The Middle East: Myths vs. Reality

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Myth #1

All Middle Eastern people are Arabs.
Which of these countries are predominantly Arab, and which are NOT?

http://www.worldmonitor.info/regions/mena.html
Arab Countries:

- Iraq
- Syria
- Lebanon
- Jordan
- Saudi Arabia
- small Persian Gulf countries (except for Iran)
- North African countries (Egypt-Morocco)
Many of them are not Arab

• Iran is Persian, an Indo-European people.
• “Kurdistan” (the Kurdish parts of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria) is also Indo-European.
• Afghanistan is a mixture of non-Arab peoples.
• Turkey is Turkish.
• Israel, at least the non-Arab parts, are Israeli.
Myth #2

All Middle Eastern people are Muslims.
Other religious groups in the Middle East:

- Jews (not just in Israel)
- Zoroastrians
- Baha’is
- Christians
  - Assyrian Christians in Iraq and Iran
  - Palestinian and Lebanese Christians
  - Armenian Christians (in Iran too)
  - Egypt’s Coptic Christians
Myth #3

You can believe the Western stereotypes of Muslims.
NOT! Let’s look at:

- who/where they are
- what they believe
- their alleged support for the killing civilians.
True or false?

Most Muslims are Arabs who live in the Middle East.
False.
Of more than 1 billion Muslims worldwide, only about 1/5 are Arabs.
Which country has more Muslims than any other country in the world?
Indonesia - with over 200 million Muslims.

http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/idnewz.gif
Note: The U.S. has about 5 million Muslims.

http://www.hahmed.com/pics/newsweekmuslims_large.jpg
True or False?
Muslims have a strange religion and worship a god called Allah.
False.

Muslims are *monotheistic* and worship the same one God as Christians and Jews.
Note: ‘Allah’ is the Arabic word for ‘God.’
True or False?

Most Muslims dislike Jews and are anti-Semitic.
False.

- Muslims respect Jews and Christians as "peoples of the book" and worshippers of the same, one God.
- The first declaration of religious tolerance came from Iran, about 2,500 years ago.
- Arabs are a Semitic people too.
- Note, however: While most Muslims respect the Jewish religion, they HATE Israeli politics.
True or False?

Muslims believe it is o.k. to kill civilians in a holy war (“jihad”).
False.
Only Muslim extremists believe this. (Just like most Christians do NOT believe in bombing abortion clinics.)
Myth #4:
Most Middle Eastern Muslim women wear veils over their faces and are treated very badly.
Reality:

• Muslim women have many different styles of dress. (Very few cultures require women to cover their faces.)
• The treatment of women varies from country to country and family to family.
• Some Muslim countries, like Pakistan, have had female prime ministers. The U.S. has never had a female president.
Pakistani dress (left); Saudi Arabian (right)
Only Afghani women wear burqas
Iranian woman

Green Cine.com
Video: “A Land Called Paradise”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbcmPe0z3Sc
Myth #5

“They hate our way of life.”
American culture is popular in the Middle East.

Donald Duck in Tehran, Iran. Coca Cola in Egypt.
Many Middle Eastern people fear our military/political policies.
Conclusions:

• There are many peoples, languages, and cultures in the Middle East.
• There are several religions in the Middle East.
• Many Muslim beliefs are similar to ours.
• The status of Middle Eastern women is complex.
• Middle Eastern attitudes toward the U.S. are complicated.