

Andrew Garer

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Chapter 17 Response

North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia

While there are many different directions to take writing about the gigantic regions of North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia, I believe one topic rises above the rest in relevance and domainance of the region: **OIL**. While this is somewhat offset by the general lack of oil in North Africa, with a few exceptions, Southwest and Central Asia are filled with truly humungous quantities of oil. This has led them to positions of outsized geopolitical importance in the world, and has also bred a great deal of strife in the region: "why build industry when you can just pump more oil?" has been a trap for many of the countries in the region. This has led to continual political instability, and the spill over(ha, see what I did there) has had worldwide consequences. Two nations epitomize this: Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The existence of Saudi Arabia is down to two things: a deal with the British a century ago, and an ungodly amount of oil. The deal with the British was a super complicated one regarding the Ottoman Empire, support in WWI, and a ton of inter-family politics. The oil is a bit more straightforward: they have a lot of it. The entire economy of Saudi Arabia, and the continued coherence of the nation itself, is based on oil. All of the profits of the oil trade fund the government, and a certain amount of this money is handed out in social services in orer to keep the population from revolting and demanding democracy.

Iran is a bit different. They have a lot of oil, not as much as Saudi Arabia, but due to the revolution that deposed the Shah and installed the Ayatollah, they have had limited external markets for that oil. Specifically, the US(and by extension, a bunch of other first world countries) maintained a trade embargo on Iran for a long time. The more limited profits have not been focused on social services, but rather the enrichment of the ruling class, funding proxy wars *cough* Hezbollah, Houthis, Yemeni Civil War, and a lot of others *cough*. This has led to a great degree of regional animus between Saudi Arabia and Iran, in addition to the existing Sunni-Shia divide.

The oil deposits across Central Asia are generally poorer than those in Southwest Asia proper, with perhaps the very notable exception of the Caucasus. Oil was discovered in the Caucasus mountains centuries ago, and has been a source of wealth and conflict ever since. Currently Russia and Azerbaijan are the main controllers of this oil. Many a dictatorship has been propped up by oil profits, and many a war fought over it. This will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future, but as the demand for oil peaks and then falls, the geopolitical importance of the region will likely wane - maybe they should catch up on that industry after all.