Part IV: Case Studies

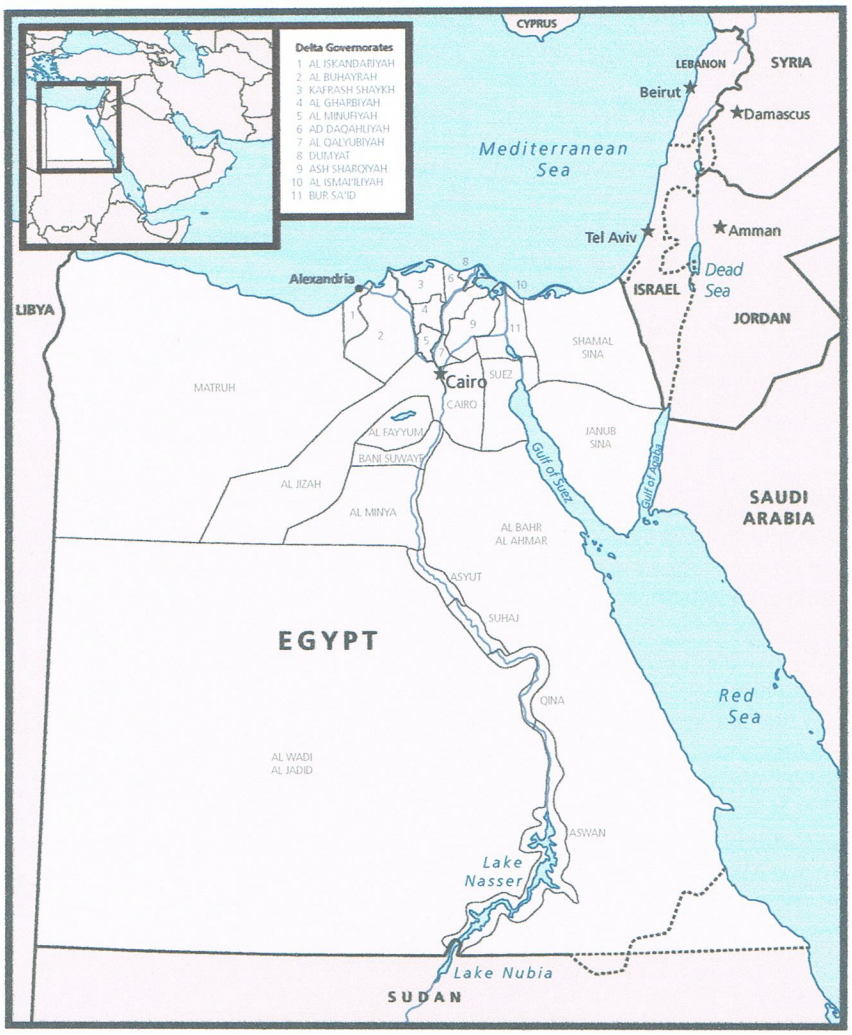
The following case studies explore more deeply the history of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Syria, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Each case highlights the role that U.S. policy has played in the history of a particular place or group of people, leading up to the present day. Taken together, the cases illustrate trends in U.S. policy in the Middle East as well as ways that U.S. involvement has varied based on context.

These case studies are not meant to be comprehensive and do not include all of the countries of the Middle East. They are designed to introduce you to some of the challenges and controversies that are relevant to broader debates on U.S. policy in the region. The case studies will help prepare you to consider what direction U.S. Middle East policy should take.

As you read, consider similarities and differences across cases and how these comparisons shed light on these key questions:

- What values and interests have shaped U.S. policy in the Middle East, historically and today?
- In what ways have the values and interests that motivate U.S. policy in the Middle East contradicted one another?
- How does U.S. policy affect the Middle East, and how do people throughout the region experience and respond to this policy?
- What are the various perspectives on U.S. policy in the Middle East, including those held by people who live in the region?

Egypt



Egypt is a Mediterranean country situated in northeast Africa, with a small portion in southwest Asia. It borders Libya, Sudan, the Gaza Strip, and Israel. Roughly 94.7 million people live in Egypt. Most of Egypt is desert, so 95 percent of the country's population lives on just 5 percent of the land—in the fertile areas near the Nile River. About 90 percent of the population is Muslim (mostly Sunni), while around 10 percent of the population practices some form of Christianity.

People have inhabited present-day Egypt for thousands of years. Around 3200 BCE, a kingdom arose, and dynasties of this kingdom ruled Egypt for the next three thousand years. Following these dynasties, a number of powers including the Persians, Romans, and Greeks ruled Egypt. In the seventh century, the Arabs conquered the country, bringing with them Islam and the Arabic language.

Drawn to Egypt's strategic location and the Suez Canal, the British took control of Egypt's government in 1882. While the British officially ruled, Egypt remained tied to the Ottoman Empire until 1914. In 1922, Egypt gained partial independence from Britain.

In 1952, a group of Egyptians staged a military coup, ousting the corrupt king. Former army colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser emerged as Egypt's leader. Over the next fifteen years, Nasser strengthened his position as a leader of the Arab world. While strengthening its power, his government built popular support by establishing a land reform program and some democratic political institutions. Nasser was also a bold leader in foreign policy, standing up to world powers and acting as a force for Pan-Arab unity.

After Nasser's death in 1970, Anwar al-Sadat took power. Sadat made a number of policy changes, particularly in Egypt's international relations. For one, he aligned Egypt with the United States in the ongoing Cold War instead of continuing Nasser's policy of not officially endorsing either power. When Sadat participated in peace negotiations with Israel in the late 1970s, many countries in the

Middle East disapproved and kicked Egypt out of the Arab League.

In 1981, Sadat was assassinated and Hosni Mubarak came to power. Mubarak and his secular government ruled Egypt under increasingly authoritarian conditions. In late January 2011, as part of the Arab Spring uprisings across the region, widespread protests began in Egypt, involving millions of people. Protesters demanded political and economic changes—including Mubarak's resignation.

In February, Mubarak left office and fled Egypt. Egypt's military took control, and Mohamed Morsi was elected president. Morsi represented the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic political organization with a long history in Egypt and widespread public appeal. Just over a year after his election, massive protests erupted to express dissatisfaction with the government and economy under Morsi. The military ousted and imprisoned Morsi, suspended the constitution, and called for new elections. The army and police killed hundreds of pro-Morsi protesters. Tens of thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members were imprisoned, and hundreds were executed without trial.

In May 2014, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who led the army in ousting Morsi, became president in a controversial election. El-Sisi rebuilt the police state and suppressed all dissent, with the goal of restoring political stability.

"The regime in Egypt is waging war against the young who dare to dream of a bright future for themselves and their country."

—Remarks from the family of Alaa Abd el-Fattah, an activist detained by the Egyptian government, June 2015

What has U.S. policy been in Egypt?

U.S. policy toward Egypt largely reflects U.S. concerns and interests in the Middle East more broadly, especially around the security of Israel. As a result, U.S.-Egyptian relations have been more tense under Egyptian leaders who did not support Israel, such as Nasser. Under Sadat, Egypt and the United States grew into close allies. During Mubarak's rule, the United States considered Egypt to be an important source of stability in the region and thus maintained close ties. Egypt became (and remains) a top recipient of U.S. military aid in the region, second only to Israel.

When the 2011 protests began, the United States initially remained loyal to Mubarak. Within weeks, the United States switched positions, urging Mubarak to step down and calling for a peaceful transfer of power. Overall, the U.S response to the Egyptian government's violent repression has been cautious, despite clear challenges to U.S. values—such as human rights violations and suppression of freedom of speech. The U.S. government did not publicly condemn the coup against Morsi, though it did express concern about the killing of Morsi supporters. The United States continues to treat Egypt as a trusted ally today.

Gigi Ibrahim, CC BY 2.0.

Protesters in Cairo, Egypt, demonstrating against President Mohamed Morsi in August 2012.

"The military was asked to intervene by millions and millions of people, all of whom were afraid of a descendance into chaos, into violence.... To run the country, there's a civilian government. In effect, they were restoring democracy."

—John Kerry, U.S. secretary of state, after Morsi's removal from power, July 2013

What are perspectives on U.S. policy in Egypt?

U.S. policy in Egypt has affected the country and its people differently over time. Egyptian perspectives on the United States and its policy toward Egypt reflect these shifts.

Foreign aid has been a major factor in how U.S. policy affects Egypt. As a top recipient of U.S. aid for decades, Egypt's government, military, and society have come to depend on the United States in many ways. Even with U.S. aid cuts, Egypt has received billions of dollars in military aid from the United States, allowing the country to become the strongest military force on the African continent. This increases Egypt's international power and strengthens the role of the military in Egyptian society.

Today, the majority of Egyptians disapprove of the U.S. role in the world. A 2014 poll conducted by Pew Research Center found that 85 percent of Egyptians had a negative view of the United States. This disapproval intensified following the overthrow of President Morsi and the election of President el-Sisi. Critics have pointed to imprisoned Egyptian journalists and activists as a sign that the United States is unconcerned with ongoing human rights abuses in Egypt.

Many Egyptians also criticize the United States for its policy toward other countries and people in the region. For example, Egyptians accuse the United States of hypocrisy for supporting Israel while Palestinians experience rights violations. The U.S. failure to intervene effectively in the civil war in Syria, or to meet its goal of eradicating the extremist group ISIS from the Middle East, also contribute to Egyptians' negative perceptions of the United States.

"Egyptians of every political persuasion deserve justice. That must never be considered unrealistic. Rather, it is myopic and naïve to think that supporting our dictators, as so many Western administrations do, will make real the mirage of stability they claim to support. It must never be considered delusional to expect our human rights to be respected."

—Mona Eltahawy, an Egyptian-American journalist in an op-ed in the *New York Times*, March 28, 2017

How do Egyptians envision their future?

Egyptians have different ideas about what they would like to see for the future of their country. A number of issues concern Egyptians—ranging from security and human rights, to education, economic opportunity, and the role of religion.

Some Egyptians question the role that religion should play in the country. Some conservative Muslims imagine a future where Egypt is governed by Islamic law. Other Egyptians want a more secular government. After the overthrow of President Morsi of the

Derek Gulbranson, CC BY 2.0.

A view of Cairo, July 2013. With about 9.5 million people, Cairo is the most populous city in Egypt.

Photograph by Lindsay Turchan.

Protesters in Cairo, 2013.

Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, hundreds of the group's members were killed. This has left members of the Muslim Brotherhood feeling threatened and uncertain about their future.

"They've said that many times before, and it's not true. They are already arresting not only Muslim Brotherhood members, but members of the wider Islamist movement. No one is going home."

—Mohamed Soudan, a Muslim Brotherhood official, referring to a statement by Egypt's interior ministry that promised safety to Morsi supporters who left the pro-Morsi protests before the police crackdown, August 2013

Some Egyptians—for example Coptic Christians, a minority group in Egypt—have called for greater religious tolerance within the country.

A large part of the Egyptian population today is concerned about its day-to-day survival, as Egypt's economic difficulties have led to price increases and unreliable access to basic services. For these Egyptians, improved economic opportunity and quality of life are the main priorities.

"My husband, who is an accountant, and I, can hardly meet the needs of our family with the nearly 4,000 pounds we earn every month.... Also, it has become difficult these days to find affordable schooling in good schools."

—Wafa Ahmad, an Egyptian teacher, quoted in *Gulf News*, August 4, 2017

Many Egyptians are concerned about the future of democracy in their country. While the election of President el-Sisi halted many efforts for political change, the majority of Egyptians still remain hopeful that they and their country are capable of making strides toward a more democratic society.

"I don't believe it was a waste.... It created a feeling, a space, even if we don't have that now. Even if the people are afraid again, that experience was so important. In spite of everything, I believe it was worth it."

—Ahmed Maher, founder of the April 6 Youth Movement, reflecting on the uprisings in Egypt, quoted in the *New York Times*, March 14, 2017

Economic, political, and social pressures will continue to transform Egypt in the coming years. Its large population, strategic location, and powerful military suggest that it will remain an important country for U.S. foreign policy. How both of these countries navigate this important relationship will remain a critical question.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is the largest Arab country in the Middle East, covering more than half of the area of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. About 28.2 million people live in Saudi Arabia, concentrated in urban areas in the middle of the peninsula. Roughly 30 percent of the population are immigrants who came as foreign workers. Saudi Arabia is home to Mecca and Medina, the two holiest cities in Islam. Islam is the country's official religion, and the majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. There are also smaller populations of Shi'i Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 by Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud after his thirty-year effort to unify the Arabian Peninsula. The country achieved full independence at this time, allowing King Saud to establish a system of government and international relations relatively free from European influence. From the start, Islam played a central role in the Saudi state.

After oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia in 1933, the country became an economic power in the Middle East. King Saud directed most of the country's oil profit to the royal family. He also used it to provide financial assistance to neighboring countries, often as a diplomatic strategy to ease tensions with other states.

Members of the royal family replaced King Saud in 1964, concerned about his financial irresponsibility and growing tension with other Arab states. The new king oversaw a decade of political and economic transformation that increased Saudi Arabia's status. Saudi Arabia has since been one of the most stable countries in the Middle East. At the same time, Saudi monarchs have maintained tight political control, limiting the activity of opposition groups and committing human rights abuses to prevent challenges to their power.

What has U.S. policy been in Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia's role as a major oil-exporter has led to a long history of economic interdependence—and, in turn, a strong political and military relationship—with the United States. In 1933, the country granted a U.S.-based company access to Saudi oil in exchange for the construction of oil-producing facilities and royalty payments.

As the U.S. government began to play a more active role in the Middle East toward the end of World War II, it established formal

diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. The countries forged a decades-long alliance based on mutual economic and security interests.

"The now proven importance of our oil interests in Saudi Arabia and generally improved economic conditions which will result therefrom make it desirable in my opinion that we now enter in formal diplomatic relations with that state."

—Paul Knabenshue, U.S. minister to Iraq, to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, June 1939

Public Domain, the White House.

U.S. President Trump and King Salman bin Abdulziz of Saudi Arabia signing the Joint Strategic Vision Statement for the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, May 20, 2017.

The Saudi royal family has been a steady ally to the United States, but it has also used this position to put pressure on U.S. policymakers. For example, during the Arab-Israeli war in October 1973, when the United States provided military assistance to Israel, the Saudi government sided with Syria and the Palestinians, implementing an embargo on oil to the United States. This forced the United States to step back from its overt support for Israel in the regional conflict. In recent years, the Saudi government has also pressured U.S. administrations to take strong stances against Iran, a country Saudis view as a threat and source of regional instability.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia has relied on U.S. military assistance. In the 1970s and 1980s, the United States received billions of dollars through weapons deals with the Saudi government. When Saudi Arabia declared war on Iraq during the Persian Gulf War, the United States deployed about 500,000 troops to defend Saudi oilfields against Iraq.

"[The deployment] discourages Iraq from doing the wrong thing militarily and encourages the Saudis to do the right thing economically."

—Representative Les Aspin, (D-WI), August 1990

Thousands of U.S. troops remained in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War. Today, the United States maintains a military base on Saudi Arabia's Gulf coast. The Saudi government is currently the United States' biggest foreign military sales customer, an arrangement that benefits the Saudi government and U.S. weapons producers.

During the Arab Spring revolutions, the Saudi government crushed protests within its borders and also sent troops to suppress uprisings in other Arab countries. Despite criticisms that Saudi Arabia's response was undemocratic and part of a longer pattern of political repression, the Obama administration worked to maintain good relations with the Saudi government to protect U.S. economic and security interests.

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An image of the skyline of Riyadh in November 2016. Riyadh is the capital of Saudi Arabia and the most populous city in the country. Around 35 percent of the people in the city are immigrants and people not of Saudi descent.

"Sometimes we have to balance our need to speak to them [Saudis] about human rights issues with immediate concerns that we have in terms of countering terrorism or dealing with regional stability."

—President Barack Obama, before a visit to Saudi Arabia, January 27, 2015

U.S.-Saudi relations grew more tense in the final years of Obama's administration. One source of tension was Saudi Arabia's refusal to engage in U.S.-led negotiations about Iran's nuclear program. The Obama administration also issued warnings about Saudi Arabia's involvement in Yemen's civil war, a conflict that is in part a military competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

"There's a growing perception at the White House that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia are friends but not allies, while the U.S. and Iran are allies but not friends."

—Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert, speaking about Saudi Arabia's decision to skip a summit to discuss relations with Iran, May 2015

U.S.-Saudi relations have grown stronger under the Trump administration, which fully supports Saudi Arabia's agenda in the region, including its military campaign in Yemen.

What are perspectives on U.S. policy in Saudi Arabia?

Since the United States is one of Saudi Arabia's closest allies, many Saudi officials work to maintain positive relations. At the same time, Saudi government officials do not unanimously support all U.S. policies. Some Saudi authorities express fear that U.S.-led wars could negatively impact stable countries in the region. They worry that this could lead extremist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS to expand their influence.

Saudi clerics are religious officials who give legitimacy to the royal family by defending most of the Saudi government's policies. Some clerics criticize the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. They argue that having foreign troops stationed in Islamic land violates Islamic doctrine. More radical Islamic leaders accuse the Saudi monarchy of being corrupt and unfaithful to Islam through its alliance with the United States.

There is also a history of anti-U.S. sentiment among groups within Saudi Arabia who oppose U.S. support for Israel. Many segments of the Saudi population support Palestinian groups fighting Israel. They criticize the Saudi government for maintaining close ties with the United States through especially tense moments in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Activist groups in Saudi Arabia have expressed frustration toward U.S. policymakers for not taking a clearer stance against the

Saudi government's violent crackdown on the Arab Spring protests in Saudi Arabia and neighboring Bahrain. These critics point out the contradiction between the democratic ideals U.S. officials claim to defend and the U.S. government's tolerance of violent repression by its allies.

Another aspect of U.S. influence in Saudi Arabia is cultural. For example, some U.S. policymakers and organizations have called on Saudi leaders to loosen political, economic, and cultural restrictions on women. Many Saudi activists embrace these ideas.

> ***"For me, I'm a proud Saudi woman, and I do love my country, and because I love my country, I'm doing this. Because I believe a society will not be free if the women of that society are not free."***
>
> —Manal al-Sharif, Saudi Arabian gender equality activist known for her role in the Women's Right to Drive campaign, in a TED talk, June 2013

While Saudi Arabians seek change, some see U.S. involvement as cultural imperialism and would rather lead their own liberation efforts.

> ***"We don't want the U.S. to force us to bring change.... [T]hey are forcing the world to accept their views."***
>
> —A Saudi teacher, in response to a talk given by a U.S. official, Jeddah, September 2005

How do people in Saudi Arabia envision their country's future?

Saudi Arabia has a relatively stable political history, yet not all Saudis have experienced that stability in positive ways or hope for it to continue. Groups that have benefited from existing systems envision a future that maintains them, while other groups within the country hope for change.

Members of the Saudi royal family have the most at stake in maintaining existing structures. The country's rulers seek to continue Saudi Arabia's productive oil economy in the interest of financial stability and regional influence. They also aim to avoid the political instability that has affected other countries in the Middle East, such as pro-democracy protests and sectarian violence. Saudi rulers have achieved this goal in part through repressive measures, but also by addressing certain calls for change from the public—in areas such as employment, housing, and freedom for women in public life.

The Sunni ruling elite is intent on silencing the country's Shi'i minority. Members of this Shi'i population have continued to build a resistance movement, demanding freedom from discrimination and violent repression as well as greater political participation. Activists from different sects of Islam have called for a more democratic political system that is still rooted in Islamic law.

There are many non-Muslim minority groups that have their own goals for a politically and culturally inclusive Saudi Arabia.

> ***"I was born here [in Mecca], schooled here, worked here and married here. This is the only place that feels like home. Although, we visited India every year on our two-month summer holiday to meet our relatives, we yearned to come back here.... Even my parents were born and brought up here. Most of my relatives are also here. This place never seemed foreign to us. In fact, we feel foreign when we go to India."***
>
> —Amal Hussain, a resident of Mecca of Indian descent discussing the hardships of immigrants in Saudi Arabia, quoted in *Gulf News*, September 2, 2017

Pro-democracy activists from a variety of ethnic and religious groups within Saudi Arabia promote a vision of a more democratic country. Despite government repression following the Arab Spring uprisings, these activists have continued to call for a more open political system, greater gender and religious equity in public life, improved economic op-

portunity, and an end to human rights violations.

In recent years, there has been a growing call from the population at large for Saudi leaders to move away from costly interventions in foreign conflicts—such as the civil wars in Yemen and Syria—and to devote more attention to domestic reforms.

Black Zero, CC BY 2.0.

A labor camp, or housing complex, where immigrant laborers live in Dammam Second Industrial City in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, June 2013. The city is the home of numerous factories for a variety of products. About seventy-five thousand people are reported to work there. Workers in many labor camps in Saudi Arabia often face a number of hardships including unpaid wages and limited access to food, water, and healthcare. Labor camps are often poorly constructed and not safe to live in.

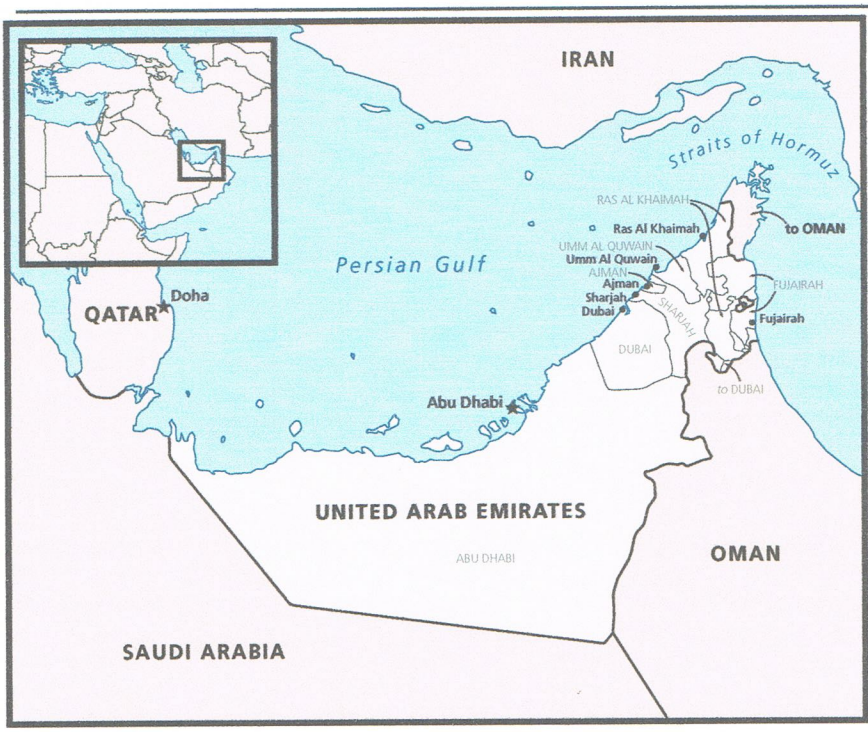
"We will not progress and evolve significantly at every level of our existences unless we follow the teachings of Islam.... The only way for us, as Arabs and Muslims, to evolve and to progress is to combine Islam and democracy."

—Shaykh Zaki al-Milad, a Shi'i activist, June 2003

"Today, the people are in need of a new social contract, one between the reformed Saudi regime and free people. This can only be done through a constitutional governance that draws its legitimacy from the people. The government must be elected, representative of the people's will, and held accountable to them alone."

—Suliman al-Rashudi, Abdullah al-Hamid, Mohammad Fahad al-Qahtani, and Abdulkareem Yousef al-Kathar, Saudi Arabian activists, June 2012

The United Arab Emirates



The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is located on the Arabian Peninsula. It borders Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf. The UAE consists of seven emirates (or principalities), each of which is ruled by a different monarch. These monarchs govern the entire country through the Federal Supreme Council. About 9.2 million people live in the the UAE, mostly in the emirates Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah. Immigrants make up about 88 percent of the population, the majority coming from South Asia. The official religion of the UAE is Islam. Seventy-six percent of all residents are Muslim, while 9 percent are Christian.

Although the United Arab Emirates (UAE) did not come into existence as one country until 1971, people have lived there for around seven thousand years. In the pre-Islamic period, different groups settled throughout the region. In the seventh century, Islam became a unifying regional force, bringing the various groups together under Arab Muslim rule. More people came to the area, and large port cities developed.

In the 1700s, a confederation of tribes called the Qawasim grew into a regional power, controlling territory on the Persian Gulf coastline. The Qawasim played an important role in trade in the region, while another group, the Bani Yas, ruled near present-day Abu Dhabi. When a new dynasty of rulers took control of the coastal village of Dubai, the city quickly grew into an important commercial center. These Arab Muslim rulers were called emirs, and the lands they governed were called emirates.

For geopolitical and commercial reasons, the British took an interest in the Persian Gulf region, including the present-day UAE. The British and the local ruling groups sometimes traded with each other, but they also had tense relations. In 1820, a treaty brought the local kingdoms under British protection.

Oil was one of Britain's main interests in the area. In the 1950s, British companies began drilling for oil, which they discovered at the end of the decade. As companies exported the oil, the industry began to bring profits to the local rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. These leaders invested the money in a number of projects—such as new roads, schools, hospitals, and measures to diversify the economy.

In 1968, the British determined that they could no longer afford to keep the kingdoms under their protection. In 1971, the treaty of protection between the emirates and the British expired, making the emirates independent. Dubai and Abu Dhabi's rulers held a meeting to draft a new constitution and then invited the rulers of the other emirates to become part of a federation called the United Arab Emirates. Four additional emirates agreed to join the new federation, and the last emirate joined the UAE in 1972.

Since achieving independence, the UAE has continued to grow, becoming an international power after the 1990s. Today, the UAE is the third wealthiest country in the Middle East. It is a major economic force in the region with well-developed oil, natural gas, tourism, business, and other industries. It is known internationally for its impressive skyscrapers, expensive hotels, indoor ski resort, massive shopping malls, and other extravagances. The UAE is also an example of political stability in the Middle East.

Mohammad Sabbouh, CC BY 2.0.

The Sheikh Zayed Highway, the Emirates Towers, the Financial Center, the metro line, and the tallest building in the world, Burj Khalifah, in Dubai, August 2014. Dubai is a cosmopolitan city that serves as a regional and international hub for business, commerce, and tourism.

The United States took an interest in the UAE as soon as it was founded in 1972—and relations continue into the present.

What has U.S. policy been in the UAE?

U.S. policy has played a less direct role in shaping the UAE's history than it has elsewhere in the Middle East. The UAE and the United States have had a friendly relationship since diplomatic relations began in 1972. The two countries have worked together on various issues, including non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, defense, energy policy, and trade. One reason for this cooperative relationship is that both countries have goals to promote economic growth and maintain regional stability.

Militarily, the UAE and United States have also worked together closely. The United States has sold the UAE billions of dollars worth of military equipment, in large part to intimidate a U.S. rival, Iran. The weapons sales also benefit U.S. weapons manufacturers and the U.S. economy. The UAE has participated in nearly all of the regional military campaigns led by the United States after the Gulf War (except the 2003 invasion of Iraq).

Oil has also played an important role in U.S.-UAE relations. Today, more than one hundred U.S. oil and gas companies operate in the UAE. Many other U.S. companies see the UAE as a valuable cosmopolitan center for business, often holding meetings or opening firms there. As of 2016, the UAE was the United States' largest export market in the Middle East.

> ***"We are different from our neighbors.... We're your best friends in this part of the world."***
>
> —Yousef al-Otaiba, Emirati ambassador to the United States, speaking about UAE-U.S. relations, quoted in the *Washington Post*, November 2014

> ***"The United States and the UAE enjoy a vibrant and expanding bilateral relationship, including strong defense***

the United States claims to defend.

Photograph by Lindsay Turchan.

The American University, Sharjah, December 2012. The United Arab Emirates is known for having some of the best universities in the Middle East. Many residents of the UAE see higher education as a key to success, but the high cost of universities makes this goal unattainable for many.

"If people think of the UAE and other states in the Gulf at all, they don't think about human rights…. They think about oil, or wealth or the world's tallest building; they think that the UAE is an open society. This award [for human rights activism] will shed light on the daily human rights abuses that go on here and in these other wealthy countries."

—Ahmed Mansoor, an Emirati human rights activist, quoted in the *Independent*, October 6, 2015

Others in the UAE criticize not just the effects of U.S. policy in the Middle East, but the social and political climate within the United States. These critics point out problems in U.S. society, such as economic inequality and racism, in an attempt to highlight the hypocrisy of U.S. claims to be a world leader of democratic values.

"The UN's message [urging the United States to take action on racism] is a good start in formulating the language and paradigm that sees discrimination not as an isolated phenomenon but fundamental to the infrastructure of the country, in the same way as the nation's other inequalities. Race hate is not a temporary blip or hysteria that has come to pass because of a freak election or referendum."

—Nesrine Malik, in an opinion piece in *Gulf News*, reflecting on racism in the United States, August 27, 2017

Photograph by Lindsay Turchan.

A view of Dubai, December 2012. Dubai is an international hub for business and tourism and is known for its extravagance.

Still, most people in the UAE have a favorable view of the United States and U.S. policy. They tend to focus their concerns on the UAE's relations with world powers other than the United States.

How do different groups in the United Arab Emirates envision their future?

People within the UAE have a variety of visions

Photograph by Lindsay Turchan.

Maha Basaddig presents her piece "Adaptor" in 2012. The painting represents her experience moving to the UAE from Saudi Arabia at age fifteen and sometimes struggling to understand her identity.

for their future. For many members of the Emirati ruling elite, the major goals are to maintain economic growth and political stability. The UAE's leaders aim to expand their country's economy even further by pushing for economic growth in new sectors. They also have an interest in maintaining the existing political system—avoiding uprisings similar to those that took place elsewhere in the Middle East. Some wealthy immigrants and business owners living in the country share these goals.

Many in the UAE envision a country in which priorities broaden from economic and political development to also include social improvements.

> ***"In the UAE, we believe it is possible to be Muslim, moderate and modern at the same time. We are committed to promoting this ideology of openness, optimism and opportunity across the region. Arab parents can and should believe that their children's future can be better than their own. We know it is a vision, but also a realistic and attainable one—no less difficult or less inspiring than launching a man to the moon or a mission to Mars."***
>
> —UAE Ambassador to the United States Yousef al-Otaiba in an opinion piece in *Gulf News*, December 3, 2015

Activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and some government officials continue to work for democratic change on a variety of fronts, including freedom of expression, labor rights, gender equality, and citizenship and immigration rights. Activists express these demands through social media, art, and music, as well as through collaboration with government officials or NGOs.

> ***"The winds of change are blowing, and believe me you don't want to be left behind.... It's time for the corporate world in our region to rewrite their gender playbooks so that they can tap fresh perspectives and ideas from women."***
>
> —Mona Al Marri, vice president of the UAE Gender Balance Council, in an interview with the *National*, May 2017

Iran

Iran is the world's seventeenth largest country in area. It borders Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. It also borders the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Caspian Sea. Iran is a country of about eighty million people, the majority of whom live in cities. Iran's full name is the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its government and laws are based on an interpretation of Islam. Over 99 percent of Iranians are Muslim, mostly Shi'a.

The arrival of Islam in the lands of Iran—when Arabs conquered the area between 637 and 651 CE—profoundly affected Iranians and their history. Islam's messages of justice and fairness appealed to many Iranians. By the tenth century, most Iranians had adopted Islam, but pre-Islamic culture continued to influence society.

After this time, foreigners ruled Iran until about 1500 CE, when the Safavid Dynasty came to power. Safavid rulers formed a highly organized state. They oversaw economic development by building roads and expanding trade. Shi'i Islam became an integral part of Iranian life, but Safavid rulers also tolerated other religions in order to encourage trade.

In the nineteenth century, Great Britain and Russia attempted to control Iran. The ruler Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896) gave foreigners the right to develop parts of Iran's economy in exchange for royalty payments. This made the shah wealthy but led to economic hardship for most Iranians. Economic struggles, widespread inefficiency, and corruption led many Iranians to protest the government.

> ***"All that's needed in this matter is goodwill, planning, honesty, and lack of greed.... All difficulties can be overcome with the assistance of justice and equality."***
>
> —Ebrahim Beg, speaking to the Iranian minister of the interior, recounted in the *Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beg*, 1895

Public demands for change led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. A new constitution established a parliament, limited the power of the shah, and defined the rights of Iranians. Unhappy with his loss of power, Iran's shah arrested leaders of the constitutional movement and collaborated further with the British and Russians. In 1907, he allowed foreigners to divide Iran into spheres

of influence. The Russians took possession of the north, while the British controlled the southeast.

"Today, the Iranian foreign minister must clearly inform the two powers that any agreement that has been concluded regarding Iran, without her knowledge, is void and illegitimate. Any government that wants to enter into relations with Iran must address itself directly to the Iranian people."

—Criticism of the shah's agreement with the British and Russians in the Iranian newspaper *Habl al-Matin*, September 11, 1907

In the twentieth century, Iranians continued to resist foreign interference in their political and economic affairs. Reza Shah (1926-1941) succeeded in many ways but was not able to limit Britain's control over Iran's oil industry. When the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh attempted to take control of the oil industry, he was forced from power by the U.S.-sponsored coup of 1953. For the next two decades, the shah who ruled Iran maintained close ties with the United States.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution was a crossroads for Iran. After the U.S.-backed shah fled the country, groups from across the political spectrum proposed visions for the future. Some Iranians wanted to create an Islamic state. Some hoped for a socialist society. Others called for an effective parliamentary system of government. Ultimately, an overwhelming majority of Iranians voted to create an Islamic Republic. They elected an assembly of experts to produce a new constitution. Religious leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was given the new position of Supreme Islamic Jurist with final say over all political and religious matters.

During the 1980s, Iranian society underwent a process of "Islamization." Khomeini decreed that Iran's courts had to implement Islamic laws based on the Shar'ia. (The Shar'ia is a wide body of Islamic literature that lays out legal principles.)

Political repression and growing economic frustration increased public discontent during the following decades, especially among Iranians born after the 1979 Revolution.

In mid-2009, hundreds of thousands of Iranians protested the results of a presidential election they believed had been rigged. The government responded by killing scores of marchers and jailing thousands. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's decision to declare the election fair and denounce the protests undermined the legitimacy of the political system in the eyes of many Iranians.

"[P]rotecting the rights of minorities, supporting freedom of expression, and pursuing the demands and rights of citizens are no longer political issues; rather they constitute a way to free yourself, and to bring about the release of your friends."

—Masoud Bastani, an imprisoned journalist in a letter to his wife after her release from prison, September 2013

Hassan Rouhani, a moderate cleric, became president in 2013. Iranians re-elected him in 2017 by a wide margin. While Ayatollah Khamenei retains the highest political position in Iran, Rouhani has made significant changes. He has worked to lessen the role of religious hardliners in the government and improve international relations.

"Now he must provide more freedoms, break the hard-line monopoly on the state-run radio and television, and increase freedom of press."

—Fazel Meybodi, a cleric from Qom, celebrating the re-election of President Hassan Rouhani, May 17, 2017

What has U.S. policy been toward Iran?

The U.S. relationship with Iran has been filled with hostility and mistrust for decades. For many Iranians, mistrust dates back to the coup of 1953. Although Iranian dissatisfaction with the shah was widespread during the 1970s, he was able to remain in power largely due to U.S. support. At the time, the United

Hamed Saber, CC BY 2.0.

An Iranian woman holding a sign that reads "They killed my brother because he asked 'Where's my vote?'" during the Green Protests, June 17, 2009.

States saw Iran as an ally against the Soviet Union and was willing to overlook the shah's abuses of his own people to preserve that alliance.

Iran and the United States do not currently have diplomatic relations, making it difficult for the governments to work together.

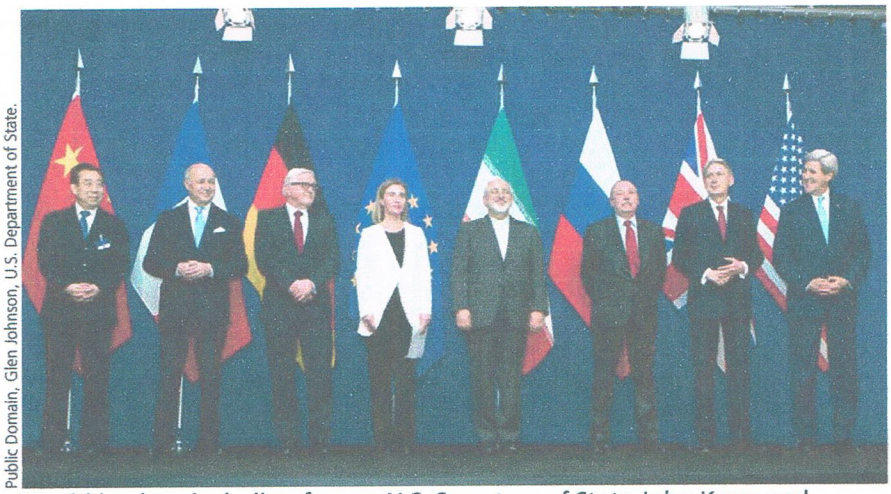
Since the early 2000s, Iran's nuclear program has been a serious concern for the U.S. government. In 2002, President George W. Bush (2001-2009) identified Iran (along with Iraq and North Korea) as part of an "axis of evil" that threatened the world. Many in the United States worried that Iran's leaders were using their nuclear program to build nuclear weapons, rather than for the peaceful purposes—such as nuclear energy—allowed by international treaties.

The United States has been involved in various attempts to limit a potential nuclear program in Iran. When a secret Iranian nuclear enrichment plant was discovered in 2009, the United States, the UN and the European Union placed economic sanctions on Iran in an attempt to pressure its leaders to cooperate. The sanctions severely damaged Iran's economy and caused hardships for Iranians. In 2010, a computer virus attacked Iranian nuclear enrichment facilities. Many experts believe that Israel and the United States developed the virus.

In 2015, after negotiations with the United States and other members of the international community, Iran agreed to reduce its nuclear program and to allow inspections of its nuclear facilities. In return, the international community agreed to end economic sanctions on Iran. U.S. President Donald Trump (2017-) has stated that he thinks this deal is bad for the United States.

The United States continues to view Iran as an adversary in conflicts in the Middle East. U.S. policymakers see Iran as a threat to the security of Israel and Saudi Arabia, two important U.S. allies. Iran has backed Bashar al-Assad's government in the Syrian Civil War, as well as Shi'i groups in Yemen and Iraq who are fighting U.S.-backed Sunni groups. The Iranian government also provides support to the militant group Hezbollah, which the United States and the European Union consider to be a terrorist organization.

On the other hand, the United States and Iran have consulted closely on certain security



Public Domain, Glen Johnson, U.S. Department of State.

World leaders, including former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Javad Zarif, announce plans for a deal with Iran regarding its nuclear program, Switzerland, April 2, 2015.

issues. For example, U.S. and Iranian diplomats cooperated on the military response to the Taliban government in Afghanistan after September 11, 2001.

"The issue of relations between Iran and the United States is a complicated and difficult issue.... After all, there is an old scar. Prudence has to be adopted to cure this scar. Of course, we will not pursue continuing or expanding tensions.... It would be wise for the two nations and countries to think more of the future."

—Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, June 18, 2013

While there was some hope that relations might improve after the 2015 nuclear deal, President Trump's public statements make this seem less likely.

What are perspectives on U.S. policy in Iran?

Iranian perceptions of the United States and U.S. policy are complex and vary across the population. The Iranian government's primary goal is to protect itself from perceived security threats—a goal that is often in conflict with U.S. policy in the region. The Iranian government sees the United States and its allies as a major threat to Iran's security.

For years after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Iran's government-controlled media produced anti-U.S. propaganda. Today, there are Iranians—including some conservative religious leaders and members of older generations—who continue to condemn the United States. Many express skepticism about the motivations behind U.S. foreign policy, claiming that the stated goals of U.S. policy in Iran do not always align with U.S. actions.

"They say we can't test-fire missiles, the U.S. says, but India, Russia and Britain can do so without problems. We cannot just allow them to dictate to us."

—Mohammad Marandi, a professor at Tehran University, February 9, 2017

Other Iranians note that the United States criticizes Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism while it is itself involved in military conflicts and violence around the world.

While disapproval and skepticism toward the United States still exist, many younger Iranians do not hold anti-U.S. views. These Iranians point out contradictions underlying U.S. policy in the Middle East, but they also hope for improved relations with the United States. Many believe that stronger relations would help their country join the international economy and prosper.

"Stop saying, 'Death to America,' make amends with the world and foreign investors and jobs will come."

—Hamidreza Faraji, May 15, 2017

How do Iranians envision their future?

Seventy percent of Iran's population today was born after 1979. For many in this younger generation, the goals of the Islamic Revolution are not at the center of their vision for Iran's future. Many Iranians today call for a more democratic government and improved international relations.

Evgeniy Isaev, CC BY-SA 2.0.

A busy street in Tehran, April 2017.

Although Iran's population is highly educated, many Iranians experience economic hardships due to international sanctions and poor governance. These economic problems, along with repression of dissent, fuel calls for political change. Many Iranians see President Rouhani as a leader of this change.

> ***"He's the one the country needs now because there are problems—the economy, inflation—I think he can solve."***
>
> —Hadi, an Iranian university student quoted in the *New York Times*, December 2013

Others have criticized Rouhani for failing to nominate women to high-level positions in his government. The role of women in Iranian society is changing, and many are demanding increased political, social, and cultural rights. Women make up about 60 percent of the students in Iran's universities and are assuming a greater role in the workforce and in public life.

> ***"Of course the huge rise in the number of female university students is also responsible for the increased socio-political awareness of women. This new consciousness is spreading daily. In the past couple of decades women activists have used group meetings, workshops and the internet to raise awareness and spread their struggle for women's rights."***
>
> —Jila Baniyaghoob, journalist and women's rights activist, July 17, 2014

Women won an unprecedented number of seats in Iran's parliamentary and local elections in 2016 and 2017. While Iranian women face legal restrictions and pressures to conform to certain norms that men do not, they are redefining Iranian society.

> ***"What we have now that's different than in years past is an increased presence of women in city and village councils. We want to empower those voices and try to get more and more women elected in such positions in the future.... We don't hold out hope on these old clerics changing their minds. Our hope lies in the young women who are stepping up to lead and the younger generation that is willing to support them."***
>
> —Mahnaz, a women's rights activist in Tehran, quoted in *Al-Monitor*, September 5, 2017

Iranians are also concerned about the environment. Among other environmental concerns, Iran faces water scarcity issues and has high levels of pollution. In February 2017, thousands of Iranians protested in the streets of Ahvas, one of the world's most polluted cities, demanding that the government take steps to address these issues.

Syria

Syria is located in the Eastern Mediterranean. It borders Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon. In 2016, Syria's population was roughly 17.2 million people, although the ongoing civil war has changed the size and geographical distribution of the country's population. In recent decades, the largest portions of the population have lived along the Mediterranean coast, in the Euphrates River valley, and in the major cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs. Roughly 87 percent of Syrians are Muslim (mostly Sunni), 10 percent are Christian, and 3 percent are Druze.

Following independence from France after World War II, Syria experienced political instability. Due to the legacy of French divide-and-rule policies, Syria's leaders were not practiced at governing a nation, especially a fragmented one. For two decades, civilian government was interrupted by a series of coups in which military leaders took control.

Israel's rise as a regional power during the 1960s challenged Syria's attempts at stability and prosperity. Syrian leaders allied with Palestinians resisting Israeli occupation, but Syria's military power did not come close to matching Israel's. Although the Soviet Union provided assistance to Syria during the Arab-Israeli conflicts, Syria lost land, resources, and civilian lives.

In 1970, Syrian defense minister Hafez al-Assad overthrew the government in a coup, establishing an authoritarian military regime. This final coup led to a period of political stability and economic reform. Early in his rule, al-Assad implemented policies that allowed for greater political participation and economic equality. Still, his regime maintained tight control over all aspects of Syrian society.

The al-Assads were from the Alawite sect of Shi'i Islam. Alawites are a minority group whose followers mostly live in rural areas and have beliefs and traditions different from those of the Sunni Muslim majority. During the 1980s, various non-Alawite Muslim groups led uprisings against the al-Assad regime, but the army violently suppressed them. The regime became more repressive in response.

> ***"The religious, ethnic, historical and social characteristics of Syria will be taken into account.... The Islamic government will create conditions for the normal life of all religious communities—Sunnis, Christians, Ismailis, Druze, Alawites."***
>
> —Khava, of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic political organization that led uprisings against al-Assad, 1982

syriana2011, CC BY 2.0.

Large crowds of Syrian protesters gather in Hama Al-Assy Square in 2011.

Hafez al-Assad ruled Syria until his death in 2000. He was succeeded by his son, Bashar. Bashar al-Assad continued his father's authoritarian rule, brutally repressing any kind of dissent. He remained in power as of November 2017, amid a civil war that has engulfed Syria since 2011.

What has U.S. policy been in Syria?

The United States and Syria historically have had tense relations. In 1957, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) led a secret attempt to topple Syria's government, which the United States feared was aligning with the Soviet Union. Syria had a civilian parliamentary government at the time, and the Syrian Communist Party was becoming a major political influence. The Ba'ath Party, which advocated for Arab unity, socialist reforms, and freedom from imperial control, was also gaining strength. The administration of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) claimed that its policy in the Middle East promoted stability and democracy. But when the CIA's failed attempt to overthrow the government was discovered, resentment in Syria and the region toward the United States grew.

As the Arab-Israeli conflict intensified in the 1960s and 1970s, Syria sided against Israel. The United States attempted to negotiate cease-fire agreements early on, but by the 1970s was providing direct military aid to Israel. U.S.-brokered peace talks during subsequent decades were unable to reach an agreement.

Syria's position during the Iran-Iraq War increased tensions with the United States. Syria sided with Iran, mainly due to a longer-standing rivalry between the governments of Syria and Iraq. Al-Assad also saw Iran's leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, as a symbol of resistance against U.S.-Israeli power. Syria has been on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism because of its support for groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which the United States considers terrorist organizations.

Some scholars have argued that the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was in part an attempt to intimidate Syria and Iran. During the war, the United States accused Syria of allowing foreign fighters to cross the border into Iraq to join the insurgency against the U.S. occupation. The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq

in 2011 led local terrorist groups, such as ISIS, to grow. This made Syria a more central focus of U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

The United States has become more directly involved in Syria since 2011, when the Syrian government responded to the Arab Spring protests with violence.

> ***"The Tunisians had already been freed. The Egyptians were on their way to be free. We thought it was our turn to be free too."***
>
> —Amer Matar, an organizer of the first major protest in Syria, August 2012

President Obama called on al-Assad to step down and imposed sanctions.

> ***"When people are oppressed, and human rights denied—particularly along sectarian lines or ethnic lines—when dissent is silenced, it feeds violent extremism. It creates an environment that is ripe for terrorists to exploit."***
>
> —U.S. President Barack Obama, in remarks at the White House, February 19, 2015

In 2012, the United States started offering arms and training to moderate rebel groups fighting government forces in Syria's ongoing civil war. As ISIS, one of the more extreme rebel groups, extended its control into parts of Syria, the U.S. military used airstrikes in Syria against the group. The fact the al-Assad government is also fighting against ISIS illustrates the complexity of the situation.

The danger of the violence in Syria becoming a regional war makes Syria a top security concern for U.S. policymakers. Since 2014, the United States has joined other countries attempting to organize peace talks between the al-Assad regime and rebel groups, but the fighting has continued.

As millions of Syrians flee their country, U.S. policymakers have had to make decisions about admitting Syrian refugees into the country. Between 2011 and 2016, the United States resettled roughly eighteen thousand Syrian refugees. The majority of them arrived in 2016, after the Obama administration responded to international pressure to admit more refugees. In 2017, President Donald Trump (2017-) issued a controversial executive order indefinitely banning the United States from accepting Syrian refugees. Trump claimed it was necessary to protect U.S. security. U.S. courts halted the ban, ruling that it discriminated against Muslims.

What are perspectives on U.S. policy in Syria?

While the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War is not a direct consequence of U.S. policy, the U.S. military has actively participated in the violence. Airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS have killed hundreds of civilians and forced tens of thousands to flee. The U.S. military claims to be targeting ISIS, but the strikes often hit neighborhoods that are densely packed with civilians.

For example, one hundred people died in a U.S.-led air campaign against the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa in August 2017.

> ***"In Raqqa city, if you don't die from air strikes, you die by mortar fire; if not by mortars then by sniper shots; if not by snipers, then by an explosive device. And if you get to live, you are besieged by hunger and thirst, as there is no food, no water, no electricity."***
>
> —A Syrian who fled Raqqa after seven family members were killed in the fighting, August 2017

As a result of the war, more than half of Syria's population has fled their homes, with millions seeking protection in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. For example, at the end of 2016, Turkey was home to 2.8 million Syrian refugees—more than the rest of the world combined. In the face of this humanitarian crisis, shifts in U.S. refugee policy affect how Syrians and the international community at large view the United

States. Some argue that the Obama administration did too little to raise the cap on refugees. People across the world have spoken out against the Trump administration's attempt to ban Syrian refugees.

Many Syrians have been critical of U.S. foreign policy for decades, pointing to U.S. support for Israel and its pattern of intervening in regional conflicts to pursue U.S. financial and political interests.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, CC BY-ND 2.0.

Aleppo, March 2013. Syrian cities and towns have been destroyed by years of violence. Damaged infrastructure and disrupted services make it hard for civilians to meet their basic needs.

"Whenever a new president comes to the White House, America doesn't change its policy toward the Arabs.... The presidents always support Israel."

—A Syrian man in Damascus, speaking about U.S. policy after the election of Barack Obama, December 2008

Some Syrians trace causes of the current civil war to the U.S. occupation of Iraq. They claim that U.S. intervention worsened ethnic and sectarian divisions in Iraq and fueled Islamist extremism that poured into Syria. Others, including many who led the Arab Spring uprisings, do not see U.S. policy or cross-border ethnic divisions as major factors in Syria's current conflict. Instead, they blame the al-Assad regime for brutally repressing a popular movement for political change.

"There is a war between a military regime that is slaughtering us and a people who are being slaughtered. The security people and the army come from all sects in Syria and so do the people. We're fed up of people telling us this is a [sectarian] civil war."

—Amer Matar, an organizer of the first major protest in Syria, August 2012

How do Syrians envision their country's future?

Early in the civil war, opposition groups attempted to form coalitions and envision a future for Syria under a more democratic government. In September 2011, the National Committee for Democratic Change adopted a Charter of Dignity and Rights, which elaborated on the core beliefs expressed in the Committee's slogan: "No to violence, no to sectarianism, no to foreign intervention." In July 2012, a conference of opposition groups met with the support of a joint envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States. The conference focused on a new National Charter that outlined a vision for settling political conflicts and establishing a new Syrian constitution.

"The Syrian people are one people, whose identity was established through history. It rests on full equality of citizenship."

—National Charter written at a conference of Syrian opposition groups, June 2012

Many Syrians see a change in government as a necessary step toward ending the current violence, refugee crisis, and political repression. Others fear that the fall of al-Assad

Mark Garten, UN Photo 668862

Young Syrian refugees at a refugee camp in the Beqaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, March 25, 2016.

could lead to an equally repressive Islamist-controlled government.

"We had years of French occupation, coups, years of Ba'athists. Now we do not want the years of Islamists."

—A wealthy woman in Damascus, explaining her support for al-Assad in November 2012, published in the 2016 book *The Morning They Came for Us: Dispatches from Syria*

Rebel groups, though unified in their opposition to the government of al-Assad, have different visions for a new government. For example, while ISIS calls for a caliphate (a term for an Islamic state), some Kurds want to establish an independent state apart from Syria.

The majority of Syrians most urgently want Syria rebuilt so people can lead safe, healthy lives in their home country. With so much of the population displaced and the foundations of everyday society disrupted by war, a basic sense of stability is a necessary first step toward envisioning Syria's future.

"It was so touching to see Syria in this way because this is what they are dying for—they are dying for a better Syria and not for a country shredded into parts and religions."

—Mireille Bakhos, a student at Syracuse University, speaking about her Syrian classmate who was killed on a trip to Syria in May 2012