

Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt. In February 2011, anti-government protestors gather to listen to a speech by President Hosni Mubarak, who says that he will relinquish some powers but later resigns after continued protests. It is part of what some call the Jasmine Revolution or the Arab Spring.

Photo: © Chris Hondros/Getty Images.



chapter 8

Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia

desalination plants also is increasing the salinity of water bodies. For example, the Persian Gulf's salinity in 2010 was 47 percent higher than it was in 1980.

The oil industry is a major polluter throughout the world, and the concentrations of production and distribution centers in the Persian Gulf area pollute the atmosphere and waters of areas around oil wells, surface seepages, and where unwanted gases are flared off. Leakages pollute the waters near ocean terminals. Particles in the atmosphere cause fogs that create or worsen respiratory problems. Even before the Gulf War in 1991, the Persian Gulf had lost most of its plant and animal life as a result of pollution since initial oil production began in the early 1900s. At the end of the Gulf War, the retreating Iraqis set oil wells on fire, adding carbon gases and particles to the atmosphere, but the particles fell on desert sands. They also released a huge oil slick, damaging the plant and animal life, but it had less impact than it would have if the Persian Gulf had not already been heavily polluted.

Global Environmental Politics

Countries in Southwestern Asia increased their CO₂ emissions by almost 152 percent from 1990 to 2008. Over this same period, the United States' emissions increased about 15 percent and Europe's emissions declined. Southwestern Asia's CO₂ emissions were surpassed during this period only by China's 192 percent increase. This was the period in which the Kyoto Protocol (1997) sought to have countries on its Annex I list reduce their 1990 greenhouse gas emissions by 5 percent. Though many countries in Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia ratified the Kyoto Protocol, they were not on the Annex I list and have done little to curb their emissions. When measuring CO₂ emissions per person, the top emitters in the world have been Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait, followed by the United States and Canada, and then Saudi Arabia. Though China is the world's largest total CO₂ emitter, its emissions per person are low compared to many Southwest Asian countries.

8.3 CULTURAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY WITHIN A WIDER WORLD

This region was a hearth for early technical developments, three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, related to one another through worshipping the God of Abraham), further technical and artistic developments in the medieval Muslim empires, and a focus of geopolitical strategies by major world powers from the 1800s. Located between other world regions, this region has influenced and has been influenced by neighboring regions. Religion and language are as fundamental as politics and economics in this world region.

First Civilizations

The Tigris-Euphrates River Valley of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and the Nile River valley formed two of the world's early culture hearths (see Chapter 1). Early human achievements diffused to the surrounding continents. Even in ancient times of slow and limited transportation, this region acted as a hub with constant movements of people to and from Northern Africa, Europe, and China. The internal empires of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians gave way to external control from Persia, Greece, Rome, and then the Byzantines before the AD 600s expansion of the Muslim Arabs.

Religions

Religion and related traditions contribute greatly to peoples' identities in Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia. The early animist religions had many gods linked to natural phenomena. Some emperors were treated as gods. After approximately 1000 BC, dominance by religions with many gods gave way to religions based on a single god: *monotheism*. Judaism was the first monotheistic religion. Christianity grew out of Judaism, and then Islam emerged to become the dominant religion, but Judaism and Christianity still exist in the region today. These three monotheistic religions share common religious figures and religious texts. All three diffused from their hearths in Southwestern Asia to Europe, Africa, and Asia (Figure 8.7).

Judaism

Judaism is a religion whose adherents worship Yahweh, seen as the only God, creator, and lawgiver. It began in the area now known as Israel and the Palestinian territories around 2000 BC, where Abraham and his descendants settled after moving from Mesopotamia. Jewish beliefs focus on the historic role of family based on the line from Abraham, persecution beginning with slavery in Egypt, redemption as Moses led the people out of Egypt, and their occupation of the promised land. Yahweh intervened to support and punish through times of trouble and deportation, promising a messiah to save Jews from domination by others. At the time of Jesus ("Christ" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew "messiah"), many Jews expected a military leader messiah to end the Roman occupation. In AD 70, the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and dispersed Jews through Southwestern Asia, Northern Africa, and Europe to form a major diaspora.

Christianity

Christianity stemmed from new interpretations of the beliefs and teachings of Judaism in the early years AD, beginning with the life, teachings, death, and claimed resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians began as Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah. Christianity gave

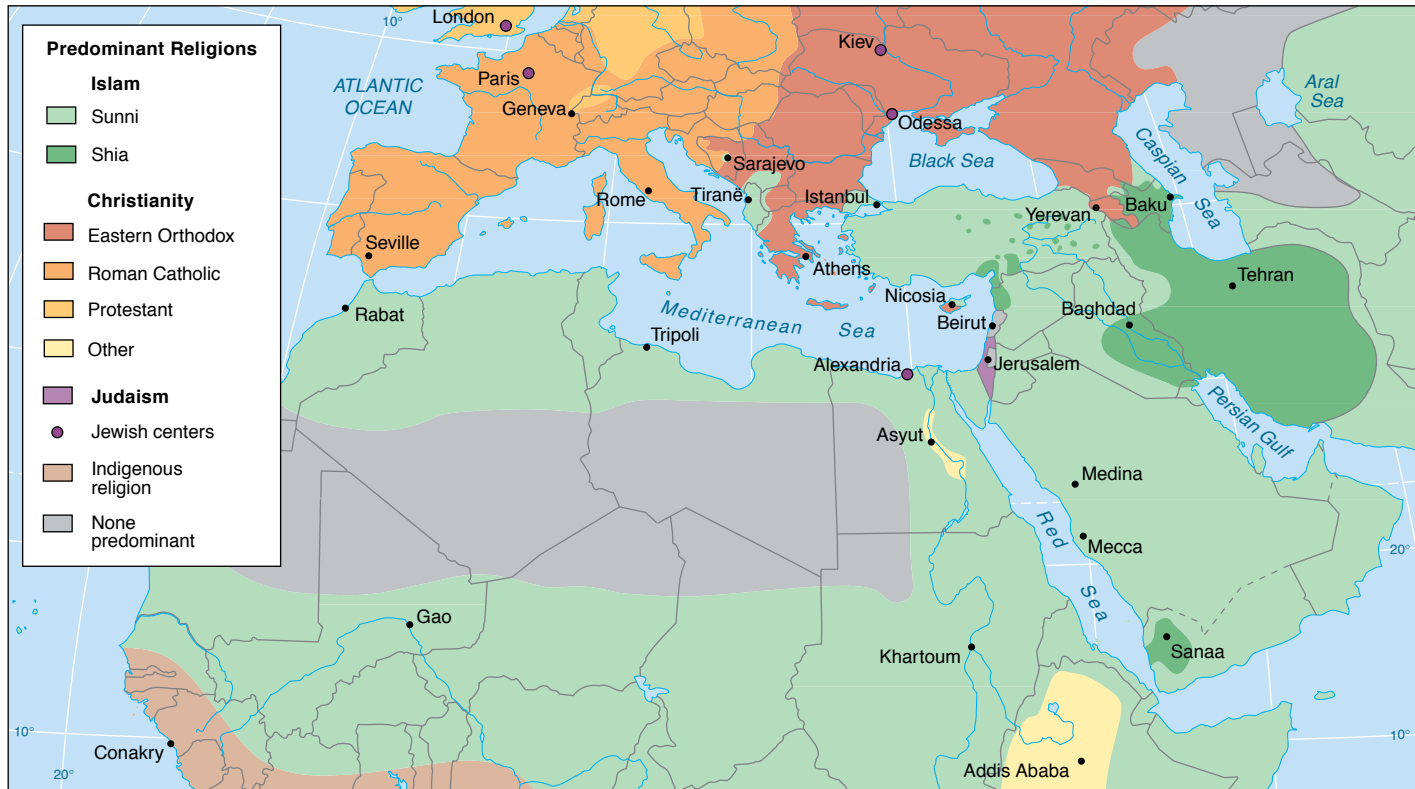


FIGURE 8.7 Major Religions in Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia. Beginning in Mecca and Medina, Muslim Arabs conquered the area shown in green after Muhammad emerged as a new religious leader around AD 600. Islam also spread over trade routes. Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, spreading through Europe. Jews were dispersed at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the modern country of Israel was not formed until 1948.

a fresh impetus to monotheism against the many gods of the Greeks, Romans, and Arabs. Christian churches spread across Southwestern Asia and into Africa and Europe. In the late AD 300s, the Roman Emperor Constantine declared it to be the empire's official religion. Controversies over how much Jesus was man and how much God resulted in divisions within Christianity. A later division occurred between the eastern (Orthodox) and western (Catholic) groups of churches in Europe. From 395 to 1453, the eastern church was centered in Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey). The largest Christian sect in this region today is the Coptic Church, with a pope who resides in Alexandria, Egypt.

Islam

Muhammad founded Islam in Arabia, notably in Mecca and Medina, during the early AD 600s. **Islam** means “submission to the will of Allah (God)” and the followers of the religion, **Muslims**, are “those who submit to Allah.” Muhammad adopted many Jewish and Christian beliefs such as monotheism. Seen as the prophet of Allah, Muhammad is believed to succeed earlier prophets such as Moses, David, and Jesus. The **Qu’ran** (holy book) is believed by Muslims to be the word of Allah revealed to Muhammad.

After Muhammad’s death in 632, Arabs spread Islam rapidly westward to Northern Africa and Spain as well as eastward into central Asia, uniting the Arab peoples and

creating a series of empires, converting Persians, Turks, and people in India through conquest and trade. It led to a Muslim “Golden Age” of artistic and scientific achievements alongside further military expansion from the 800s



FIGURE 8.8 Islam and Architecture. Mosques are a common feature of urban landscapes in Muslim countries. Older (1300s) and more recent (1800s) mosques tower over Cairo, Egypt. Photo: © Joseph P. Dymond.

to the 1100s. New forms of art and architecture developed. Muslim mosques remain dominant features of town landscapes, often doubling as centers of religious and secular activities (Figure 8.8). One of the oldest is the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, begun in 692. Islamic visual art, often characterized by abstract patterns that avoid depicting human forms, ranges from pottery and metalwork to paintings and textiles. Calligraphy became the most important form of art because of the religious significance of the Qu'ran. Poetry and music were generally more important than the visual arts but less significant in the landscape.

Early divisions within Islam continue to be significant today. The **Sunni Muslims**, or Sunnis, are the majority Muslim group and base their way of life on the Qu'ran, supplemented by traditions. Political power was at first given to a succession of leaders, or *caliphs*, descended from the historic Muslim leaders. Many Sunni Muslims are moderates in maintaining traditional Islamic practices. Exceptions include the Wahhabi sect that dominates Saudi Arabia and the Taliban faction that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.

A minority of Muslims also follow the Qu'ran but dispute the caliph leadership succession accepted by Sunnis. They look to descendants of Ali, the fourth caliph of Islam and a cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad. His son, Hussein, was

defeated and killed by the Sunni caliph of Damascus in 680. Supporters of Ali see Ali as the only *imam*—authoritative interpreter of the Qu'ran—and are known as “partisans of Ali,” “Shi’at ‘Ali,” **Shia Muslims**, or Shiites. They look to the return of the twelfth *imam*, Ali’s descendant, Muhammad al-Mahdi, who disappeared in 874. For most of their history, Shia Muslims were known for commemorating and lamenting Hussein’s death by flagellation and withdrawal from the world as they awaited al-Mahdi’s return. Politically, they were quiet, regarding political control as evil and looking to clerics, supported by alms, for leadership. Today Shiites comprise large proportions of the population in a few countries, including 90 percent of the Iranian population and 60 percent in Iraq. From 1979 Shiites governed Iran, tried to establish Iranian isolationism from Western ways, and supported extremist groups such as Hamas (Palestine) and Hezbollah (Iran, Syria).

Languages

Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia are linguistically diverse with numerous languages spoken among four major language families (Figure 8.9; see also Figure 2.16). The Afro-Asiatic family represents most language speakers of the region with such languages as Arabic, Berber, and Hebrew.

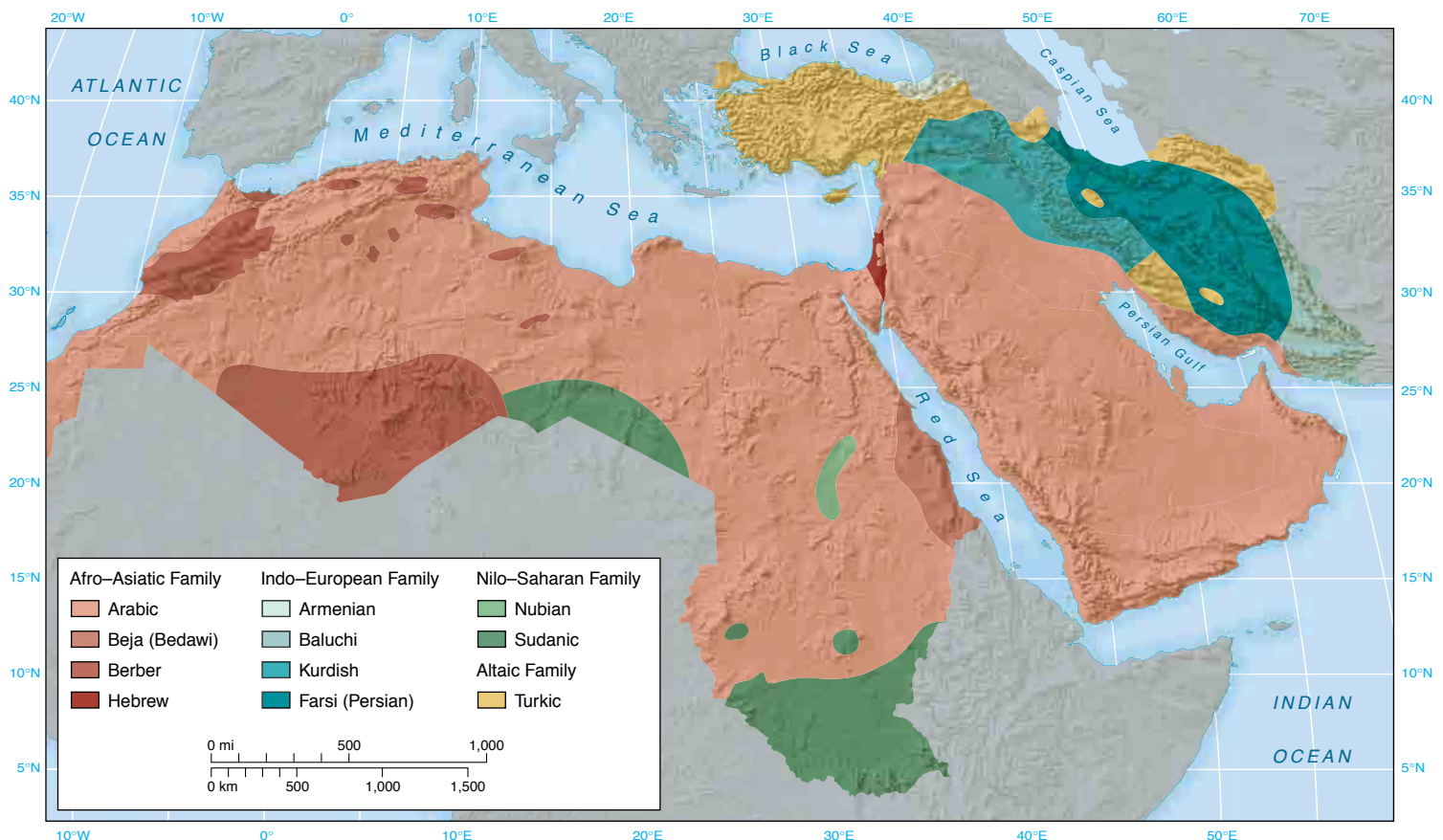


FIGURE 8.9 Language Families and Languages of Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia.



(a)

Fishing. (a) Mohammad and Nicole. (b) Mohammad and Greg, who is displaying a squid he caught. Photos: Nicole Kessell.



(b)

of the dozen or so other boats in the vicinity to borrow another. The friend was covered in squid ink and his singing could be heard over the whir of our boat motor. The other fishermen were friendly and intrigued and would wave to us and say hello in English. When the sun was high it was time to return, and Salim wrote down his address for us in case we returned or our families decided to visit. We thanked him for the pleasant morning and he headed off for home.

We ate lunch, lounged around for a while, and decided to pack up and head further south into Wahiba Sands. As we were driving back to the main road from the coast we saw Salim's truck. We

stopped and through the window he handed us a lunch of fish, rice, and vegetables, as well as water, orange soda, and Coca-Colas. These men went out of their way to ensure our comfort and safety, and their genuine hospitality was overwhelming. It is a trait that has defined the Omani nationality, and it is clear they take pride in their reputation.

Oman is beautifully scenic, delightfully rustic, and surprisingly cosmopolitan all at once. It is a shame that it is situated in a region that deters Western visitors. Oman has much to offer, from shopping to squid fishing, and its people are keen to impress their guests.

Arabic is spoken by just under 50 percent of the people in the region. It is also the preferred language in the Qu'ran and Muslim prayers. "Arabs," who were once defined as living in the Arabian Peninsula, now include all those using Arabic as their first language. **Berber** is found primarily in Morocco and Algeria, especially in the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara Desert where it best resisted the spread of Arabic (Figure 8.10). **Hebrew** is the official language of Israel. The language of the Hebrew Bible and religious services is an archaic form, superseded in everyday usage by modern Israeli Hebrew. The movement devoted to creating a Jewish state from the 1800s, known as *Zionism*, revived the use of Hebrew, modernizing it for secular usage to provide a common religious and secular element among Jews from many countries.

Indo-European languages are also significant in the region. **Farsi (Persian)** is the official language of Iran. **Kurdish** speakers straddle Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Their numbers are unknown because the language is at the heart of demands for a separate nation-state: non-Kurds talk in terms of 10 million people, while the Kurds claim their numbers to be over 20 million.

Turkish is a member of the Altaic family (see Figure 2.16), which spread westward from Central Asia. Turkish speakers in Turkey use the Roman script, reflecting Europe's influence on Turkey. The Azeri (or Azerbaijanis) in Iran, who are also Turkish speakers, use the Arabic script. A large number of the world's Turkish speakers live in Central Asia (see Chapter 4).

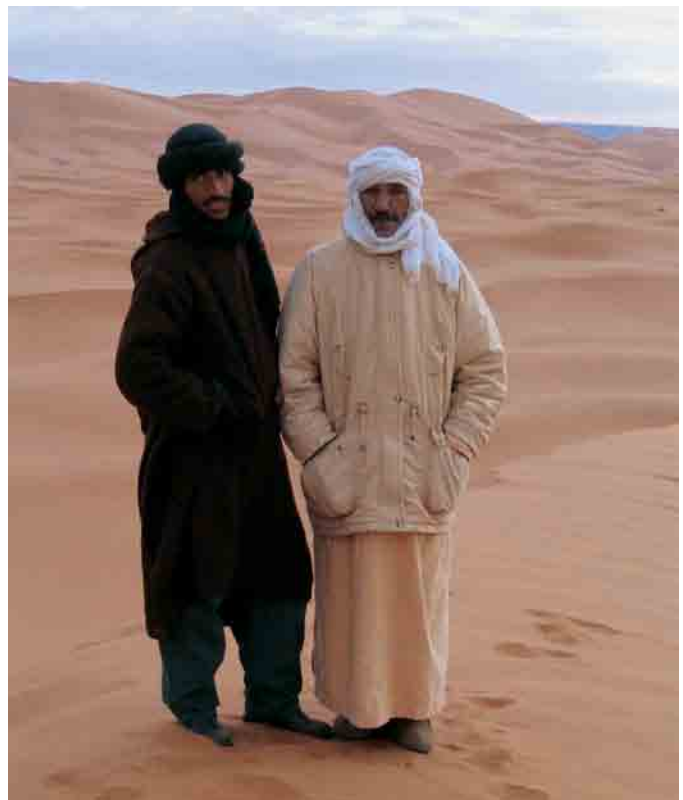


FIGURE 8.10 Berbers in Morocco. These two Berber men guide tourists into the Sahara Desert close to Erfoud, Morocco. Photo: © Heike Alberts.

to export revolution, the Saudi princes wished to maintain the system by which they had grown rich. When Saddam Hussein of Iraq declared war on Iran in 1981, he had support from the Saudis, other Gulf countries, and Western countries. However, the war stalled, and after huge losses of life, an armistice was reached between Iraq and Iran in 1989.

The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Army generated another jihad financed by the Persian Gulf and Western countries. This unified Islamists around the world as international brigades from Egypt, Algeria, the Arabian Peninsula countries, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia worked together in guerrilla warfare as part of the Islamist armed struggle. In 1989 the Soviet Army withdrew from Afghanistan, causing Islamists to declare a great victory and gain immense self-confidence.

The Gulf War of 1990–1991 and subsequent failures to impose military solutions in Algeria and Egypt were major blows for Islamists. Not only did Saddam Hussein fail to unite the Muslim world against the “infidel,” his invasion of Kuwait and his threats to Saudi Arabia brought American troops to Saudi Arabia, the soil on which so many Islamic holy places are found. Islamic jihadists then turned their hostilities toward the United States and the Arab kingdoms like Saudi Arabia that had good relations with the United States.

Islamist failures caused most countries that had supported guerrillas to withdraw from extremist actions. Even in Iran, a democratic movement is building, supported by many young people who prefer peaceful coexistence with other countries rather than the radical, isolationist position that Iran’s leaders created. At the same time, extreme Islamists became frustrated at their lack of political success and expanded their terrorist activities. Following their actions of September 11, 2001, organizations like al-Qaeda and individuals like Osama bin Laden gained great international attention. However, many Muslim countries held memorial services for the victims of 9/11, including Iran in its capital, Tehran. Thus, despite their actions on 9/11 and their support of suicide bombings in Israel, Islamic extremists have had little success in advancing their goals.

Oil and Natural Gas Resources

The huge oil and gas production from Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia accounts for 36 percent of the world total. Despite the addition of new producers in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, this world region accounts for almost 62 percent of world total oil reserves (Figure 8.13a, b and Figure 8.14). Saudi Arabia alone has 20 percent of the world total. For natural gas, this world region produces almost 19 percent of world total production and contains 45 percent of world total reserves.

Not all the countries of Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia, however, are major oil producers. Morocco, Turkey, Israel, and Jordan produce no oil. Tunisia, Sudan,

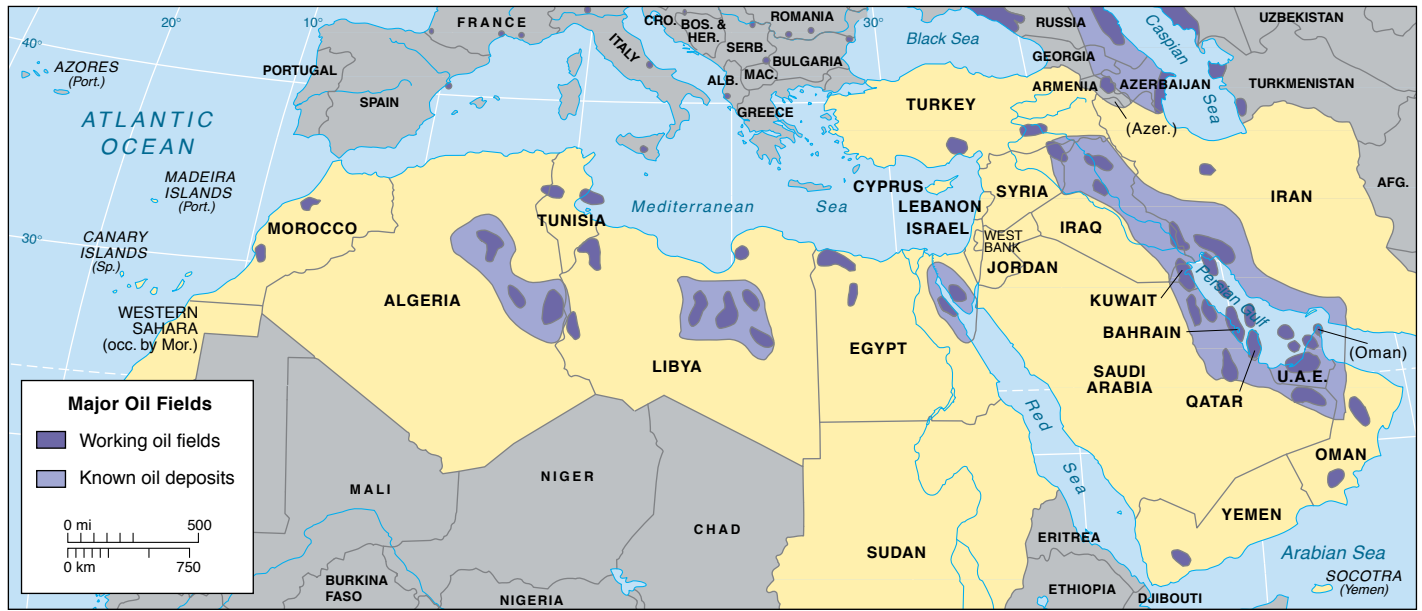
Syria, and Yemen produce and export modest amounts. Countries that import oil face the burden of purchasing oil, whatever its price, and many go into debt during times of high prices.

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries

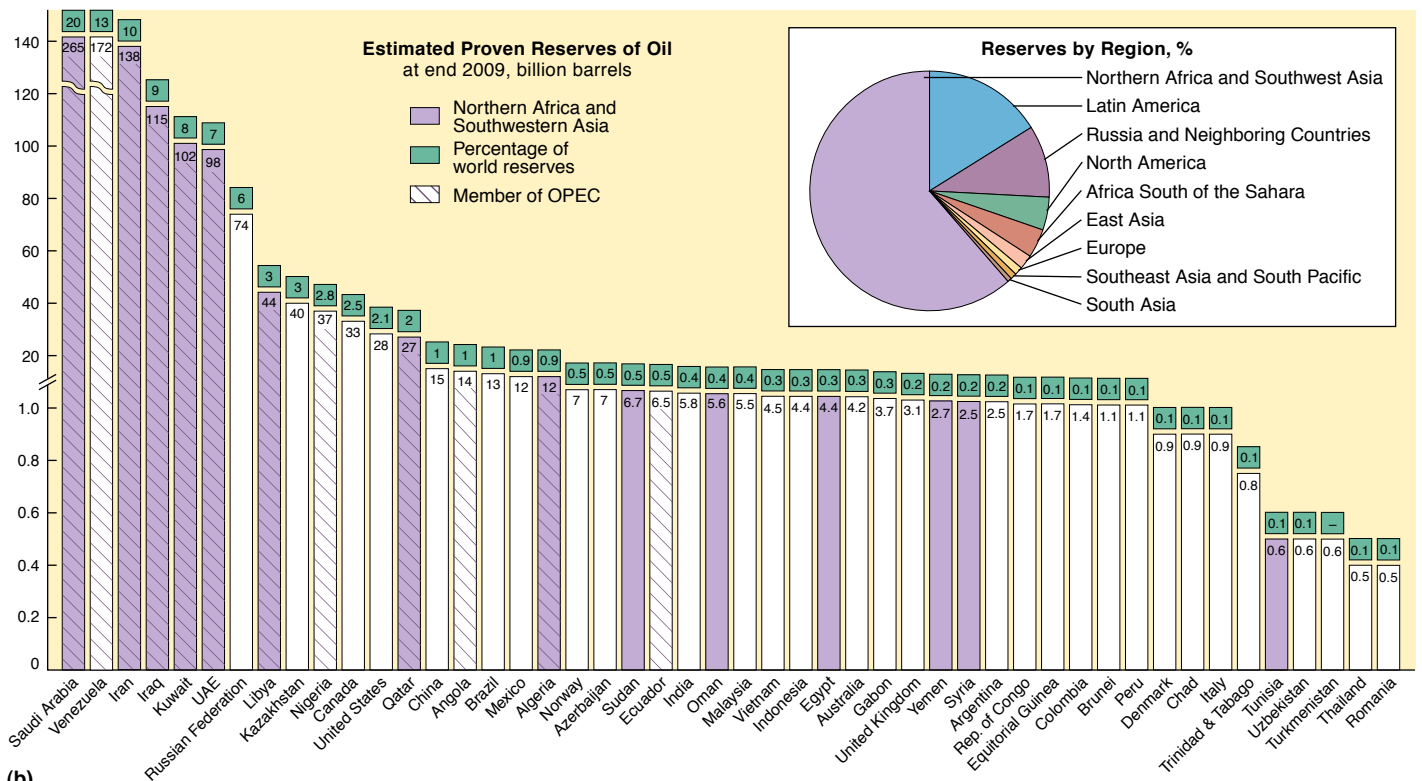
From the early 1900s, international oil companies kept oil prices low to consumers in the world’s wealthiest countries by paying little to the producing countries. In 1960 Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Venezuela met in Baghdad, Iraq, and founded the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)**. OPEC’s main purpose is to work as a **cartel**—an organization that coordinates the interests of producing countries by regulating oil prices. It was not long before other countries joined OPEC: Qatar (1961), Indonesia (1962), Libya (1962), the United Arab Emirates (1967), Algeria (1969), Nigeria (1971), Ecuador (1973), Gabon (1975) and Angola (2007). Ecuador suspended its membership in December 1992 and did not return until October 2007. Gabon ended its membership in 1995. Indonesia suspended its membership in January 2009 when it stopped being a net exporter of oil. As of 2011, OPEC had 12 members. It accounted for 77 percent of the world total oil reserves, and the countries of Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia accounted for 73 percent of OPEC’s total oil reserves.

OPEC’s oil embargo on wealthy countries during the Arab-Israeli War in 1973 established OPEC as the controlling factor in world oil distribution for a few years. Prices rose fourfold. Revenues of the oil-producing countries boomed in the mid- and late 1970s. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Iraq gained over 90 percent of their export earnings from oil sales. They invested their money locally in new roads, hospitals, government buildings, airports, and military hardware, as well as in projects and banks outside the region.

The world’s wealthier countries that used most of the oil were affected first by higher oil prices and then by economic recession. It was soon clear, however, that the high oil prices and recession also adversely affected the world’s poorer countries. Western oil companies opened new oil fields outside the OPEC area, including those in the North Sea (Europe), that had previously been too expensive to develop. Beginning in the 1990s, Russia exported increasing quantities of oil and natural gas as its main source of currency. A world oil glut brought very low market prices and financial problems to the Arab producers. By the late 1990s, the OPEC oil producers and major industrial countries saw that their interests lay in a moderately high, but stable, oil price. War, other crises, and increased demand from growing economies like China pushed oil prices to record highs in the 2000s. Though these prices subsided during the world recession of 2007–2009, the growth of developing countries are pushing prices high again.



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 8.13 Oil Resources in Northern Africa and Southwest Asia. (a) Map of major oil fields. (b) World oil resources at the end of 2009, showing the continuing significance of this region. Northern Africa’s and Southwestern Asia’s share is 61.6 percent of world reserves. Note which countries in the region have major oil reserves and which have little or no oil. Sources: (a) *The Economist*. (b) British Petroleum.

Water Politics

Much attention is given to oil, but the issue of water in this arid region of the world has been highly significant through this region’s history. The major civilizations of the Nile and

Tigris-Euphrates river valleys were based on irrigation water, and many local developments brought water from its source to areas of use. The renewable supplies that come from rain and snowfall feeding rivers are meager over most of this region. Other sources include underground reservoirs that



FIGURE 8.14 Oil: Iraq. Shaiba oil refinery, 20 kilometers south of Basra.
Photo: © AFP/Getty Images.

accumulated over millennia, which means they are virtually nonrenewable. Yet the growth of irrigation farming, the rise of the oil industry, and rapidly growing populations have led to greater demands for water and have resulted in conflicts.

Like oil, however, water is not evenly distributed. Eighty percent of the region's freshwater is found in the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates River basins. The Jordan River, though much smaller, is crucial to countries that depend on it. However, each of these rivers flows through more than one country (see Figures 8.1 and 8.6), creating a need for cooperation between governments and creating or exacerbating political conflict where agreements cannot be reached. Conflict may increase because freshwater scarcity is becoming more of an issue as populations grow rapidly. Between 1975 and 2001, the amount of freshwater available to each person dropped by more than half.

In 1959 the Egyptian and Sudanese governments signed the **Nile Waters Agreement**, which led to the building of the Aswan High Dam to store sufficient water and generate electricity. On completion of the dam in 1970, Lake Nasser behind

the dam stored three times Egypt's annual water usage; Sudan receives only 13 percent of the annual flow. Along with disputes they may continue to have with each other, Egypt and Sudan also now contest the use of the water with countries in the upper Nile River watershed such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania (see Chapter 9). By 1988, the expectation that the Aswan High Dam would ensure Egypt's water needs for 50 years was proved wrong, and discharges below Aswan had to be reduced to maintain flow through the year.

The Turkish government constructed a series of dams in southeastern Turkey on the upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers as a part of a greater plan to irrigate lands to increase agricultural production (Figure 8.15). Because these irrigation projects divert water from Iraq and Syria downstream, tensions have increased between Turkey and these two countries.

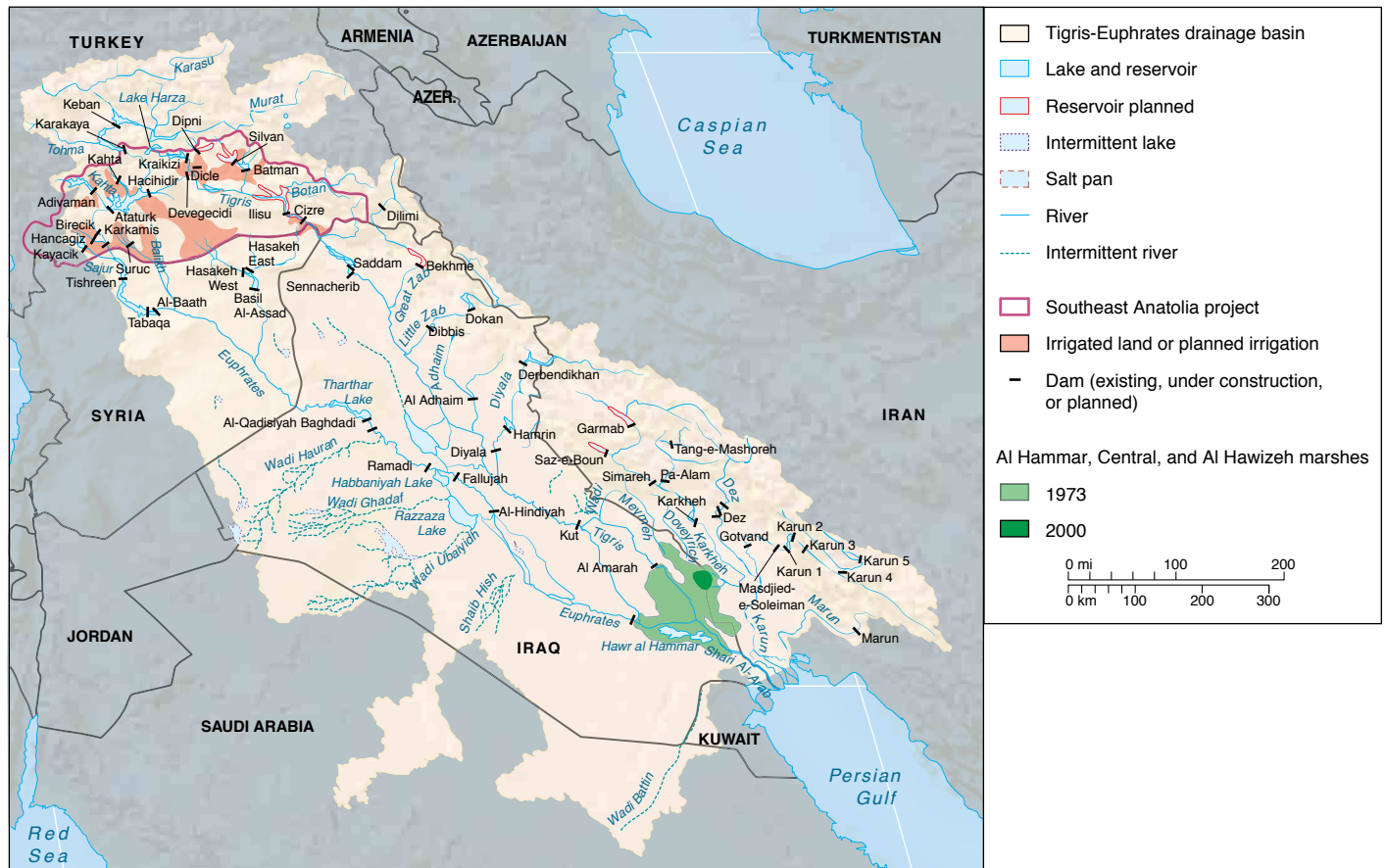
To provide freshwater, the region's wealthier countries have invested heavily in **desalination plants**, which make seawater usable. Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia account for almost half of the world's desalination capacity. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates account for about 30 percent of the world's capacity by themselves and contain the world's 10 largest desalination plants. Saudi Arabia receives about 70 percent of its freshwater from its desalination plants. Desalination is very energy intensive and consumes much of the region's oil supplies. Increasingly, many governments are planning nuclear power plants to supply the energy needed for desalination. Despite high costs, continued investment is increasing desalination capacity by about 10 percent per year.

Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank occupy a small area of land between the Mediterranean coast and the Jordan River valley. The terrain includes a coastal plain and mostly hilly land with lower areas around Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee) and along the Jordan River to the Dead Sea. Although Israel receives winter rain, the total rainfall is low, and summer drought brings water shortages. Great efforts made it possible to supply water to dry areas and to manage the environment efficiently. Despite such careful management, internal groundwater sources are now fully used, and Israel relies on external sources for 25 percent of its water. Brackish (slightly saline) water is used for some farming but can damage the soils if too much is used over many seasons. Urban water supply relies increasingly on coastal desalination plants.

The water shortage enters politics. Israel retains jurisdiction over the West Bank and the Golan Heights both for defense and access to water. Peace negotiations with Jordan included agreement on the use of the Jordan River basin waters, which have become central in the negotiations over the future of the West Bank.

Agriculture

The arid lands of Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia leave little opportunity for farming, requiring most countries to import food. Most of the arable land extends from



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 8.15 Tigris-Euphrates Drainage Basin. (a) Turkey's southeast Anatolia region has more than 20 dams to divert water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for irrigation projects, depriving Syria and Iraq of water. Dam building in Iran also has reduced the flow of water into wetlands of the lower Tigris River. In the early 1990s, Saddam Hussein's regime launched a program to drain marshes, partially to drill for oil and partly to eradicate the Marsh Arabs who opposed him. In Southern Iraq, the Central Marshes and Al Hammar Marshes have completely dried up, and the Al Hawizeh Marsh is a fraction of its former size. (b) The Ataturk Dam on the Upper Euphrates River as it neared completion in 1992. Sources: (a) Data from UNEP; (b) Photo: © Ed Kashi/VII Photo Agency.

the shores of the Mediterranean (Figure 8.16) and Red Seas and the Persian Gulf. The Nile and Tigris-Euphrates rivers provide irrigation. Interior deserts have given rise to nomadic herding. Some agriculturally productive areas are

on the fringes of the region such as in Turkey (Figure 8.17). Indeed, the building of dams in southeastern Turkey has enabled Turkey to increase its production of cotton, soybeans, grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Many of the problems in agricultural production stem from the type of economy established by colonial countries. The colonial system involved land appropriation for European settlers and local elites, who used irrigation water for intensive commercial farming tied to markets in Europe. Consequently, agriculture is geared in many areas to export crops such as citrus fruits, olive oil, and cotton. Iran is still known for its export of nuts, especially pistachios. In recent decades, governments have encouraged greater cultivation of domestically needed crops such as cereal grains, vegetables, and dairy and poultry products. Productivity has increased with the introduction of mechanization, the application of fertilizers, and double cropping, which allows some areas to harvest two crops within a year. As noted in the “Environmental Problems (p. 327)” section, improper irrigation techniques in places lead to continual problems of salinization.

Population Distribution and Dynamics

The population of Northern African and Southwestern Asia tends to be concentrated near the Mediterranean and Red Seas, the Persian Gulf, and in the fertile valleys of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates rivers (Figure 8.18). Moderate densities are also found in the rest of Turkey and western Iran. Much of the region is almost empty of people.

The populations of all the region’s countries continue to grow rapidly, and are expected to increase by more than one-third over the next 20 years. High birth rates combined

with falling death rates result in the rapid population growth (Figure 8.19). As the population pyramid in Figure 8.20a indicates, the large groups of young people will produce continuing high rates of population increase as they reach childbearing age. In 2010, several countries had high total fertility rates with the highest being Yemen (5.5), Palestinian Territory (4.6), Sudan (4.5), Iraq (4.1), Saudi Arabia (3.8), and Jordan (3.8). In contrast, total fertility rates were below 2.1 (the rate necessary to maintain populations at their current sizes) in most of the smaller and richer Gulf countries: Qatar (1.8), Bahrain (1.9), United Arab Emirates (2.0), and Kuwait (2.2). When the Iranian religious leaders gained power in 1979, they encouraged more births but later reversed the policy. They now find that the preponderance of younger adults is a major source of opposition, both politically and culturally.

In recent years, many of the region’s countries have implemented policies to slow birth rates. For example, Tunisia set a minimum age for marriage and instituted a successful family planning program soon after it obtained independence. Morocco and Algeria implemented family planning and maternal and child services. Egypt’s support for family planning resulted in a drop in that country’s total fertility rate from over 5 to 3.0 between the 1970s and mid-2010.

Variations in immigration make Israel’s population growth irregular. The annual growth rate fell from 2.8 percent in the period 1965 to 1980 to 1.8 percent in the 1980s, but rose again in the mid-1990s to 3.3 percent as a result

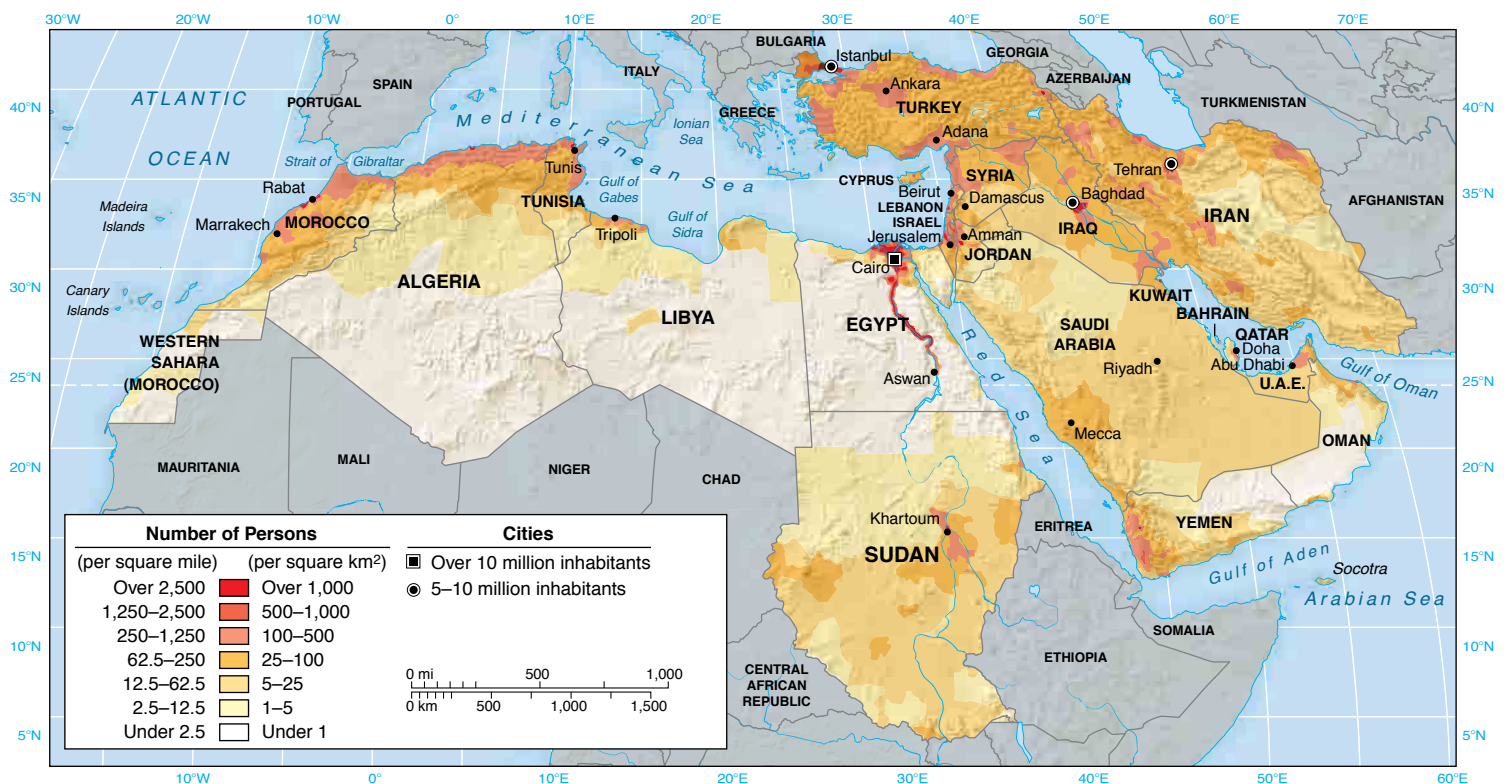


FIGURE 8.18 Northern Africa and Southwestern Asia: Population Distribution. Note where the highest and lowest densities of population occur.

of immigration. In the early 1990s, over 1 million Russian Jews moved to Israel. In mid-2010, Israeli natural increase was 1.6 percent. The mid-2010 resident Israeli population of 7.3 million included 18 percent non-Jews, most of whom were Arabs. The fluctuating number of immigrants and the higher proportion of older people means that Israel's population structure differs from that of the region's Arab countries (Figure 8.20b).

Immigration, nevertheless, plays a significant role in many countries. The booming oil business requires more labor than many of the oil-producing countries possess. Much-needed imported labor comes from other parts of the region (such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Yemen) and from South and East Asia. Foreign labor has made up nearly 30 percent of the total labor force since the mid-1980s. Immigrant labor formed large proportions of the population in Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Figure 8.20c shows how the presence of male foreign workers affected the age and sex structure of Kuwait. The reconstruction of Kuwait after the 1991 Gulf War also depended on immigrant labor. Although the origins of foreign labor shifted from other Arab countries to South Asia in the 1990s, the total remains high. In 1995, estimates put the number of migrant workers in the Gulf countries at around 1.6 million, over 90 percent coming from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Egypt.

Most of the region's countries have life expectancies around 72 years. Israel has the highest with 81 years and is followed by Kuwait with 78 years. Life expectancy is the lowest in Sudan (58 years) and Yemen (63 years).

Urban Patterns

The natural environment and recent nature of economic growth in a globalizing world led to a dominance of urban living environments in the region. Today most countries in the region are very highly urbanized (Figure 8.21). The high level reflects the direct shift from nomadism to urbanism in countries that lack farmland, changes brought by the oil industry in numerous countries, and the development of urbanized manufacturing and government employment. For example, between 1950 and 2010, Kuwait and Qatar went from 50 percent to over 98 and 100 percent urban, respectively. Saudi Arabia went from 10 to 81 percent urban. The rate of urban expansion means that many cities are dominated by new buildings. Amman, Jordan, lost most of its historic small-town character as it grew to be a capital city with over a million people; land speculation, combined with lack of planning, replaced the old town with wide avenues and featureless blocks. In Kuwait City after the destruction of the 1990–1991 Gulf War, only the ruler's palace remained of the old town.

As the populations grew and crowded into cities, the expanding demand for housing by poorer people was often more than governments could meet. Shantytowns are features of cities across the subregion; they are known as *bidonvilles* in Casablanca, Morocco, and as *gourbivilles* in Tunis.

The Fertile Crescent, which runs along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, and up the Nile River valley, is the location of some of the world's oldest and most historically significant cities (Table 8.2). These older cities, which were central

TABLE 8.2 North Africa and Southwestern Asia: Major Cities and Their Populations (in millions)

| | Population | |
|---|------------|------------------|
| | 2009 | 2025 (estimated) |
| North Africa | | |
| Casablanca, Morocco | 3.3 | 4.1 |
| Algiers, Algeria | 2.8 | 3.6 |
| Rabat, Morocco | 1.8 | 2.3 |
| Tripoli, Libya | 1.1 | 1.4 |
| Tunis, Tunisia | 0.8 | 0.9 |
| Nile River Valley | | |
| Cairo, Egypt | 11.0 | 14.0 |
| Khartoum, Sudan | 5.2 | 8.0 |
| Alexandria, Egypt | 4.4 | 5.6 |
| Arab Southwest Asia | | |
| Baghdad, Iraq | 5.9 | 8.0 |
| Riyadh, Saudi Arabia | 4.8 | 6.2 |
| Jeddah (Jidda), Saudi Arabia | 3.2 | 4.1 |
| Aleppo (Halab), Syria | 3.1 | 4.2 |
| Damascus, Syria | 2.6 | 3.5 |
| Kuwait City, Kuwait | 2.3 | 3.0 |
| Sana'a, Yemen | 2.3 | 4.3 |
| Beirut, Lebanon | 1.9 | 2.1 |
| Mecca, Saudi Arabia | 1.5 | 1.9 |
| Mosul, Iraq | 1.4 | 2.1 |
| Amman, Jordan | 1.1 | 1.4 |
| Basra, Iraq | 0.9 | 1.3 |
| Israel and Palestinian Territories | | |
| Tel Aviv–Jaffa | 3.2 | 3.8 |
| Iran and Turkey | | |
| Istanbul, Turkey | 10.5 | 12.1 |
| Tehran, Iran | 7.2 | 8.4 |
| Ankara, Turkey | 3.9 | 4.6 |
| Izmir, Turkey | 2.7 | 3.2 |
| Meshed (Mashhad), Iran | 2.7 | 3.3 |
| Isfahan (Esfahan), Iran | 1.7 | 2.2 |
| Bursa, Turkey | 1.6 | 1.9 |
| Karaj, Iran | 1.6 | 2.0 |
| Tabriz, Iran | 1.5 | 1.8 |
| Adana, Turkey | 1.4 | 1.6 |
| Shiraz, Iran | 1.3 | 1.6 |

Source: Data from "Urban Agglomerations (2009)," United Nations.