



The Fault Lines of the Middle East: The History of the Religious and Political Issues Affecting the Region

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures

*Discusses the Sunni-Shia divide, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian civil war, the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic State, and al-Qaeda, and more.

*Includes footnotes and bibliographies for further reading

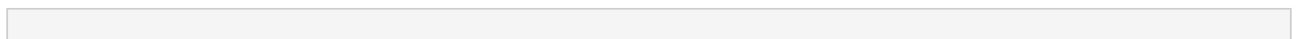
The Middle East has been a troubled region for centuries, and it is perhaps the most notorious hotspot in the early 21st century, as longstanding political and religious issues continue to roil the region. As a result, countries across the region have uneasy alliances against each other, open conflicts with some, and an ongoing civil war in Syria that has Iranian and Syrian proxies fighting against other groups supported by different nations. Throw in substate terrorist groups and militias like the Islamic State, and the mix has become even deadlier of late.

Today, the most important religious split is between the Sunnis and the Shias (Shiites) within Islam. Unlike divisions in other faiths - between Conservative and Orthodox Jews or Catholic and Protestant Christians - the split between the Sunnis and Shia has existed almost as long as the faith itself, and it quickly emerged out of tensions created by the political crisis after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In a sense, what are now two different forms of Islam essentially started as political factions within the unified body of Muslim believers.


Over the past few centuries, Christians have mostly been able to live alongside their co-religionists, but the split between the Sunnis and Shias is still so pronounced that many adherents of each branch view each other with disdain if not as outright apostates or non-believers. The religious divide is perhaps the most important fault line in the turbulent Middle East today, with Sunni nations like Egypt and Saudi Arabia at odds with Shiite nations like Iran. At lower levels, non-state groups like the Islamic State and Hezbollah are fighting each other in ways that cross state lines in places like Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. Although it is technically a split in religion, the divide has had substantial global ramifications for decades, and there seems to be no end in sight.

While the religious divides have spawned groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and others, the controversial conflict between Israel and the Palestinians continues to be perhaps the most contentious foreign policy issue not just across the Middle East but much of the world, as Western powers have constantly tried to help broker peace over the last several decades. The conflict is also one of the most historically complex, making it all the more important to understand it.

The Fault Lines of the Middle East traces the origins of the Sunni-Shia split and the historic effects of the main divide within Islam, which continues to wreak havoc in places like Iraq and Syria today. It also discusses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian civil war, the historic Iranian Revolution, and the history and beliefs of influential groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the history of the Middle East like never before.



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