

## Oil and the Middle East: Read and Respond

AOI: Environment

Leaner Profile: Inquirers & Knowledgeable

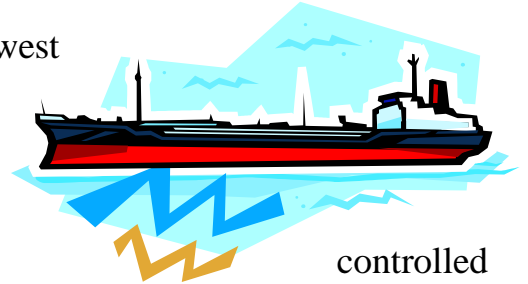
IB Unit?: How does geography affect where we live?



**SS7G7** The student will explain the impact of location, climate, physical characteristics, distribution of natural resources, and population distribution in Southwest Asia (Middle East).

- a. Explain how the distribution of oil has affected the development of Southwest Asia (Middle East).

Two of the most important natural resources found in Southwest Asia are natural gas and oil. These two resources bring wealth into the region because they are needed for much of the world's economy. Deposits of underground oil and natural gas were discovered in Southwest Asia at the beginning of the 1900s. At first, companies from the United States and Europe the drilling and refining of most of this oil, but now most of the oil operations are controlled by the countries themselves. Over half of the world's known oil reserves are found in this part of the world. This has made some of these countries extremely rich and has led them to have a lot of control over the global economy.



controlled

In the 1960s, several of these Southwest Asian countries joined with other oil-rich countries around the world to create the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in order to have more control over the price of oil on the world market. OPEC has called for an embargo, or a slow-down or temporary halt, to oil supplies at different times in the past to get political and economic agreements from the other countries in the world. While some countries in Southwest Asia have grown very rich due to their oil production, others have struggled to help their populations make a decent living.

The Southwestern Asian countries with the greatest reserves of natural gas and oil are Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait. Some other countries have smaller reserves, especially those found around the Arabian Gulf. These countries have enjoyed tremendous growth in national wealth and an improved standard of living in the past fifty years. Those countries without oil reserves have had a much harder time improving living conditions for their populations. This difference in wealth in some of the Southwest Asian countries has led to conflicts among the nations.

1. What are the two most important natural resources found in Southwest Asia?

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2. How much of the world's known oil reserves are found in this location?

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3. What happened in the 1960s?

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4. What does OPEC stand for?

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5. What Southwestern Asian countries have the greatest oil reserves?

## Factors that Influence the Middle East

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- b. Describe how deserts and rivers of Southwest Asia (Middle East) have affected the population in terms of where people live, the type of work they do, and how they travel.



Three major river systems are located in Southwest Asia: the Euphrates River that runs through Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait; the Tigris River, which runs through Turkey, Iraq, and Kuwait; and the Jordan River, which forms part of the border for Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and Israel. In addition to being important sources of water, these rivers also provide boundaries between nations. These three rivers are important because they furnish water for drinking and irrigation, as well as routes for transportation and trade for those who live along their routes. Many of the major cities in Southwest Asia are located on or near these rivers. These cities and towns are also centers of industry, as that is where workers can most easily be found.

Southwest Asia has a number of very large desert areas: the great Syrian Desert shared between Syria and Iraq, and the Rub al-Khali, or “empty Quarter,” in southern Saudi Arabia. These deserts have historically provided Southwest Asia with natural barriers against invasion. They have also led to a way of life that developed around the need to survive in such harsh surroundings. Some people have always managed to live in and around the desert, living in tent camps and surviving as sheep and camel herders and making a living by trading animals and handmade goods with those who lived in the towns on the desert’s edge. These people are known as “Bedouins,” or desert nomads, and their way of life is gradually disappearing.

The countries of Southwest Asia generally have a very hot and dry climate. The climate is the type of weather a region has over a very long period. Four large oceans or bodies of water the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean border Southwest Asia. Even so, mountain ranges close to many of the coastal areas block rains coming from these bodies of water and the result is that much of the interior of Southwest Asia is desert. Because there are coastal areas as well as a number of large rivers, other parts of this region have enough water to support agriculture and towns and cities of significant size.

Southwest Asia is located between three major continents: Europe, Africa, and Asia. For this reason, the region has played a major role in trade among these continents through the centuries. Ships loaded with trade goods from Asia would travel to the coast of Southwest Asia. These goods would then be loaded onto caravans that traveled across the desert to the coast on the other side of Southwest Asia. Today the Suez Canal in Egypt links the

Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, making it possible to continue the trade among continents without having to use overland caravans.

Many people in Southwest Asia practice subsistence agriculture, growing small amounts of crops, to take care of their local needs. Because the climate is so dry, agriculture nearly always depends on irrigation, directing water from small rivers and streams to the farmers' fields. There is some commercial agriculture (growing crops for industrial markets), but even that is limited by lack of water.



Water is a critical resource in Southwest Asia, both as a source of life and as a route for trade. Because the Tigris and Euphrates rivers run through more than one country, access to the water has led to many political conflicts in recent years. Several countries have built dams along their portion of these rivers, to create lakes for irrigation and to generate hydroelectric power (electricity created using the energy of running water). Each dam cuts down on the water available to the countries further downstream.

No agriculture or animal herding can take place without access to adequate sources of water. People in this region have used many creative ways to bring water to the fields where it is needed, using water wheels and pumps powered by animals or electricity, digging wells and qanats (underground tunnels that bring water from the hills to dry plains), and building canals. An additional problem comes with irrigation. Irrigated land usually needs chemical fertilizers. Repeated use of fertilizer eventually causes salts to build up in the soil, making it hard to grow anything. Many places in Southwest Asia that have been irrigated for many years no longer produce crops as well as they once did.

6. What are the three major rivers systems of the Middle East?

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7. Why are these rivers important?

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8. What is located along these rivers?

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9. Who are the Bedouins?

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10. What is the difference between subsistence farming and commercial farming?

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11. Why are dams a problem for other countries?

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12. What is a qanats?

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13. What are the problems with fertilizers?

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