

NORTH AFRICAN/SOUTHWEST ASIA

POLITICAL UNITS AND GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS OF NORTH AFRICA/SOUTHWEST ASIA

- Egypt and the Lower Nile Basin
- The Maghreb and Its Neighbors
- Middle East
- Arabian Peninsula
- The Empire States
- Turkestan
- African Transition Zone

POPULATION

- Under 50,000
- 50,000–250,000
- 250,000–1,000,000
- 1,000,000–5,000,000
- Over 5,000,000

National capitals are underlined

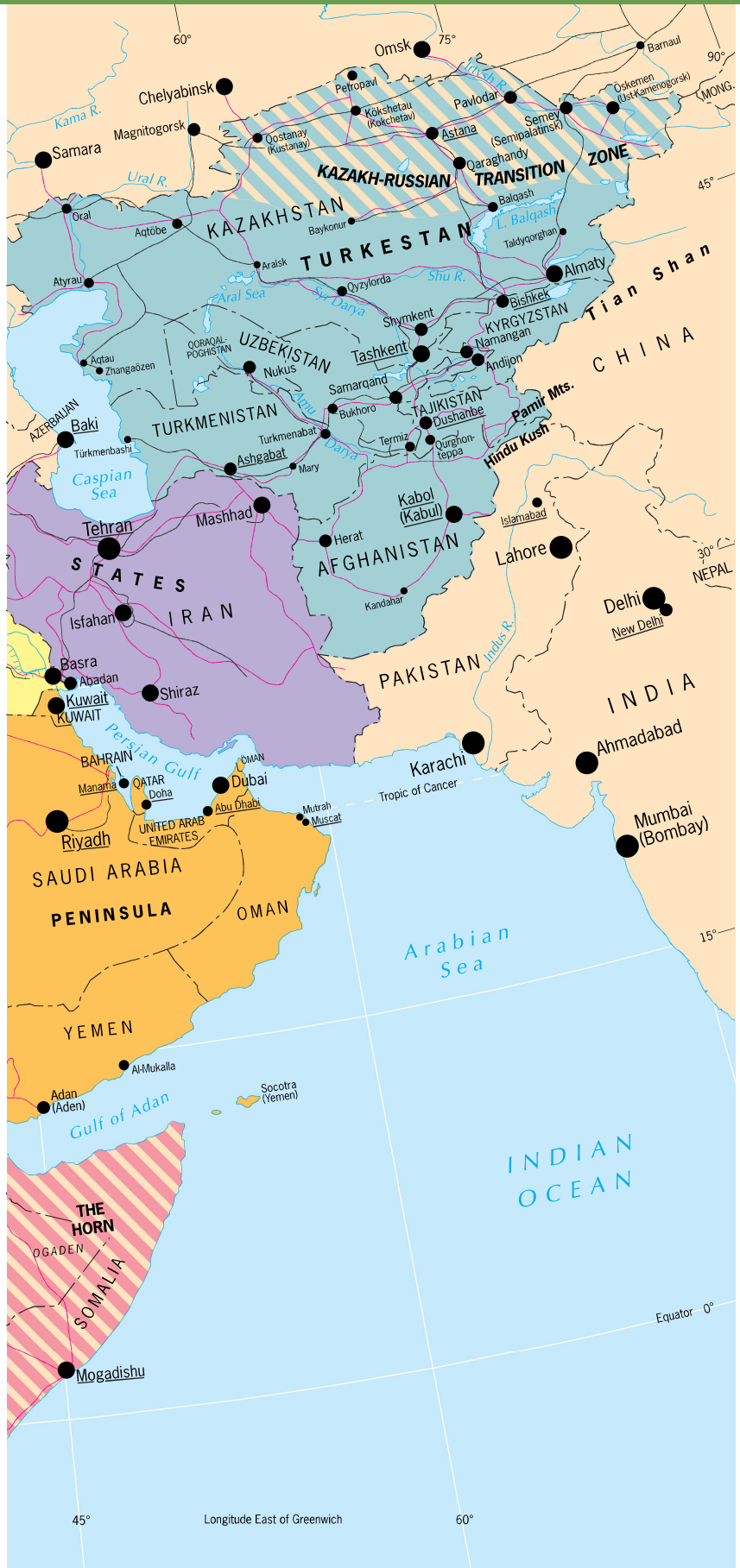
- Railroad
- Road
- Canal

0 400 800 1200 1600 Kilometers
0 200 400 600 800 1000 Miles





ASIAN REGIONS



REGIONS

- Egypt and the Lower Nile Basin
- The Maghreb and Its Neighbors
- The Middle East
- The Arabian Peninsula
- The Empire States
- Turkestan

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- ◆ The near-breakup of Mali
 - ◆ Turkey on the rise
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FIGURE 7B-1

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Identifying and delimiting regions in the sprawling North Africa/Southwest Asia realm is quite a challenge. Population clusters are widely scattered in some areas, highly concentrated in others. Cultural transitions and landscapes—internal as well as peripheral—make it difficult to discern a regional framework. This, furthermore, is a highly changeable realm and always has been. Several centuries ago it extended into eastern Europe; now it reaches into Central Asia, where an Islamic **cultural revival** [1]—the regeneration of a long-dormant culture through internal renewal and external infusion—is well under way.

REGIONS OF THE REALM

The following are the regional components that comprise this far-flung realm today (Fig. 7B-1):

- 1. Egypt and the Lower Nile Basin.** This region in many ways constitutes the heart of the realm as a whole. Egypt (together with Iran and Turkey) is one of the realm's three most populous countries. It is the historic focus of this part of the world and a major political and cultural force. Also included is Sudan, the truncated, northern portion of the much larger former Sudan that split apart in 2011.
- 2. The Maghreb and Its Neighbors.** Western North Africa (the *Maghreb*) and the areas that border it also form a region, consisting of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco at the center, and Libya, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania along the volatile African Transition Zone where the Arab-Islamic realm of North Africa merges into Subsaharan Africa (see Fig. 6B-9).
- 3. The Middle East.** This pivotal region includes Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. In effect, it is the



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crescent-shaped zone of countries that extends from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean to the head of the Persian Gulf.

4. **The Arabian Peninsula.** Dominated by the enormous territory of Saudi Arabia, the Arabian Peninsula also encompasses the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Yemen. Here lies the source and focus of Islam, the holy city of Mecca; here, too, lie many of the world's greatest oil deposits.
5. **The Empire States.** We refer to this region as the Empire States because two of the realm's giants, both the centers of major historic empires, dominate its geography: Turkey and Iran.
6. **Turkestan.** Turkish influences mix with Islam and Soviet legacies in the five former Central Asian republics; fractious Afghanistan also forms part of this region. Not long ago considered isolated and remote, Turkestan is assuming an increasingly strategic position between Russia, China, Iran, and South Asia.

■ EGYPT AND THE LOWER NILE BASIN

Egypt occupies a pivotal location in the heart of a realm that extends over 9600 kilometers (6000 mi) longitudinally and some 6400 kilometers (4000 mi) latitudinally. At the northern end of the Nile and of the Red Sea, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, in the northeastern corner of Africa across from Turkey to the north and Saudi Arabia to the east, adjacent to Israel,

MAJOR CITIES OF THE REALM	
City	Population* (in millions)
Istanbul, Turkey	12.2
Cairo, Egypt	11.8
Tehran, Iran	7.6
Baghdad, Iraq	6.6
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	6.1
Khartoum, Sudan	5.1
Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Israel	3.6
Kabul (Kabul), Afghanistan	3.3
Casablanca, Morocco	3.2
Algiers, Algeria	3.2
Damascus, Syria	2.9
Tashkent, Uzbekistan	2.3
Beirut, Lebanon	2.1
Almaty, Kazakhstan	1.5
Tripoli, Libya	1.2
Jerusalem, Israel	0.8

*Based on 2014 estimates.

to Sudan,* and to Libya, Egypt lies in the crucible of this realm. And because it owns the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, alone among states on the African continent, has a foothold in Asia. This foothold gives it a coast overlooking the strategic Gulf of Aqaba (the northeasternmost arm of the Red Sea). Egypt also controls the Suez Canal, the vital link between the Indian and Atlantic oceans and a lifeline of Europe. The capital, Cairo, is the realm's second-largest city and a leading center of Islamic civilization.

Egypt has six subregions, mapped in Figure 7B-2. Most Egyptians live and work in Lower (i.e., northern) and Middle Egypt, subregions ① and ②. This is the country's core area anchored by Cairo and flanked by the leading port and second-largest manufacturing center, Alexandria. The other four regions are remote and sparsely populated, especially Upper Egypt ③, the Western Desert ④, and the Sinai ⑥. The northern stretches of the Eastern Desert ⑤ are now in the path of Cairo's encroaching urban sprawl (see *Field Note* photo).

Gift of the Nile

Egypt's Nile is the aggregate of the two great branches upstream: the White Nile, which originates in the streams that feed Lake Victoria in East Africa, and the Blue Nile, whose source lies in Lake Tana in Ethiopia's highlands. The two Niles converge at Khartoum, capital of present-day Sudan. About 95 percent of Egypt's 85.6 million people live within 20 kilometers (12 mi) of the great river's banks or in its delta (Figs. 7B-2, 7A-2).

Before dams were constructed on the Nile, the ancient Egyptians used *basin irrigation*, building fields with earthen ridges and trapping the annual floodwaters with their fertile silt, to grow their crops. That practice continued for thousands of years until, during the nineteenth century, the construction of permanent dams made it possible to irrigate Egypt's farmlands year-round. These dams, with locks for navigation, controlled the Nile's annual flood, expanded the country's cultivable area, and allowed farmers to harvest more than one crop per year on the same field. The largest of these dams, the Aswan High Dam completed in 1970, created Lake Nasser (the reservoir that extends southward 150 kilometers [100 mi] into northern Sudan) and increased Egypt's irrigable land by nearly 50 percent. Today it still provides about 15 percent of the country's electricity.

Much farther upstream, in the western highlands of Ethiopia where the Blue Nile originates, its government is constructing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, with more than one-third of the funding coming from China. After completion in 2015, the dam is expected to boost

*Sudan refers to the truncated, northern portion of the former country of Sudan that remained after South Sudan (discussed in Chapter 6B) became independent and split away on July 9, 2011. The much larger country that existed before that date is referred to as *former Sudan*.



FIGURE 7B-2

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From the Field Notes . . .

"Taking off from Cairo International Airport on the northeast edge of this sprawling megacity, we flew over one of Cairo's new-



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est housing developments at the edge of the northern reaches of the Eastern Desert. Look at this residential density—in a desert!

With a birth rate twice that of the United States, Egypt's critical problem is the provision of a sufficient water supply—which right now is steadily decreasing. Earlier on this day in November 2009, we took a field trip through this area led by a local geographer. These are middle- and upper-middle-class residential complexes. All those new apartment towers will need water, and so will anything green planted here. Where will these people work and how will they get there? Is this sustainable urban development?"

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electrical power production to meet all domestic demands as well as earn new revenues from sales to Ethiopia's energy-deficient neighbors. But the project has also attracted growing opposition (and raised the potential for conflict) in downstream Sudan and Egypt, who fear a reduction in water supplies flowing into the lower Nile Basin.

Egypt's elongated oasis along the Nile, just 5 to 25 kilometers (3 to 15 mi) wide, broadens north of Cairo across a delta anchored in the west by the historic city of Alexandria and in the east by Port Said, gateway to the Suez Canal. The delta contains extensive farmlands, but it is a troubled area today. The ever more intensive use of the Nile's water and silt upstream is depriving the delta of desperately needed replenishment. And the low-lying delta is also at risk due to geological subsidence and sea-level rise, increasing the danger of salt-water intrusion from the Mediterranean that can severely damage soils.

Egypt's millions of subsistence farmers, the *fellaheen*, struggle daily to make their living off the land, as did the peasants of the Egypt of five millennia ago. Some rural landscapes seem barely to have changed; ancient farming methods are still used, and dwellings remain rudimentary. Persistent poverty, disease, and moderately high infant mortality rates prevail among Egypt's masses. The government has announced grandiose plans to expand irrigated acreage into the desert, but almost nothing has taken place so far.

Economic and Political Discontent

Until recently, Egypt had experienced steady economic growth for almost a decade at an annual rate of about

5 percent, and the economy diversified somewhat. At the same time, its annual rate of population growth has declined, while literacy and per capita consumption have increased markedly. Egypt now exports fruits, vegetables, rice, and textiles in addition to its longtime staple, cotton; it also has a sizeable tourist industry (which is frequently damaged by the actions of Islamic extremists and, since 2010, by widespread social unrest). Now that Egypt has begun to exploit its domestic resources, the country's expenditures on oil imports have substantially declined. These gains notwithstanding, the economy has slowed in this decade, and today economic growth (down to about 2 percent yearly) barely exceeds population growth. And even when growth rates were higher, the primary beneficiaries were the wealthy and the upper-middle class.

Egypt's poor today are as deprived and entrenched in poverty as ever. As the population continues to grow, the gap between food supply and demand widens, and Egypt must now import roughly U.S. \$6 billion worth of food every year. Nearly 60 percent of the population is under 25 years of age, and the young, most of whom lack economic opportunities, are restless. After the Mubarak regime came into office following the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981, it failed to connect with Egypt's new generation and in the end was unable to justify its three-decade lock on power. All along, this government repressed Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, but discontent had also been rising among broader segments of the population, especially the secular middle class and the young.

AMONG THE REALM'S GREAT CITIES . . .

CAIRO

STAND ON THE roof of one of the high-rise hotels in the heart of Cairo, and in the distance you can see the great pyramids, monumental proof of the longevity of human settlement in this area. But the present city was not founded until Muslim Arabs chose the site as the center of their new empire in AD 969. Cairo (al Qahira) became and remains Egypt's primate city, situated where the Nile River opens onto its delta, home today to nearly one-seventh of the entire country's population.

Cairo's population of 11.8 million ranks 20th among the world's largest urban agglomerations, and it shares with other cities of the less-advantaged realms the staggering problems of crowding, inadequate sanitation, crumbling infrastructure, and substandard housing. But even among such cities, Cairo is noteworthy for its stunning social contrasts. Along the Nile waterfront, elegant skyscrapers rise above carefully manicured, Parisian-looking surroundings. But look toward the east and the metropolitan landscape extends gray, dusty, almost featureless as far as the eye can see. Not far away, more than a million squatters live in the sprawling cemetery known as the City of the Dead (see *Field Note* photo). On the urban outskirts, millions more survive in overcrowded shantytowns of mud huts and hovels, while exclusive new residential developments for the middle and upper classes sprawl well into the desert beyond.

Nevertheless, Cairo is not only the dominant city of Egypt but also serves as the cultural capital of the entire Arab World, with high-quality universities, splendid museums, world-class theater and music, as well as magnificent mosques and Islamic learning centers. Although Cairo has always primarily been a focus of government, administration, and religion, it also is a river port and an industrial complex, a commercial center, and, as it sometimes seems, one giant bazaar. Cairo is truly the heart and soul of the Arab World, a creation of its geography and a repository of its history.



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Tahrir Square, located in the center of the city, has become Cairo's most famous public space in this decade—a cauldron of protest, a crucible of solidarity for Egypt's anti-government activists, as well as an arena of repression. Literally 'Freedom Square,' it has served as the main stage for demonstrations since 2010, and images broadcast from here have become familiar on television and computer screens around the world (see opening photo in Chapter 7A).

Political Upheaval

As we noted in Chapter 7A, when Tunisia's longtime president was forced to resign in early 2011 after massive demonstrations in Tunis, it was the spark that ignited an "Arab Spring" of political upheaval all across the realm, most notably in Egypt. Hundreds of thousands of people quickly assembled in Cairo's Tahrir Square to demand the removal of President Mubarak. Following initial efforts by the authorities to crush the protests, and after more than a week of violent confrontations in which an estimated 850 people perished, the regime caved in and Mubarak resigned shortly thereafter. Such an outcome would have been unthinkable just a few months earlier, and many Egyptians—even those risking everything at Tahrir Square—could scarcely believe they had been victorious.

With Mubarak arrested and put on trial, military leaders took control of the situation and swiftly organized a referendum on constitutional change, as demanded by the protesters. New constitutional amendments approved overwhelmingly, included term limits for the president and judicial oversight of free elections. Following prolonged demonstrations urging more rapid change, parliamentary elections were held in early 2012 and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood prevailed over the combined opposition by 52 to 48 percent of the vote. A few months later, the Muslim Brotherhood's leader, Mohamed Morsi, was elected president.

At first, the new leadership seemed to espouse governance in line with the **Turkish model [2]**, a multi-party democracy that has a place for, yet is not dominated by, Islamic parties. But soon President Morsi took a winner-take-all view of Egyptian democracy, announcing decrees that



From the Field Notes . . .



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“On the eastern edge of central Cairo we saw what looked like a combination of miniature mosques and elaborate memorials. Here lie buried the rich and the prominent of times past in what locals call the ‘City of the Dead.’ But we found it to be anything but a dead part of the city. Many of the tombs here are so large and spacious that squatters have occupied them. Thus the City of the Dead is now an inhabited graveyard, home to well over a million people. The exact numbers are impossible to determine; indeed, whereas metropolitan Cairo in 2014 has an officially estimated population of just under 12 million, many knowledgeable local observers believe that 17 million is closer to the mark.”

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gave his office sweeping new executive and legislative powers and ignoring minority rights and concerns. Once again the protesters took to the streets, now reflecting the president’s shrinking popularity and fueled by a failing economy and growing unemployment. At first, the military cracked down on the protests, inflicting serious casualties, but by mid-2013 it was clear that the government had failed. In July the army, having issued an ultimatum requiring presidential compromise, intervened amid massive celebrations and installed a “transitional” team that would reset Egypt’s course toward more competent administration. But a clear outcome was not in sight.

Sudan

As Figure 7B-2 shows, Egypt is bordered by two countries that have recently gone through even more turbulent times than Egypt itself: Sudan to the south and Libya to the west. Sudan, the northern remnant of the 2011 breakup of former Sudan, is almost twice the size of Egypt (but with barely 40 percent of the population), and lies centered on the confluence of the White Nile (from Uganda) and the Blue Nile (from Ethiopia). Here the twin capital, Khartoum–Omdurman, anchors a sizeable agricultural area where cotton was planted during colonial times.

Almost all of Sudan is desert, with irrigated agriculture along the banks of the White Nile and the Blue Nile. The country also has a 500-kilometer (300-mi) coastline on the Red Sea, where Port Sudan lies almost directly across from Jiddah and Makkah (Mecca) in Saudi Arabia. For several years after former Sudan became independent in 1956, the economy was typical of the energy-poor global periphery, exchanging sheep, cotton, and sugar for oil, with Saudi Arabia the main trading partner.

Moreover, former Sudan’s decades of civil war between north and south following the end of colonial rule

VOICE FROM THE

Region

CAIRO AS MIRROR



© Bahia Shehab
Bahia Shehab, Artist,
Designer, Historian, Cairo

“Two years into the Egyptian revolution and we are still facing police brutality on the streets. My newsfeed is filled with images of constant and consistent violence against peaceful protesters. As an artist the only weapon I have is a spray can, so I decided to use it. I spray messages on the streets of Cairo. In my messages I say no. In Arabic to say no, we say “No, and a thousand times no”. I decided to say no to military rule, no to emergency laws, no to postponing trials, no to military trials, no to stripping the people, no to blinding heroes, no to snipers, no to sectarian divisions, no to killing, no to killing men of religion, no to sexual harassment, no to burning books, no to violence, no to barrier walls, no to bullets, no to tear gas, no to infiltration, no to stealing the revolution, no to a new pharaoh . . . no, and a thousand times no! My series of “no” is all over the streets of Cairo and I do not see myself as somebody who is vandalizing the city; on the contrary, I think I am making it more human by creating a mirror that reflects the dreams of the people living in it. I add color to a gray smoky city. I want to make people think about their dreams and to remind them every day, as they drive to work or go to get their groceries, that the revolution will continue and it will not stop until every street in Egypt is a clean and safe place for any human being to exist.”

had impoverished the Islamic regime in Khartoum. One particularly violent chapter of Sudan's recent history was written in the western province of *Darfur* (Fig. 7B-2). The local people there, the Fur, have for centuries lived as Arabized pastoralists in the north and as settled farmers in the south. It is not clear how the conflict began, but a number of officials of the Khartoum regime suspected the southern Fur of sympathizing with rebels in the far south who were opposed to Islamic rule. In 2003, northern pastoralist militias, called the *Janjaweed* and encouraged by the regime, rode into the villages and fields of the southern Fur, burning homes, destroying crops, and killing thousands. An estimated 2 million people were driven from their homes, and a combination of violence and resultant disease took a toll that by now may exceed 400,000.

Oil in the Transition Zone

In the 1980s, it became clear that significant oil reserves lay in former Sudan, and during the 1990s discoveries were made in Kordofan Province and elsewhere in the central part of the country, including major deposits in the embattled south. The government then saw its income rise, allowing it to purchase more weapons. Local peoples living on top of or near the newly tapped deposits were forcibly relocated. A construction boom of ultramodern buildings in Khartoum reflected the newfound wealth for the elite few. But the discovery of oil in the south also fueled the drive for independence in that part of former Sudan and culminated in the breakup of 2011.

As a single political entity, former Sudan had been a fixture on the map of northeastern Africa for over a century. But on July 9, 2011, after 55 years of independence, that country split in two. Post-2011 Sudan constitutes the much bigger, Islamic, northern part; the new South Sudan is a typical Equatorial African country dominated by Christianity and African religions. The breakup followed more than five decades of bitter and bloody conflict with an estimated 1.5 million fatalities. Sudan is now a more homogeneously Islamic state, with a Muslim population of more than 90 percent (compared to the 68 percent of pre-breakup Sudan). Even though the unofficial international boundary puts the majority of the former Sudan's oil reserves in South Sudan, the pipelines for export run northward across post-2011 Sudan.

Both Sudan and South Sudan remain involved in costly military operations and internal as well as cross-border conflicts, while their populations remain in critical need of economic and political progress. One of their disputes concerns

the ownership of Abyei Province—located astride the still-unresolved international border between the two—which contains a mixed population and sits atop an important oil reserve. Although South Sudanese troops crossed the border in early 2012 to briefly seize the key Heglig oilfield (see photo), a year later tensions had subsided and both sides were abiding by a new agreement to avoid open conflict and allow the oil pipelines to resume operations. By mid-2013, relations between the two countries were also improving in other spheres, but the final chapter in this still-unfolding geopolitical drama has yet to be written.

■ THE MAGHREB AND ITS NEIGHBORS

The countries of northwestern Africa are collectively called the *Maghreb*, but the Arab name for them is more elaborate than that: *Jeziira-al-Maghreb*, or “Isle of the West,” in recognition of the great Atlas Mountain range rising like a huge island from the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the sandy flatlands of the immense Sahara to the south.

The countries of the Maghreb (sometimes spelled *Maghrib*) include Morocco, last of the North African kingdoms; Algeria, a secular republic beset by religious-political problems; and Tunisia, smallest and most Westernized of the three (Fig. 7B-3). Neighboring Libya, facing the Mediterranean between the Maghreb and Egypt, is unlike any other North African country: an

Sudanese technicians inspect the oil facilities damaged during the April 2012 conflict at the Heglig oilfield in Sudan. Border clashes between the two neighbors had been ongoing since South Sudan became independent in July 2011. In 2012 the two countries signed an agreement to honor a demilitarized zone along the border and allowing minorities on both sides to cross the border freely—but tension remains and hostilities could resume.



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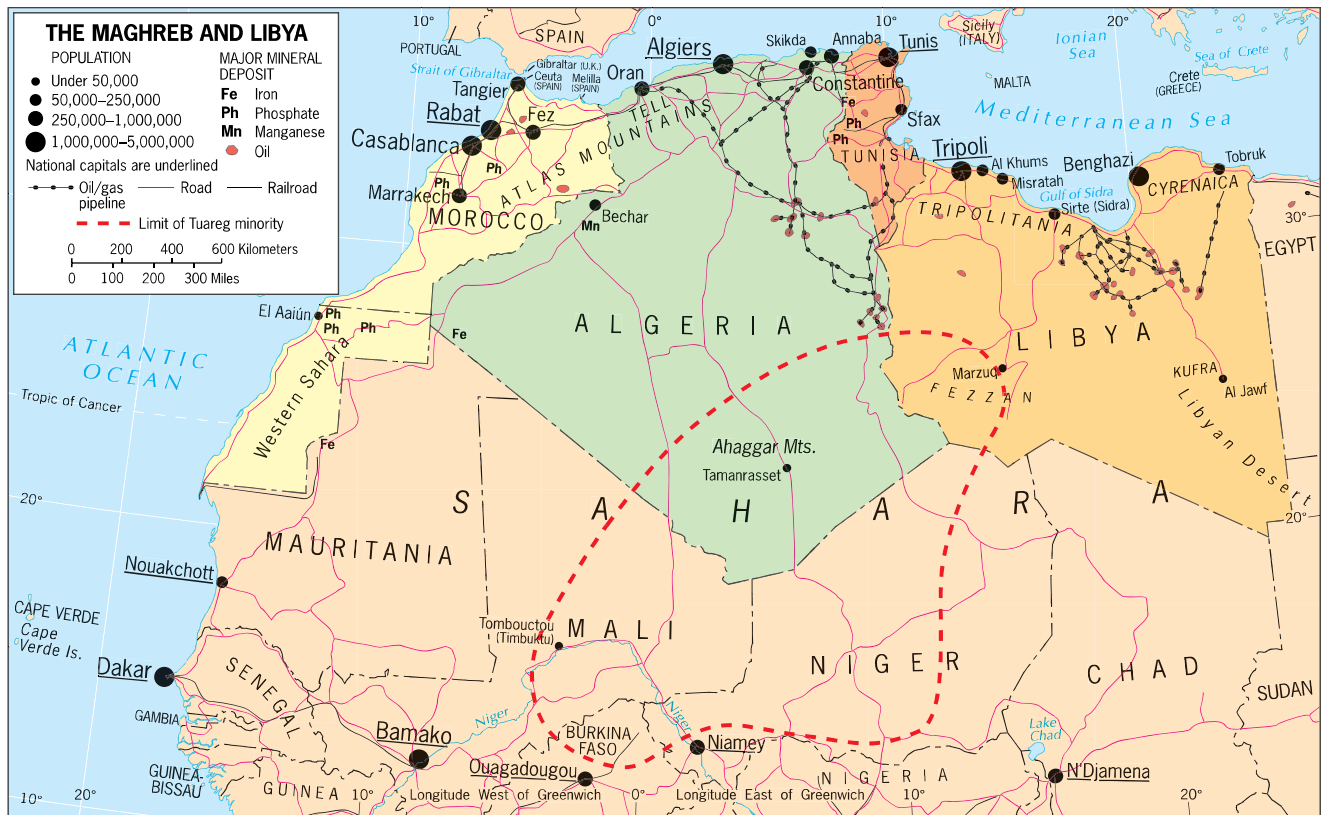


FIGURE 7B-3

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oil-rich desert state whose population is almost entirely clustered in settlements along the coast—and continues to reel in the political aftermath of a brief but especially violent episode of civil war that overthrew the Qadhafi dictatorship.

Atlas Mountains

Whereas Egypt is the gift of the Nile, the Atlas Mountains facilitate the settled Maghreb. These high ranges wrest from the rising air enough orographic rainfall to sustain life in the intervening valleys, where good soils support productive farming. From the vicinity of Algiers eastward along the coast into Tunisia, annual rainfall averages greater than 75 centimeters (30 in), a total more than three times as high as that recorded for Alexandria in Egypt's delta. Even 240 kilometers (150 mi) inland, the slopes of the Atlas still receive over 25 centimeters (10 in) of rainfall. The effect of this topography can even be read on the world climate map (Fig. G-7): where the highlands of the Atlas terminate, aridity immediately takes over.

The Atlas Mountains are aligned southwest-northeast and begin inside Morocco as the High Atlas, with elevations close to 4000 meters (13,000 ft). Eastward, two major ranges dominate the landscapes of Algeria proper: the Tell Atlas to the north, facing the Mediterranean, and

the Saharan Atlas to the south, overlooking the great desert. Between this pair of mountain chains, with each consisting of several parallel ranges and foothills, lies a series of intermontane basins markedly drier than the northward-facing slopes of the Tell Atlas. Within these valleys, the **rain shadow effect** [3] of the Tell Atlas is reflected not only in the steppe-like natural vegetation but also in land-use patterns: pastoralism replaces cultivation, and stands of short grass and shrubs blanket the countryside.

Colonial Impact

During the colonial era, which began in Algeria in 1830 and lasted until the early 1960s, well over a million Europeans came to settle in North Africa—most of them French, and a substantial majority bound for Algeria—and these immigrants soon dominated commercial life. They stimulated the renewed development of the region's towns, and Casablanca, Algiers, Oran, and Tunis became the urban foci of the colonized territories. Although the Europeans dominated trade and commerce and integrated the North African countries with France and the European Mediterranean world, they did not confine themselves to the cities and towns. They recognized the agricultural possibilities of the favored parts of the *tell* (the lower Tell Atlas slopes and narrow coastal plains that face the Mediterranean) and



From the Field Notes . . .



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“The medina (old city) in Marrakech, Morocco is lively, and the central square is crowded with locals and visitors alike. But the neighborhoods and streets and alleys beyond the tourist destinations reveal a different aspect of this sprawling city where modernization and tradition coexist. You’ll look in vain here for signs in English—or, for that matter, French . . .”

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established prosperous farms. Not surprisingly, agriculture here is Mediterranean. Algeria soon became known for its vineyards and wines, citrus groves, and dates; Tunisia has long been one of the world’s leading exporters of olive oil; and Moroccan oranges went to many European markets.

The Maghreb Countries

Between desert and sea, the Maghreb states display considerable geographic diversity (Fig. 7B-3). **Morocco**, a conservative kingdom in a revolution-marked region, is tradition-bound and weak economically. Like some of the other Arab monarchies in the realm, Morocco’s government introduced some modest reforms to preempt growing popular discontent. Its core area lies in the north, anchored by four major cities; but the Moroccans’ political attention is focused on the south, where the government is seeking to absorb its neighbor, **Western Sahara** (a former Spanish dependency with almost 600,000 inhabitants, many of them immigrants from Morocco). Even if this campaign is successful, it will do little to improve the lives of most of Morocco’s 33.5 million people, of whom hundreds of thousands have migrated to Europe.

Algeria, France’s one-time colony whose agricultural potential drew more than one million European settlers, now has an economy based primarily on its substantial oil and gas reserves. Its bitter war of liberation (1954–1962) was followed by recurrent conflict between Islamists and military-backed secular authorities, costing over 100,000

lives and resulting in a long-delayed compromise still punctuated by occasional skirmishes. The country’s primate city, Algiers, is centrally situated on the Mediterranean coast and contains nearly 10 percent of Algeria’s 39 million people. But a large contingent of Algerians—officially estimated at between 1.7 and 2 million—has emigrated to France, where they form one of Europe’s largest Muslim population sectors. Hardnosed military control in combination with generous social spending kept the Arab Spring at bay. But in early 2013, a major terrorist attack by Muslim extremists took place in the remote Sahara of far southeastern Algeria. Jihadists associated with insurgents in northern Mali overran a well-protected gasfield, occupied its main production complex, and captured dozens of hostages. A few days later, Algerian troops stormed the facility and killed all of the rebels . . . but also left 38 hostages dead.

The smallest of the Maghreb states, **Tunisia**, lies at the eastern end of the region. As Appendix B shows, Tunisia in many ways outranks surrounding countries: it has a higher urbanization level, higher social indicators, and a much lower growth rate (among its population of just over 11 million) than elsewhere in the Maghreb. Most of the country’s productive capacity lies in the north in the hinterland of its historic capital, Tunis.

Nonetheless, in January 2011 Tunisia took center stage as the launching pad for a wave of revolt that swept through most of the Arab World and beyond. Despite its rather modern appearance, Tunisia’s repressive and corrupt

government had become intolerable to the people. Their response was the *Jasmine Revolution*, a sudden and explosive outburst of street protests that forced out the regime of President Ben Ali, who fled the country. It was an amazing feat: the dictator of a **police state** [4] entrenched for a generation overthrown in a matter of weeks by a spontaneous uprising.

All across the Arab World, the events in Tunisia were closely monitored by excited populations and nervous governments. But in Tunisia, as in Egypt shortly thereafter, the ouster of the regime gave way to a power vacuum, rendering the governance system dysfunctional. Still, free elections were held later in 2011 and the moderate Islamist party, Ennahda, emerged as the biggest winner, announcing that it would continue the country's secular tradition and not seek to impose Islamic law. But once in office, Ennahda increasingly showed signs of a conservative Islamist turn (the assassination of a secular opposition leader in early 2013 darkened the mood further). Nevertheless, of all the revolutions sparked by the Arab Spring movement, Tunisia's was by far the most successful, and democratic prospects remain alive.

Libya

Almost rectangular in shape, Libya (with a population of 6.7 million), faces the Mediterranean Sea between the Maghreb states and Egypt (Fig. 7B-3). What limited coastal-zone agricultural possibilities exist lie in the two districts known as Tripolitania in the northwest, centered on the capital of Tripoli, and in the northeast in Cyrenaica, where Benghazi is the urban focus. But it is oil, not farming, that propels the economy of this highly urbanized country. The oilfields are located well inland from the central Gulf of Sidra, linked by pipelines to coastal terminals. Libya's two interior corners, the desert Fezzan district in the southwest and the Kufra oasis in the southeast, are connected to the coast by two-lane roads subject to frequent sandstorms.

Muammar Qadhafi had been one the Arab World's most violent despots, clinging to power for more than four decades. His iron-fisted response to anti-government demonstrations in several Libyan cities that arose in early 2011 did not come as a surprise. Within a few months, however, advancing rebel forces captured a number of cities including their main base of Benghazi as well as Tobruk in the northeast; Misratah, about 200 kilometers (125 mi) east of Tripoli; and a few smaller towns in the far northwest near the Tunisian border. From there, they extended their reach and by the fall of 2011 had seized control of Tripoli. They could not have done so without the intervention of air power supplied by a coalition of NATO countries (including the United States), which enforced a no-fly zone for Qadhafi's air force throughout northern Libya and carried out a series of bombardments on key military targets. After nine months of fighting the rebels prevailed, and on October 20, 2011 Qadhafi was cornered and killed in Sidra,

his home town located on the shore of the gulf of the same name, midway between Tripoli and Benghazi.

But even though the Libyan people had rid themselves of a despised dictator, their country remains in political chaos. The militias involved in the uprising have not disarmed, and elections have yet to reach the discussion stage. Local tribes and ethnic groups, long suppressed under Qadhafi, have re-emerged and are contesting each other as Libya lingers in crisis.

Adjoining Saharan Africa

Between the string of North Africa's coastal states and the southern margin of the Sahara lies a tier of five states, all but one of them landlocked, dominated by the world's greatest desert, sustained by modest ribbons of water, and under the sway of Islam. Figure 7B-1 best displays this chain of countries whose populations are hardly insignificant by African standards, totaling some 70 million.

Only coastal **Mauritania** contains a minuscule population even in this company: less than 4 million in a territory the size of Texas and New Mexico combined, half of it concentrated in and around the Atlantic coastal capital, Nouakchott, base of a small fishing fleet. Overwhelmingly Muslim and experiencing its first democratic presidential election as recently as 2007, Mauritania has been infamous for tolerating slavery despite its official abolition in 1981; following that unprecedented election, its parliament voted to impose prison terms on slave-owners continuing the practice. Despite that breakthrough, democracy was short-lived, and in 2008 the military seized power again.

Neighboring **Mali** (17.0 million), a huge country the combined size of Texas and California, was until recently held up by many as a democratic model before it descended into chaos in 2012 after a military coup sidelined its president. The military was said to be frustrated with the government's handling of the Tuareg insurgency in the sparsely populated north (Fig. 7B-3). But the coup triggered a rebel surge, and within months the country was effectively split in two. The Islamic jihadists (espousing Taliban sympathies) took control of the fabled city of Timbuktu—located near the center of this hourglass-shaped country—and declared the north an independent state, naming it *Azawad*.

In early 2013, the military returned control to a civilian government in the capital, Bamako; shortly thereafter France sent in 4000 of its troops to help recapture Timbuktu. But once this key city was reclaimed the French began to withdraw their forces, turning over the effort to restore full government control of northern Mali to a UN-mandated all-African military force. Exacerbating this conflict was a natural crisis in the form of a severe drought that plagued the country's central Sahel zone, which by mid-2013 had already forced more than 100,000 Malians to flee their impoverished villages. At press time, it was clear that Mali's long post-independence era of stability was ending as it became a failed state, the latest victim of the turmoil endemic to the African Transition Zone.

Uranium is now the leading export of **Niger**, which is pronounced *nee-ZHAIR*. As in Mali, the Niger River is the lifeline of this nation of 17.5 million, as reflected by Figure 7A-2, and Niamey, the capital, lies on its banks in the far southwestern “tail” of this goldfish-shaped country. We should keep in mind that these landlocked and low-income countries emerged more than half a century ago as independent states from French imperial rule; when their boundaries were first laid out nobody seriously imagined these colonial dependencies would ever become sovereign states.

This explains why there is a country called **Burkina Faso**—lying south of Mali and southwest of Niger—where there is no Niger River, no coastline, and little economic opportunity (this is one of the world’s poorest countries, with nearly half the population of 18.6 million subsisting on one U.S. dollar a day or less). Environmental variability here is marked by destructive floods alternating with severe droughts, the latter driving people and their livestock southward into Ivory Coast, resulting in deadly conflicts. Despite all this, a representative government in the capital of Ouagadougou manages to play a regional and international role in this part of the continent.

The fifth member of this tier of desert-margin states, **Chad**, lies east of Niger and, as Figure 7B-1 indicates, is also bisected by the wide African Transition Zone. Here, divisions between Chad’s Islamized north and Christian/animist south are strong, and the map shows its capital, N’Djamena, lies directly on the Islamic Front. Since 2000, this country of 12.5 million has been in upheaval, the crisis in Sudan’s Darfur provinces spilling across the border into its eastern territorial margin, the south experiencing an oil boom (see Fig. 6B-6), and the capital the focus of a struggle among rebel factions trying to overthrow the government.

Islamic militancy, diverse resources increasingly in demand, and restive minorities are now at long last drawing the international attention of global powers to this broad, remote, Sub-Saharan periphery of north-central Africa long in the shadow of more prominent coastal neighbors to the north and south.

■ THE MIDDLE EAST: CRUCIBLE OF CONFLICT

The regional term *Middle East*, we noted earlier, is not satisfactory, but it is so common and generally used that avoiding it creates more problems than it solves. It originated when Europe was the world’s dominant realm and when places were *near*, *middle*, and *far* from Europe: hence a Near East (Turkey), a Far East (China, Japan, and other countries of East Asia), and a Middle East (Egypt, Arabia, Iraq). If you check definitions used in the past, you will see that these terms were applied inconsistently: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and even Jordan sometimes were included in the Near East, and Persia and Afghanistan in the Middle East.

Today, the geographic designation *Middle East* has a more specific meaning. And at least half of it has merit: this region, more than any other, lies at the middle of the

far-flung Islamic realm (Fig. 7B-1). To the north and east of it, respectively, lie Turkey and Iran, with Muslim Turkestan beyond the latter. To the south lies the Arabian Peninsula. And to the west lie the Mediterranean Sea and Egypt plus the rest of North Africa. This, then, is the key region of the realm, its very heart.

Five countries comprise the Middle East (Fig. 7B-4): Iraq, largest in population and territorial size, facing the Persian Gulf; internally-embattled Syria, next in both categories and fronting the Mediterranean; Jordan, linked by the narrow Gulf of Aqaba to the Red Sea; Lebanon, whose survival as a unified state has come into question; and Israel, Jewish nation in the crucible of the Muslim world. Because of the extraordinary importance of this region in world affairs, we focus in some detail on issues of cultural, economic, and political geography.

Iraq’s Enduring Importance

Figure 7B-4 explains, even at a glance, why Iraq is pivotal among the states of the Middle East. With about 60 percent of the region’s total area, more than 45 percent of its predominantly Arab population, and most of its valuable energy and agricultural resources, Iraq is key to the Middle East’s fortunes. Iraq also is heir to the early Mesopotamian states and empires that emerged in the basin of its twin rivers, the Tigris-Euphrates, and the country is studded with matchless archeological sites and museum collections. Much of this heritage was disastrously damaged in 2003 when the United States led a military invasion of Iraq in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America. The map indicates why this attack had (and continues to have) critical consequences for the region and beyond: Iraq has six neighbors. To the west lie Syria, Iraq’s staunch ally during dictator Saddam Hussein’s despotic rule, and Jordan, whose leaders chose Iraq’s side during an early 1990s conflict with southern neighbor Kuwait. To the south, Iraq possesses a lengthy border with Saudi Arabia. And to the north, Iraq has borders with Iran, against which it fought a bitter war during the 1980s, and with Turkey, source of its crucial river lifelines.

With so many land neighbors, it is no surprise that Iraq is nearly landlocked. Figure 7B-4 shows how short and congested its single outlet to the Persian Gulf is; this was the main reason that Iraq tried to conquer and annex neighboring Kuwait in 1990 (Kuwait has significant oil reserves as well). As a result, a network of pipelines across Iraq’s neighbors must carry much of Iraq’s oil export volume to coastal terminals in other countries—another reason these countries have an interest in what happens to Iraq in the years ahead.

Discordant Cultural and Political Geographies

Let us now turn to the larger-scale map of Iraq (Fig. 7B-5), which shows how Iraq is divided into three cultural domains in which religion, tradition, and custom form the basis of its political geography. The largest population sector



FIGURE 7B-4

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(within the national total of 35.7 million) is that of the 19 million Shi'ites in the southeast, whose religious affinities are with neighboring Iran. The next largest is the Sunni minority of about 10 million in the north and west, which ruled the country before the 2003 U.S. invasion. Perhaps the most striking feature in Figure 7B-5 is the orange-colored zone that covers northeastern Iraq, large parts of Turkey and Iran, and smaller parts of other countries. This is the area where the majority of residents are not Arabs but Kurds, one of the world's largest **stateless nations** [5] (discussed further in Chapter 7A). More than 6 million Kurds inhabit the hilly north of Iraq; adjacent southeastern Turkey is the traditional home of about 20 million more, and another 6 million or so live in western Iran.

The U.S.-Led Invasion and Withdrawal

The United States invaded Iraq in 2003 on the grounds that it possessed weapons of mass destruction and that al-Qaeda had important bases there. Neither proved to be true, and the invasion was heavily criticized in the United States and around the world—even though Saddam Hussein's regime was widely considered to be one of the most brutal in this realm. Hussein was swiftly removed but the invasion unleashed horrendous sectarian violence and enabled al-Qaeda terrorists, who had not previously been active here, to worsen the security situation.

More recently, Iraq's people have repeatedly voted in elections that advanced the country toward representative government, and some middle-class Iraqis (among the hundreds of thousands who fled the country in the mid-2000s)

IRAQ

POPULATION

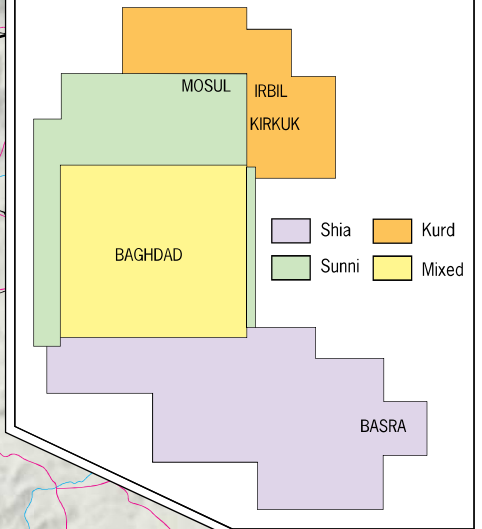
- Under 50,000
- 50,000–250,000
- 250,000–1,000,000
- 1,000,000–5,000,000
- Over 5,000,000

Oilfield (Red shape)
Road (Pink line)
Railroad (Black line)
Oil pipeline (Black line with dots)
Province boundary (Red dashed line)
T Turkmen Minority
Su Sunni Minority

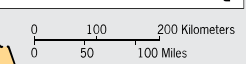
National capitals are underlined
Domains depict prevailing majorities; minorities (Turkmen, Assyrians) not shown. Borderlands between domains have mixed populations.

0 40 80 120 160 200 Kilometers
0 20 40 60 80 100 Miles

CARTOGRAM OF POPULATION GROUPS IN IRAQ



PROVINCES OF IRAQ



have returned to their homeland. The allied presence also helped to create a more open economy. In 2010, the official combat role of U.S. troops in Iraq was declared to be at an end, following a protracted war that claimed an estimated 150,000 Iraqi lives and caused the death of some 5000 allied soldiers; the last U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq on December 18, 2011.

Today, the Kurdish and Shi'ite zones are relatively stable and prosperity has risen as the level of violence has subsided. But the Sunni domain, especially around the capital, Baghdad, remains conflicted and very poor. Tensions between the Shi'ite-dominated government and the Sunni minority show no signs of letting up. In a typical month of early 2013, a wave of car bombings in Baghdad's Shi'ite neighborhoods claimed more than 30 fatalities and dozens of severe injuries. It remains uncertain as to whether Iraq will be able to achieve anything resembling structural stability, let alone lasting political democracy.

Syria

Like Iraq before 2003, Syria was ruled with an iron fist by a minority (that was still brutally fighting for its political life as this book went to press). Although Syria's population of 23.4 million is about 75 percent Sunni Muslim, the ruling elite comes from a smaller Shi'ite Islamic sect based in the country—the Alawites—who account for only around 12 percent of the population. Leaders of this powerful minority have retained control over the state for decades, mostly by ruthless suppression of dissent. In 2000, president-for-life Hafez al-Assad died and was succeeded by his son, Bashar, signaling a continuation of the political status quo. For 25 years, part of this status quo was the occupation and control of neighboring Lebanon, but in 2005 the Syrians finally withdrew.

Like Lebanon and Israel, Syria has a Mediterranean coastline where crops can be raised without irrigation. Behind this densely populated coastal zone, Syria has a much larger interior than its neighbors, but its areas of productive capacity are widely dispersed (Fig. 7B-4). Damascus, in the southwestern corner of the country, was built on an oasis and is considered to be one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. It is now the capital of Syria, with a population of 2.9 million.

The far northwest is anchored by Aleppo (ravaged in 2013 by the regime's vicious military attacks on Syria's defenseless civilians), the focus of cotton- and wheat-growing areas close to the Turkish border. Here the Orontes River is the chief source of irrigation water, but in the northeast the Euphrates Valley is the crucial lifeline. It was in Syria's interest to develop its northeastern provinces (which also contain recently discovered oil reserves), but all development plans came to a screeching halt when the Arab Spring movement arrived. As the latter engulfed the country and ignited a ghastly civil war, disintegrating Syria was swiftly transformed into a failed state.

Syria's dictatorship had first seemed immune to the wave of unrest that cascaded across much of the Arab World in early 2011. But demonstrations soon broke out in a number of cities, and the protest movement spread rapidly in response to the Assad regime's savage military crackdown, with the worst of the brutalities inflicted on the western cities of Aleppo, Latakia, Dara'a, and Homs. By mid-2013, at least 100,000 people had died in the violence while thousands more were reported to be in custody or missing. The conflict also created about two million refugees, many of whom crossed the border into Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and, to a lesser extent, Iraq; for those who stayed, widespread food shortages only added to their suffering. Internationally, even though the regime had been almost universally condemned, it continued to receive steady (if tacit) support from Russia, Iran, and China—as discussed in Chapter 7A.

Jordan

With a poverty-stricken capital (Amman), lacking in oil reserves, and possessing only a small and remote outlet to the Gulf of Aqaba, Jordan (population 6.7 million) has survived with U.S., British, and other aid. It lost its West Bank territory in the 1967 war with Israel, including its sector of Jerusalem (then the kingdom's second-largest city). No third country has a greater stake in a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians than does Jordan, especially because Palestinians are the majority here.

Jordan did not experience the kind of upheaval that shook many other Arab countries in 2011 because the monarchy had enjoyed widespread support and government policies lacked the level of repression found in Syria or Tunisia. Yet there were some demonstrations to air grievances, and King Abdullah II had to dismiss his cabinet to quell the protests. Jordan's long-term challenges are economic, and in 2012 deepening deprivation began to turn into political discontent; by mid-2013, this convergence had strengthened to a level that threatened the fundamental tribal alliance critical to the monarchy's continued control of the state.

Lebanon

The map suggests that Lebanon has significant geographic advantages in this region: a lengthy coastline on the Mediterranean Sea; a well-situated capital, Beirut, on its shoreline; oil terminals along its coast; and a major capital (Syria's Damascus) in its hinterland. The map at the scale of Figure 7B-4 cannot reveal yet another asset: the fertile, agriculturally productive Bekaa Valley in the eastern interior. But if Lebanon is well endowed from a physical geographical point of view, its social geography and geopolitical situation are problematic. As a result, the country has gone back and forth between good times and bad.

For so small a country, Lebanon is permeated with religious and ethnic factions and is prone to sectarian breakdown. The Lebanese were unhappy with what they felt to

be a Syrian occupation, yet that situation persisted for well over two decades. In the meantime, an Iran-sponsored terrorist movement, Hezbollah, came into being and even became a political force. The Syrians finally departed in 2005 under United Nations auspices, and a stable new Lebanese government coalesced around a power-sharing agreement. Peace, however, was short-lived. In 2006, a Hezbollah kidnapping of Israeli soldiers provoked an attack from Israel, shattering the reconstructed physical and political infrastructure. By 2013, Beirut seemed to be regaining some of its luster, once again attracting international business as well as more tourists. Lebanon is sometimes aptly described as a “garden without a fence” because of its vulnerability to outside interference, its latest burden being the more than

600,000 refugees of the Syrian war (as of mid-2013). With so many external powers and influences involved in its affairs, Lebanon is unlikely to achieve stability and significant progress in the foreseeable future.

Israel and the Palestinian Territories

Israel, the Jewish state, lies in the center of the Arab World (Fig. 7B-1). Since 1948, when Israel was created as a homeland for the Jewish people on the recommendation of a United Nations commission, the Arab-Israeli conflict has affected all else in the region.

Figure 7B-6 helps us understand the complex issues involved here. In 1946, the British, who had administered

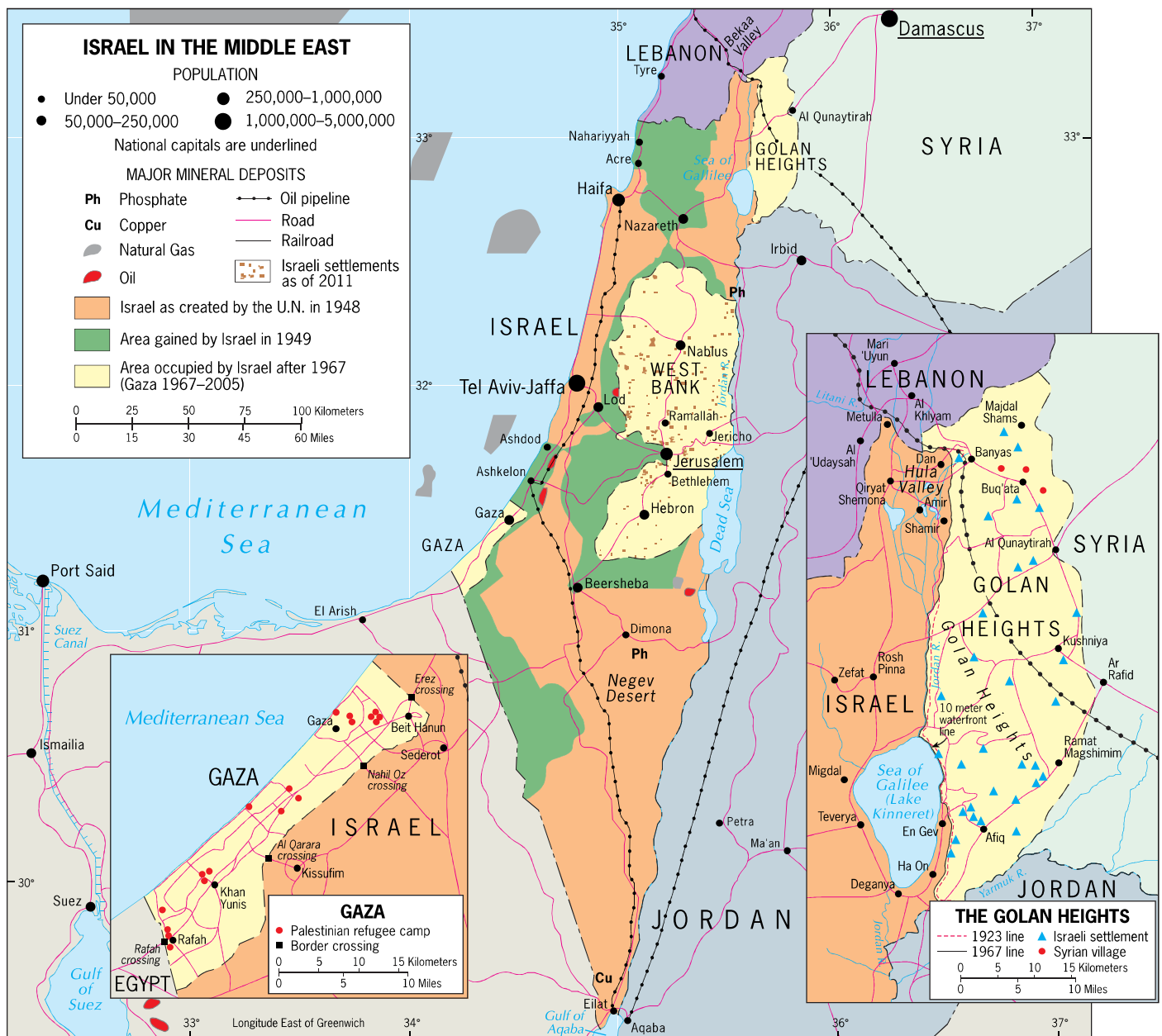


FIGURE 7B-6

this area in post-Ottoman times, granted independence to what was then called Transjordan, the kingdom east of the Jordan River. In 1948, the orange-colored area became the UN-sponsored state of Israel—including, of course, land that had long belonged to Arabs in this territory called Palestine.

As soon as Israel proclaimed its independence, neighboring Arab states attacked it. Israel, however, not only held its own but pushed the Arab forces back beyond its borders, gaining the green areas in 1949 (Fig. 7B-6). Meanwhile, Transjordanian armies crossed the Jordan River and annexed the yellow-colored area named the West Bank (of the Jordan River), including part of the city of Jerusalem. The king called his newly enlarged country Jordan.

Further conflict soon followed. In 1967, a six-day-long war produced a major Israeli victory: Israel took the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank from Jordan, and the Gaza Strip from Egypt; it also conquered the entire Sinai Peninsula all the way to Egypt's Suez Canal. In later peace agreements, Israel returned the Sinai to Egypt but not the Gaza Strip.

All this strife produced a huge outflow of Palestinian Arab refugees and displaced persons. The Palestinian Arabs constitute another of this realm's *stateless nations*; about 1.7 million continue to live as Israeli citizens within the borders of Israel, but more than 2.3 million are in the West Bank and about another 1.7 million in the Gaza Strip. Many Palestinians live in neighboring and nearby countries, including Jordan (2.9 million), Syria (600,000), Lebanon (450,000), and Saudi Arabia (350,000); another 450,000 or so reside in Iraq, Egypt, and Kuwait; and some live in other countries around the world, including the United States (ca. 300,000). The estimated size of the total, stateless Palestinian population in 2014 was between 11 and 12 million.

Israel is approximately the size of Massachusetts and has a population of 8.2 million (including its 1.7 million Arab citizens), but because of its location, a powerful military, and its strong international links, these data do not reflect Israel's importance. Israel has been a recipient of massive U.S. financial aid, and American foreign policy has been to seek an accommodation between Jews and Palestinians, as well as between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Washington is strongly pushing toward a two-state solution, but the political will on either side does not appear to be forthcoming.

Geographic Obstacles to a Two-State Solution

1. The West Bank. Even after its capture by Israel in 1967, the West Bank might have become a Palestinian homeland, but steady and deliberate Jewish immi-

gration into this territory made such a future problematic. In 1977, only 5000 Jews lived in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In 2013, there were nearly 400,000 living in the West Bank (plus at least another 300,000 in East Jerusalem)—constituting fully 15 percent of the population and creating a seemingly inextricable jigsaw of Jewish and Arab settlements (Fig. 7B-7) that makes a two-state solution increasingly difficult. Moreover, the West Bank is almost entirely bounded by the Israeli-built 'security fence' (see below).

2. The Golan Heights. The right inset map in Figure 7B-6 suggests how difficult the Golan Heights issue is. The Heights overlook a large area of northern Israel, and they flank the Jordan River as well as crucial Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), the main water reservoir for Israel. Relations even with a post-Assad Syria are not likely to become normalized until the Golan Heights are returned, but in democratic Israel the political climate may make the ceding of this territory impossible.

3. Jerusalem. The United Nations intended Tel Aviv to be Israel's capital, and Jerusalem an international city. But the Arab attack and the 1948–1949 war allowed Israel to drive toward Jerusalem (see Fig. 7B-6, the green wedge into the West Bank). By the time a cease-fire was arranged, Israel held the western part of the city, and Arab forces the eastern sector. But in this eastern sector lay major Jewish historic sites, including the Western Wall. Still, in 1950 Israel declared the western sector of Jerusalem its capital, making this, in effect, a *forward capital*. Figure 7B-8 shows the position of the (black) armistice line, leaving most of the Old City in Jordanian hands. Then, in the 1967 war, Israel conquered all

Jerusalem's urban landscape is rife with cultural contrasts—and is also home to the holy sites that mean so much to Jews, Christians, and Muslims



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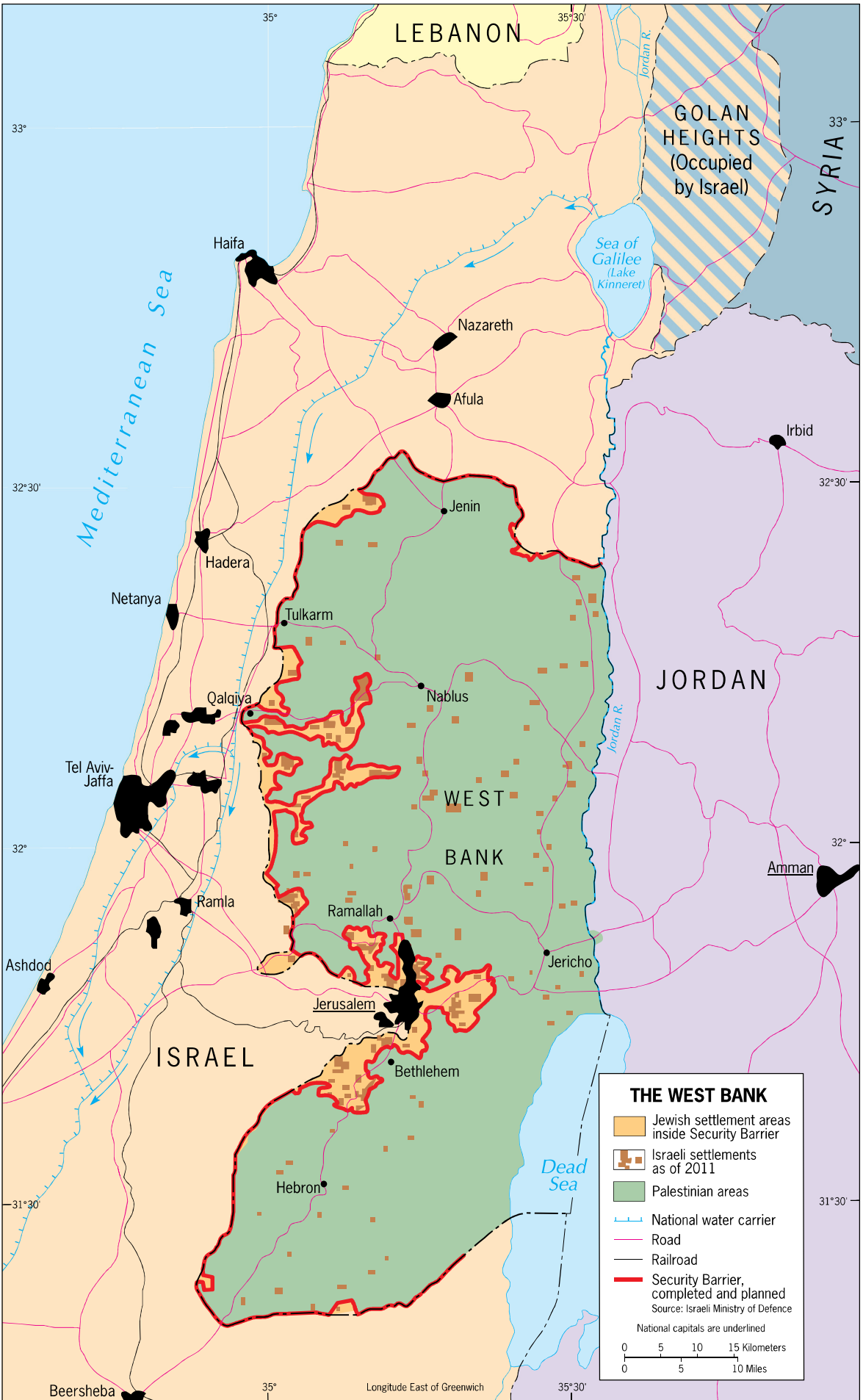


FIGURE 7B-7

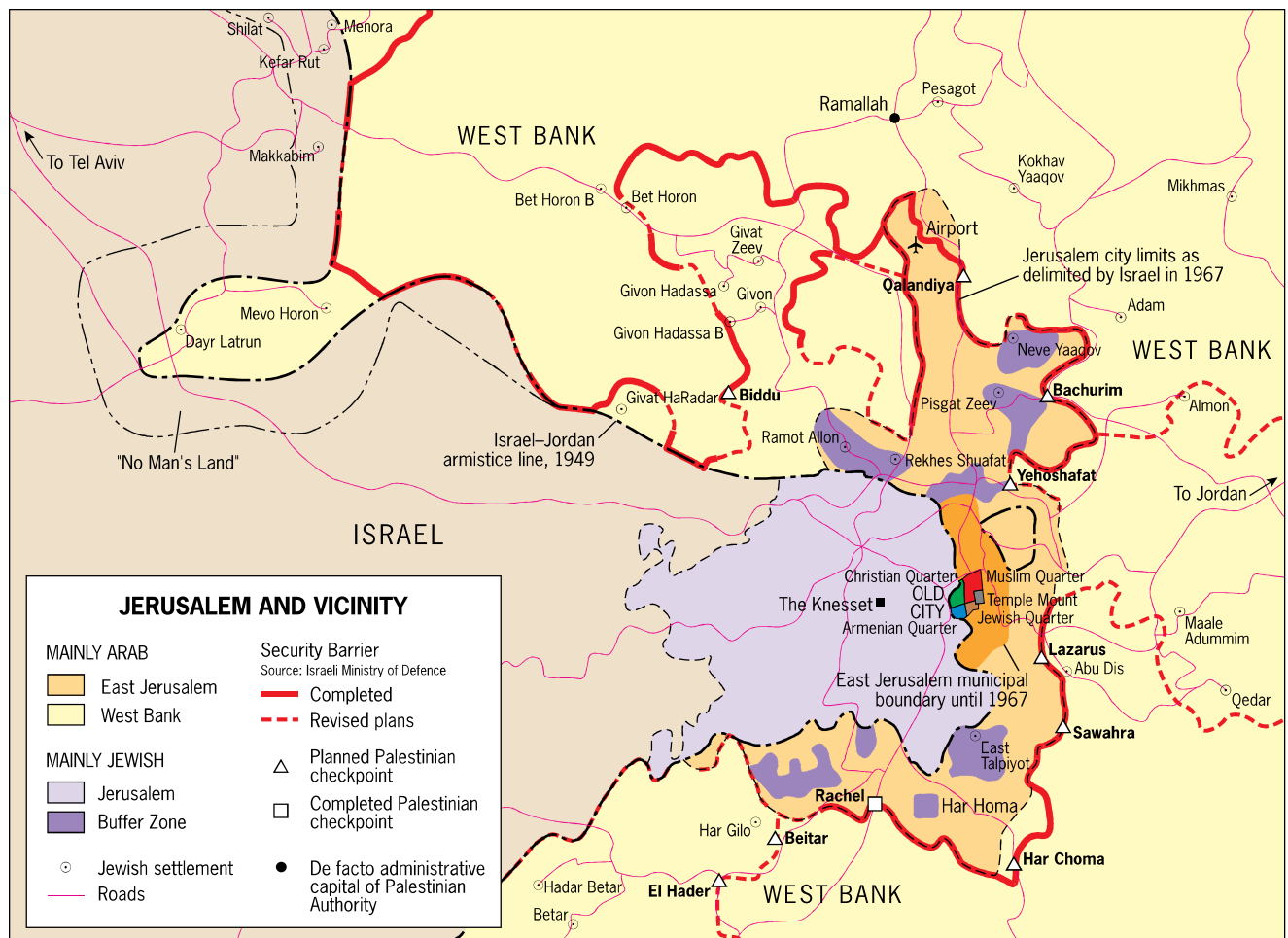


FIGURE 7B-8

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of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; in 1980, the Jewish state reaffirmed Jerusalem's status as capital, calling on all countries to relocate their embassies from Tel Aviv (a few did, but none are here today). Meanwhile, the government redrew the map of the ancient city, building Jewish settlements in a ring around East Jerusalem that would terminate the old distinction between Jewish west and Arab east (Fig. 7B-8). This enraged Palestinian leaders, who still view Jerusalem as the eventual headquarters of a hoped-for Palestinian state. Renewed U.S. efforts to persuade Israel to halt the construction of new settlements in East Jerusalem have thus far been futile, despite promises of increased American aid to Israel.

4. The Security Fence. In response to the infiltration of suicide terrorists, Israel has now walled off most of the West Bank along the Security Barrier border shown in Figure 7B-7 and the next photo. This reinforcement of the West Bank border imposes a hardship on Palestinians, and for some it runs between their homes and their farm fields. Palestinians demand that the wall be taken down; Israelis reply that the Palestinian National

Authority (the interim self-government body) must control the terrorists.

5. The Gaza Strip. Israel in 2005 decided to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, removing all Jewish settlements and yielding control of the area to the (then) Palestinian Authority (Fig. 7B-6, left inset map). A power struggle ensued between the two main Palestinian political factions, Fatah and the more militant Hamas, and Hamas won a disputed 2006 election. As rockets smuggled in from Egypt through tunnels dug beneath the Gaza-Egyptian border (see photo) fell on Israel, causing some deaths, injuries, and damage, the Israelis warned the Palestinian (Hamas) regime of retaliation. Hamas authorities either would not or could not stop the rockets fired from Gaza, and in 2009 Israel launched a massive attack, killing about 1300 Gaza residents including many civilians and inflicting considerable infrastructural damage. Condemnation of Israel's assault as disproportionate was worldwide, but a majority of Israeli citizens approved of it. A cease-fire led to a relatively peaceful interlude during which Gaza received considerable investments from abroad (especially from oil-rich



© AP/Wide World Photos

Israel's Security Barrier takes several forms—a concrete wall, an iron fence—and its effect also has multiple dimensions. This section of the barrier separates the village of Abu Dis on the outskirts of Jerusalem (left) from the West Bank (right). While Israel defines this demarcation as a security issue, the Arabs, citing its location inside Palestinian territory, argue that it is motivated primarily by politics.

Persian Gulf states) and the economy entered an upswing, particularly its construction sector. But in late 2012, another episode of violent cross-border exchanges occurred, with rockets flying into southern Israel and the retaliating Israeli security forces killing more than 200 Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel lies in the path of a fast-moving geopolitical storm. The issues raised above are only part of the overall problem: others involve water rights, compensation for expropriated land, Arabs' "right of return" to pre-refugee abodes, and the exact form a Palestinian state would take. Meanwhile, an Iranian regime continues its aggressive declaratory stand toward Israel while that country appears to be on its way

to nuclear weapons capability and already has the means to deliver them.

Israel's recent resolve may partly be due to new discoveries of major offshore gasfields in the Mediterranean (see Fig. 7B-6). The largest field is also the furthest north and has generated a dispute with Lebanon as to its exact location relative to maritime boundaries. And the southernmost field lies off the shore of the Gaza Strip. Although the Palestinian authorities have been eager to commence exploitation that could provide a badly needed lift to their impoverished economy, Israel has vetoed the project on security grounds.

■ THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

The regional identity of the Arabian Peninsula is clear: south of Jordan and Iraq, the entire peninsula is encircled by water. This is a region of old-style sheikdoms made fabulously wealthy by oil, modern-looking emirates, and the site where Islam originated.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia itself has only 29.7 million residents (plus about 11 million expatriate workers, 2 million of whom are undocumented) in its vast territory, but we can see the kingdom's importance in Figure 7A-8: the Arabian Peninsula contains the world's largest concentration of known petroleum reserves. Saudi Arabia occupies most of this area and may possess as much as one-fifth of the world's liquid

February 9, 2013: A Palestinian works inside a smuggling tunnel beneath the Egyptian-Gaza border in the town of Rafah (see inset map in Fig. 7B-6). As the Israelis systematically curtailed traffic between the Gaza Strip and Israel, Gaza has become highly dependent on Egypt for all kinds of goods. But these tunnels are used to smuggle arms and ammunition into the Strip for attacks against Israel. A few weeks after this photo was taken, Egypt, fearing the destabilization of the Sinai Peninsula, ordered its military to flood all cross-border tunnels, some of them with raw sewage.



© Abed Rahim Khatib/Demotix/Corbis

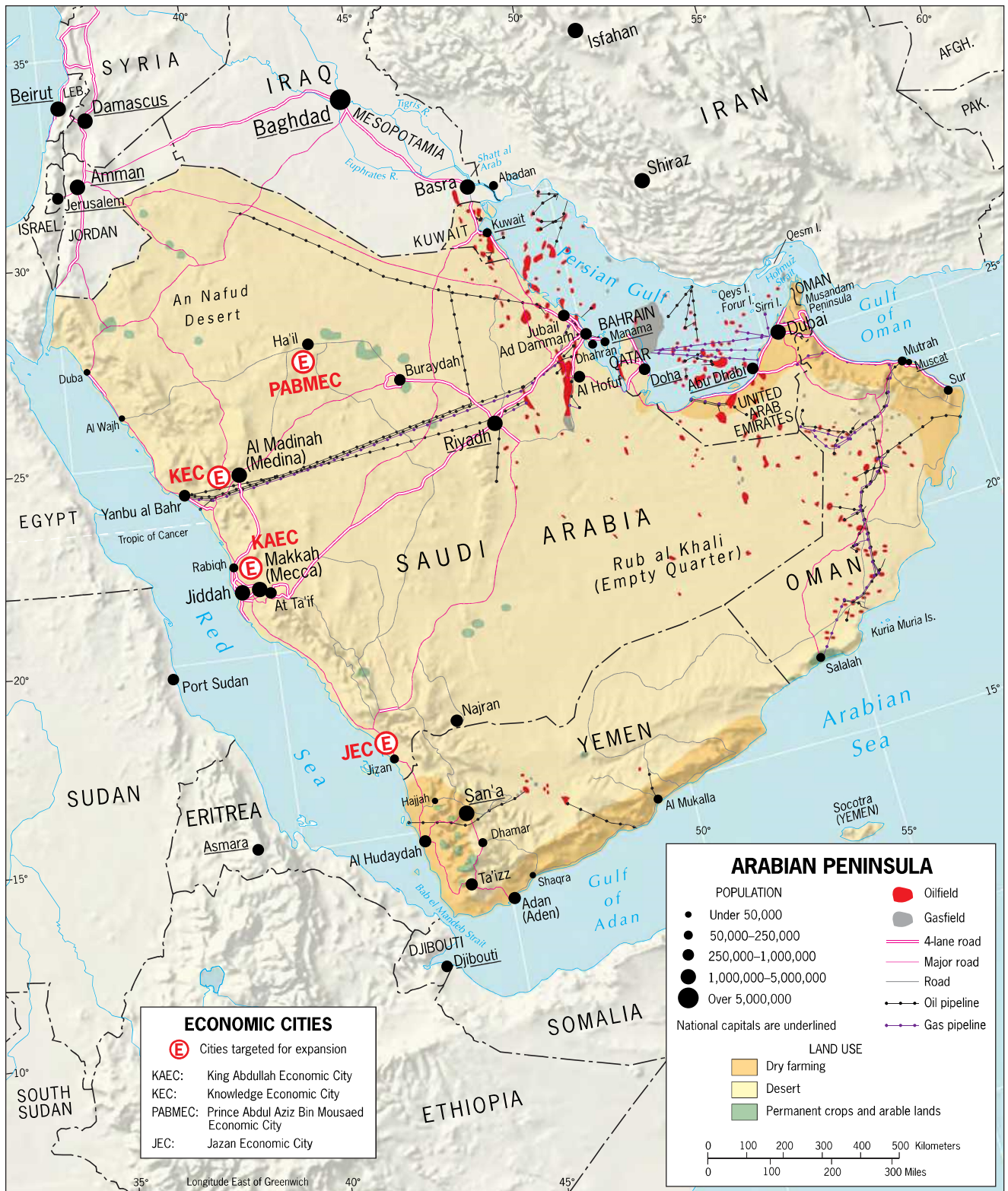


FIGURE 7B-9

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oil deposits, second only to reserve leader Venezuela. As Figure 7B-9 shows, these reserves lie in the eastern part of the country, particularly in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf, and extend southward into the Rub al Khali (Empty Quarter).

As a region, the Arabian Peninsula is environmentally dominated by a desert habitat and politically dominated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Fig. 7B-9). Containing 2,150,000 square kilometers (830,000 sq mi), Saudi Arabia is the realm's third-biggest state; only Kazakhstan

and Algeria cover more territory. On the peninsula, Saudi Arabia's neighbors (proceeding clockwise from the head of the Persian Gulf) are Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Sultanate of Oman, and the Republic of Yemen. Together, these countries on the eastern and southern fringes of the peninsula contain 45 million inhabitants; the largest by far is Yemen, with 27 million.

Figure 7B-9 reveals that most of the economic activities in Saudi Arabia are concentrated in a wide belt across the “waist” of the peninsula, from the oil boomtown of Dhahran on the Persian Gulf through the national capital of Riyadh in the interior to the Mecca–Medina area near the Red Sea. A modern transportation and communications network has recently been completed, but in the more remote zones of the interior Bedouin nomads still ply their ancient caravan routes across the vast deserts. For decades, Saudi Arabia's royal families were virtually the sole beneficiaries of their country's wealth, and there was hardly any impact on the lives of villagers and nomads. When the oil boom arrived in the 1950s, foreign laborers were brought in (today there are roughly 11 million, many of them Shi'ite) to work in the oilfields, ports, factories, and as domestics. The east boomed, but the rest of the country has lagged behind.

Disparities, Uncertainties, and Development Plans

Efforts to reduce Saudi Arabia's regional economic disparities have been impeded by the enormous cost of bringing water from deep-seated sources to the desert surface to stimulate agriculture, by the sheer size of the country, and by a population growth rate that is still 50 percent above the global average. Nonetheless, housing, health care, and education have seen major improvement, and industrialization also has been stimulated in such new cities as Jubail on the Persian Gulf and Yanbu on the Red Sea. In fact, the latter is part of the historic Mecca–Medina corridor which itself is modernizing rapidly.

Saudi Arabia's conservative monarchic rule, official friendship with the West, and huge social contrasts resulting from ongoing economic growth have raised political opposition, for which no adequate channels exist. Consider this: women are still not allowed to drive and will only acquire the right to vote in 2015; in fact, until a few years ago, women were not even allowed to travel without a male companion! The Saudi regime has watched nervously as uprisings have diffused across NASWA since late 2010, but things have remained relatively quiet here. By no coincidence, the government was quick to announce a new jobs program in 2011 involving billions of government dollars while beefing up police presence on the streets. But Saudi Arabia's planners have learned to think much bigger than this, and their grandiose plans call for nothing less than a complete economic transformation of the country.

The Saudis have good reason to invest in their economic future. Today, 70 percent of the population is under the age of 30, and unemployment among these young people may run as high as 40 percent. In order to accelerate the generation of the millions of jobs that will be needed, the Saudi royal rulers are spending their country's oil money on

six new “economic cities” that by 2020 will create 1.3 million new jobs. The sites of four of these cities have been selected, and construction is under way (see Fig. 7B-9). *King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC)*, at Rabiqh on the Red Sea, will be completed first by 2016 and will house more than 2 million residents as well as an industrial complex containing more than 2000 factories. According to the grand design, these new urban agglomerations will have diversified economic bases but specialize in particular combinations of industries: Medina will become the site of the *Knowledge Economic City (KEC)*, with a new graduate-level university; *PABMEC* near Ha'il in the desert north will concentrate on agricultural research, equipment, and innovation; and *JEC* next to Jizan in the far south will focus on environmentally-friendly energy and manufacturing industries. Overall, in anticipation of the end of the oil era, the ultimate goal is to transform Saudi Arabia from a petrodollar-based economy into a global-scale industrial power.

On the Peninsular Periphery

Five of Saudi Arabia's six neighbors on the Arabian Peninsula face the Persian and Oman gulfs (Fig. 7B-9) and are monarchies in the Islamic tradition. All five also derive substantial revenues from oil. Their populations range from 1.3 to 8.3 million in addition to hundreds of thousands of foreign workers; these are not strong or influential states, but they do display considerable geographic diversity.

Kuwait, at the head of the Persian Gulf, almost cuts Iraq off from the open sea, an issue the 1990–1991 Gulf War did not settle. Mini-state Kuwait's oil reserves are the sixth-largest in the world, but even this country feels the need to diversify its economy.

Bahrain, an island-state ruled by a royal family since the eighteenth century, is a tiny territory with dwindling oil reserves. It has become an important banking center for the region and has some of the more progressive social policies in this part of the world. Its 1.3 million people are split between Sunnis (30 percent) and Shi'ites (70 percent); nearly two-thirds of its labor force is foreign. When faced with popular unrest and demonstrations in 2011 (mainly by its marginalized Shi'ite majority), the government assumed an increasingly tough stance and invited in additional troops from Saudi Arabia (also run by a Sunni monarchy) to suppress demonstrators and maintain order (more than 50 people died in the clashes). Over the years, Bahrain has maintained such friendly relations with the United States that the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet is headquartered here. The country's repression of popular demonstrations continued from 2011 through mid-2013, but drew only minimal criticism from Washington.

Neighboring **Qatar** consists of a peninsula jutting out into the Persian Gulf that has capitalized on its oil reserves and its increasing natural gas reserves (this may be the richest country in the world in terms of per capita annual income). With a modest population of 1.9 million but a dominant Sunni majority, this emirate is trying to establish itself as not only an Arab World focus for



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The Burj Khalifa, centerpiece of the ultramodern city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Completed in 2010, the 163-story Burj is the world's tallest building, topping out at 828 meters (2716 ft)—just over half a mile high, almost twice the height of New York's Empire State Building.

international economic, social, and political reform, but as a global center for financial deliberation. Its capital, Doha, is the site of annual “Doha Round” meetings of the world's leading economic powers, and it is home to global media giant Al Jazeera (which played a leading role in telecasting the Arab Spring across the realm). The political unrest that coursed through much of the realm during 2011 bypassed

Qatar, which was the first Arab country to grant full recognition to Libya's anti-Qadhafi insurgents. Qatar will host soccer's World Cup tournament in 2022, its winning bid a surprise to most observers. This minuscule nation has no soccer tradition to speak of, and its summer temperatures can reach 50° Celsius (122° F). The local organizers, hardly lacking monetary resources, have grandiose plans to build several indoor, fully air-conditioned stadiums.

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, a federation of seven emirates that is home to 8.3 million citizens, faces the Persian Gulf between Qatar and Oman. A reigning sheik is the absolute monarch in each of the emirates, and the seven sheiks together form the Supreme Council of Rulers. In terms

of oil revenues, however, there is no equality: two emirates—Abu Dhabi and Dubai—have most of the reserves. As the photo reveals, Dubai (Dubayy) has converted its favorable geographic location together with its oil revenues into a booming economy (staggered by the recent global recession but now recovering) in which banking, trade, tourism, and international transit functions (led by a prestigious global airline) are symbolized by cutting-edge architecture, state-of-the-art engineering feats, and world-class sports, leisure, and entertainment complexes.

The eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula is occupied by the Sultanate of **Oman**, another absolute monarchy, centered on the capital of Muscat. Figure 7B-9 shows that Oman is fragmented into two parts: the large



From the Field Notes . . .

“The port of Mutrah, Oman, like the capital of Muscat nearby, lies wedged between water and rock, the former



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encroaching by erosion, the latter crumbling as a result of tectonic plate movement. From across the bay one can see how limited Mutrah's living space is, and one of the dangers here is the frequent falling and downhill sliding of large pieces of rock. It took about five hours to walk from Mutrah to Muscat; it was extremely hot under the desert sun, but the cultural landscape was fascinating. Oil also drives Oman's economy, but here you do not find the total transformation seen in Kuwait or Dubai. Townscapes (as in Mutrah) retain their Arab-Islamic qualities; modern highways, hotels, and residential areas have been built, but not at the cost of the older and the traditional. Oman's authoritarian government is slowly opening the country to the outside world after long-term isolation.”

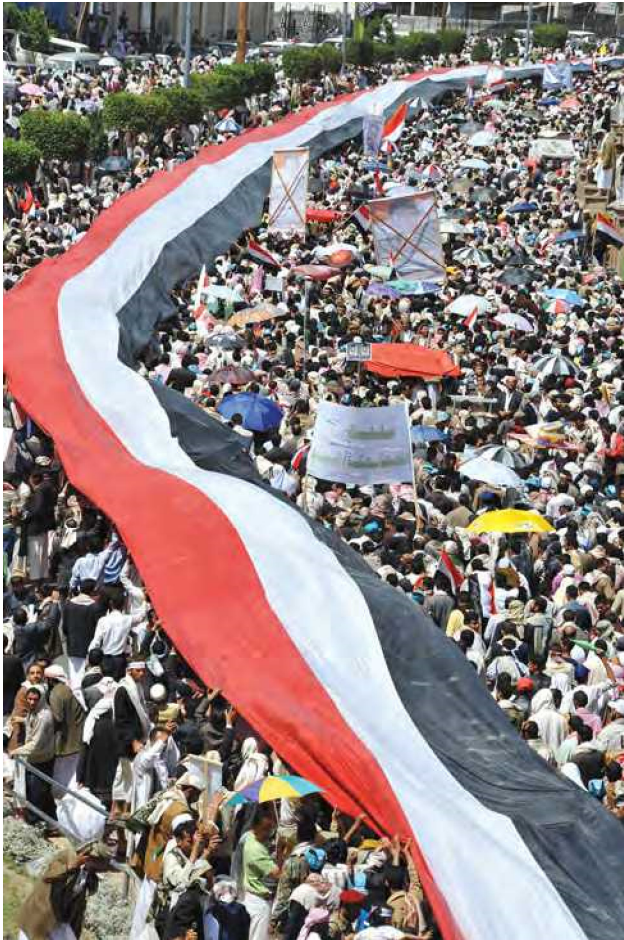
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eastern corner of the peninsula, and a small but highly critical cape to the north—the Musandam Peninsula—which protrudes into the outlet of the Persian Gulf to form a narrow channel that is a classic **choke point** [6], the Hormuz Strait (Iran lies on the opposite shore). Tankers leaving the other Gulf states must negotiate this slender, twisting channel at slow speed, and during politically tense times warships have needed to protect them. Iran's claim to several small islands near the Strait which are owned by the UAE remains the source of a dispute that has intensified since 2012.

This brings us to what is, in so many ways, Saudi Arabia's most substantial peninsular neighbor: **Yemen**. The boundary between the two has only recently been satisfactorily delimited in an area where there may be substantial oil reserves. Another boundary, between former North Yemen and South Yemen, was erased in 1990, when the two countries joined to form the present state.

A sea of Yemeni protesters on May 13, 2011 carry an enormous flag during a demonstration in San'a to demand the ouster of President Saleh. Here and in most other countries touched by the Arab Spring, demonstrators often defiantly displayed their national flag to confirm their nationalistic feelings—but also as a gesture of scorn to remind their government how badly it had failed the country and its people.



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San'a, formerly the capital of North Yemen, retained that status; Adan (Aden), the only major port along a lengthy stretch of the peninsula's Arabian Sea coast, anchors the south.

Yemen, with a population of 27.3 million—approximately 53 percent Sunni and 45 percent Shi'ite—is faced with poverty, centrifugal political forces, and terrorist activity—all in abundance. A Shi'ite rebellion against the central government has destabilized the north even as a secessionist movement flares in the south, where oilfields encourage such aspirations.

Figure 7B-9 underscores the geographic attractions Yemen has for al-Qaeda and other Islamic terrorist groups. Not only does Yemen lie at the back door of Saudi Arabia: its southern tip overlooks another of the world's busiest choke points at the entrance to the Red Sea (the Bab el Mandeb ["Gate of Grief"] Strait), where ships converge and risk capture by pirates. Across the Gulf of Aden lies another terrorist haven (and leading pirate base), Somalia, and across the Red Sea lies Eritrea, a likely target for extremists of the al-Qaeda stripe. From Yemen, too, these militants can stoke turmoil all along Africa's Islamic Front (see Fig. 6B-9).

Yemen's precarious position became even more complicated in 2011 when the country was inundated by mass demonstrations against the 32-year-old regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The government responded with a mix of conciliatory measures and violent confrontation, but courageous protesters, many students among them, defied the brutalities inflicted by police and returned to Yemen's streets again and again (see photo). After obtaining promises of immunity from prosecution, President Saleh finally resigned in early 2012. He was succeeded by his vice president, but many of Saleh's relatives and operatives continued to occupy key positions in government and the military. Although a slide into anarchy may have been averted, the current situation does not bode well for a more democratic future.

■ THE EMPIRE STATES

Two major states, both with imperial histories, dominate the region that lies immediately to the north of the Middle East and Persian Gulf (Fig. 7B-1), where Arab ethnicity gives way but Islamic culture endures—Turkey and Iran. Although they share a short border and are both Muslim countries, they display significant differences as well. Even their versions of Islam are different: Turkey is an officially secular but dominantly Sunni state, whereas Iran is the heartland of Shi'ism. Turkey's leaders have worked to establish satisfactory relations with Israel; not long ago, Iran's president promised to "wipe Israel off the map." In recent years, Turkey has been involved in negotiations aimed at entry into the European Union. Iran's goals have been quite different as that country has defied international efforts to constrain its nuclear ambitions. Two smaller countries are inextricably

bound up with these two regional powers: island *Cyprus* to the southwest, still divided today between Turks and Greeks in a way that threatens Turkey's European ambitions (discussed in Chapter 1B); and oil-rich, Caspian Sea-bordering *Azerbaijan* to the northwest, with ethnic and religious ties to Iran but economic links elsewhere (covered in Chapter 2B).

Turkey

As Figure 7B-10 indicates, Turkey is a mountainous country with generally moderate relief; it also tends to exhibit considerable environmental diversity, ranging from steppe to highland (see Fig. G-7). On central Turkey's dry Anatolian Plateau, villages tend to be small and subsistence farmers grow cereals and raise livestock. Coastal plains are not large, but they are productive as well as densely populated. Textiles (from home-grown cotton) and farm products dominate the export economy, but Turkey also has substantial mineral reserves, some oil in the southeast as well as massive dam-building projects on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and a small steel industry based on domestic raw materials.

In Chapter 7A we chronicled the historical geography of the Ottoman Empire, its expansion, cultural domination, and collapse. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the country we now know as Turkey lay at the center of that disintegrating state, ripe for revolution and renewal. This occurred in the 1920s and thrust into prominence a leader who became known as the father of modern Turkey: Mustafa Kemal, known after 1933 as Atatürk, meaning "Father of the Turks."

Capitals New and Old

The ancient capital of Turkey was Constantinople (now Istanbul), located on the Bosphorus, part of the strategic Turkish Straits that connect the Black and Mediterranean seas. But the struggle for Turkey's survival had been waged from the heart of the country, the Anatolian Plateau, and it was here that Atatürk (who ruled the country from 1923 to 1938) decided to place his seat of government (Fig. 7B-10). Ankara, the new capital, possessed some unique advantages: it would remind the Turks that they were (as Atatürk always said) Anatolians, it lay much closer to the center of the country than Istanbul, and it could therefore act as a stronger unifier.

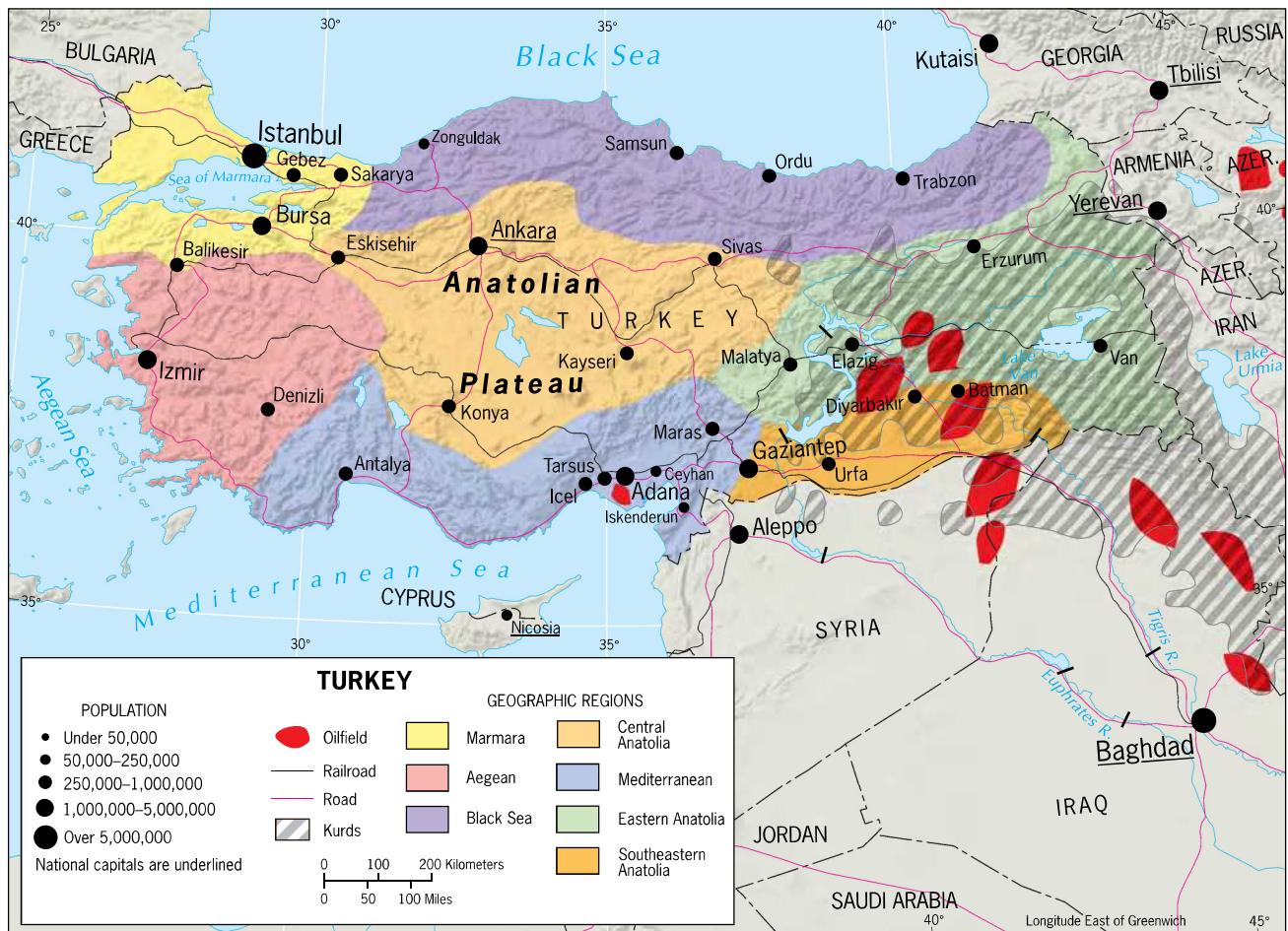


FIGURE 7B-10

AMONG THE REALM'S GREAT CITIES . . .

ISTANBUL

FROM BOTH SHORES of the Sea of Marmara, northward along the narrow Bosphorus waterway toward the Black Sea, sprawls the fabulous city of Istanbul, known for centuries as Constantinople, headquarters of the Byzantine Empire, capital of the Ottoman Empire, and, until Atatürk moved the seat of government to Ankara in 1923, capital of the modern Republic of Turkey as well.

Istanbul's site and situation are exceptional. Situated where Europe meets Asia and where the Black Sea joins the Mediterranean, the city was built on the requisite seven hills (as Rome's successor), rising over a deep inlet on the western side of the Bosphorus, the famous Golden Horn. A sequence of empires and religions endowed the city with a host of architectural marvels that give it, when approached from the water, an almost surreal appearance.

Turkey's political capital may have moved to Ankara, but Istanbul remains its cultural and commercial headquarters. It also is the country's leading urban magnet, luring millions from the countryside. Istanbul's population is doubling every 15 years at current rates, having reached 12.2 million in 2014 to become the realm's largest city. But its infrastructure is crumbling under this massive influx, threatening the legacy of two millennia of cultural landscapes.

In the heart of the city known as Stamboul and in the "foreign" area north of the Golden Horn called Beyoğlu, modern buildings vie for space and harbor views. Istanbul's



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frenzied development—and particularly the Westernization of its youth—suddenly came into global view in May 2013, when protests against the demolition of tiny Gezi Park (next to Beyoğlu's Taksim Square) to make way for a mall quickly escalated into nationwide unrest after a harsh crackdown by police.

Even though Atatürk moved the capital eastward and inward, his orientation was westward and outward. To implement his plans for Turkey's modernization, he initiated reforms in almost every sphere of life within the country. Islam, formerly the state religion, lost its official status, and Turkey became a secular state whose army ensured that the Islamists would not take over again. The state took over most of the religious schools that had controlled education. The Roman alphabet replaced the Arabic. A modified Western code supplemented Islamic law. Symbols of old—growing beards, wearing the fez—were prohibited. Monogamy was made law, and the emancipation of women was begun. The new regime emphasized Turkey's separateness from the Arab World, and in many ways it has remained aloof from the affairs that engage other Islamic states.

Turkey and Its Neighbors

From before Atatürk's time, Turkey has had a history of intolerance of minorities. Soon after the outbreak of the First World War, the (pre-Atatürk) regime decided to expel all the Armenians, concentrated in the country's northeast. Nearly 2 million Turkish Armenians were uprooted and brutally forced out; an estimated 600,000 died in a

campaign that continues to arouse anti-Turkish emotions among Armenians today.

In modern times, Turkey also has been criticized for its harsh treatment of its large and regionally concentrated Kurdish population. About one-fifth of Turkey's population of 76.7 million is Kurdish, and successive Turkish governments have mishandled relationships with this minority nation, even prohibiting the use of Kurdish speech and music in public places during one especially repressive period. The historic Kurdish homeland lies in the southeast of Turkey, centered on Diyarbakir (Fig. 7B-10), but millions of Kurds have moved to the shantytowns around Istanbul—and to jobs in the countries of the European Union. With Kurdish nationalism rising across the border in embattled Iraq, Turkey has responded in two principal ways: by suppressing Kurdish insurgent movements both in Turkey itself and across the border in Iraq, and by awarding more rights and freedoms to those Kurds not involved in armed resistance. Thus Turkey improved its human rights record, a key stumbling block in its aspirations to join the European Union. Simultaneously, Ankara made tentative but significant moves to rehabilitate its relations with Armenia, addressing an erosive, longstanding problem.



From the Field Notes . . .

“Having spent the night in Istanbul’s Beyoğlu District on the European side, I walked across the Atatürk (Unkapanı) Bridge to the Eminönü District on the south side of the Golden Horn, intending to make it to the upscale Fatih District later. But getting a clear view of the Hagia Sophia ‘Museum’ was not easy from this angle, amid the congested



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buildup in this hilly area. In a line of taxis at a taxi stand one had a sign saying ‘Speak English’ so I asked the driver about getting to a good vantage point, and he showed me on my map how to find a lookout point on the terrace of a local restaurant. From there, I could see the bridge I had crossed to my left, the Hagia Sophia Church with its later minarets in the distance, the Sultan Haseki Hürrem Baths to the right, and in the foreground a simple, local mosque. ‘You should know the rules about mosques,’ he said. ‘The number of minarets reveals the importance of any mosque. One minaret, and it’s local, neighborhood. Two, and it’s likely to be more prosperous, perhaps the work of a very successful citizen or community. Any more than two, and the builders have to have not only religious sanction but also state permission to build. And if they get that, they go for four.’ Thousands of mosques, many of them architectural treasures, grace the urban landscape of Istanbul, whose population today, according to local geographers, is really 21 million [almost twice the official 12.2 million].”

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Turkey’s main foreign policy issue at the present time, besides the Kurdish problem in as far as that extends beyond its borders, is Syria. By mid-2013, at least 500,000 Syrian refugees had settled on Turkish soil and the alleged cross-border movements of Syrian rebel forces have invited fire from government troops inside Syria. Turkey is a strong critic of Syria’s violently repressive regime, particularly its treatment of majority Sunnis within that country. Growing tension between Turkey and Syria since 2011 has on more than one occasion brought them to the brink of war.

Turkey and the EU

With its diversified and robustly growing economy, secular government, and independent posture in international affairs, Turkey is the key predominantly Islamic state potentially eligible for admission into the European Union. However, major obstacles lie in the way of this becoming a reality, beginning with the Cyprus and Kurdish issues as well as Turkey’s checkered human rights record. Nonetheless, Turkey has made considerable progress over the past decade. The state is now a functioning democracy, and its secular values are constitutionally protected so that even an Islamic party majority in government does not portend radicalization even as it may encourage symbols of piety.

Even though Turkey might be closing in on European Union targets and requirements, enthusiasm among Turks for joining the EU is diminishing. The economy has

been doing so well in recent years that the need for EU membership is not as alluring as it once looked—especially as some established EU members (Greece in particular) effectively entered bankruptcy in the early 2010s. In addition, many Turks take offense at the unrestrained public debate in Europe concerning their candidacy, often including criticisms of Turkish customs and traditions not only in Turkey itself but also in Turkish communities already established in Europe. So we have now reached a point that if the EU should eventually extend an invitation to Turkey, it is by no means certain that a future Turkish government would accept it. Polls indicate that popular support for EU membership has dropped from 75 percent in 2000 to less than 50 percent in 2012, with a mere 17 percent believing that EU accession would ever take place.

Turkey is a crucial country in a unique geographical position that is trying to steer an independent and singular course in one volatile realm while accommodating the demands of another. Its importance was confirmed in a most dramatic fashion when protesters across the Arab World in 2011 repeatedly espoused the *Turkish Model* as the ideal future for their countries: a mildly Islamist government that does not alienate the religiously devout and that prioritizes democratic reform while at the same time pursuing vigorous economic growth. For the EU to pass up Turkey’s admission, many observers say, looks increasingly imprudent.

Iran

Iran has its own history of conquest and empire, collapse and revival. Oil-rich and vulnerable, Iran already was just a remnant of a once-vast regional empire that waxed and waned, from the Danube to the Indus, over more than two millennia. Long known to the outside world as *Persia* (although the people had called themselves Iranians for centuries), the state was officially renamed *Iran* by the reigning shah (king) in 1935. His intention was to stress his country's Indo-European cultural heritage as opposed to its Arab and Mongol infusions.

But for all the rhetoric about modernization, the shahs failed to advance the lot of the common people (a failure so often repeated throughout this realm), and by 1979 a fundamentalist revolution had engulfed the country. The monarchy was replaced by an Islamic republic ruled by an ayatollah (leader under Allah), and Islamists continue to tightly control the state today. Most recently, the disputed 2009 presidential election—that resulted in a wave of street protests, violence, reprisals, and murder—dramatically exposed these divisions.

A Crucial Location and Dangerous Terrain

As Figure 7B-1 shows, Iran occupies a critical position in this turbulent realm. It controls the entire corridor between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. To the west it adjoins Turkey and Iraq, both historic enemies. To the north (west of the Caspian Sea) Iran borders both Azerbaijan and Armenia, where once again Islam confronts Christianity. To the east Iran meets Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to the northeast lies similarly volatile Turkmenistan.

Iran, as Figure 7B-11 reveals, is a country of mountains and deserts. The heart of it is a sizeable upland, the Iranian Plateau, that lies surrounded by even higher mountains, including the Zagros in the west, the Elburz in the north along the Caspian Sea coast, and the mountains of Khurasan to the northeast. This mountainous topography signals geologic danger: here the Eurasian and Arabian tectonic plates converge, causing major and often devastating earthquakes. The Iranian Plateau is actually a huge highland basin marked by salt flats and wide expanses of sand and rock. The highlands wrest some moisture from the air, but elsewhere only oases interrupt the arid monotony—oases that for countless centuries have been stops on the area's caravan routes.

In ancient times, Persepolis in southern Iran (located near the modern city of Shiraz) was the focus of a powerful Persian kingdom, a city dependent on **qanats** [7], underground tunnels carrying water from moist mountain slopes to dry flatlands some distance away. Today, Iran's population of 81 million is 69 percent urban, and the capital, Tehran (population 7.6 million), lies far to the north on the southern, interior slopes of the Elburz Mountains, at the heart of modern Iran's core area.

The Ethnic-Cultural Map

Iranians dominate Iran's affairs, but the country is no more ethnically unified than Turkey. Figure 7B-11 shows that

three corners of Iran are inhabited by non-Iranians, two in the west and one in the southeast. Iran's northwestern corner is part of greater Kurdistan, the multi-state region in which Kurds are in the majority and of which southeastern Turkey also is a part (Fig. 7B-4). Between the Kurdish area and the Caspian Sea the majority population is Azeri, who number more than 13 million and also form the majority in the neighboring state of Azerbaijan to the north.

In the southwest, the minority is Arab and is concentrated in Khuzestan Province. During the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, Saddam Hussein had his eye on this part of Iran, whose Arab minority often complained of mistreatment by the Iranian regime, and where a large part of Iran's huge oil reserve is located (note the situation of the export terminal of Abadan in Fig. 7B-11). The Arab minority here is among Iran's poorest and most restive, in a province whose stability is key to the country's economy.

The third non-Iranian corner of the country lies in the southeast, where a coastal Arab minority focused on the key port of Bandar-e-Abbas on the Strait of Hormuz gives way eastward to a scattered and still-nomadic population of Baluchis who have ties to fellow ethnics in neighboring Pakistan (see Fig. 7B-11). On the Iranian side of the border, this is a remote and currently inconsequential area, but in Pakistani Baluchistan the government faces a persistent rebellion by tribes who feel slighted by official neglect. Iran's ethnic-cultural map, therefore, is anything but simple.

Energy and Conflict

As Figure 7A-8 shows, Iran possesses the realm's second-largest concentration of oil reserves, which amount to just over half of those in Saudi Arabia. Petroleum and natural gas production account for about 90 percent of the country's income. The reserves lie in a zone along the southwestern periphery of Iran's territory, and Abadan became its petroleum capital near the head of the Persian Gulf. But Iran is a large and populous country, and the wealth oil generated could not transform it in the way the shah, or the ayatollahs who succeeded him, intended. Modernization remained but a veneer: in the villages distant from Tehran's polluted air, the holy men continued to dominate the lives of ordinary Iranians. As elsewhere in the Islamic world, urbanites, villagers, and nomads remained enmeshed in a web of production and profiteering, serfdom and indebtedness that has always characterized traditional society here.

The Islamic revolution swept this system away, but it did not improve the lot of Iran's millions: the economic failure of the shah was followed by the economic failure of the ayatollahs. A devastating war with Iraq (1980–1990), into which Iran ruthlessly poured hundreds of thousands of its young men, sapped both the coffers and energies of the state. When it was over, Iran was left poorer, weaker, and aimless, its revolution spent on unproductive pursuits.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, evidence abounded that the people of Iran remained divided between conservatives determined to protect the power of the mullahs (teachers of Islamic ways) and reformers seeking to modernize and liberalize Iranian society. Economically, the

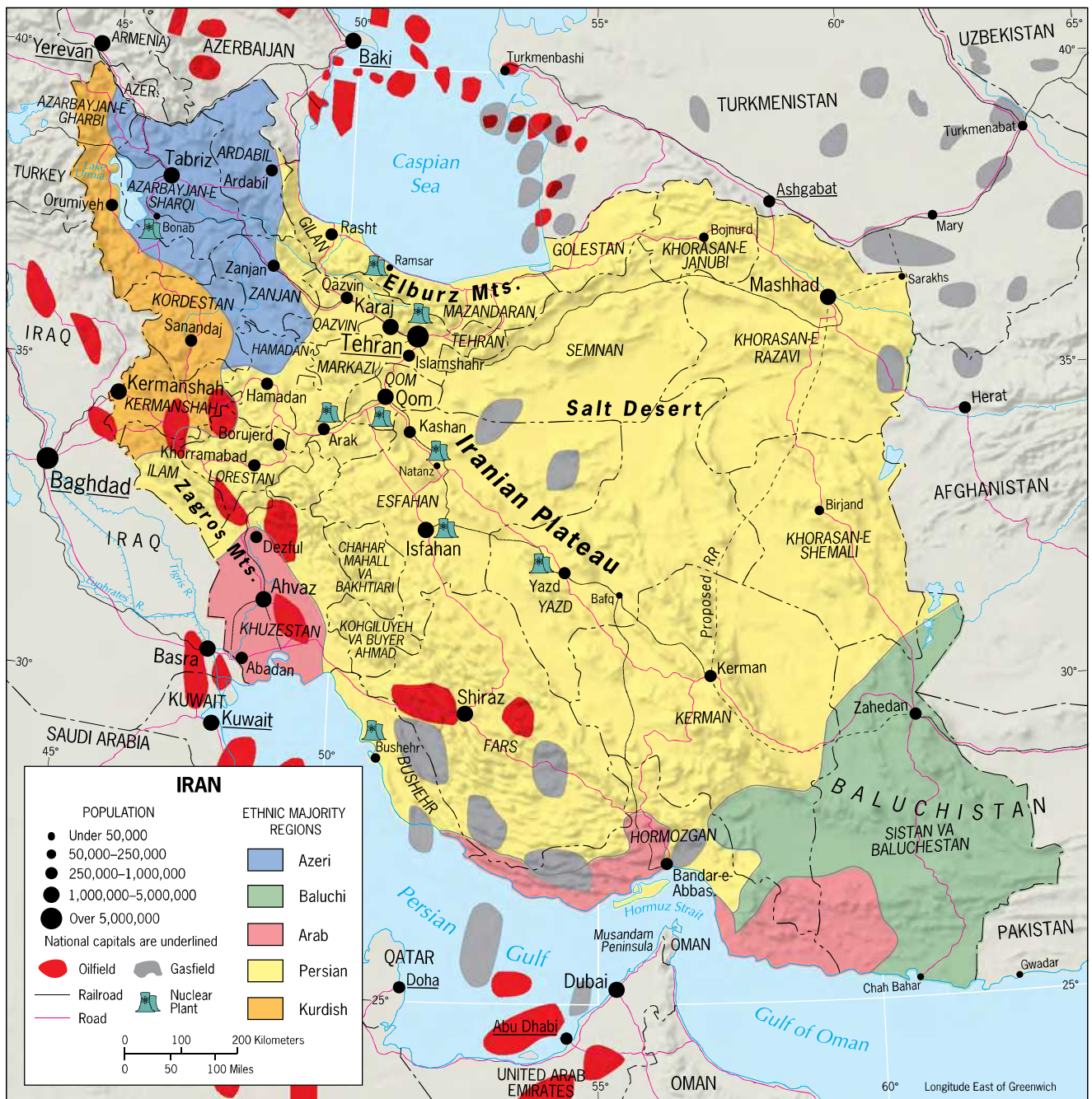


FIGURE 7B-11

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country is at a low ebb, with prices rising about 25 percent per year, in no small part due to international embargoes related to Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities.

Iran's rise as a (near) nuclear power and its regional ambitions are not surprising. Although revolutionary Iran disavowed the imperial designs of its Persian predecessors, this does not mean that its national interests now end at its borders. Tehran has a major stake in developments in Iraq and Afghanistan, both neighbors; it has an already-nuclear and unstable Pakistan on its southeastern border; it has a strong interest in the fate of Shi'ite majorities and minorities elsewhere in the realm; it has long been an avowed en-

emy of Israel and a strong supporter of Palestinian causes; and it has funded organizations labeled terrorist whose actions have even reached across the Atlantic.

Since the beginning of this decade, there has been talk of possible attacks by the United States and/or Israel on Iran to destroy its escalating nuclear capabilities. Given the regime's extremely hostile position toward Israel, that country is especially nervous about Iran's intentions. However, it would be difficult to actually destroy key (increasingly subterranean) facilities, in part because intelligence may be lacking. Iran's worsening economic condition, accentuated by international sanctions, might make the regime more

receptive to voluntarily agreeing to abandon its nuclear-weapon ambitions in exchange for an end to those sanctions, but nothing was in the works at press time.

■ TURKESTAN: THE SIX STATES OF CENTRAL ASIA

For many centuries, Turkish (Turkic) peoples spread outward across a vast central Asian domain that extended from Mongolia and Siberia to the Black Sea. Propelled by population growth and energized by Islam, they penetrated Iran, defeated the Byzantine Empire in present-day Turkey, and colonized much of southeastern Europe. Eventually, their power declined as Mongols, Chinese, and then Russians invaded their strongholds. During the twentieth century, the Soviet Union ruled most of this region and, between China and the Caspian Sea, created five Soviet Socialist Republics named after the majority peoples within their borders. Thus the Kazakhs, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, and other Turkic peoples retained some geographic identity in what was then Soviet Central Asia. These Republics became independent when the USSR imploded in 1991 (Fig. 7B-12).

As we define it here, Turkestan includes six states: (1) *Kazakhstan*, territorially larger than the other five combined but situated astride a major ethnic transition zone; (2) *Turkmenistan*, relatively closed and dictatorial, but with important frontage on the Caspian Sea and bordering both Iran and Afghanistan; (3) *Uzbekistan*, the most populous state and situated at the heart of the region; (4) *Kyrgyzstan*, wedged between powerful neighbors and chronically unstable; (5) *Tajikistan*, regionally and culturally divided as well as strife-torn; and (6) *Afghanistan* (which was never part of the USSR), engulfed in almost continuous warfare since it was invaded by Soviet forces in 1979.

Central Asia—*Turkestan*—is a still-evolving region marked by enormous ethnic complexity and diversity. The detailed map of ethnolinguistic groups shown in Figure 7B-13 actually is a generalization of an even more complicated mosaic of peoples and cultures. Every cultural domain on the map also includes minorities that cannot be mapped at this scale, so that people of different faiths, languages, and ways of life rub shoulders everywhere. Often this results in friction, and at times such friction escalates into ethnic conflict. It should not come as a surprise, in this geographic context and given the Soviet legacy, that democracy is hard to come by: these countries are either autocratic or have flawed representative governments. Tajikistan, in fact, may already be labeled a failed state.

The States of Former Soviet Central Asia

During their hegemony over Central Asia, the Soviets tried to suppress Islam and install secu-

lar regimes (this was their objective when they invaded Afghanistan as well), but today Islam's revival is one of the defining qualities of this region. From Almaty to Samarkand, mosques are being repaired and revived, and Islamic dress again is part of the cultural landscape. National leaders make high-profile visits to Mecca; most are sworn into office with a hand on the Quran. All of Central Asia's countries now observe Islamic holidays. In other ways, too, Turkestan reflects the norms of the NASWA realm: in its dry-world environments and the clustering of its population; its mountain-fed streams irrigating farms and fields; its sectarian conflicts; and its oil-based economies. It also is a region where democratic government remains an elusive goal.

Turkestan's intricate ethnolinguistic mosaic is vividly represented in Figure 7B-13. Although states in this region tend to be named after their largest ethnic population sectors, political boundaries do not conform to the distribution of cultures. Perhaps the most complex cultural fabric is that of Afghanistan, populated by Pushtuns (occasionally spelled Pashtuns), Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, and several lesser groups. Add to this the region's rugged relief, extensive deserts, and limited surface communications, and you can see why national integration is such a difficult challenge here.

Kazakhstan is the region's giant and borders two even greater territorial titans: Russia and China (Fig. 7B-12). During the Soviet period, northernmost Kazakhstan was heavily Russified and become, in effect, part of Russia's Southeastern Frontier (see Fig. 2B-1). Rail and road links crossed the area mapped as the Kazakh–Russian Transition Zone, connecting the north to Russia. The Soviets made

Astana, Kazakhstan's capital since 1998, exhibits spectacular architecture to symbolize the Kazakh nation, its rapid economic development and modernization, and its aspiration to become the key urban center for all of Turkestan. This is the Bayterek Tower, which depicts a mythical giant poplar tree containing a golden egg in its branches.



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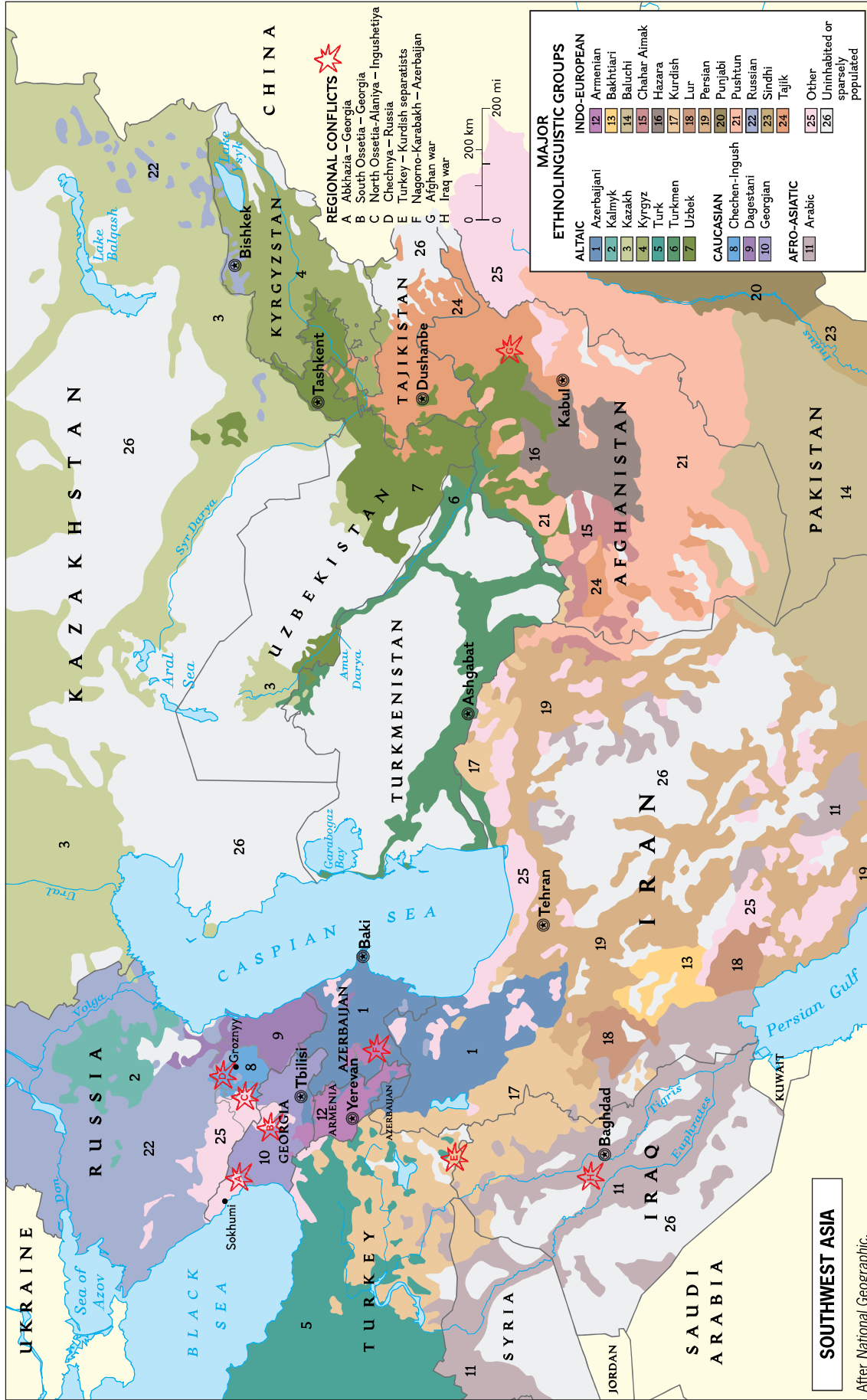


FIGURE 7B-12

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Almaty, deep inside the Kazakh domain, the territory’s capital. Today the Kazakhs are in control, and they in turn have moved the capital to Astana (see photo), right in the heart of the Transition Zone, where over 4 million Russians (who constitute 24 percent of the total national population of 17.3 million) still live. Clearly, Astana is another **forward capital** [8].

Kazakhstan is now leading an energy boom in Central Asia: it already ranks among the world’s leading producers of uranium as well as the top 20 oil-producing countries. Economic growth has averaged 8 percent per year over the past decade. Figure 7B-12 further reveals Kazakhstan’s position as a bridge between the huge oil reserves of the northern Caspian Basin and China. New oil and gas



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FIGURE 7B-13



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Kyrgyzstan's dry scrublands offer few agricultural opportunities besides pastoralism, and these quickly peter out with rising elevation here in the foothills of the Tian Shan mountain corridor that marks the Chinese border. The semi-nomadic herders of these marginal highlands must constantly move their animals in search of pasture grass, and reside in portable tent-like dwellings known as *yurts*. The yurt is native to Turkestan and its distinctive crown is the central symbol on the post-Soviet flag of Kyrgyzstan.

pipelines operating across Kazakhstan are serving to reduce China's dependence on oil imports carried by tankers along distant international sea lanes.

Uzbekistan occupies the heart of Turkestan and borders every other state in it. Uzbeks not only make up more than 80 percent of the population of 31 million, but also form substantial minorities in a number of neighboring states. The capital, Tashkent, lies in the eastern core area of the country, where most of the people live in towns and farm villages, and the crowded Fergana Valley is the focus. In the far west lies the shrunken Aral Sea, whose feeder rivers were diverted into cotton fields and croplands during the Soviet occupation; heavy use of pesticides contaminated the groundwater, and countless thousands of local people continue to suffer from cancers and other catastrophic medical problems as a result.

Turkmenistan, the autocratic desert republic that extends all the way from the Caspian Sea to the borders of Afghanistan, has a population of 5.3 million, of which nearly 90 percent are ethnic Turkmen. During the Soviet era, communist planners initiated work on a massive project—the Garagum (Kara Kum) Canal designed to transfer water from Turkestan's eastern mountains into the heart of the desert. Today the canal is 1100 kilometers (700 mi) long, and it has enabled the cultivation of more than one million hectares (ca. 3 million acres) of cotton, vegetables, and fruits. The plan is to extend the canal all the way to the Caspian Sea, but meanwhile Turkmenistan has hopes of greatly expanding its oil and gas output from Caspian

coastal and offshore reserves. But take another look at Figure 7B-12: this country's relative location is clearly disadvantageous for export routes.

Kyrgyzstan's topography and political geography are reminiscent of the Caucasus. The agricultural economy is generally weak, consisting of pastoralism in the highlands and farming in the valleys. Mapped in yellow in Figure 7B-12, Kyrgyzstan lies intertwined with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the point of having exclaves and enclaves along their common borders. Ethnic Kyrgyz constitute about 70 percent of the population of 5.9 million. More than three-fourths of the people profess allegiance to Islam, and (orthodox-Sunni) Wahhabism has achieved a strong foothold here as well; the town of Osh is often referred to as the headquarters of this movement in Turkestan. In 2010, ethnic rioting erupted in Osh between the

Kyrgyz majority and the Uzbek minority, killing hundreds and placing the country in jeopardy of breaking apart. Tens of thousands of Uzbeks, who make up roughly 14 percent of the total population but form a prosperous merchant class, fled their homes.

Tajikistan's mountainous scenery is even more spectacular than Kyrgyzstan's, and here as well topography is a barrier to the integration of a multicultural society. The Tajiks, who constitute more than 80 percent of the population of 7.4 million, are ethnically Persian (Iranian), not Turkic, and speak an Indo-European language related to Persian. Most Tajiks, despite their Persian affinities, are Sunni Muslims, not Shi'ites. Small though it is, regionalism to the point of state failure plagues Tajikistan: the government in Dushanbe is repeatedly at odds with the barely connected northern part of the country (Fig. 7B-12), a boiling cauldron not only of Islamic revivalism but also of anti-Tajik, Uzbek activism.

Fractious Afghanistan

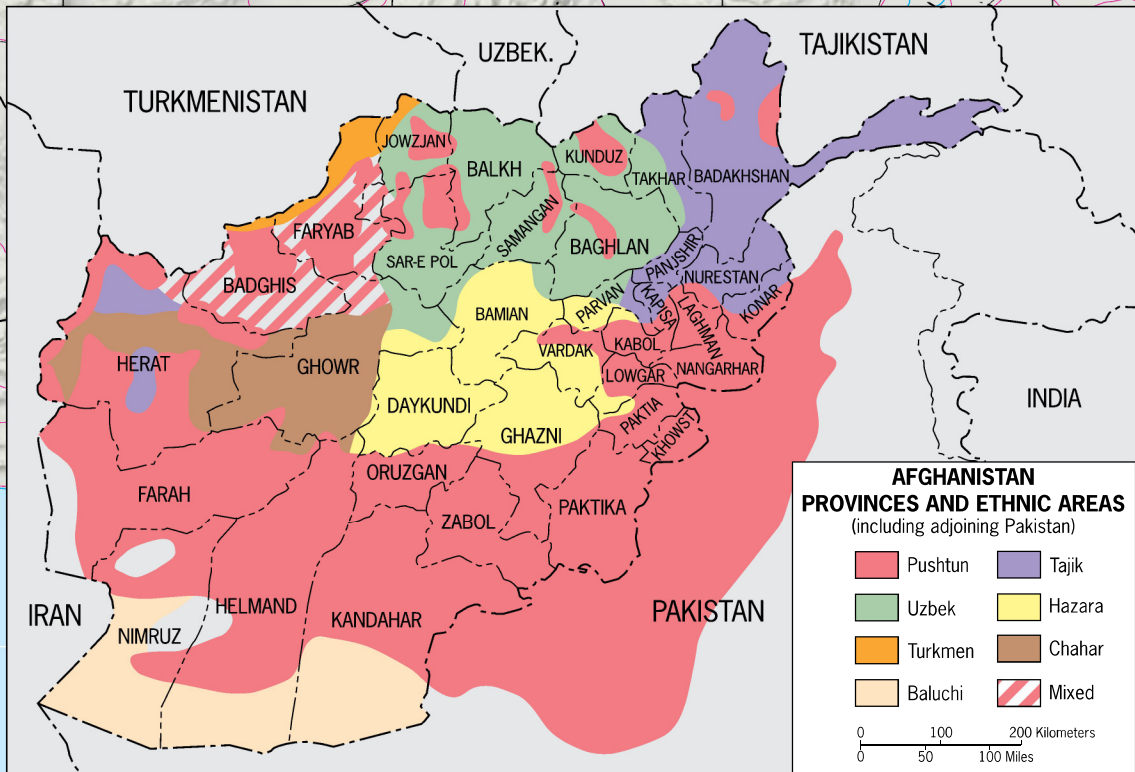
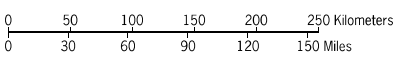
Afghanistan, the southernmost country in this region, exists because the British and Russians, competing for hegemony in this area during the nineteenth century, agreed to tolerate it as a cushion, or **buffer state** [9], between them. This is how Afghanistan acquired the narrow extension leading from its main territory eastward to the Chinese border—the Vakhn Corridor (Fig. 7B-14). As the colonialists delimited it, Afghanistan adjoined the domains of the Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Tajiks to the north, Persia (now Iran) to the west, and the western flank of British India (now Pakistan) to the east.

Landlocked and Fragmented

Geography and history seem to have conspired to divide Afghanistan. As Figure 7B-14 shows, the towering Hindu Kush range dominates the center of the country, creating three broad environmental zones: the relatively well-watered, fertile northern plains and basins; the rugged, earthquake-prone

AFGHANISTAN

- Highest relief
- Moderate relief
- Low relief
- Main opium-poppy growing areas
- Forest
- Steppe, grassland
- Road
- The Ring Road
- Railroad
- International boundary
- Provincial boundary
- TAJIK/T Ethnic group



AFGHANISTAN PROVINCES AND ETHNIC AREAS
(including adjoining Pakistan)

 Pushtun	 Tajik
 Uzbek	 Hazara
 Turkmen	 Chahar
 Baluchi	 Mixed

0 100 200 Kilometers
0 50 100 Miles