

Textbook Discussion Questions
Chapter 9: The Middle East and the Islamic World

Introduction

1. How can the Middle East be said to have fueled the process of globalization?
2. Name the six major world religions that originated in the Middle East.

The Middle of Where?

1. Where did the term “Middle East” come from?
2. How does the term “Middle East” derive from a Eurocentric or Western perspective?
3. How has the meaning of the term “Middle East” changed since September 11, 2001?
4. Explain how the geographical term “the Middle East” has meant different things at different times, and “changes with the changing interests” of the West?
5. “With the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, the colonial powers of Europe divided up the Middle East and established arbitrary borders where none had previously existed.” How was the region mapped, in general, prior to WWI by Middle Eastern cartographers? What long-range consequences did this act of remapping have?
6. What “border-crossing affinities” do people living in the Middle East identify with? (Besides their national origin, what ties might they align themselves with?)
7. Which recent events have led some to speak of a “Shi’ite resurgence”?
8. Contrast the meaning of the phrases “Islamic World” and “Muslim World.”
9. Why do you think Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world? What information would you need to test your hypothesis?

Land and Livelihood

1. How many inches of annual rainfall do Western agricultural experts consider the minimum necessary for large-scale agriculture? On average, how many inches of annual rainfall do the countries of the Middle East receive?
2. Name two of the agricultural engineering devices used by farmers in the Middle East to irrigate their fields.
3. Define the term “transhumant pastoralism.”
4. Why is the Bedouin livelihood of herding in decline? Summarize the situation in your own words.
5. Besides herding, name the two other forms of mass population movement in the Middle East.
6. Identify two groups of refugees in the Middle East, currently displaced from their homelands.
7. Why do foreign workers outnumber citizens in Kuwait?

From Past to Present

1. What do historians call the region of river valleys including the Nile, the Jordan, and the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates—the region where agriculture was invented?

2. In the seventh century AD, the Islamic faith split into two separate communities: name these two groups, and in your own words, describe the nature of the schism. How did it happen, and why?
3. Name the empire that began with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and ended with the defeat of Germany and its allies at the end of WWI.
4. Describe the transformation in which the Colonial powers of Europe created and controlled new states in the Middle East after WWI. What new countries were created? Who controlled them? What were some of the results?
5. What are some of the ways in which the historical legacy of colonialism contributes to on-going contemporary problems in the Middle East.
6. Explain why the U.S. pressured its European allies to give up their colonial presence in the Middle East after WWII.

The Problem of Palestine

1. Define the term “diaspora” in your own words.
2. When did the Zionist movement begin? What was the central goal of Zionism?
3. In 1917, Great Britain issued the Balfour Declaration. Paraphrase the contents of this declaration: what was promised, to whom, and on what grounds?
4. On May 14 1948, what new state declared its existence and its independence?
5. What happened the following day?
6. Where is the region known as the West Bank territory? What is it west of?

Diversity and Division

1. Give two examples of the language diversity that exists in the Middle East.
2. What does the word “Islam” mean?
3. What are the five pillars of Islam?
4. What is the *Qur’an*? What other religious text is considered essential to many Muslims for studying the faith of Islam?
5. What kinds of stereotypes do you hold about the Middle East? Where do you think those ideas came from? Why do you think these stereotypes persist, even when they are exaggerated or untrue?
6. How is the nature of Islam changing in the 21st century? What factors contribute to the ways in which the faith is being practiced in new ways?

From Empires to Nation States

1. Why was the 20th-century evolution from empire to the nation-state difficult in some parts of the Middle East? Why was it difficult for some individuals to see themselves as citizens of a new nation?
2. What are some of the benefits of the tribal structure in the Middle East?
3. What is a proto-state?
4. Name a current proto-state in the Middle East. What are they currently doing to try to achieve statehood? Who is opposed to them achieving statehood, and why?

The Richest and the Poorest

1. What is the difference between what economists call a production state and an allocation state? How does each type of country create its national revenue?
2. Most of the allocation states in the Middle East derive their revenues from what natural resource?
3. Do all of the countries of the Middle East currently enjoy healthy economies?
4. What does the average GDP per capita of a country tell us about the economic life of its citizens? What does it not tell us? How can such a figure be misleading?
5. What has urbanization done, in the last century or two, to the economies of many countries in the Middle East?
6. Why does urbanization occur? List two reasons.
7. What is the definition of “capital flight”?
8. People often rely on informal economies when their attempts to survive within formal economies are not successful. What are some of the types of informal economies listed in the chapter?

The Rise of Political Islam

1. What does the term “political Islam” refer to? Describe the concept in your own words.
2. Where in the Middle East have explicitly religious parties gained significant political ground? For the most part, when did this movement begin? What is thought to have caused it?
3. What does the book suggest was “perhaps the most important catalyst for political Islam”?
4. How has the international community also played a role in the creation of Islamist groups?
5. Paraphrase the definition of terrorism that the book provided. Now give one example of an act that you would call an act of terrorism, and apply the definition: does it “count” as terrorism by the book’s definition? How else might we define terrorism?
6. Where does terrorism come from? Why do you think it occurs?
7. How is colonialism connected to the rise of terrorism?
8. What global region is cited as having had the highest number of anti-U.S. terrorist incidents before the United States invaded Iraq?