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## Understanding the Middle East: Regional and International Identities, Interests and Strategies

PROF. ALESSANDRO QUARENGHI

### OVERVIEW

**Area:** International Relations

**Dates:** 10 -20 July (2 weeks)

**Campus:** Milan

**Course Number:** IR/PO321

**Term:** Summer School 2018

**Credits:** 6 ECTS

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course aims to enable students to achieve a clear understanding of the key 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. In addition, 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. Finally, it focuses on the features of its specific (regional) order while tracing the post-2011 decreasing efficiency of their its mechanisms.

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.

### COURSE CONTENTS

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 the features, internal processes, and the main



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problematic issues of its political order, while emphasizing its relationship with the West, itself a plural entity.

## METHOD OF TEACHING

The course will combine lectures, in-class debates, and a role-play activity (mock-negotiation). 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 to briefly present it during classes; b) to play the role of that political actor: during the second week of 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. One student will play the role of the United Nations, and write a position paper outlining UN strategy for the mock negotiation process. More detailed instructions will be given in class by the instructor.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- a. Students are expected 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 orally present a political actor of their choice (but chosen from among those suggested); one student, who will play the UN in the mock-negotiation, will write a short position paper (1500 words, tolerance +/-10%) outlining UN strategy;
- d. Students are required to engage in the role-play activity;
- e. Students will have to take a final written exam.

## GRADING

Class participation	20 % of final grade
Presentation (or position paper) and Role-play activity	20 % of final grade
Final written exam	50 % of final grade

## COURSE READINGS AND MATERIALS

All the readings and the lecturer's slides will be available on Blackboard.



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## RULES OF CONDUCT

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory and no absence/s will be excused. Unexcused absences will prevent students from being admitted to the final exam. In case of health issues, students will need to inform both UCSC International Office (at [international.advisor@unicatt.it](mailto:international.advisor@unicatt.it)) and the professor and provide a medical certificate.

**Exam Date:** The exam date cannot be re-scheduled. Unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. In cases of unforeseeable circumstances such as illness or injury on the day of the exams, the student must submit a medical certificate and communicate his/her absence to the Professor and UCSC International Office via email prior to the exam. If the student does not justify his/her absence through sufficient documentation and with adequate notice before the final test, the student will receive an automatic Failed.

## SCHEDULE

### FIRST WEEK.

**Lesson 1: THE STRATEGIC CENTRALITY OF THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST** (Tuesday 10 July, 4 hours)

Since 11 September 2001, the Middle East has increasingly looked like the place no Great Power can afford not to be involved in, or the new 'centre' of international politics. After establishing what are the reasons concurring to the strategic centrality of the Middle East, the class deals with the processes that created the political region and its contemporary shifting definition, and of its boundaries, before summarizing its 'identity fault-lines' which, even though they are not on the geographical map, matter a great deal in its political life, and make understanding it particularly complex.

**Lesson 2: UNDERSTANDING/EXPLAINING THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST: THE WEST, AND ISLAM** (Wednesday 11 July, 4 hours)

The first part of this class focuses on the main research agendas to apply IR Theory to the study of the Middle East, pointing out their respective strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, the class will briefly focus on the construction of Otherness in Western-Eastern relationships by discussing Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Westoxication. The final part of the class will try to recall the most



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notable events in the history of Islam and the political concepts developed from those events; That will allow us to gather a preliminary but sufficient knowledge to understand Middle Eastern political discourses.

**Lesson 3: THE MIDDLE EASTERN STATE (AUTHORITARIANISM)** (Thursday 12 July, 4 hours)

The introduction of a foreign political structure to the region at the end of the First World War was characterized by imbalanced power relationships between Europe and the political and economic powers of the region: The Middle Eastern state, therefore, developed features that have marked its development since then.

**Lesson 4: THE 'CURSE OF BLACK GOLD', CONFLICT AND COOPERATION** (Thursday 12 July, 2 hours)

This class deals, firstly, with the political economy of the Middle East, and particularly with the use of its resources. Despite being blessed with an abundance of 'black gold', Middle Eastern states have some of the lowest rates of development, literacy, and human health and well-being in the world. Is this a matter of culture (and religion), or politics and economics? Secondly, we focus on the creation and maintenance of conflict and on the lack of political cooperation. The Middle East is the region with the highest rates of military expenditures in the world, and one of the areas of the world where conflict is the most recurrent, both within and outside states. Indeed, the military has always played an essential political role in regional politics, sometimes stabilizing states' institutions, sometimes overthrowing governments, sometimes fomenting regional instability.

**Lesson 5: IDEOLOGIES** (Friday 13 July, 3 hours)

This class deals with recurrent ideological trends that have swept the region: Nationalism, Arabism, liberalism, pan-Islamism, pan-Ottomanism, Islamism, Zionism, anti-Zionism, communism, etc.: some are forgotten by history, but many are alive and well, influencing the political life of the region. In particular, political ideologies claiming to be Islamic are alive and well. Through what process has a religion been transformed into a modern political ideology? Is Islam as a religion really to be blamed?

**VISIT/GUEST LECTURE** (Friday 13 July, 3 hours)



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## SECOND WEEK.

### **Lesson 6: A DEMOCRATIC OR A ISLAMIST 'WAVE'? THE MIDDLE EASTERN 'UPRISINGS', FROM TUNISIA TO THE 'SYRIAN SPILLOVER'** (Monday 16 July, 4 hours)

After the unsuccessful 2009 and 2010 Iranian 'Green Revolution', since December 2010 peaceful popular movements have spread through the Middle East achieving regime change in some cases and developing into civil wars in others. After attempting to define the political phenomenon, this class will try to compare features and trajectories of the different experiences, in order to understand if the revolts are potentially able to structurally transform the international politics of the Middle East.

### **Lesson 7: THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN (ARAB) CONFLICT** (Monday 16 July, 3 hours)

The cause of all Middle Eastern troubles or just one of many? We look back at the history of the conflict, from the first step of the Zionist movement towards the creation of Israel (and the Palestinian *Nakhba*) to today's wall, Road Map, latest rounds of conflict, and consider the identities of the movements, the issues at stake, and the opposing perspectives involved.

### **Lesson 8: INTERNATIONAL ACTORS: THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, AND CHINA** (Tuesday 17 July, 4 hours)

The class deals with the goals, interests, and policies of the most important external actors. Firstly, it focuses on the 'nature' of the European Union and its alleged 'exceptionality', which is supposed to give rise to a different type of foreign policy. The problem is: can this policy work? And has it worked in the Middle East? Secondly, the class looks at the role of the US in the Middle East, from the end of the Second World War to 11 September, through the end of the Cold War, in order to assess if President George W. Bush or President Barack Obama have brought real change. And finally: is US hegemony in the region going to last or it is already over? Finally, it deals with 'returning' (Russia) and new Powers (China), which have attempted to establish a political presence in the region. What are they looking for? And, will they be able to fill the vacuum left by the US and the EU?

### **Lesson 9: REGIONAL ACTORS: IRAN, TURKEY, ISRAEL, EGYPT, SAUDI ARABIA, AND THE ISLAMIC STATE** (Wednesday 18 July, 4 hours)



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In the last few years, established regional powers have seen their regional relevance decline (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia), while others (Turkey, Iran) have acted so to increase their regional power. In addition, non-State groups have increased their power, so much that some are aiming at achieving statehood (the Islamic State). Indeed the 'Arab Uprisings' and their aftermath have increased the speed of regional change. What kind of regional order has characterised the Middle East, and how is it changing?

**Lesson 10: IN CLASS ROLE-PLAY: THE UN-SPONSORED CONFERENCE: FOR A PEACEFUL AND STABLE MIDDLE EAST** (Wednesday 18 July, 3 hours)

Students will attempt to negotiate a regional agreement that would bring peace and stability to the region. Each student will play the role of a relevant actor; one student will act as the United Nation. The instructor will act as facilitator.

**Lesson 12: THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF THE MIDDLE EAST: STRUCTURAL FEATURES AND CONTEMPORARY CHANGE** (Thursday 19 July, 4 hours)

The final class wraps up the course, and reviews the main points discussed, by focusing on the dynamics of the role-play activity and highlighting processes of structural regional resilience and change.

**FINAL EXAM** (Friday 20 July, 3 hours)

**INSTRUCTOR BIO**

**Alessandro Quarenghi** is a Lecturer in International Politics at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, where he teaches on International Relations, Economic Geography, 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 Masters' Degrees in Postcolonial Politics and Cross-cultural Mediation. His work focuses on international order, international relations and politics of the Middle East.

@: [alessandro.quarenghi@unicatt.it](mailto:alessandro.quarenghi@unicatt.it)