

MIDDLE EASTERN POLITICAL SYSTEMS

By **DANKWART A. RUSTOW**

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This slim book is part of a series put out by the publisher for use in introductory level university courses in comparative politics. It is not presented as an original piece of research; in fact most of the material has appeared elsewhere in the author's extensive contributions to the study of politics in the Middle East. What we have here, in essence, is a rather long introductory essay on the recent political history of the region aimed at second year students in the United States. This target audience is assumed, and I suspect correctly, to be completely ignorant about the region. Professor Rustow therefore has the large task of making the internecine complexities of politics in the region comprehensible to this readership-and all within a space of 101 pages.

The approach of the book is squarely within the conceptual tradition of contemporary North American political science. Politics is viewed as an autonomous behavioral sub-system functioning within an environment of other sub-systems which together comprise the total society. The normal tendency of systems is towards equilibrium or homeostasis. The task of political analysis is therefore to examine inter-sub-system relations and the forces tending towards stability or instability. Political change is handled in an evolutionary perspective with systems moving from a traditional state through a transitional situation towards becoming modern polities.

The foregoing approach requires the author to compress a vast amount of information in altogether too limited a space. The first half of the book is devoted to a quick overview of the foundations of politics in the region, i. e. the history, geography, economics, languages, religions, social structure and ideologies. Of necessity the treatment has to be very cursory. Instability and conflict are viewed as the dominant characteristics of politics in the region and traced to factors indigenous to these societies. The most important of these are the relatively recent creation of these states and the ambivalent psychological

orientation of Middle Easterners towards Western civilization. Most of these societies still do not constitute integrated nation-states and primordial groupings continue to be the channels through which most of their members relate to the larger world. Furthermore, there is a high degree of ideological dissensus in all these societies. Except for Zionism in Israel, a commonly shared vision of the Good Society has yet to gain wide acceptance in any of the other countries.

What effect does this have on political behavior, decisionmaking and governmental performance? The latter half of the book is devoted to exploring these questions. Prof. Rustow sees all three types of political systems in the region. Most Middle Eastern countries are viewed as "systems in flux." Their political systems show all the characteristics of societies which have yet to resolve questions about identity, unity and the central issue of who is exercising power for what purposes. Interestingly, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf Sheikdoms are included in this category. Only Afghanistan and Yemen are placed at the traditional end of the scale. Social change has yet to reach any momentum in these two societies and politics continues to be largely the prerogative of ascriptively recruited rulers. Only Israel and, with some hesitation, Turkey are viewed as modern political systems.

This reviewer could only infer the criteria used by the author for distinguishing between different system types since these are not spelled out anywhere. It would seem that a modern political system is one which most closely approximates the institutional form of representative democracies found in the West. Israel and Turkey therefore belong in the category of modern systems because they have organized electoral and party systems which actually function in recruiting a reasonably representative political leadership, universal suffrage, constitutional order and the rule of law. The one area where Turkey still lags behind Israel and other modern systems is in the relative weakness of associational groups and the continuing predominance of institutional interest groups in the political process. It is this which leads Professor Rustow to conclude that genuinely democratic institutions are solidly entrenched only in Israel. In Turkey they have begun to strike roots only since the second Republic in the 1960's. For the rest of the Middle East the choice for the present lies between conservative pseudo-constitutional oligarchs and attempts at social revolution under the auspices of a military or party dictatorship.

In summary, this book has all the virtues and defects of political science as researched and taught in the United States. If one is persuaded that politics can be understood without the application of traditional class analysis or without reference to the role of external influences in domestic politics then this book can serve as a useful introduction to Middle Eastern politics. Those who consider traditional class conflict models to have greater heuristic value in the study of politics in developing countries will find this book disappointing - if not superficial and sterile.

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