Unit 8: North Africa and Southwest Asia
Geographic Regions: by definition

- **Formal regions** are areas in which a certain characteristic is found throughout them.
- **Functional regions** consist of a central place and the surrounding places affected by it.
- **Perceptual regions** are defined by people’s attitudes and feelings about areas.
- Although parts of the region fit each definition, North Africa and Southwest Asia are considered a perceptual region based on common language and religion.
Sahara Desert & It’s Impact

• The Sahara, the world’s largest desert at about 3.5 million square miles, covers most of North Africa.
• Scientists define a desert climate as one in which precipitation averages 10 inches or less a year.
• By that definition deserts cover almost 50% of the lands in the region.
• In recent decades, droughts have expanded the Sahara.
• This expansion has forced the shift in population from area away from the interior to areas along the Mediterranean coast.
Rivers

- The Nile River is the world’s longest at 4,160 miles.
- The Tigris River extends 1,180 miles.
- The Euphrates River is 1,700 miles.
• The Nile Delta and the land along the banks saw the beginning of one of the world’s first civilizations.
• Today more than 90% of Egyptians live in the delta region or along the banks of the river.
• This area covers only 3% of Egypt’s land.
• The Aswan High Dam and others have reduced flooding but have also stopped the deposits of alluvial soil.
Population Patterns

- North Africa & Southwest Asia has remarkable ethnic diversity, or differences among groups based on their language, customs, and beliefs.
- Most people of the region are Arabs.
- Most Arabs are Muslims, followers of the religion of Islam.
- Many Arabic-speaking people today are descended from ancient groups.
Israelis

• Jews trace their heritage to the Israelites, who in ancient times lived in Canaan, the land today shared by Israel and Lebanon.

• Over time, wars, trade, and persecution led Jews to settle in other countries.

• The Jewish state of Israel was founded in 1948 after the horror of WWII.

• Jewish people from all over the world have since migrated into Israel making it one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world.
• The Arabs of the region did not want a Jewish state in territory that had been their homeland for centuries.
• Especially effected were the Palestinians who had made their home in the territory where Israel was established.
• This has led to numerous wars and constant conflict.
• Today, agreements have led to greater Palestinian self-rule.
Kurds

• Kurds are Muslims who live in the border areas of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the Caucasian republics, in an area that is sometimes called Kurdistan.

• The Kurds have no country of their own and have been repeatedly crushed by Turk and Arab leaders.

• In the 1980s Sadaam used chemical weapons against entire villages to stop an uprising.
Population and Resources

- Population has settled along rivers, seacoasts, oases, or highlands where water is readily available for transportation and consumption.
- Water has been a major issue in the disputes between Israel and its neighbors.
- The most disputed areas, The Golan Heights and the West Bank, contain water sources that Israel needs to survive.
- Desalination plants in Israel have eased some of the pressure but tensions remain high.
Since 1975, Turkey’s extensive dam and hydropower construction has reportedly reduced water flows into Iraq and Syria by approximately 80 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Approximately 90 per cent of the water flow in the Euphrates and 50 per cent in the Tigris originate in Turkey. Low flow rates in Iraq have allowed salt water to infiltrate nearly 150km inland from the Persian Gulf. Lack of international agreement is hampering progress on a deal between Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Turkey has accused Iraq of poor water management practices, which, it says, are exacerbating Iraq’s water crisis. Tensions between these countries remain high because of the issue of water management.
Population Growth

- The region's population is growing rapidly due to improved healthcare and a high birthrate.
- Political instability, drought, famine, and disease have all led to large-scale migrations throughout the region.
- Large urban areas dominate social and cultural life in their respective countries.
- Cities are growing too fast to supply enough jobs, housing, or infrastructure.
- Poverty, snarled traffic, and pollution have resulted.
• Families often crowd into makeshift shelters overloading the city services.
• Illegal developments without water or waste services have developed outside the cities increasing pollution and health problems.
• Urban growth continues due to overuse of land and water resources and high population growth.
Sec. 2 History and Government

• By 6000 B.C. farming communities had arisen in areas along the Nile River, the Mediterranean Sea.
• The region’s farmers were among the first in the world to domesticate plants and animals.
• The civilization that arose in Mesopotamia became one of the world’s first cultural hearths.
Empires and Trade

- The Phoenician civilization developed an alphabet that formed the basis of many alphabets used today.
- The Persian Empire developed qanats to carry and store precious water sources.
- Beginning about 100 B.C. the Silk Road was in use connecting China with the Mediterranean Sea.
- Cultures traded silks and cotton as well as ideas and inventions.
- This led the area to be called the “crossroads of civilization”
Suez Canal
Why is the Suez Canal Important?

• The Suez Canal is a shortcut like many other straits. Many countries like Africa and the U.S. transport crude oil, oil, and many goods using this strait.

• Countries from the far east also use this strait to transport goods and oils.

• Europe also used this strait to colonize Africa.
Three Major Religions

• The three major religions begun in the region, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are monotheistic.
• Judaism is the oldest with their origins going back to the ancient Israelites.
• Jerusalem was their ancient capital and the center of their government today.
• Religious life is guided by the Hebrew Bible or Torah.
• Worship services are held in a synagogues, where a rabbi officiates.
Christianity

• About 30 A.D. Jesus began preaching a message of renewal and God’s mercy.
• Christians included the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament and included the New Testament.
• As the centuries passed, Christians spread the message of Jesus throughout the world.
Islam

- Islam is the major religion of the region today.
- Tradition states that in 610 A.D. revelations from God came to Muhammad in the city of Makkah (Mecca).
- His followers believe that he was the last of a long line of prophets that included Abraham and Jesus.
Islam has had a profound impact on the religious, political, and social influences of the region.

Today 1/5th of the world’s population is Muslim.

The Islamic holy book, called the Qur’an, establishes the laws that Muslims must live by, including making a pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in their lifetime and praying five times a day preferably in a mosque.

However, many of the traits that are contributed to the region are cultural traits and not actually dictates of the Qur’an.
Many of the traits that are contributed to the region, such as fewer political and social rights for women, are cultural traits or laws of each nation and not actually dictates of the Qur’an
Arab-Israeli Conflict

• After WWI the British gained control of Palestine which had been Canaan, the ancient Jewish homeland.
• The British supported a Jewish state which was finally established after the atrocities of WWII.
• Wars and conflicts have continued to occur between the Jews and Palestinians because they each claim the same homeland.
• Establishing a boundary between the two groups has been complicated by the location of aquifers and Israeli settlements.
Conflict in Afghanistan

- Afghanistan has seen conflict with foreign forces and rival Afghan groups for decades.
- In the 1970s the U.S. gave money and weapons to a radical Muslim group known as the Taliban to fight off a Russian insurgency.
- In the 1990s, the Taliban won control of most of the country but were criticized internationally because of human rights abuses and sheltering terrorists.
- In October 2001, American & British warplanes began bombing with the support of other Afghan groups.
May 2, 2011 Osama bin Laden, who was believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, was finally hunted down and killed for his orchestration of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S.

President Obama has stated that all U.S. troops will be out of Afghanistan at the end of December 2014.

Unrest is still very serious in numerous areas and is considered a failed state by some.
Arab Spring
The Arab Spring (or the Arab Revolutions) refers to the recent revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests occurring in the Arab world.
Since December, 2010 there have been revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt; a civil war in Libya; civil uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen; major protests in Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, and Oman.
Protesters were generally young people, who also used the social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to organize, communicate, and raise awareness in the face of their governments’ attempts at censorship.
Many demonstrations have met violent responses from government authorities, as well as from pro-government militias.
During this period of regional unrest, several leaders announced their intentions to step down at the end of their current terms. Some leaders struck back with military violence and suppression.
The outside world has also become involved in the events of the Arab Spring
Numerous factors led to the protests, but most focused on the overthrow of authoritarian (total power; the opposite of democracy/representative government) leaders.
Some governments were dictatorships (rule by one man), while others were absolute monarchies (power held by a king/queen with total authority).
In all countries, there were accusations of human rights violations, government corruption, unemployment, extreme poverty...
and a large percentage of educated but dissatisfied youth within the population.
The catalysts for the revolts in Northern African and Persian Gulf countries have also been the concentration of wealth in the hands of autocrats (authoritarian leaders) in power for decades.
In recent decades rising living standards and literacy rates, as well as the increased availability of higher education, have created internet-savvy youth of these countries.
Some people in the region are conflicted by these events. They want the freedoms and advantages that come from democracy but they are concerned with the influence that Western cultural values have on the traditional values of the region (ex. Hijab vs. traditional dress, male authority vs. women’s rights)