



UNIVERSITÀ
CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

International Relations and the Middle East: a Comparative European Perspective

PROF. ALESSANDRO QUARENGHI

Area of study:	International Relations
Area Code:	IR/PO321
Method of Instruction:	in-person

Description

The course helps students understand the key political structures of the Middle East, its role in global politics, and the strategies used by major international actors in the region. It also examines the strengths and weaknesses of Western political science and international relations concepts when applied to the Middle East, highlighting similarities and differences with other regions.

By the end of the course, students will:

- Understand the key events, facts, political structures, and issues shaping Middle Eastern politics.
- Have a solid grasp of the region's trends and unique features.
- Be able to evaluate how international and Middle Eastern powers influence the region.
- Improve their research skills, teamwork abilities, and presentation skills.

Course contents

The course examines the politics of the diverse and evolving Middle East from a global perspective, focusing on its characteristics, internal dynamics, and key challenges, with a special emphasis on its relationship with the West—particularly Europe and the European Union.

It is organized into three parts:

- **Part 1:** Provides background on Middle Eastern politics, discussing the region's strategic and political significance, and the processes that shaped it. It also covers Islam as a political phenomenon and explores how the Middle East and the West perceive each other (e.g., Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Westoxication).
- **Part 2:** Examines the main features of Middle Eastern politics, such as authoritarianism, the political economy of oil, conflicts, and ideologies. It also looks at the Middle Eastern "civil revolts" and their regional impact.
- **Part 3:** Analyzes the goals and strategies of key international and regional powers, highlighting the structure of the Middle Eastern international order and its ongoing transformation.

Prerequisites



UNIVERSITÀ
CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

This course introduces politics and international relations of the Middle East. It is open to students from all backgrounds interested in understanding the region. While a background in political science, international politics, or Middle Eastern studies may be helpful, it is neither required nor necessary.

The course shares about 5% of its content with “The International System in International Relations: Origins, Evolution, and Contemporary Challenges ” also taught by Prof. Quarenghi. Students may take either course or both.

Method of instruction

The course will combine lectures, in-class debates, and student presentations: students, in groups, will be asked to choose a (State or non-State) political actor from among those suggested and to a.) study it in depth and b.) briefly present the chosen political actor in class. 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, in relatively small groups, are required to orally present in class one of the suggested political actors;
- f. Students will have to take two written exams: a midterm test and a final test, at the end of the teaching period.

Credits

6 ECTS

Grading

Participation	10% of final grade
Midterm exam	30% of final grade
Presentation	30% of final grade
Final written exam	30% of final grade

The midterm exam will be made of multiple choice and open questions, and it will last 60 minutes. The final exam will be made of only open questions, to be answered essay-style, and it will last 90 minutes.

Books will NOT be allowed in exams. Students may be examined on anything covered or discussed prior to the exam, but final exam questions will focus on topics covered after the midterm. A sample of exam questions will be made available to students.

Course readings and materials



UNIVERSITÀ
CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

All readings and materials can be downloaded from the dedicated course blackboard pages (<http://blackboard.unicatt.it>). Further instructions on the downloading procedure will be provided 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 Politics at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, where he teaches International Relations and International Relations of the Middle East. He holds a degree in Law, a PhD in International Relations, a Specialization in International Economics and Politics, and Master's Degrees in Postcolonial Politics and Cross-cultural Mediation. His work focuses on US foreign policy, international order and international relations and politics of the Middle East.

E-mail address

alessandro.quarenghi@unicatt.it