

## Contemporary issues in the Arab and Muslim World

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Yarmouk Palestinian Camp – Damascus – 2015



## **Objectives and description**

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This course constitutes an introduction to the key issues in Middle East politics nowadays. It deals mainly with the Machreq states and numerous local non-state actors, including refugees and migrants. I will start the course with a general lecture introducing Middle Eastern politics through its key historical moments in the XX<sup>th</sup> century that brought up the modern nation-state system from the remains of the Ottoman Empire and authoritarian regimes once states became independent. I will also shed a light on the current interregnum period faced by the entire region in the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and new local alliances.

The thematic organization of the course intends to open several debates on today's issues at stake in the Middle East region. Starting with wide-reaching issues and in order to make the link with the inaugural session, the first theme proposes to deal with authoritarianism in the Middle East. Second, we will continue with the longstanding problem of the Palestinian refugees. This will bring us to the main internal divisions on the Palestinian political scene by discussing the political success of the Hamas movement since 2006 with its domination of Gaza.

Shifting to the neighbouring state, Lebanon, the two following sessions will discuss sectarianism as a mode of governance and the role of Hizbullah as a powerful political party and an armed non-state actor. The Syrian issue will be then analysed through the fate of millions of refugees living in Lebanon in Jordan, a lasting problem for the decade to come. In the Machreq, the political trajectory of Iraq raises the question of the Kurdish minority and how the political leaders have managed to mobilise around their ethnic identity to secure greater autonomy in the post-Saddam era. The final session will focus on al-Qaida, the jihadist matrix of the Islamic State, in order to shed light on the changing phenomenon of the violent movements in political Islam. At the beginning of each class, after the discussion of the reading of the week, I will briefly introduce each theme before leaving the floor to oral presentations.

## **Requirements and grading**

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The “conférence de méthode” (CM) is aimed to be a discussion class. This implies mandatory diligence, personal commitment and regular work.

Active and well-prepared participation is expected. Readings are compulsory; at every session we will discuss them together: take time at home to read and take notes. One of you, randomly selected, may be asked to present the assigned reading of the week orally.

To get ready for discussion, the following questions must be addressed to each text:

→ What is the author's main thesis?

→ What arguments are developed to defend it?

→ What sort of empirical material is used? Does it fit with the corresponding arguments?

→ How does the text contribute to the field?

→ What is your personal opinion of the text?

- 10 % of the overall grade reflects your participation grade in class throughout the semester.

### • Oral presentation

- Each one of you will give a 15 minute-long oral presentation on an assigned topic. You will have to hand out the outline of your presentation and your bibliography, presented according to international standards. Additionally, you can use a Powerpoint presentation.

When preparing an oral presentation, keep in mind the following methodological advice:

→ An oral presentation must be built around a thesis. You are supposed to provide a demonstration, including arguments and examples to prove your assertions.

→ You need to use academic sources for your presentation: books, articles of academic journals, newspapers or magazine articles if they are scholarly in nature. Online sources are OK, but again they need to be scholarly in nature: wikipedia.com does not count! However you may use it, as well as movies, blogs, radio programs, in addition to academic sources.

- 50% of the overall grade: Oral presentations based on readings (see below)

### • Final assessment

- 40 % of the global grade: Final written exam: this 1h30 exam will take place at the end of the semester on December 12th and will consist in a choice between two citations to comment among the themes listed below.

## Course schedule

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### 1. Introduction

First hour: general presentation of the region of the Middle East

Second hour: discussion of the first reading, here below:

Reading	Raffaella Del Sarto, Malmvig Helle, Soler i Lecha Eduard, <i>Interregnum: the regional order in the Middle East and North Africa after 2011</i> , MENARA final report, No 1, 2019.
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### 2. Authoritarian regimes

Reading	Philippe Droz-Vincent, "Authoritarianism, Revolutions, Armies and Arab Regime Transitions", <i>The International Spectator</i> , Volume 46, 2011, Issue 2, pp. 5-21.
Oral presentation 1	Did Tunisia succeeded to get rid of the authoritarian system that prevailed under Ben Ali? (Mullin, 2015)
Oral presentation 2	Why some authoritarian regimes fall when facing social protests while other don't? (Volpi, 2012)

### 3. Palestine and the Palestinian refugee issue

Reading	Riccardo Bocco, Jalal al-Husseini, "The Status of the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East: The Right of Return and UNRWA in Perspective", <i>Refugee Survey Quarterly</i> , Volume 28, 2010, Issues 2&3, pp. 260-285.
Oral presentation 1	Where lies the border between Israel and the future state of Palestine? (Khamaisi, 2008)
Oral presentation 2	Why are Palestinian refugees facing a legal limbo in Lebanon? (Knudsen, 2009)

### 4. Gaza and the Hamas movement

Reading	Manal Jamal, "Beyond Fateh Corruption and Mass Discontent: Hamas, the Palestinian Left and the 2006 Legislative Elections", <i>British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</i> , Volume 40, 2013, Issue 3, pp. 273-294.
Oral presentation 1	The marginalization and abandonment of Gaza: an Israeli system of control? (Peteet, 2011)
Oral presentation 2	Can the Hamas movement be a security provider for the population of Gaza? (Berti & Gutierrez, 2016)

## 5. Lebanon and the sectarianism

Reading	Antoine Apprioual, "Lebanon's Political Stalemate: The Failure of the Sectarian Regime", <i>POMEAS Policy Brief</i> , 11, February 2016
Oral presentation 1	Are sectarianism and anti-sectarianism equally unable to address the real issues like social inequalities? (Shaery-Yazdi, 2020)
Oral presentation 2	Is sectarianism the main driver of the current stalemate Lebanon is facing? (Baumann, 2019)

## 6. Hizbullah: an Iranian proxy?

Reading	Marc De Vore, Armin B. Stähli, "Explaining Hizbullah's Effectiveness: Internal and External Determinants of the Rise of Violent Non-State Actor", <i>Terrorism and Political Violence</i> , Volume 27, 2015, Issue 2, pp. 331-357.
Oral presentation 1	How can you explain the popularity of Hizbullah? (Karagiannis 2009)
Oral presentation 2	What is the relationship between Hizbullah's success and the borderland region of South Lebanon? (Meier 2015)

## 7. The Syrian refugee issue

Reading	Lewis Turner, "Explaining the (Non)-Encampment of Syrian Refugees: Security, Class and the Labour Market in Lebanon and Jordan", <i>Mediterranean Politics</i> , Volume 20, 2015, Issue 3, pp. 386-404.
Oral presentation 1	What are the main reasons for the precarity of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon? (Janmyr, 2016)
Oral presentation 2	Why is the integration of Syrian refugees in the Jordanian labour market a problematic issue? (Lenner & Turner, 2019)

\_\_\_\_\_ WEEK OFF \_\_\_\_\_

## 8. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Kurdish identity

Reading	Denise Natali, "Manufacturing Identity and managing the Kurds in Iraq", in B. O'Leary, I.S. Lustick, T. Callaghy (eds), <i>Right-sizing the State: The Politics of moving borders</i> , Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 253-288.
Oral presentation 1	What are the disputed territories showing of the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad? (Bartu, 2010)
Oral presentation 2	What is at stake in the exploitation of the natural resources by the KRG in the north of Iraq? (Abdulrahman, 2017)

## 9. From al-Qaida matrix to ISIS and HTS

Reading	Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, "Al Qaeda and the reinvention of terrorism" in J.M. Hanhimäki, B. Blumeneau (eds), <i>An International History of Terrorism</i> , London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 230-244.
Oral presentation 1	Explain the successes and setbacks faced by IS in its implantation in Syria? (Legrand 2014)
Oral presentation 2	What is specific in the trajectory of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Idlib as an offspring of al-Qaida? (Drevon & Haenni, 2021)

### Specific Bibliography

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The following titles only refer to the abovementioned references for oral presentations. Additional references will be provided upon a request.

Abdulrahman Salman, "Natural resources in Kurdistan and the legitimacy of their exploitation by the regional authorities. Water, oil, and gas", *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 2017, DOI: 10.1080/00207233.2017.1374074

Bartu Peter, « Wrestling with the Integrity of a Nation: The Disputed Internal Boundaries in Iraq », *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, No 6, 2010, pp. 1329-1343.

Baumann Hannes, « The Causes, Nature, and Effects of the Current Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism », *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 25, No 1, 2019, pp. 61-77.

Berti Benedetta, Beatriz Gutierrez, « Rebel-to-political and back? Hamas as a security provider in Gaza between rebellion, politics and governance », *Democratization*, Vol. 23, No 6, 2016, pp. 1059-1076.

Drevon Jerome, Haenni Patrick, *How Global Jihad Relocalises and Where it Leads. The Case of HTS, the Former AQ Franchise in Syria*, European University institute, RSC, Fiesole, Working paper n° 8, 2021.

Janmyr Maja, « Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon », *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No 4, 2016, pp. 58-78.

Karagiannis Emmanuel, « Hizballah as a Social Movement Organization: A framing Approach », *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 14, No 3, 2009, pp. 365-383.

Khamaisi Rassem, « From Imposed Ceasefire Line to International border: The Issue of the Green Line Between Palestine and Israel », *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 23, No 1, 2008, pp. 85-102.

Knudsen Are, « Widening the Protection Gap: The 'Politics of Citizenship' for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, 1948-2008 », *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 22, no 1, 2009, pp. 51-73.

Legrand Felix, « The Colonial Strategy of ISIS in Syria », Policy Alternative, *Arab Reform Initiative*, June 2014.

Lenner Katharina, Turner Lewis, "Making Refugees Work? The Politics of Integrating the Syrian Refugees into the Labour Market in Jordan", *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 28, Issue 1, pp. 65-95.

Meier Daniel, « (B)ordering South of Lebanon: Hizbullah's identity building strategy », *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 30, Issue 1, 2015, pp. 97-109.

Mullin Corinna, « Tunisia's 'Transition': Between Revolution and Globalized National Security », *POMEAS Policy Paper*, No 8, September 2015.

Peteet Julie, *A Fortress Country and a Gated Enclave: Locating the Palestinian Margin*, Working Paper Series, Birzeit University, 2011,  
[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1764249](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1764249)

Shaery-Yazdi Roschanack, "Rethinking Sectarianism: Violence and Coexistence in Lebanon", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2020: DOI  
[10.1080/09596410.2020.1780408](https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1780408)

Volpi Frederic, "Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and of authoritarianism in the Maghreb", *Democratization*, Vol. 20, Issue 6, 2013, pp. 969-990.