



# The Politics of Sunni-Shi'a 'Sectarianism' in the Modern Middle East

**Fanar Haddad**

This lecture will examine the concepts of sectarian identity and 'sectarianism' in the study of the modern Middle East. It will explain how the subject can be treated while avoiding simplistic essentializations – be they orientalist or nationalist. The first part of the lecture will discuss the conceptual confusion surrounding the subject: what is 'sectarianism'? How does sectarian identity relate to other forms of collective identity and how does it relate to secularism, religion and nationalism? The second part of the lecture looks at the case of post-2003 Iraq to chart the transformations in the political relevance, utility and social divisiveness of sectarian categories between 2003 and 2020. In doing so we will explore the causal factors that have variously driven and weakened the politicization of sectarian identity in Iraq and across the region.

---

**Fanar Haddad** is Visiting Fellow at the Middle East Centre, London School of Economics and is currently Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister of Iraq. He previously lectured in modern Middle Eastern politics at the University of Exeter, at Queen Mary, University of London and at the National University of Singapore. Prior to obtaining his PhD, Haddad was a Research Analyst at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Middle East and North Africa Research Group. He is the author of *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (2011) and *Understanding 'Sectarianism': Sunni-Shi'a Relations in the Modern Arab World* (2020).