EXPLORE GLOBAL ISSUES IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT:
The Middle East

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The Middle East (Near East) is a term used since the 1900s to mark the area at the juncture of Eurasia, Africa, the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The term defines a geographical area but does not have precise borders. The modern Middle East began after World War I, when the Ottoman Empire, which was allied with the defeated Central Powers, was partitioned into a number of separate nations. Other defining events in this transformation included the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the departure of European powers, notably Britain and France from the area.

In its modern definition, it includes the states of Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Egypt is considered a part of the Middle East with its Sinai Peninsula in Asia but North African nations of Libya, Tunisia and Algeria are called North African. Sometimes, depending on the topic of interest, the Middle East may include other countries in the region: Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia of the Caucasus region; Cyprus, Afghanistan and the North Africa, Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia.

The Middle East is primarily arid and semi-arid with grasslands, rangelands, and deserts. The Anatolian Plateau is between the Pontus Mountains and Taurus Mountains in Turkey. Mount Ararat in Turkey’s eastern borders is 5,165 meters, while Mount Damavand in Iran's Elburz Mountains rises to 5,610 meters. The Dead Sea, located on the border between the West Bank, Israel, and Jordan, is situated at 418 m (1371 ft) below sea level, making it the lowest point on the surface of the Earth.
1. **There are many ethnic groups in the Middle East.** Arabs, Turks, Persians, Jews, Armenians, Georgians, Egyptians, Kurds, Greeks, Assyrians, Azeris, Circassians, Berbers, Nubians, Samaritans, and Turkmens all live in the Middle East. Originally, the term "Arab" referred to the peoples that inhabited the northern and central portions of the Arabian Peninsula. Following the spread of various Arab-Islamic empires throughout the Middle East and into Europe and South Asia, the term “Arab” has come to be synonymous with those who speak Arabic. Presently, about 60% of the total population in the Middle East speak Arabic and consider themselves to be an Arab. Not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs.

2. **The Middle East is very diverse in religions,** most of which originated there. Islam in its many forms is the largest religion in the Middle East, but Judaism and Christianity are also important. There are also minority religions like Bahai, Yazdanism, and Zoroastrianism.

3. **Most Muslims in the Middle East belong to the Sunni sect of Islam.** Another sect, Shiite or Shia Islam, is the majority religion in Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, and Bahrain. There are also Shiite minorities in Lebanon, Kuwait, and Yemen. Other smaller sects also exist within Islam. These sects include, among others, the Alawites, the Druze, the Ibadis, the Ismailis, the Shafis, and various Sufi orders. Islam is practiced in other countries besides the Middle Eastern states listed above.

4. **Majority of the Muslims do not live in the Middle East.** Over the centuries Islam spread far and wide, through Asia and Africa, and even to parts of Europe. This spreading of Islam has resulted in Islam becoming the dominant religion in non-Middle Eastern states such as Central Asia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia. There are also large numbers of Muslims in the Philippines, China, the former Yugoslavia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, parts of Europe, and the United States. More Muslims live outside the Middle East than within.

5. **Languages of the Middle East** include languages from Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic, and Altaic language families. Arabic, in its numerous varieties, and Persian are most widely spoken in the region. Other languages in the region include Armenian, Syriac (a form of Aramaic), Azeri and Turkmen (Turkic), Berber languages, Circassian, Persian, Georgian, Gilaki language, Mazandarani languages, Hebrew in its numerous varieties, Kurdish languages, Luri, Turkish, and Greek. English is used among the middle and upper class, in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Iraq and Kuwait. French is spoken in Algeria, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Egypt. Urdu and other South Asian languages are spoken in many Middle Eastern countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and Qatar, which have large numbers of South Asian immigrants.

6. **The 3 largest Middle Eastern economies,** according to CIA world factbook 2013 in terms of PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) are Turkey, followed by Iran and Saudi Arabia. When it comes to per
capita based income, Qatar ($102,100) is number one, followed by Kuwait ($42,100) and Israel ($34,900). The three lowest ranking countries in the Middle East, in terms of per capita income are Afghanistan ($1,100) and Iraq ($1900). The economic structures of Middle Eastern nations are not similar, while some nations are heavily dependent on export of oil and oil related products (Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait), others have a diverse economic base (Turkey and Egypt). Industries of the region include oil and oil related products, agriculture, cotton, cattle, dairy, food products, textiles, leather products, surgical instruments, and defense equipment (guns, ammunition, tanks, submarines, fighter jets, UAVs, and missiles).

7. **Mass production of oil** began around 1945, with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates having large quantities of oil. Estimated oil reserves, especially in Saudi Arabia and Iran, are some of the highest in the world, and the international oil cartel OPEC is dominated by Middle Eastern countries.

8. **Arab Spring** is the wave of demonstrations and protests (non-violent and violent), and civil wars in the Middle East’s mostly Arabic speaking nations that began on December 18, 2010. By December 2013, rulers had been forced down in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen; civil uprisings had erupted in Bahrain, Syria, and major protests had broken out in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Sudan.

9. **History** … The world's earliest civilizations originated in the Middle East: Mesapotamia (Sumer, Akkad Assyria and Babylonia) and in Egypt. These were followed by the Hittite and Greek and Urartian civilizations of Anatolia (Asia Minor) and Elam in pre-Iranian Persia, as well as the civilizations of the Levant (Ebla, Ugarit, Canaan, Aramea, Phoenicia, and Israel). Later there were civilizations in Iran, North Africa (Carthage) and on the Arabian Peninsula. Later the area would be under the Romans and the Byzantine to name only two. The Arab conquest of the region in the 7th century AD, after Islam, unified the entire Middle East and created the dominant Arabic speaking Islamic identity. The Mongols and the Turkic Seljuk and Ottoman Empires, the Safavids and the British Empire later dominated the region.

10. **Current Events** … During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union, competed to influence regional allies. The United States sought to divert the Arab world from Soviet influence. Current issues include the Syrian civil war, Iraq after US occupation, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, political turmoil of Afghanistan, and the Iranian nuclear program.
GLOBAL ISSUES: Conflict and Resolution

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Comprehensive peace in the area (and with positive results globally) is only possible with a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has been going on for decades. However, the conflict between the major Palestinian political parties Fatah and Hamas threatens Palestinian national unity and is critical to the success of a two-state solution.

Principal obstacle to a viable two-state solution is the continued presence and expansion of Israeli settlements and outposts in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The West Bank is home to some 500,000 to 700,000 Israeli settlers living among 2.4 million Palestinians. Almost 40 percent of the West Bank has been absorbed by Israeli settlements and related infrastructure and other areas closed to Palestinians. The settlement grid cuts off Palestinian communities from each other and has had a devastating impact on the social and economic life of Palestinians in the West Bank.

The situation of the Palestinians has become a source of unrest and displeasure within the Muslim populations globally.

Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War (Syrian Uprising), is an armed conflict between forces loyal to the government and those seeking to oust it. The unrest began on March 15, 2011, and grew nationwide by April. Syrian protesters at first demanded democratic and economic reform within the framework of the existing government, and later when the Syrian army fired on demonstrators, it became fierce and turned into war. The Syrian army gets support from Russia and Iran, while Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the US transfer weapons to the rebels.

A 2012 UN report describes the conflict as being "sectarian in nature", between mostly Alawite government forces, militias, and other Shia groups fighting against Sunni-dominated rebel groups. More than four million Syrians have been displaced, more than three million Syrians fled the country and became exiles, and millions more are in poor living conditions with shortage of food and drinking water. In Turkey alone there are 900,000 Syrian refugees.

Related Resources:

- Cato Institute: “Can we Export Democracy?”
- Free Palestine (A political group dedicated to equal treatment of Palestinian people):
  http://www.freepalestinemovement.org/home.html
  Interview with Historian of Israel-Palestinian Conflict: http://www.logosjournal.com/morris.htm
- Of Herrings and Elephants: Benny Morris and “Palestinian Rejectionism”:
Water in the Middle East

In the Middle East, water is an important strategic resource and political issue. By 2025, it is predicted that the countries of the Arabian Peninsula will be using more than double the amount of water naturally available to them. In the Middle East, all major rivers cross at least one international border, and rivers like the Tigris and Euphrates cross through three major Middle Eastern nations. The nations downstream from these rivers are hugely affected by the actions and decisions of the upstream nations. Up to 50% of water required for any specific state within the Middle East finds its source in another state. For example, Jordan has little water and dams in Syria have reduced Jordan’s available water sources over the years. Dams in Turkey have cut the water resources in Iraq. Water is an important issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The mountain aquifers lie under the West Bank and the coastal aquifer is mostly under the Israeli coastal plain. In 1967 Israel took control of the West Bank 1967. Currently, a total of 150 million cubic meters per year is consumed by its residents—115 million cubic meters per year by Palestinians and 35 million cubic meters per year by Israelis. Water usage issues have been part of a number of agreements reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Related Resources:
- Waternet – English Language website with great resources on Middle Eastern water crisis: http://www.waternet.be/
Food Security

Food security relates at both the micro and macro levels to the economic, physical, and social access to sufficient food sources. Food security for a country or a region exists when all or most people within it can regularly access sufficient quantities of nutritious food. A nation’s food sovereignty is measured by the degree to which it is food self-sufficient, and has possession of an adequate food supply to meet its population’s needs. The Middle East, one of the most arid regions of the world, faces challenges in maintaining both food security and food sovereignty. That is, some of the countries in the region are agricultural producers and exporters but demonstrate levels of under-nutrition, hunger, and food insecurity. Some others have higher levels of income and do not face the problems of hungry or malnourished populations, but are not self-sufficient in terms of food production and demonstrate low food sovereignty. For example, 60% of food is imported in the Gulf while the population is increasing. The needed irrigation levels cannot be sustained in some of the areas. By 2060, in Saudi Arabia, the desert will have reclaimed the irrigated areas from the farmland. This is a major issue, which will have to be addressed in the coming years.

Related Resources:

- Project of the Carnegie Middle East Center: Food Security in the Arabian Peninsula: http://carnegie-mec.org/events/?fa=2798
- Time lapse videos from TIME: http://world.time.com/timelapse/
  Shows growth of irrigation in Saudi Arabia, though commentator is ignorant of their source, stating they come “from nowhere.” In fact, this practice of irrigation will soon deplete all of Saudi Arabia’s “fossil” groundwater.
GLOBAL ISSUES:
Trade and Economics

OPEC and Its Continued Relevance

OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) came to dominate the world in a market unrecognizable today. Formed in 1960, it had the objective to “co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers; an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and a fair return on capital to those investing in the industry.” Unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, today the top oil producers sell to a more varied market and there are many producers outside of OPEC. The growth of China as an oil consumer with the recent rise in US oil production has led to a change in OPEC tactics.

Related Resources:
- Iran’s President to Chair Next OPEC Meeting: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/20/world/middleeast/20iran.html
- Arab Spring at an OPEC Meeting: http://www.mywesttexas.com/business/oil/article_00d70134-70bc-5e0a-9515-3d200be38c44.html
- OPEC Shia/Sunni Split: http://www.zawya.com/story/ZAWYA20120304050157/OPEC_ShiaSunni_split/

Tourism and the Middle East

The era of the super-rich tourist has begun, but where it will go next is anyone’s guess. With tourist destinations like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and super-exclusive resorts across the Middle East resuming their rise following the 2008 crisis, the likelihood of an economy based on tourism for Middle East countries increasingly depends on attracting the wealthy with untraditional services including access to off-shore banking and luxury on-demand. In a global world, the super-rich visitors come from many areas outside the US and Western Europe.

Related Resources:
- Turkish Tourism Feels Ripples of Arab Spring: http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/16/uk-turkey-tourism-idUSLNE83F03B20120416
- International times, Tourists Return to Egypt, But Image Problems Remain: http://www.ibtimes.com/tourists-return-egypt-image-problem-remains-1037202
- BBC | Arab nations aim to win back tourists: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15651730
Art and Culture Post-Revolution

The uprisings that occurred across the North Africa and Middle East region resulted in the toppling of regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and in uprisings in Syria – loosely termed The Arab Spring, and several other countries. Graffiti art is one form of revolutionary art that was widely used by protestors during the 2011 uprisings in addition to music and dance. Artistic expression facilitated the uprisings against dictatorial regimes in untraditional ways, particularly the rise of politically savvy graffiti artistry. These revolutions have paved the way for a new era and greater degree of freedom of expression. However, artists continue to face challenges post-revolution from the general public and specific groups that oppose certain forms of artistic expression and artistic content. Censorship, however, remains for artists in the post-revolution.

Related Resources:

- Art in Egypt’s Revolutionary Square: http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/art-egypts-revolutionary-square?ip_login_no_cache=13acdd903068a73d71e95d0e470f6e18
- Revolutionary Art on the Streets of Tunisia: http://pdq.rwu.edu/news/revolutionary-art-streets-tunisia
- You Tube Video Asmaa Mahfouz: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk
Syrian Civil War

Syria is along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, about the size of Washington state with a population of 22 million. Although Syria is very diverse, ethnically and religiously, most Syrians are ethnic Arabs and follow the Sunni branch of Islam. Civilization in Syria goes back thousands of years, but as a nation-state its borders were drawn by European colonial powers in the 1920s.

In March 2011, in a Syrian city called Deraa, locals took to the streets to protest after 15 schoolchildren had been arrested and reportedly tortured for writing anti-government graffiti on a wall. The protests were peaceful to begin with, calling for the children’s release, democracy, and greater freedom for people in the country. The government responded angrily and the army opened fire on protesters, killing four people. The following day, security forces shot at mourners at the victims’ funerals, killing another person. People were shocked and angry at what had happened and soon the unrest spread to other parts of the country.

While the protesters first called for democracy and greater freedom, once security forces opened fire on peaceful demonstrations, people demanded that the President, Bashar al-Assad, resign. President Assad has refused to step down. As the violence worsened he has offered to change some aspects about how the country is run, but his many supporters inside and outside of Syria have helped him to hold onto his office.

International pressure on the ASAD regime has intensified since late 2011, and the Arab League, EU, Turkey, and the United States have expanded economic sanctions against the regime. In December 2012, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces was recognized by more than 130 countries as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Unrest continued in 2013, and the death toll among Syrian Government forces, opposition forces, and civilians is over 100,000. In January 2014, the Syrian Opposition Coalition and Syrian regime began peace talks at the UN sponsored Geneva II conference.

Gezi Protests in Turkey

In Turkey the protests started on 28 May 2013, initially to contest the urban development plan for the Taksim Gezi Park in Istanbul. Supporting protests and strikes took place across Turkey protesting a wide range of concerns, issues of freedom of the press, of expression, assembly, and the government's encroachment on secularism. Social media played a key part in the protests, especially because the government sponsored media did not report the protests or downplayed them. The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan dismissed the protesters as "looters", and the police suppressed the protests with tear gas and water cannons. In addition to the 11 deaths and over 8,000 injuries, more than 3,000 arrests were made. The range of the protesters encompassed individuals of different political
inclinations and complaints ranged from the original local environmental concerns to the authoritarianism of the Prime Minister, who brought restrictions on alcohol, kissing in public, and the government’s involvement in Syria. Protesters called themselves çapulcu (looters), using Erdoğan's insult, and coined the word "chapoling”, meaning "fighting for your rights".

**Related Resources:**
- "Young, Exiled Syrians Still Believe in Revolution": http://www.npr.org/2013/03/18/174594723/young-exiled-syrian-still-believe-in-revolution
- Full “Newsworthy” Timeline of Syria, including detailed 2011-present: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14703995
- Syria Infographic: http://visually.visually.netdna-cdn.com/TheSyrianUprising_4efc64647d8a4.jpg
- Electoral Democracy Won in Turkey, but What is Next for Erdoğan http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2014/04/02-electoral-democracy-turkey-erdogan-kirisci
Other Useful Resources

CSME Website Resources

- http://www.iub.edu/~csme/resources.shtml

Infographics

- Who Buys Iranian Oil?: https://www.flickr.com/photos/gdsdigital/4127935686/
- Tensions in the Arab World: http://visual.ly/tension-arab-world
- Unrest in Arab countries: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_dr3S8zqPnj4/TuxM07dbBeI/AAAAAAAAULc/_qTfp1Oytzw/s1600/162453012.jpg
- Middle East as Global Travel Hub: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-U608w1Sz7bo/TV0Sf1HgKG/I/AAAAAAAAAGI/KaqAmj41HqY/s1600/v5.jpg
- The Coming Water Wars: http://www.princeton.edu/~ina/infographics/water.html

Resources