

The Middle East: Questions for U.S. Policy

Student Text



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Introduction: What is the Middle East?

The history of the region called the Middle East is long and complex. The terms “Near East” and later “Middle East” were used by British colonial officials to describe a region to their east. This region included territory between the Mediterranean Sea and British colonies in the “Far East,” such as in India and China. In the following pages, the term “Middle East” refers to the countries highlighted on the map on the preceding page, stretching from Egypt in the west to Iran in the east. This text does not include other North African countries in its definition of the Middle East.

People across the Middle East have diverse ethnicities, religions, languages, life experiences, and understandings of their histories. For example, Iranian society includes urban professionals in Tehran, a city of fourteen million, as well as oil workers who live near the Persian Gulf. In Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, large Christian populations exist alongside Muslims. The religion of Islam is understood and practiced in many ways across the region. The landscape also varies—from sparsely populated arid deserts, to vast urban metropolises, to forests, mountains, rivers, and marshes. Variations in culture, history, and geography influence the region’s societies, governments, and economies.

What is important to know about the U.S. role in the Middle East?

Since the early 1800s, the Middle East has played an important role in U.S. foreign policy. To understand the U.S. role in the Middle East, it is important to consider a number of factors. While U.S. policy differs across countries and groups of people, there are patterns in the motivations and values that have driven U.S. policy over time.

U.S. intervention must be understood as part of a longer history of imperialism and colonialism. As a

Introduction Definitions

Colonialism—Colonialism is the conquest, acquisition, exploitation, and political rule of territory by a foreign power for its own economic and political benefit.

Imperialism—Imperialism is a policy of exerting cultural, economic, or political influence over other societies. Colonialism is a form of imperialism, but imperialism includes a broader array of policies that powerful states use to influence the affairs of less powerful states.

Interests—Interests is an international relations term to describe the goals a country holds. Countries have security, economic, political, and cultural interests that they try to further through policies.

global power, the United States has been motivated by competition with other imperialist countries pursuing wealth and power in the Middle East. The motivation to access and control oil resources has been central to U.S. policy in the region. To maintain economic and political power, the United States has intervened militarily, economically, and politically in Middle Eastern countries. U.S. policies have had a profound impact on people in the region. Within the United States, strong disagree-



U.S. navy ships attack the city of Tripoli (present-day Libya) in 1803 during a war to stop pirate attacks on U.S. ships.

Michele Felice Corne (1752–1845). Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

ment exists about what U.S. policies should be. For all these reasons, the U.S. role in the Middle East is complicated.

While reading this text, you will grapple with key questions related to U.S. involvement in the Middle East:

- What interests have motivated the United States to intervene in the Middle East, historically and today?
- How have values affected U.S. policy in the Middle East?
- How do U.S. policies affect the Middle East, and how do people throughout the region experience and respond to these policies?
- What are various perspectives on U.S. policy in the Middle East, including those held by people who live in the region?
- Which interests and values should provide the basis for U.S. policy in the Middle East?

This text is not a comprehensive review of all the countries in the region. Instead, you will read about selected parts of the history of the Middle East and U.S. policy in the region. In Part I of this



Today, the United States has military forces throughout much of the Middle East and other surrounding regions. For example, the United States has military forces in the following countries pictured on the map: Bahrain, Djibouti, Greece, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

reading, you will focus on the political history of the Middle East beginning in the late nineteenth century. You will also learn about the history of U.S. policy in the region through the Second World War. Part II examines some of the major events in the Middle East that shaped the region's relationship with the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. Part III of the reading covers U.S. policy in the Middle East in the twenty-first century.

The Middle East: Questions for U.S. Policy

Teacher Resource Book



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Graffiti in the Egyptian Revolution

Objectives

Students will: Learn more about the causes and effects of the uprisings and protests in different countries of the Middle East.

Analyze graffiti as a primary source.

Assess the role of graffiti as a form of political expression in Egypt.

Required Reading

Students should have read Part III of the reading and completed “Study Guide: Facts and Information—Part III” (TRB 29-30) or “Study Guide: Analysis and Synthesis—Part III” (TRB-31).

This lesson requires access to the internet. Students will need to watch videos and view digital slideshows. Preview the YouTube videos to make sure they are appropriate for your classroom. Materials can be found at <www.choices.edu/middleeast>.

Videos

The short videos for use with this lesson are available at <www.choices.edu/middleeast>

- “What happened in Egypt on January 25, 2011?” (Professor Sherine Hamdy)
- “What are some of the long-term effects of the Arab Spring on the Middle East and North Africa?” (Professor Nadjie Al-Ali)

Resources

“Graffiti and the Egyptian Revolution” (TRB-35)

“Responding to Images of Graffiti” (TRB 36-37)

The following three resources can be found at <www.choices.edu/middleeast>.

Slideshow: “Graffiti as Protest in Cairo”

YouTube video by the Mosireen Collective

YouTube video by Soraya Morayef

In the Classroom

1. Set the Stage—Write the following questions on the board: “What is a protest? How can protesters express their ideas?” Call on students to share their thoughts. Invite students to reflect on protests they have learned about, witnessed, or participated in. How did protesters at those demonstrations express their ideas?

Ask students what they know about the protests that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2009. You may want to show the videos, “What happened in Egypt on January 25, 2011?” by Professor Sherine Hamdy and “What are some of the long-term effects of the Arab Spring on the Middle East and North Africa?” by Professor Nadjie Al-Ali for information on the events in Egypt before, during, and after the uprisings and protests in the region.

2. Examine Graffiti as a Source—Tell students that today they will learn about the role of graffiti during the protests in Egypt. Students will need to interact with online resources (the slideshow “Graffiti as Protest in Cairo,” and one of two YouTube videos) in order to examine the graffiti.

Distribute “Graffiti and the Egyptian Revolution” and have students follow the instructions on the handout. After reading, invite them to turn to a classmate and share two new facts they learned from this reading. Distribute “Responding to Images of Graffiti.” Read the instructions on the handouts.

You may choose to have students work in pairs or small groups to respond to the questions on the handouts.

3. Class Discussion—Invite students to share their responses to the images of graffiti in the slideshow “Graffiti as Protest in Cairo.” What stood out to them in these sources? What demands were protesters expressing? Do students think that graffiti is a powerful way for protesters to voice their demands? If so, what makes this graffiti powerful? Why do students think the Egyptian government has tried to limit graffiti?

You might close by asking students to make connections to their own experiences. Have they seen graffiti that expresses political messages? Where and on what issues? Were these similar in any ways to the messages and demands of protesters in Egypt?

Extra Challenges

1. Create Your Own Art: Ask students to think about a recent or upcoming protest event that they have participated in, heard about, or imagine occurring in the near future. Have them create their own graffiti art (displayed on a piece of paper, poster, or canvas) related to the demands made by protesters at this demonstration.

2. Collect and Analyze Primary Sources: If students know of a public space near where they live that has political graffiti, have them go take photographs of the graffiti there. Tell them to create a slideshow or display of their photographs and write or present about the political messages expressed through this graffiti. What demands are the artists expressing? What other messages does the graffiti convey? How does the graffiti allow people to communicate about these ideas in unique ways?

3. Persuasive Writing: Write the following question on the board: “Is graffiti a form of art or vandalism?”

Have students write a short, evidence-based persuasive essay in which they answer this question. Students should write in the third person and use evidence and examples to support their argument.

Students may want to consider the following questions:

Does the location of graffiti—for example, on the outside wall of a public building, private residence, subway tunnel, or dumpster—make it more or less acceptable? Or is it the type of graffiti—political cartoon, tag, mural, etc.—that matters? Or both?

Graffiti and the Egyptian Revolution

Instructions: Read the following text about the role of graffiti in Egypt during and after the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Underline at least two new facts that you learn. Be ready to share these with a classmate.

During the 2011 uprisings in Egypt—often referred to as the Egyptian revolution—protesters gathered for massive demonstrations in the capital city of Cairo, calling for “bread, freedom, and social justice.” Seventeen days after they began, the protests brought an end to President Hosni Mubarak’s almost thirty-year regime. Although Mubarak was removed from power, the revolution continued because Egyptians did not believe that their demands had been met. Graffiti artists flocked to the streets to document the spirit, events, and hardships of this unfinished revolution. Some artists acted on their own, while others were part of artist collectives. A range of graffiti appeared, including political cartoons that mocked government officials and security forces, depictions of the names and faces of people who died in the revolution (often called “martyrs”), and slogans such as:

“Wake up, Egypt! The poor are hungry.”

“Take to the streets.”

“To those who sacrificed their lives for the future of a nation: a salute of glory and pride to the Martyrs of the 25 January Revolution.”

Graffiti, a previously uncommon sight in Cairo, transformed blank walls into open-air galleries. Mohamed Mahmoud Street became the most popular street for graffiti because it is a short walk from Tahrir Square, the main public square where millions of people gathered to demonstrate against Mubarak’s regime throughout early 2011. For months following the uprisings, new layers of graffiti appeared on Mohamed Mahmoud Street that criticized the outsized power of the Egyptian military and the continuing lack of democracy in Egypt.

Once in power, the new Egyptian government, led by Mohamed Morsi, responded to graffiti protests by whitewashing Mohamed Mahmoud Street with paint and threatening to imprison the authors of the graffiti. Many activists refused to stop, and they created new graffiti over the painted walls despite the risk of punishment by military and security officials. As Morsi consolidated his power and drew increasing criticism from many Egyptians, his face became a regular image in graffiti murals.

Street art in Cairo has become less common under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, whose military regime has cracked down on free speech by arresting journalists, street artists, and protesters who speak out against the government. Graffiti remains on some walls in Cairo, but the movement of activist-artists that grew after January 2011 is not as active today.

Responding to Images of Graffiti

Instructions: Look through the slideshow called “Graffiti as Protest in Cairo,” which contains a collection of photographs of graffiti from Mohamed Mahmoud Street and other locations in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. Then choose one YouTube video to watch:

- The first video is by the Mosireen Collective, an Egyptian activist group that created short documentaries about the revolution in Egypt using cellphone video footage from demonstrators.
- The second video is by Soraya Morayef, an Egyptian journalist who compiled footage from other Egyptian journalists and filmmakers to show street art in Cairo after January 25, 2011.

After examining the slides and video, respond to the questions below. Be ready to share your answers with your classmates.

1. What image stood out to you from the graffiti in Cairo shown in the photos and the video? Describe one image in particular.
2. What patterns did you notice across the different images of graffiti? Were there certain symbols, colors, words, or ideas represented more than once?
3. List three protest demands that you saw represented in the graffiti shown in these sources.

Name: _____

4. Why do you think the Egyptian government covered up the graffiti with paint?

5. Do you think that graffiti can be a powerful method of protest (i.e., a powerful way for protesters to express their opinions and demands)? Why or why not?

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The Middle East: Questions for U.S. Policy

The Middle East: Questions for U.S. Policy draws students into the policy debate on the issues that shape U.S. ties to the region. The United States' need for oil and its political and military alliances make the Middle East an important region for U.S. policy. Students examine the region's history, the role the United States has played, and how U.S. policy affects the lives of people in the Middle East.

The Middle East: Questions for U.S. Policy is part of a continuing series on current and historical international issues published by Choices Program at Brown University. Choices materials place special emphasis on the importance of educating students in their participatory role as citizens.



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