

Reading Guide for *The Age of Walls* by Tim Marshall Chapter 4, The Middle East

“Fences & walls are not necessary. Mostly they are manifestations of superficial thinking.”

As Chapter 3 focused on Israel and Palestine, this chapter presents an overview of the entire Middle East, specifically addressing the political tensions that exist between Muslim countries. The Islamic nations of the Middle East are not a monolithic bloc that acts as one political entity. Rather, the Islamic world has fault lines based on religious, ethnic, and economic divisions, and some of these divisions are very serious. You’ll learn about the two major sects within Islam, the Sunni and the Shia; the historic rivalry between Arabs and Persians (Iranians, in current terminology); the saga of the Kurds, a large ethnic group without a nation of their own; the radical Islamist movement embodied by the Islamic State, or ISIS; and the struggle for pan-Arab unity.

p. 101-103 This introduction explains the upsurge in terrorist attacks in the Middle East that have led to the numerous walls that have been built to prevent such attacks, including the U. S. military’s construction of the **Green Zone** in **Baghdad** after the U.S.’s invasion of Iraq in 2003.



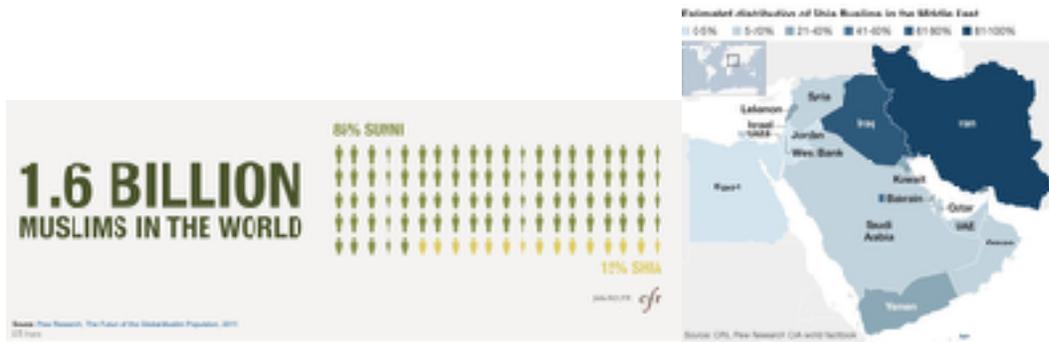
Religious tensions between the **Sunni & Shia** (https://www.cfr.org/interactives/sunni-shia-divide?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI1bmMtY7R4wIVDcRkCh0XrQ0NEAAYASAAEgLSKvD_BwE#!/sunni-shia-divide), the rise of **Islamist ideology**, and the Arab uprisings in 2011 that became known briefly as the “**Arab Spring**.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Spring)

45% of terrorist attacks in the world occurred in the Arab world in 2014.

103-106 **Pan-Arab Unification** -- hindered by religious divisions.



Definition of **Sectarian**. -- **Sectarianism** is a form of prejudice, discrimination, or hatred arising from attaching relations of inferiority and superiority to differences between subdivisions within a group. Common examples are denominations of a religion, ethnic identity, class, or region for citizens of a state and factions of a political movement.



The Sunni-Shia split -- Understand the history behind this split... the **Battle of Karbala** (680 CE)

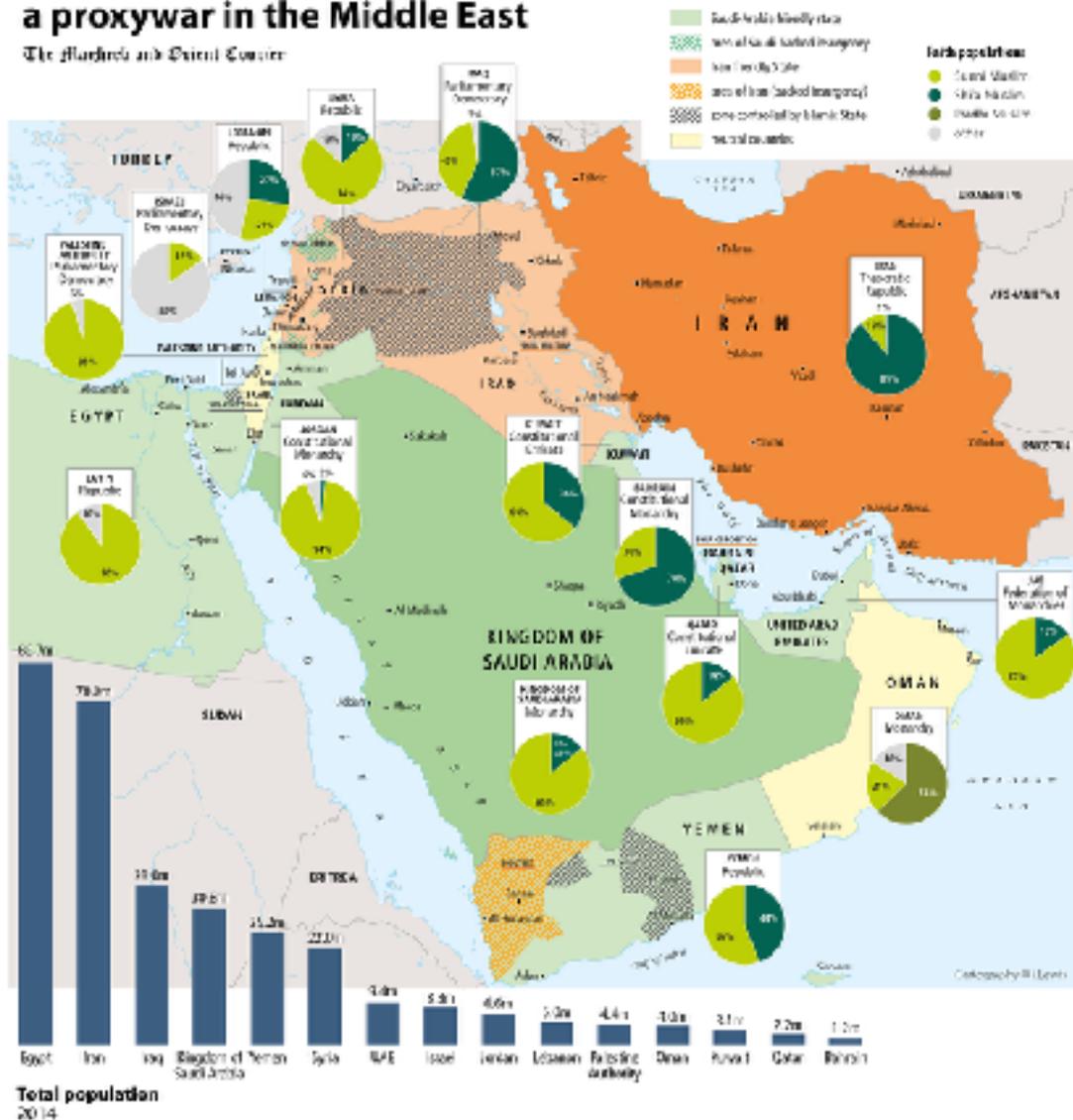


ISIS -- <https://www.rand.org/topics/the-islamic-state-terrorist-organization.html>

106-107 The proxy war in **Yemen** (“the world’s worst humanitarian crisis”), the civil war in **Syria**

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia vs Islamic Republic of Iran : a proxywar in the Middle East

The Muslims and Shiite Conflict



108 Ethnic differences and rivalries also divide the Islamic World. Even though they are both Muslim, the Shia **Persians** (Iranians) & the (mainly) Sunni **Arabs** have historically been rivals. On page 110-111 the proxy war between rivals Iran & Saudi Arabia in **Yemen** is explained.

108-112 New security walls going up over the Middle East.

112-11 Various minorities in the Middle East are discussed.

The **Kurds** on page 113 are particularly important. Kurdistan is a region that is divided by borders created by Europeans. The result is that the Kurds—30 million strong—are dispersed among four different nations. Thus, they have no nation-state of their own but they want one. This is a problem.



114 One cannot underestimate the impact of **Colonialism** (mainly European) and **Geography** on the Middle East's political development.

114-115 Arab Human Development Report (2002) – **The Three Deficits**

1. Failure to keep up with global knowledge – science, technology, political thought, comparative religion
2. Failure to embrace developments in communications to disseminate knowledge
3. Women's participation in politics and work

115 Arab regimes have ruthlessly crushed dissenting opinions & curtailed civil rights.

115-116 “The closing of the Arab mind.” Why has this happened?

Ijtihad – the interpretation of religious problems not covered by the Koran or the hadith. Arab culture's deep respect for tradition and authority “holds it back.”

116 Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince **Mohammed bin Salman (MBS)**.

<https://www.france24.com/en/20190619-un-expert-credible-evidence-linking-saudi-crown-prince-mbs-khashoggi-murder>



117. The dream of a united Arabia born during World War I has “has turned into a nightmare of pan-Arab divisions” (p. 119). **Religion, ethnicity, & tribe** are stronger than the desire for the concept of the nation-state or ideas about civil liberties.



118. **Islamists** – the most extreme examples being **ISIS** and **al Qaeda** -- consider socialism, nationalism, and the nation-state to be evil Western influences that are un-Islamic. Secular governments in Iraq and Syria in the 1970s through the 2000s were despotic

Poverty and poor education are certainly factors holding the region back.