Major Geographical Qualities

- **World crossroads**
- **Physical**
  - Aridity
  - Oil
- **Cultural**
  - Culture hearths
  - World religions
  - Conflict
- **Population**: Discontinuous clusters around infrequent water sources
- **Regional Imbalances**: Oil and non-oil states (“haves” versus “have-nots”)
- **Political Geography**: Fragmented due to colonial experience

Naming the Realm

- **Popular Labels**
  - Dry World
  - Arab World
  - Islamic World
  - Middle East
The Dry World?

- Dry/arid climate prevails throughout the realm
- **Exceptions:**
  - Peripheral regions of Turkey
  - Northwestern Iran
  - Oases
  - Several great river valleys, e.g. the Nile

Annual Precipitation

Water - A Renewable or Finite Resource?

- Water is **critical** for life, food production, and industrial processes.
- Nine out of 14 Southwest Asian states face water-short conditions. **This is the most concentrated region of water scarcity in the world.**
- **Growing populations** increase stress on water sources: North Africa/Southwest Asia averages a natural increase of 1.8%
Israel-Syria Border

Population Distribution

- The majority of the population in this realm lives not in the dry or arid regions, but around water resources such as the
  - Nile River
  - Mediterranean Sea
  - Euphrates and Tigris Basin (early Hydraulic Civilizations emerged here)
  - Lower mountain slopes of Iran, south of the Caspian Sea

Population Distribution

An Arab Realm?

- Relates to ethnicity and language as cultural features of this realm
- Arabic is the dominant language in 16 states of the realm; ethnic Arabs are dominant in 2 of the 16
- In non-Arab States, indigenous or colonial languages dominate:
  - Turkey - Turkish
  - Iran - Farsi
  - Israel - Hebrew
  - Niger - French
  - Kazakhstan - Kazakh
Islamic Realm?

- This region is the birthplace of the three major monotheistic religions of the world
  - Judaism
  - Christianity
  - Islam
- Islam is the dominant religion
- The Jewish faith dominates in Israel, with minorities in other states
- Significant Christian minorities (Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Syria, elsewhere)

Religions of the World

Dome of the Rock

The Western Wall
Islam

- **Muhammad** (571–632 A.D.) as final and greatest prophet
- **Quran (Koran)** is the holy book
- **Five Pillars of Faith**
  - Repeated expressions of creed
  - Frequent prayer (5 times per day)
  - Month of daytime fasting (Ramadan)
  - Alms-giving
  - Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)

**Spatial Diffusion**

- The process by which a concept, practice, or substance spreads from its point of origin to new territories
- **Types**
  - *Expansion* diffusion
    - *Contagious diffusion*: to next available person
    - *Hierarchical diffusion*: from larger to smaller places
  - *Relocation* diffusion: by migrating populations
Divisions within Islam

- **Sunnis versus Shi’ites**
  - Split over issue of successor to Muhammad
  - 85% of Muslims are Sunni
  - Shi’ites are dominant in:
    - Iran
    - Iraq
    - Azerbaijan

- **Religious revivalism**
  - Iranian revolution (1979)
  - Wahhabism (Saudi Arabia)
  - Al Qaeda and Usama Bin Laden

Islam and Other Faiths

- Submersion of Judaism and Christianity in the Levant (eastern Mediterranean shore)
- Crusades: Christian attempt to recapture Holy Land
- Israel and Arab neighbors
- Ottoman Empire and aftermath

Ottoman Empire