of Sunni government in regime
- Various groups during Lebanese civil war have all been branches of major battle ground of
- Sects: Syria → (Allowai, Assad) concentration of power in Assad’s hands major issue for opposition (like in Hama) which is predominantly Sunni (being persecuted by Allowai’s)
- Careful talking about the Muslim, the Jews, the Christians → many differences within itself
- **Extremism**: within Islam extreme forms have gained lots of influence
- Importance of the Caliphate: belief/ideology to unit all Muslims in one place, different groups have different approaches on how to achieve this but all want society (Caliphate) based on teachings of the prophet, Islam and political ideas of Islam
- Arab Spring; throwing off authoritarian, secular dictatorships, eg in Yemen, Egypt, Libya, (Syria) and establish political Islam
- Change of leadership/change of ideology: increased importance on political Islam but still many differences depending on country/region

Discussion questions:

Is there a connection between ideology and power?

Can you get into power without an ideology? – eg. military backed, facilitated by contacts

Is it important that people believe in your ideology? How can you get people to believe in it? – pushed by media attention/support, right spot at the right time

Is religion in the ME context encouraging conflict/violence? – makes people more passionate

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