Europeans Claim Muslim Lands
(Chapter 27 section 3)

After dividing Africa, European nations expanded their empires by seizing land from Muslim states in the Middle East. Current political events in the Middle East are STILL influenced by imperialism from the late 1800s!

Geopolitics: An interest in OR the taking of land for its strategic location AND / OR its resources or products.

1. Ottoman Empire (Turkey) (location):
The O.E. controlled trade route access to the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Landlocked nations (such as Russia) had to travel through Ottoman lands to reach a warm – water port on the Black Sea.

Russia used alliances and then warfare to try to gain access to the Black Sea.

In 1853, the Crimean War broke out on the Crimean peninsula (which extends into the Black Sea). This is the first war among the major European powers since the Congress of Vienna met in 1815. The British and the French tried to check Russian power by supporting the O.E. Russia was defeated. The O. E. became known as “The Sick Man of Europe.”

After the Crimean War, the O.E gradually lost more and more territory as groups within the empire were inspired by nationalism to break away and become independent. The Russians (who are a Slavic people) aided (other) Slavic people in the Balkans. The Ottomans lost Romania, Montenegro, Cyprus, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Bulgaria in the Balkans and Algeria, Tunisia, part of Libya and part of Egypt in northern Africa.

Other Middle Eastern nations realized the need for reform, or they ran the risk of being consumed by European powers.

2. Egypt — Suez Canal (location) and Cotton (resource):
After Napoleon and the British fought over Egyptian territory in the late 1790s, Egypt broke away from the Ottoman Empire. The new ruler began to modernize the military and the economy and forced Egyptian peasants to give up traditional agriculture in favor of a cash crop: cotton. In the early 1800s, the Egyptians began to construct the Suez Canal through the Isthmus of Suez (near the Sinai Peninsula) in order to connect the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The canal was built with French money and Egyptian labor.

The Suez Canal opened in 1869. The Egyptians were unable to pay the minimum interest payments on their $450 million debt. In 1882, the British occupied Egypt and took over financial control of the Canal.
To the British, the Suez Canal became the “lifeline of Empire.” It provided the British navy with easy access to Asia and its East African colonies.

3. Afghanistan (location): The Great Game
Russia and Great Britain struggled to control Muslim territory in Central Asia: namely India. India was “the Jewel in the Crown.” India’s most valuable colony. Russia tried to take territory in India away from the British and Britain tried to expand its borders to the north. The center of this struggle was Afghanistan.

The British withdrew in 1881, and in 1921 they agreed that their empire would not extend beyond the Khyber Pass, which is on the eastern border of Afghanistan.

Russia was now (in 1921) called the Soviet Union. The USSR signed a nonaggression pact with Afghanistan which lasted until 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

4. Persia (Iran) (location) and Oil (resource):

Russia wanted access to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Britain wanted to use Afghanistan as a buffer between India and Russia. In 1857, Persia gave up all territorial claims in Afghanistan.

Persian rulers began to grant concessions to Western businesses. The businesses could buy the rights to operate in a certain area OR to develop a certain product. For example, in the late 1800s, Persian tobacco was a valuable commodity in the international market. In 1890, the Persian ruler sold a concession to Britain to export Persian tobacco. This led to a boycott of tobacco by the Persians and riots. The concession was cancelled.

In 1907, Russia and Britain divided Persia into Spheres of Influence.

In 1908 OIL WAS DISCOVERED and this area of the world suddenly became very valuable... and the focus of a great deal of international attention.
GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

1. Region: Approximately how much of the Ottoman Empire was lost by 1914?

2. Region: How many European nations claimed parts of the Ottoman Empire? Which areas became independent?
History in Depth

Suez Canal

The Suez Canal was viewed as the “Lifeline of the Empire” because it allowed Britain quicker access to its colonies in Asia and Africa. In a speech to Parliament, Joseph Chamberlain explained that he believed Britain should continue its occupation of Egypt because of "the necessity for using every legitimate opportunity to extend our influence and control in that great African continent which is now being opened up to civilization and to commerce."

This painting represents the opening celebration of the canal on November 17, 1869.