



***Geopolitics of the Middle East:  
Cultural Roots and Ideological Radicalization***

Academic Year 2025/2026

2<sup>nd</sup> Semester [Instruction hours]

José Castello Branco

[X] ECTS

**Programme**

BA in Political Science and International Relations

• **Overview of the goals of the course**

Focusing on the “Geopolitics of the Middle East”, the main goal of this course, is to provide students with a deep, interdisciplinary understanding of the region's complexity, moving beyond simple media narratives to analyse the historical, cultural, and ideological forces that drive its contemporary conflicts and political dynamics.

Upon completing the course, students will be able to:

- Identify and analyse the long-term historical factors that created the current state system and regional identities.
- Evaluate the role of cultural and religious foundations in shaping contemporary political structures.
- Differentiate and explain the evolution of major political ideologies operating in the Middle East today
- Assess the dynamics of key regional rivalries
- Critically analyse the impact of external powers and the role of resource geopolitics (namely, oil and water) on regional stability.

• **Requirements students are expected to meet**

Students enrolled in “Geopolitics of the Middle East: Cultural Roots and Ideological Radicalization” are expected to meet the following requirements to successfully complete the course and achieve the learning outcomes:

- Attendance: Mandatory attendance is required. Excessive absences (exceeding the institutional limit) will result in failure of the course.
- Active Participation: Students must demonstrate active engagement in class discussions (requires preparation).



- **Due dates exams and major written exercises**

TBA

- **Statement on how students will be graded**

The evaluation of learning in this course unit will be continuous and comprehensive, covering the acquisition of knowledge (written exam), the ability to synthesize and communicate (presentation to be carried out in a group or individually), and the development of critical thinking in a debate setting (active participation in class). The final course grade will be calculated based on the following elements, with their respective weightings:

- Written Examination: 35%
- Presentation: 35%
- Active participation: 30%

- **Course outline** (Main Topics)

**1. The World Before Islam: Concepts and Categories**

(week 1)

1.1. Middle East: *Africa Terra*, Arabia, Levant, Fertile Crescent

1.2. "Arab World" vs. "Islamic World" vs. "Persian World"

**2. The World Before Islam: Cultures and Religions**

(weeks 2-3)

2.1. The Geopolitics of the ancient Middle East

2.2. Arabia and the Arab Peoples

2.3. Pre-Islamic Religion and Culture

2.4. Economy and Politics: Catalysts for Change

**3. Birth and Golden Age**

(weeks 3-7)

3.1. The Birth of Islam (610–632)

3.2. Rashidun (The "Rightly Guided" Caliphs (632–661)

3.3. The Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates (661–750; 750–950)

3.5. The Caliphate of Córdoba and the Al-Andaluz

**4. From Empire to Modern States**

(weeks 7-8)

4.1. Post-Abbasid Fragmentation (10th–14th centuries)

4.2. The Ottoman Collapse and the Twentieth Century

**5. Pan-Arabism, Islamism, Revolution and Radicalization**

(weeks 8-end)

5.1. The birth of Arab Nationalism (late 19th century – 1945)

5.2. Pan-Arabism, Arab Socialism, Ba'athism: Ideology, Parties, and States

5.4. Jihadism: the near and the far enemy

5.5. Islamism: fundamentalism and revolution



- **Bibliography** (*preliminary*)

**Chapters 2, 3, 4**

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Black, Antony. *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2001

Enayat, Hamid. *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, London & New York, I.B. Tauris, 2005, 2009

Esposito (Ed.s), John Donohue, J. John L. *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 2007,

Hourani, Albert. *A History of the Arab Peoples (Uma História dos Povos Árabes)*

Kurzman (Ed.), Charles. *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998

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Lewis, Bernard. *The Middle East: 2000 years of History from the Rise of Christianity to the Present Day*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1995

Lewis, Bernard. *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, London, Phoenix, 1982

**Chapter 5**

Bergesen (Ed.), Albert. *The Sayyid Qutb Reader*, New York, Routledge, 2008;

Kepel, Gilles. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*

Kepel, Gilles. *The Roots of Radical Islam*, London, SAQI, 2005

Lia, Brynjar *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt*, Reading, Ithaca Press, 1998;

Mitchell, Richard P. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969;

Qutb, Sayyid. *Milestones*, New Dehli, Islamic Book Service, 2001

Ramadan, Tariq. *Radical Reform*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009

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