“***The Middle East***” refers to Northern Africa and Southwest Asia

**History**

“Cradle of civilization”

      The oldest civilizations in human history developed in the Middle East

      Early civilizations in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in today’s Iraq

Current Significance

      The region is significant to the United States for two major reasons:

        --Religion and Natural resources (oil)

Religion

      Three major religions originated in Middle East:

        --Judaism, Christianity, Islam

      All from Abrahamic tradition

Middle East today:

      Arabic (language)

      Muslim (religion)

      Mixture of cultures causes tension

      Because of all the different cultures and the religious significance of the region, there has been serious conflict for thousands of years.

      Many of the Islamic countries do not like Western ideas because of their traditional religious beliefs.

        --Women’s role in society

        --“infidels” in Muslim lands

        --Separation of church and state

Many others in the Middle East feel that the modern countries take advantage of them for their natural resources (oil).

Palestine is a major area of conflict:

      Jews believe that this land was given to them by God (the Promised Land).

      Palestinians (Arabs) have also lived there for thousands of years.

      Most of the world today calls it Israel

      The city of Jerusalem lies at the heart of the conflict.  It is sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

        --Dome of the Rock (Islam)

        --Western Wall (Judaism)

        --Church of Holy Sepulcher, Bethlehem (Christianity)

      Several wars and peace agreements in the 20th century

      United States has usually favored Israel

      Arab states have usually favored the Palestinians

      Many in the Middle East hate the United States for supporting Israel

**Governments**

      Few democracies

      Many dictatorships or theocracies

      Governments typically do not protect human rights

      Some have supported terrorism

**Terrorism**

      Terrorism is not at all a new idea, but many in the United States didn’t know much about it until the World Trade Center attacks in 2001.

      Terrorism has been around for centuries

      Islamic extremists use these methods to try to achieve their goals

      Islam is a peaceful religion, but terrorists often convince people that their actions are supported by the Koran (Islamic “Bible”).

**Recent conflicts**

      Wars between Israel and Arab countries

        --United States intervention (Gulf War, current situation in Iraq, etc.)

      Cycle of violence

**Middle East Today**

      Today, the countries of the Middle East reflect the vast differences in cultures and beliefs of its people, and the differences in the physical resources of the lands.

      Much of the oil used by modern countries comes from the Middle East.

      Countries with oil are wealthier

      Countries without much oil are usually very poor

Oil-Rich Countries:

        --Saudi Arabia

        --Kuwait

        --United Arab Emirates

      When there is trouble in the Middle East, the oil supply becomes uncertain, and prices rise.

**Wealth**

      Countries with above average per capita GDPs:

        --Kuwait:  $22,100

        --United Arab Emirates:  $29,100

        --Qatar:  $26,000

        --Israel:  $22,200

      Unequal income distribution

      Developing Countries

               --Yemen:  $800

               --Egypt:  $4,400

               --Iraq:  $3,400

**Land Size**

      Algeria

      Saudi Arabia

      Libya

**Population**

      Iran:  68 million

      Turkey:  69.7 million

      Egypt:  77.5 million