ARMY

DEFENCE CULTURAL SPECIALIST UNIT

UNDERSTANDING THE ARAB PEOPLE

DCSU

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FOREWORD:

This booklet is designed to be an introduction to a fascinating and diverse group of people who inhabit a key strategic territory stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf. They are united by a common language but have often been divided by politics, nationalism and sectarianism.

The need to understand the human terrain and cultural context in which we operate is key to our success in the future.

I encourage you to use this booklet as the starting point of a process of study and active engagement to understand the people you will be interacting with and to help ensure that this experience is positive for both sides. This understanding will make your job easier to accomplish.

Wing Commander Andy Bunce,
Commanding Officer,
DEFENCE CULTURAL SPECIALIST UNIT

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CONTENTS

WHO ARE THE ARABS?

The Arab World is a vast area which is home to people from diverse cultures. The way in which people behave and interact with you will therefore vary greatly across the region. This guide discusses aspects of Arab culture that you might experience in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen. Further reading on individual countries is recommended before you deploy.

The Arab World

Most Arabs are Sunni Muslims who speak Arabic. However, there are many different religions, ethnic and social groups in the Arab world, among them Christians, Jews, Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, Kurds, Turks and Berbers. Some of these groups have suffered oppression in their countries, but many live happily as Arabs and as part of Arab society. While some Arab countries are very conservative and have strict rules about the role of women, others are more permissive in their approach to issues like alcohol, religion and education. The familiar stereotype of the Bedouin Arab with his camel, tent, robes and blood feuds is only a small part of Arab identity and history. In fact, this traditional way of life has died out in many parts of the Arab world, and is not significant today in areas like North Africa.

With the improvement in technology and social media in recent years, people across the Arab World have been exposed to other cultures to a much greater degree than previous generations. Approximately 70% of the Arab World are under the age of 30 and so the entire region is undergoing a transformation as people try to find ways to integrate their traditional cultures into the modern world.

Arab Empire.

Before the arrival of Islam with the Prophet Muhammed in the 7th century, nomadic Arabs lived in the Arabian peninsula (what is now Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman and other Gulf countries). By the end of the 7th century they had created one of the largest land empires in history, stretching across the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan) a region known as al-Sham and into North Africa and southern Spain. The Arabs were fairly tolerant of non-Muslim groups such as Christians and Jews, who became a part of Arab society. Over the centuries the empire was threatened by both the Ottoman Turks and the Mongols and slowly declined until the Ottoman empire took over in the 16th century. From the

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19th century until after the Second World War colonial powers including Britain and France ruled parts of the Middle East. Arabs are generally more critical of this Western imperialism than of the Ottoman rule before it.

Independence, Nationalism and Islamism.

Arab nationalism is an ideology that has been around from the early part of the 20th century. Adherents called for those nations who share a common linguistic, religious and cultural heritage to join in a political union. In the aftermath of WWII many of the European colonies became independent countries in their own right. The support for Arab nationalism flourished, influenced by contemporary political theories like socialism and secularism. There was also a short-lived experiment to unite Arab countries into a single Arab state which included Egypt and Syria. However many of these new governments struggled to deliver on their initial promises and by the 1970s many people had lost faith with the nationalist movement. The desire for secularist government faded leading to an increase in support for political Islamism. It also led people to move away from the idea of one homogenous nation and celebrate the regional history and culture that made each country unique.

Members of al-Fatat (the Young Arab Society), a group formed in 1911 to unite the Arab Countries.

Arabs come from a diverse range of countries and heritages

Notwithstanding this, the idea of Arab identity remains strong today but is used to differentiate between those from outside the Arab world as opposed to uniting those within it. In North Africa, being an Arab distinguishes you from your sub-Saharan African or European neighbours. In Iraq, it marks you out from your Iranian (Persian) and Kurdish neighbours; and in the Levant from the Jews, Armenians, Kurds and other groups in that region.

A Unifying but Diverse Language.

Arabic has 250 million speakers and connects the people of 18 countries, uniting many different ethnic groups, religious communities and nationalities. Arabic also acts as a symbol of pan-Arab nationalism, on the basis that people who speak the same language belong to the same nation, as heard in the Arabic phrase, 'my language is my nation'! However, there are many forms of Arabic, and local dialects can be very different to classical Arabic. The five broad regional variations are North African, Egyptian/Sudanese, Levantine, Arabian Peninsula and Iraqi. Each region has many dialects particular to each country. For example, Yemeni Arabic differs from Kuwaiti Arabic, and Libyan Arabic differs from Moroccan Arabic. There are significant differences in grammar and vocabulary between North African, Gulf and Iraqi dialects. Although Arabic is a very difficult language for Europeans to learn, Arabs will be pleased if you try learning and speaking their language. However, do not be surprised if your Arabic, learned in one region, is not necessarily comprehensible to all in another region.

	Morrocan	Algerian	Libyan
Good	*mzyaan* مزيان	*Mliih* مليح	*baahi* باهي
Now	*daaba* دابا	*Druuk* ضروك	*tawwa* توا
Only	*Saafi* صافي	*bark, yeer* برك. غير	*bass* بس

There is significant variation between the different Arabic dialects.

A Religious Language.

For Muslims who comprise the majority of the Arab world, Arabic is the language of God, of his Prophet and of the Qur'an, the holy book. Many Muslims therefore reject the idea of translating the Qur'an into any other language. In the Hadith, the collected sayings of the Prophet, Arabic is described as the 'language of heaven'. For Muslim Arabs, Arabic therefore has a mystical or religious quality. Arabic inscriptions of words from the Qur'an should always be treated with great respect.

Many Muslims learn to recite the Qur'an from an early age.

RELIGION

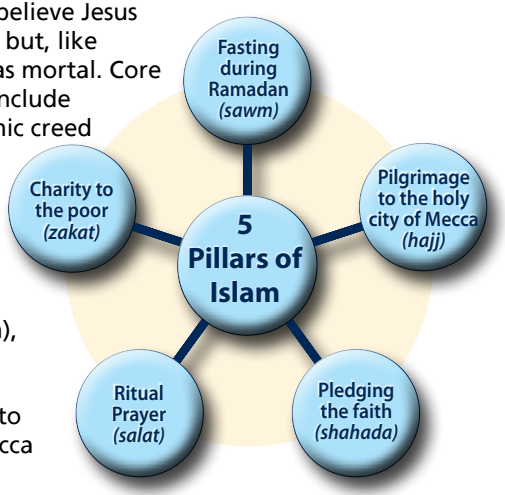
Islamic Majority.

Islam is the religion of approximately 90% of the Arab world's 210 million people. Although many non-Muslim groups live in Arab countries, they have long been outsiders, unlikely to progress in their respective militaries, judiciaries or public services. The proportion of Muslims in different

countries ranges from around 60% in Sudan to almost 100% in Oman and Qatar. As in Christianity, there are many interpretations of Islamic doctrine and practice. Like Christianity, Muslim traditions vary across the region and are often mixed with local superstitious or ancient pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. The core of Islam, as with most religions, is the provision of principles for living a moral life. Religion is present in business transactions, the resolving of disputes and everyday conversations.

Muslim Beliefs.

Muslims believe that there is only one god, Allah, and that the Prophet Muhammad (570-632AD) was his messenger on earth. Muslims believe Jesus was also a prophet but, like Muhammad, he was mortal. Core Muslim principles include following this Islamic creed (or shahada), daily prayer (five times for Sunnis, three for most, but not all, Shi'a), fasting during the month of Ramadan (sawm), almsgiving (zakat) and undertaking a pilgrimage or Hajj to the holy city of Mecca at least once in a lifetime.



Islamic sects worship in different ways but they all follow the Five Pillars of Islam as the foundation of their faith.

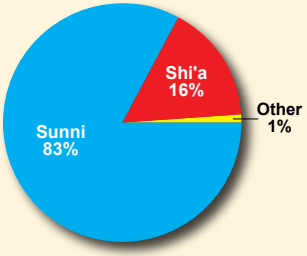
Sunni and Shi'a.

Muslims follow a variety of Islamic sects, just as Christianity has Protestants and Catholics, and evangelicals in both groups. Sunnis are the majority in all Arab countries except Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain, where Shi'as are more numerous.

Basic Differences between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims

Sunni	Shi'a
• Believe that the first four caliphs were "rightly guided"	• Believe that Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, should have succeeded Muhammad
• Believe that Muslim rulers should follow the Sunna, or Muhammad's example	• Believe that all Muslim rulers should be descended from Muhammad; most do not recognise the authority of the Sunna
• Claim that the Shi'a have distorted the meaning of various passages in the Qur'an	• Claim that the Sunni have distorted the meaning of various passages in the Qur'an

Percentage today of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims worldwide



There are many differences between the various sects but the main differences stem from the period after the Prophet Muhammad's death

Sunnis believe that Prophet Muhammed did not appoint a successor, and that the community should decide on their religious leadership by consensus. A significant minority of Muslims are Shi'a ('followers of Ali'), who believe that the Prophet Muhammad appointed his cousin and son-in-law Ali to be his successor. Sunnis believe that individuals have a direct relationship with Allah, whereas Shi'as value the interpretation of religious leaders. Shi'as are not all the same; sects have a difference of opinion over the number of Imams that followed Ali, and each holds a different Imam as their point of worship.

Within the two Islamic sects (Shi'a and Sunni), there is a great variation of belief. This includes formal divisions between schools of Islamic thought (such as Maliki, Hanbali, Shafi'i and Hanafi), but also particular strains of Islam, which determine how people conduct their religious practice. Two of the most controversial of these are Salafism and Wahhabism because of their links at times to militant Islam. These are known as revivalist strains, because they reject association with any one school.

Salafism.

Salafists believe that Muslims need to return to the principles from the time of the Prophet, and that the Golden Age of Islam can return only in an Islamic community guided by Sharia law. Salafists also believe they have the right to persuade non-believers into thier faith. Radical Salafis believe that any government that does not abide by Sharia must be fought and resisted. However, Salafism traditionally takes a non-political stance and focuses on maintaining stability and peace.

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Wahhabism.

The dominant Sunni Salafist sect in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Wahhabism is based on the beliefs of 18th century Muslim scholar Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, whose descendants helped unify Saudi Arabia in 1932. Wahhabism represents a movement to purify Islam from heretical beliefs and actions. Wahabism believes that the State must fully enforce Islam and that, symbiotically, without Islam any State is liable to tyranny. Strict Wahhabis believe that other Sunnis do not follow the concept of the unity of God, and therefore may be legitimately persecuted. Shi'as are considered heretical.

Sufism.

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam, involving a direct spiritual relationship with Allah. It is usually heavily influenced by local cultural practices and beliefs. Orthodox Sunnis may frown on some Sufi practices, including using music and dancing during religious rituals, and Wahhabis and Salafis believe that Sufis are not following the true path of Islam.

Sufi orders use music and dance as part of their religious rituals. One of the orders has a distinctive spinning dance as part of their formal ceremonies and so members of this order have the nickname of 'Whirling Dervishes'

Religious Practice.

Islam affects almost every aspect of life as a Muslim Arab. People use Islamic symbols to decorate their homes and cars, carry miniature Qur'ans with them, and go on pilgrimage to various holy shrines around the Arab world. Most Arabs follow a pattern of daily prayer, celebrate Islamic festivals and holidays, and adhere to the rules of Islam. Verses from the Qur'an are memorised. In most Arab countries, Islam also affects politics and law, influencing marriage, inheritance and divorce law, as well as many aspects of business and banking.

It is common to see a copy of the qu'ran on car dashboards in Muslim countries.

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Sharia.

Sharia is the law as revealed by God and based on the philosophy laid out in the Qur'an and Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammed). It provides the legal basis for all public rituals but also guides an individual in their personal life, such as how to wash and how to behave in relationships. Sharia is interpreted for the people by religious scholars (collectively known as an Ulema). In Saudi Arabia and Sudan, sharia is interpreted very strictly and encompasses all aspects of domestic and civil law. In other countries it is integrated with other influences. For example, Tunisia is a former French colony and during that period French civil law applied. Since gaining independence the law has developed and evolved to incorporate sharia into the existing framework, resulting in a more liberal interpretation.

Christians.

There are an estimated 12-16 million Christians in the Arab world, representing 5-7% of the total population. Larger communities are located in Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Jordan and Iraq. The Coptic church is the most important Christian denomination in the Middle East, and suffers from discrimination in Egypt and elsewhere. A significant minority of these Christians do not consider themselves Arabs.

ARABIC VALUES

Honour and Shame.

These are two of the most important principles influencing the way people interact with each other in Arab societies. They influence everything from a casual interaction between

friends in a teashop or market to violent blood feuds between families. Upholding the honour of yourself and your family is a duty for everyone, men and women. Once honour has been lost, it is difficult to win back.

		Others believe I am: guilty	Others believe I am: not guilty	
I believe I am:	guilty	I am guilty and am punished	I should feel guilty regardless	GUILT CULTURE
	not guilty	I protest my innocence and fight the accusation	No Problem	
I believe I am:	guilty	I am guilty and am punished	No-one knows, so I am not shamed	SHAME CULTURE
	not guilty	I am shamed and dishonoured by their belief	No problem	

In the UK people generally belong to a guilt culture whereas many Arab countries have a shame culture. How a person reacts in the face of an accusation will depend on their cultural values.

This leads into the second fundamental principle in Arab life: shame. Most communities in the Arab World are collectivist meaning that the needs of the group have a higher priority than the needs of an individual. In these societies, actions by a member of the group are taken to be representative of the entire group, be that a family, an organisation, a tribe. An individual who loses honour brings shame not only to themselves but to the group as a whole. This contrasts with more individualistic cultures, such as the UK and US, where an individuals faults reflect only on themselves.

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A Blackened Face.

The need to avoid damage to your social status (a 'loss of face'), is therefore important. Arabs describe the face as being 'blackened' when honour is undermined, and 'whitened' when it is restored. These terms are linked to verses in the Quran relating to the afterlife. Loss of face can occur in many social situations. It might happen when someone refuses someone else's hospitality, ignores their authority, behaves disrespectfully towards them in some way, or acts in sexually suggestive or explicit ways.

Blood.

For Arabs, blood and what it symbolises are values of everyday life. Blood represents family and identity. Honour comes from the purity of your Arab blood, through both the mother and father. Certain Arab tribes, particularly those with Bedouin blood, are seen as more authentically Arab than others.

Age and Influence.

In Arab society, age is well respected. Status is directly linked to age, and children are taught to be obedient to their parents throughout their lives. When parents become elderly, their children expect to look after them; the idea of a nursing home is shocking to most Arabs. Ultimate responsibility in an Arab family rests on the senior male. An Arab man becomes more senior when his father dies, and the memory of fathers, grandfathers and ancestors are continually celebrated. Arab society is patrilineal: inheritance runs through men, and an Arab's second name is usually his or her father's name.

In Arab societies there are often three or more generations living in the same household

Virility and Bravery.

An Arab man is said to be honourable if he can prove that he is virile by having many children, especially sons. Sons continue the blood line. Traditionally, a man's honour also depends on his ability to prove his bravery and protect his family and home from enemies. Although most Arabs now live in cities and lead different lives to their ancestors, these principles are still very important.

Employment.

Certain jobs such as farming or craftsmen are seen as not traditionally 'Arab', and may be viewed as dishonourable. Some daily tasks, for example making dinner or looking after

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the children, also undermine a man's honour, as these domestic tasks are seen as being the job of women. It is also considered demeaning to do a job for which you are over-qualified.

Hospitality.

In Arab societies, hospitality must always be shown to guests to preserve one's honour. To refuse hospitality without a good reason will result in a loss of face for the host, as it implies that the host is not good enough for the guest. When offered hospitality, you should try to accept if possible. The amount of food served at communal meals tends to be very generous, and the Western custom of serving food in individual portions is virtually unknown in the Arab world. When offered a second helping of food, tea or coffee, you should always accept.

The Arab tradition of hospitality stems from their environment. In hostile desert conditions survival was difficult and so travellers were treated exceptionally well and given all help possible by their host.

Families and Tribes

Households and family are the focal point in the lives of most Arabs. Historically, family, clan and tribe provided the essential support network required for an individual to survive in the difficult desert environment. Despite the shift for many from a rural existence to an urban lifestyle, the loyalties and ties to these groups remain a key part of their identity. They also result in certain social hierarchies, for example Arabs who consider themselves tribal may look down on those who are not, as they see them as people who do not know their origins and therefore have no purity or honour to defend. However, although tribalism is important for social, economic and political life in some countries, in other countries religious or ethnic groups, occupation, geography or nationalism may be more important.

Families.

Although they are becoming smaller, extended families remain important. Traditionally, a man, his wife, their unmarried sons and daughters, their married sons and wives, and any of the latter's unmarried children all live together in one household. However, as many people have moved to cities, extended families don't live in the same house as much as in the past, but several related families often live in the same neighbourhood or apartment block. People generally remain close to their extended family (cousins, aunts and uncles) for their whole lives and loyalty to this group is usually placed before personal need.

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A Lebanese family gathering for Christmas celebrations. The extended family tends to maintain close links.

Tribalism.

A tribe is a group of people who are related through being descended from a shared male ancestor. Tribes can vary in size from a few hundred individuals to thousands, and are usually named after an ancestor. Tribesmen are morally obliged to cooperate with those who share common ancestors. Tribes are 'segmentary': the different segments (families, clans) may compete against one another, but will join together when it is in their common interest, such as when competition arises from another tribe. This is shown in the proverb: 'My brother and I against my cousin, my cousin and I against the stranger.'

Tribal Leadership.

Although leadership is often inherited in one family, the head of a tribe is a man that the community feel is best able to serve the tribe's interests. He will stay in that role for as long as the community see fit. The tribal leader, or sheikh, should project an image of strength and warriorhood. Tribal leaders may represent their tribe to higher authorities, consent to marriages or represent the state like a local politician.

Lineages, Clans and Confederations.

Tribes are made up of many clans or sub-tribes, which in turn contain lineages, made up of a number of extended families. The importance of the clan varies across the Arab world. In addition, several tribes can form a confederation, which may be connected simply by geography or historical ties, rather than based on being related by blood. Confederations may contain both Sunni and Shi'a tribes. Tribes in Libya, for example, form three confederations, in the east, west and south of the country.

FAMILY LIFE

Male and Female Roles.

Life for men and women in the Arab world is complex, and varies greatly between countries. Generally men and women occupy separate spheres, with men engaging in public and women being responsible for the private sphere. There are significant differences between male and female education and employment opportunities. In some countries only caring and domestic roles (such as nursing, teaching and midwifery) are filled by women. Women's illiteracy remains

about 60% across the region and laws on marriage, divorce and inheritance tend to favour men.

Veiling.

The honour of an Arab family is linked to the sexual honour of its women. Any action that breaks the strict rules about how men and woman should behave can ruin family honour. A woman's honour is at risk from attention from unrelated men, which is why many Arab and Muslim women veil in the presence of people outside their immediate family. In particular, a woman's hair is seen as a point of glory in her beauty and must be covered up (men are also required to cover their arms and legs).

Traditional Muslim Headgear

HIJAB	*ABAYA*	*NIQAB*	*BURKA*
			
• *A head scarf that hides the hair, ears and neck.* • *Widespread use in the Muslim world. Championed by the Muslim Brotherhood.*	• *A full cloak that covers the body and hair, it has no hand openings, or any buttons or clasps. It is held closed by the woman's hands or wrapping the ends snugly round her waist.* • *Not obligatory in Islamic countries.*	• *A veil that entirely covers the woman including the mouth and nose with a small opening for the eyes.* • *Widespread use through the influence of Wahhabi Islam, especially in urban environments.*	• *Covers the head and the body and has a grill which hides the eyes. Traditionally worn by Pashtuns in Afghanistan.* • *Enforced by the Taliban*

Traditions behind veiling differ from country to country and between different Islamic sects.

While veiling is universal in the more conservative countries like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the UAE, in other countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria it is a question of personal choice and many women do not cover their hair in public. In Tunisia, veiling in public is outlawed. However, overall, the custom is becoming more common across the region. The fact that veiling allows women to engage in public life suggests that this can be viewed as part of a feminist drive. Types of veils include the hijab, covering the hair, neck and shoulders; the niqab which covers the face below the upper cheeks and bridge of nose; and the burqa, a complete body covering with slit for eyes and nose.

Household Influence.

Women hold a powerful position within and between households. At home, older women may be listened to just as much as men. Women have particular influence within the family over the marriages of their children or grandchildren, and many women will control the family finances. The bond between mothers and their children is a central relationship in Arab families, formed as they are raised and maintained into adulthood.

Marriage.

Arabs tend to prefer that marriages are arranged by the family, as they feel that marriage is so important that it cannot be left to a couple acting on their emotions. As men and women tend to be largely segregated after puberty it is harder for them to meet a prospective partner. Although love marriages have become more common, there is usually some family involvement. As the average age of marriage has risen it has become more common for individuals to have a few fiancées before marriage. However, pre-marital chastity for girls remains very important.

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Marriage ceremonies vary significantly across the Arab world. In Saudi Arabia the men and women are segregated during the celebrations whereas in Egypt it is traditional to have a parade of belly dancers and drummers.

Keeping it in the family.

In order to keep wealth within the family and ease any tensions over split loyalties, Arabs traditionally prefer a man to marry the daughter of his father's brother. This is called cross-cousin marriage and remains common in rural areas. When a woman marries she is expected to minimise her ties to her father's family and transfer her loyalty to her husband's family. A young woman is subordinate to her husband's mother and sisters, and will be under pressure to produce a son.

Polygamy, divorce and homosexuality.

Under Muslim law, men are allowed up to four wives, as long as he can provide equally for all of them. In reality this practice – polygamy – is rare and practiced only by some wealthy Gulf sheikhs or nomadic Bedouins. Polygamy is outlawed in Tunisia and discouraged in Morocco. Muslim law discourages divorce but it is not illegal in the Arab world. It is more difficult for women to divorce their husbands than vice versa, and it is extremely difficult for them to do so in Saudi Arabia. A woman faces a difficult future if she is divorced by her husband. Homosexuality is illegal in most Arab countries.

PATTERN OF DAILY LIFE

Eating.

Arabs consider the left hand unclean because it is used for cleaning, so food, drink and gifts are given and accepted with the right hand. The left hand may be hidden in clothing during meals. Pork is strictly forbidden for all Muslims, and some other animals, such as dogs, are considered dirty. Arabs do keep pets such as cats, fish and birds.

Drinking.

Alcohol is forbidden by Islamic law, but attitudes towards it vary throughout the region. For example, while in Saudi Arabia alcohol is illegal to all, in Yemen alcohol is only illegal to Yemeni citizens, and in Lebanon alcohol is legal but consumed mainly by the large Christian population, and not by the Muslims. It is crucial to adhere to laws on alcohol when in an Arab country, outlined in the table on page 26.

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Smoking.

Many Arabs smoke, although women rarely smoke in public. When smoking at a public gathering, it is polite to pass cigarettes around to everyone present. It is sometimes considered rude to smoke around older men, and in some countries there are restrictions on smoking in certain places, such as taxis and shops.

Concepts of Time.

Different cultures have different attitudes towards the passing of time. The UK is known as a monochronic culture, there is an appropriate time and place for everything, interruptions are disturbances, deadlines are taken seriously. Most Arab cultures are more polychromic. Pre-arranged meetings may not start at the exact time planned and will rarely have designated times by which they must be completed. Although some countries have adopted Western business styles, Arabs do not expect to give or receive an apology if they are kept waiting for a meeting or if they keep others waiting. You should be prepared to be more flexible with your time schedule than you would normally be at home.

Monochronic	Polychronic
One thing at a time	Multiple activities at once
Rigid approach to time	Flexible approach to time
Strict agenda	No strict agenda
Focus on task	Focus on relationship
Completion of job most important	Relationships more important than job
Emphasis promptness	Promptness based on relationships

Attitudes to time by different cultural types.

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Country	Legal position on alcohol	Comments
Saudi Arabia	Illegal to all.	Anyone found in possession of alcohol can be severely punished, regardless of religion or nationality.
Kuwait, Libya, Qatar	Illegal to all.	Severe punishments for Kuwaitis; less severe for foreigners. Available in some hotels in Doha.
Yemen	Illegal for Yemeni citizens; illegal to buy for Yemeni citizens.	Available to foreigners in a handful of hotels in San'a and Aden.
UAE	Illegal for UAE citizens; illegal to buy for UAE citizens; illegal to drink alcohol in public; illegal to all in Sharjah.	Only available in hotel bars and selected restaurants, with the exception of Sharjah.
Bahrain, Oman	Legal, but consumption by Muslims discouraged; illegal for Muslims to drink alcohol during Ramadan.	Foreigners must obtain a license to drink alcohol at home in Oman.
Iraq	Legal, but consumption by Muslims discouraged; illegal for Muslims to drink alcohol during Ramadan.	Previously available in large Baghdad hotels and from a few shops, many alcohol sellers have been forced to cease trading by militant Islamic groups.
Syria	Legal, but consumption discouraged; illegal to drink alcohol in public during daylight hours during Ramadan.	Available in some bars and restaurants in Syrian cities.
Algeria	Legal. Algerian parliament banned alcohol imports in 2003-4, under Islamist party influence. Current government has pledged to overturn this.	Alcohol available in hotel bars and more expensive restaurants.
Egypt	Legal, but consumption discouraged. Minimum legal drinking age of 21.	Available in certain bars and hotels in major cities and resorts.
Tunisia	Legal. Minimum legal drinking age of 21.	Available in certain bars, restaurants and hotels.
Jordan	Legal. Minimum legal drinking age of 21. Illegal for Muslims to consume alcohol during Ramadan.	Available in most restaurants and many bars.
Lebanon	Legal, but consumption by Muslims discouraged. Alcohol drunk largely by Christians (35-40% of population).	Widely available in hotels, restaurants, bars and from some larger supermarkets.
Morocco	Legal. Minimum legal drinking age of 21. Illegal for Muslims to buy alcohol during Ramadan.	Widely available in shops and supermarkets as well as restaurants, bars and hotels.

Legal position on alcohol in Arab countries.

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INTERACTING WITH ARABS

Personal Space.

Arabs have a very different sense of personal space to Europeans. Between Arabs of the same sex, personal space does not really exist as we know it. Arab culture stresses the need to 'share the breath' of one's companion, and there is no word in Arabic for privacy. To a Westerner, this lack of personal space in conversations may seem invasive or too intimate. It is also common for Arabs of the same sex to touch each other on the arm while chatting or to hold hands while walking.

It is not unusual for friends of the same gender to be physically affectionate with each other.

Public behaviour.

How you behave in public is extremely important in the Arab world. Public displays of intimacy between men and women, even if they are married, are seen as highly inappropriate in virtually all Arab countries. Even holding hands is offensive. These rules apply to Westerners as well as locals. Avoid public displays of affection. In conversation with Arabs, there are certain themes that should be avoided. Men should always avoid questioning Arab men about women in their family. Political discussion may be uncomfortable in some countries and discussing religious beliefs is also best avoided. To break eye contact when holding a conversation with an individual of the same sex is disrespectful. However, for a man to make eye contact with a woman is offensive in most social contexts and should be avoided.

Behaviour during meetings.

The host initiates and directs the discussion at a meeting. At the start you should remain standing until invited by the host to sit down, and should also stand when a woman or senior man enters or leaves a room. Women leave the room first and men should offer their seat to women if there are no other places to sit. Sit upright and make sure that your hands are not in your pockets. Crossing legs is also inappropriate and it is insulting to display the soles of shoes or feet to other people. Always remember to remove your shoes when entering a holy place.

Gestures to avoid.

Western gestures to avoid in Arab countries include the thumbs up sign, and the OK sign. Forming a circle with the index finger and thumb of one hand signifies the evil eye. Do not point with one finger as this can also cause offence. Hand-shaking is the usual form of greeting, and tends to be more intimate and prolonged than in the West. It may

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be accompanied by kissing and embracing on both cheeks, although Arabs will be more restrained with Westerners than with each other. Do not refuse a hand-shake. It is also disrespectful for a man to offer his hand to a woman unless she extends it first, and women should never be kissed. Finally, do not take photographs of someone without asking their permission first. It is unacceptable to photograph women or people at prayer.

In this image the businessman on the left probably doesn't realise the offence he is causing by showing the sole of his foot.

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ARAB ATTITUDES TO THE WEST

It is difficult to generalise about Arab attitudes to the West. However, there are several themes which are relevant to all countries in the Arab world.

A Clash of Civilisations.

Many Arabs blame Western nations, particularly Britain and France, for creating artificial states in the region whose borders have caused tension ever since. The political problems faced by many Arab countries over the past 50 years are often viewed as a direct result of earlier Western colonial policies. In addition, to many in the religious establishment, Western culture is perceived as a threat to traditional Islam and there are concerns about the attraction of some Western values to young Arab people. Westerners are often perceived as culturally arrogant, unjustifiably regarding their culture as superior to that of Arabs. The recent history of the Arab world, including the Iraq war, has been extremely painful for many. However, the Arab Spring has arguably provided many Arabs with a new sense of empowerment.

Israel and Palestine.

The foundation of Israel in 1947 led to a sense of grievance that colours the outlooks of many Arabs. Jews around the world had been persecuted for their religion so, from the late 19th century through the early part of the 20th century, the Zionist movement called for the establishment of a Jewish state. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 by the British Government promised support for establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire. This still causes rancour among arabs. Events leading up to and during WWII resulted in many Jews heading to Palestine,

the historical birth place of their religion. In 1903, 5% of the population was Jewish. By the 1940s this had increased to a third resulting in increasing conflict with the Arabs who had settled there in more recent times.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

After WWII the United Nations supported a partition within Palestine to establish the new Jewish state of Israel, granting them 56% of the territory, a move strongly supported by the US government at the time. This was deeply unpopular with the Palestinian Arabs who had lived in the region for centuries who felt that they were being robbed of their land and their communities. Pan-Arab nationalism was growing throughout the Arab world and the nations neighbouring Israel responded by invading Israel the day after it was established. Israel has fought its neighbours, and won, in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973.

The issue remains unresolved today. Israel's hard-line policies towards the Palestinians remain a key political issue for many people in the Arab world. The United States' support for Israel (and to a lesser extent the UK's support), the media portrayal of both sides of the conflict and the political stance of the UN are all taken by many Arabs as evidence of the West's double standards.

The War on Terror.

American foreign policy following 11 September 2001, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, has led to suspicions that the US and its allies are pursuing a hidden agenda under the guise of the 'global war on terror'. There is a feeling in some Arab communities that the war on terror is a war against Muslims in general.

A Changing World.

Over the last few decades, Arab populations have increasingly been exposed to Western cultural values. However, this has not meant that Arab culture has

Camels have an important place in Bedouin heritage. With the transition from rural life to urban life for many Arabs, their role in society has been reinvented and the sport of camel racing was invented in the 1980's to preserve their role in Arab culture.

disappeared. While many Arabs want to study and work in the West, conservative elements view the West as a threat to traditional Islamic values. In addition, the population of the Arab world is now extremely young, and many young men are unemployed. The events since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011 are examples of some of these dynamics playing out, and show that the principles that underpin how Arab society works are open to change.

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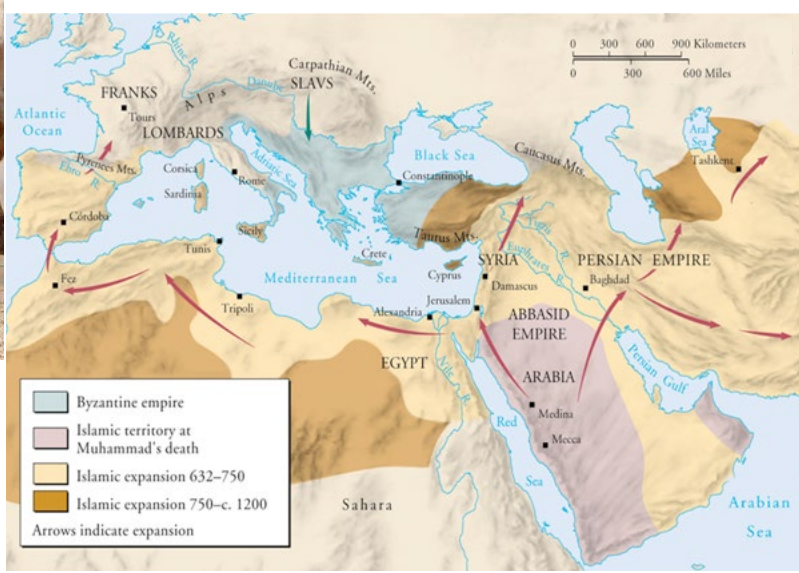
THE ARAB/PERSIAN CONFLICT

At the beginning of the 7th century the two great powers were the Byzantine Empire which ruled over most of mainland Europe and the Persian-Sassanid Empire which was centered around modern-day Iraq and Iran. Within 50 years the Arab Muslims had expanded out of the peninsula and had conquered vast areas of both empires.



The spread of Islam during the 7th century.

Many scholars believe that the Persians have never forgotten this defeat. In the centuries since they often rebelled against Arab Rule and fiercely held on to their own language,

culture and laws, integrating Arab customs in many areas but refusing to abandon their heritage. The Persians weren't just a geographically connected empire; they had a civilisation, their own political systems, had produced great artwork, scientific discoveries, and had a history which stretched back over a thousand years. Over the centuries there have been many periods of interaction and co-operations between Arabs and Persians, however this underlying rivalry has continued.

In more modern times, the relationship between the two groups have been a significant cause of most of the conflict throughout the Middle East. The most powerful Arab nation today is Sunni Saudi Arabia whilst Shia Iran, the birthplace of the Persian empire, is the other significant country in the region. Sectarian issues, ethnic divides and historical grievances all tie in to the current state of affairs between the two countries. Both support other countries and groups throughout the region as a method of gaining power and influence for their own benefit.

THE ARAB SPRING

This is a phrase used collectively to describe a series of anti-government protests and demonstrations that occurred across the Arab world starting in 2010. Many countries were affected by these protests which resulted in four governments (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen) being overthrown and several leaders announcing their intention to stand down at the end of their current terms. The success of the Arab Spring can be debated but it led to instability in many Arab countries, many of which are still in a period of readjustment.

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Mohamed Bouazizi's actions were a result of extreme desperation. Thousands across the country identified with his plight and within days mass protests against the government had started.

Tunisia was the first country to be hit by protests. On 17 December 2010, a Tunisian street vendor called Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest of the confiscation of his wares because he didn't have a vendor's permit. This became the catalyst for the Tunisian Revolution and the subsequent Arab Spring. Demonstrations, precipitated by high unemployment, food inflation and corruption, resulted in scores of deaths and injuries and led to the eventual ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011 after 23 years in power. This successful action by the protesters inspired similar actions throughout the Arab world.

In its early phase, protest in Yemen in January 2011 started against unemployment, economic conditions and corruption. This soon escalated to calls for Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign. Following a mass demonstration Saleh announced that he would not run for re-election in 2013 and that he would not pass power to his son. Further anti-government protests took place in the following months, many resulting in fatalities as opposing forces clashed. In May the Hashid Tribal Federation, one of the most powerful tribes in the country, declared support for the opposition. Heavy street fighting ensued which resulted in Saleh and several others being injured during a bombing of the presidential compound. While Saleh travelled to Saudi Arabia for treatment, Vice President Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi took over. Following treatment, Saleh returned to Yemen before finally signing over power. Since then, a coup by the Shia Houthi tribe has led to ongoing fighting, a proxy war involving Iran, Saudi Arabia and al Qaeda and the threat of Yemen splitting in two.

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh was one of several leaders who was overthrown during the events of the Arab Spring.

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In Egypt, protesters turned out in their millions. Social media was the primary method of co-ordinating the movement.

The population of Egypt saw events unfold in Tunisia and were inspired by the ousting of a ruler who had seemed untouchable. For 29 years the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had ruled the country resulting in huge disparity across the social divide. However any public dissatisfaction at the unequal economic conditions was met with police brutality. On 25 January 2011, millions of Egyptians took to the streets in protest, using social media as a means of co-ordinating with each other. The government shut down many of the social network sites and there was a media blackout to try and prevent the crowds coming together, but the people continued to protest. Hundreds were killed

and thousands were injured at the time, with thousands more being detained and subsequently tortured. However the revolution was successful; Muburak was overthrown. Elections were held to replace his government and Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood became President in June. Morsi granted himself powers allowing him to pursue fundamental Islamic policies which proved very unpopular with both the civilian population and the military. In July 2013, Morsi was himself deposed by a coup d'état and the military governed the country until elections held early in 2014 installed the former General, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Although the violence decreased, there are still numerous civil issues which need to be addressed before the country returns to its former levels of stability.

The Libyan protests began to escalate on 15 February 2011. For the previous two years there had been regular calls and protests for an investigation into the massacre of over a thousand people in Abu Salim prison in 1996. The arrest of the human rights attorney who was representing hundreds of the families resulted in protests outside Benghazi police headquarters. As the crowds grew the police began to use tear gas, batons and hot water to disperse them. Social media was again used to coordinate opposition and by 23 February they took Benghazi, with the trouble spreading throughout the rest of the country.

Civil war ensued with Colonel Muammer Gaddafi, the country's authoritarian leader, authorising airstrikes on the population. The United Nations authorised a no-fly zone over the country and 27 countries contributed to a bombing campaign against pro-Gaddafi forces. The government was overthrown and Gaddafi fled. He was captured and executed by the opposition in August 2011. In the three years since, the country has struggled due to a lack of coherent leadership. Although elections held in June 2014 resulted in an elected government, its members were forced to flee from Islamist militias who have since taken control of the major cities. The ongoing issues mean that Libya is at risk of becoming a failed state.

Muammer Gaddafi was captured by Libyan rebels whilst trying to flee NATO airstrikes. The rebels found him hiding in this drain with several bodyguards. There are conflicting reports regarding events after he was pulled from the drain; he was dead shortly afterwards and his body put on public display for several days before burial.

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Bahrain's first day of protests was 14 February 2011, when demonstrators occupied Manama's Pearl Roundabout, demanding more democracy and an end to discrimination against the majority Shia Muslim community by the Sunni royal family. The protesters were driven out by security forces after King Hamad declared a state of emergency and brought in troops from neighbouring Sunni-led Gulf states to restore order and crush dissent. The unrest left at least 30 civilians and five policemen dead. Almost 3,000 people were also arrested, and scores were handed long prison terms by military courts. International condemnation prompted King Hamad to set up the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which issued recommendations that included the prosecution of security forces personnel responsible for

The Pearl Roundabout was the location of the largest protests in Bahrain. It was demolished by authorities in an attempt to deter the crowds. Instead it galvanised the people and the roundabout is now a symbol of the movement.

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the torture and deaths of detainees, the release of prisoners of conscience and the reinstatement of dismissed Shia workers. The king accepted the recommendations and the government says they have all been implemented. However, critics have complained that not only is that not happening but that the crackdown is continuing and abuses are on the increase. A national dialogue process was initiated in July 2011 aimed at allowing people to air their views and make their demands for reform in a constructive manner that would allow consensus between all parties. The process is still ongoing and has been suspended on several occasions when parties reached an impasse. Sectarian tensions in the country remain heightened and have occasionally flared into violence.

Demonstrators in Oman took to the streets to campaign not for an overthrow of the government but rather for significant social reforms and improvements to the education system for the citizens of the country. Although predominantly peaceful, a small minority of the population started vandalising property and throwing stones at the police who were trying to break them up. This led to the security forces using lethal force against the protestors, antagonising the general population. Thousands started to take to the streets in protest. The country's leader, Sultan Qaboos, had seen how the other Arab countries had been affected by riots and protests and swiftly offered social and political reforms. This was largely successful; although there have been accusations of heavy handedness by the authorities since then, the country and the government's place in it has remained stable.

Sultan Qaboos offered reforms to the population to prevent any possible unrest.

Much like Oman, Morroco's citizens did not want the King, Mohammad, to be removed but rather were demanding constitutional reform. The King agreed and, after consultation with the people, he agreed to give up some of his powers to the elected parliament. Since then there have been mass protests against the authorities failure to deal with the country's economic issues including high youth unemployment, low wages and cuts in fuel and food subsidies imposed by the IMF.

Algeria's President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was another Arab leader to offer concessions shortly after the protests started rather than risk an escalation of public disorder. The country had been under a state of emergency since 1992 when the government was involved in a civil war against Islamists within the country. Although the violence had decreased in the intervening years, the state of emergency remained, forbidding any form of demonstration or gathering as an anti-terrorism measure. Bouteflika lifted this in February 2011 and introduced several constitutional reforms over the following months allowing greater freedom of speech to the public. Since then elections have been held and the

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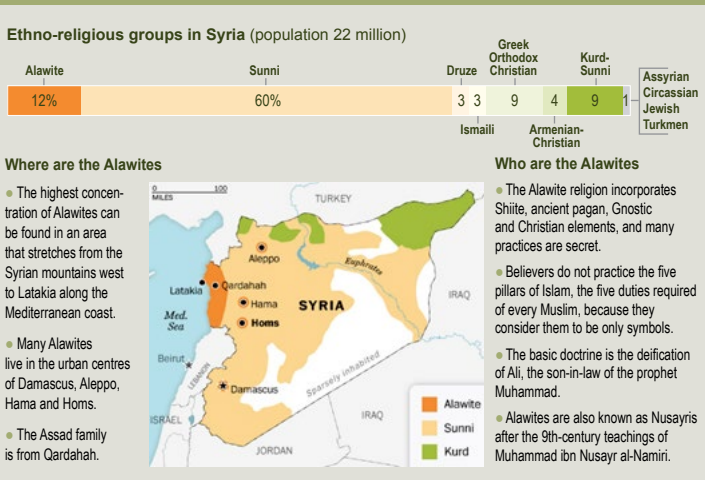
first Prime Minister, Abdelilah Benkirane, belonged to a moderate Islamist party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD). The reforms have been largely successful and the country has come out of the Arab Spring relatively unscathed.

Despite the turmoil moving across the Middle East in the early part of 2011, few people expected Syria to be badly affected. The country was a dictatorship and had been headed by the al-Assad family for over 40 years but the population were generally content with the leadership. Hafez al-Assad came into power in 1971 as the result of a coup and spent the next 30 years carefully balancing the needs of the population to ensure he remained in power. He built a largely socialist state which gained the support of the predominantly Sunni working class, despite the fact that he was from a Shia sub-sect. He connected with the other religious minorities in the country by making the state institutions secular. However he did purposely exclude some groups, for example the Kurds. The broad level of support Hafez built up was enough to ensure stability in the country for the duration of his reign.

He died in 2000 and his son Bashar came into power. He introduced reforms that deepened the natural divisions in society which started to build up as resentment to his regime. His economic reforms especially caused issues as they tended to leave the working class more disadvantaged while allowing those with the right connections to build up huge fortunes through trade monopolies and government contracts. A large proportion of those who benefitted were Alawites, members of the same sub-sect as Bashar. This fuelled the discontent among those who had been supportive of his father.



The Alawites are often considered a heretical Islamic sect.

Despite the country's internal issues, the Syrians did not start turning out to protest until March 2011, when 15 boys were arrested and tortured for writing anti-Assad graffiti on a wall. News of this spread quickly by social media and thousands of protestors took to the street demanding reform and an end to government corruption. The response of the security forces was brutal; water cannons and teargas were initially used to disperse the people but when that failed the police resorted to firing on the crowd, mass arrests and displays of force. Instead of deterring the public it instead inspired them to organise formal political and military movements so as to be better able to oppose the government. Within the central authority there were

The number of refugees from the Syrian conflict is now approaching 2 million people. This has placed significant tensions in neighbouring countries which have absorbed huge numbers of people into their economies in a short period of time.

disagreements over how to tackle the protesters leading to the collapse of the country's administration. The country remains embroiled in war 3 years later.

As public activism spread across the Arab world, many observers expected Jordan to suffer the same fates as Tunisia and Egypt. During 2010 there had been protests by various sectors of society against government corruption and the latest elections had been boycotted by many of the opposition who declared it a sham. There was a widening wealth gap between the rich and the poor and the security

forces were accused of oppression. Protests began in January 2011 calling for extensive political and economic reforms. King Abdullah II conceded to concessions including agreeing to share his power by appointing a Prime Minister. However the fact that there have now been five prime ministers demonstrates these concessions have been little more than platitudes rather than actual reform.

Economic reforms have been hindered by the instability across the region. Disruption in the gas supply from Egypt led to the government cutting fuel subsidies for its citizens

Violence has flared sporadically in Jordan during the past three years.

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which resulted in thousands of people turning out in violent protest. The situation calmed again in the space of a few days but the economic situation remains volatile. The civil war in Syria has resulted in hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to Jordan placing an increasing burden on the government to provide sufficient health care and schooling for the population.

The security apparatus is still accused of using heavy handed tactics. The economic situation for many families in the kingdom has become worse in recent years. Although the monarchy and the government systems have remained intact to date, there are still significant problems which could lead to political instability.

In Saudi Arabia, the Shia community account for approximately 10% of the population and reside mainly in the Eastern Province of the country. Despite the fact that the majority of the countries oil reserves are in the province, the Shia have protested against discrimination over jobs and religious freedom for years, with little success.

Early in 2011 King Abdullah announced a $85 billion economic package for his citizens. The plan included a housing project in the Eastern Province, increased unemployment benefits and changes in the process for mortgage applications. These measures benefitted all Saudi citizens, not just the Shia. It did not prevent protests and those who did venture onto the streets were dealt with forcibly by the Saudi security forces. Hundreds were arrested without charge and several were killed. The succession of King Salman,following the death of his brother Abdullah in January 2015 has so far led to business as usual.

Sheikh Nimr's trial has been condemned both within the country and by foreign governments as being unjust.

The sectarian tension has continued to build since then and has recently reached a point where it may cause issues in other countries with Shia majorities. Sheikh Nimr is a popular Shia cleric who was arrested as a leader of the protesters in 2012. He was tried in a Saudi court and sentenced in October 2014 to death by beheading and crucifixion. This has caused outcry by Shias across the world as well as the international community, as it is reported that it was not a fair trial and it is largely seen as an attempt to quell rebellion. The punishment has yet to be carried out but this event has the potential to be a catalyst for violence within the country.

Unlike many of the other Arab countries, Kuwait's population were already politically engaged and had been for many years. A political movement, made up predominantly of Kuwaiti's young adults, had successfully cajoled the government into political reforms in the years preceding 2011. As a result the Kuwaiti leadership did not face the same challenges as those countries which had not previously allowed public dissent. However it did encourage more people to get involved in public protests

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and the crowd numbers involved in demonstrations swelled significantly. In the early part of 2011 the Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed Al Sabah was facing accusations of corruption. His uncle, Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed Al Sabah, was also reforming the electoral law in a way that would effectively make the opposition parties in government completely powerless. In November 2011, protesters stormed the National Assembly. The Emir was forced to dissolve government and the Prime Minister resigned. However he still went ahead with the unpopular electoral reforms.

Kuwaitis storm the gate at the National Assembly in defiance of a security crackdown.

Through 2012 opposition protests continued though their long-term goals were never clearly understood. It took until 2013 for the various opposition groups to sit down and draw up a coherent list of desired reforms. A wide range of interested representatives were involved including political activists, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, a youth coalition, trade unions, civil society groups and so on. The report they produced included demands for a complete overhaul of the parliamentary system, a review of the criminal code, an independent judiciary and changes to the constitution that would reduce the power of the ruling elite. However the country has avoided the levels of violence associated with the Arab Spring elsewhere.

The Qatari state news channel, Al Jazeera, drew accusations of fermenting dissent in other Arab countries by reporting on the events of the Arab spring.

Qatar is another state that saw little internal disturbance as a result of the Arab Spring, however its standing in the international community has profoundly altered. Throughout the previous decade Qatar had built up a reputation as a progressive and stable state. On the regional level the Qataris have proactively engaged in foreign policy issues, providing mediation between opposition groups in Sudan, encouraging the government of Yemen to engage with the Houthi rebels who opposed it, and working with Iran and Israel whilst still maintaining their friendships with the rest of the Arab states.

When it became obvious that there was a revolution taking place on an untold scale across the Arab world, Qatar chose to support the uprisings. Prior to this they had been considered a neutral state but the violent oppression of protestors resulted in them taking sides. At the time Qatar held the leadership of the Gulf Co-operation Council, the political alliance of several Middle Eastern countries. It used this position to lead the regional support requesting NATO intervention in Libya and Syria. It also provided political backing to emerging Islamist political parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood. These policies have eroded Qatar's reputation as a neutral player in the region, resulting in intense scrutiny from those countries that recognise it only as a terrorist organisation.

Finally Iraq's Arab Spring has led to a radical change in dynamics across the region. Prior to the Iraq War in 2003 a Sunni minority had dominated the Shia population.

Following the regime change an elected government was elected on a democratic basis, however Sunni citizens felt they had been reduced to 'second-class' citizens under the new political system. Protests spread across the Sunni towns and villages in northern Iraq, demanding an end to the discrimination and harassment they faced. However many of the Shia community had suffered under the previous regime and cared little for their complaints.

The significant difference in Iraq was that the protests weren't led by hopeful political activists but rather by battle hardened war veterans. At the same time that the Shia government was ignoring their demands, a Sunni militant group called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant was gaining power in Syria. This group, known by the acronyms ISIL or ISIS, began a campaign in 2014 to expand the territory they held. They threatened to kill anyone who opposed them and the Sunni population, already disenfranchised from the Shia government, saw little incentive to intervene and the group rapidly swept through the country until it reached the urban centres which were predominantly Shia. By June 2014 they had successfully captured Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. Their leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of a new Islamic Caliphate and the renaming of the group to Islamic State (IS).

The Caliphate, headed by a Caliph, was the form of government under which Muslims lived until the last Caliphate, under the Ottoman Sultans, was dissolved in 1924.

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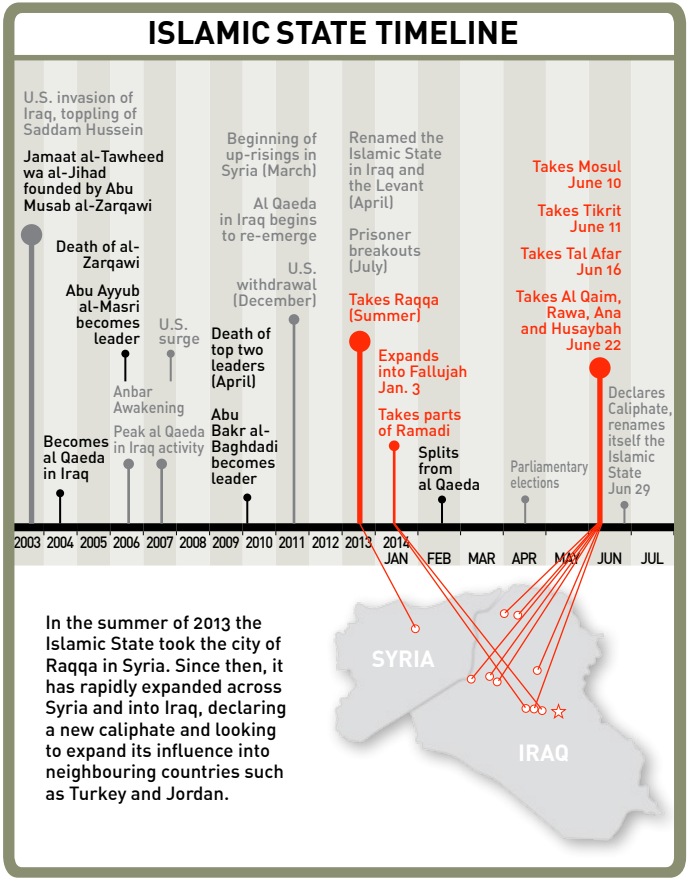

Evolution of the militant organisation known as Islamic State.

It is now seen as a golden era of expansion and civilisation. A new Caliphate would claim political and religious authority over all Muslim and challenge the legitimacy of other Arab rulers.

The ambitions of IS are not limited to Iraq. They already hold land equating to the land mass of the United Kingdom. Jihadist maps show that the aspiration of this caliphate is to extend across Eurasia and North Africa. Iran and Saudi Arabia, traditional opponents on almost every aspect of foreign policy, are both providing support to the Iraqi government in different ways to battle this threat. An Arab-led military coalition is working with US and UK forces to provide military training and logistical support. Interest in solving the Syrian crisis has been reinvigorated with a sense of urgency especially by those countries which are closest to the threat. It is likely that the outcome of Iraq's Arab Spring, whilst not immediately important to the majority of Arab citizens, will have far-reaching implications for future foreign policy and relationships across the region.

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Comments and suggestions for improving this document are welcomed.

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