

## Introduction: After September 11

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On September 11, 2001, terrorists angry about the U.S. military's presence in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. role in the Middle East attacked the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. The terrorists were followers of Osama bin Laden, a multi-millionaire originally from Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden had been implicated in attacks on the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. Other reports linked him and his organization, al Qaeda (loosely translated as "the base"), to the bombing deaths of U.S. military personnel in Saudi Arabia in 1996 and the attack on the USS *Cole* by suicide bombers in 2000 that killed nineteen U.S. sailors.

Before September 11, 2001, the United States had cut its defense budget. Some U.S. troops had been withdrawn from overseas bases. Foreign aid spending on most parts of the world had been slashed. After September 11, U.S. leaders and the U.S. public began to reconsider carefully U.S. policies in the Middle East as well as the nation's role in the world. In early 2002, President George W. Bush identified two Middle-Eastern countries, Iran and Iraq, as part of an "axis of evil" that threatened the security of the United States and the world.

In the spring of 2003, U.S.-led military forces raced through the Iraqi desert, swept aside Saddam Hussein's military, and occupied Iraq. Now in its sixth year, the war in Iraq has caused divisions both at home and abroad. The political and economic consequences of the occupation, as well as the physical destruction in Iraq, promise to ripple across the landscape of the Middle East for years to come.

In addition to the September 11 attacks and the war in Iraq, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions also put the Middle East on the forefront of the minds of many U.S. citizens.

### *Why does the United States maintain an active role in the Middle East?*

The United States maintains an active role in the Middle East for four main reasons. First, the United States wants to ensure the steady flow of oil, the fuel which currently drives most of the world's economies. Second, the United States is concerned about long-term stability and about retaining power and influence in this important area of the world. The U.S. involvement in Iraq and its promotion of democracy fall under this category. Third, the United States is concerned about nuclear proliferation, so it keeps a close eye on Iran, which the U.S. government believes is trying to develop nuclear weapons. Finally, the United States has long been enmeshed in efforts to settle the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Each of these reasons overlaps with the others, making the U.S. role in the Middle East very complex.

In the following pages, you will read about the debate regarding U.S. policy in the Middle East. You will confront the same questions facing U.S. policymakers: Which interests and values should provide the basis for the role of the United States in the region? How should the Middle East's enormous oil reserves and the United States' close relationship with Israel figure into our calculations? Does the importance of Islam in the politics of the Middle East challenge the United States?

The reading will prepare you to wrestle with these questions. In Part I, you will explore the history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East since World War I. In Part II, you will examine the critical issues facing the United States in the Middle East today. Finally, you will have the opportunity to consider four options for the future of the U.S. role in the Middle East.

## Part I: The Middle East in the World

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most people in the United States were introduced to the Middle East through the Bible. The territories that are at the center of the Arab-Israeli conflict today were referred to as the “holy land.” The Middle East, which is often called the cradle of civilization, is the birthplace of three of the world’s major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

During the Middle Ages, Islamic empires in the region were at the center of the world’s science, scholarship, and commerce. By the 1500s, the Ottoman Turks, one of those empires, had skillfully ruled over the diverse peoples and religions of the area which stretched from the Persian Gulf to the western end of North Africa for three centuries. This empire was militarily strong as well. In 1683, an Ottoman army invaded Europe, conquering Eastern Europe as far as the Austrian city of Vienna before being stopped.

To the east of the Ottomans, the Safavid Empire of Iran was a thriving center of Persian culture and commerce from 1501 to 1736. A well-administered and stable governmental system allowed the Safavid capital of Isfahan with its population of over 400,000 to become renowned for its poetry, paintings, and scholarship.

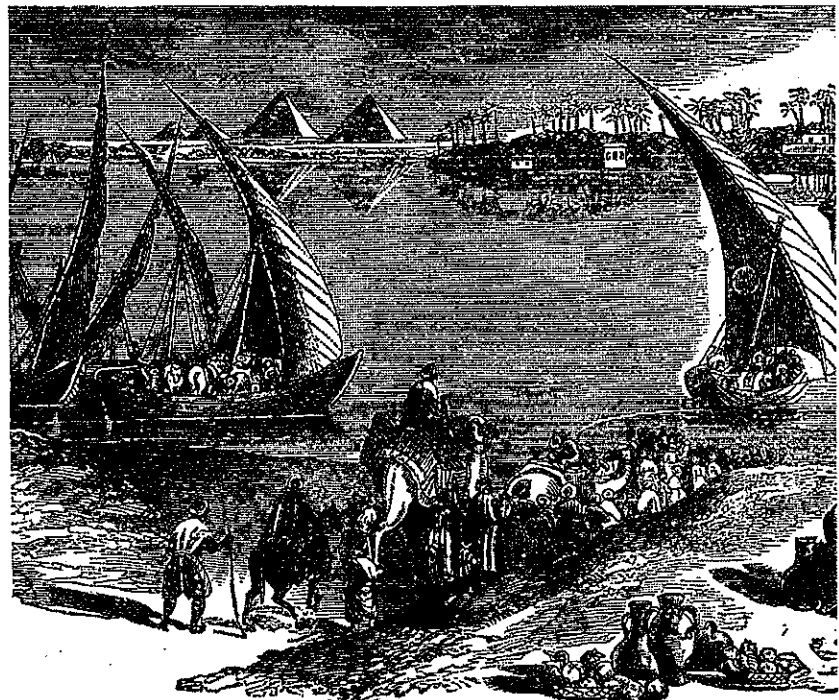
### The Middle East Meets the West

In the early 1800s Protestant missionaries traveled to the Middle East, hoping to convert the Muslims of the region to Christianity. To a large extent, U.S. impressions of the Middle East were filtered through the eyes of these missionaries.

Despite the earlier wealth and scholarship of the Otto-

man and Safavid Empires, by the nineteenth century the Middle East had fallen behind the nations of the West. The advances in science and technology that fueled the Industrial Revolution in Britain, the United States, and other Western nations were slow to reach the Middle East. The Middle Easterners who greeted the missionary pioneers were surprised when they began to understand that their region lacked much of what Westerners took for granted. For instance, the Ottoman military was unable to match the new firepower of its European rivals, and the traders who followed the missionaries brought items Middle Easterners had not seen before.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire was in decline, often called the “sick man of Europe.” Throughout Europe and the Middle East at that time nationalist movements challenged large, multinational empires. For the Ottomans, this trend, as well as European imperialism, ultimately destroyed the empire. In southeastern Europe, local independence movements took territory away from



From *A History of the Empire and People of Turkey*

The nineteenth century Middle East in the Western imagination.

the Ottomans. In the northeastern reaches of the empire, ambitious Russian tsars interested in gaining more land drove them out. Meanwhile, the Ottoman economy increasingly fell under the domination of European nations eager to gain access to oil, a material growing in importance for military and civilian uses. Britain and France, nations with no oil fields of their own, were especially interested in controlling the region.

To the east of the Ottomans, Russia and Britain competed to control Iran and its resources throughout the nineteenth century. Iran's economy and infrastructure suffered from being in the middle of the two great powers' struggle. In 1907, Russia and Britain, fearing that the newly-established constitutional regime would limit their role in Iran, agreed to cooperate with each other. In 1912, they invaded Iran to assure "stability" and "security."

#### ***How did World War I affect the Middle East?***

World War I, which began in 1914, destroyed the Ottoman Empire. In the early months of the war, the Ottoman Empire allied itself with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although the decisive battles of the war took place in Europe, the Middle East was thrown into turmoil as well. British forces, with the assistance of their Arab allies, drove Ottoman armies out of most of the empire's Arab provinces. Fighting between Russia and the Ottomans along the Caucasus front turned vast areas into wasteland.

During the war, parts of Iran were occupied by the Ottoman Empire, by Russia, and by Britain. Iranian leaders had hoped to free themselves from European influence after World War I. But after the Ottomans were defeated and the Russians left to focus on their own revolution in 1917, the British took steps to make sure they could continue to access Iranian oil.

#### ***What was the Sykes-Picot Accord?***

Meanwhile, much of the most important action took place away from the battlefield.

In 1916, diplomats from Britain and France signed a secret treaty concerning the postwar division of the Ottoman Empire. Under the terms of what was known as the Sykes-Picot Accord, the British and French agreed to carve up the Arab provinces of the empire between themselves.

***“It is accordingly understood between the French and British governments.... That...France and... Great Britain shall be allowed to establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.”***

—from the Sykes-Picot Agreement

#### ***How did President Wilson's principle of “self-determination” affect the Middle East?***

U.S. President Woodrow Wilson presented the main obstacle to British and French designs. When the United States joined World War I in 1917, Wilson insisted that his country was fighting for a higher set of ideals than the European powers were. He announced a sweeping fourteen-point peace plan which he hoped to implement at the end of the war. Among the key principles of Wilson's proposal was a call for a postwar international system (a “League of Nations”) based on the “self-determination,” or right to govern oneself, of nations.

***“The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development....”***

—Point XII of the Fourteen Points, Woodrow Wilson, 1918

Arab leaders applauded Wilson's views. They saw the president's emphasis on self-determination as an endorsement of Arab efforts

to govern themselves without outside interference. In contrast, the British and French realized that self-determination undermined their plan to impose the Sykes-Picot Accord on the Middle East.

Ultimately, at the Paris Peace Conference following World War I, Wilson backed down from his call for self-determination. His European counterparts forced a compromise which allowed European nations to keep their colonial possessions.

When Wilson returned to the United States, he encountered strong opposition to U.S. participation in the new international system he had envisioned. In 1919, the U.S. Senate soundly rejected the treaty that Wilson had helped negotiate. Wilson's defeat was a turning point for the United States. Over the next two decades, U.S. leaders chose to be involved in international affairs only in ways

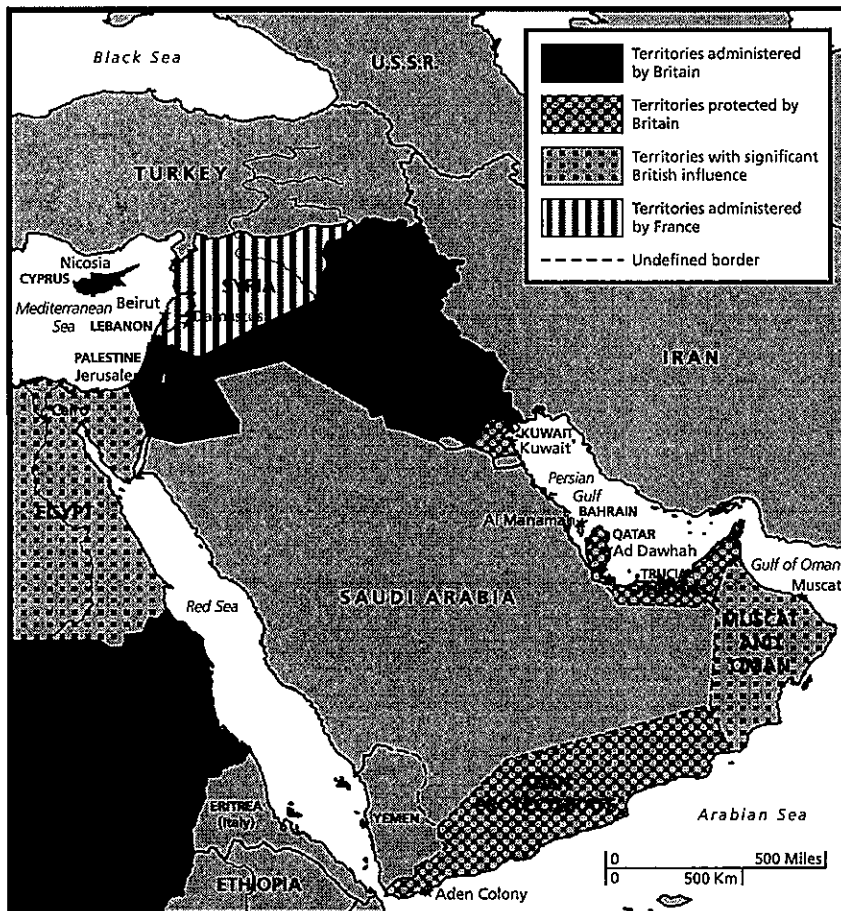
that were beneficial to the United States. Once the United States had retreated from the international scene, Britain and France were free to divide the defeated Ottoman Empire.

**What were "mandates"?**

The newly-formed League of Nations, precursor to the United Nations, decided that many of the areas that had been controlled by the Ottoman Empire were unprepared for self-government. The League established "mandates," which gave Britain and France the authority to control and manage the new states that had been carved out of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. While France took over Syria and Lebanon, the British controlled Iraq, Kuwait, Palestine, Jordan, and most of the coastal areas of the Arabian peninsula. Although these areas were not officially called "colonies," the Arabs within these mandates saw themselves as subjects of European colonialism.

With Russia weakened by civil war, Iran increasingly fell within Britain's sphere of economic domination as well. Turkey and Saudi Arabia were the only Middle Eastern countries to attain complete independence after World War I. In Turkey, a nationalist movement overthrew the last remnants of the Ottoman Empire and established a republic in 1923. In the Saudi Arabian kingdom, leaders preferred not to have connections with the international world.

Despite being dominated by European nations, the outlines of the countries of today's Middle East were clearly recognizable by the 1920s. With few changes, the map that the Allies drew at the Paris Peace Conference is the same one that exists today.



British and French influence in the Middle East, 1926.

## Oil Politics

The contest for European control of the Middle East during and after World War I was driven largely by oil. The war effort had been powered mostly by coal, but far-sighted military strategists understood that the next major war would be fueled by oil. Oil was quickly becoming the lifeblood of economies around the world.

***“I am quite clear that it is all-important for us that this oil should be available.”***

—Lord Balfour, British foreign secretary, 1918



SOCAL changed its name to ARAMCO in 1944. This aerial photograph of the ARAMCO headquarters and workers' community in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia was taken in 1947.

R. S. Leonard/Saudi Aramco World/PADA. Used with permission.

### ***How did the United States become involved in the oil politics of the Middle East?***

Compared to the European Allies, the United States was a latecomer to the oil politics of the Middle East. Unlike Britain and France, the United States was an oil giant and produced roughly two-thirds of the world's oil output during World War I. Nonetheless, U.S. policymakers encouraged U.S. oil companies to begin looking overseas for new oil reserves.

To maintain good relations with the United States in the 1920s, the British agreed to allow U.S. oil companies to participate in the development of the Middle East's oil resources. At the time, the two main centers of oil production in the region were northern Iraq and the Iranian side of the Persian Gulf.

Serious oil exploration in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait did not take place until the 1930s. Leading members of the Saudi royal family were reluctant to open their country to foreign oil firms in the 1920s because they were worried that their traditional way of life would be disrupted.

But the Saudis also wanted to increase their wealth and reduce poverty in their kingdom. In 1933, they signed a sixty-year agreement with Standard Oil of California (SOCAL). In exchange for \$175,000 up front and the promise of royalty payments on any oil produced, SOCAL was permitted to explore 360,000 square miles of eastern Saudi Arabia (an area larger than Texas and Oklahoma combined). SOCAL invested \$10 million before making a major discovery in 1938. At about the same time, a British-American partnership also struck oil in Kuwait.

### ***What was the first oil war?***

World War II illustrated the geopolitical importance of oil. The eruption of war in 1939 dashed hopes of turning a quick profit from the newly-discovered oil fields of the Middle East. Instead of expanding production, U.S. and British leaders tried to prevent the energy resources of the Middle East from falling into the hands of Nazi Germany. In 1941, British and Soviet troops jointly occupied Iran to block German ambitions. Technicians even

made plans to destroy the oil wells of the Persian Gulf in case Germany invaded the region. World War II had a profound impact on the position of the Middle East in international affairs.

As strategists in World War I had foreseen, oil was essential for the armies of World War II. The decisive weapons of the conflict—airplanes, tanks, and military trucks—all ran on fuels derived from oil. The war aims of the leading Axis powers, Germany and Japan, were shaped by their quests for oil resources.

The United States was the industrial engine of the Allied victory in World War II. Protected from enemy attack by two oceans, U.S. industry boomed. By the end of 1942, U.S. military production surpassed the output of Germany and Japan combined. During the next year, U.S. factories turned out roughly 100,000 warplanes. The United States was also blessed with abundant oil reserves. In 1940, for example, the United States produced 63 percent of the world's oil (compared to less than 5 percent from the Middle East). The United States' wartime leaders feared that demand would soon outstrip supply. Like their British and French counterparts in World War I, U.S. officials in World War II wanted to secure their country's access to oil.

***“If there should be a World War III it would have to be fought with someone else's petroleum, because the United States wouldn't have it.”***

—Henry Ickes, U.S. secretary of the interior, 1943

### ***Why was Saudi Arabia so important to the United States?***

The U.S. strategy included fresh attention to Saudi Arabia. Before 1939, the United States did not have a single diplomat in the country. But in 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt began providing aid to the Saudi monarchy, which was on the verge of financial collapse because of the war. Over the next decade U.S. involvement in Saudi Arabia increased dramatically as U.S. citizens consumed more gasoline in their cars and industry boomed.

SOCAL's 1938 discovery of a huge oil field brought increased cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the United States. (SOCAL changed its name to ARAMCO, or Arab-American Oil Company, in 1944.) Since then, oil has been at the center of U.S. policy in the Middle East.

## **The Birth of Israel**

The creation of Israel in 1948 complicated U.S. efforts to retain friends in the Persian Gulf. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the Jewish quest for a homeland gained support in the United States. But most Arab leaders opposed Israel because the country was carved out of lands where Arabs already lived. Saudi King Saud Ibn Saud even threatened to break his contract with ARAMCO to protest U.S. policy. Nonetheless, the United States played a key role in bringing the Jewish state into existence. The story of Israel's creation starts in the late 1800s.

### ***What was Zionism?***

“Zion” is a Hebrew word for the land of Israel. Zionism, the movement for establishing the state of Israel, had its origins in Europe, where Jews had long been subjected to persecution. At the end of the nineteenth century, some Jewish intellectuals argued that their people could flourish safely only by establishing an independent state. They looked in East Africa and South America before settling on Palestine, a significant region in Jewish history, as the best choice. In the early 1900s, these Zionists started buying land there for Jewish settlements.

***“One fundamental fact—that we must have Palestine if we are not going to be exterminated.”***

—Chaim Weizmann, Zionist leader, 1919

### ***What promises did Great Britain make to Arabs and Jews during World War I?***

In 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, pledging to help establish “a national home” for Jews in Palestine. The British hoped

that the declaration would rally Jewish opinion, especially in the United States, behind the Allied war effort in World War I. At the same time, the British promised Sharif Hussein, the ruler of Mecca, that they would help to set up an independent Arab state across all of the Arab areas of the Ottoman Empire after the war. In exchange, Hussein began a rebellion against the Ottomans in Arabia, which helped the Allies to win the war. These dual promises proved to have long-term effects on the Middle East.

Between 1922 and 1939, as Zionists moved to Palestine, the Jewish population in Palestine rose from 84,000 to 445,000, or about 30 percent of the total population. But the Zionist movement increasingly found itself at odds with the aspirations of Palestinian Arabs to forge a state of their own. British efforts to strike a balance between Palestinians and Jews failed to hold down the escalating tensions.

***Why did so many Jews head to Palestine in the 1940s?***

Zionism might not have fulfilled its mission without the tragedy of the Holocaust. During World War II, Adolf Hitler sought to exterminate all of the Jews of Europe. Six million Jews were put to death by the Nazis.

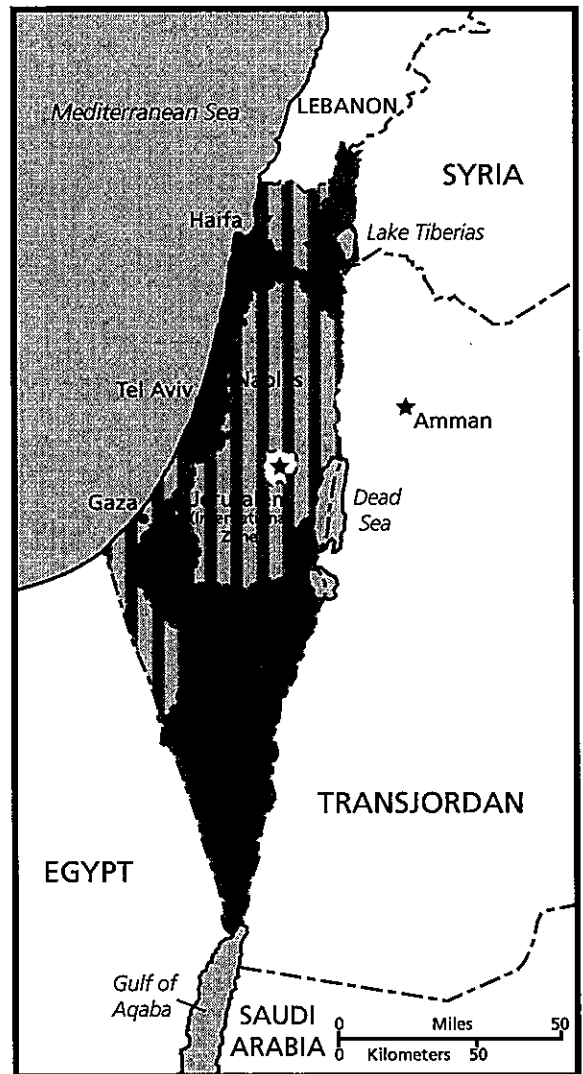
After the war, hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees saw immigration to Palestine as the only hope for rebuilding their lives. The Holocaust also won the Zionists widespread sympathy in the West. President Truman became personally committed to the Zionist cause.

In 1947, the British announced they would leave Palestine within a year, turning over responsibility for the mandate to the newly-formed United Nations (UN). A plan to partition the mandate between Jews and Palestinian Arabs passed the UN General Assembly by two votes, thanks in large part to U.S. lobbying.

***How did Israel's creation plant the seeds of conflict?***

The Zionists viewed the UN partition

UN Partition of Palestine, 1947



plan as their best hope for a Jewish state, and accepted it. The Arab world did not, fearing that Arabs, who were in the majority, would become subject to a minority immigrant population. Arabs also felt that the creation of Israel would lead to instability in the region.

Knowing the British would pull their troops out the day the partition went into effect, Zionists began to take control of the territory allotted to them by the UN, including many predominantly Arab towns that had been included in the Jewish zone. As the date of the British departure approached, violence

erupted as each side fought to extend its control. Fighting soon engulfed much of Palestine. This violence was intense; there were terrorist acts on both sides.

With the withdrawal of the last British forces in May 1948, Israel proclaimed itself a state and immediately won recognition from the United States and the Soviet Union. The Arab states refused to recognize Israel.

For some time, Palestinian Arabs had been supported in their fight by men and arms from neighboring Arab countries. The day after Israel declared itself an independent state, forces from Egypt, Syria, Transjordan (now known as Jordan), Lebanon, and Iraq invaded Israel.

***“It does not matter how many [Jews] there are. We will sweep them into the sea.”***

—Abd al-Rahman Azzam Pasha,  
Secretary General of the Arab League, 1948

Fearing just such an attack, Zionist leaders had been collecting weapons for years. By the time a truce was reached in January 1949, the Zionists had seized a large portion of the land that the UN had designated for the Palestinians. What was left of the former mandate was claimed by Transjordan (which absorbed the West Bank) and Egypt (which held the Gaza Strip). More than 750,000 Palestinians became refugees. Arab countries refused to make peace with or to recognize the fledgling Israeli state. Without a treaty, the cease-fire lines in effect became the borders between Israel and its neighbors. The animosity set the stage for decades of conflict.

Although the Truman administration approved a \$100 million loan for Israel, U.S. policy remained torn. Within the State Department (the governmental body responsible for carrying out U.S. foreign policy), many officials advised against supporting Israel. They feared an Arab backlash against the United States. These fears were based in part on the United States' need for oil from Arab nations, and also on the growing presence of the Soviet Union following World War II.

## The Middle East in the Midst of the Cold War

Since the early 1800s, Britain had been the leading power in the Middle East. Britain controlled the Suez Canal (linking the Red Sea and the Mediterranean) and most of Egypt after 1882. British naval forces patrolled the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf, guarding shipping lanes to India, the jewel of the British Empire.

World War II brought down the old order of international relations. In 1947, British officials told their U.S. allies that Britain could no longer maintain its presence in the Middle East. World War II had nearly bankrupted Britain. Britain's postwar leaders saw their enormous empire as a financial burden. They urged the administration of U.S. President Harry Truman to fill the vacuum in the Middle East ahead of the powerful Soviet Union. Both Britain and the United States saw the Soviet Union as a dangerous expansionist power. They believed protecting the Persian Gulf's oil reserves from Soviet control was critical to the West's economic survival. Indeed, in 1948, for the first time, the United States imported more oil than it exported.

In fact, the Soviets had already begun to increase their activities in the Middle East. In Iran, the Soviets delayed the withdrawal of their troops after the war. In Turkey, they raised territorial claims along the Soviet border and insisted on sharing control of the straits connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

### ***What was the Truman Doctrine?***

In 1947, President Truman announced a \$400 million foreign aid package to Turkey and Greece. In what became known as the “Truman Doctrine,” Truman pledged U.S. support for governments resisting communism.

The Truman Doctrine confirmed that the United States was willing to step into the shoes of the British in the Middle East. For U.S. policymakers, this meant that the Persian Gulf would rank second in importance only to protecting Western Europe.

By 1948, the hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union seemed frozen in place. What became known as the Cold War would eventually reach every corner of the globe, raising tensions to particularly dangerous levels in the Middle East.

***How did the politics of the Arab world change following World War II?***

The politics of the Arab world underwent deep changes after World War II as well. Resentment and mistrust toward the West spread in the Middle East as it did in Africa, Latin America, and regions of Asia. As Britain and France retreated from the region, Arab nationalists criticized the Arab monarchies and rich landowners who had cooperated with the colonial powers of Britain and France. In the 1950s and 1960s, nationalist military officers overthrew kingdoms in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Libya.

***Why did Nasser's message appeal to other Arab countries?***

Egypt's Gamal Abd al-Nasser was the most prominent voice of Arab nationalism. A former army colonel, Nasser emerged as Egypt's leader after taking part in a coup that toppled the country's corrupt king in 1952. Nasser addressed his message not just to Egypt, but to the larger Arab world. He campaigned for "pan-Arabism"—the unification of Arabs into a single state.

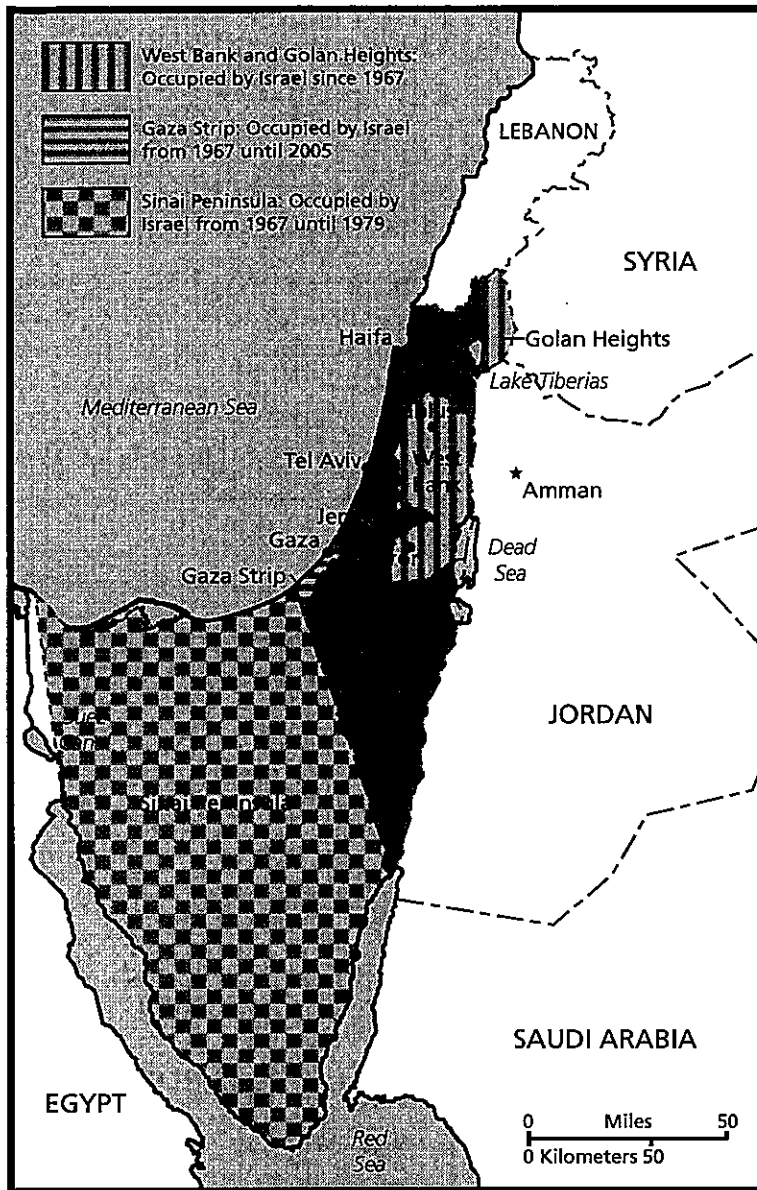
Nasser's reputation soared over the next fifteen years as he strengthened his position as the most dynamic leader of the Arab world. Part of what made Nasser

appealing to other Arabs was his condemnation of Israel, which he described as an outpost of Western influence in the Middle East. In 1958, Nasser merged Egypt and Syria in order to begin to implement his pan-Arabist campaign (the merger disintegrated in 1961). He also built up his army, mostly with Soviet weapons. Nasser's prestige enabled him to play the United States and Soviet Union skillfully off one another.

***Why did President Kennedy sell advanced anti-aircraft missiles to Israel?***

U.S. officials mistrusted Nasser's motives but felt that his popularity could not be ignored. The United States resumed limited financial assistance to Egypt but also began to see Israel as an ally against the expanding Soviet influence in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. In





financing. The arms sales marked the beginning of a steady flow of U.S. military equipment to Israel. No formal alliance was signed, but the United States and Israel were clearly developing a special relationship. At the same time, the Arab-Israeli conflict continued.

**What factors contributed to the Six-Day War?**

Expanding nationalism, growing superpower involvement, and an escalating arms build-up ignited another Arab-Israeli war in 1967. The immediate cause was Nasser's decision in May 1967 to order the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers separating Egyptian and Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula and to deny Israeli ships access to the Red Sea by closing the Suez Canal.

President Johnson attempted to resolve the crisis diplomatically. But Israeli leaders placed little faith in diplomatic solutions. In June 1967, they launched a surprise attack, destroying most of the Egyptian and Syrian air forces on the ground. With control of the air, Israeli tanks rolled across the Sinai to the Suez Canal. On their eastern flank, the Israelis drove the Jordanian army out of the Old City of Jerusalem and overran the West Bank.

1962, President John F. Kennedy approved the sale of advanced anti-aircraft missiles to Israel, along with a loan to help the Israelis pay for their purchase.

***“We are interested that Israel should keep up its sensitive, tremendous, historic task.”***

—President John F. Kennedy, 1962

Three years later, President Lyndon Johnson permitted the Israelis to buy more than two hundred tanks, again with generous

Within two days, Egypt and Jordan claimed that they were ready to accept a UN resolution that the United States proposed for a cease-fire. But Israel continued its military operations. Israeli warplanes bombed a U.S. communications ship based off the coast of Egypt, killing thirty-four U.S. sailors. Although Israeli leaders claimed the attack was a mistake, some U.S. officials privately believed that Israel's intent was to direct attention away from Israeli military preparations against Syria. Indeed, two days later the Israelis smashed through Syrian defenses on the strategic Golan

Heights. Syria quickly agreed to a truce. What came to be known as the Six-Day War ended in a complete military victory for Israel.

#### ***What were the results of the Six-Day War?***

Although Israel would not consider withdrawing from the Golan Heights or Jerusalem, it did not refuse to withdraw from the other territories it had conquered if Arab leaders would recognize Israel's right to exist. When Arab leaders refused, the Israelis became responsible for governing more than one million Palestinians on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Six-Day War also set the stage for the next round of fighting in the Middle East. Although pan-Arabism had failed, Arab leaders were more determined than ever to match the military might of the Israelis. Increasingly, they turned to the Soviet Union. The Soviets, embarrassed by the speedy defeat of their allies and eager to extend their influence in the Middle East, were more than willing to help. They provided technical assistance and military support to Arab leaders. The United States, though still working for peace and stability, continued to support Israel in the hopes of countering Soviet influence.

#### ***What happened during the October War of 1973?***

In 1970, Anwar al-Sadat came to power in Egypt. Sadat's top priority was to regain the Sinai Peninsula. When U.S. diplomacy failed to persuade Israel to withdraw, Sadat began making preparations for war.

In October 1973, Egypt and Syria opened a surprise two-front offensive against Israel on Yom Kippur, the most sacred day on the Jewish calendar. Along the Suez Canal, Egypt's army broke through Israeli lines and spilled into the Sinai Peninsula. At the same time, Syrian troops overwhelmed Israel's defenses on the Golan Heights and were poised to attack northern Israel.

Israel's army quickly recovered from its setbacks. Within days, the Israelis drove a wedge between Egyptian forces in the Sinai

and crossed to the west bank of the Suez Canal. Against the Syrians, they soon regained the Golan Heights and swept toward Damascus, the Syrian capital. By the end of October 1973, after less than a month of fighting, the Israelis agreed to stop their advance.

#### ***How did the Cold War affect the U.S. position during the October War?***

The October War brought the United States' chief concerns in the Middle East to the boiling point. In the first week of the conflict, Washington's commitment to Israel was put to the test. Israel's prime minister, Golda Meir, pleaded with President Richard Nixon to ship U.S. military supplies to her country. Nixon approved a resupply effort but did not want to give Israel a lopsided advantage on the battlefield.

Cold War politics ultimately convinced Nixon to step up the flow of arms. From the outbreak of the October War, the Soviet Union had showered Egypt and Syria with military assistance. By the second week of fighting, the United States decided to do the same for Israel and began airlifting one thousand tons of military supplies a day. Superpower tensions rose further when the Soviets vowed to send troops to the region to stop Israel's advance. Nixon warned the Soviets against taking action. He put the U.S. military on worldwide alert to emphasize U.S. resolve.

#### ***How did the Arab states try to use oil as a weapon against the United States?***

Most significantly, the October War prompted Arab states to lead an oil embargo against the United States.

High oil prices and increasing U.S. demand for oil made the embargo an effective tool against the United States. From 1970 to the start of the October War, world oil prices had doubled. During the same period, U.S. oil imports nearly doubled, exceeding one-third of total U.S. consumption. U.S. allies in Western Europe and Japan were almost entirely dependent on imported oil, mostly from the Middle East. Rising demand allowed the

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC, which at the time included Algeria, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela) to steadily push up prices for the first time since its formation in 1960.

In mid-October 1973, Saudi Arabian King Faisal Ibn Saud, a solid U.S. ally, initiated the oil embargo. He hoped to emphasize to the United States that it would have to do more for the Arab side in the Arab-Israeli conflict if it wanted to minimize Soviet influence in the region. The Arab oil-producing states raised prices on their exported oil by 70 percent. When President Nixon proposed giving Israel \$2.2 billion in military aid a few days later, the Arabs responded by completely cutting off oil shipments to the United States. At the same time, they reduced their overall production by 10 percent and vowed to lower oil output by 5 percent a month until Israel withdrew from the territories occupied in the 1967 War and restored the rights of the Palestinians.

#### ***What was the impact of the oil embargo?***

The impact of the Arab cutbacks on the international oil market was not catastrophic, but it was dramatic. By the end of 1973, world oil production had fallen about 9 percent. Major non-Arab oil producers, such as Iran and Venezuela, increased their exports as new markets opened to them. Nonetheless, the Arab measures set off an economic panic. Oil prices rose as high as \$17 a barrel—six times the price in early October. Gasoline prices in the United States jumped 40 percent. Over the next two years, U.S. economic output dropped 6 percent, while unemployment doubled and inflation surged.

The Arab states also caused divisions in the Western alliance. Unlike the United States, most Western European countries and Japan backed away from overt support of Israel. In turn, the Arab oil producers allowed more exports to them. The situation caused the United States to reevaluate its Middle East policies.

U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger undertook what came to be known as “shuttle

diplomacy.” Jetting between countries of the region, Kissinger negotiated two agreements to end the fighting between Israel and Egypt and between Israel and Syria. The state department left the Soviet Union out of the negotiations. Kissinger’s efforts were enough to convince King Faisal Ibn Saud to call off the embargo in March of 1974.

#### ***How did the October War lay the groundwork for peace?***

While the October War was the most destructive conflict yet between Arabs and Israelis, it also laid the groundwork for the first steps toward peace. The early battlefield successes of the Arab armies had soothed the humiliating sting of the 1967 War. Arab pride, especially in Egypt, was partially restored.

The initiative for peace came from Egyptian leader Sadat. In 1977, he visited Israel and spoke before Israel’s parliament. Meanwhile, U.S. officials worked behind the scenes to set the stage for serious negotiations.

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter invited Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to the presidential retreat at Camp David for peace talks. The negotiations were scheduled to last three days. Instead, they dragged on for two weeks.

#### ***What were the Camp David Accords?***

Thanks largely to Carter’s persistence, the talks produced a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. In exchange for Israel’s withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt became the first Arab country to recognize Israel. U.S. foreign aid sweetened the deal for both countries. Israel received \$3 billion in immediate military assistance, while Egypt was given \$1.5 billion. (Israel and Egypt remain the top two recipients of U.S. foreign aid.)

What were known as the Camp David Accords scarcely addressed other aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arab leaders condemned Sadat for neglecting the needs and hopes of Palestinians and expelled Egypt from the Arab League, an organization founded in 1945 to serve the common good of Arab countries. In

1981, Sadat himself was assassinated by political Islamist extremists. (The term political Islamist is used to describe political movements based on an interpretation of the principles of Islam.)

### ***How did the Camp David Accords affect the position of the Soviet Union in the Middle East?***

The Camp David Accords brought Egypt securely into the U.S. camp in the Middle East. At the same time, countries who opposed the treaty, such as Syria and Iraq, moved further into the Soviet camp. To counter the Soviets, U.S. officials placed greater weight on their relations with other long-time friends in the region.

Aside from Israel, the United States counted on close ties with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Turkey was linked to the United States through membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The United States also provided Turkey with ample foreign aid. The Saudis, while they opposed Israel and U.S. support for Israel, nevertheless relied heavily on U.S. firms to market their oil exports and invest their profits. The U.S. relationship with Iran was also complex.

## **The United States and Iran**

At the same time as many conflicts in the Arab-Israeli relationship were heating up, the United States was also trying to strengthen its relationship with Iran in order to oppose the Soviet Union. The United States was bound to Iran and its shah, or king, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, by political, military, and oil interests. The shah was tied to Washington through his own complicated past. In 1953, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) helped the shah topple a nationalist prime minister who threatened the shah's power and wanted to bring



"Of course I'd resign if I thought that they really meant it."

Pat Oliphant. Copyright 1979. Universal Press Syndicate.

the foreign oil industry under state control. At the time, Pahlavi was a timid, inexperienced ruler. Over the next two decades, U.S. support boosted his confidence and ambitions.

By the early 1970s, Pahlavi imagined that he could rekindle the greatness of ancient Persia in modern Iran. To celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire, he spent at least \$100 million to host a lavish banquet that featured a 165-person catering staff from Paris and 25,000 bottles of French wine. The rise in oil prices in 1973 permitted the shah to increase his spending on other items as well, particularly on weapons. By the mid-1970s, Iran accounted for half of U.S. arms exports.

### ***How did U.S. policymakers fail to understand the feelings of the Iranian people?***

Both Pahlavi and U.S. policymakers underestimated the anger simmering just below the surface of Iranian society. The shah's efforts to modernize Iran's educational system and redistribute land sparked protests among the country's Islamic clergymen because the changes threatened their ideology and power. His push toward industrialization forced millions of peasants to abandon the countryside. Iran's cities were soon overcrowded, while the gap between the rich and the poor widened. Additionally, rampant corruption in Pahlavi's government and the brutal role of SAVAK

(the secret police) in suppressing dissent also increased opposition to his rule. Nevertheless, the United States offered full support to Iran in order to counter Soviet support of other Middle Eastern nations.

***“Iran, because of the great leadership of the shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled regions of the world.”***

—President Jimmy Carter, 1977

### ***Who led the opposition movement?***

Islamic clergymen were in the best position to encourage resistance to the shah’s regime. They emerged at the helm of a broad opposition movement that included democrats, nationalists, and communists. In 1978, they began organizing demonstrations against the shah. The shah responded with force, ordering the army and police to smash the protests. In September, they opened fire on a huge crowd in Tehran, Iran’s capital, killing or wounding as many as two thousand demonstrators.

Pahlavi, suffering from cancer, facing hostile public opinion, and losing support from the military for his repressive policies, soon lost the will to hold on to power. In January 1979, he left the country. Two weeks later, the spiritual leader of Iran’s Islamic movement, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, returned to Iran from exile in France.

### ***What were the goals of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini?***

Khomeini wanted to transform Iran into his vision of a pure Islamic state. His revolution aimed at purging the country of Western popular culture. He prohibited movies and music from the West. He banned alcohol. He also ordered women to cover themselves from head to toe when in public.

Khomeini branded the United States as the “great Satan.” (He referred to the Soviet Union as the “lesser Satan.”) When Carter permitted Pahlavi to enter the United States for medical treatment, Khomeini claimed that Washington was plotting a counter-revolution. In Novem-

ber 1979, Iranian university students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran. For over a year, they held the U.S. embassy staff as hostages. Carter’s attempt at a military rescue failed, leaving eight U.S. troops dead. The U.S. Cold War policy for Iran had clearly failed.

***“Our relations with the United States are the relations of the oppressed and the oppressor.”***

—Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

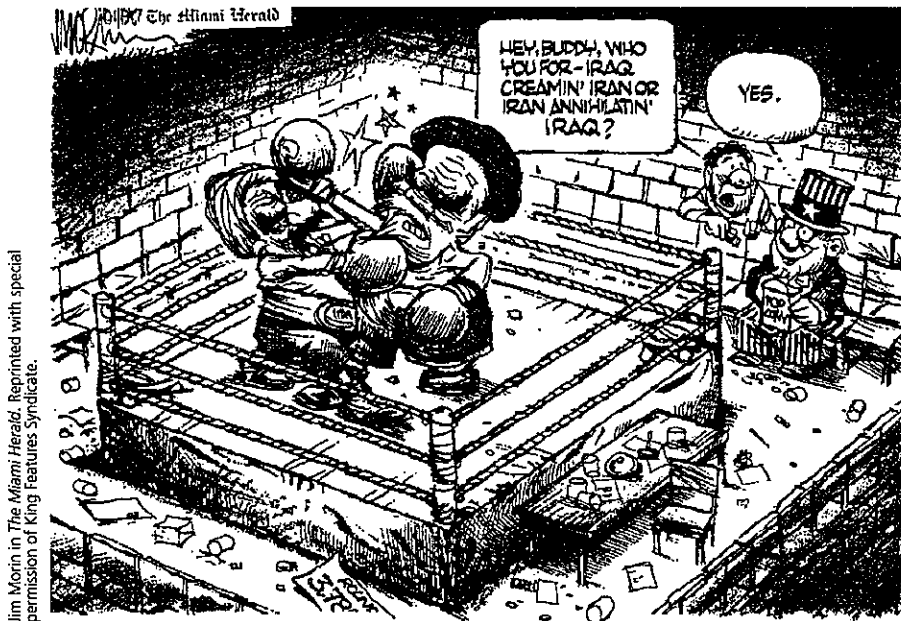
### ***How did the Iranian Revolution affect the world oil market?***

The Iranian Revolution touched off another panic in the oil market. Before the revolution, Iran had been the world’s second largest oil exporter (trailing Saudi Arabia). By the end of 1978, the foreigners who managed much of Iran’s oil industry had been evacuated and Iranian oil exports had ground to a halt. Again prices soared, nearly tripling in a few weeks.

## **The Iran-Iraq War**

The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in September 1980 further limited world oil supplies. Iraq’s leader, Saddam Hussein, hoped to take advantage of an Iranian army weakened by revolution to seize a disputed waterway spilling into the Persian Gulf. He also wanted to prevent the spread of Iran’s Islamist revolution elsewhere in the Middle East.

Saddam Hussein aimed to deliver a quick knockout blow, concentrating on Iran’s oil facilities. Instead, Iraq’s invasion stalled. Iran counter-attacked but lacked the strength to defeat Hussein’s impressive military. For the next eight years, the war seesawed back and forth. Iraq had an advantage in air power, missiles, and chemical weapons. Saddam Hussein also benefited from the financial backing of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab oil producers. Iran could count on millions of dedicated volunteer soldiers. Tens of thousands were killed charging Iraqi positions in human-wave assaults, often with plastic keys, which they



were told would open the gates to heaven, dangling from their necks.

### ***What was the U.S. position in the Iran-Iraq War?***

The administration of President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) remained officially neutral during the war but did not want a victory by Iran's Islamist government, which was clearly hostile to the United States. The United States began playing a more active role in 1986, when Iran stepped up attacks against Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf. The United States gave Iraq military intelligence and loans to buy advanced U.S. weapons. Washington also permitted Kuwaiti ships to sail under the U.S. flag and provided them military escorts.

During the Iran-Iraq War, the United States led an international arms embargo against Iran. But in a contradiction of this public policy, the United States secretly sold thousands of anti-tank missiles and military spare parts to Iran. The U.S. government hoped this would improve relations with Iran so that Iran would help to free U.S. hostages held in Lebanon. This goal was only partially met; some hostages were freed, but others were taken. The secret dealings with Iran damaged the credibility of the United States in the Middle East.

By the time Iraq and Iran agreed to a cease-fire in 1988, the war had claimed more than one million lives. Millions more were injured or became refugees. It also cost each country approximately \$500 million. Neither side could claim victory, and the war did not resolve the disputes which started it.

### ***How did the United States deal with the uncertainty of the Middle East oil industry?***

At the same time, the United States and other western nations learned to live with the uncertainty of the Middle East's oil industry. The oil price hikes of the 1970s spurred energy conservation in wealthy countries. The fuel efficiency of the average American car more than doubled between 1975 and 1985. By 1983, oil consumption in the non-communist world had dropped by 11 percent from 1979 levels. Higher prices also led oil companies to develop new resources in the North Sea, Alaska, and other sites outside the Middle East. Coal, natural gas, and nuclear power gained a greater share of the energy market. From \$34 a barrel at the beginning of the 1980s, oil prices slid to around \$18 a barrel by the end of the decade.

### **Civil War in Lebanon**

While the Iran-Iraq War dominated events in the Persian Gulf during the 1980s, Lebanon was the main focus of attention in the eastern Mediterranean. Lebanon had long been home to a patchwork of Christian and Muslim groups. Beirut, Tripoli, and other Lebanese ports were centers of Middle Eastern trade and commerce. But beginning in 1975, the country was torn by civil war.

Before the fighting ended in the late 1980s, nearly 150,000 people had been killed. Moreover, because of Lebanon's location and its connections to neighboring countries, the war drew in most of its neighbors as well as the United States. Syrian leaders, who believed Lebanon belonged under their wing, sent in troops to occupy most of the eastern part of the country. The Syrians also directed many of the actions of anti-Israeli militias working in Lebanon.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon to root out the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was fighting against Israel from Lebanon. PLO units had set up bases in Lebanon after they were expelled from Jordan in 1970. Israel's efforts to crush the PLO resulted in bombardments of the Lebanese capital. The escalating war prompted the United States to try to negotiate peace.

### ***Why did the United States deploy troops in Lebanon?***

In hope of stabilizing Lebanon and preventing a wider regional war, the United States sent in troops as part of an international peacekeeping force. But U.S. soldiers were soon caught in the middle. In 1983, a suicide bomber drove a truckload of explosives into the U.S. marine barracks at the Beirut airport. Two hundred and forty-one troops were killed. A few months later, President Reagan pulled out the U.S. peacekeeping force.

In the United States, the Beirut bombing reinforced the Middle East's reputation as a dangerous and hostile region. Most people in the United States favored limiting U.S. involvement in the area. But within a few years the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, a small country with big oil reserves, would pull the United States deeper than ever into the Middle East.

## **The First Persian Gulf War Reshapes U.S. Policy**

On July 25, 1990, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, met with Saddam Hussein at the presidential palace in Baghdad. Their conversation focused on Hussein's claim

that Kuwait was pumping oil that rightfully belonged to Iraq from deposits along the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border. The Iraqi dictator also complained that Kuwait was holding down oil prices to slow Iraq's economic recovery from the Iran-Iraq war. When Glaspie left the meeting, she believed that she had clearly warned Hussein of the dangers of using force to resolve his dispute with Kuwait. The conversation did not make the same impression on Saddam Hussein. Eight days later, 100,000 Iraqi troops poured across the desert border into Kuwait.

### ***How did the end of the Cold War affect U.S. actions toward Iraq?***

A few years earlier during the Cold War, the United States might have hesitated to take strong action against Iraq for fear of setting off a wider international crisis. But by the late 1980s, both the world and the U.S. outlook had changed. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev sought to improve relations with the West, and the Soviet Union itself was beginning to teeter under the weight of an ailing economy and political turmoil. Within hours of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Gorbachev stopped arms shipments to Saddam Hussein and joined the United States in supporting a UN Security Council resolution demanding Iraq's immediate withdrawal from Kuwait. With the Soviets on his side, President George H.W. Bush (1989-1993) had an opportunity to steer the international system in a new direction.

President Bush quickly positioned U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia to stop any further advances. The United Nations imposed economic sanctions against Iraq. In the weeks that followed, the United States led an effort to build an international coalition to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. The United States' European allies, as well as several Arab states, contributed forces to an international military force.

### ***How did U.S. citizens think the United States should respond to Iraq?***

Within the United States, the public was split about how far the country should go in



Jim Borgman. King Features syndicate. Used with permission.

its response to Iraq's aggression. U.S. leadership was also divided. Opposition to using force was especially strong from some U.S. military leaders concerned about possible casualties. Many warned that Iraq would turn to chemical weapons or international terrorism if attacked. There were worries that Iraq might even possess nuclear bombs. Some argued that economic sanctions should be given more time to take effect. Other experts noted that with Iraqi control of the Kuwaiti oil fields, Saddam Hussein controlled one quarter of the world's oil resources.

***“Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom and the freedom of friendly countries around the world would all suffer if control of the world's great oil reserves fell into the hands of Saddam Hussein.”***

—President George H.W. Bush, 1990

President Bush favored attacking Iraq quickly. He doubted that economic sanctions alone would pressure Saddam Hussein out

of Kuwait. He also felt that the coalition of nations he had assembled would not hold together long. Particularly worrisome was Saddam Hussein's appeal in the Arab world. He sought to rekindle Arab nationalism and called for Arabs to unite against Israel and its ally, the United States. U.S. officials feared that his message would deepen hostility toward the United States throughout the Middle East.

In November 1990, Bush won UN approval to use “all necessary means” to force Iraq out of Kuwait. A deadline was set—January 15, 1991—for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. By January there were 540,000 U.S. troops in the Gulf and an additional 160,000 from other countries. When President Bush asked the Senate in early January to approve military action to drive Iraq out of Kuwait if the deadline was not met, his request passed by five votes.

#### ***What happened in the Persian Gulf War?***

After the assault against Iraq began in mid-January 1991, the U.S. public quickly rallied behind the war effort. Despite Saddam's

prediction of “the mother of all battles,” his army proved no match for the United States and its allies. For over a month, warplanes pounded Iraqi targets. By the time allied ground troops moved forward in late February 1991, communication links within Iraq’s army had been shattered. Coalition forces, who came from twenty-eight nations and acted with UN approval, retook Kuwait’s capital with little resistance.

After one hundred hours, President Bush brought the ground war to a halt. The president and his advisors, worried about the consequences of controlling a completely destabilized Iraq, objected to totally destroying Iraq’s retreating army and toppling Saddam Hussein. Instead, they allowed the remnants of Iraq’s front-line divisions to limp northward.

The Persian Gulf War was one of the most lopsided conflicts in history. Iraq’s military presented few obstacles to the advance of the half-million coalition forces. In all, 146 U.S. troops were killed during the war. (Coalition forces suffered a total of 260 deaths.) Iraq lost as many as 100,000 people, both soldiers and civilians, in the war. Saddam Hussein also inflicted a heavy blow against the environment by ordering retreating Iraqi troops to set hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells on fire and to spill thousands of barrels of oil into the Persian Gulf.

***What were the effects of the Persian Gulf War on the U.S. role in the Middle East?***

Through a combination of power and persuasion, the United States had won greater



U.S. Air Force jets flying over burning oil wells during the Persian Gulf War.

United States Air Force.

influence in the Middle East as a result of the war. At the same time, there were fresh responsibilities. Once the fighting in the Persian Gulf ended, governments there looked to the United States to provide leadership on regional issues.

The war against Iraq brought the region once again to the forefront of discussion in the United States, particularly as events were broadcast live on television. The war also convinced Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the smaller states of the Persian Gulf that a U.S. military presence was needed in the region to safeguard their own security.

Yet the presence of more than fifteen thousand U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf created tensions of its own. For the United States, increased involvement in the Middle East has not been without cost.

The U.S. military presence reminded the Arab world of its own weaknesses and divisions. It also angered many people, including extremists like Osama bin Laden and his followers.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Study Guide—Part I

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- In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most people in the United States were introduced to the Middle East through the \_\_\_\_\_. The Middle East is the birthplace of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- What did the Sykes-Picot Accord say?
- During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson called for a postwar \_\_\_\_\_ based on the “\_\_\_\_\_” of nations. \_\_\_\_\_ leaders applauded his views.
- Why were European and U.S. leaders so concerned about access to oil?
- Fill in the chart below comparing competing pacts and promises in the Middle East during WWI.

Pacts and Promises	Who agreed?	What did they agree to?
Balfour Declaration		
British promises to Sharif Hussein		

- Why were some U.S. government officials concerned by support for Israel in 1948?
- Egypt’s Gamal Abd al-\_\_\_\_\_ was the most prominent voice of Arab \_\_\_\_\_. He campaigned for “\_\_\_\_\_,” the unification of Arabs into a single state. This leader skillfully played the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ off one another.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

8. The Middle East has been the scene of numerous conflicts. Fill in the chart below based on the reading.

Conflict	Participants	Outcome of Conflict	U.S. and Soviet Role
Palestine— May 1948			
Suez Crisis— 1956			
Six-Day War—1967			
October War—1973			

9. List two outcomes of the Camp David accords.

a.

b.

10. Why did the United States support the shah of Iran?

11. List two ways that the United States helped Iraq during the Iran/Iraq war.

a.

b.

12. List three outcomes of the Persian Gulf War.

a.

b.

c.