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International Relations and the Middle East: a Comparative European Perspective

PROF. ALESSANDRO QUARENGHI

Area of study:	International Relations
Area Code:	IR/PO322
Method of Instruction:	in-person and live-streamed (dual mode)
Participation:	synchronous/live and asynchronous

Description

The course aims to enable students to achieve a clear understanding of the main structures that characterise the politics of the region, the role of the Middle East in contemporary international politics, as well as the strategies available to and employed by the main international actors towards the Middle East. Finally, it aims to investigate the usefulness and 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 main events, facts, political structures, and issues that have shaped and are shaping the politics of the region and will have gained a good knowledge of its trends and specific features. In addition, students will be able to assess the effects on the region of the strategies that international powers can deploy towards it. Lastly, they will have improved their research skills and ability to cooperate in a group of peers and to present their ideas to peers.

Course contents

The course explores 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 emphasising its relationship with the West, itself a plural entity, and especially with Europe and the European Union.

It is divided into three parts:

1. The first part provides some necessary background to the study of Middle Eastern politics by discussing the strategic, political, and international importance of the Middle East; outlining the processes that have created the political region and the main international academic approaches to its study; providing some historical and analytical elements for an understanding of Islam as a political phenomenon; and focusing on the construction of 'Otherness' images of the Middle East ('Orientalism') and the West ('Occidentalism' and 'Westoxication');
2. The second part first outlines the main structural features of Middle Eastern politics (authoritarianism, political economy and 'the curse of oil', conflict, and ideologies) before focusing on the events of the Middle Eastern 'civil revolts' and their regional consequences;
3. The third part, after discussing the Israeli-(Arab)Palestinian conflict, deals with the main international and regional powers by analysing their goals and strategies to outline the features of the Middle Eastern international order and its contemporary structural transformation.

A more detailed syllabus, outlining class topics, and a reading list will be provided at the beginning of the course.



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Prerequisites

The course is an introduction to the politics and international politics of the Middle East; therefore, it can be approached by students of all backgrounds who are interested in understanding the political region. A background in political science, international politics, and/or Middle Eastern studies could be helpful but is not required.

Method of instruction

The course will combine lectures, in-class debates, and a role-playing activity (if possible, depending on the number of students who are able to attend in person): a fictional UN-sponsored conference on Middle Eastern Regional Order, which will take place at the end of the course. Students will be asked to choose a political actor from among those suggested and, in small groups, to a.) study it in depth and provide a position paper on it; b.) briefly present the position paper in class; c.) play the role of that political actor in the fictional UN-sponsored conference. More detailed instructions will be given in class by the instructor. Students who attend the course online (both live and asynchronous streaming) will not be asked to participate in the fictional conference but only to provide a position paper about one of the suggested political actors. More detailed instructions will be provided by the instructor at the beginning of the course.

Course requirements

- a. Students who attend in person and through live-streaming 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 small groups or individually, are required to write a short position paper (1500 words, tolerance 10%) about one of the suggested political actors;
- d. Students who attend in person are required, in small groups, to orally present their position paper;
- e. Students who attend in person are required to engage in the role-play activity;
- 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

Midterm exam	1/3 of final grade
Position paper (for students who attend in person: additionally, presentation, and role-play activity)	1/3 of final grade
Final written exam	1/3 of final grade

The midterm 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 may be examined on anything covered or discussed prior to the exam. A past exams will be made available to students.

Students who attend in person will be allowed to take the exams only if they attended at least 75% of classes. Students who miss examinations for non-medical reasons will not have the opportunity to re-sit



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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 readings and materials 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 provided in class. Both readings and lectures/class activities are crucial components of the course and are interrelated.

Instructor bio

Prof. Alessandro Quarenghi is a Lecturer in International Politics at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, where he teaches International Relations, Economic Geography, and International Relations of the Middle East. He holds a degree in Law, a PhD in International Relations, a Specialisation in International Economics and Politics, and Master's Degrees in Postcolonial Politics and Cross-cultural Mediation. His work focuses on US foreign policy, Middle Eastern Order, regional security issues, Democratisation processes, and regional cooperation.

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