



THE CHALLENGE OF
BEAUTY
~ STRIVING FOR ~
PERFECTION
~ IN AN ~
IMPERFECT
— World —

Topic III
Middle East: Early
History, Economics,
Culture

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History

WWI and the Fall of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was an empire established at the end of the thirteenth century in the region of Anatolia, present-day Turkey, by an Oghuz Turkish tribal leader named Osman. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the height of its power under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Empire was a multinational, multilingual empire controlling much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, the Caucasus, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa. With Constantinople as its capital and control of the lands around the Mediterranean Basin, the Ottoman Empire was at the forefront of the relationship between the Eastern and Western world for six centuries. The empire continued to maintain a flexible and strong economy, society, and military throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century. However, during a long period of peace from 1740 to 1768, the Ottoman military system fell behind that of their European rivals, the Habsburg and Russian Empires.

The Ottoman Empire became aware of the European advances in industry and technology and sought to , reinvigorate the army, and give order to the tax collection system, including the introduction of modern industrial machinery in order to maintain their influence. The first of these reforms was called the Nizam-i Jedid (New Order), which was instituted by Sultan Selim III, after he was inspired by the reforms after the French Revolution. The second reformation era was during 1837 to 1876, the Tanzimat or reorganization. The Tanzimat introduced the postal system, the telegraph, steamships and railway construction to the Ottoman Empire. These reformations gave rise to a class of modernists called “Young Ottomans” and “Young Turks” who would seek to reform the system from within. With their European political ideals, Islamic upbringing and Ottoman heritage combined, they wished to convert the Ottoman dynasty into a constitutional parliamentary system, which created a number of competing factions in the administration. By the early twentieth century, the idea of a multinational, multireligious empire soon became untenable, along with the rise of ideologies such as nationalism and the need for self-determination was breaking the empire apart.

With the entry of the Great War in 1914, the Young Turk movement created the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) which focused on secularism and “Turkish nationalism” rather than “Ottomanism”. They slowly came to power in 1912, keeping the sultan in a titular position until 1918. In their reign, the CUP rapidly secularized schools and the judicial system, repressed Christian minorities and the Muslim ulama. The empire reluctantly sided with the European Central Powers, a coalition that consisted mainly of the German Empire and Austria-Hungary, against the Allies, consisting of Britain, France and Russia. Although the the Central Powers had scored some early victories, including the fall of the Russian Government in 1917, the Allies overpowered their opponents and ultimately won the war.

The Allies captured Constantinople, and its entire empire was split up amongst themselves in an effort to curtail the empire’s previous power. The geographical division of the Ottoman Empire, increased the participation of countries such as Britain and France, in occupying regions of the Middle East and gave rise to what is now known as the modern Arab world. The empire officially ended on November 1st 1922, when the Ottoman Empire was abolished and Turkey was declared a republic. The Ottoman caliphate continued as an institution within the Turkish government, with greatly reduced authority, until it too was abolished on March 3rd 1924.

Interwar Period

At the end of the Great War, three sets of primary players emerged into the politics and diplomacy of the Middle East: Britain, France and local political actors and individuals. With the end of the Ottoman Empire left every player scrambling to engage their own interests through competition and rivalry, and sometimes even cooperation.

Britain

At the time, Britain's main focus was the security of its "crown jewel", India, and its protection against possible invasions by the French and Russians. This necessitated active British attention to Iran, but also that the Suez Canal remain under British control. At the time, the Suez Canal was the shortest route to India for the British navy, a mere forty days as compared to 5 months around the Cape.

Secondly, the British were quite keen on expanding the navy's fuel requirements. They wanted to maintain secure and free access to the newly discovered oil along the Persian Gulf. And lastly, and maybe what was the most important, was the Eastern Question; what to do with the dying Ottoman empire and its territories. To expand their influence, Britain embarked on a number of diplomatic initiatives such as the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, the Sykes-Picot agreement, and the Balfour Declaration.

France

French objectives were namely the same as the British, however without a colony such as India to protect, their stance on the Eastern Question was a little different. France sought to compete with the other European powers to acquire as much influence as possible in the Ottoman territories, and to protect the region's Christians, which were mainly concentrated in the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, and Jordan). In its desire to protect the Levant, also was a desire to reclaim France's imperial glory.

Another interest revolved around commercial investments. At the end of the Great War, France held 60 percent of all Ottoman loans.

Local Political Players

Kemal Ataturk

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was born in 1881, in the former Ottoman Empire. He was involved with the Young Turks, and led the Turkish War of Independence. Ataturk was elected Turkey's first president, and ushered in a number of reforms to modernize Turkey. He believed that modernization entailed Westernization, and established strict state secularism and a constitution that separated government clearly from religion. He established a number of social and economic reforms overnight, namely replacing the Arabic alphabet with a Latin one, introduced the Gregorian calendar, and urged people to dress in Western clothes. He established state-owned factories and a railway network, and established a number of laws to legally instill equality between both sexes. Not all of his reforms were warmly received, as he was accused of decimating important cultural traditions. He took the last name Ataturk, Father of the Turks.



Hashemite Clan

Please follow the below link for a brief summary about the Hashemite clan as well as the Hus-sain-McMahon Correspondence.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Husayn-McMahon-correspondence>

Sykes-Picot Agreement

Please follow the below links for summaries on the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25299553>

<http://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2016/sykes-picot-100-years-middle-east-map/>

World War II's Aftermath

For this topic, only the aftermath of World War II will be tested. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict may be part of future MIST Bowl topics.

At the end of the Second World War, Britain, albeit being a victor, was thoroughly exhausted in its resources. From 1936 to 1939, Britain contended with the "Arab Revolt", a nationalist uprising by Palestinian Arabs in Mandatory Palestine against British administration, demanding Arab independence and ending the authorized Jewish immigration by the League of Nations in 1922. The unsuccessful outcome of the Arab revolt, combined with the Second World War created apprehension in the British, and they began searching for a way to end its mandatory rule upon Palestine and leave. Due to this desperation, Britain turned over the responsibility of the region to the United Nations, who adopted Resolution 181, calling the partition of Palestine into a separate Arab and Jewish state, leaving Bethlehem and Jerusalem as international status. The resolution was voted on November 29, 1947 with the Arab League in opposition, rejecting the plan.

The ongoing civil war that remained after the conclusion of Resolution 181 eventually resulted in an inter-state conflict on May 15, 1948, following the Israeli Declaration of Independence the previous day. The belligerents were Israel and the Arab League. This resulted in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948, which finally ended on March 10, 1949. The war concluded with an Israeli victory, and an Arab League strategic failure. With the war, Israel was able to acquire 50% of the area originally allotted to the Arab state by the League of Nations. One of the lasting results from this war was the Egyptian defeat, which would define the country in a different manner: Nasserism.



The Age of Arab Nationalism

The unsuccessful result of the 1948 war for the Arab armies exposed the illusions of grandeur and conquests that were fed to them by their leaders. Slowly, with their defeat, the Arab armies slowly began to revolt against their leaders who were now seen as incompetent and corrupt, blaming them for the loss. Thus began a new era for young Arabs who were keen to grow and emerge away from the past of their defeated leaders. This new generation bonded over post-1948 nationalism; the disappointment in their military defeat, but the sense of solidarity for their Palestinian brethren, who were now displaced in refugee camps around the Middle East.

The post -1948 nationalism consisted of three principles: modernity, militaristic, and strength in numbers. These principles were all embodied thoroughly by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's second president. His popularity came at the time a rich literature was beginning to arise in Arab nationalist intellectuals, and by tapping into dormant emotions in the Arab people, Nasser was able to utilize the question of Palestine to further embody the Arab nationalist rhetoric.

Gamal Abdel Nasser

Nasser was born in Egypt in 1918, and his generation experienced many historic developments. In Egypt itself, the monarchy existed in a country that was minimally independent under the heavy British presence in their economy and politics. In the political backdrop, many groups began forming, although they seldom had a coherent platform, they were united in their dislike of the ruling elite, and wished to reverse the political and military incompetence, in an attempt to revive the larger Arab social and political life. By the mid-1930s, groups such as the Wafd Party and the Muslim Brotherhood entered the Egyptian army and began attracting followers against the monarchy and the British. Nasser, who entered the military under this context, rose quickly to lieutenant colonel in 1952. Returning from the 1948 war, Nasser organized a secret military cell called the Free Officers, with the aim to capture political power. Free Officers were mainly united on the goals to rid Egypt of its monarchy, British imperialist rule, and using armed forces to achieve them.

From 1950 to 1952, political tensions were high with frequent assassinations of public figures and sporadic violence. It culminated all on July 23, 1952, where the Free Officers staged a takeover of the state. The government was overthrown and replaced by the key players of the Free Officers movement, to a group called the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). Muhammad Naguib, an older army general was asked to serve as the first prime minister, but within a year, he was outed by the RCC as a traitor. Initially, Nasser was not generally liked by the Egyptians, as many feared him for his brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. However, he managed to capture the people's popularity through his foreign policy and his social and political programs. Prior to his rise to presidency, he passed an elections law allowing women the right to vote, which also added to his increase in popularity.

Nasser's Agrarian Reform

Post revolution, less than six percent of Egypt's population owned more than 60 percent of the land, and less than 0.5 percent of Egyptians owned more than one-third of all the fertile land. The landowners charged exorbitantly high rents, sometimes 75% of the income generated by the land. This, with the high interest rates the banks offered farmers plunged a large proportion of Egypt's population into debt. Historian Robert Stephens has compared the state of Egyptian farmers before land reform as that of French peasants before the French Revolution.



On September 11, 1952, Law Number 178, began land reform in Egypt. The law managed to curtail landowners from owning expansive amounts of land, however, made considerations based on the size of the family. There were limits on rental rates of land, and all land leases were set to a minimum of three years, allowing farmers to lock in on prices. There were cooperatives for poor farmers established, allowing them to purchase needed supplies such as fertilizers, pesticides, and seeds and as well allowing them to cooperatively transport their goods to market.

The initial results of the reform managed to abolish political influence of major land owners, however it only managed to redistribute about 15% of Egypt's land under cultivation. Eventually, land reform had no place in Egyptian economy as the populace slowly moved away from agriculture.

Aswan Dam & Suez Canal Crisis

Another famous remnant of Nasserism is the Aswan Dam. The dam was able to control floods, provide water for irrigation, and generate hydroelectricity; all necessary for Egypt's growth into industrialization. Prior to the construction of the dam, the Nile flooded the land every year, bringing nutrients and minerals to enrich the soil, keeping it fertile, hence it's reputation as one of the ideal farming valleys since ancient times. However, as Egyptians slowly distanced themselves from agriculture and population conditions changed, there arose a desire to properly control the floods, and utilize the excess water in years of droughts. Initially, both the USA and the USSR were interested in aiding the development of the Aswan High Dam, however with the development of the Cold War, and intra-Arab rivalries, Nasser sought to gain the partnership of the country that could best aid Egypt.

Nasser realized that unless he could defend Egypt against Israel militarily, he would lose his position as the leader of pan-Arab nationalism, and the influence he had accumulated thus far. Hence, he looked to modernize his military and turned towards the USA and USSR. President Dwight Eisenhower told Nasser the USA would engage in supplying Egypt with weapons only if they were used for defence, and with American military supervision. Refusing these terms, Nasser looked to the USSR who wished to trade Egypt for grain and cotton in exchange. In 1955, Egypt and the USSR engaged in an arms deal with Czechoslovakia.

The United States sought to gain the goodwill of Egypt again, competing with the USSR, to pledge \$56 plus \$14 million from Britain towards the construction of the Aswan High Dam. However, after seeing that Nasser was unwilling to break the arms deal with the USSR, furthered by Nasser's diplomatic recognition of China in 1956, President Eisenhower retracted its offer of funding, along with Britain. Later that year, Eisenhower aimed to launch an American peace initiative to try to permanently end the Egypt-Israel tensions. Nasser eventually refused to accept the final offer, which was financing the High Dam in exchange to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict peacefully, as it would mean losing his neutrality in the Cold War.

With two of its largest donors retracting their pledges for the Aswan High Dam, Nasser sought to find other means of financial funding for the construction, along with achieving one of his longest foreign policy goals: the nationalization of the Suez Canal. On July 26, Nasser gave a speech in Alexandria, wherein the name of the canal builder, Ferdinand de Lesseps, was a code-word for Egyptian army forces to seize control of the canal.



In his speech he announced that the Nationalization Law had been passed in Egyptian government, that the assets of the Suez Canal Company had been frozen, and that stockholders would be paid the price of their shares. On the same day, Egypt closed the canal to Israel. Many historians relate that the events leading up to, and inclusive of the Suez Canal Crisis were indicative of his solitary decision-making.

International response

The nationalization of the Suez Canal surprised the Commonwealth and Britain, and as earlier discussed threatened Britain's economic and military interests. The British government decided on military intervention to avoid the detrimental loss of prestige as well as economical interests.

France, on the other hand, was equally concerned about their economical interests, as well as the growing influence Nasser had exerted upon its North African colonies. For three months after the nationalization announcement, USA, France and Britain fretted about the state of their oil transport, and debated military intervention. In October 1956, in a secret meeting with Britain and France, Israeli support was enlisted for an alliance against Egypt. They agreed that Israel would invade the Sinai Peninsula, and that Britain and France would intervene in the name of peace, to separating the warring forces, instilling a boundary of 16km from either side of the canal, protecting the canal from nationalization. This was named the Protocol of Sevres.

On October 29, 1956, Israel invaded the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula as promised, and the troops engaged towards the canal. The British and French added to the assault through a bombing campaign to force the reopening of the canal. Nasser responded by sinking 40 ships, and thus further physically blocking the canal. The canal would remain unusable until early 1957. On November 2, the United Nations met to discuss the crisis, to which Britain and France claimed to be acting as "police forces". On November 7, a UN ceasefire comes into effect after the United States pressure Britain financially. During the period of the crisis, the Bank of England had lost \$45 million dollars, their oil supply damaged, and their currency was falling. They applied for assistance from the IMF, however the United States rejected their appeal, and furthered it by ordering their Treasury to sell part of the UK's bond holdings. Cornered by the economic devaluation of the pound, as well as the increasing financial loss that the closure of the canal brought, Britain and France conceded to the withdrawal and ceasefire. Israel also withdrew from the Sinai peninsula, destroying integral infrastructure in the process.

In essence, the crisis brought a rapid decolonization in Africa and Middle East, as many remaining European colonies sought independence in the following years. The crisis also laid the foundation for the future Six Day War in 1967. In addition, it also allowed the formation of the Eisenhower Doctrine; wherein a Middle Eastern country could request economic aid or assistance if it felt it was being threatened by another state due to armed aggression. It also gave rise to the first UN military force of its kind, the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), formed by the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld and Canadian Minister of External Affairs Lester B. Pearson.



Modern Economy

For an understanding on the foundation of Middle Eastern economy:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/economics/>

The Middle East has experienced a growth and decline cycle over the last thirty years. The period from 1965-1985 represented a time of tremendous economic growth. This growth was facilitated by the dramatic rise in oil prices, which were related to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

As oil prices rose to new highs, most states in the Middle East benefited from heightened revenues. Oil-producing states (especially large producers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar) benefited directly in the form of high export earnings. Likewise, these states had many job opportunities available as a result of the booming economies of the Gulf.

The non oil-producing Middle Eastern states also reaped some benefits from the oil-producing states. Many people who lived in the non oil-producing states went to the oil-producing states to earn money as teachers, construction workers, oil-field workers, etc. The money these “guest” workers sent home to their families was of tremendous importance to the national income in states such as Jordan, Egypt, Yemen, and the Palestinian areas. This money--spent in their home location--boosts their national economies. During this period of economic growth these non oil-producing states also benefited from increased levels of foreign aid received from their oil-producing neighbors.

As a result of this newfound wealth, enormous social achievements occurred in the Middle East. For example, infant mortality was halved, and life expectancy rose by more than ten years. School enrollment went up substantially, and adult literacy rose from 34% in 1970 to 53% in 1990. Another result of this newfound wealth was a widening in the income gap among the Middle Eastern states, meaning that while all the states increased their national wealth during this period, some states grew at substantially faster rates than others. On the higher end of the gap, major oil-producing states, especially those in the Gulf with small populations, were able to achieve incomes per person rivaling, and in some cases surpassing, western European economic levels. On the lower end of the gap, states such as Jordan and Yemen remained amongst the poorest in the world.

The economic growth of the 1970s and early 1980s came to a decline in 1986 when the price of oil fell dramatically from \$28 per barrel in December 1985 to \$10 per barrel in July 1986. The drop in price was a result of the overproduction of oil. Suddenly, the huge foreign export earnings that had driven the growth of the last two decades were drastically reduced.



Economic Future

Two factors are currently affecting the economic growth and development in the Middle East. The first factor is the high rate of population growth. In the region, there is an average population growth rate of 3% per year. This 3% average population growth rate means that the population in a given state will double about every 20-30 years. This average regional population growth rate is the second highest growth rate of any region in the world, exceeded only by sub-Saharan Africa region. In Iraq, Libya, and Saudi Arabia it is over 3.5%, and in UAE and Yemen it is well over 4%.

Large population growth rates generate tremendous stresses on the states' resources as these people need access to clean water, food, medicine, education, and so on. The result will be large-scale unemployment. Unemployment rates in the Middle East run from below 10% in Saudi Arabia and Syria to over 30% in Iran, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Yemen. Some estimates put the unemployment rate in Gaza as high as 50%.

The second factor affecting the economic future of the Middle East is fluctuations--in either direction--in the price of oil .In an effort to reduce their reliance on oil revenues, many states in the region are making major efforts to develop alternative economic activities. Efforts are being made to further develop such sectors as banking, tourism, light manufacturing, and agriculture.

The Arab Spring has brought to light key challenges in the MENA region that had already existed for some time. These challenges include high unemployment levels (in particular among youth); pervasive corruption and lack of accountability and transparency; bloated public sectors with state-owned enterprises that crowd out the development of private enterprise and investment; low levels of enterprise creation; and, for a number of countries, a high dependence on fuel and food imports generating extensive exposure to commodity price volatility. Given that these challenges are both structural and interconnected, they can be addressed only through a coordinated and comprehensive strategy that involves governments, the private sector, civil society, and the international community.

Job creation is the first priority in the MENA region. The available evidence indicates that the region suffers from long-term unemployment, ranging between 10 and 25 percent, and that the employment situation is likely to worsen in the context of recent events. In Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, official unemployment rates have remained close to 10 percent over the last ten years. Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority and Yemen have witnessed significant increases in unemployment since 2000. The lowest levels of unemployment can be found in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Although total unemployment rates for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are low, and native participation in the labor force is very limited, unofficial estimates suggest that unemployment among GCC young nationals (16–24 years), and especially among university graduates, is more than twice that of the total labor force (more than 35 percent across the GCC region).



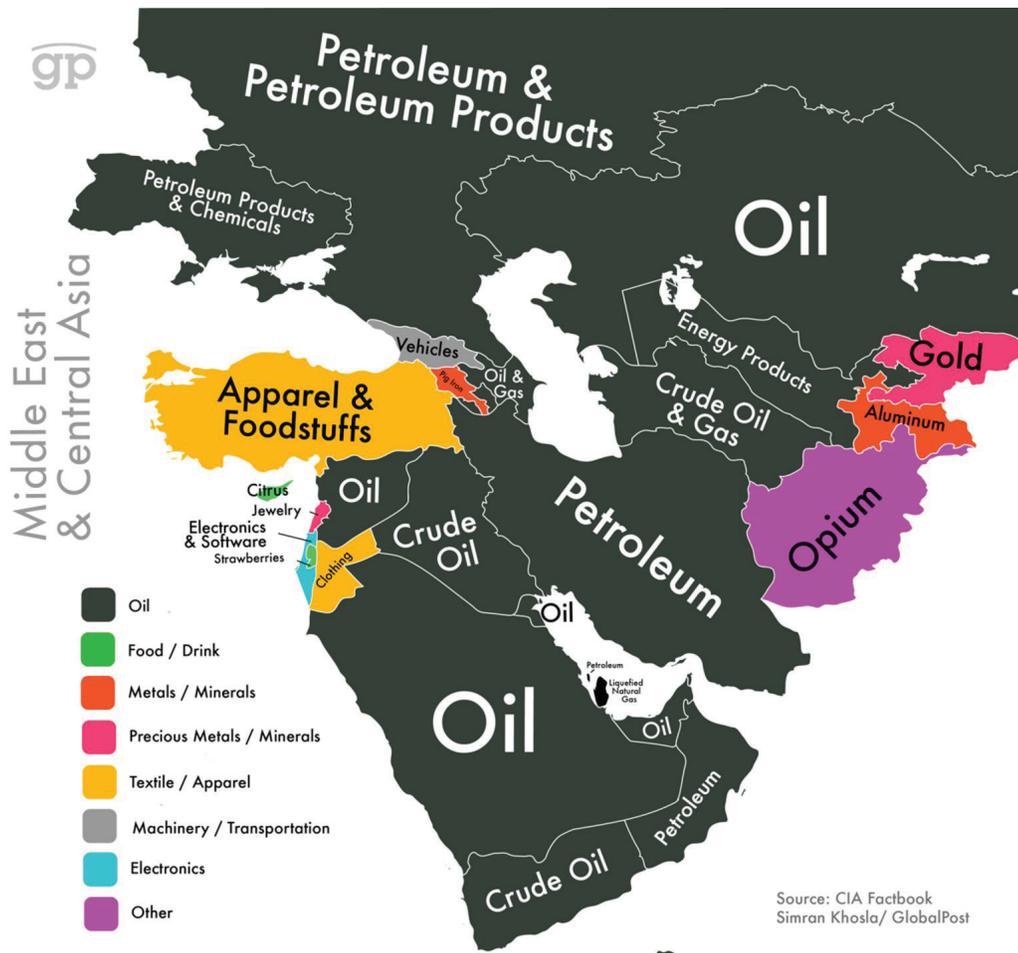
Unemployment is particularly acute among youth (15–24 years), averaging approximately 25 percent in the MENA region, which is significantly higher than the 17.3 percent of the OECD area. 12 Youth unemployment is about 25 percent in Jordan and Egypt, closer to 30 percent in Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, and nearly 50 percent in the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, the 2.8 million young workers who enter the labor market every year are finding it increasingly difficult to find formal employment. Youth unemployment is exacerbated by weak economic growth, restricted government budgets (limiting further expansion of employment in the public sector), and a private sector—the main vehicle for sustainable job creation—that is stifled by red tape, corruption, and unfair competitive practices, especially in resource poor countries. Again, it should be highlighted that some European countries also have specific problems with youth unemployment, which reaches over 20 percent in Belgium, France, Finland, and Poland, and around 30 percent in Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Spain.

A striking feature of unemployment in MENA is that it is also high among the most educated: over 43 percent of those with tertiary education are unemployed in Saudi Arabia; 24 percent in the Palestinian Authority; 22 percent in Morocco and the United Arab Emirates; 14 percent in Tunisia; and over 11 percent in Algeria. One of the reasons for high levels of unemployment for youth and the educated is a persistent gap between the skills acquired at university and the requirements of business. Enterprises often cite lack of suitable skills as an important constraint to hiring: according to the World Bank's Enterprise Surveys, firms identify labor skill levels as a major constraint in Lebanon (38 percent of surveyed firms), Syria (36 percent), Jordan (33 percent), Mauritania and Egypt (31 percent in both countries). 15 The World Economic Forum (2011) has also identified an inadequately educated labor force as one of the most problematic factors for doing business in the Arab World.

Unemployment is also disproportionately high among women. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2010, significant progress has been made in the region to increase women's educational attainment rates, and over the past decade, almost all MENA countries have closed 90 percent or more of the gender gap in education. However, these improvements in education have not been matched with comparable increases in female labor force participation rates: approximately 33 percent of working-age women join the labor force, compared with 56 percent in low- and middle-income countries and 61 percent in OECD member countries. The very low participation of women in the labor force and low employment levels are widely considered a missed opportunity for economic growth and development. The labor market outcomes for women in the MENA region could be attributed to prevailing cultural attitudes, gendered laws, and weak support services. The OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum, an interregional network bringing together civil society, government, and private sector representatives, works to overcome these obstacles by supporting the development of targeted policies and business support services for women entrepreneurs.

Another key challenge facing the region is bloated public sectors, including government agencies that employ significant shares of the labor force. Employment in the public sector ranges from 22 percent in Tunisia to around 33–35 percent in Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. Worse, if only non-agricultural employment is considered, the share of the public sector reaches 42 percent in Jordan and 70 percent in Egypt. The public sector in the MENA region acts as a magnet for young graduates attracted by high salaries, employment protection, and a special social status. The position of the public sector as a prime target for employment may create incentives for individuals to acquire knowledge and skills in areas demanded by that sector, thus reducing the pool of qualified candidates for the private sector.

In crisis situations such as the Arab Spring, the first reaction of governments is to increase salaries and jobs in the public sector as a short-term response to social discontent. The government of Egypt, for instance, had announced a 15 percent increase to the base wage of all civil servants (5.8 million employees) and —incentives schemes for the lowest-paid government employees (around 1.9 million people, working mostly in municipalities). Tunisia’s transitional government had also announced an employment plan, which included the creation of 20,000 jobs in the public sector. Similar measures have been undertaken by many other MENA governments. Although such measures are helpful in mitigating unemployment in the short term, appeasing social discontent, and contributing temporarily to revitalising the economy through increased consumption, they also add pressure to already strained public budgets in resource-poor countries. In a context of diminishing public budgets, these policies are not sustainable.



Art

Islamic art consists of architecture, bookbinding, calligraphy, manuscript illumination, and art of ceramics, glass, and textiles. It is observed that most Islamic art pieces are adorned by geometric design, floral patterns, calligraphy, and scrolling patterns. Different time periods brought out different styles.

Follow the below link for an introduction on the evolution of abstract Islamic art. Note: only general themes and characteristics will be tested. Pages 1-7 are Regional testable material.

http://www.archnet-ijar.net/index.php/IJAR/article/view/558/pdf_41

Follow the below link for an introduction to Islamic art by empire. Note: this link is only Nationals testable material.

<http://www.discoverislamicart.org/gai/ISL/>

Culture

The Middle East consists of many different communities, therefore, contributing to its diversity. The Middle East consists of approximately 20 countries, all with varying flavours of traditions and practices.

Follow the below link for a brief history on cultures of the Middle East:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/culture/>

Follow the below link for events affecting the practices of traditions in this region. Note: pre-1900s to 1949 are Regionals testable material. 1950s to 2000s is Nationals testable material.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/timeline/text/tculture.html>

Religion

The three major religions of this region are Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Some minor religions practices in this area are Bahá'í Faith, Druze, Yazidism, Mandaism, Gnosticism, Yarsanism, Samaritanism, Shabakism, Ishikism, Ali-Allahism, and Zoroastrianism.

Follow the below link for a quick introduction on the three major religions of this region:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/religion/index.html>

Follow the below link for a timeline of events that affected religions of this region. Note: pre-1900s to 1949 are Regionals testable material. 1950s to 2000s is Nationals testable material.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/timeline/text/treligion.html>

