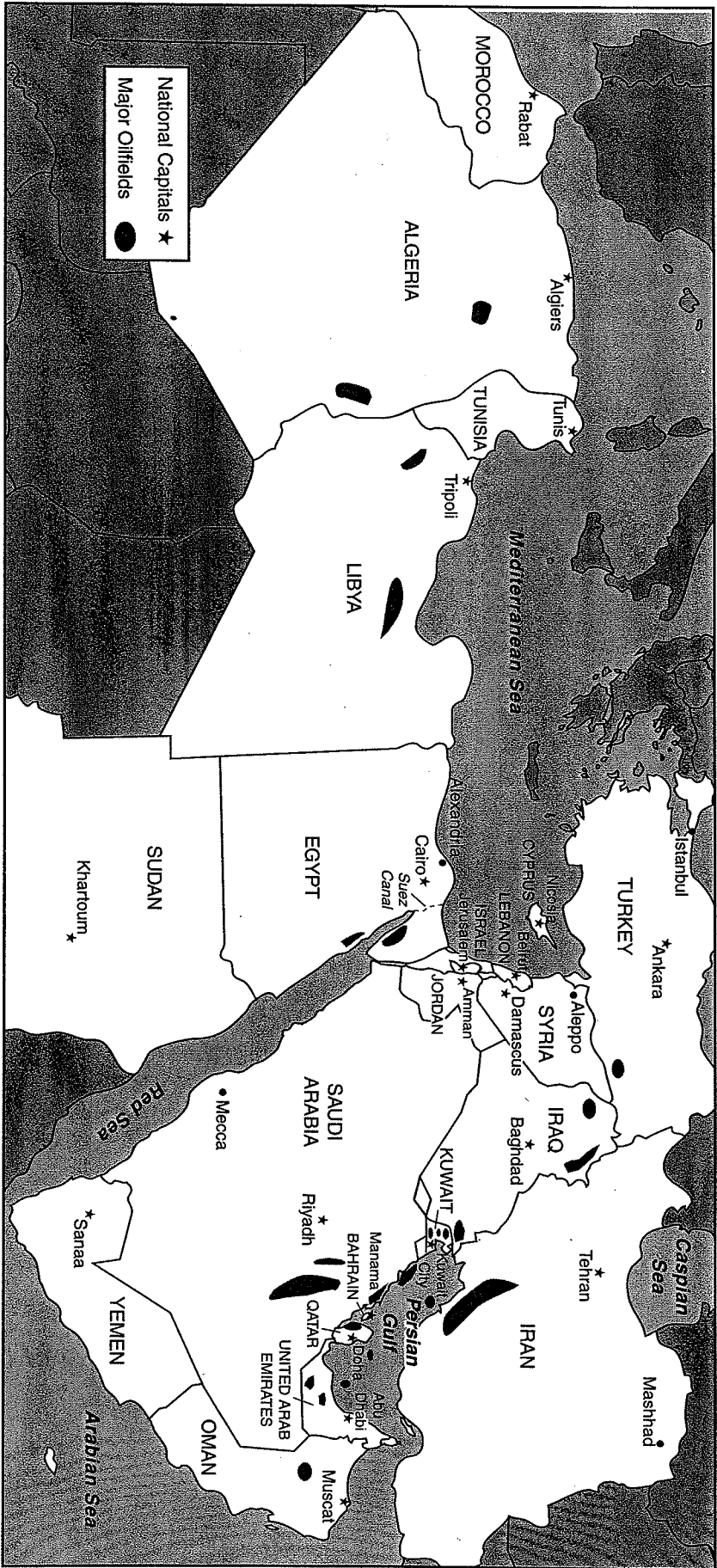


# The Middle East



## INTRODUCTION: AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

In the spring of 2003, U.S.-led military forces raced through the Iraqi desert and defeated Saddam Hussein's military. Although the major fighting ended quickly, the consequences of the war promise to ripple across the landscape of the Middle East for years to come. One early effect came on April 29, 2003 when the United States announced that it was withdrawing its forces from the Prince Sultan Air Base deep in the barren desert of Saudi Arabia and moving them to nearby Qatar.

For more than ten years the air base protected U.S. interests in a part of the world we know as the Middle East. From the base, U.S. pilots were a few minutes' flying time from the Persian Gulf—the center of the world's oil industry. Veering northward, U.S. pilots could reach Iraq and Iran, two countries that American leaders identified as foes of the United States. A few hundred miles to the west and U.S. warplanes were over Israel, a long-time ally of the United States and the flashpoint of four wars since 1948.

The United States established its military presence in Saudi Arabia when a U.S.-led international military mission drove Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army from Kuwait in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Prince Sultan Air Base was testimony to American military power and technological ingenuity. Its presence had also heightened anger against the United States in a part of the world central to U.S. policy.

### ***How did the events of September 11 focus new attention on the Middle East?***

On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked by terrorists angry about the American military's presence in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. role in the Middle East. The terrorists were followers of Osama bin Laden, a Saudi born multi-millionaire. Bin Laden had been implicated in attacks on the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. Other reports linked him and his organization, al Qaeda (loosely translated as "the base"), to the bombing deaths of U.S. military personnel in Saudi Arabia in 1996 and the attack on the USS *Cole* by suicide bombers in 2000 that killed nineteen U.S. sailors.

Before September 11, the Prince Sultan Air Base and the growing U.S. commitment in the Middle East seemed in contrast to the overall direction of U.S. foreign policy. With the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, the United States had been redefining its international role. The United States had cut its defense budget. American troops had been withdrawn from overseas bases. Foreign aid spending to most parts of the world had been slashed. After September 11, U.S. leaders and the American public began to reconsider carefully U.S. policies in the Middle East as well as our country's role in the world.

### ***Why does the United States maintain an active role in the Middle East?***

The United States maintains an active role in the Middle East for two reasons. First, the defeat of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and continuing U.S. military presence in Iraq have reconfirmed the United States at the center of the balance of power in the Middle East. The United States has begun an effort to bring democracy to Iraq with the hope that it might spark reform and stability in a region critical to our economy and security. Second, our country has been deeply enmeshed in efforts to settle the long conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Breakthrough agreements have been signed between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as between Israel and Jordan.

In this following pages, you will take part in the debate regarding U.S. policy in the Middle East. You will confront the same questions facing U.S. policymakers: Which interests and values should provide the basis for America's position in the region? How should the Middle East's enormous oil reserves and our country's close relationship with Israel figure into our calculations? What is the challenge presented to the United States by the importance of Islam in the politics of the Middle East?

The reading will prepare you to wrestle with these questions. In Part I, you explore the history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East since World War I. Part II examines the critical issues facing the United States in the Middle East today.