

# Development of the middle east from 1945 to the 1960s

[History](#), [Middle East](#)



The 1940's were marked by wars for independence. The postwar period witnessed the end of the old foreign rule of colonial masters Britain and France. They were, however, replaced by the United States and former USSR competing for allies and resources and embroiled the area in what came to be known as the cold war. From the 1970s, and especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the U. S. emerged as the supreme foreign power alongside domestic turbulence ravaging the region.

The military staged coups against Arab old ruling landed elites during the 1950s and 1960s and key figures in installing new regimes composed of predominantly the military and senior bureaucrats. These new political order embraced radical ideologies, notably pan-Arabism and socialism, and implemented populist programs. One such program was land reform. However, at the time education levels were well below other developing regions, with adult illiteracy estimated at 85 percent in 1939 and only 23 percent of children ages 5–19 enrolled in school. (Yousef 2004).

The 1970s showed a dwindling down of these ideologies, giving way to a certain economic liberalization as well as pragmatism in foreign policy. But Political regimes saw no democratization and most of which even developed into highly authoritarian regimes with little or no tolerance for any opposition. A number of major wars, both within and between states, has marked regions history, causing great losses to life and property.

The most notable is the Arab-Israeli wars which emerged as a seemingly permanent condition after 1948, when the Arab states and the Palestinians vowed to destroy the newly created state of Israel and put an Arab

Palestinian State in its place. After four bloody wars failed to dislodge the Israelis who gained territory and perhaps fatigue, realism prompted diplomatic courses of action which brought about historic peace treaties among the nations of the region.

Although the promise of Israel as America's strategic asset was never quite fulfilled, Washington's pursuit of such relationship was part of a more ambitious quest. (Little 2002). Happening alongside where the major conflicts of war for independence by the Algerians in 1954, Yemen and Lebanon experience civil war in 1962 and 1975 respectively, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, Morocco's long war in the Western Sahara which begun in 1976 and culminating in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. However, during these tumultuous times, the Middle East saw rapid demographic and economic growth.

The region's population grew at an astonishing rate, accelerating from about 2 percent per year in 1945-60 to almost 3 percent per year in 1960-93. The total population rose from about 61 million in 1945 to 255 million. Massive rural-urban migration fueled this population explosion and has in turn establishes family planning. The 1950 swept the region in an economic boom. The standard of living improved everywhere and the economy was becoming more diversified and less dependent on agriculture which expanded its production but still represented a diminishing share of total output.

It was the onslaught of industries driven by fossil fuel that made considerable advances despite only a modest level of development by world standards. Most Arab States took an active and sometimes exclusive role in

directing their national economies. Their bureaucracies and public sectors swelled to unprecedented dimensions, especially as a high proportion of their budgets went into the military and internal security forces, which expanded tremendously.

In 1970s, the region's oil industry gained world importance, and especially when oil prices soared. An immense amount of wealth flowed into the oil states from the West and set in motion several regional trends: large-scale investment in development schemes; a massive migration of workers to the oil states; a growing gap between rich and poor countries; increasing dependence of the oil states on the West for goods, expertise, and investment opportunities; and economic liberalization in the poorer states as a way of sharing in the boom.

This also created liberalization in terms of culture where the position of women changed with the great socioeconomic transformations of the period. When prohibited not a long time ago, women now entered the educational system and the workforce in unprecedented numbers. Several countries passed laws to reduce social inequalities and to provide women with a greater measure of security within the family. The feminist cause gained some ground, although conservative elements insisted on keeping women in more traditional social roles.

The cultural scene was also transformed, especially by the expansion of education and the spread of the mass media. The number of schools and students increased dramatically at all levels, and illiteracy rates declined. Radio and then television became commonplace and, together with the

cinema, formed the prime sources of popular entertainment as well as exposure to the wider world. Along with audio and video media are the output of novels and poetry which has immensely increased. The region has produced two regional writers, S. Y.

Agnon of Israel and Najib Mahfuz of Egypt and won Nobel Prizes for their literary accomplishments. However, a remarkable and somewhat scary phenomenon amid these changes has spawned and this is the emergence of militant Islamic opposition movements throughout the region at which point or thereabout appeared the words “fundamentalist” to refer to these emerging militants. The programs of the various “fundamentalist” groups differed in methods and demands, but all shared a rejection of secular government and the desire to impose an Islamic identity on state and society.

Although only in Iran was a government overthrown by Muslim opposition, movements everywhere won wide appeal among the disaffected. Their clashes with the authorities, often violent, intensified a long-standing, bitter debate over the nature and future of Muslim societies. The rise of fundamentalism also triggered bitter cultural disputes among intellectuals in countries such as Egypt between the fundamentalists and the defenders of more pluralist traditions and secular outlooks.

But in the 1960s and 1970s, Egypt and other countries of the Middle East experienced robust economic growth, based largely on high levels of investment in physical capital that facilitated substantial increases in per capita income. However, despite the increase in economic growth the GDP

decelerated in 1970s. It might seem obvious that the higher oil prices of the 1970s should have sustained the growth cycle in this oil-exporting region, but GDP growth per worker in the Middle East decelerated in that decade, and factor productivity growth actually turned negative.

In the 1980s and even well into the 1990s, growth per worker in the region was decreased steadily, and modest gains in human capital were largely offset by a continuous decline in total factor productivity. This prompted a wide range of explanations for the economic slowdown in the Middle East and one of them was expressed, including structural economic imbalances, in the so-called “curse” of natural-resource abundance deficient political systems, conditions of war and conflict and even culture and religion. ,