

CFR Resources

[“Iran’s Revolutionary Guards.”](#)

A backgrounder on Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a unique paramilitary force that projects Iranian power throughout the region. (1,800 words)

[“U.S.-Saudi Arabia Relations.”](#)

A backgrounder on U.S.-Saudi Arabia relations, one of the United States’ most important and complex bilateral relationships. (2,400 words)

Andrew Chatzky, [“OPEC in a Changing World.”](#)

A look at the history and current status of OPEC, the oil cartel that includes a number of powerful Middle Eastern countries. (1,900 words)

Zachary Laub, [“Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood.”](#)

A backgrounder on Egypt’s large and influential Islamist political party, which has seen its fortunes rise and fall in the wake of the Egyptian revolution. (1,600 words)

Zachary Laub and Kali Robinson, [“What Is the Status of the Iran Nuclear Agreement?”](#)

A look at where the Iran nuclear agreement stands in the wake of U.S. withdrawal and heightened tensions after the killing of Qasem Soleimani. (1,800 words)

Kali Robinson, [“What Is Hezbollah?”](#)

A backgrounder on Lebanese political party and paramilitary force Hezbollah, which has played an influential role both in Lebanese politics and in neighboring countries. (2,200 words)

[“The Kurds’ Quest for Independence.”](#)

A multimedia timeline of the Kurdish people and their quest for a nation-state of their own over the last hundred years. (3,600 words)

Articles

Scott Anderson, [“Fractured Lands: How the Arab World Came Apart,”](#) *New York Times Magazine*, August 11, 2016.

An enormous five-part series that covers 2003–2016 Middle Eastern history through the eyes of six individuals from across the region. (41,100 words)

Ronen Bergman, [“The Hezbollah Connection,”](#) *New York Times*, February

The Middle East and North Africa: Classroom Reading List

10, 2015.

An account of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri that also serves as a primer on Lebanese politics and political history. (9,200 words)

Dexter Filkins, "[A Saudi Prince's Quest to Remake the Middle East](#)," *New Yorker*, April 2, 2018.

A profile of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, known as MBS, who operates as the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia and as such wields enormous wealth and power as he works to reposition Saudi Arabia in the world. (10,600 words)

Dexter Filkins, "[The Shadow Commander](#)," *New Yorker*, September 23, 2013.

A profile of Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard General Qasim Soleimani, who was involved in wars across the region for decades. (10,500 words)

Kim Ghattas, "[The Muslim World's Question: 'What Happened to Us?'](#)" *Atlantic*, January 25, 2020.

An excerpt from the author's book *Black Wave*, which examines two defining events in Middle Eastern history that both happened in 1979: the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. (2,900 words)

Firas Maksad, "[Lebanon's Year of Fire](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, October 21, 2019.

A summary of events in Lebanon in 2019, which included protest movements and shifts in who holds power in society and government. (1,300 words)

Elias Muhanna, "[Mashrou' Leila and the Night Club's Political Power](#)," *New Yorker*, July 31, 2017.

A brief profile of Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila that also examines nightclub culture and gay culture in Lebanon. (800 words)

Michael Sokolove, "[Why Is There So Much Saudi Money in American Universities?](#)" *New York Times*, July 3, 2019.

A deep dive into one way that Saudi Arabia uses its wealth to conduct diplomacy. (4,700 words)

Lesley Stahl, "[Sesame and the IRC Join Forces to Help Syrian Refugee Children](#)," *CBS News*, November 17, 2019.

A look at the lives of Syrian refugees and at a collaboration between the International Rescue Committee and the makers of Sesame Street to provide services to refugee children. (Although the video

The Middle East and North Africa: Classroom Reading List

requires a subscription, there is a complete transcript and some photographs beneath.) (1,900 words)

Books

Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (2005).

An accessible summary of Islam and Islamic history that evenhandedly discusses the internal diversity of the religion, including Sunnis, Shias, and Sufis. (384 pages)

Steven Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square* (2011).

A book by a CFR fellow that traces the history of modern Egypt and how it set the stage for the Arab Spring. (370 pages)

Guy Delisle, *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* (2011).

A graphic novel that illuminates the culture of Jerusalem and the effects of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. (336 pages)

Thomas Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (1990).

A classic introduction to the region, originally written in the 1990s but since rereleased with updates. (541 pages)

David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (1989).

A book about World War I and its aftermath in the Middle East that tells the story of how many of the countries we are familiar with came to be and explains the historical origins of many of the issues in the region today. (635 pages)

Suzy Hansen, *Notes on a Foreign Country: An American Abroad in a Post-American World* (2017).

A Pulitzer Prize finalist that is part memoir, part extended essay examining America's role in the world and particularly in the Middle East. (288 pages)

George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (2005).

A look at the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and its effects on both countries. (481 pages)

Wendy Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria* (2017).

A collection of first-person accounts of Syrian refugees that illustrates the tremendous toll of the Syrian civil war. (352 pages)

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2000).

An autobiographical graphic novel about growing up before, during,

The Middle East and North Africa: Classroom Reading List

and after the Islamic Revolution in Iran; touching, accessible, and an excellent introduction to Iranian culture and history. (153 pages)

Anthony Shadid, *House of Stone: A Memoir of Home, Family, and a Lost Middle East* (2012).

A memoir by late Lebanese-American journalist Anthony Shadid that uses his family history to illustrate the history of Lebanon and the region. (336 pages)

Emma Sky, *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (2015).

A thoughtfully critical memoir by a U.S. official who worked for both the State and Defense Departments during the U.S. occupation of Iraq. (400 pages)

Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (2015).

The Pulitzer Prize–winning history of the self-declared Islamic State commonly known as ISIS. (368 pages)

Graeme Wood, *The Way of the Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State* (2016).

Based on interviews with supporters and recruits, a look at the psychology and ideology fueling the self-declared Islamic State. (352 pages)

Literature

Alaa Al Aswany, *The Yacoubian Building* (2002).

A novel about the residents of an apartment building in modern Cairo that challenges stereotypes by revealing modern Egypt in all its diversity. (256 pages)

Ibtisam Barakat, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* (2007).

The memoir of a girl growing up in Ramallah during and after the Six Day War. (192 pages)

Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (2002).

A novel about a boy growing up against the backdrop of the birth and early years of Israel. (560 pages)

Naguib Mahfouz, *The Cairo Trilogy: Palace Walk / Palace of Desire / Sugar Street* (2001).

From a Nobel Prize–winning writer, the story of a family over three generations living in Cairo during the British occupation. (1,313 pages)

The Middle East and North Africa: Classroom Reading List

Multimedia

Michael Barbaro, "[The American Women Who Joined ISIS](#)," *New York Times*, February 22, 2019.

A thought-provoking podcast episode on the plight of women who left the United States to live in territory controlled by the self-proclaimed Islamic State and who now, as the Islamic State is in shambles, are looking to return to the United States. (30 minutes)

Sam Ellis, "[Why Iraq's Great Rivers Are Dying](#)," *Vox*, July 3, 2019.

A video explainer on water use in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. (10 minutes)

"[Four Days in August](#)," *NPR*, July 11, 2019.

A podcast episode on the 1953 coup against the prime minister of Iran that was supported by the United States and United Kingdom. (38 minutes)

"[Middle East Focus](#)," *Middle East Institute*.

A podcast from a respected Middle East think tank that consistently provides thoughtful analysis on issues in the region.

"[No Friend but the Mountains](#)," *NPR*, November 7, 2019.

A podcast episode on the history of the Kurds and their quest for a nation-state. (43 minutes)

"[The Siege of Mecca](#)," *NPR*, November 14, 2019.

A podcast episode on the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979. (44 minutes)

News Sources

[Al Jazeera English](#)

The English version of Qatar's well-funded satellite TV and web outlet that has extensive coverage of the region and the world.

[Al-Monitor](#)

A web outlet published in Washington, DC, that covers the Middle East with a focus on going beyond the headlines.

[Haaretz](#)

Israel's most respected and longest-running daily newspaper.