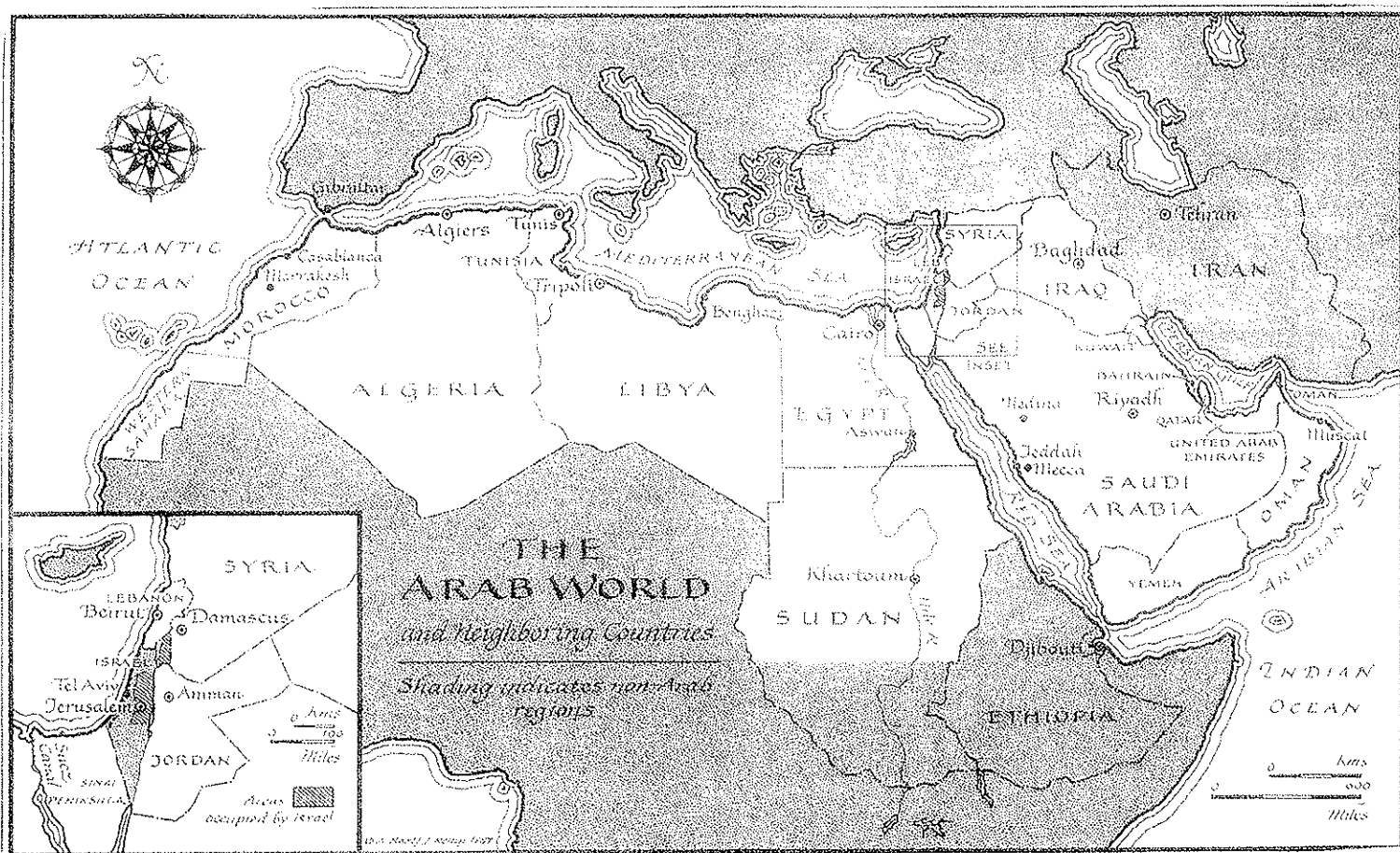


# The Arab World



الحمد لله الذي جعل القلوب والنفوس والارواح والاشباح والبرصا

Royal Divani script: "Beauty is the joy of hearts, the balm of injury, the adornment of life and its elixir."

# **Who Are the Arabs?**

- *Arabs define themselves as “those who speak Arabic as their native tongue and who identify themselves as Arabs.” This currently consists of about 300 million people living mostly in 17 independent countries plus the Palestinian Territories that make up “The Arab World.” They are:*

<b>Morocco</b>	<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>
<b>Tunisia</b>	<b>Syria</b>	<b>Yemen</b>
<b>Algeria</b>	<b>Iraq</b>	<b>Oman</b>
<b>Libya</b>	<b>*Palestinian Territories</b>	<b>United Arab Emirates</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Qatar</b>
<b>Sudan</b>	<b>Kuwait</b>	<b>Bahrain</b>

*\*Palestinians are Arab, although they are a nation without a recognized country.*

- *Arabs are not a monolithic group. There are many ethnic and religious groups as well as diverse histories, geographies, governments, and social norms. Many current borders of the region were drawn up by colonial powers less than a century ago.*
- *The Arab World does not correspond to the Muslim World. Arabs make up less than 20% of Muslims worldwide. Also, not all Arabs are Muslim; there are Arab Jews, Arab Christians, Arab Bahai’s ... and several other religious Arab identities.*
- *Though Arabs have existed since ancient times, most did not identify themselves with a collective “Arab consciousness” until about 100 years ago. Some Arab families/tribes claim descent from one of the twelve tribes of Abraham’s first son, Ishmael. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) claims decent from one of these sons.*
- *Arabs are “collectivists” as a unit of society, with strong emphasis on the family and/or tribal identity. Whatever one person does is seen as directly impacting others in the group.*
- *Along with Hebrews, Assyrians, Chaldeans and others, Arabs are a Semitic people. The Arabic language is likewise related to other Semitic languages.*
- *Although fewer than one in five Muslims worldwide speak Arabic as their native language, all Muslims consider Arabic as a sacred language since Muhammad received God’s messages in Arabic, as recorded in the Qur’an.*

*Johnnie Hicks – 09/16/13*

# Arab Culture and Beliefs

- *Arabs have a rich cultural heritage and are proud of their historical contributions to religion, philosophy, literature, mathematics, medicine, art, architecture, and the natural sciences.*
- *Almost everyone believes in God, acknowledges His power over this life, and has a strong religious identity. Humans cannot control all things; some are in the hands of Al-lah (“Ensha-allah” --- “if God wills!”)*
- *The basis of Arab society is the family, which often includes a tribal identity. Individuals are not generally seen as independent from their “collectivist” group; therefore, the behavior of each group member affects the whole group.*
- *A person’s dignity, honor, and reputation are of paramount importance; no effort should be spared to protect them! Piety is one of the most admirable personal attributes. One must behave at all times in ways that create a good impression on others.*
- *Loyalty to one’s family takes precedence over personal preferences. Also, loyalty to the “honor of the family” may take precedence over the “truth” in communication.*
- *One’s personal status is generally determined at birth according to family background, reputation, and social class. One who is born into an honorable family is said to “come from a good tent.”*
- *There are often very strong “in-group – out-group” distinctions. One’s deepest values are generally reserved for members of one’s own family or group.*
- *Arabs think of themselves as exceptionally generous, hospitable, polite, loyal, and humanitarian; they see these traits as distinguishing them from other groups.*
- *Issues of “pride” and “shame” are critical to the Arab personality. One should always uphold the reputation and dignity of one’s self as well as one’s family or group. Perceived “shame” by an Arab may be masked or reframed.*
- *Arabs generally believe that they have been misunderstood by others and exploited by the Western World; the experience of the Palestinian people represents the most painful and present example.*

*Some ideas taken from Nydell, Margaret: Understanding Arabs – A Guide for Westerners.*

## **Understanding Arab Families**

- *Bloodlines are very important to many groups and are often linked to Biblical and/or ancient histories.*
- *Religion is extremely important and often the definer of one's identity.*
- *For many, the importance of place has deep spiritual and emotional significance, as there are very strong links with ancestry, religion, and a profound sense of "belonging".*
- *The collective honor of one's family name is among the most cherished values; it is a source of great pride and should always be pronounced correctly.*
- *Issues which determine "pride" and/or "shame" are of utmost value; one must try, at all times, to avoid being in a position of "shame."*
- *Loyalty to one's extended family and/or tribal group generally takes precedence over personal needs and interests; almost all important decisions are made according to what is considered best for the group.*
- *A person's dignity and honor are of paramount importance since these values are seen to reflect on the whole extended family.*
- *Piety is also one of the most admirable traits of human character; it is extremely important at all times to behave in a manner that creates a good impression on others.*
- *Courtesy, generosity, and superb hospitality are deemed to be among the highest values; these are often afforded to strangers and sometimes even one's enemies.*
- *Strong beliefs in the workings of fate means that human beings cannot control all of life's events; one must, therefore, always depend on the workings of God in life. One often hears "Ensha-Al-lah!" ("If God wills!"), or "Masha-Al-lah!" ("It's a blessing from God!")*
- *Since cultural beliefs about destiny are often rooted in the past, traditions are deeply honored and the future generally viewed with less certainty or importance.*
- *Social class and family membership are major determiners of one's personal status in life; "who one is" at birth is often seen as more important than "what one does" or seeks to accomplish.*
- *Tribal histories contribute to strong loyalties toward "insiders" of the group; "outsiders of the group" are often viewed with suspicion or less importance.*

## **Tips for Communicating**

- *When meeting, most people from the Middle East avoid physical contact with the opposite sex. "Salaam Aleikum" is the most commonly used greeting.*
- *A warm formality, rather than informality, is a good rule of thumb. One should never expose the bottom of a shoe to someone from the Middle East!*
- *Family matters are considered a private matter though a wish for everyone's good health is appropriate. A male should never inquire about another male's wife!*
- *Most Arabic speakers have a louder speech "norm" than most English speakers and also express more emotion. When husband and wife are together, the husband is usually the spokesperson for the family.*
- *Care must be taken that what is said does not create a position of "shame" for the family. For example, a "problem" needing to be resolved should be discussed in terms of the behavior, not the character of the person.*
- *"Saving face" is so important! One never says "no" when asked to do something, as this is considered very rude. Better to say: "I'll try."*
- *Oral communication generally is preferred over written communication. In verbal communication, the tendency is to be "indirect;" that is, emphasis is often placed on detail rather than the key issue. One should not expect to "get to the point" right away; the style of communicating is to be able to "fill in the blanks" of what is not said!*
- *In many cultures, something needs to be said two or three times to be considered important (the "3-time rule!")*
- *Be careful when admiring someone's possessions, particularly if visiting in their home. They may be culturally obliged to give it to you!*
- *Always use the right hand to pass something over to someone. (The left hand is traditionally thought to be the hand used for other purposes).*
- *The non-verbal "yes" is generally a drop of the chin forward. Throwing the head back slightly has the opposite meaning.*
- *Use hand and finger gestures sparingly. The "thumbs-up" gesture has a very negative meaning in the Middle East!*
- *Hospitality is important in the Middle East. Consider an offer of tea (two or three times!) if possible before the start of a meeting or important conversation.*

# Some Arab Proverbs

*"The hand of God is with the group."*

*"The world changes – one day honey, next day onion."*

*"A concealed sin is 2/3d's forgiven."*

*"A foolish man may be known by six things: anger without cause; speech without profit; change without progress; inquiry without object; putting trust in a stranger; and mistaking foes for friends."*

*"Every sun has to set ... patience is beautiful."*

*"Only the tent pitched by your own hands will stand."*

*"Support your brother, whether he is the tyrant or the tyrannized."*

*"The monkey in the eyes of his mother is a gazelle."*

*"Older than you by a day ... wiser than you by a year."*

*"Do not dress as the infidels lest you become like them."*

*"Seek counsel of him who makes you weep, not of him who makes you laugh."*

*"Believe what you see and lay aside what you hear."*

*"A known mistake is better than an unknown truth."*

*"A horse of good breed is not dishonored by his saddle."*

*"Every ambitious man is a captive and every covetous one a pauper."*

*"Measure your guilt ... then stretch your legs!"*

*"He who plants thorns must never expect to gather roses."*

*"Bring up your children other than the way you were brought up yourselves, for they were born for times other than yours."*

*"The knife of the family does not cut."*

*"A book is a garden carried in your pockets."*

*"Repetition teaches even a donkey."*

## **Famous Arab-Americans**

### **Science and medicine**

Dr. Michael DeBakey – famous heart surgeon, Baylor University; died 2008

Dr. Elias Corey – 1990 Nobel Prize winner for chemistry

Farouk El-Baz – space program specialist who helped plan Apollo moon landings

Christa McAuliffe – teacher/astronaut who died on the Challenger space shuttle

### **Political figures**

Ralph Nadar – Consumer advocate and outspoken political speaker

George Mitchell – former U.S. Senate Majority Leader from Maine; also served as an official U.S. negotiator for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process

John Sununu – former White House Chief of Staff; Governor of New Hampshire

Donna Shalala – former Secretary of Health and Human Services

Dr. Philip Habib – special Presidential envoy and Ambassador

Helen Thomas – 50-year veteran with UPI; dean of the White House press corps; died July 20, 2013

Ray LaHood – Congressman from Illinois

### **Humanitarians**

Candy Lightner – founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

Danny Thomas – founder of St. Jude's Children's Hospital (late comedian and entertainer); also: Marlo Thomas, his daughter

Ralph Johns – key participant in the 1960's Civil Rights Movement

### **Business and Entrepreneur**

Dr. Joseph Jacobs – founder of the international Jacobs Engineering Group

Dr. Ray Irani – President and CEO of Occidental Petroleum

Najeeb Halaby – former head of Federal Aeronautics Authority; former CEO of Pan-American Airlines (His daughter is the former Queen Noor of Jordan)

J.M. Haggart – designer and owner of Haggart Slacks for men

Tony Ismail – founder of Alamo Flag Company, largest retailer of flags in the U.S

### **Entertainment**

Radio: Casey Kasem and Dan Bustany - founders of Casey's Countdown and American Top 40 radio shows

Singers: Paul Anka; Paula Abdul; Frank Zappa; "Tiffany"; "Tiny Tim"; "Shikara"

Actors/Actresses: Jamie Farr ("MASH."); F. Murray Abraham (Oscar for Best Actor in "Amadeus"); Marlo Thomas (television series); Michael Ansara

(star of "Cochise"); Kristy McNichol ("Empty Nest"); Kathy Najimy (Sister Act);

Michael Nouri ("Flashdance").

Directors/Producers: Assad Kelada ("Family Ties," "Who's the Boss?" etc.);

Moustapha Akkad (epic film producer: "Halloween"); Tony Thomas

("Golden Girls"; "Driving Miss Daisy").

### **Sports**

Bill George – NFL Hall of Fame Linebacker

Doug Flutie – Heisman Trophy winner and NFL quarterback

From: *The Prophet*

By: *Kahlil Gibran*

*On "Children"*

*"And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said:  
'Speak to us of Children.'*

*"And he said:*

*'Your children are not your children;  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you, but they are not from you,  
And though they are with you yet, they belong not to you.*

*You can give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You can house their bodies, but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
Which you cannot visit ... not even in your dreams.*

*You can strive to be like them,  
But seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward, nor tarries with yesterday.*

*You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,  
And He bends you with His might, that His arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;  
For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is  
stable'."*



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Compiled by Johnnie Hicks – 09/16/13

# **“Understanding Arabs and The Arab World”**

## **A Little Quiz**

**Just circle “T” for “True” and “F” for “False”:**

- T     F     *Everyone living in the Middle East is part of “The Arab World.”*
- T     F     *“The Arab World” is the same as “The Muslim World.”*
- T     F     *Arabic is the national language of people in “The Arab World.”*
- T     F     *Iran and Iraq are both Arab countries.*
- T     F     *Important Arab values include ‘loyalty,’ ‘honor,’ and ‘coming from a good tent.’*
- T     F     *Bloodlines, religion, and place are important to most Arabs.*
- T     F     *Arabs always attempt to improve their status in life after they grow up.*
- T     F     *Arab families tend to be hierarchal, male dominated, and highly bonded.*
- T     F     *Family matters are always settled by “outsiders” of the Arab family.*
- T     F     *Arabs generally prefer written communication over oral communication.*
- T     F     *Exposing the soles of one’s shoe may be the worst insult an Arab can express.*
- T     F     *“Saving face” may be of higher value than “truthful words” at times.*
- T     F     *Education in “The Arab World” depends heavily on rote memorization.*
- T     F     *Teachers always punish “cheating” in Arab schools.*
- T     F     *Jews and Christians have had little impact in the history of Arabs.*
- T     F     *Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, and Libya are all part of “The Arab World.”*
- T     F     *Arab Muslims constitute the largest group of Muslims worldwide.*

*On the back of this page, write a few brief responses to these two questions:*

- 1. What are some perceptions that people of the United States have about Arabs?*
- 2. What are some perceptions that people in the Arab World have about the United States?*

# Arab Country Snapshots

## **North Africa**

### **Morocco (Officially: “Kingdom of Morocco”)**

- Population is 32 million. Area is 172,413 square miles. Capital is Rabat.
- Ethnic groups are Arab (55%); and Berber (44%). Most Moroccans speak Arabic or French.
- Religion is 98% Muslim (Sunni); few Christians and Jews (about ½ of all Jews in the Arab World live in Morocco).
- Government is a Constitutional Monarchy; the King is both political and spiritual leader. The royal family claims descent from the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). King Hassan II ruled for 38 years (died 1999); son King Mohammad VI now rules.
- Morocco boasts the famous cities of Tangier, Casablanca (largest city with 5 million people), and Marrakesh ... all of which are very popular tourist destinations.
- Tribal societies are important in Morocco, particularly in the rural areas. Traditional farming is the occupation of about ½ of the population.
- Sub-Saharan Africa, Moorish Spain, and traditions of the indigenous Berbers all contribute to the complex and sometimes mystical cultures and lifestyles of Moroccans.
- About 70% of Moroccans are under age 25. At least 50% of university students are women.
- Moroccan women have the freedom to dress as they choose; however, modesty is the rule for both men and women.

### **Algeria (Officially: “Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria”)**

- Population is 34 million. Area is 919,590 square miles (4 times the size of Texas). Capital is Algiers. More than 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of land is in the Sahara Desert region.
- Ethnic groups are Arab and Berber. Seventy percent of Algerians are under age 30.
- Religion is 99% Muslim (Sunni).
- Government has Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches and is based on Islamic and socialistic law. President is Abdel-Aziz Bouteflika.
- Algeria gained independence from France on 5 July 1962. The long, traumatic war cost one million Algerian lives and 28,000 Frenchmen. Partly because of this, Arab nationalism is very strong. Urbanization is strongly emphasized.
- There is high polarization in Algeria between secular and Islamic groups. Fighting between political factions --- the National Liberation Front (primary) and the Islamic Salvation Front (rebel) --- resulted in more than 100,000 deaths between 1992-1998.
- Long wars have resulted in massive displacement of people, causing long-term stress.
- Family and social traditions tend to be very conservative; polygamy is still practiced but divorce laws are becoming more stringent.
- More women veil in Algeria than in any other North African country.

## **Tunisia (Officially: "Republic of Tunisia")**

- Population is 10 million. Area is 63,170 square miles. Capital is Tunis. Tunisia is the smallest of the North African countries of the Maghreb.
- Ethnic groups are mostly Arabs or Berbers, with several smaller European identities.
- Religion is 98% Muslim (Sunni Maliki); also a few Jews and Christians.
- Government is a Republic. President Zayn Al-Abdin Ben Ali was forced from office by protestors in 2011, beginning a movement later tagged as the "Arab Spring." The current President is Moncef Marzouki; Prime Minister is Hamadi Jebali.
- After gaining independence from France in 1957, Tunisia's first President, Habib Bourguiba styled himself as "The Liberator of Women." They now have the same divorce rights as men.
- Tunisians represent a Mediterranean culture, bridging European and African styles. About 60% of Tunisian families consider themselves to be culturally of "middle" to "upper" class.
- Society is cosmopolitan and many Tunisians are well-traveled. They enjoy a literacy rate of about 78% and are considered the most egalitarian country of North Africa.
- Tunisians are very passionate about their arts and have exquisite displays of tile mosaics in art and architecture as well as other artistic expressions.
- Tunisians are friendly and hospitable to one another as well as to outsiders. The government encourages tourism and private enterprise as key industries of the economy.
- Headscarves and veils are banned in most schools and government offices.

## **Libya (Officially: "The Libyan Republic")**

- Population is 6.5 million. Area is 679,362 square miles. Capital is Tripoli.
- Ethnic groups are Arab and Berber, with Berbers thought to be about 25%. (Berbers were the original inhabitants of the region before the Arab conquests of the seventh century.)
- Religion is 97% Muslim (Sunni) and historically tends to be very conservative.
- Libyan protests led to the 2011 "Arab Spring" overthrow of President Muammar Gaddafi, who had ruled Libya according to his own little "Green Book." Current elected President of the General National Congress of Libya as of June 25, 2013 is Nouri Abusahmain.
- The name "Libya" comes from Egyptian "Lebu" referring to the ethnic Berber people. It is the only North African nation that was colonized by Italy.
- Libya has long been divided into two distinct provincial divisions: "Tripolitania" in the west around Tripoli and "Cyrenaica" around Benghazi in the East.
- Tribalism is an important source of identity among most Libyans. Most estimates are that Libya has up to 140 different tribes, with around 30 holding particular political significance.
- The largest tribe is the "Warfalla," thought to be up to one-sixth of the total Libyan population. The second largest tribe is the "Magarha." The "Gaddadfa" tribe from which the former ruler emerged is one of Libya's smaller tribal groups but was highly favored during Gaddafi's long rule.
- Most Libyans are quick to offer hospitality even to strangers, but show passionate loyalty to family and extended tribal members.
- The current status of women is in some uncertainty. Under Gaddafi's socialistic rule, women enjoyed certain freedoms, even holding a few important government positions. During the civil fighting, women were the victims of massive rapes and violence. It is uncertain whether this represents a return to the subservient role of women in the

*traditional tribal society. Urban women are seen in more modern trends whereas "tradition" seems to overshadow constitutional freedoms in rural areas.*

### **Egypt (Officially: "Arab Republic of Egypt")**

- *Population is 80 million (approximately 25% between the ages of 18-25). Area is 386,662 square miles. Capital is Cairo ("El Qahira" - "the victorious").*
- *Ethnic groups are Egyptian (formerly "Copts"); Arab; Nubia; Berber; and others. Egypt has about 40% of the total Middle Eastern Arab population. Some Egyptians prefer to identify themselves as "descendants of the Pharaohs" rather than as "Arabs."*
- *Religion is 85-90% Muslim (mostly Sunni); 10-12% Christian (mostly Coptic); and a few other groups.*
- *Government is a Republic. Egypt's long-ruling President Hosni Mubarak was overthrown in a massive and generally peaceful "Arab Spring" uprising on Feb. 4, 2011. Egypt's third President Mohamed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood member, was likewise overthrown on July 4, 2013. The current interim government is headed by Adli Mansour and under the stewardship of the Egyptian military.*
- *Most of Egypt lies in a desert. About 98% of the people live on only 4% of the land.*
- *Egypt enjoys claims of great glories and achievements throughout history: the Sphinx, the Nile, ancient Luxor, the pyramids, and much more.*
- *Egypt holds the dominant political and cultural influence in the Arab World. The most influential Islamic seat of learning is Egypt's "Al Azhar University."*
- *Egypt has an abundance of professionally trained citizens but unemployment is above 13%. Two-thirds of Egypt's population is under the age of 30 but constitutes about 70% of the unemployed.*
- *Poverty is on the rise; food production is limited and provides only about 22% of local consumption. There are also rapidly increasing numbers of urban poor.*
- *Several Islamist groups have emerged out of Egypt, the most prominent being the Muslim Brotherhood. These organizations have gained support largely because they provide social services not available from the government. The current Egyptian government recently declared the Muslim Brotherhood "illegal," and it remains to be seen what the response might be.*
- *More than ½ of all university students in Egypt are women, who enjoy considerable personal freedom in pursuing their interests. Women also constitute about 28 percent of university professors.*
- *Most women did not wear the "hijab" until 20 years or so ago; now, more than 85% do so with many saying they are "reclaiming their Arab identity."*

### **Sudan (Officially: "Republic of the Sudan" and "South Sudan")**

- *Population is around 40 million. Total area is almost a million square miles. The capital of the North is Khartoum; the capital of South Sudan is Juba..*
- *Ethnic groups are Arab (70%); Nubians; Copts; Beja; and others.*
- *Religion is 97% Muslim in the Republic of the Sudan; South Sudan is about 60% Christian and 33% animist.*

- Since 1989, the northern government has been led by President Omar Al-Bashir who gained power via a military coup. The new country of South Sudan was created in 2011, and the President is Salva Kiir Mayardit.
- Sudan is the largest country in Africa and, if developed, could feed all of Africa. It is also one of the 25 poorest countries in the world, with 90% living below poverty level.
- Civil wars between the Muslim North and Christian South have led to more than 2 million deaths and 4 million displaced persons. Draught and famine have taken countless others.
- The culture is highly tribal and diverse; there are about 600 different tribes and more than 200 languages. Both males and females often indicate their tribal identity with facial markings. Among southern tribes, wealth is sometimes determined by the number of cattle one owns. A social strata exists with some tribes being more favored than others.
- The Sudanese people have a long oral tradition with their histories, legends, and myths reflected in colorful traditions, ceremonies, and performances.

## **The “Levant” and Central Region**

### **Lebanon (Officially: “Lebanese Republic”)**

- Population is 4 million. Area is 4,015 square miles. Capital is Beirut (“Beyrouth”).
- The largest ethnic groups claim Phoenician, Canaanite, or West Aramaic descent (50-70%); second largest are Arab (20-30%); followed by Armenian, Greek, Assyrian, Hebrew, Kurd, and Persian.
- Religion is about 54% Muslim, 42% Christian (mostly Maronite), and 5% Druze.
- Government is a Republic. By law, the President must be a Maronite Christian; the Prime Minister, a Sunni Muslim; and Speaker of Parliament, a Shi’ite Muslim. Current President is Michel Suleiman; Prime Minister is Najib Mikati.
- Many Lebanese take great pride in their ancestry to the Phoenicians of history.
- The name “Lebanon” comes from Aramaic word “laban” meaning “white,” referring to the snow-capped tops of Mount Lebanon. It was created from the region of Greater Syria as a haven for Christians who had suffered massacres by the Druze and Turks in the 1860’s.
- Lebanon has long been a crossroads of civilizations and possesses a vibrant, rich culture. Beirut is still recognized by many as the cultural center of the Arab World. However, since the civil wars between 1975-1990, West Beirut has become the Muslim sector and East Beirut the Christian sector.
- Lebanon gained independence from France in 1938. It was once the most cosmopolitan country with the highest standard of living in the Arab World.
- Civil Wars between 1975-1990 resulted in 25% of the people being killed or misplaced. Many have fled and resettled in other areas of the world, particularly in Argentina and other South American countries.
- On February 14, 2005 Lebanon was again shaken by the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Strong Syrian influence was blamed for his murder, and the last of Syrian troops were forced to leave Lebanon on 26 April 2005.
- Rafik Hariri’s son, Saad Hariri was elected Prime Minister; however, Hezbollah members of Parliament recently forced his resignation.

- *Lebanon enjoys a high literacy rate. The American University at Beirut (established by American Arabists in 1866) has been a major learning center for the Middle East. Its President, Malcolm Kerr was assassinated on January 18, 1984. Current president of this university is Peter Dorman.*
- *Lebanese dress in traditional and modern clothing; veiling for women is optional.*

### **Syria (Officially: "Syrian Arab Republic")**

- *Population is about 23 million (36% under age 15). Area is 71,498 square miles. Capital is Damascus; largest city is Aleppo. Sixty per cent live in Aleppo Province.*
- *Ethnic groups in Syria include Arabs (88%); Kurds (10%); Armenians; others.*
- *Religion is 90% Muslim (70% Sunni; 13% Shi'a, including Alawite; 5% Druze); and 10% Christian.*
- *Government is a Socialist Republic. President Hafez Al-Assad died in 2000; his son Bashar now heads the country. He is an Alawite Muslim (branch of Shi'ism).*
- *The country of Syria was carved out of the larger area known as Greater Syria during the Ottoman rule. It was given to France as a mandate following the "carving up" of the Middle East following the victories of World War I.*
- *Syrians gained independence from the French Mandate on April 17, 1946.*
- *Syria claims one of the oldest and most inhabited cities of the world, Aleppo. For centuries it was Greater Syria's largest city and the Ottoman Empire's third largest. The ancient heart of the old city of Aleppo, which the Syrians refer to as "our soul," was utterly destroyed and burned during the September 2012 civil war in Syria.*
- *Syria was the first Arab country to condemn Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and contributed 20,000 troops to the first Gulf War. Later, Syria accepted more than a million refugees fleeing Iraq after the 2003 U.S. invasion.*
- *Syrians are currently in a 2½ year long bloody civil war between President Bashar Al-Assad's forces and a coalition of rebel forces. More than 100,000 Syrians have been killed and at least 2,000,000 displaced. The situation has led to devastation of the country and a major humanitarian crisis with no end in sight.*
- *The Syrian military's use of chemical weapons on Aug. 21, 2013 led to a U.N. agreement to remove and destroy its chemical stockpiles. Uncertainties of who the several opposition groups represent, as well as fears of a second bloody civil war between them should the Assad regime collapse prevents outside forces from intervening in the conflict.*
- *Syrians are friendly and very hospitable ... and proud of their long, rich cultural heritage that is rooted in Mesopotamian origins. They enjoy a high level of education; women hold 39% of the positions in Syria's national universities.*

### **Jordan (Officially: "Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan")**

- *Population is 6.5 million. Area is 35,637 square miles. Capital is Amman.*
- *Ethnic groups are Arab (including Bedouin); as well as Circassians, Chechans, and others.*

- Religion is 90% Muslim (mostly Sunni; also Shi'ite and Druze); 6% is Christian.
- Government is a Constitutional Monarchy, with a ruling family who claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The current ruling monarch is King Abdullah II. He is the grandson of Jordan's first Heshemite monarch and the son of former King Hussein.
- King Hussein ruled Jordan from 1953-1999. In 1978, he married his 4<sup>th</sup> wife, American Lisa Halaby who became the popular Queen Noor. King Abdullah's wife is Queen Rania, a public champion of women's rights, though she is said to be unpopular among many Jordanians.
- Created out of Greater Syria under British mandate at the end of World War I, Jordan officially gained its independence from Britain in 1946.
- Jordan enjoys a rich history with roots in the Fertile Crescent and has strong historical and cultural ties with Iraq. Jordan's first monarch was a brother to the first monarch of newly created "Iraq," both sons of the then ruling Saudi monarch. Iraq eventually overthrew their monarchy, but the dynasty continues in Jordan.
- Jordanians are historically identified as dwellers of the East Bank of the Jordan River. The East Bank is tied to the Heshemite tribes of Northeast Saudi Arabia. (Heshemites are the descendents of Noah's son, Shem).
- About 60% of Jordan's population is Palestinian Arabs (from the West Bank of the Jordan) who speak a different dialect of Arabic than that of native Jordanians.
- Jordan is currently caught in the throes of the Syrian conflict, with thousands of refugees crossing over into Jordanian territories. During the Iraq War, Jordan also became a haven for more than 700,000 refugees after the 2003 U.S. invasion. Refugees are creating overwhelming challenges to Jordan's economic and political stability.
- Jordan continues to work unceasingly on a resolution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. King Hussein once said that Jerusalem should be " ... the symbol of peace between the followers of the three monotheistic religions. Solving the problem of Jerusalem will symbolize the coming together of all the children of Abraham."
- Women now hold 5.5% of the seats in the lower house and 12.7% in the upper house. Veiling in Jordan is optional.

### **Iraq (Officially: "Republic of Iraq")**

- Population is around 32 million. Area is 168,754 square miles. Capital is Baghdad.
- Ethnic groups are Arab (75%); Kurd (20%); and others (Assyrian, Armenian, Chaldean, Turkoman).
- Religion is 90-95% Muslim (60% Shi'ite; 32% Sunni); 5-8% Christian. Many "sacred sites" for Shi'a Muslims are located throughout the country, especially in the south.
- The "elected" government consists of a Shi'ite Prime Minister (Nouri Al-Malaki), a Kurdish President (Jamal Talabani), and a council elected from the 18 provinces of Iraq (3 of which are Kurdish). President Talabani suffered a medical emergency on Nov. 18, 2012 and remains hospitalized in Germany.
- The name "Iraq," means "country with deep roots." It was determined by the British advisor, Gertrude Bell who was very influential in the formation of the new country after it was "carved out" of the Ottoman Empire following WWI.
- Iraq, formerly known as Mesopotamia, has its beginnings in the Fertile Crescent, with the longest histories of civilization in the Western World. Its great time line includes the civilizations of Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Medes, Persians, and others.
- Iraq is also the sacred birthplace of Biblical stories including the Garden of Eden, Noah, Abraham, Jonah, King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, Ezekiel, and others. Many of the ancient



- archeological sites and artifacts were destroyed and/or damaged as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and the numerous bombings and civil conflict that followed.*
- *Baghdad (name means "gift of God") was the illustrious center of the Great Islamic Empire from the 8<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, where scientists, philosophers, scholars, and artists from around the world gathered to learn and to lay the foundations of today's modern sciences and schools of learning. These developments were later brought into Europe's Renaissance period.*
  - *The embargo imposed on Iraq following the 1991 Gulf War resulted in more than a million deaths, mostly children. Another million Iranian and Iraqis died during the Iran-Iraq War between 1980-88. At least another 100,000 Iraqis have died as a result of the invasion by United States and British forces in March, 2003.*
  - *In spite of an increasingly brutal dictator, Iraq enjoyed one of the most secular and cosmopolitan lifestyles in the Middle East under Baathist rule. Much is at stake currently, as political groups, as well as terrorists, continue to carry out killings and massive violence.*
  - *Before 2003, Iraqi women were considered the most liberated in the Arab World. Many became lawyers, physicians, professors, engineers, writers, and artists. The future for women is less certain under the current Shi'a government rule.*

### **Kuwait (Officially: "State of Kuwait")**

- *Population is 2.9 million (more than half are foreign workers). Area is 6,880 square miles. Capital is Al Kuwait.*
- *Religion is 85% Muslim (60% Sunni; 25% Shi'ite); 15% other (Christian, Hindu).*
- *Ethnic groups include Arab, South Asian, Persian, and others.*
- *Government is a Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy. Current Chief of State (a semi-hereditary position) is Emir Sabah IV Al-Ahmad Al-Jabar Al-Sabah who appoints a Prime Minister (currently Jabar al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah).*
- *Kuwait is an oil rich kingdom located on the coast of the Arabian (Persian) Gulf.*
- *Under the Ottoman Empire (ended in 1921) Kuwait was a province included with the area that is now Iraq. It became independent of British control in 1961 and has since been ruled by the Al Sabah royal family.*
- *The violent invasion by Saddam Hussein in 1990 left heavy economic, physical, social, and psychological consequences on Kuwaitis.*
- *Kuwait maintains close political and cultural ties with Saudi Arabia, though it is not as austere in its restrictions. Society is tribal, very religious, & conservative.*
- *Men (and sometimes women --- though separated) participate in social gatherings known as "diwanahs" where they talk about history, politics, and other matters. Women are veiled but can drive and are not separated from social contact with men.*

## **The Gulf States**

### **Saudi Arabia (Officially: "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia")**

- *Population is 29 million (60% under age 18). Area is 756,985 square miles. Capital is Riyadh.*

- *There are 4 tiers of class in the society: 1) the royalty; 2) the educated elite; 3) the emerging middle class; and 4) the uneducated (mostly wandering Bedouins).*
- *Religion is virtually total Muslim (92% Sunni Wahabi; 8% Shi'ite). Other religions are banned, though ex-patriots may practice their religions in designated areas.*
- *Government is a Monarchy. King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz assumed the throne following the death of his half-brother, King Fahd bin Abdul al-Aziz Al Saud on August 1, 2005. The newly named Crown Prince to the kingdom's throne is Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz al Saud.*
- *The ruling family are descendents King Abdel-Aziz-ibn-Saud who unified the Bedouin tribes under the House of Saud in 1935. There are thousands of princes and princesses throughout the Kingdom.*
- *Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Mohammad and is central to Muslims worldwide. It is the home to the two Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. The Saudi monarch is the official "Keeper of the Two Holy Mosques."*
- *Most Saudis follow an austere Wahabi sect of Islam, which is rigid and puritanical (dress, prayer, alcohol prohibition; separation of men and women; total control of the media).*
- *The Kingdom is a welfare state; that is, all citizens who are not independently wealthy are entitled to a plot of land and \$80,000 to build a house.*
- *Religion governs all aspects of life in the Kingdom. Alcohol, pork products, pictures of women without covering, non-Muslim religious pictures, and any non-Muslim religious artifacts (such as Bibles or Buddha statues) are strictly forbidden.*
- *Saudi culture is severest on women, who must be fully veiled at all times when in public. Women cannot drive a car, go out alone, or leave the country without a male relative's permission. Most work in all female environments. However, women can own businesses (they own ¼ of the small businesses in Jeddah).*

### **Yemen (Officially: "Republic of Yemen")**

- *Population is 23.5 million. Area is 204,850 square miles. Capital is Sana'a.*
- *Ethnic groups in Yemen are Arab (92%); Somali (3.5%); and others.*
- *Religion is 99% Muslim (60% Sunni; 40% Shi'ite).*
- *Government is a Republic. Current President is Abed Rabul Mansour Hadi. Former President H.E. Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down in February, 2012 following massive protests for him to resign. Prime Minister is Mohamed Salem Basindwah.*
- *Sana'a is one of the world's most ancient cities, dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Tradition says that it was founded by Noah's son, Shem, who was guided here by a bird. Once part of the ancient Sabean Kingdom, Yemen's rich history dates back to 750 B.C.E.*
- *Formerly separated into "North Yemen" and "South Yemen", the country united to form a Republic in May, 1990.*
- *Yemen natives are known by their tribal identities and most live in remote villages made up of fellow tribesmen. There are frequent clashes between tribes, particularly between those of the northern and southern tribal groups.*
- *Yemen is thought to be an important training ground for AQAP (Al-Queda in the Arabian Peninsula). A U.S. drone strike on Aug. 30, 2013 killed AQAP leader Qaeed al-Dhahab, plus two others. Al-Dahahab was thought to be the brother-in-law of former American leader, Anwar Al-Alaki who was killed in Sep., 2011.*
- *Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world. 45% of the people live below the designated poverty level of \$1.25 per day.*

- *Yemeni culture is known to be colorful and tradition-oriented. Men wear distinctive dress, which is a sarong like skirt and wide belt in which the traditional dagger ("jambiyya") is placed. Women wear a "sharshaf," which is a black cloak over their (often very colorful) dresses or slacks.*

### **Oman (Officially "Sultanate of Oman")**

- *Population is 3 million. Area is 82,031 square miles. Capital is Muscat.*
- *Religion is 88% Muslim (mostly Ibadi); also Hindu (8%) and Christian (4%).*
- *Government is a Monarchy with hereditary rule. Current ruler is His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, whose family has ruled since 1744 after gaining independence from Iran.*
- *The Portuguese occupied Oman for more than a century until expelled by Imam Sultan bin Saif in 1650 C.E. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the Omanis ruled a far-flung empire, which continued until the early 1900's.*
- *Oman was forced to become a British Protectorate in 1891 because of piracy. The term "musketeer" originally referred to someone from Muscat.*
- *Under Qaboos' leadership, dramatic changes in health, education, and commercial development have occurred. Sultan Qaboos is recognized as one of the most innovative rulers in the Gulf region, particularly for promoting higher education and women's participation in society.*
- *Culture is very conservative, though it is known as a "land of friendly people."*
- *Men often wear bright blue, loose-fitting, floor-length shirt-dresses called "disdashas," often with a curved "khanjar" knife dangling from the waist. Women's clothing is colorful with bright-colored dresses, shawls, and veils.*
- *Omani women were given the right to vote in 1997. In 2004, 70% of university students were women.*

### **United Arab Emirates**

- *Population is nearly 5 million. Area is 32,000 square miles. Capital is Abu Dhabi. The main port and commercial center is Dubai.*
- *Religion is 96% Muslim (mostly Sunni); also minor Hindu and Christian sectors.*
- *Ethnicities in the U.A.E. are Emrati, Arab, Persian, South Asian, and others. Large numbers of Iranians migrated to the U.A.E. in the early 1900's and now constitute the largest ethnic group in Dubai. Many Indians and Pakistanis migrated during the 1960's.*
- *Government is a Federation; the U.A.E. is a union of seven sovereign sheikhdoms formed when the British withdrew from the Gulf in 1971. Current ruler is Sheikh Khalifi ibn Zayed Al-Nahayan.*
- *UAE culture ranges from traditional Bedouin customs and lifestyle to Western consumerism and sophistication. It is perhaps the most liberal country in the Gulf region but still very conservative by Western standards.*
- *Like Doha (Qatar), Dubai is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world. Its skylines are a magnificent testimony to its wealth and ingenuity.*
- *Men are recognized for wearing a white ankle-length shirt over pants; many women are seen wearing the abaya. Modern Western wear is also common in metropolitan areas.*

- Only about 2 million people living in the country are U.A.E citizens; the rest are expatriates from other Gulf countries, as well as from Pakistan, Iran, India, and elsewhere.
- While women are typically veiled, they are encouraged to pursue higher education.

### **Qatar (Officially “State of Qatar”)**

- Population is 1.4 million. Area is 4,416 square miles. Capital is Doha.
- Religion is 83% Muslim (mostly Sunni); also Christian (10%); and other (4%).
- Ethnic groups are Arab (40%); Indian (18%); Pakistani (18%); Iranian (10%); and other.
- Government is a traditional Monarchy. Present emir is Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifi al-Thani, who came to power in 1995 after ousting his father in 1995.
- Qatar is fabulously rich in oil and natural gas, accounting for 70% of its exports. In 2012, Forbes designated Qatar as the richest country in the world, with an \$88,000 GDP. Doha’s skylines attest to the magnificence of modern architecture and luxurious qualities.
- Qatar was the first Gulf country to have diplomatic contact with Israel in 1953.
- Qatari culture, like Saudi Arabian, revolves almost entirely around (Wahabi) Islam; however, women are allowed to drive cars and alcohol is readily available.
- Qatar is primarily a Bedouin culture with tribal loyalties and preferences for poetry and song perhaps over architecture and art. They are known for their arts of weaving.
- Qatar is also home to the important Al-Jazeera satellite television channel.
- Women are veiled and cover their bodies with a long black dress called “al-battoulah”; only the eyes, nose, and mouth are uncovered in public. Men wear a “throbe,” which is a long white shirt over loose pants, as well as the traditional loose headdress held on with a black rope.

### **Bahrain (Officially “Kingdom of Bahrain”)**

- Population is 700,000. Area is 257 square miles. Capital is Al Manamah (Manama).
- Religion is 82% Muslim (mostly Shi’ite); also Christian (9%) and other (9%).
- Ethnic groups are Arabs (64%); Indo-Pakistani (14%); Persian (13%); Filipino (5%); and others.
- Government is a Constitutional Monarchy with hereditary rule. Current ruler is Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifi.
- Sometimes referred to as “Gateway to the Gulf,” the kingdom is actually an archipelago of 33 islands on the western side of the Arabian (Persian) Gulf.
- Bahrain has long been an important banking center and a centuries-old hub of foreign business and trade. It is possibly the most modernized of the Gulf States.
- A traditional mainstay of Bahrain is the drinking of traditional Arabian coffee.
- Bahrain’s capital is very modern, though traditional ways prevail throughout the country. The country’s literacy rate is around 85%.
- The United States maintains a large Naval facility in Bahrain.
- Bahraini women received voting rights in 2001 and constitute about 24% of the workforce.

**Note: Attempt has been made to gather current and relevant ‘snapshots’ of these Arab countries, though there may be errors and/or updates! ☺ Johnnie Hicks – 09/30/13**