

MMES M.Phil & Mst in Oriental Studies

Special Paper: The Politics of the Gulf

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Queries on the availability of this option should be directed to Dr Robins

This option is being offered to students on the MMES M.Phil & Mst programmes in Oriental Studies. It runs for the duration of one term. It is comparable in substance and workload to the established options offered for these degree courses. It will be examined alongside the other options taught for these degrees in a single three hour written exam to be held at the end of the last Trinity Term of study.

Aims & Objectives

The aim of this course is to provide an introduction for students interested in the domestic and international politics of the Gulf states. Here, 'Gulf states' is taken to refer to the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), that is to say: Bahrain; Kuwait; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Because the course also addresses issues in international politics, a wider view of 'the Gulf' as an international relations sub-system is also included.

Owing to the 'special paper' nature of the option, a certain amount of flexibility has been built into the option mindful of the particular interest of the first student taking the paper in MT 2007. It should therefore be understood that there is no one way to tackle the politics of the countries of the sub-region, and that, as such, this outline is one among many possibilities.

Course Outline

Topic One: Historical Backdrop

In order to contextualise the issues and debates of the moment, and to avoid the pitfall of being ahistorical, it is essential to place the politics of the Gulf in context. It is desirable to know something of the politics of the region before the arrival of the British. It is necessary to be informed about the colonial backdrop experienced by the region, whether directly as in the Trucial States,

or indirectly in Saudi Arabia. In the case of the former, it is important to know how the ruling elites and the societies in the Gulf interacted with the colonial presence. This topic, which contains a broad historical sweep, ends with the emergence of all of the Gulf states as independent entities by the early 1970s.

Sample essay questions:

1. Was the relationship between the British and the Trucial States a conventionally colonial one?
2. Account for the durability of the ruling dynasties in the Gulf states.
3. Is the preoccupation with elite-based politics in the Gulf states justifiable historically?

Suggested reading (core works asterisked):

Wm L. Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East (Westview, Boulder, 1994)

Halliday, Fred, Arabia Without Sultans (Penguin, London, 1974)

*Heard-Bey, F., From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates (London, 1982)

Hourani, Albert, A History of the Arab Peoples (Faber & Faber, London, 1991)

Kedourie, Elie, Politics in the Middle East (OUP, Oxford, 1992)

Mansfield, Peter, The Arabs (Penguin, London, 1983)

*Owtram, Frances, A Modern History of Oman (Tauris, London, 2004)

Yapp, M.E., The Near East Since the First World War (Longman, New York, 1991)

*Zahlan, Rosemary Said, The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman (Ithaca Press, Reading, 1998)

Topic Two: Islam & Ideology

This topic focuses on the major ideologies present in the Gulf states. It includes a discussion of Islam, the dominant belief system in the Gulf states. The focus will include Unitarian (or 'Wahhabi') Islam, which is especially strong in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. It will also address other variants within Islam, notably the Shiism found in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. However, care will be taken not to be reductionist and to attribute all

normative phenomenon to religion. To what extent do patriarchy and social structure, for example, better explain the social conservatism of the Gulf states? Other ideational issues beyond Islam also need to be born in mind, such as why Arab nationalism gained such limited traction in the region.

1. Why have the Gulf societies been relatively unaffected by the radicalism that has periodically afflicted the broader Middle East over the last 50 years?
2. Is pragmatic 'Wahhabism' an oxymoron?
3. How important has Islam been in legitimizing regimes in the Gulf?

Ayubi, Nazih, Political Islam (Routledge, London, 1991)

Burgat, Francois, Face to Face with Political Islam (Tauris, London, 2002)

*Commins, David, The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia (I.B. Tauris, London, 2006)

Eichelman, Dale and Piscatori, James, Muslim Politics, (Princeton UP, Princeton, 1996).

Esposito, John L., The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality? (OUP, Oxford, 1995)

_____ ed., Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism or Reform? (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1997)

Hunter, Shireen T., ed, The Politics of Islamic Revivalism, Diversity and Unity (Indiana UP, Bloomington, 1988)

Ismail, Salwa, Rethinking Islamist Politics (Tauris, London, 2003)

Mortimer, Edward, Faith and Power. The Politics of Islam (Faber & Faber, London, 1982)

Moussalli, Ahmad S., Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: the Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy and the Islamic State (Univ Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1999)

Roy, Olivier, The Failure of Political Islam (Tauris, London, 1994)

Piscatori, James, ed. Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis (The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991)

_____, Islam in a World of Nation-States (CUP, Cambridge, 1986)

Tamimi, Azzam, ed, Power-Sharing Islam (Liberty, London, 1993)

Zubaida, Sami, Islam, The People and the State (Tauris, London, 1993)

Topic Three: Oil & Political Economy

The political economies of the Gulf tend to be among the most rent-based in the world, as a result both of the presence of much of the world's hydrocarbons and their strategic location. This topic will examine the impact of oil in particular on the inter-section between politics and economics in the Gulf. A key issue will be to what extent have developmental experiences over the past four decades been the product of structure or agency. This topic will also consider the various development strategies chosen by the Gulf states. Special attention will be required on the likes of Bahrain and Dubai, where alternative strategies to the indigenous production of hydrocarbons have had to be elaborated. The relationship between rentierism and authoritarian politics is also of central importance. Other political economy-type issues can be collected here, including labour migration and water.

1. 'But for oil there would already be democratization in the Gulf'. Discuss.
2. In the current phase of high oil earnings, are decision-makers in the Gulf learning from the mistakes of an earlier experience in the 1970s or repeating them?
3. Compare and contrast the development strategies of two Gulf states, and judge the relative effectiveness of them.

Ayubi, Nazih, 'Arab Bureaucracies: Expanding Size, Changing Roles' in Luciani (ed) The Arab State (Routledge, London, 1990)

* _____ Overstating the Arab State (Tauris, London, 1995)

Beblawi, Hazem and Luciani, Giacomo The Rentier State (Croom Helm, London, 1987)

El-Ghonemy, M. Riad, Affluence and Poverty in the Middle East (Routledge, London, 1998)

Khuri, Fuad, State Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State (Univ of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980)

Henry, Clement M. & Springborg, Robert, Globalisation and the Politics of Development in the Middle East (Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 2001)

*Herb, Michael, 'No Representation without Taxation? Rents, Development and Democracy' Comparative Politics, Vol. 37, No. 3, April, 2005

Heydemann, Steven, Networks of Privilege: the Politics of Economic Reform in the Middle East (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004)

*Luciani, Giacomo, 'Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework' in Luciani (ed), The Arab State (Routledge, London, 1990)

Niblock, Tim & Murphy, Emma ed. Economic and Political Liberalisation in the Middle East (British Academic Press, London, 1993)

Richards, Alan, 'Economic Imperatives and Political Systems' in Middle East Journal Vol.47, 1993

*Richards, Alan & Waterbury, John, A Political Economy of the Middle East (Westview, Boulder, 1990)

Ross, Michael L. 'Does Oil Hinder Democracy?' World Politics, (53) April 2001, pp. 325-61

Topic Four: Dynastic Politics

The political systems of the Gulf states are often described as being 'traditional' or 'conservative'. What does this mean, and is it an insightful way of viewing them? To what extent should we take at face value claims that are made about the domination of dynastic elites in governance? Time will be spent considering the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, and the basis on which the former appeal to the latter. This section will also consider the leadership styles that the Gulf dynasties have forged, and make judgements about their comparability. It will also focus on individual leaders, and apply a leadership criteria in assessing the successfulness of kings and emirs in power. This topic will also look at the evolving experiences of political succession within the Gulf states, and will conclude on the relative institutionalization of this process.

1. What makes a good leader in the Gulf?
2. Compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of two rulers, living or dead, in the Gulf.
3. Is political succession a continuing source of vulnerability for Gulf dynasties?

*Herb, Michael, All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999)

*Kostiner, Joseph, ed., Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2000)

Peterson, J.E., The Arab Gulf States, Steps Toward Political Participation (CSIS/Praeger, New York, 1988)

*Posusney, Marsha and Angrist, Michele (eds.), Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Co., 2005)

Salame, Ghassan, ed, Democracy Without Democrats, The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World (Tauris, London, 1995)

Satloff, Robert E., The Politics of Change in the Middle East (Westview, Boulder, 1993)

Topic Five: Country Case--Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is in many ways (population size, land mass, oil income) the dominant state among the six. How has that affected its relationship with the other Gulf states over time? The question also needs to be asked: is Saudi Arabia the same as the others, only operating on a larger scale, or does size impact more profoundly? How important is Islam as a regime legitimiser? This topic provides an opportunity to engage with the history of the Kingdom in greater detail. Key processes to consider include: Abdul Aziz's state building; the Saud-Faisal struggle for power; the political economy of oil rents, both at times of abundance (1973-1986; 1998-now) and times of scarcity (1986-1998); the contrast in leadership between Kings Fahd and Abdullah. The topic should also note contemporary developments, such as the consequences of 9/11, both internally and in relations with the US, and early signs of political liberalization.

1. 'Saudi Arabia's stability and cohesion have been based on its huge oil earnings alone'. Discuss.
2. Compare and contrast the policies and leadership style of two of Saudi Arabia's kings.
3. How unnatural is the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the US?

*Aarts, Paul and Nonneman, Gerd, (eds.) Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs (Hurst, London. 2005)

Aburish, Said K., The Rise, Corruption and Coming Fall of the House of Saud (Bloomsbury, London, 1994)

- *Champion, Daryl, The Paradoxical Kingdom (Hurst, London, 2003)
- al-Farsy, Fouad, Saudi Arabia, A Case Study in Development (KPI, London, 1982)
- Holden, David & Johns, Richard, The House of Saud (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1981)
- Kostiner, Joseph, The Making of Saudi Arabia, 1916-1936: From Chieftancy to Monarchical State (OUP, Oxford, 1993)
- Lacey, Robert, The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud (Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, New York, 1981)
- Lackner, Helen, A House Built on Sand: The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia (Ithaca, London, 1979)
- *Al-Rasheed, Madawi, A History of Saudi Arabia (CUP, Cambridge, 2002)
- *Vassiliev, Alexei, The History of Saudi Arabia (Saqi, London, 1998)
- *Yamani, Mai, Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in Saudi Arabia (RIIA, London, 2000)

Topic Six: Country Case--Kuwait

Kuwait has historically been the most liberal state in the Gulf, leading, for example, in the area of political institution building. The importance of the old merchant families was long critical in the system of checks and balances that existed on the executive. While some of these were eroded with the coming of oil, the emirate has retained a political culture in which political discourse (eg through a semi-free press and a considerable degree of academic freedom) and participation are highly valued. The presence of a large expatriate workforce has been instrumental in freeing Kuwaiti citizens so that they can pursue these values. Domestic political life has not, however, been entirely harmonious, with significant Sunni-Shia tensions, and attempts in 1976 and 1986 by the regime to dissolve the National Assembly. The experience of invasion and occupation in 1990/91 has done much to forge a sense of national unity at home. Governance related politics remains noisy and even fractious, as recent clashes between the government and the assembly have illustrated.

1. Analyse the impact of the Iraqi invasion of August 1990 on Kuwaiti domestic political dynamics.
2. Describe the essence of the development strategy in Kuwait. Broadly speaking has it been a success?

3. How would you characterize the nature of the political culture prevalent in the emirate?

*Crystal, J., Oil and Politics in the Gulf (CUP, Cambridge, 1990)

Ismael, Jacqueline, Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective (Syracuse UP, Syracuse, 1982)

Mansfield, Peter, Kuwait, Vanguard of the Gulf (Hutchinson, London, 1990)

*Tetreault, Mary Ann, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait (Columbia UP, New York, 2000)

Topic Seven: Regional Security & the GCC

The Gulf sub-system is characterized by a scalene triangle of power, with the Gulf states typically having less hard power at their disposal than the other littoral powers, Iraq and Iran. The Gulf states have tried different strategies to address this power deficiency. This has included Gulf entities bandwagoning foreign hegemonic powers (eg Britain pre-1971) and micro-entities bonding together into larger, more sustainable states (eg creation of the UAE). In 1982 this included the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council, forged when the attentions of both Baghdad and Tehran were distracted by conflict with one another. However, the nature and potential of the GCC remains highly ambivalent, as some of the smaller Gulf states fear exchanging domination by Saudi Arabia for domination by either of the two main regional powers. Intra-GCC squabbling over a range of issues, from boundary disputes to the pace and nature of liberalization, has characterized the organization at least as much as security and economic cooperation. Since Iraq's defeat in Kuwait in 1991 managing Iran as the region's main power has dominated the foreign policies of most of the Gulf states. This has intensified since 2003 and the US war of regime change in Iraq.

1. Discuss the threat perceptions of two Gulf states, and the consequent strategies that they have adopted in order to manage such threats.
2. Do you agree that the GCC has been a disappointment as a regional organization and why?
3. Which have proved to be the greatest challenges to Gulf state stability, internal or external ones?

Freedman Lawrence & Karsh Efraim, The Gulf Conflict, 1990-91 (Princeton UP, Princeton, 1993)

Maull Hanns & Pick Otto ed., The Gulf War (Pinter, London, 1989)

*Murden Simon, Emergent Regional Powers and International Relations in the Gulf, 1988-1991 (Ithaca, Reading, 1995)

Potter Lawrence & Sick Gary ed., The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security and Religion (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1997)

Security in the Persian Gulf: Origins, Obstacles, and the Search for Consensus (St Martin's Press, New York, 2002)

Safran, Nadav, Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security (Cornell UP, Ithaca, 1985)

Topic Eight: The Gulf & the Superpowers

The UK was the hegemonic power in the Gulf for two centuries. After a hiatus, the US emerged to play a similar role in the mid 1980s. However, establishing a viable balance of power has proved more difficult than in the past, partly due to the fragmentary nature of the Gulf states, and partly due to new phenomena, such as the level of militarisation in the Gulf, the spread of transnational movements (eg the Iranian revolution) and cross-border terrorism. The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq is but the latest manifestation of these difficulties. The Gulf states have entered into an ever closer defence cooperation with the US, encompassing massive transfers of resources in return for advanced military technology. They have disguised this converging strategic relationship by signing defence accords with other members of the UN Security Council's Permanent 5. The high levels of rents together with the symbiotic defence relationship with the US arguably has helped insulate the Gulf states from the transformatory impact of the forces of globalization.

1. Was Britain a success in imposing stability and security in the Gulf, pre-1971?
2. Why has the US found it so difficult to stabilize the Gulf since the mid 1980s?
3. Have weapons transfers to the Gulf states been a force for stability or instability since the 1970s?

*Cordesman, Anthony, The Gulf and the West, Strategic Relations and Military Realities (Westview, Boulder, 1988)

Efrat R & Berkovitch J, Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East (Routledge, London, 1991)

Danchev, Alex & Keohane Dan ed. International Perspectives on the Gulf Conflict, 1990-91 (Macmillan, London, 1994)

Gerges, Fawwaz, The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967 (Westview, Boulder, 1994)

Golan, Galia, Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War II to Gorbachev (CUP, Cambridge, 1990)

Kuniholm, Bruce, The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East (Princeton UP, Princeton, 1981)

Marantz, Paul & Steinberg, Blema S eds., Superpower Involvement in the Middle East (Boulder, 1985)

*Sayegh, Yezid & Shlaim, Avi ed., The Cold War and the Middle East (1997)

Shoemaker C & Spanier J, Patron and Client State Relationships: Multilateral Crises in the Nuclear Age (Praeger, New York, 1984).