

The Middle East in world history since 1750

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The Middle East “is a focal point of international relations; it is an area that emanates international issues, not an area where they are merely played out. As a bridge between Asia, Africa, and Europe, as the oil-producing center of the world, as a battlefield of opposing nationalisms, as a major area of big-power competition, the Middle East plays a major role in the international system.”¹

Tareq Ismail’s description of the Middle East, written in the middle of the twentieth century, identifies the key elements of the place of the Middle East in modern world history. The region’s central location in the eastern hemisphere gives it a special significance, both strategic and cultural. Middle Eastern oil is essential to modern industrial society. World views and ideologies articulated in the region have been important elements in world history, from ancient monotheisms to modern radical nationalisms and contemporary religious resurgences. It has been an arena for conflict among major powers from the days of the Egyptian pharaohs and Babylonians to the “Eastern Question” of nineteenth-century imperialisms and the current conflicts identified by some as a “clash of civilizations.”

In the modern era, Middle Easterners experienced the changes that transformed societies around the globe. Increasing urbanization changed Middle Eastern societies, as it did other major societies, from social orders with peasant and rural majorities into urban majority societies. The redefinitions of gender roles affected Middle Eastern cultures as it did other regions around the globe. These social changes took different forms in the particular countries within the Middle East, and the Middle East, as a region, did not have a distinctive role in these global societal transformations. The most visible global dimensions of Middle Eastern involvement in modern world history,

1 Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Middle East in World Politics: A Study in Contemporary International Relations* (Syracuse University Press, 1974), p. vii.

as a region, involve its importance in global strategic and political affairs and its significance in the global resurgence of religion in the contexts of globalizing modernity. As a result, this chapter will focus its analysis on the strategic-political and religious-ideological dimensions of modern Middle Eastern involvement in world history.

The Middle East is not an isolated, separate global region; it is an important part of the global network of relationships in the modern era. Distinctively Middle Eastern developments reflect and influence global trends. The demonstrations in Tahrir Square in Cairo and other events of the Arab Spring in 2011 specifically expressed opposition to particular authoritarian regimes. At the same time, these national movements utilized the new tools of protest provided by global electronic social media, giving them worldwide visibility. They were influenced by, and then influenced, other populist protest movements around the world. Global and local elements combined to shape the nature of historical events and movements in the region and in the modern world.

The territorial dimensions of the region are fluid, reflecting the changing nature of the global and regional developments. In the mid-eighteenth century, the region effectively included much of southeastern Europe, which was under Ottoman control. By the twenty-first century, the region called the Middle East by outside analysts and people in the region usually includes the Arab world, Turkey, and Iran, although the label is a term of convenience rather than a carefully defined concept.²

One key to understanding modern Middle Eastern history is the changing relationships between foreign powers and regional and local groups. The foreign and domestic-regional elements are often viewed as competing factors, but they are also complementary. The synthesis of the global and the particular or local in world history has been identified, with an awkward but useful neologism: “glocalism.”³ In this framework, the global and the particular are not opposites. In modern Middle Eastern history, for example, European imperialist policies were often shaped by local and regional responses, just as developing nationalist movements cannot be understood separately from the imperialisms that they were rejecting.

2 John Obert Voll, “The Middle East in world history,” in Jerry H. Bentley, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of World History* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

3 Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity,” in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, eds., *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 40.

Major events in Middle Eastern history since 1750 illustrate the relationships between the global and the regional. Selected episodes will be discussed in this chapter, showing the complementary connectedness of global and particularist elements. The conclusion is that the distinction between “outside forces” and “regional actors” needs to be supplemented by a sense of how local Middle Eastern developments help to shape global trends, while more cosmopolitan, transregional forces are involved in defining the character of the modern Middle East.

The Middle East in the eighteenth-century world

The Middle East was in a period of decline in the eighteenth century, according to many later analysts. However, if there was a major decline of states and a stagnation of culture, it was not necessarily visible to most people at the time.

The Ottoman Empire in 1750 began two decades of peace (Map 18.1). Although the empire lost territories in the Balkans because of wars in Eastern Europe, reformist viziers and sultans kept the central empire firmly intact. At the end of the century, Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807) began a major reform program to create a military similar to European models.

In Morocco, Sultan Muhammad ibn Abdullah (r. 1757–1790) confirmed control by the new Alawi dynasty, whose rule continues into the twenty-first century. He was a religious reformer, but his policies also included commercial relations with Europe. As a part of his encouragement of trade, in 1777, Sultan Muhammad became the first head of state to formally recognize the United States, and the two countries signed a treaty regularizing commercial relations in 1786. His general economic policies gave his domestic policies a strongly global dimension.

In Iran, the Safavid Empire collapsed during the first half of the eighteenth century and in mid-century the country was a battleground for ethnic groups and warlords. These conditions did not prevent the expansion of participation by Iran in global trade in products like silk and other textiles. At the end of the century, Agha Muhammad Khan led the Qajars, a tribal confederation in northwest Iran, in conquering the territories of modern Iran. The new Qajar dynasty fought a number of wars with Russia and survived for more than a century, avoiding colonial conquest, and establishing the foundations for modern centralized government in Iran.

The three major states in the Middle East were not simply local powers, preyed upon by outside forces. In their wars, they were allies with some



Map 18.1 Islamic states in 1750 (including modern borders and countries)

European powers and enemies of others. They were part of the global interstate system emerging by the nineteenth century. Like the trade policies of Sultan Muhammad in Morocco, this global involvement shaped domestic policies in each of the countries, and local conditions influenced the ways that states like Russia, Britain, and France developed their policies. The late eighteenth century in the Middle East was not simply an era of losing control to outsiders.

Two events highlight the world-historical position of the Middle East in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Treaty of Küçük Kainarji ending the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774 and the invasion of Egypt and Syria by Napoleon in 1798. Later analysts cite both of these events as signs of the decline of Ottoman power, viewing them as developments within the region. However, they also need to be seen in the context of global politics. The Treaty of Küçük Kainarji came just two years after the first partition of Poland and was part of the reshaping of the European balance of power. In contrast to Poland, which lost its independence in the third partition in 1795, the Ottoman Empire lost some territories but survived for a century and a half within the European state system. The Ottomans were part of the broader history of the major multi-ethnic empires including those of Russia and the Habsburgs, sharing many of the same problems and influencing each other with their attempted solutions.

When Napoleon invaded Egypt, an Ottoman province, in 1798, it was part of a global strategy. The French army easily defeated the forces defending Egypt, and some scholars view this as a sign of Ottoman decline. However, Ottoman forces in alliance with British naval power stopped the French invasion of Syria and forced the withdrawal of the French in 1801. The consequences reflect a synthesis of the global and local elements. The Ottoman commander, Muhammad Ali, became the governor of Egypt, ruling from 1805 until 1848. His modernizing reforms gave Egypt virtual independence within the Ottoman Empire and, by the 1830s, Egypt, rather than any European power, posed the strongest threat to the survival of the Ottoman dynasty.

The global–local (glocal) character of the Napoleonic episode set an important framework for “the Eastern Question.” This label is given to the issues involved in the expansion of European power in the territories of the Ottoman Empire. Although the Eastern Question is frequently viewed as primarily an aspect of European diplomatic history, Middle Eastern actors like Muhammad Ali played important roles. Muhammad Ali was transforming Egyptian conditions, and, at the same time, his policies changed British

and French involvement in the region. He challenged the Ottoman Empire by invading the Syrian Province in 1831, ultimately forcing the British to defend the Ottoman sultan and setting in motion the British commitment to the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire. This became a main theme in the diplomacy of the Eastern Question. Middle Eastern developments were major factors in shaping global relations.

The Middle East played a similar role in world economic history. In the eighteenth century, societies around the world were still in the pre-industrial age in terms of sources of energy and economic institutions. No single local economy was in a dominant position in the global networks of trade and commerce. Before the emergence of fossil-fuel dependent industrial societies and the discovery of large petroleum resources in the Middle East, the region's primary importance was what it had been for centuries: as a centrally located transit region in the trade networks of the eastern hemisphere. This factor was important, for example, in Napoleon's decision to invade Egypt, and it was a major element in the prosperity of major cities in the region, like Aleppo, Smyrna/Izmir, and Cairo.

Important religious movements developed in the Islamic world during the eighteenth century. Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqahs*) were associations for expression of popular piety involving networks of teachers and preachers that spread throughout the Muslim world. While activities in the Middle East were important in these networks, the major brotherhoods were transregional in their importance. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, leaders in some of the orders reframed their groups in ways that established movements of religious revival.⁴

The Naqshbandiyyah Tariqah, for example, had its origins in Central Asia and the transregional network of its teachers and centers was an important framework for a number of renewal movements. A Chinese member of the order, Ma Mingxin (1719?–1781), traveled in Central Asia and studied in Yemen and Mecca with teachers associated with the brotherhood. On his return to western China, he led an activist movement of reform in the Muslim community. A later teacher in the order, Khalid al-Baghdadi (1776–1827), established a renewalist sub-order, the Khalidiyyah, which gained followers in Syria and Iraq and in the middle of the nineteenth century provided an organizational base for jihad against Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus. Other orders had similar histories of transregional influence.

4 John Obert Voll, "Foundations for renewal and reform: Islamic movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," in John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 509–547.

Another major movement of religious revival was explicitly anti-Sufi and opposed to many manifestations of popular piety – the movement of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1791). This puritanical teacher joined with an Arab tribal chieftain, Muhammad Ibn Saud, to establish a state in central Arabia and a tradition of rigorous religious reform. This Wahhabi revivalist tradition inspired many activist and sometimes extremist, violent movements throughout modern history, and has become a major part of global relations in the twenty-first century.

The history of the Middle East in the second half of the eighteenth century is an important part of the history of the world. Local developments influenced global relations and the changing nature of global affairs shaped those local developments. However, these relations were within the framework of pre-industrial world history. The transition to modern history becomes a major theme of both Middle Eastern and world history by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth-century transformations in the Middle East and the world

Societies in the Middle East and the world changed dramatically in the century between the rise of Napoleon in the 1790s and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The Industrial Revolution gave global economic and military dominance to Western Europe. The changes transformed political systems in ways that made older regimes vulnerable to overthrow and created the foundations for new political orders. This new world order involved an intensification of the integration of Middle Eastern states and societies into global networks. Comparisons of events in three major states in the Middle East at the beginning and end of the era provide an indication of the nature of the transformations that occurred during the nineteenth century.

Revolts against sultans marked the beginning and end of the century in the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Selim III was overthrown in 1807 by reactionaries opposed to his New Order reform program. Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839) came to the throne after a brief period of disorder and began a reorganization of the state based on the lines of European state development. The reforms were initiated to strengthen central control in the empire and represented the vision of a modernizing but authoritarian elite.

A century later, the autocratic sultan, Abd al-Hamid II (r. 1876–1909), faced a military mutiny in 1908 that set in motion the Young Turk Revolution. The

revolutionaries included constitutionalists, Islamic modernists, ethnic nationalists, and Westernizing technocrats. All of these elements were products of nineteenth-century developments and had had no role in Ottoman politics at the beginning of the century. Liberal constitutionalism replaced authoritarian centralization as the key theme of reform. The Young Turks created the foundations for the modern Turkish republic in the twentieth century.

In Iran, the Qajar conquests brought unity to Iran at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, the dynasty was unpopular and faced crises related to wars with Russia and diplomatic tensions with European powers. Shi'ism was the religion of the state and the majority of the population, and the religious leaders were a significant force generally beyond the control of the Qajar shahs. By the end of the century, strong movements to limit the powers of the monarchy came together in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911. The Shah was forced to accept a constitution by a revolutionary coalition of Westernizing reformers, major religious leaders, and the merchants controlling the bazaars essential to the Iranian economy. This alliance of social elements is a distinctive product of the history of Iran in the nineteenth century.

The Turkish and Iranian constitutional revolutions were part of a global pattern of liberal revolution against authoritarian regimes in the decade before the First World War. New communications technologies helped revolutionaries around the world to be inspired by their compatriots. The Russian Revolution of 1905 was among the early movements to encourage others. A British diplomat in Iran, for example, reported, “Events in Russia have been watched with great attention, and a new spirit would seem to have come over the people,” while an Ottoman opposition newspaper argued, “If we strive like Russians . . . it won't be long before we see even the Sultan's aides-de-camp among our supporters.”⁵ Revolutions in Portugal, Mexico, and China, along with those in Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Iran created an interactive global framework of liberal constitutionalist movements in which the Middle Eastern groups were important participants. These developments initiated a new global-local public sphere which would be the arena for twentieth-century politics.

Morocco's nineteenth-century history represents a different but equally important trend. At the beginning of the century, under Sultan Suleiman (r. 1792–1822), the Alawi dynasty faced revolts but maintained control over

5 Quoted in Charles Kurzman, *Democracy Denied, 1905–1915: Intellectuals and the Fate of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 4.

the country. Threats to the dynasty came from within the realm. A century later, sultans were challenged by French and Spanish control over significant parts of Morocco. The monarchy, in addition, incurred significant debt to European financial institutions. The result was the establishment of French and Spanish protectorates in the country in 1912, and the sultans became historic symbols with no actual power.

The model of imperial control by protectorate was already in place in Tunisia, which came under French control in 1881. In contrast, imperialist invasions of Algeria by the French in 1830 and of Libya by the Italians in 1911 created direct colonial administrations that lasted until the middle of the twentieth century. The diverse structures of imperial rule were shaped by the local conditions as well as by imperial design.

Egypt had similarly contrasting developments at the beginning and end of the nineteenth century. Officially, Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire. However, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali and his successors, it became a virtually independent power in the region. Then in 1882, it was occupied by Great Britain and became a *de facto* part of the British Empire. At the beginning of the First World War, the British declared Egypt to be a protectorate and British troops remained in Egypt until the 1950s.

Like the emergence of constitutionalist movements in the Middle East, the expansions of nineteenth-century European powers in the region were part of a broader global history – European imperial expansion. The interaction of global and regional forces in the Middle East helped to shape both the nature of movements of democratic reform and the character of global imperialist domination.

One visible sign of the integration of the Middle East in global affairs is the Suez Canal. People had considered building a canal connection between the Mediterranean and Red Seas already in ancient times. Even without the canal, the importance of the transit between the two seas was recognized in Napoleon's imperial planning. Entrepreneurs put forward plans during the first half of the nineteenth century, culminating in the completion of the Suez Canal by 1869. The canal rapidly became a vital link in global trade and a central concern of imperial strategies. The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 was justified in terms of defense of imperial communications, especially with India. Even after India's independence following the Second World War, the British participated in an invasion of Egypt to control the Canal in 1956.

In more general terms, most areas in the Middle East experienced a significant increase in international trade. One estimate notes that Ottoman trade increased in value from £T (Ottoman lira) 9 million in 1830 to £T45.9 million in

1910–1913. This increase involved “a shift in trading patterns from one of exchange within the region itself to trade with Europe.”⁶ The trade was largely an exchange of primary products for manufacture, reflecting the changing nature of the balance of economic power in global terms.

The Middle East also was part of major ideological and religious developments during the nineteenth century. One of the significant developments was the rise of nationalist feelings and movements around the world. Nationalist movements developed in Western and Central Europe in the eighteenth century, and the ideal spread across the world in the following century. Multi-ethnic empires like the Ottoman and Habsburg empires in Eastern Europe became vulnerable to the challenges of local opposition to central control when those challenges were articulated in nationalist terms.

The First and Second Serbian Uprisings (1804–1815) were early signals of the coming new age. Eventually Serbia became independent when the last Ottoman troops withdrew in 1867. The successful Greek War for Independence, 1821–1830, was closely watched, and aided, by Western Europeans. By the beginning of the First World War, the former Ottoman territories in the Balkans were virtually all under the control of independent, or autonomous, nationally identified states. Major multinational conferences determined many of the new local boundaries, and local conflicts often influenced the policies of the major powers. Most dramatically, the initial spark for the global conflicts of the First World War was the murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist from Bosnia in 1914. The global significance of this local nationalist event is a reminder of the “glocal” nature of modern Middle Eastern history.

Nationalist movements developed more slowly in other parts of the Middle East. By the First World War, Egyptian nationalists had organized a movement and a party opposed to continued British control, but its support came primarily from the educated elite, and a mass nationalist party did not emerge until the end of the First World War. Nationalist ideas were also expressed by small but important groups of Arab intellectuals in Greater Syria, and Turkish nationalist ideas were part of the ideas involved in the Young Turk Revolution.

Among Muslims in the Middle East, Islam provided support for affirmations of identity in the face of European imperial expansion. The sense of identity with the global Islamic community was deeply rooted, and activities

6 Roger Owen and Şevket Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies in the Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 4.

like the pilgrimage to Mecca strengthened the sense of the community of believers. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) articulated this identity in the modern form of pan-Islam, advocating the political unity of states ruled by Muslims. His ideas inspired many, both during his lifetime and later, by providing an alternative to secular nationalist ideas. One of al-Afghani's important associates was Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), an Egyptian scholar who defined many of the positions at the core of Islamic modernism. He argued that Muslims could be both modern and Muslim, and that Islam and modern science were compatible. The journal *Al-Manar* presented his ideas and was read by Muslims from Java to Morocco.

Modernist thinkers were important in other parts of the Muslim world as well. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India founded a modern-style Islamic university in Aligarh that established an important Muslim intellectual tradition. In the Russian Empire, Ismail Gasprinskii (1851–1914) worked to create a viable Muslim identity within Russian imperial society. Islamic modernism was a cosmopolitan movement in which the Middle East played an important part. In global terms, Muslim modernists, like the constitutionalists in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, were also part of the more global trends in other religious traditions to create perspectives in which faith can be seen as compatible with modernity.

During the nineteenth century, the older styles of Islamic organizations continued to be of importance. The established universities like al-Azhar in Cairo, the circles of teachers in Shi'ite holy sites in Iraq and Iran, and the scholars from many parts of the world who taught in Mecca and Medina maintained significant influence. Throughout the century, Sufi brotherhoods were more visible in opposition to European imperialist expansion than the nascent nationalist movements. The Qadiriyyah led by Amir Abd al Qadir (1808–1883) was the strongest force opposing the French conquest of Algeria begun in 1830; the Qadiriyyah and Naqshbandiyyah orders were the core of resistance to Russian expansion in the Caucasus; the Sanusiyyah, just before the First World War and in the interwar period, provided the only effective resistance to Italian campaigns in Libya.

Similarly, many observers viewed the Wahhabis, continuing from the eighteenth century in the Arabian Peninsula, as a source of puritanical inspiration for movements of opposition and revolt. Events at the beginning and end of the century directly involving the Wahhabis reflect the transformations of the century. In 1803–1804, the Wahhabis captured the holy cities of Mecca and Medina where they destroyed many monuments of popular religion, including the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad, as being idolatry.

The Wahhabi state was militarily defeated in the following decades, and the Saud family ended the century in exile. In 1902, a Saudi prince, Abd al-Aziz, led a raid and captured Riyadh, beginning the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with an emphasis on state-building rather than puritanical extremism (Map 18.2).

The brotherhoods and the Wahhabis were part of networks that were important in Middle Eastern history, but they were also transregional. Significant ideological developments, whether expressed in terms of popular piety or militant puritanism, were not simply local in their nature. They also involved cosmopolitan, transregional elements of importance in modern world history.

The nineteenth century was a time of transformation in terms of Middle Eastern history. Its major developments in political, economic, and religious terms highlight the synthesis of global and local elements as local groups and individuals participated in transitions that had both local and global significance.

Empire, independence, and industry: 1914–1956

The Middle East experienced continuing transformations during the first half of the twentieth century. Between the beginning of the First World War and the mid-1950s, old empires disappeared and new political identities were created. The ways of life for most people changed as economies were transformed by newly gained revenues from oil and by rapid urbanization. In ideological terms, Middle Eastern nationalisms reflected global trends of identity politics, and religious movements responded to the challenges of secularism and globalization.

Viewing “contemporary history” in the middle of the twentieth century, world historian Geoffrey Barraclough summarized the global power transformation succinctly: “When the twentieth century opened, European power in Asia and Africa stood at its zenith; no nation, it seemed, could withstand the superiority of European arms and commerce. Sixty years later only the vestiges of European domination remained.”⁷

The First World War marked the end of the multi-ethnic Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian empires and confirmed the domination of the Middle East by the British and French. This new system created states that

7 Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1967), p. 153.



Map 18.2 Islamic states in 1900 (including modern borders and countries)

changed the official political identity of people in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq. Although communism had some appeal among Middle Eastern intellectuals, Russia had little power in the region until mid-century.

In Iran, a military commander, Reza Khan (1878–1944) overthrew the Qajars in 1925 and became Shah, establishing a new dynasty which maintained formal independence. His rule was authoritarian as he imposed a program of modernizing reforms. However, he could not prevent the occupation of Iran by British and Soviet forces at the beginning of the Second World War and was forced to abdicate in 1941.

The only country to oppose the new imperial domination successfully was the new republic of Turkey established by Turkish nationalists who opposed the First World War settlement. A war for independence against the forces of the Allies, especially Greece, Britain, and France, brought Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk) to power as president. Kemal abolished the Ottoman sultanate and caliphate, creating a secular republic committed to the modernization of Turkey. The Kemalist state under his leadership was effectively a one-party system centered on the leader.

In the period between the two world wars, Kemal Atatürk and Reza Shah were part of a major global trend. In all of the countries that had experienced liberal constitutionalist revolutions in the decade before the First World War, authoritarian leaders came into control of the governments.

In the Middle East, the first half of the twentieth century was a time of state construction as well as reform. Nationalists worked to gain independence from foreign imperial control. The Second World War provided a major turning point and following the war, virtually all of the European-controlled areas secured independence. Nationalist leaders ruled in most Arab states by the beginning of the 1960s. They were part of the global movement in which at least forty countries with more than a quarter of the world's population became independent between 1945 and 1960.⁸

Although the idea of the nation state was emerging as a defining concept for political activism, the "nation" was not the only basic political identity. For some, religion was the key identity. The emerging Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was based on a religious identity rather than a nationalist one, and the Zionist movement thought in terms of a Jewish homeland and state, achieving its goal with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In the newly created states in Iraq and Transjordan, the core institution was a monarchy based on the Hashemite family, whose prestige rested on being descendants

⁸ Ibid.

of the Prophet Muhammad. When Libya was created as an independent state by the United Nations in 1951, it was a monarchy based on the leadership of the Sanusiyyah Tariqah. However, by the 1950s, the nationalist concept of an independent nation state became the most important political vision throughout the Middle East, as it was in most of the rest of the newly independent states around the world.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Middle Eastern social structures and economies were changing in significant ways. These changes are shown in the increasing urbanization of societies and the development of the petroleum industry in the region. In world history, urbanization of human society began in the Middle East, and over the millennia the region has been, until modern times, one of the most urbanized of the world. However, the majority of the population lived in rural areas and engaged in agricultural production. In Western Europe this balance began to change with the Industrial Revolution where urban majorities began to develop in some countries by the early twentieth century. Societies in the Middle East became a part of this global trend during the first half of the twentieth century.

The urban population by 1947 in the larger Middle Eastern countries ranged from 20 percent in Iran to 33 percent in Egypt and 35 percent in Iraq. While this is still a minority of the population, it reflects the virtual doubling of the populations of major cities like Cairo, Aleppo, Baghdad, Tehran, and Ankara in the period between 1914 and 1930, and their continued rapid growth in the following decades.⁹ Immigration from rural areas to the cities was part of the changes in rural life as agricultural production became more integrated into national economic networks and as people sought employment in the growing urban industrial complexes. Gradually the old-style conservative peasant was replaced by more entrepreneurial farmers and a generally more mobile population. Rising literacy rates among women and urbanization brought women into the public sphere in ways that strengthened support for women's rights and emerging secular and religious feminist movements.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, petroleum was becoming a major source of energy in societies around the globe. In 1900, the largest oil producing countries were the United States and Russia, accounting for

⁹ Statistics drawn from Charles Issawi, *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 199, and L. Carl Brown, "The Middle East: patterns of change 1947–1987," *Middle East Journal* 41:1 (Winter 1987), 28.

almost 95 percent of the relatively small world production, and they continued in mid-century to provide about 60 percent of world production. While the Middle East became an important source for oil exports, the oil industry was only developing in the region during the first half of the century, providing about 20 percent of world production by 1950.¹⁰ The global petroleum industry during this era was shaped by two characteristics: the virtual control of the world oil market outside of the United States and Russia by a group of large Western companies and the domination of all potentially important oil producing countries outside of the United States and Russia by European and American imperial and economic power.

The first commercially exploitable oil field in the Middle East was discovered in 1908 in southwest Iran, and was operated under a concession agreement from the Shah by the newly formed Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Following the First World War, the major oil companies began negotiations for concessions elsewhere in the region, creating company consortia to operate the new fields. After long negotiations, the major companies came to an agreement in 1928 dividing control of the known resources in the newly created Iraq and restricting independent company initiatives elsewhere. Saudi Arabian oil fields began to be developed by American companies in the 1930s, and the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) was established as a consortium of four companies by 1948. Elsewhere in the Gulf region, other groupings of Western companies gained control of oil production in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar.

By the 1950s the nature of the oil industry was changing. The original concessions involved payment of royalties by the companies to the host governments. However, in 1948, Venezuela implemented a profit-sharing arrangement with the companies, and the idea soon spread to the Middle East. Saudi Arabia concluded a fifty-fifty profit-sharing agreement in 1950 and Kuwait and Iraq quickly followed. In the era of post-imperial independence, local initiatives were reshaping global relationships. A dramatic expression of this was the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian [formerly Persian] Oil Company in 1951 by the government of the nationalist premier of Iran, Muhammad Mossadegh. Although the Shah's authority was restored by a coup aided by the United States in 1953, and a new oil agreement was negotiated, the Iranian action signaled a new era, both in global economic relations and in the nature of regional-global politics.

¹⁰ Statistics drawn from American Petroleum Institute sources, cited in Albert L. Danielsen, *The Evolution of OPEC* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 15, and OPEC sources, cited in Issawi, *An Economic History*, p. 199.

During the first half of the twentieth century, nationalist movements in the Middle East, as elsewhere in the world, were primarily striving for self-determination and freedom from imperialist rule. While visions of radical revolutionary change, as advocated by the emerging communist movement, had some appeal, nationalists were more concerned with achieving independence than in social transformation. The nationalist party that emerged in Morocco under the leadership of Allal al-Fasi (1906–1973) worked with the monarchy, viewing Muhammad V as a symbol of the nation. In Egypt, the Wafd, the nationalist party that gained mass following in the 1920s, was a party led by middle class and wealthy Egyptians whose program was independence. Similarly, Shukri al-Quwatli, president of Syria from 1943 to 1949 and 1955 to 1958, was active in anti-French groups and came from a wealthy family in Damascus.

The old-style nationalists were basically successful in achieving independence, but by the 1950s, a new generation of leaders was emerging and presenting visions of revolutionary social change. The military coup in 1952 that brought Jamal Abd al-Nasir (Nasser) to power in Egypt was the most visible sign of this shift to the new radicalism of the second half of the twentieth century.

The transition is exemplified in the Suez crisis of 1956, which involved old and new themes. The new theme was the result of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and the beginning of the contemporary Arab–Israeli conflict. Israel invaded Egypt in 1956 in opposition to the activism of Nasser, as a part of the conflict which continues in different forms in the twenty-first century. However, the Suez crisis is also a symbol of the end of the imperialist age. Britain and France also invaded Egypt, in conjunction with Israeli forces, and were forced by threat of sanctions from both the United States and the Soviet Union, along with United Nations condemnation, to withdraw, bringing an end to the era of their dominance in the region.

Religious movements developed alongside nationalist movements during the first half of the twentieth century, advocating religious renewal and social reform. The best-known group is the Muslim Brotherhood, established in Egypt in 1928. In ideology it was an heir to the nineteenth-century modernists, but it created an organizational network providing social services as well as religious instruction. In the early 1950s, some observers saw the Brotherhood as providing a revolutionary alternative to the old regime. However, it was pre-empted by the young military officers around Nasser. The Brotherhood was banned in 1954 but continued as a significant underground movement.

Other Muslim organizations provided important new alternatives to the old-style associations. In Algeria, some of the religious scholars, or ulama, formed the Association of Algerian Ulama as a reformist group which affirmed the Islamic dimensions of Algerian national identity. Among Shi'ites, religious leaders had played an important role in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911 in Iran. Under Reza Shah, some ulama participated in intermittent protests. Following the Second World War, one Ayatollah, Abu al-Qasim Kashani, issued legal rulings or fatwas supporting the nationalization of the oil company. Other groups with long-term significance were not directly involved in politics. In Turkey, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877–1960) gained a large following by encouraging study of the Qur'an from a mystical and modernist perspective, while many Sufi brotherhoods developed devotional practices suitable for modern conditions.

During the first half of the twentieth century the nature of the involvement of the Middle East in modern world history changed dramatically. It began the century as a region dominated by European military and economic power. By the 1950s, new, more urbanized societies were developing and the region's major economic role in global affairs was strengthened by the development of the oil industry. The Suez crisis of 1956 indicated the end of old-style imperialism, while the Iranian nationalization of AIOC and the Egyptian revolution of 1952 reflected the beginning of the new politics of the second half of the twentieth century.

The accelerated globalization of the Middle East, 1950s–present

The acceleration of globalization in the second half of the twentieth century intensified the processes of change in the Middle East, as it did everywhere in the world. In important ways, Middle Eastern local realities were globalized. In the middle of the century, analysts could discuss distinctive characteristics of the Middle East as a region, within the conceptual framework of scholarly area studies. However, by the twenty-first century, the Middle East, as a region, became more of a geographic location for elements in broader global networks than a clearly identifiable, distinctive, political-cultural entity.¹¹

The politics of local independence became embedded in the global dynamics of the Cold War and the ideological competitions of modernization. The oil industry continued to be global in character but the nature of

¹¹ Voll, "The Middle East in world history," pp. 449–450.

Middle Eastern involvement was transformed. The continuation of social trends like urbanization followed global patterns and were emphasized by significant migrations of workers. Guest workers from Turkey are a significant part of the labor force in Germany, for example, while workers from South and Southeast Asia are a major part of the population of the smaller petroleum states in the Gulf region.

Middle Eastern movements were among the early signs of the global resurgence of religion. In the broadest terms, by the twenty-first century, societies in the region were part of the complex development of multiple modernities within the framework of intensified globalization, creating individuals and societies that were both locally rooted and globally cosmopolitan.

In the 1950s the old rivalries between European empires were replaced by the competition between two new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Local developments around the world shaped the nature of this new conflict, the Cold War. The issue of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran at the end of the Second World War influenced the firmness of US policy toward the Soviet Union, and the Truman Doctrine in 1947 calling for containment of communism, explicitly called for economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey because of possible local communist threats. The United States supported the creation of what became the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in the 1950s, bringing together Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, and the United Kingdom in a military alliance aiming at preventing Soviet expansion into the Middle East. Local developments in the Middle East, like the overthrow of the pro-Western monarchy in Iraq in 1958, reduced the effectiveness of CENTO, which was finally dissolved in 1979 following the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Soviet policies were similarly shaped by local events. The rise of radical nationalist leaders in the Arab world in the 1960s provided opportunities for increased Soviet influence.

The Cold War shaped local politics in the region as well. In the 1950s, in the context of a bipolar world, a non-aligned movement (NAM) was organized by leaders of some of the major newly independent countries. An important step was the Bandung Conference of 1955, where Nehru (India), Tito (Yugoslavia), Sukarno (Indonesia), and Nkrumah (Ghana) were joined by Nasser, the new leader of Egypt. The NAM illustrates the shift from regional to global frameworks for politics in the Middle East. The original rationale for the movement ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, but the organization was later re-energized as a vehicle for criticism of the major industrialized powers. In his inaugural address for the 2012 Non-Aligned Summit in Tehran, the Ayatollah Khamenei defined the new role in global

terms: "In the recent past, we have been witness to the failure of the policies of the Cold War era and the unilateralism that followed it. Having learnt lessons from this historical experience, the world is in transition towards a new international order and the Non-Aligned Movement can and should play a new role. This new order should be based on the participation of all nations and equal rights for all of them."¹² Distinctive local developments were shaped by and embedded in global frameworks.

An important element in this context was the competition between advocates of radical social change and more conservative programs of reform. Between 1950 and 1970, monarchies were overthrown in Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. The new regimes represented a new generation of leaders, coming to power by military coup, and advocating various forms of radical socialism. Monarchies in Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia (and the Gulf region), and Iran responded with social reform programs of their own. The 1960s was an era of competing programs of how to modernize Middle Eastern societies.

By the 1970s, discontent with both the radical and the conservative programs grew, as both paths produced authoritarian regimes. The policies of these regimes of significant state involvement and control of major sectors of the economy were generally unable to meet popular expectations. Economic problems including growing government debt and international trade deficits throughout the region soon brought the involvement of international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Such institutions required programs of economic "structural adjustment" involving reduction of state subsidies for food and other measures of economic austerity. These policies aroused vigorous opposition. In Egypt, for example, major riots took place in January 1977, when "the Government moved to cut subsidies on a number of popular items such as tea, sugar, bread, cooking oil, butane gas, and cigarettes" because of pressure from the IMF.¹³

Opposition movements began to articulate their visions for a new society in Islamic terms. New austerity measures gave opportunities for Islamic charities and activist organizations to provide services for people neglected by the state. Islamically identified organizations gained political influence in most countries in the region. In Turkey, under the leadership of Necmettin

12 International Dar-Ol-Hadith Department, Tehran, "Text of Ayatollah Khamenei's Inaugural Address, August 30, 2012," international@hadith.net, accessed August 30, 2012.

13 Marvin Howe, "Egypt is uneasy as Sadat juggles promises of peace and prosperity," *New York Times*, August 23, 1977.

Erbakan, the Islamic movement organized the National Salvation Party in 1973 and became a partner in coalition governments. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood gained more freedom of action during the rule of Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat. These beginnings of an Islamic resurgence are also visible throughout the Muslim world, and were part of the broader religious resurgence in many parts of the world. In the Middle East, a dramatic confirmation of these trends came when Islamic revolutionaries under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah of Iran and established the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979.

In the following decades, Islamic perspectives and groups played increasingly important roles in Middle Eastern politics. In some areas, Islamist groups participated in democratic processes as opportunities opened. The results showed the remarkable strength of the Islamic resurgence. In Algeria, the Islamic Salvation Front was on the verge of winning national parliamentary elections in 1991–1992 until the military intervened to nullify the elections. In Turkey, Erbakan's party won significant support during the 1990s and he was briefly prime minister in a coalition government. In 2002, a successor to Erbakan's party won control of the National Assembly. In Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, elections were open to non-extremist Islamic parties, but none succeeded until the remarkable political transformations of the Arab Spring in 2011, after which they gained important victories in the resulting elections.

Militant Islamist groups also emerged as significant elements in local, regional, and global affairs. Marginal groups like those who murdered Sadat in Egypt in 1981 continued to gain notoriety, but the concept of a global jihad emerged in the 1980s during the battle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. A global dimension was added to local anti-Soviet opposition by the recruitment of young fighters from around the Muslim world and by the support given to the mujahidin (jihad warriors) by the United States. The global volunteers provided the beginning for global networks of militants, with the most significant being al-Qaeda. During the 1990s, some of these groups gained notoriety by terrorist attacks ranging from New York City to East Africa and Yemen. The destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 ("9/11") and the subsequent response in the US-defined global "War on Terror" provides the most visible example of how local developments in the Middle East became embedded in global frameworks of action.

Even conflicts that had distinctively Middle Eastern roots became quickly part of global affairs. The Arab–Israeli conflict provides a good

example of the glocal nature of major regional conflicts. Following the Second World War, the United Nations divided the British Palestine Mandate area between Israel, a state that was the result of the actions of the global Zionist movement, and Arab-Palestinians. Each major war in this conflict – 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973 – involved not simply the local actors but also the international community. When the first peace treaty was signed, between Egypt and Israel in 1979, it was negotiated under the auspices of President Carter of the United States. Similar negotiations and agreements in the 1990s were also international in character. In the twenty-first century, the local and global continued to be intertwined. Similar global involvement in local conflicts can be seen in the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, in the civil wars in Yemen in the 1960s and Lebanon in the 1970s/1980s, and virtually any other local tension.

The oil industry in the Middle East was part of global networks from the beginning but in the second half of the twentieth century, the nature of those networks was dramatically changed. In mid-century, Middle Eastern oil was controlled by major transnational corporations, but the nationalization of Iranian oil and the emergence of profit-sharing arrangements indicated important changes. In 1959, the major companies unilaterally reduced posted prices of oil, resulting in significant losses of revenue for the governments of the producing countries around the world. This action strengthened existing efforts of co-operation among oil exporting countries, and in 1959, the Arab League organized the first Arab Petroleum Conference (APC) in Cairo, with observers from Venezuela and Iran. In 1960, five major producing countries representing about two-thirds of global known recoverable oil reserves and almost 40 percent of world output – Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait – established the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) as a vehicle for co-ordinating policies and negotiations.

The concept of an Arab regional organization continued with Arab League sponsored congresses, and then the creation of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) in 1968. OAPEC organized production cuts and selective embargoes during the Arab–Israeli war of 1973–1974, resulting in a major global crisis. However, during the 1970s, the more global OPEC became the major alliance of oil producers. The major change was the end of company dominance and the rise of global, not regional, producer power. Within this framework, the producing companies moved from profit-sharing to becoming national companies co-operating with the older oil companies. Aramco, for example, became wholly Saudi-owned in

The Middle East in world history since 1750



Map 18.3 The Middle East today

1980–1981. OPEC came to represent both major local producing companies and states. Again, Middle Eastern local developments became a part of broader global networks (Map 18.3).

Major social changes in the region continued to reflect broader global trends. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the majority of the world’s population lived in urban areas, and Middle Eastern societies were part of this trend. By 2010, in the Arab world, 56 percent lived in

cities,¹⁴ and Iran and Turkey experienced similar urbanization. This development was part of a broader transformation of society. In mid-century, agriculture was a major part of Middle Eastern economies, but by the twenty-first century, the industrial and service sectors accounted for 90 percent of GDP, and agriculture around 10 percent.¹⁵

One dimension of the changing nature of the workforce is the increasing regional and global mobility of labor. Particularly in oil-producing countries with smaller populations, immigrant labor became an important element in the economy. By 2010, migrant workers were 88, 70, and 69 percent of the total populations in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, and almost a third of the population of Saudi Arabia.¹⁶ The existence of this foreign labor force and the revenues from oil exports places effective limitations on the development of democratic political institutions and creates a small class of elite citizens. Labor emigration is also an important factor, with Turkish workers migrating to Germany, where they are 3.4 percent of the population, and North African workers going to France, where they are about 5 percent of the population.¹⁷ Global migration of workers to industrial economies has a long history. For example, in Dearborn, Michigan, home of the Ford Motor Company, the 2000 census reported that 30 percent of the population was of Arab ancestry,¹⁸ with roots in the migration of Arab workers to work in the Ford plant following the First World War. The labor market in the Middle East, as in many other aspects of regional social and political life, is not separately regional but rather, is integrated into broader global developments.

The history of the Middle East in the first decades of the twenty-first century confirms the nature of Middle Eastern history in modern world history. Religious, political, and economic developments involved both distinctively local and broadly global elements. The groups involved in the Arab Spring provide important insights into this combination of global and local. The movements in Tunisia and Egypt began as very local events. The self-immolation in 2010 of Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor who refused to pay a bribe to a local police inspector, suddenly became a symbol

14 Statistics for the Arab world in this discussion are drawn from United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN-Habitat), *The State of Arab Cities 2012: Challenges of Urban Transition* (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2012).

15 Ibid. p. ix, and Alan Richards, John Waterbury, et al., *A Political Economy of the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008), p. 59.

16 UN-Habitat, *State of Arab Cities 2012*, pp. 147, 165.

17 *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2012 Book of the Year* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2012), pp. 600, 607.

18 U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census 2000 Brief: The Arab Population: 2000* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, December 2003), p. 8.

of opposition to the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali. In Egypt, Khaled Said became a similar symbol when he was beaten to death by police in a cybercafé. These two young men were not unique in being repressed by an authoritarian regime, but the new social media enabled the opposition groups in both countries to gain global visibility.

The movements, called the Arab Spring, became a centerpiece among “populist movements” that were “demanding change in nearly every major region of the world” in 2011–2012.¹⁹ The new populism tended to be “leaderless explosions of indignation” which “transcend traditional political boundaries.” The perspectives of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionaries were globally cosmopolitan. “Breaking free from older veterans of the Arab political opposition, they relied on tactics of non-violent resistance channeled from an American scholar [Gene Sharp] through a Serbian youth brigade – but also on marketing tactics borrowed from Silicon Valley.”²⁰ However, their cosmopolitanism was rooted in their Egyptian and Tunisian identities.

Whatever the long-term outcomes of the Arab Spring movements might be, they are part of the global frameworks of modern Middle Eastern history. From the frontier wars of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century to the activists of the Arab Spring in the twenty-first, Middle Eastern history has been an interactive part of the broader narrative of modern world history.

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