

The Middle Eastern world

Starting points for research

by Karen Evans and Brad Coon

The events of the last few years have once again focused a great deal of the world's attention on the Middle East and the issues and peoples driving events in the area. It perhaps goes without saying that the passions of this part of the world run deep, and it is impossible to avoid all manner of controversy. Still, we have attempted to select resources for this article that are relatively balanced and nonpolemical; however, any given site may link to other Web sites that are more extreme in a number of ways. In addition, it should be recognized that even our selections are often going to present views quite at odds with one another, especially, but not limited to, the Israel/Palestinian situation.

We have chosen to present a cross-section of Web sites that offer information on the governments, religions, history, and socio-cultural forces of the modern Middle Eastern world. Necessarily, some historical information is included. There is no denying that understanding the holocaust and the anti-Semitism which drove it are essential keys to understanding much of the politics and social dynamics underlying Israel's positions and attitudes, and, by extension, those of the Palestinians. We believe the sites presented

here will assist your patrons in understanding a very complex situation.

We have not included either pro-Iraq War or anti-Iraq War sites in our listings. Many of these sites contain very useful information, but their generally overt political stances put them beyond the goals of this brief article. Furthermore, in this election year, including these sites in your resources might very well be seen as an overt political endorsement.

Selected country information

- **Bahrain Government Homepage.** Facts and figures about Bahrain and information about the kingdom (anthem, constitution, and charter) and the ruling family (king, prime minister, and crown prince) are presented here. The Discover Bahrain section includes the ministries, history, geography and climate, currency, and tourism. A statistical link provides foreign trade and census information. *Access:* www.bahrain.gov.bh.

- **The Central Intelligence Agency: World Factbook.** Provides basic information on countries of the world. Areas covered include background, geography, people, economic, government, and the military.

About the authors

Karen Evans is instruction and reference librarian at Indiana State University, e-mail: libevak@isugw.indstate.edu, and Brad Coon is reference librarian at Montana State University, e-mail: bcoon@montana.edu

Maps are also included. *Access:* <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>.

- **Israel Defense Forces (IDF).** IDF Announcements, Updated Reports, Useful Information (statistics), and Photos from the Field provide information on current and past IDF activities. In-depth sections present specifics on Kassam Rockets, Smuggling Tunnels, Statistics on Terror Attacks, and additional pertinent topics. Information on the history, doctrine, and units of IDF offer an in-depth look at the organization. *Access:* <http://www1.idf.il/DOVER/site/homepage.asp>.

- **Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Web site provides information on Israeli areas from “Facts about Israel” (history, economy, education, etc.) to “Israel beyond Politics” (Jewish and Arab kid camps, archaeological expeditions, etc.). Current news is also provided, including editorials from the Hebrew press. Additional sections include Israeli maps, the Anti-Terrorist Fence, Anti-Semitism, and the Peace Process. News Archives and a MFA Library provide additional information. An excellent site for historical and current information about Israel. *Access:* <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa>.



ISRAEL MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

- **The Knesset: Israeli Parliament.** A primer of information about the Knesset from members to documents. Announcements, What’s New, and Yesteryear (highlighting events of a past day and year) are a few of the selection areas available. The Knesset section provides in-depth information from how the Knesset works to facts about each Knesset session. The enhanced virtual tour of the building is exceptional. *Access:* <http://www.knesset.gov.il/main/eng/home.asp>.



- **Lebanese Republic: Prime Minister Rafic Hariri—The Official Site.** A biography, awards and honors, photographs, and

a personal commitment page provide information on the Prime Minister of Lebanon. Chapters of the Prime Minister’s book, *Statesmanship in Government*, are available to read. Government policies and cabinet decisions are available. An interesting section is the Grand Serail, a monument under reconstruction—the photographs of the monument are stunning. *Access:* <http://www.rhariri.com/>.

- **The National Museum: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.** The National Museum is a picture-heavy Web site. Exhibition Halls include Islam and the Arabs Peninsula, the First and Second Saudi State, and Prophet Mohammad’s Mission. All Exhibition Hall sites include cameras for virtual tours. The Selected Pieces from Collection section provides color pictures of pots, jewelry and cosmetic objects, and coins. Additional links provide information on publications, pictures of sites in Saudi Arabia, and archaeological digs. *Access:* <http://www.saudimuseum.com/>.

- **Palestinian National Authority (PNA).** This official Web site of PNA offers links to key documents, press releases, and reports generated by PNA. *Access:* <http://www.pna.gov.ps/>.

- **Salam Iran.** Iran is not an Arab country, but is undeniably a major player in the Middle East. This is the Web site of the Iranian embassy in Canada (Iran does not maintain diplomatic relations with the United States) and is a good English-language source of Iranian information. *Access:* <http://www.salamiran.org/http://www.salamiran.org/>.

- **Saudi Arabian Information Resource.** Information on current news and issues affecting Saudi Arabia is on this site. Data is also provided with links ranging from “Fact File” to “Statistical Tables.” The site provides basic information on Islam, including the Five Tenets of Islam and Ramadan. An informative section on the Role of Women in Saudi Arabia discusses the differences between Saudi and Western women. *Access:* <http://www.saudinf.com/>.

- **Virtual Jerusalem Tour.** This is a small site, but definitely worth a visit. Links provide

color photographs to the Jerusalem Gates (Damascus, Herod, and Zion), Holy Sites (Dome of the Rock and the Temple Mount), and the Chagall Windows. A fourth link leads to the Jerusalem Mosaic. *Access:* <http://www.md.huji.ac.il/special/vjt/>.

- **Welcome to the Presidential Palace—Republic of Lebanon.** Information on the President of Lebanon and the Office of the Presidency. The President of Lebanon section includes a biography, speeches, and a series of photograph albums showing private and personal photographs of the president, as well as albums showing work-related photos. The Office of the Presidency segment includes information about Lebanon and the Republican Guard Brigade. The site is available in English, French, and Arabic. *Access:* <http://www.presidenc.gov.lb/>.

Islam and the Islamic World

- **Al Jazeera.** This, the most prominent and arguably the best known of Arab news sources, is also perhaps the most controversial Web site on our list, the news here is distinctly aimed at the Arab street. It has both outraged and informed those from other backgrounds. *Access:* <http://english.aljazeera.net/HomePage>.

- **Arab-Islamic History.** Begins with sections devoted to pre-Islamic history of the Arab people, but the bulk of the site is devoted to their history since conversion to Islam. There are a vast number of articles looking at many of the most important periods and events over more than 12 centuries. Perhaps out of modern political sensitivity, coverage from the fall of the Ottomans is generally lacking. *Access:* <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/history.htm>.

Arab League. More accurately, the League of Arab States, this is an organization of 22 Arab states, including some the casual observer might not have included (e.g., Djibouti). Functioning similarly, in many ways, to the other regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States, the Arab League provides a forum for all of the Arab states to gather and debate the issues of the

day. It includes sections dealing with news, issues, and Arab history to name but a few. *Access:* http://www.arableagueonline.org/arableague/index_en.jsp.

- **Arab Women Connect.** This is a very comprehensive site looking at the roles of modern Arab women. The site contains links to news about Arab women today, women in Arab business, women's rights activists, and Arab governments and women. While many sections are available to all users, the site does require users to login for complete access, but registration is free. *Access:* <http://www.arabwomenconnect.org/>.

- **The Arab World: Your Guide to Everything Arab.** A metasite with a vast collection of links to many different categories, including the arts and humanities, architecture, history, language, religion, and many other aspects of Arab culture. *Access:* <http://cecilmarie.web.prw.net/arabworld/>.

- **Distinguished People in Arab History.** There are links on this site to many articles, which are broken down by category, e.g., scientists, women, and scholars. *Access:* <http://el.hct.ac.ae/UAE/Arab/Peop.htm>.

- **The Holy Qur'an.** Many Muslims hold the Holy Qur'an to be untranslatable from the original Arabic; however, this view has not stopped many from undertaking the effort. This Web site is rich with resources for understanding the history of the book and its place in Islam in particular, as well as its influence on the growth of Arab civilization and culture. There are links to a dozen English translations as well as translations in nearly 20 other languages. Several search engines are available to search the Qur'an in both English and in transliterated Arabic. *Access:* <http://www.quran.org.uk/>.

- **Introduction to the Arab World.** This site is maintained by *Middle East News and World Report*. A good comprehensive introduction to both general Arab history as well as the history and nature of various institutions and disciplines. *Access:* <http://www.middleeastnews.com/intoarab101.html>.

- **Middle Eastern and Asian Maps.** Not limited to the Middle East, this University of

Texas Web site offers many maps of states, cities, and political boundaries in the area. *Access:* http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/.

- **Sunnah and Hadith.** Along with the Qur'an, Sunnah and Hadith are the primary sources of Muslim law and practice. The Sunnah refers to the way in which Muhammad led his life and the Hadith collects anecdotes about that life. This Web site contains links to various collections of the Hadith, their history and the methods used to ascertain their veracity, as well as a link to articles on the Sunnah. *Access:* <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/>.

Judaism and anti-Semitism

- **aish.com.** A variety of topics are provided on this site, including Jewish World (includes Jewish Society, Israel Diary, and Media Objectivity), Spirituality, Family, Dating, Jewish Literacy, and Holocaust Studies. A weekly Torah portion, information on Jewish holidays, and a live video of the Western Wall make this a great site for information on all aspects of Judaism. *Access:* <http://www.aish.com/>.

- **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.** A premier Web site for information about the Jewish Holocaust. Educational material is provided on numerous aspects of the Holocaust (personal histories, online exhibits, special exhibits at the museum). Research, History, Remembrance, and Conscience (dealing with genocide issues) are additional areas of featured information. *Access:* <http://www.ushmm.org/>.

- **Yad Vashem: The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority.** Yad Vashem has been "entrusted with documenting the history of the Jewish people during the Holocaust period . . ." The site contains a vast amount of information on topics related to the Holocaust. *Access:* <http://www.yadvashem.org.il/>.

Terrorism

- **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA): The War on Terrorism.** Several statements and remarks of the former director of the

CIA on aspects of terrorism can be found on this site. Information on Terrorist CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear attacks) includes various forms of the four different sources. Also includes Terrorism FAQs and a Related Links sections. *Access:* <http://www.cia.gov/terrorism>.

- **Jurist Legal Intelligence: Terrorism Law and Policy.** One-stop shopping for sources on a variety of terrorism topics is available here. Among the topics on this site are Terrorism and Terrorists, Counterterrorism Policy, Civil Liberties, and Bioterrorism: Legal Issues. The topics contain links to articles and other sites. The Civil Liberties section contains information on Hearings and Testimony, Civil Liberties Groups, and the U.S. government. *Access:* <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/terrorism.htm>.

- **Purdue Extension: Terrorism and Children.** Articles and multimedia (audio and video) sources for helping children cope with the stress and threats of terrorism are provided at this site, as well as strategies for parents and teachers to assist children. *Access:* <http://www.ces.purdue.edu/terrorism/>.

- **University of Michigan Documents Center: America's War Against Terrorism.** There's a wealth of information terrorism issues here, including September 11, 2001, Terrorism Suspects and Prosecution, Counterterrorism, Previous Attacks, Background Research, and Related Web Pages. Each section contains a multitude of links to topical information. *Access:* <http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/usterror.html>.

- **U.S. Department of State: Counterterrorism Office.** This Web site discusses U.S. policies for dealing with terrorism and the kidnapping of American citizens through terrorist actions. Links provide information on various terrorism-oriented topics, including the Global Coalition Against Terrorism, Operations Directorate, and Counterterrorism Finance and Designation Unit. A Related Sites link allows users to locate additional sources geared toward the fight against terrorist activities. *Access:* <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/>. ■