The course:

Perhaps no region of the world is more identified with high-profile political leaders than the Middle East. This is partly a consequence of the prevailing systems of government in the region – from presidencies-for-life to hereditary monarchies – which have only recently been undermined by the events of the Arab Spring. It may reflect weak state institutions, and the traditionally dominant role of military men on horseback and powerful clerics in turbans. The region has also experienced a series of revolutions, and political turbulence has always opened opportunities for the emergence of perceived heroes.

Whatever the reasons, the history and politics of the Middle East are difficult to decipher without an understanding of personalities. This course is devoted to political leadership in the Middle East, as an alternative approach to understanding the region and its complexities.

As the syllabus indicates, the scope of the course is broadly conceived, both in space and time. We will reach back into the 19th century to trace the emergence of new and modern forms of political leadership. Case studies will take us through the early years of nation-building in the first half of the 20th century, the revolutionary transformations in its second half, and right up to the events of the Arab Spring. In geographic terms, our case studies will cover the entire breadth of the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, the Arab lands, and Israel. Here are just some of the personalities we will cover: Atatürk, Herzl, Nasser, Ben-Gurion, Sadat, Begin, Khomeini, Saddam, Bin Laden, Erdoğan, Ahmadinejad, and more.

While the approach is primarily historical and political, we will also relate case studies to certain theoretical constructs: patrimonialism, charisma, narcissism, and transformational leadership. But your instructor has no theoretical commitments, and our approach to theory will be entirely eclectic and practical. The psychological motivations of leaders are only one side of the coin. We will also consider the perception of leaders by their followers. What constitutes legitimacy, especially in societies that don’t go to the ballot box? How do the leader’s qualities interact with cultural expectations? What is the function of a personality cult? (Both current and posthumous ones?)

The reading is highly varied, and you will encounter a wide variety of authors, employing very different approaches. I’ve also made a special effort to locate credible documentary biographies on Youtube. Imagery is extraordinarily important in the consolidation of a leader’s authority – sometimes almost as important as words. It will receive due attention in this course.

By the conclusion of this course, you should have not only a deeper understanding of the relationship between leaders and followers, and the impact of leaders on events. You will also
have a far more detailed understanding of the modern history of the Middle East. You don’t necessarily have to have had much Middle Eastern history before this course (although it would certainly help). But by the end of it, you will have learned a great deal of that history, through the prism of its most fascinating personalities.

Grading:

• 15 percent of the grade is determined by class (and possibly on-line) participation. (I am new to Blackboard, but I have lots of experience in blogging and social media, so I will give its features a try during the first weeks of class, to see whether it works for us.)

• 20 percent of the grade is determined by a short mid-term “state of the art” paper (maximum 1,200 words), surveying the secondary and primary sources for the study of a leader, and assessing the reliability and limitations of the source materials. This is the sort of preliminary survey you would do before embarking on a major research project. This short paper will be due on Friday, October 19.

• 65 percent of the grade is determined by a final paper, the topic of which you will choose in consultation with me.

Calendar:

You will note that there are readings for 13 sessions, and that includes the first session. The first class session will be devoted to the question of whether leaders matter. I recommend that you read the overview articles either before or immediately after the first session, as a supplement to the overview I will provide in class. I have provided URLs for the articles, but you should be able to access these items via electronic reserves. The URL is for future reference, should you want to revisit the readings after the course.

I will hold an office hour immediately before class, or you may make an appointment if you have something else in that slot. Just message me through Blackboard.

Readings

1. Do Leaders Matter? How Do We Know?


“The First Image Revisited,” exchange with Andrew Parasiliti on the above article: http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/016228801753191187
2. Four Concepts: Patrimonialism, Charisma, Narcissism, Transformational Leadership


3. The Legacies of Old


4. Nation-Forgers: Herzl and Atatürk


Anitkabir (Ataturk Mausoleum) (4 min., short clip). http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfBUfkOkNdQ


5. Change Artists: Ben-Gurion and Nasser


Interview with Nasser and Ben-Gurion (and King Hussein) (interviews, 7 min.), 1956. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfsHLDTW7nw

**6. The Peacemakers: Sadat and Begin**


PBS, “The 50 Years War: Israel and the Arabs” (documentary, min. 29 thru min. 49), 1998. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wXebyT1kCw


7. From Shah to Supreme Leader


8. Rogues: Saddam and Qadhafi


9. Islamist Insurgents, from Al Qaeda to Hezbollah


Tobias Thiel, “Prophet, Saviour and Revolutionary: Manufacturing Hassan Nasrallah’s Charisma,” http://lse.academia.edu/TobiasThiel/Papers/1448374/Prophet_Saviour_and_Revolutionary_Manufacturing_Hassan_Nasrallahs_Charisma

10. They Fall Down: Mubarak and Assad


11. The Monarchical Exception


**12. The Elected Ones: Erdoğan and Ahmadinejad**


**13. The Leader Will See You Now, and Summation**


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