

CHAPTER 19 SECTION 1

Landforms and Rivers

The region formed by the Persian Gulf and the interior Southwest Asia includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. This region is also referred to as the **Middle East**.

The Arabian Peninsula is located between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. To the north of the peninsula are the countries of Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Tectonic activity is believed to have shaped the physical features of this region. The collision of these plates has created a mixture of mountains, plateaus and valleys. As the Arabian and African plates collide some of the coastal gulfs, and seas were formed.

Northeast of the peninsula is an area called **Mesopotamia** (land between rivers). The **Tigris and Euphrates** create a large fertile crescent in the region. These two rivers merge into a channel called the **Shatt al Arab** before it empties into the Persian Gulf.

The mountains in the region include the Zargos, Kapet-Dag and the Elburz of Iran. In Afghanistan the Hindu Kush dominate the landscape.

Other land features include the coastal plains, and the high plateau of Iran.

Climates and Plants

Hot and dry climates dominate the region. Rains come mostly during the winter, and occasional cyclones that will dump rainfall. The southern interior is a mostly uninhabited desert called the Rub' al-khali (empty quarter). To the north is the An Nafud a desert of reddish sand.

The region's mountains provide water to the valleys below. The region's wettest climate is in Iran in a narrow zone along its southern shore of the Caspian Sea. The lowlands of Saudi Arabia along the Persian Gulf are among the hottest places in the world-recording temperature above 114 degrees. The inland areas are very dry and experience wide range of temperatures during the day caused by the rapid heating and cooling of the land. Scrubs and grasses cover the region's wide dry plains. Trees are common in the mountain areas.

Natural resources

The region's two most important resources are oil and water. Oil is plentiful, but water is not. The Tigris and Euphrates are the main sources of water in Iraq.

Surface water is rare in the desert areas. **Oasis'** provide some surface water, but their numbers are few. Deep wells are often dug in areas of dried riverbeds to provide local water sources. Many of these wells are fossil waters, which are limited in supply.

Desalinization also provides freshwater to the region. This is a process that removes the salt from saltwater. This is limited to the wealthy countries because the process is expensive to operate and maintain. Saudi Arabia produces the region's most desalinated water.

Oil is the region's most valuable resource. The oil reserves along the Persian Gulf are the largest in the world. Oil is a nonrenewable resource so their dependence on oil revenues will one day run out. Estimated to be in about 50 years. Only Iran has other mineral resources in some quantity, which gives them the potential to develop other industries for economic growth.

CHAPTER 19 SECTION 2

HISTORY AND CULTURE

Empires and Independence

The world's first civilizations developed in the area known as the Fertile Crescent. Many plants and animals found on farms throughout the world today may have been first domesticated in the Fertile Crescent region. About 3,000 BC; a people called the **Sumerians** built the world's first known cities in southern **Mesopotamia**. The rich resources of Mesopotamia attracted invaders again and again. Akkadians conquered the Sumerian cities around 2,350 BC and created the region's first real empire. About 550 BC an empire developed in Persia, where Iran is today. The Persians conquered both Mesopotamia and Asia Minor (Turkey). Theirs was one of the largest, richest and most powerful in world history. The Greeks and then the Romans controlled much of the region for a time.

The prophet **Muhammad**, who lived in the region from about 570 to 632 AD, established **Islam**. Islam is one of the world's most widely practiced religions. Muhammad was born in Mecca. At age 40 he had a religious experience. He reported that a messenger of **Allah** (Arabic word for god) told him to preach the word of Allah. The followers of Muhammad were called Muslims. By the time Muhammad died Islam had spread across the Arabian Peninsula. After his death, a conflict among his followers leads to the spreading of Islam to different parts of the world. A holy book called the **Qur'an (Koran)** contains what Muslims believe to be Allah's message to Muhammad.

In the 1200s the Mongols swept out of Central Asia to conquer what is now Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. Rulers called **Safavids** came to power in Iran in the early 1500s. Historians consider the rule of the Safavids, which lasted more than 200 years, a golden age of Persian culture. The Safavid dynasty, or line of hereditary rulers, ended in the mid-1700s when the British and the Russians began to expand their influences into what is now Iran and Afghanistan.

In the 1500s the **Ottoman Turks** conquered Mesopotamia and the coastal areas of the Arabian Peninsula. The Ottomans lost their control of this region after the British in WWI defeated them. In 1932 Iraq and Saudi Arabia became independent countries. Other countries like Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen did not become independent from Britain until the 1960s and 1970s.

Culture

Islam is the unifying cultural feature of the region. Most people in the Persian Gulf and interior part of Southwest Asia are Arabs, and Arabic is the dominant language. To read the Koran, Muslims have to learn Arabic. All Arabic speakers became known as Arabs. Non-Arab ethnic groups are also numerous in the region. The Kurds, who live in the borderlands of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, are Muslims but not Arab. The Kurds have never had their own country. Their desire for self-rule is a source of political unrest in some countries, including Iraq.

Cultural diversity is even more complex in Iran and Afghanistan. Most of Iran's people are Persians who speak Farsi. Persians dominate Iran and hold most of the important positions in Iranian society. A number of other ethnic groups like the Turkmen, Azeri, and Qashqai peoples speak a Turkic language. In Afghanistan the Pashtun make up the largest ethnic group. The name Pashtun really refers to a number of tribes that speak the Pashtu language.

CHAPTER 19 SECTION 3

Economic Development

Oil and gas production is central to the countries along the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia produces about 8.25 million barrels of oil a day. Oil wealth has helped modernize the economies of the region. Arid climates and a rugged landscape make farming difficult. Farmers find fertile soils mainly in the river valleys, on high plateaus and at a few oases. All the countries of the region must import food. The more humid areas have been overgrazed, leading to soil erosion. Most farmers practice subsistence agriculture, producing only enough to support their families. If there is any surplus they will attempt to sell it in local markets or the **bazaars**. Barely and wheat are the most common grains, some raise livestock. The commercial farms are located near the cities and most raise some type of citrus fruit. There are a few specialized commercial farms like dairies and chicken farms. Saudi Arabia even grows flowers to export to European countries.

Traditional farming by the Bedouins still occurs. These people are nomadic herders. Grazing camels, goats and sheep. They also produce craft items that are sold in local markets as they travel the dry land areas. The region's beautiful and valuable wool rugs have been famous for centuries. Rugs are still made by hand, using traditional designs. Modern manufacturing in the region is limited. The only large industries involve oil refining and related chemical manufacturing. These industries are highly automated and provide few jobs.

Urban Environments

Among the largest cities in the region are the national capitals. In the world's developing regions, many people have migrated to the cities looking for jobs. Many of the region's cities are ancient. Old-style buildings are still in use. Central marketplaces called bazaars are where merchants setup booths each day to sell or barter their goods. In contrast, the newer sections of the cities have modern buildings and air-conditioned malls. Many of the areas look like many western cities with chain fast food stores and gas stations.

Governments, Issues, and Challenges

The region's politics and concerns for the future center around oil wealth, Islam, and modern versus col-style leaders.

Oil Wealth

The importance of oil in the region has given oil rich countries much world political power.

Saudi Arabia's huge oil reserves make it the world's largest exporter of oil. It is a key member of **OPEC** (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). This organization controls the price of oil by controlling the production of oil. Saudi Arabia is also the caretaker of Islam because the holy city of Mecca is located on its western coast.

Iran politics has seen turbulent times. In 1979, the monarch was exiled by a minority Shia Muslim faction. The country was then ruled by an **Ayatollah** (highest religious authority). They established a theocracy (religious based government). Since the death of the original ayatollah the country has backed off some of their more strenuous laws, particularly those directed at women.

A dictator Saddam Hussein, who has used his country's oil wealth to build up the military rules Iraq. Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, trying to seize control over their oil fields. The war lasted 8 years damaging each country's oil wealth and society. In 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait in an attempt to take their oil fields. A US backed coalition drove the Iraq forces from Kuwait. Today, the threat of massive weapons build up and support of terrorist groups is moving Iraq toward another conflict with the US.

Afghanistan is another country that has been marred by conflict. The country has many rival Islamic factions that have been competing for power for the last 50 years. Bloody civil wars opened an opportunity for the Soviet Union to invade. In the 1980s the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the US began supporting the Islamic factions against the Russians. The conflict ended with a Soviet withdrawal. The Islamic factions went back to their civil conflict. A group known as the Taliban was able to take control of the capital city Kabul. The Taliban imposed a strict Islamic theocracy over the nation of Afghanistan. The Taliban closed all western influences and restricted the lifestyles of women in the nation. Because of their support of terrorism and the events of 9/11/01, the US invaded Afghanistan and destroyed the Taliban rule. Helping other more moderate Islamic groups control the government.