

THE MIDDLE EAST

**INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENT &
POLITICS SERIES**

Dilip Hiro

ORYX

The Middle East

International Government & Politics Series

by
Dilip Hiro



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The rare Arabian Oryx is believed to have inspired the myth of the unicorn. This desert antelope became virtually extinct in the early 1960s. At that time several groups of international conservationists arranged to have 9 animals sent to the Phoenix Zoo to be the nucleus of a captive breeding herd. Today the Oryx population is over 1000, and over 500 have been returned to the Middle East.

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LIST OF MAPS



Maps prepared by Suresh Vedak

Middle East 1996 36

Turkey 39

Iran 52

Iraq 66

Kuwait 75

Bahrain and Qatar 83

United Arab Emirates 87

Oman 92

Saudi Arabia 97

Yemen 104

Egypt 110

Syria 119

Lebanon 125

Jerusalem in 1949 133

Jerusalem in 1967 135

Palestine, 1947; Israel, 1949;
Israel, 1967 143

Jordan 153

P R E F A C E



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The Middle East is a region with flexible boundaries. In its widest sense, the term applies to the area from Morocco to Pakistan, and from Turkey to Sudan. In its narrowest sense, it excludes not only the non-Arabic-speaking countries like Pakistan and Turkey, but also Arab North Africa.

One way to arrive at a working definition is to think of the Middle East as composed of a core and peripheries. The core includes Egypt, the Fertile Crescent countries (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian-inhabited West Bank and Gaza Strip), the countries of the Arabian Peninsula (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia), and Iran. To the south of this core lies Sudan; to its west the North African states of Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco; and to its north and east Cyprus, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

This book deals with the core of the Middle East and Turkey. It covers 15 states: Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tur-

key, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Because Israel evolved out of Palestine in 1948, a chapter on Palestine and the Palestinians is also included.

WHY STUDY THE MIDDLE EAST?

There are compelling geographical, historical, political, economic, and cultural reasons why a study of the Middle East should matter to young Americans.

With a total area of more than 2.8 million square miles, the Middle East and Turkey are as large as the United States without Alaska. They form the central region of the Eastern Hemisphere where Africa, Asia, and Europe meet. As a crossroad between the European West and the Asian East, the region remains strategically important. This is partly why the U.S. has maintained its Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean since the end of World War II in 1945.

The Middle East has produced the world's leading monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Old Testament, the

New Testament, and the Koran are all rooted in Middle Eastern soil. Since most Americans have Christian backgrounds and grow up in a Judeo-Christian environment, a study of the Middle East and its history is a means of acquiring self-knowledge.

Two of the world's most ancient civilizations—the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian—originated in the Middle East. Egypt has one of the longest recorded histories in the world. The Mesopotamian plain, lying between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, is the cradle of human civilization, with a history stretching back some 12,000 years. The earliest settled agrarian society evolved here.

The Middle East contains two-thirds of global petroleum reserves. At the current rate of extraction, these will last well into the late twenty-first century. Because the U.S. depends on oil imports from the Middle East, and because U.S. reserves will be depleted within a decade, what happens in the region is of vital significance to Americans. Petroleum is not only the source of gasoline for cars, but also of asphalt for road construction, fertilizers for agriculture, heating oil, jet fuel for aircraft, paints for domestic and other purposes, plastics, and synthetic rubber.

Since the end of World War II, the Middle East has been the most volatile region on the planet. It has witnessed numerous conventional wars, revolutions, and coups, and much civil unrest. Because they caused shifts in the international balance of power in a world dominated by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, these conflicts mattered to the American government and people. They also affected, directly or indirectly, oil supplies and prices. The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, for instance, resulted in the doubling of petroleum prices.

Middle Eastern events have twice influenced American presidential elections. One of the main reasons Democratic President Jimmy Carter (1924 –) lost his campaign for re-election in 1980 was his failure to free the American hostages held by Iran. After his victory in the Gulf War between the United States-led coalition and Iraq in March 1991, President George Bush (1924 –), a Republi-

can, became so popular that his re-election in 1992 seemed assured. This perception discouraged leading Democratic politicians from entering the race for their party's nomination, and inadvertently paved the way for the election as president of a comparatively unknown governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton (1946–).

The Middle East has been the setting for five major military confrontations since the end of World War II, the latest being the Gulf War. The U.S. dispatched over 550,000 troops to the Persian Gulf—more than it had in Vietnam at the peak of fighting. The armed conflict between Iraq and Iran, lasting from 1980 to 1988, was the longest conventional war in the twentieth century. When the Persian Gulf became a scene of warfare, oil tankers became vulnerable—a third of world petroleum supplies pass through the narrow Straits of Hormuz. This threat to world oil supplies is one of the major reasons why President Clinton established the Fifth Fleet in 1995 for permanent stationing in the Persian Gulf.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The Middle East is divided into two parts. In Part 1, I discuss major regional themes—starting with monotheism. I then assess the strategic importance of the area before turning to its oil riches, and the degree to which the West is dependent on its petroleum. In the remainder of Part 1, I explore the internal dynamics of the region, beginning with the history of the Arab-Jew conflict. I next describe the division within the Arab world, which culminated in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. While progress has been made towards peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors in the 1990s, the decade has also seen the rise of Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism in the area. Therefore, the future for a lasting, comprehensive peace in the region remains uncertain.

In Part 2, I discuss each state or territory separately. In every case, I start with a basic profile of the country, and then give an account of its political and economic history.

PREFACE

XI

Because the histories of most of these countries are interlinked, some overlap in the narrative is inevitable. However, I have avoided, as far as possible, repeating information or insights.

I use the terms "Gulf" and "Persian Gulf," also called "Arabian Gulf," interchangeably.

To help the reader place a political leader in time, I state in parentheses—following the first mention of his or her name—the birth and death dates for nonhereditary rulers, and the years of reign for hereditary rulers. I use the suffix A.D. only for the first millennium.

Dilip Hiro

CONTENTS



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List of Maps by Suresh Vedak vii

Preface ix

Part 1: The Region 1

CHAPTER 1: Cradle of Monotheism:
 Judaism, Christianity, and Islam 3
 Judaism 3
 Christianity 5
 Islam 6
 The Monotheistic Faiths 7

CHAPTER 2: A Strategic Bridge and
 Highway 8
 Trade Routes 8
 The Twentieth Century 9

CHAPTER 3: The Oil Jugular of the
 Western World 10
 The Discovery of Oil 10
 Oil Production Since World War II 11
 Oil and World Politics 12

CHAPTER 4: The Conflict Between Arabs
 and Jews 13
 *The Issue of Palestine, the Holy
 Land* 14

CHAPTER 5: The Arab Split: Iraq's
 Invasion of Kuwait 19
 *The Kuwait Crisis and the Gulf
 War* 20

CHAPTER 6: The Emerging Peace: An
 Israeli-Palestinian Accord 23
 The 1993 Accord 23

CHAPTER 7: Islamic Fundamentalism in the
 Region: A Rising Tide? 26
 Egypt 27
 Jordan 29
 Palestinians 30
 Iran 31
 Conclusion 32

CHAPTER 8: Peaceful Future
 Uncertain 33

Part 2: The Countries 35

CHAPTER 9: Turkey 37
 Profile 37
 History Before 1918 38
 *Emergence of the Turkish Republic:
 1918–1923* 41
 History of Turkey Since 1923 41

CHAPTER 10: Iran	50	
Profile	50	
History Before 1925	51	
The Pahlavis: 1925–1979	53	
The Islamic Republic Since 1979	55	
CHAPTER 11: Iraq	63	
Profile	63	
History Before 1918	65	
History: 1918–1958	65	
Republican Iraq Since 1958	67	
CHAPTER 12: Kuwait	73	
Profile	73	
History Before 1918	74	
History: 1918–1961	76	
Independent Kuwait Since 1961	76	
CHAPTER 13: Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates	79	
Bahrain	79	
Qatar	81	
United Arab Emirates	84	
CHAPTER 14: Oman	90	
Profile	90	
History of Muscat and Oman Before 1970	91	
Sultanate of Oman Since 1970	93	
CHAPTER 15: Saudi Arabia	95	
Profile	95	
History Before 1932	96	
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Since 1932	98	
CHAPTER 16: Yemen	102	
Profile	102	
North Yemen Before 1962	103	
Republican North Yemen: 1962– 1990	105	
South Yemen Before 1990	105	
Republic of Yemen Since 1990	106	
CHAPTER 17: Egypt	108	
Profile	108	
History Before 1952	109	
Republican Egypt Since 1952	112	
CHAPTER 18: Syria	117	
Profile	117	
History Before 1946	118	
Independent Syria Since 1946	120	
CHAPTER 19: Lebanon	123	
Profile	123	
History Before 1946	124	
Independent Lebanon Since 1946	126	
CHAPTER 20: Palestine and the Palestinians	131	
Profile	131	
History Since 1918	132	
CHAPTER 21: Israel	141	
Profile	141	
History Since 1948	142	
CHAPTER 22: Jordan	151	
Profile	151	
History Since 1916	152	
Glossary	157	
Additional Reading	162	
Index	165	

PART

1

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THE REGION

CHAPTER

1

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Cradle of Monotheism: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Today's major world religions emerged either in India or the Middle East. India offered the world Hinduism and Buddhism, and the Middle East gave birth to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Just as Buddhism arose out of Hinduism, so Christianity and Islam arose out of Judaism. Sometimes Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are collectively called Abrahamic faiths, because Abraham was the first prophet to preach monotheism, belief in one God.

JUDAISM

Judaism, the first monotheistic creed, is a compendium of law, tradition, and doctrine that evolved in stages, starting with the prophet Abraham. He was the leader of a nomadic Hebrew tribe that moved west from Mesopotamia, modern Iraq, around 1900 B.C. Son of an idol-maker, Abraham smashed his father's idols and proclaimed faith in the one and only God, whose image was not to be cast.

According to the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament, Abraham had an encounter with the Lord God when he was in the land of Haran, present-day southern Turkey. The Lord

God made a covenant with Abraham, and said, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you." The first son to be born to Abraham was by Hagar, a maid to the family, and was called Ishmael/Ismail. Later came another son, named Yitzhak/Isaac, by Sarah, his wife.

As Abraham and his entourage passed Shechem, near today's West Bank city of Nablus, God appeared to Abraham, and said: "Unto thy seed I will give this land." Shechem was then part of the land of the Canaanites whose occupation of the region—covering present-day Israel, the West Bank, and southern Lebanon—went back to about 4000 B.C. Abraham finally settled near Hebron where he acquired some land. According to the Book of Genesis, God renewed His original promise to Abraham, the Covenant, with Abraham's son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob, who later received the name Israel, which means "pre-

vailing with God." Jacob had 12 sons from whom arose the 12 tribes of Israel. He tried to settle in Shechem, but the local residents objected.

Later, following a widespread famine in the area, Joseph, a favored son of Jacob, led the tribes of Israel into the fertile Nile valley in Egypt. Here the tribes of Israel tended their flocks and prospered until a pharaoh of Egypt enslaved them in about 1700 B.C. Known by now as Beni Israel, that is, "children of Israel" or Israelites, they endured this condition until the mid-thirteenth century B.C. when God called on Moses to lead them out of Egypt. The Israelites then escaped into the Sinai Desert.

During their 40 years of wandering in the Sinai, God gave them the Law through Moses. The Law, with its stress on virtuous action, provided a strong ethical foundation for Israelite beliefs. Moses initiated the Israelites into the worship of the one God, called Jehovah or Yehovah (a derivative of YHVH in Hebrew).

The teachings of Moses were the formal beginning of monotheism. Israelites then began to enter the "promised" land of Canaan from the east, under the leadership of Joshua, the successor to Moses. They settled in the hilly area along the Jordan River, and intermixed with their neighbors, the Maobites. The Israelites were a confederation of tribes led by Judges, such as Gideon and Samson. The Israelites set up altars and sanctuaries in Canaan, with the revered Ark of the Covenant deposited at Shilo. (The Ark was the sacred wooden chest that represented for the Israelites the Covenant and God's presence among them.) As the Israelites spread over Canaan, they came into conflict with the Philistines—who had come originally from Crete and the islands of the Aegan Sea—as the latter began expanding their base from the coastal plain. Supported by the Hebrew tribes who had stayed behind at the time of the great famine several centuries before, the Israelites began confronting the Philistines. In the mid-eleventh century B.C., the Hebrew-Israelites defeated the Philistines.

Around 1030 B.C., they consolidated their gains by founding a state based on the monotheistic religion of Jehovah, with Saul as king. David (ca. 1010–970 B.C.), a son of Jesse of Bethlehem, destroyed the last bastion of Philistine power in the region, and established three more Hebrew provinces to the east of the Jordan River. Taken together, King David's domain was known as Eretz Israel ("Land of Israel"). David brought the Ark of the Covenant from Shilo to his capital of Jerusalem, as a shrine for the God of Israel. David's son Solomon (ca. 970–931 B.C.) built the First Temple in Jerusalem.

After Solomon's death, opposition to dynastic rule led to the breakaway of the northern tribes. They called their domain Israel. The southern remnant of Solomon's kingdom, now named Judah, was ruled from Jerusalem by King David's descendants.

During the eighth century B.C., the prophet Amos declared that violations of the moral-ethical code of the Covenant would bring the wrath of God upon the Israelites. In 721 B.C., Israel fell to Assyria, a powerful kingdom to the northeast in Mesopotamia, and many Israelites were expelled from their homeland.

Judah continued to exist; but from 605 B.C., its people, practicing Judaism and called Jews, were exiled by the army of Babylonia, a kingdom in present-day Iraq. Finally, in 586 B.C., the king of Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 B.C.), destroyed Jerusalem and the First Temple, and expelled the Jews, carrying many off to captivity in Babylon. King Cyrus the Elder (550–529 B.C.) of Persia captured Jerusalem in 537 B.C. and allowed the Jews to return. They began constructing the Second Temple and finished it in 515 B.C.

Although the new Covenant of God, promising a kingdom under a descendant of King David, was not fulfilled, King Artaxerxes (464–424 B.C.) of Persia declared the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament (also known collectively as the Pentateuch), to be the law for Jews. The conquest of the region in 333 B.C. by Alexander the Great (363–323 B.C.), ruler of the Greek kingdom of Macedonia, marked the emergence of Helle-

nistic Judaism. This was a synthesis of two contrasting cultures: the inclusive, tolerant way of life of Greece, as lived in Athens during the fifth century B.C., and a demanding, exclusivist way of life as prescribed by the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible.

The banning of Judaism by the Greek ruler, Antiochus IV (175–163 B.C.), in 168 B.C. resulted in the Jewish revolt of 166 B.C. led by Judas Maccabaeus of the Hasmonean family. He succeeded in gaining religious freedom for Jews three years later, but not political freedom. In his attempt to secure the latter, he was killed in 160 B.C. The Jewish commonwealth was revived under Jonathan in 152 B.C. However, with the Torah, written originally in Hebrew, now translated into Greek, Hellenization of Judaism continued.

In 63 B.C., the Roman general Pompey captured the region, named it Judea, and incorporated it into the Roman Empire. Various attempts by Jews to set up an independent Jewish state failed.

Following the death of Jesus (ca. 6 B.C.–28 A.D.), Christianity emerged initially as a sect within Judaism. Restrictive decrees from Rome led to a Jewish revolt in 66–70 A.D., during which the Second Temple was destroyed and the Jews were expelled and scattered across the Roman Empire. Although many Jewish communities existed for centuries in the Middle East, around the Mediterranean, and across Europe, no Jewish state existed until the founding of Israel in the twentieth century except the Khazar (Jewish) kingdom in the Caucasian region between the Caspian and Black Seas from 740 A.D. to 965 A.D.

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity arose out of the birth, crucifixion, and teachings of Jesus, a carpenter from Nazareth, a settlement in the Roman province of Galilee. Born a Jew, Jesus was acclaimed as the Christ—a Greek term meaning “Anointed”—by his principal followers, called the Apostles, who were also Jewish. They regarded Jesus as the Christ who had been sent

to earth as part of God’s earlier covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, Christianity was considered a Jewish sect.

Following the failed Jewish uprising against Rome in 66–70 A.D., the Jewish element within the Christian community withered. Those believing in the one eternal truth and salvation, as laid down by Christ, followed the rites prescribed by him—especially baptism and the Eucharist. The latter consisted of the consecration and distribution of bread and wine, symbolizing the body and blood of Christ offered in sacrifice.

After the death of Christ, his teachings were assembled and compiled into four books called Gospels, which form the early part of the New Testament in the Christian Bible. While the Apostle Peter exercised religious authority, the Apostle Paul spread Christ’s teachings among non-Jews. Christianity evolved as a well-organized religion, and Roman officials felt threatened by it. The pagans hated its monotheistic doctrine and persecuted the early Christians. The situation changed in 313 A.D. when Roman Emperor Constantine I adopted Christianity and made it the state religion.

The breakup of the Roman Empire in 395 A.D. into Western and Eastern sections undermined the unity of the Christian Church. After 325 A.D., various Church councils were held to officially settle controversies. Such a council produced the dogma of the Trinity—the Father (God), the Son (Christ), and the Holy Ghost/Spirit—in the sixth century A.D. Increasingly, the Church was racked by differences on such issues as the number of natures Christ possessed (divine, or divine and human), and the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. Also, following the barbarian attacks on the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century A.D., the Church, led by the pope in Rome, with Latin as the official language, came to fill the resulting political vacuum. In contrast, in the Eastern Roman Empire, the Byzantine rulers controlled a Church led by the patriarch in Constantinople (now Istanbul), and using Greek as its official language.

Guided by Rome and Constantinople, Christian monks spread the faith among pagans all over Europe. They also made progress in Turkey, North Africa, and the Middle East, but failed to hold on to their gains against the rise of Islam in these regions. After the seventh century A.D., Christians were a minority in the Middle East and North Africa.

ISLAM

The last of the leading monotheistic religions, Islam (Arabic meaning "submission" [to God's will]), draws upon Judaism and Christianity. It was founded by the prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah (570–632 A.D.), who was born in Mecca, a trading post in western Arabia, into the Hashem clan of the merchant tribe of Quraish, at a time when Judaism and Christianity existed in Arabia and the surrounding lands. Those who follow Islam are called Muslims. They believe that as the last prophet of monotheism, Muhammad synthesized what had been divinely revealed before.

When Muhammad was about 40, his introverted, religious nature drove him to periodic retreats to a cave in the hills near Mecca to engage in solitary contemplation. In the course of these retreats, the first divine revelation "came down" to him on the night of 26–27 Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. In 613 A.D., Muhammad began to preach these revelations to a small group of relatives and friends. His message was to abandon all forms of idolatry and surrender completely to the omniscient, omnipotent, and compassionate God.

Because Muhammad's monotheistic teachings ran counter to the polytheistic idol worship practiced in Mecca and elsewhere in Arabia, his teachings proved unpopular. The growing local hostility made the life of Muhammad and his small band of followers unbearable.

In 622 A.D., they left Mecca for Medina, an oasis town about 300 miles to the northeast. Here the feuding tribes of Aus and Khazraj welcomed Muhammad as an arbiter.

Their subsequent acceptance of Islam enabled the tribes of Medina to live in peace as fellow Muslims.

Muhammad became the civil and military governor of Medina, and laid the foundation of the Realm of Islam, based on the Constitution of Medina. Following a series of military victories, Muhammad expanded his domain, and defeated the residents of Mecca in 630 A.D. He entered Mecca at the head of an army of 10,000, and had the town's collection of 360 stone idols overturned from their pedestals. He touched the sacred Black Stone, called the Kaaba, with his stick, and shouted "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great"), the victorious cry of Islam.

The ranks of Muhammad's followers swelled as the polytheist nomads converted to Islam in droves. Muhammad welcomed them, aware that the fledgling state of Medina needed all the protection it could gather in order to survive his death.

While Muhammad was alive, his divine revelations, delivered in rhythmic prose, were taken down by his followers on palm leaves, camel bones, or patches of leather. After his demise, these were compiled into 114 chapters of varying length to form a book of 6,616 verses, called the *Quran/Koran* (Arabic for "Recitation" or "Discourse"). Judaism and Christianity appear many times in the divine revelations to Muhammad, and there are numerous references in the *Koran* to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. There was also an oral record of what Muhammad had done and said, especially as an administrator, legislator, judge, and military commander. Following his death, elaborate means were used to collect his sayings and doings, which were called the *Sunna* ("Practice"). Later, 2,700 sayings and doings of Muhammad were codified and published in six canonical collections called the *Hadith* ("Report"). Together, the *Koran* and the *Hadith* form the *Sharia* ("Way" or "Road"), the Islamic Law.

After Muhammad's death, his duties were assumed by his viceregent, the caliph Abu Bakr, who died in 634 A.D. He was followed