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EAST AND WEST OF SUEZ: The Story of the Modern Near East

John S. Badeau

(16)

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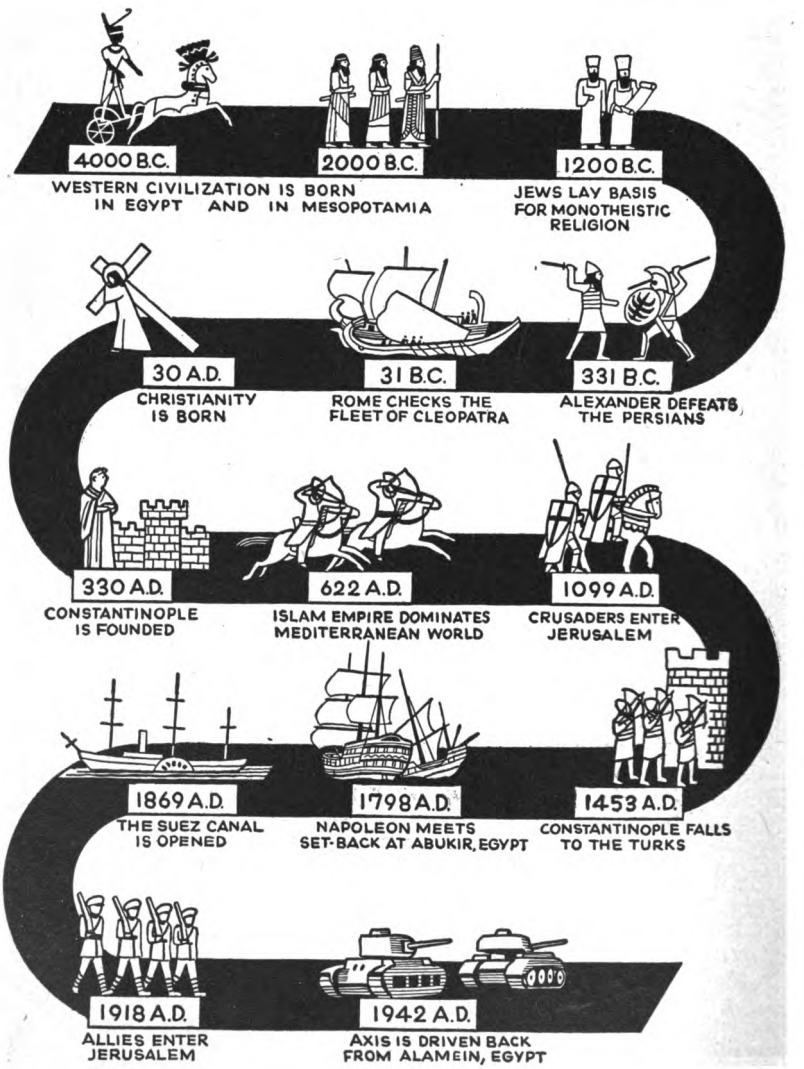
MILESTONES IN NEAR EASTERN HISTORY



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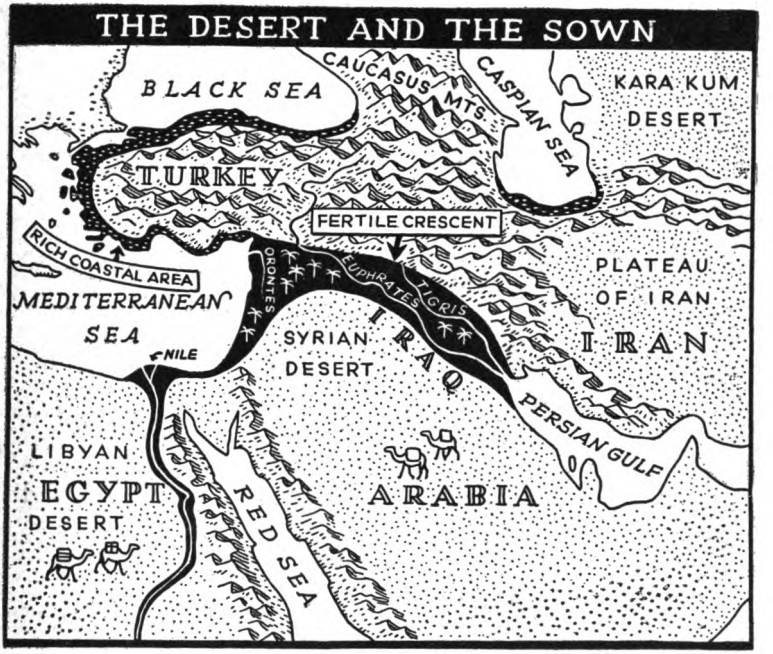

ington, Oregon, California, and Idaho left out. If the Arabian peninsula (whose coasts are of chief importance since they border on sea routes) is excluded, the size of the effective Near East is somewhat less than half that of our country.

THE DESERT AND THE SOWN

To the tourist fresh from home, the most striking feature of Near Eastern geography is its sharp contrast between arid wilderness and tilled field, the "desert and the sown," as the Arab calls them. In few places is there a continuous landscape of green; vegetation is usually confined to more or less sharply defined areas around which barren steppes or rocky hills close in. Damascus, that "great and splendid Arab city set in a girdle

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most fertile spots in the Near East and has always been a bone of contention between the great civilizations on either side of it.



PORTICO TO THE WORLD

The mountains, plains, and river valleys of the Near East stand at the crossroads of three continents; they form a portico from which open front, side, and back doors to Europe, Asia, and Africa. Five seas—the Mediterranean, Black, Caspian, Red, and Persian Gulf—meet in the Near East to furnish easy transportation east, north, and south. The Fertile Crescent opens a well-watered caravan trail to India and the East. Passes through the mountain chains of the north give entrée to Russia and Central Asia. The Nile Valley offers the only direct road from the Mediterranean to the heart of Africa. Such a concentration of possibilities will always have world-wide importance.

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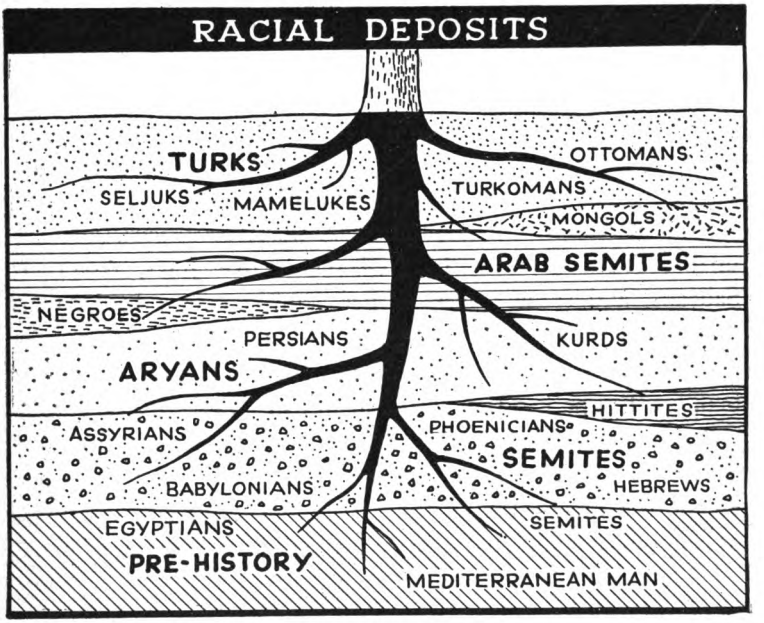

Hittites, Seljuk Turks, and Mongols held power for brief intervals; Negro slaves infiltrated from Africa, and the Crusades brought European blood to mingle with the Saracen in the Holy Land. Each left some deposit of racial characteristic that went into the making of the many local types with which the Near East is filled.

Today four major groups stand out clearly. The heart of the Near East is possessed by the Semitic Arabs, who hold most of Iraq, Arabia, Syria, Palestine, Trans-Jordan and the nomad lands of Egypt. Each of these countries has its own variant of the parent stock, and each speaks some version of the original Arabic. To their north lie Iran and Turkey, containing what is left of the Persian and Ottoman Empires and their founders. Each of these speaks its own language and continues in the

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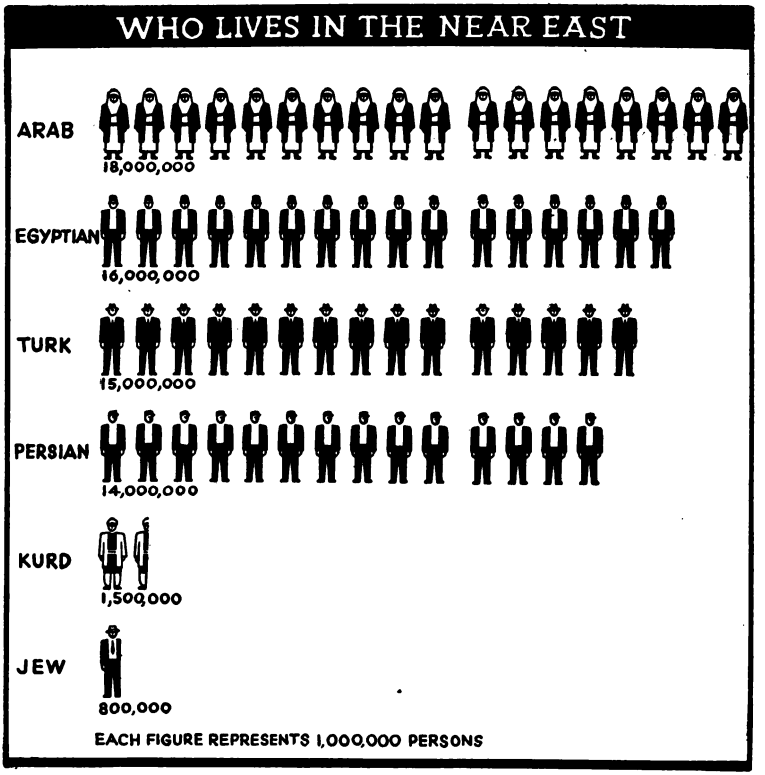

Binding the heritage of government, culture, literature, and language together is the pervasive influence of *religion.* Ninety-two per cent of the people of the Near East are Moslems. Although this dominant faith is divided into a number of sects, it produces a typical mind in its adherents. Under Islam, religion is a much more pervasive influence than it is in the West, for it not only creates personal beliefs about God, but gives form and substance to communal life. The legal code of the state, the basis for marriage and divorce, the rights of

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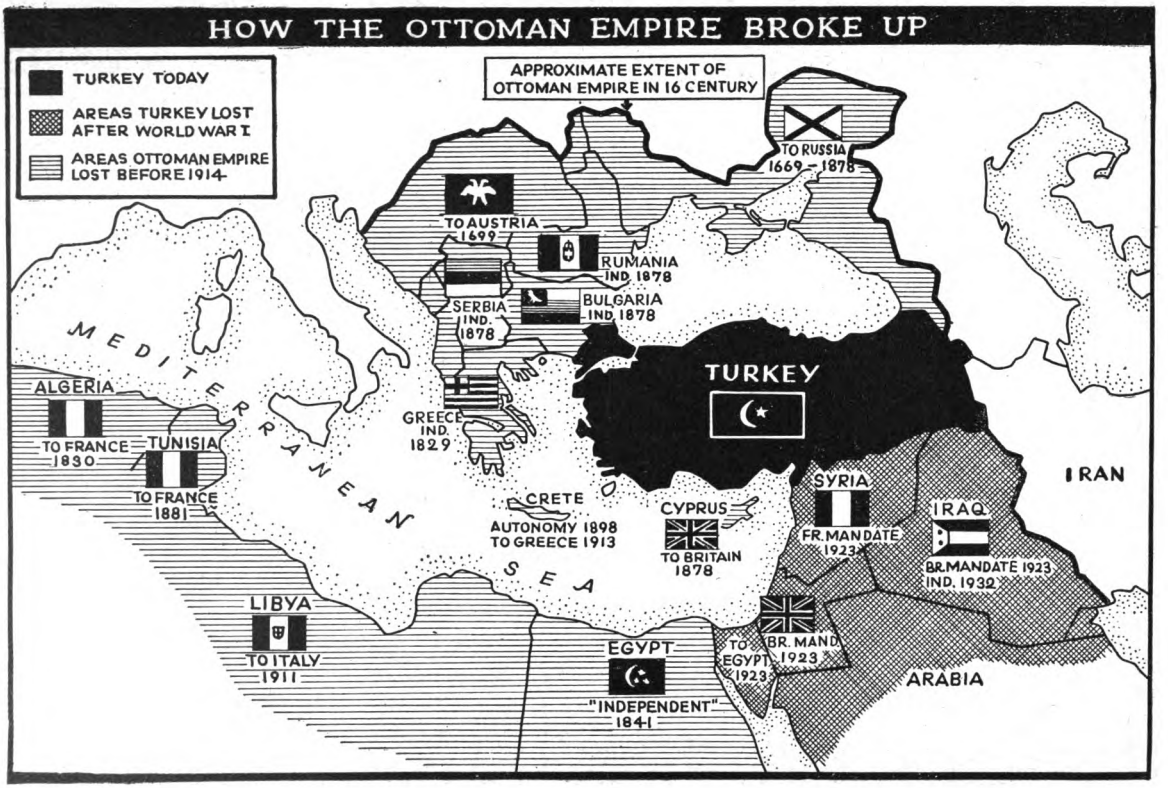

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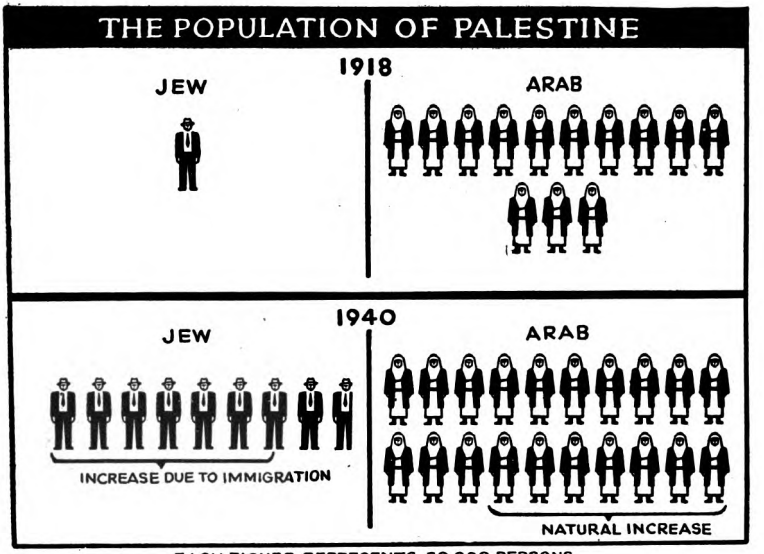

Actually, the Zionist influx resulted in a remarkable stimulation of life and business. Citrus culture, already practiced for generations by the Arabs, was developed into a principal industry (in 1939 7,595,645 boxes of fruit were exported). The chemicals of the Dead Sea were exploited, and the manufacture of soap, chemicals, medicines, perfumes, cement, and numerous other products, was undertaken. In every field the determination and ingenuity of the Jewish colonist was shown.

Yet Arab resentment continued, even increased. It was not basically anti-Semitism, for on the whole the historic record of the Moslem Near East in its treatment of Jewish minorities is better than the record of Christian Central Europe. The root of the trouble was in the announced *political* objective of Zionism to create in Palestine, not a national *home*, but a national *state*—which could only be a Jewish state, which

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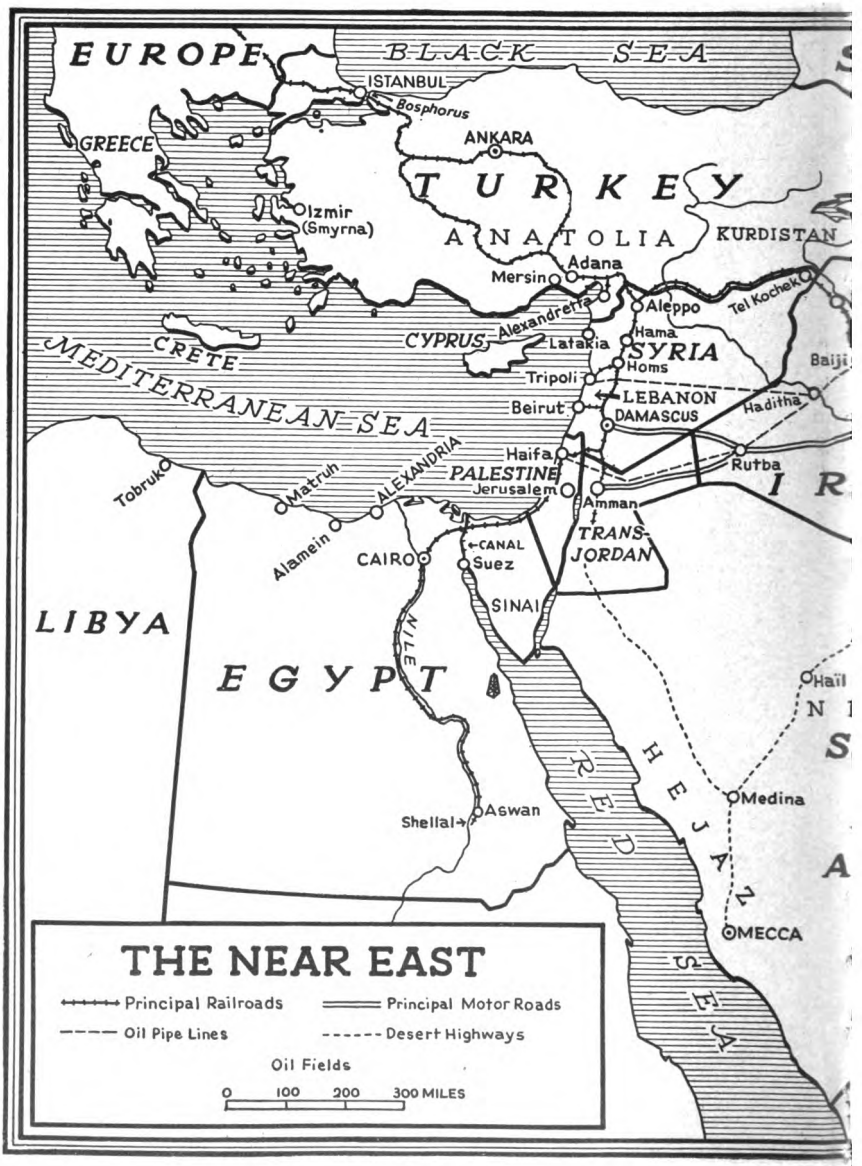

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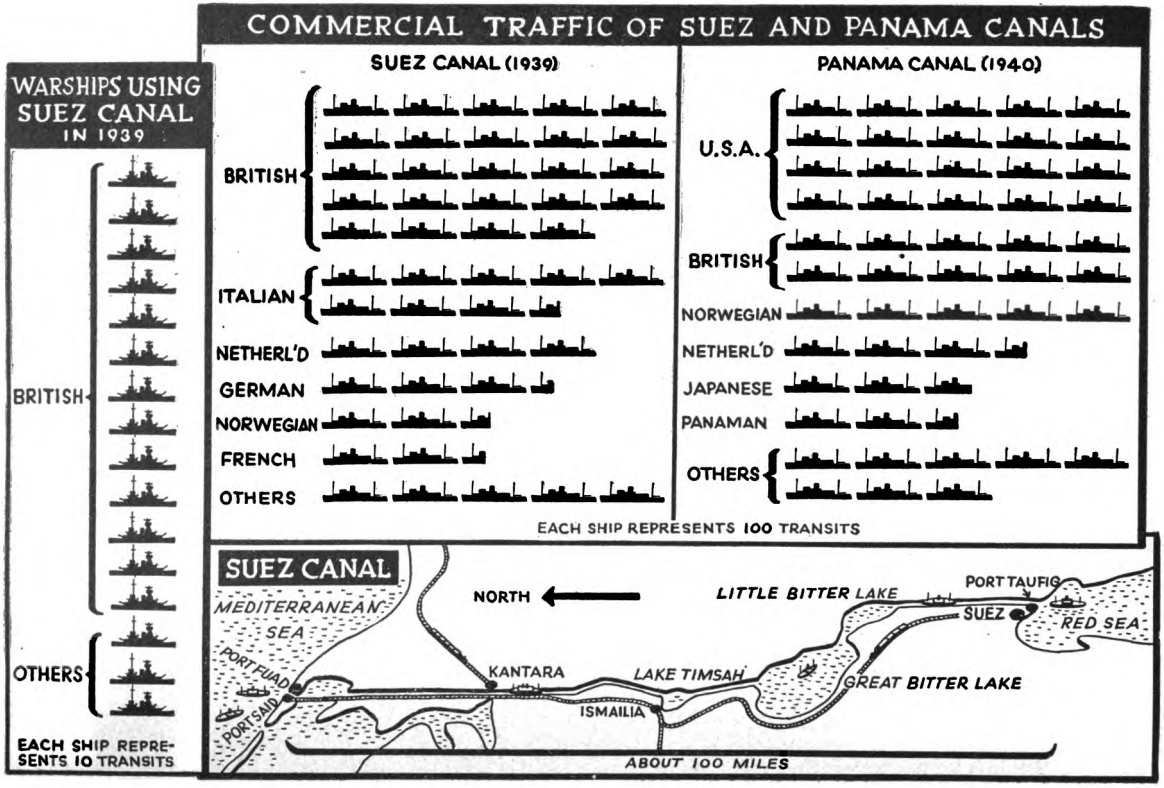

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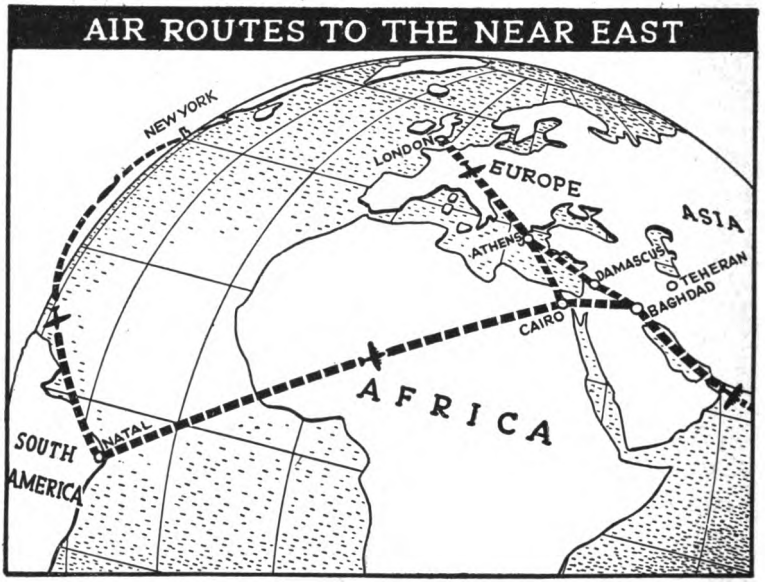

its network of imperial communications. Political rivalry developed at once, and other European Powers hastened to stake their claims in the new development of the Near East. Iran (possibly under German pressure) objected to any flying over south Persian territory, and forced the British to use the much less attractive Arabian side of the Persian Gulf. In 1927 the German Junkers air company gained a concession from Iran and opened four airlines radiating from Teheran. The Dutch K.L.M. service was extended to the Netherlands East Indies, making Baghdad its Near Eastern base. The French Air Orient (later "Air France") pushed its lines toward the French colonies in the Far East, flying via Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, and Basra. By 1932 the aircraft of four great European nations met at the Baghdad Airport, which had become the halfway house of all the air routes to the East.

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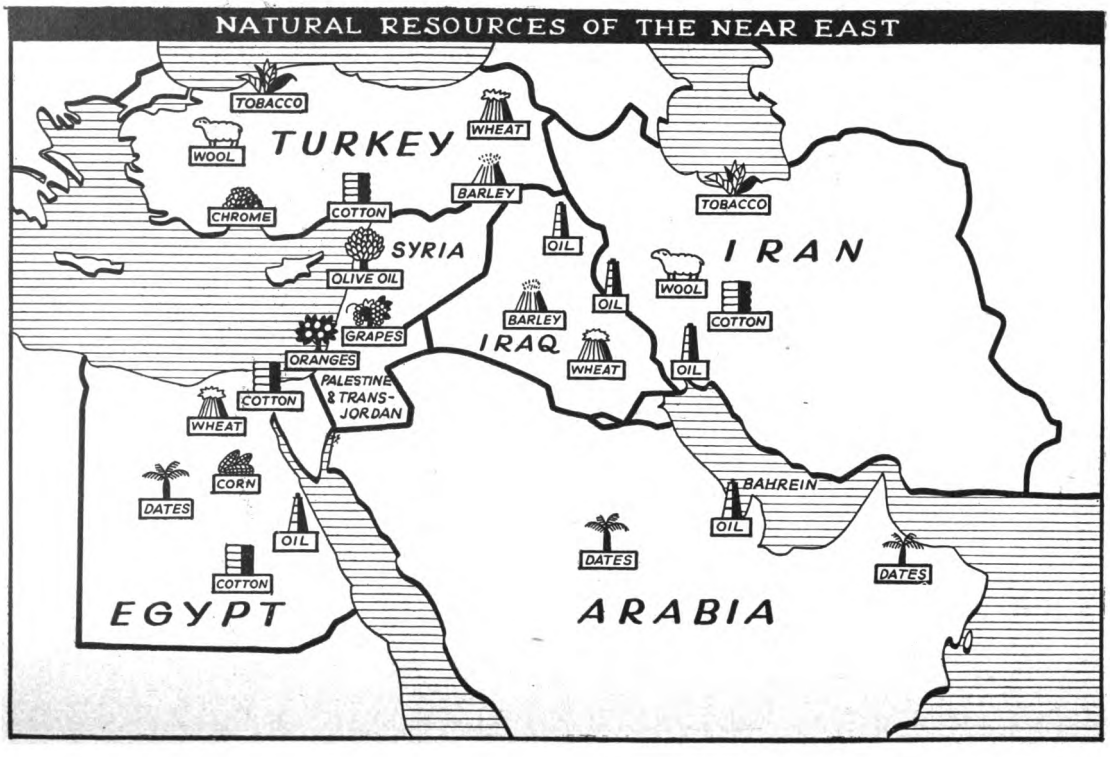

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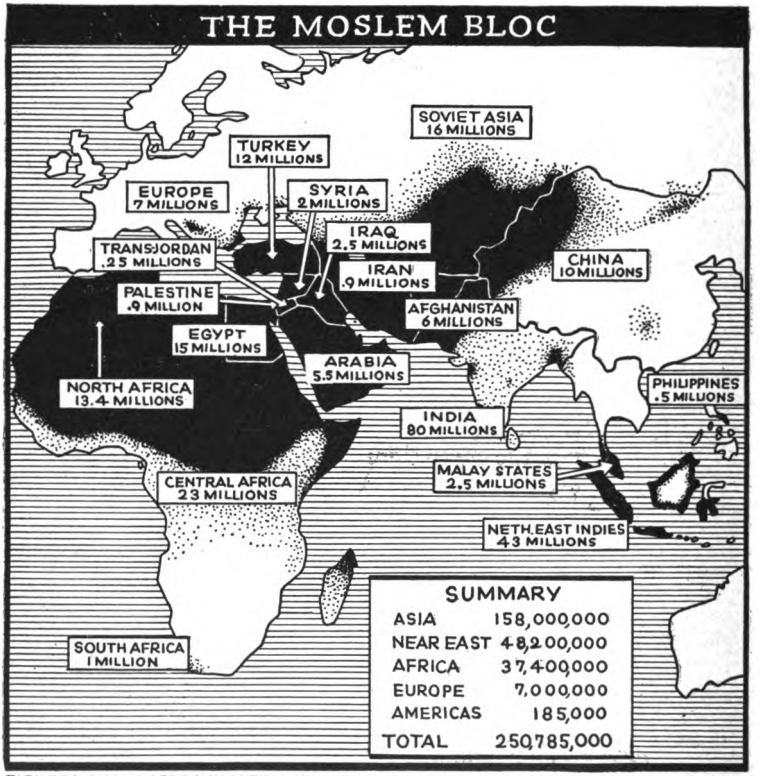

FIGURES SHOW APPROXIMATE MOSLEM POPULATION

that is more basic than loyalty to nation or race. Original Islam knew nothing of nationality; religious brotherhood was its organizing concept. Believers were Moslems first, and Indians, Persians, and Arabs only by accident.

Nationalism is making inroads on this unity, but has not yet worked its complete destruction. With the defeat of Turkey and the abolition of the caliphate, the dream of pan-Islanism died, carrying with it the last vestiges of the political unity of the Moslem world. Yet a certain atmosphere of world fellow-

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V. The Present Outlook



The old field-hand's formula for successfully negotiating life was, "Boss, yuh jus' gotta cooperate wid de inevitable!" To us, the present world struggle has come as the inescapable showdown between two bitterly opposed ways of life, but to the Near East, it is still largely the intrusion of a Western quarrel. Faced with a war not of their own making, in which their lands are a major battlefield, and a possible prize, how are the peoples of the Near East "cooperating with the inevitable?"

ALLIED SYMPATHIES

It is not difficult to gather an impressive group of statements voicing the Allied sympathies of the Near East. Most prominent leaders at one time or another since the outbreak of war have announced their loyalty to France and Great Britain; some have even contributed to the Allied war chest.

Nor is there lacking practical proof that gives substance to such statements. Three of the independent states—Egypt, Iran, Iraq—have pro-Allied governments cooperating with the war effort. The other two great powers, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are neutral, but "neutral against the Axis." Egypt has fulfilled her obligations to Great Britain as contained in the 1936 Treaty of Alliance, by which she is bound in the event of war to place her sea, rail, and air facilities at her ally's disposal. Trans-Jordan

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EAST AND WEST OF SUEZ

The Story of the Modern Near East

by
JOHN S. BADEAU

Illustrated by
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