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## IR/PO321 – International Relations and the Middle East: a Comparative European Perspective

Prof. ALESSANDRO QUARENGHI

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

In recent years the Middle East has arguably established itself as the centre of international politics or, at least, as the region that no international actor can afford to stay away from. Why? How did this happen? This course will explore the politics of the plural and changing Middle East from an international perspective, focusing on its features, internal processes, and the main problematic issues, while emphasizing its relationship with the West, itself a plural entity.

The course aims to enable students to achieve a clear understanding of the main issues that have shaped and are characterizing the politics of the region, its role in contemporary international politics, as well as the strategies available and employed by the main international actors towards it. Finally, it aims to investigate the usefulness and the shortcomings of ('Western') international relations and political science approaches and concepts to the region, highlighting both the differences and similarities between the Middle East and other political regions.

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be familiar with the events, facts, and issues that have shaped and are shaping the politics of the region, and have gained a good knowledge of its trends and specific features. Lastly, students will be able to assess the effects on the region of the strategies that international powers can deploy towards it.

### METHOD OF TEACHING

The course will combine lectures, in-class debates, and a role-play activity. About the latter: students will be asked to choose a political actor from among the suggested ones and to: a.) study it in depth and provide a position paper on it; b.) to briefly present the position paper during classes; c.) to play the role of that political actor: During the course students will be encouraged to play the role of the chosen political actor and try to achieve its aims during and outside of classes, and to prepare for a fictional UN-sponsored conference on Middle Eastern Regional Order, which will take place at the end of the course. A group of students will play the role of the United Nations: its presentation will focus on the Arab Uprisings, while its position paper will outline UN's strategy for the mock negotiation process. More detailed instructions will be given in class by the instructor.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- a. Students are expected to regularly attend sessions and to actively take part in debate;
- b. Before each class, students are expected to have read the compulsory readings (and are strongly advised to read the recommended readings);
- c. Students are required to write a short position paper (1500 words) about a political actor of their choice;
- d. Students are required to orally present their position paper or a topic;
- e. Students are required to engage in the role-play activity;
- f. Students will have to take two written exams: a mid-term test and a final test, at the end of the teaching period.



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## CREDITS

6 ECTS

## GRADING

Position paper, Presentation, and Role-play activity	1/3 of final grade
Mid-term exam	1/3 of final grade
Final written exam	1/3 of final grade

The Mid-term exam will be made of multiple choice and open questions, while the final exam will be made of only open questions, to be answered essay-style. Both exams will take about 90 minutes.

**Students will be allowed to take the exams only if they attended at least 75% of classes, and they may be examined on anything covered or discussed prior to the exam.** Students who miss examinations for non-medical reasons will not have the opportunity to re-sit exams. Medical exemptions will require documentation.

Alternative forms of examination can be considered only in exceptional cases, and at the instructor's discretion.

## COURSE READINGS AND MATERIALS

All required readings will be available in a course pack. All readings can be downloaded from the instructor's university webpage (<http://docenti.unicatt.it>) and from the dedicated course blackboard pages (<http://blackboard.unicatt.it>). Further instructions on the downloading procedure will be given in class. Both readings and lectures/class activities are crucial components of the course and are interrelated.

## INSTRUCTOR BIO

**Alessandro Quarenghi** is a Lecturer in International Relations at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Brescia. He was awarded his PhD in Political Science at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, and holds a Postgraduate Degree in Economics and International Relations from ASERI, an MScEcon RT in Postcolonial Politics from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, a Masters Degree in Médiation Interculturelle from Saint Joseph University, Beirut and a Degree in Law from the University of Milan. He is a member of the Expert Advisory Group – European and South Mediterranean Actors (EAG) of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

## EMAIL ADDRESS

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