

SECOND EDITION



AN ATLAS OF
MIDDLE EASTERN
AFFAIRS

LIAM D. ANDERSON
EWAN W. ANDERSON
Cartography by Ian M. Cool

An Atlas of Middle Eastern Affairs

This revised and updated version of *An Atlas of Middle Eastern Affairs* provides accessible, concisely written entries on the most important current issues in the Middle East, combining maps with their geopolitical background. Offering a clear context for analysis of key concerns, it includes background topics, the position of the Middle East in the world and profiles of the constituent countries.

Features include:

- Clearly and thematically organised sections covering the continuing importance of the Middle East, the background, fundamental concerns, the states and the crucial issues related to the area.
- Original maps integrated into the text, placing international issues and conflicts in their geographical contexts.
- Case studies and detailed analysis of each country, complete with relevant statistics and key facts.
- Coverage of fundamental considerations, such as:
 - water shortage
 - the petroleum industry
 - conflicts and boundary issues
- A comprehensive further reading section, enabling students to cover the topic in more depth.

Updated to include recent developments such as the “Arab Spring”, this book is a valuable introduction to undergraduate students of political science and Middle East studies and is designed as a primary teaching aid for courses related to the Middle East in the areas of politics, history, geography, economics and military studies. This book is also an outstanding reference source for libraries and anyone interested in these fields.

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To
Conor and Kiernan Anderson
&

Ewan and Isla Cool

May their generation prove wiser and more successful
than those that have gone before.

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	Boundary of State
	Boundary of State undefined or alignment uncertain
	Internal Boundary of State
	Boundary of Neighbouring State
	Boundary of Neighbouring State undefined or alignment uncertain
	Internal Boundary of Neighbouring State

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Preface

Located at the crossroads of the world where the three Old World continents meet, the area distinguished today as the Middle East has always been of more than regional significance. It saw the birth of civilisations and was the origin of three great monotheistic world religions. It saw the clash of empires but also the growth of Arab and Islamic domination. Throughout history, it has remained crucial as a focus of route ways and movement but since the Second World War it has captured international attention as a result of two key factors. The first was the establishment of the state of Israel within the Arab core of a region that is overwhelmingly Islamic. The second was the occurrence of the world's major reserves of petroleum. The Middle East can be considered the world's premier flashpoint, a view that has been greatly enhanced during the "Arab Spring" and the related events of 2011 and 2012.

Superimposed on the *mélange* of issues that afflict the Middle East is the fact that, with a few notable exceptions, the states of the Middle East remain little visited by people from the Western World. The region retains an innate mystique and few are able to make judgements from personal experience. To the many, the mention of the Middle East produces a reflex action. The region represents the major set of problems on the global stage. As a result, there are likely to be as many misperceptions as there are accurate perceptions of the Middle East.

The aim of this *Atlas* is to present an accessible and manageable coverage, in text and maps, of the affairs of the Middle East. The essential summary is provided by the maps and the text has been used to illuminate the key points in a concise manner. A list of further reading is provided for those who require greater detail. In subject matter, the *Atlas* follows a progression from a consideration of the basic landscape elements and the fundamental common concerns to the states themselves, the effects of contiguous states and the key issues that result from the actions of the states.

[Section A](#) puts the Middle East in context. The geographical and historical background of the region, in as much as it provides the stage for the actors, is set out in [Section B](#). The fundamental components – petroleum, water, boundaries and transboundary movements – are examined in [Section C](#). This section also includes a summary of the economies in which the varying dependence on petroleum is illustrated. [Section D](#) provides a synopsis of each of the states and territories. For each state, the key facts are tabulated, a list of recent events is provided, current major issues are identified and the present status of the state on the global stage is discussed. Also included in this section is a description and analysis of the neighbouring countries that exercise a profound influence on the Middle East. [Section E](#) provides a detailed analysis of the recent and current key issues in the Middle East.

The main sources of statistics have been *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency 2012), *The Military Balance* (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2012), the *BP Statistical Review of World Energy* (June 2012) and the following volumes of the Europa Regional Surveys of the World (Routledge): *The Middle East and North Africa 2012*, *South Asia 2012*,

Africa South of the Sahara 2012, Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia 2012. We are particularly grateful for access to these definitive volumes. It should be noted that, while they provide the most recently available data, for certain subjects the material relates to a date prior to the present. Other sources are noted in the text.

We place on record our thanks to Joe Whiting, who not only suggested the production of the original volume but has offered insightful support throughout the work. We are also extremely grateful to Rosemary Baillon, who managed the overall procedure, organised the volume and typed a large part of the text. Any errors are ours alone.

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December 2012

Abbreviations and acronyms

ABC	Abyei Boundary Commission
AQ	al-Qaeda
AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQSA	al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia
AQY	al-Qaeda in Yemen
AU	African Union
BC	Before Christ
bcm	billion cubic metres
BP	British Petroleum
BWC	Biological Weapons Convention
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CL	civil liberties
COR	Council of Representatives
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
cu km/yr	cubic kilometres per year
cu m/yr	cubic metres per year
CWC	Chemical Weapons Convention
DOP	Declaration of Principles
DTK	Democratic Society Congress
E	east
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
EOKA	National Organisation for Cypriot Struggle
EU	European Union
F	free
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Pakistan)
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
FJP	Freedom and Justice Party
FMA	foreign military assistance
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GAP	South-east Anatolian Project
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	gross domestic product
GHQ	General Headquarters

GIA	(Algerian) Armed Islamic Group
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
HEU	highly-enriched uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAF	Islamic Action Front
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDF	Israeli Defence Force
IDP	internally displaced person
IHO	International Hydrographic Organisation
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
ITG	Iraqi Transitional Government
JDP	Justice and Development Party
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
KAUST	King Abdullah University of Science and Technology
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDPI	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran
KGK	People's Congress of Kurdistan or Kongra-Gel
km	kilometre
km ²	square kilometre
KNC	Kurdish National Council
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
LEU	low-enriched uranium
m	metre
m ²	square metre
m ³	cubic metre
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
mcm/y	million cubic metres per year
mill tonnes	million tonnes
MINURSO	UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
mm	millimetre
MSP	Movement for the Society of Peace
MUJAO	Movement for Unity and <i>jihad</i> in West Africa
N	north
NA	Northern Alliance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NF	not free
NIF	National Islamic Front
nml	nautical miles (1 nml = 1.852 km)
NPT	Non-proliferation Treaty
NSS	National Security Strategy
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PA	Palestinian Authority
pcm	per cubic metre
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PF	partly free

PJD	Party for Justice and Development
PKK	Kurdish Workers' Party
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
Polisario Front	Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro
PR	political rights
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
R&D	research and development
R/P	reserves to production
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
S	south
SADR	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
SCIC	Supreme Council of Islamic Courts
SCIRI	Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq
SLA	South Lebanon Army
SLM	Sudanese Liberation Movement
SNC	Syrian National Council
SPLA/M	Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement
SUMED	Suez-Mediterranean oil pipeline
TAL	Transitional Administrative Law
TBC	Technical <i>Ad Hoc</i> Border Committee
TNA	Transitional National Assembly
TNC	Transitional National Council
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAR	United Arab Republic
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	UN Conference on the Law of the Sea
UNDOF	UN Disengagement Observer Force
UNEF	UN Emergency Force
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIFCYP	UN Force in Cyprus
UNIFIL	UN Interim Force in Lebanon
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency
UNSC	UN Security Council
UNSCOM	UN Special Commission
UNSMIS	UN Supervision Mission in Syria
UNTSO	UN Truce Supervision Organization
US	United States (adj)
USA	United States of America
USS	United States Ship
VX	chemical nerve agent
W	west
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
°	degrees
°C	degrees Celsius
%	per cent
\$	US dollars
×	times
—	not available/not applicable/not listed/none
9/11	11 September 2001

Section A

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The Middle East in context

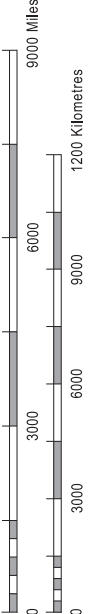
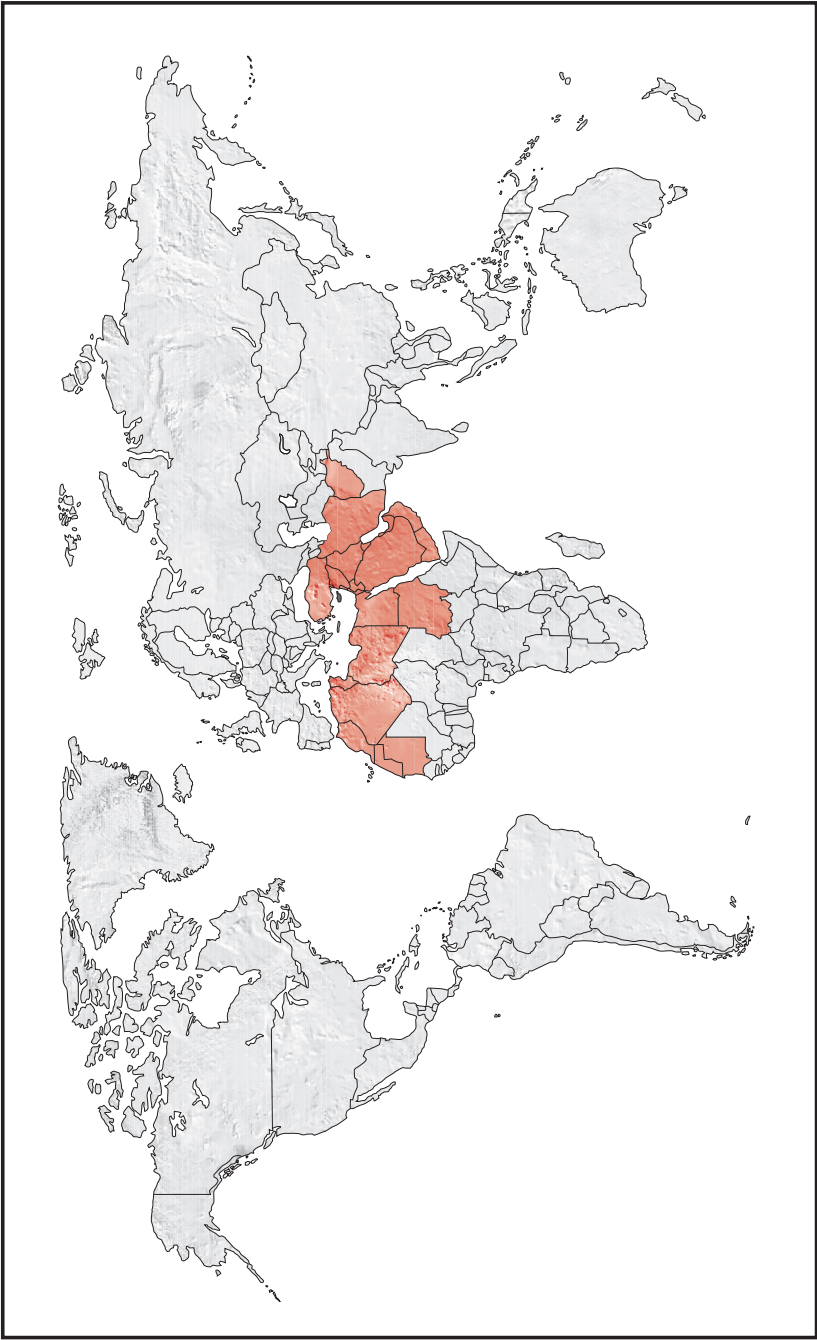
Throughout history the Middle East has been an important focus of human affairs. Soon after the last glacial period (1200–1500 BC) within the region, the settled occupation of the land with the cultivation of crops occurred. This change from nomadic hunter-gathering is recognised as the first real stage in civilisation. With the increasing organisation necessary to establish large-scale cultivation and the accumulation of surplus wealth, the first cities and the first recognisable political units appeared in the basins of the Tigris-Euphrates and the Nile.

Its location at the centre of the “World Island” allowed the transfer of ideas from all directions ([Map 1](#)).

The Middle East was the global communications hub, which attracted not only prosperity but also conflict. It saw conflict between empires and states but also the birth of great world religions. Through the blossoming of Arab arts and science, it linked the world of the Ancients with that of the Renaissance. The Middle East was highly significant in both World Wars and, subsequently, its oil wealth has made it a key political flashpoint. Since the Second World War, the establishment of Israel in a totally Arab and Islamic region has ensured that the Middle East has a continuing high, global profile and a close association with conflict.

Since the first edition of this *Atlas* in 2010, world attention has been focused on the Middle East with the advent of the “Arab Spring”. The self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia in December 2010 struck a powerful chord with the millions throughout the region who had long suffered all manner of injustice ranging from petty bureaucracy to corruption at the highest level. The regimes in Tunisia and Egypt fell rapidly while those in Libya and Yemen, where the military opposed protestors, took rather longer to be removed. Syria is enduring a protracted civil war, the outcome of which, after over two years of fighting, cannot yet be predicted. During 2011, there were serious protests in nineteen of the twenty-two Arab League countries. Whatever the long-term outcomes of the “Arab Spring”, the accepted wisdom that the Middle East prefers authoritarian rule to democracy is being seriously questioned.

Despite the fact that much of its history is lost in the mists of time, the actual term “Middle East” is a relatively recent acquisition. Since the fifteenth century and the Great Age of Discovery it had become customary to distinguish between the Near East and the Far East. The former comprised the eastern Mediterranean with its adjacent lands while the Far East was everything east of India. The Indian subcontinent itself occupied something of an anomalous position. In terms of trade and therefore military strategy, it was effectively the centre of the British Empire but, other than its most northerly and westerly approaches, was considered a separate entity, located in the East but not the Near East or the Far East. Thus, almost by default the area located between the Indian subcontinent and the Near East was characterised as the Middle East. Therefore, historically and geographically there is some logic in the designation of the Middle East or what is known as the *Mashreq*.



Map / Middle East: global location

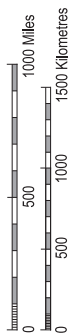
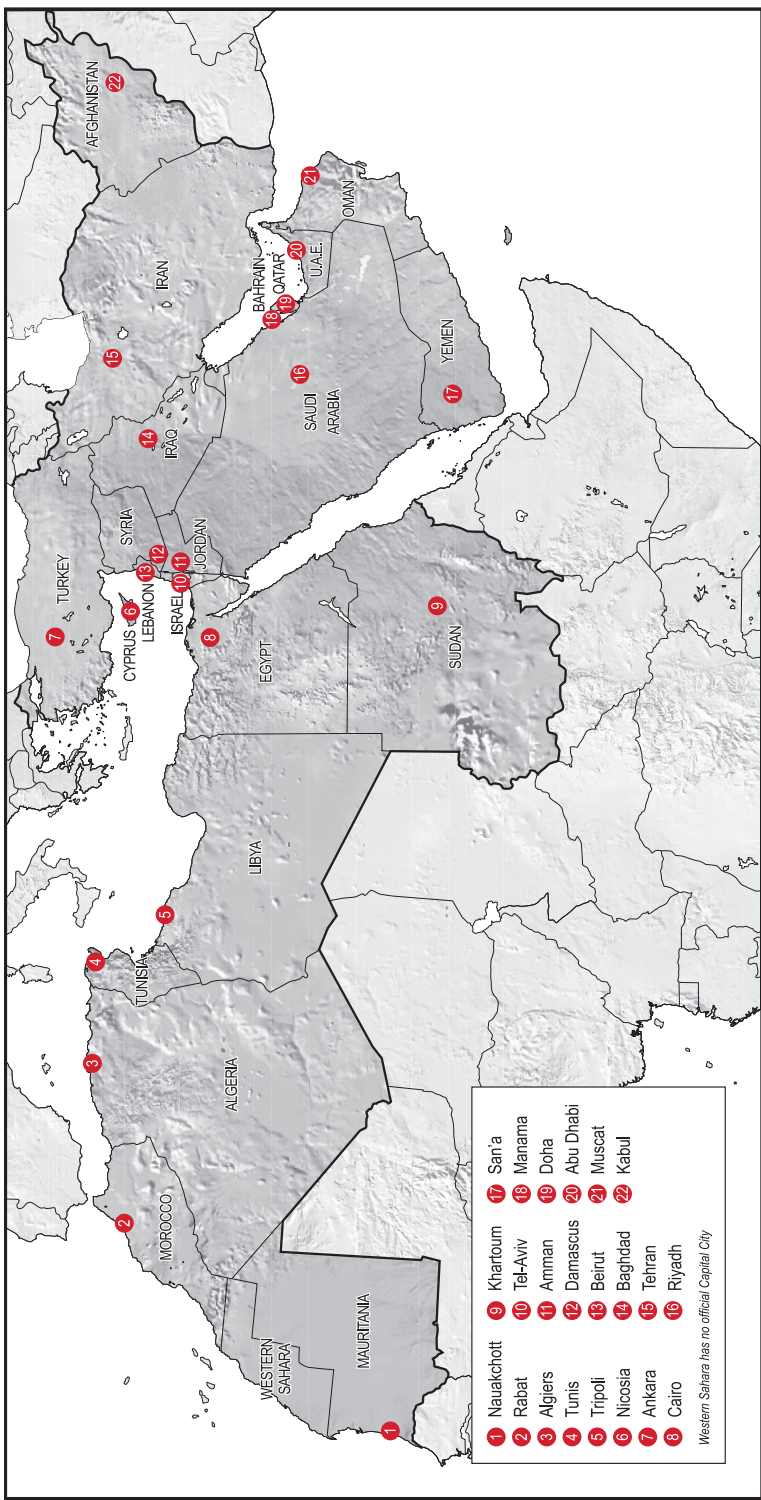
Although the term “Middle East” was used in the British India Office during the middle part of the nineteenth century, its introduction to a wider audience is normally credited to Alfred Mahan, the American naval officer, geopolitician and historian. The core of the Middle East as seen by Mahan was the Gulf. Later, his terminology was variously interpreted as the “Middle” in an east–west sense but also possibly in a north–south sense, between the British to the south and Russians to the north. Thus, from about 1900, the term “Middle East” was no longer restricted to the corridors of power in the British government but came to have a wider acceptance.

However, it was during the period of global warfare that the term achieved general acknowledgement and permanence. During the First World War, the operational area of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force was distinguished as the “Middle East” while that of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force was characterised as the “Near East”. Geographical and strategic or military definitions roughly coincided. Between the wars, the Royal Air Force amalgamated its Middle Eastern Command, based in Iraq, with its Near Eastern Command, located in Egypt. The new Command retained the term “Middle East”. This precedent was followed by the Army, which at the beginning of the Second World War, largely for the defence of the Suez Canal, established its General Headquarters (GHQ) Middle East in Cairo. Thus a swathe of land extending from Iran to Tripolitania was created as a military province and given the name “Middle East”. The importance of this region, especially in political and economic terms, resulted in the appointment of a Minister of State and the development of an economic organisation known as the Middle East Supply Centre. Originally the Supply Centre was British but later it became Anglo-American and thereby the term “Middle East” became generally recognised not only in the Eurocentric world but also, ironically, in the home of its originator.

Following the Second World War, the Middle East became the standard term of reference for a wide variety of activities: military, political and economic. At the same time, the term “Near East” gradually faded from common usage. Throughout the Cold War, the Middle East remained a focus of attention for both the East and the West. The United States of America (USA) and the Soviet Union developed close relationships with various states in the region and some, such as Egypt, changed sides. As a result, the term “Middle East” came into use worldwide, including within the region itself. However, while the term may be generally accepted, there has never been agreement on the exact boundaries of the Middle East. The United States (US) State Department has compromised by using the term “Near and Middle East”. In the US military, the region is divided between three Commands: the European, the Middle Eastern and the African.

With regard to boundaries, the chief problem would seem to lie in the west, where Arab and Islamic countries are located far from any geographical area that could be considered both “eastern” and “middle”. Indeed, Mauritania extends to almost the western extremity of Africa. Such considerations have given rise to the term “Middle East and North Africa”. However, even with that, geography needs to be stretched to include Mauritania. To the east, Iran, as a Gulf state, offers a generally accepted limit to the Middle East. However, Afghanistan, also a Muslim state, is then left in isolation. It is not accepted as part of Central Asia and it is clearly not part of the Indian subcontinent. It was indeed established as a buffer state between the British and Russian influence, ostensibly to keep the Russians out of the Indian subcontinent. It might be suggested that in Mahan’s terms, Afghanistan is classically in the middle and the east.

In the eastern part of North Africa, Ethiopia with its powerful Christian heritage offers a clear restriction on Middle Eastern influences. With the recognition of the predominantly Muslim state of Eritrea, this limit is now less clear-cut. However, the Horn of Africa is a generally recognised region. Other Middle Eastern boundary issues concern Turkey, a small but highly significant part of which is within Europe, and Sudan, which clearly extends southwards into the equatorial region of Central Africa. Given a range of factors from Islam and the predominance



Map 2 Middle East: states and capital cities

of Arabic to lifestyle, together with political, economic and social affiliation, for this *Atlas* the Middle East will be used as a term to include North Africa and to extend from Mauritania in the west to Afghanistan in the east and from Turkey in the north to Sudan in the south (Map 2).

This delimitation includes all the states generally accepted as Middle Eastern together with those of the *Maghreb* and its westward extension into Western Sahara and Mauritania. In the east it includes Afghanistan, at the present time closely linked in the public mind with Iran, Iraq, conflict and terrorism.

Thus defined, the Middle East extends from approximately 41°N to 10°N and from 17°W to 75°E. That is a latitudinal spread of approximately 31° and a longitudinal extent of 92°. It includes twenty-three states together with Palestine, a recognised independent territory, and Western Sahara, the status of which has still to be agreed. The Middle East lies between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and subsumes at least part of five seas: the Red Sea, the Gulf, the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. It lies centrally between the three Old World continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, defining in part the continental boundaries by the Red Sea in its northward extension through the Gulf of Aqaba and the Turkish Straits.

The states themselves vary in size from those such as Sudan, Algeria and Saudi Arabia considered large in global terms to micro-states such as Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. They vary enormously in wealth from the oil-rich countries such the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Kuwait to the very poor including Sudan, Western Sahara and Mauritania. All bar Israel, Cyprus and Lebanon are almost exclusively Muslim and all except Lebanon and Cyprus include areas of marked aridity. The Middle East is characterised by unity on a large scale but also by diversity, frequently on a smaller scale. In so many ways, the Middle East is a place of extreme contrasts. The ancient *sug* is set against modern high-rise buildings. A *dhow* slowly makes its way between the tower blocks of Dubai Creek. A Bedouin tent together with its long-term inhabitants appears in the grounds of a multinational-run hotel. Parched desert abuts irrigated luxuriance.

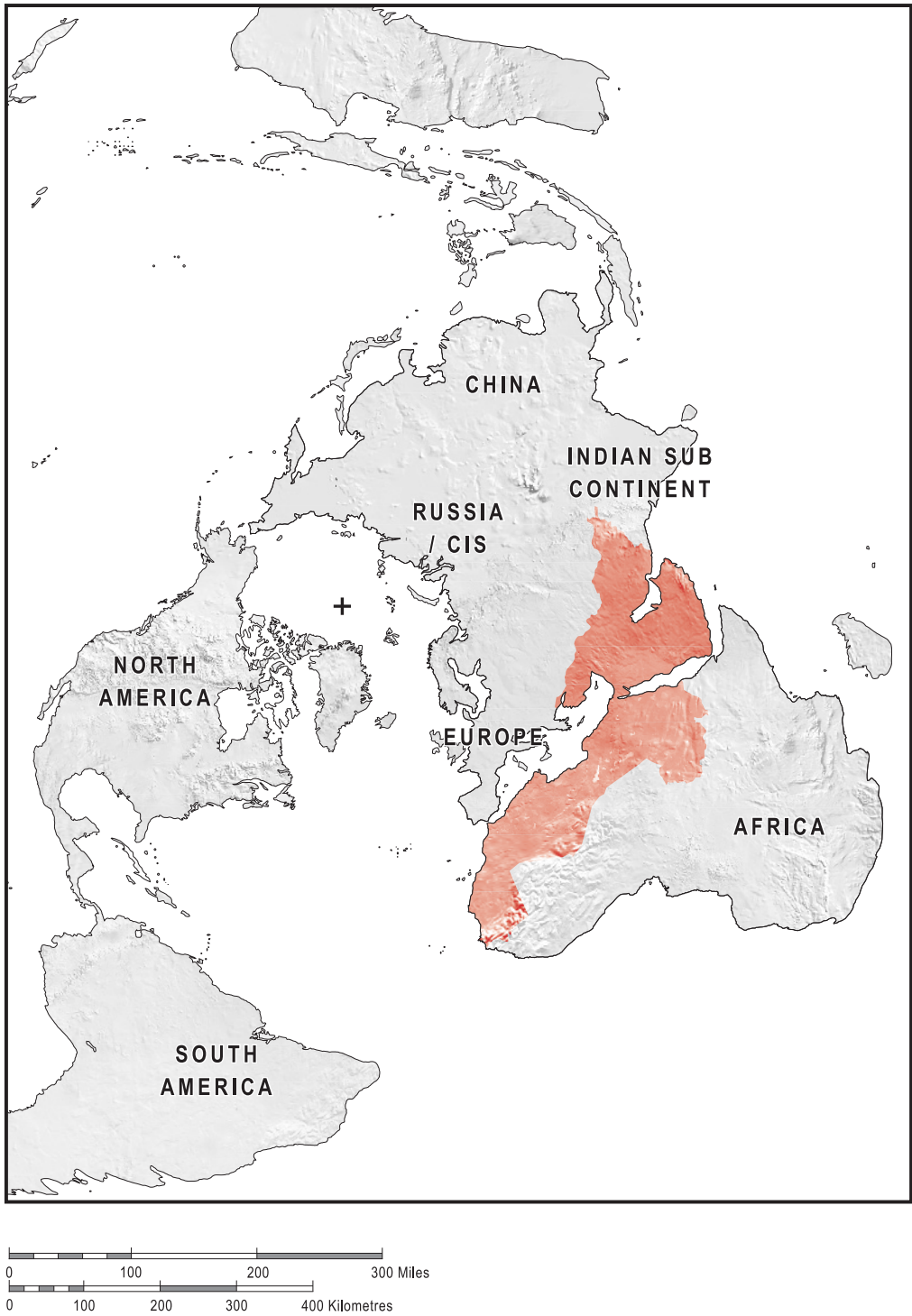
In viewing the region as a whole, there are a number of outstanding characteristics. Using a polar projection, it can be seen that the region abuts all the major global cultures other than those of North and South America (Map 3).

It shares boundaries with Europe, Russia through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Asia-Pacific through China, the Indian subcontinent and Africa. The Middle East is the global transport node and also the key international choke point. Ancient route ways, now replaced by all-weather roads, criss-cross the region. Since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, shipping has converged on the region and its many choke points: the Straits of Gibraltar, Hormuz and Bab al Mandab and the Turkish Straits. In many ways, the major choke point remains the Suez Canal itself. For air travel to Asia-Pacific, Central Asia and much of Africa, the Middle East is a stopover or plane change point. There is a sense that transport passes through the region but the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *Hajj*, and the petroleum industry are reminders that the Middle East is also a key destination. The most recent transport development has concerned pipelines from the oilfields to the coastal loading point but also other parts of the region to avoid choke points or shorten the sea passage.

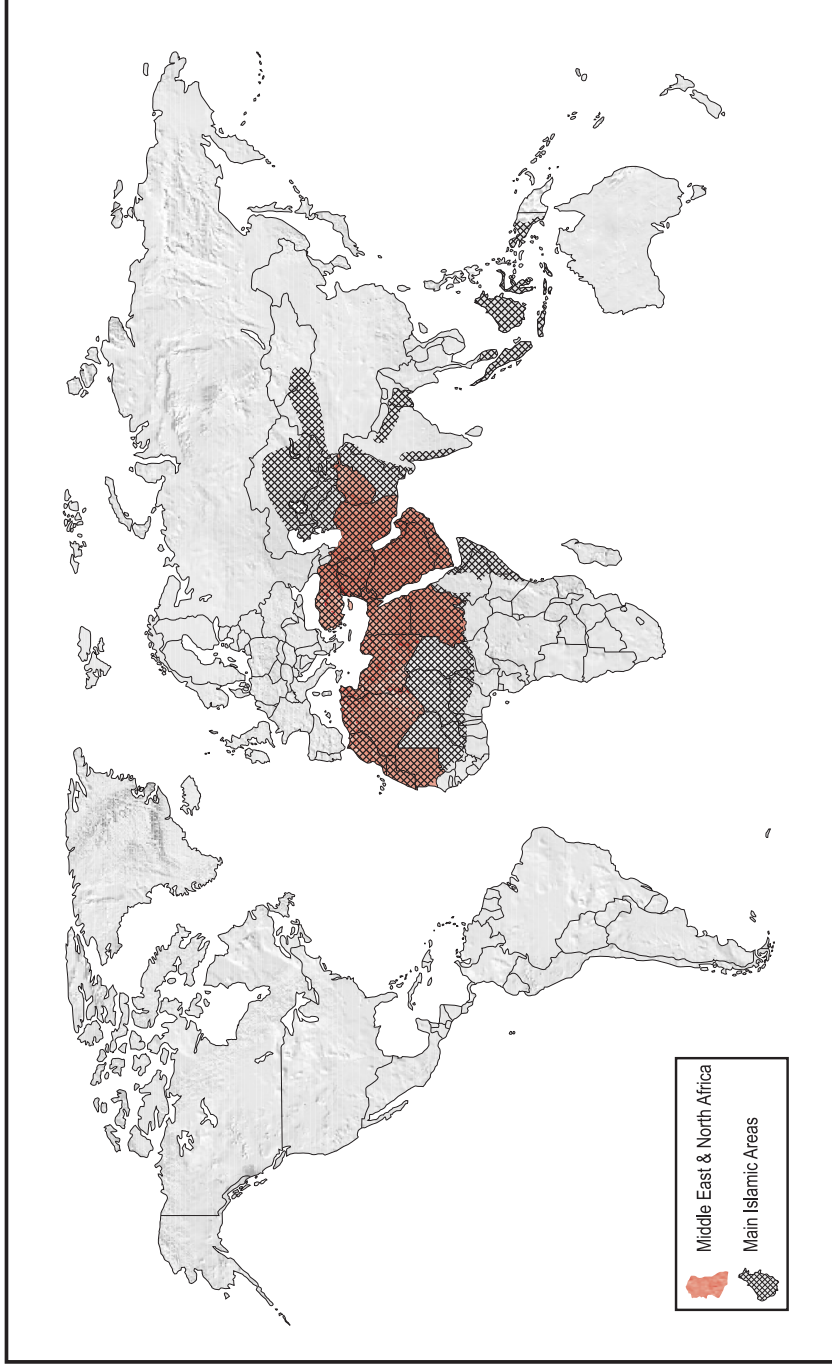
The key factor most commonly associated with the Middle East is petroleum. Five states in the Gulf region have between them more than 45 per cent of all the world's reserves. Oil is the most traded commodity and the complex infrastructure of the industry reaches every country. Petroleum is truly a global industry and, following the demise of coal, it is the key, and in many cases the only, fuel mineral.

The Middle East is perhaps the only world region that can be classed in the true sense as religious. It is located at the core of Islam (Map 4).

The daily calls to prayer dominate every settlement, and prayer mats are produced whatever the occasion or environment. Nonetheless, Islam is divided between Sunni and Shia, with a



Map 3 Polar projection of the Middle East



Map 4 Main Islamic areas

number of smaller subdivisions. It must also be remembered that in many of the countries there are significant non-Muslim minorities. Cyprus is predominantly Christian while Israel is Jewish and Lebanon has a high proportion of Christians. Egypt, despite being a core Muslim country, has a significant Christian element. The Middle East is, most importantly, the birthplace of three great world monotheistic religions, while a fourth evolved nearby and has exerted a strong influence.

Arabic is the predominant language throughout the Middle East but, unlike Islam, is not all-pervasive. Of the three regional super-states, only Egypt is Arab. Both Turkey and Iran are foci of their own language groups. There are other minority languages but essentially, the Middle East has three key languages. It remains an astonishing fact that, although dialects vary somewhat, an Arab from Oman in the east can understand an Arab from Mauritania in the west. In no other world region do such a large number of states share a common mother tongue.

A further key characteristic is the political significance of the region. During the Cold War it lay between East and West, with competition between the Soviet Union and the USA. Oman had Western bases such as Masirah Island while down the coast, off what was the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDY), Socotra was a base for the Soviet Navy. However, despite the number of bases and the flow of arms into the region, only one state, Turkey, was a member of a military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). At the end of the Cold War, NATO remained in being as the Warsaw Pact disintegrated. In justifying its existence, NATO cited the possible threat of Islamic fundamentalism from the Middle East. Almost by wish fulfilment, violence within the region increased. It reached a gory peak following the US/United Kingdom (UK) invasion of Iraq. Numerous groups, characterised by the State Department as terrorists, joined those already in existence in the region. As a result, although on any real scale it is only a recent phenomenon, the region has become associated with terrorism and its generation.

The other obvious source of violence followed the foundation of the state of Israel. Israel is in the Middle East but not of the Middle East in that its living standards and aspirations are far higher than those of any other country. If the other states are Third World or at best Second World, Israel is essentially First World and it seeks closer links with the USA and Europe rather than with its neighbours. The forcible emplacement of a Jewish state in the middle of an area that is wholly Arab and Muslim was always likely to lead to problems and violence. Over the years attitudes have hardened, exacerbated by the stance of the USA, which has offered unequivocal support for Israel. Therefore, in the public mind, the Middle East tends to be associated with violence and conflict whether or not these are generated within the region. Apart from the internal turbulence of the "Arab Spring", the Middle East has been the centre of media attention for wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982 and 2003; longer conflicts from 1980 to 1988 and 1990 to 1991; and, longest of all, warfare in Afghanistan which has lasted from 2001 to the present.

Section B

The Middle East background

Geographical and historical

States and territories of the Middle East can be envisaged as actors in a continuing drama. Each has a unique character and each exhibits different abilities. For example, the power to influence other states may depend on location, history, area of territory, size of population, economic strength, military strength, external support or the contribution of significant individuals. The characteristics of each state, together with those of neighbouring groups of states, are discussed in [Section D](#).

While the drama may, and frequently does, affect the whole world, the essential stage on which the action takes place is the landscape of the Middle East. This landscape, with its physical and human components, is the resultant of geography and history. Therefore, if Middle Eastern affairs are to be identified and interpreted, a basic appreciation of these two subjects is required.

Each state brings its own geography and history to the play, but the drama can only be appreciated in context against the broad sweep of Middle Eastern geography and history. Key elements of the total physical landscape, such as aridity, have been influential throughout the history of the region and remain crucial in current Middle Eastern affairs. Islam is a dominant component of the human landscape and the influence of this religion pervades all areas of the Middle East.

It is with such thoughts in mind that the background will be described. Aspects of the background are discussed only if they are considered relevant to an understanding of Middle Eastern affairs. However, it is realised that, given time, even the most seemingly insignificant element might be, for some activity, vital. Over geological time, no variation is too small to be discounted, but if the background is to relate directly to the other sections of the *Atlas* there needs to be selection and, given the scale of the region, there must also be generalisation. For example, vegetation is clearly an important landscape feature but it varies as a result of soil, climate, geomorphology and a number of biotic factors, particularly human influence. Since soil variation is too complex to map on such a regional scale, it can be seen that only the most generalised picture of vegetation can be provided.

Present-day geography sets the stage on which Middle Eastern events occur, but it is by no means passive. The geography of the Middle East is, in many ways, the geography of extremes and, as such, contributes to the script by imposing constraints and limitations as well as by offering opportunities. The current landscape is, furthermore, only a snapshot of a continuous process of evolution whether one considers, for example, landforms or settlement patterns. Relatively recent changes, particularly those involving the human landscape, are considered history. Middle Eastern affairs may result not only from the current combination of factors but may entail a significant historical legacy. For convenience and because they represent different viewpoints, one focusing on place and the other on time, the geographical and historical perspectives will be considered separately although it must always be borne in mind that they are intimately entwined. This relationship is clearly indicated by the persistent patterns, identified by Held (2000), related to religion, infrastructure, natural resources, strategic features, culture, art and conflict.

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Geographical background

The present landscape of the Middle East, more than that of any other world region, illustrates the sharpest contrast between the works of nature and the works of man. Landscapes in the temperate zone are basically the product of natural variables and human factors. Mountainous areas may have been little affected by human activity while urban areas may seem little influenced by nature, but in general there is a clear interplay between the two. In the Middle East there are vast areas, some mountainous but mainly comprising desert, in which any effect of human life is difficult to detect. In contrast, the valleys of the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates have been moulded by human action over millennia. Given this contrast, it is appropriate to separate considerations of physical geography from those of human geography.

Physical geography

As indicated above, physical geography is important in any consideration of Middle Eastern affairs in that it places obvious constraints on human activity. To name but a few aspects, agriculture, movement and indeed permanent settlement are all severely limited in the Middle East. However, the geological conditions for the formation of petroleum and natural gas, the river valleys with their possibilities for agriculture and settlement and the deep aquifers as a source of water all offer opportunities for human development. Thus, aspects of both the underlying structure and the surface form are of significance.

Relief and structure

Given the fact that so much of the landscape is unencumbered by human artefacts or even vegetation, the relationship between structure and form is, in most parts of the Middle East, very apparent. However, underlying this clarity and seeming simplicity is complexity of scale and process. The foundations laid during tectonic history are on a macro-scale. The geological sequence, a product of emergence and submergence together with drier and wetter periods, varies over time and in location throughout the region and the differences are essentially on a meso-scale. The moulding of the present landscape has been by geomorphological processes, many of which operate on a micro-scale.

Interpretation is further hindered by the fact that there is variation in the current state of knowledge. There has been elaboration of the theory of plate tectonics and particularly the locations of the edges of the plates, but with regard to geology, the level of knowledge varies widely across the Middle East. In areas in which there has been drilling for potential hydrocarbons or occasionally water, there is abundant information about the underlying stratigraphy. In areas

lacking these interests, geological information is sparse. Geomorphology depends essentially on meticulous fieldwork and detailed monitoring, both of which are problematical in many of the harsh environments of the Middle East. It remains true that there are fewer textbooks on arid zone geomorphology than there are annual journals on glaciology.

Tectonics, geology and geomorphology are closely interlinked. For example, tectonic movements resulting in emergence and submergence control the geological succession and through lateral movements they produce fold mountains and depressions. The changing face of the landscape influences geomorphological processes which are further affected by geology as a result, for example, of permeability. The basis for the large-scale movements is plate tectonics. The surface of the Earth comprises a series of plates, the movement of which produces changes at the plate edges. The movement itself may be accompanied by faulting, earthquakes and volcanic activity and these facilitate the identification of the plate edges.

There are three categories of plate edge effects. Plates may move apart in what is termed “spreading”, as for example in the case of the central trough of the Red Sea. Alternatively, plates may move together with one plate being compressed against another. One plate is forced below the other and its edge is then consumed in what is termed a “subduction zone”. The Taurus and Zagros Mountains indicate a subduction zone. Third, plates may move laterally with respect to each other, producing transform faults such as that which dictates the basin form of the Jordan Valley.

For the Middle East, a simplified version of events is that there were two major plates, the Afro-Arabian to the south and the Eurasian to the north. Between them a major depression in the Earth’s crust was occupied by the Tethys Sea in which, from the erosion of the two plates, vast amounts of sedimentation occurred. Later the Afro-Arabian plate moved northwards, thrusting up massive fold mountain ranges of which the mountains in the north of the region are but remnants. As movement occurred, the African plate was split into three separate plates: the African, the Arabian and the Somalian plates, separated by the Great Rift Valley system which runs from the Dead Sea through the Red Sea into the Rift Valleys of Ethiopia and Kenya. Also, the northern edges of the plate shattered, producing the Aegean and Turkish plates. The overall result is that the physical landscape of the Middle East can be basically divided into two forms: the continental platforms, representing the plates, and the mountain orogenic belts at the edges of the plates. The platforms comprise stable blocks while the orogenic belts are liable to instability.

Other than the fact that the oldest rocks occur only on the continental platforms, there is little basic difference geologically between the two forms. For obvious reasons, outcrops tend to be far more extensive on the undisturbed platforms than in the orogenic belts. With human activity in mind, a key distinction is between the older sedimentary rocks which tend to occur towards the north and south of the region and the younger sedimentaries which occur through the centre. The former, for example Nubian Sandstone, are generally of continental origin whereas the later are of maritime. This position can be related to the tectonic model with marine sediments, particularly limestones and marls, being laid in the Tethys Sea. These calcareous rocks, which occur in the northern part of North Africa and in a belt from the Levant down either side of the Gulf, are particularly vital as it is in them that the petroleum reserves are concentrated.

With regard to geomorphology, a key point is the extent to which the present landforms represent current processes rather than those that obtained during past climates. Over large areas of the region, extensive drainage networks are etched into the landscape even though today they rarely carry any surface water. The issue is whether these channels, called wadis, some of which are massive gorges, could have been produced under present conditions. The prevalent geomorphic processes are aeolian but it is doubtful whether wind action alone can produce landforms on the scale found in many parts of the Middle East. Therefore, the dominant processes may still