

**Module: North Africa and Southwest Asia**  
**Topic Content: Physical Features of North Africa and Southwest Asia**

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**Crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe**



North Africa and Southwest Asia are located at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe. North Africa spans the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This region extends across the northern part of the African continent, from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east.

Southwest Asia is located east of North Africa. This region is framed by several bodies of water. The Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea are located to the northwest. The Caspian Sea is located to the north. The Red Sea is located to the southwest. The Arabian Sea, which flows into the Indian Ocean, is located to the southeast.

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**Anatolian Peninsula**



The Anatolian Peninsula is the westernmost part of Asia. It contains most of Turkey and is located south of the Black Sea and north of the Mediterranean Sea. The Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara separate the Anatolian Peninsula from Europe. A network of waterways in this region allows transportation from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. The Bosphorus Strait connects the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. The Dardanelles Strait connects the Sea of Marmara to the Aegean Sea. Finally, the Aegean Sea flows into the eastern Mediterranean.

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**Sinai Peninsula**



The Sinai Peninsula is a small triangular piece of land that connects North Africa and Southwest Asia. It is situated between the Mediterranean Sea in the north and the Red Sea in the south. The Sinai Peninsula juts out into the Red Sea, forming an isthmus in the east and the west. The western isthmus is called the Isthmus of Suez. The Isthmus of Suez marks the division between Africa and Asia. It is also the strategic location of the Suez Canal, which allows transportation between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. The Suez Canal is the shortest maritime route between Europe and the Indian Ocean.

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**Arabian Peninsula**



The Arabian Peninsula is the largest peninsula in the world. It extends from Southwest Asia into the Arabian Sea. The Red Sea is located to the southwest of the peninsula. The Persian Gulf, also called the Arabian Gulf, is located to the northeast. The Persian Gulf flows into the Arabian Sea, via the Strait of Hormuz. The Arabian Peninsula contains several Arab nations, the largest of which is Saudi Arabia.

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**Persian/Arabian Gulf**



There is international disagreement over the name Persian Gulf. It was named by Ancient Greek geographers when the Persian Empire controlled this region. For thousands of years, it has been known as the Persian Gulf. In the 1960s, Arab nations began contesting the name, and proposed that it be renamed the Arabian Gulf. Arab nations adopted the new name, but Iran refused. Iran is located across the gulf and is culturally Persian. Using the name Arabian Gulf is viewed as an insult to Iran.

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**Deserts**



Most of the terrain in North Africa and Southwest Asia consists of desert or dry steppe. In fact, the two largest hot deserts in the world are found in this region. The Arabian Desert is located on the Arabian Peninsula in Southwest Asia. It is the second-largest hot desert in the world, after the Sahara. The Sahara is located in North Africa and is the largest hot desert in the world. The Sahara covers most of North Africa, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. It is roughly the size of the United States, and accounts for one-third of Africa's land area. The name "Sahara" is derived from an Arabic word that means "desert."

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**Desert Terrain**



Desert terrain consists of erg and desert pavement. Erg describes a sandy desert with dunes made of loose sand. These sand dunes shift when the wind blows. The Rub' al Khali, or Empty Quarter, is part of the Arabian Desert and is the largest area of erg in the world.

Desert pavement describes a stony desert with a combination of densely packed gravel and sand. Approximately 70% of the Sahara is made up of desert pavement. Desert pavement is known as reg in the western Sahara, and serir in the eastern Sahara.



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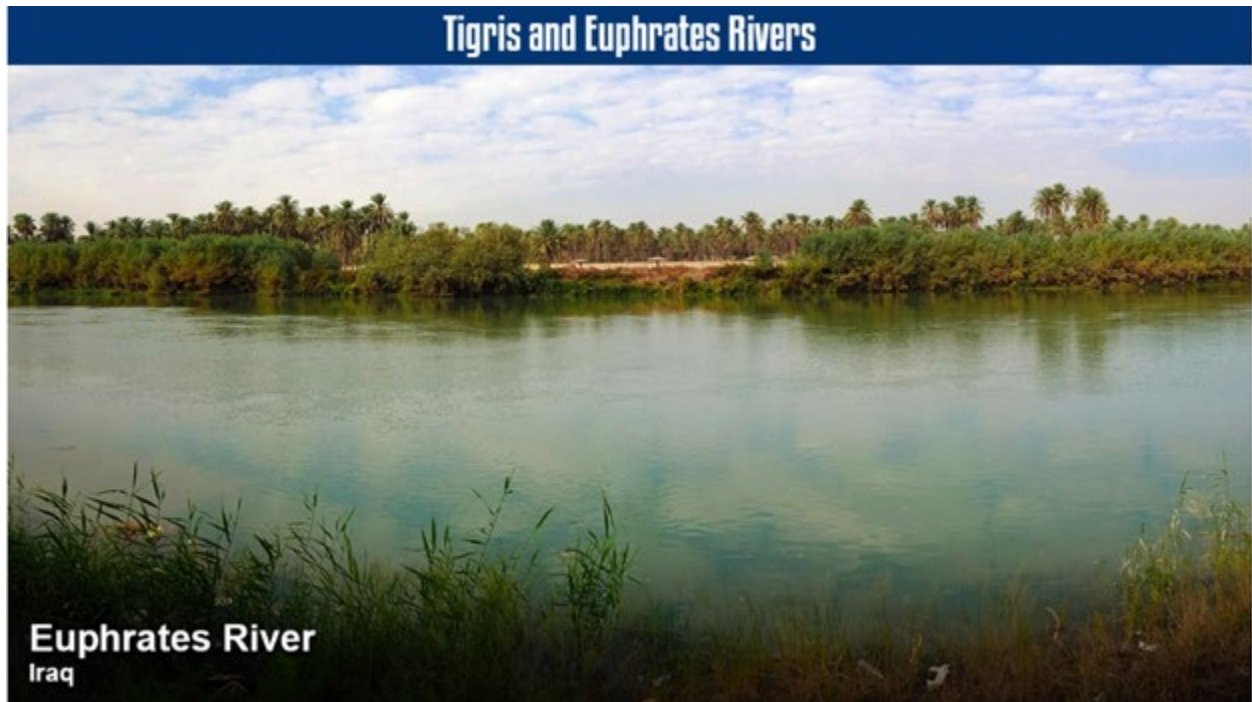
**Nile River**



The Nile River is the most important river in North Africa. At 4,130 miles long, it is also the longest river in the world. It begins near the equator and flows north toward the Mediterranean. The Nile flows through several countries, but has been the primary water source for Egypt and Sudan since ancient times. The Nile has two main tributaries: the Blue Nile and the White Nile. The Nile forms a large delta before it empties into the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile Delta is an extremely fertile region due to deposited sediment.

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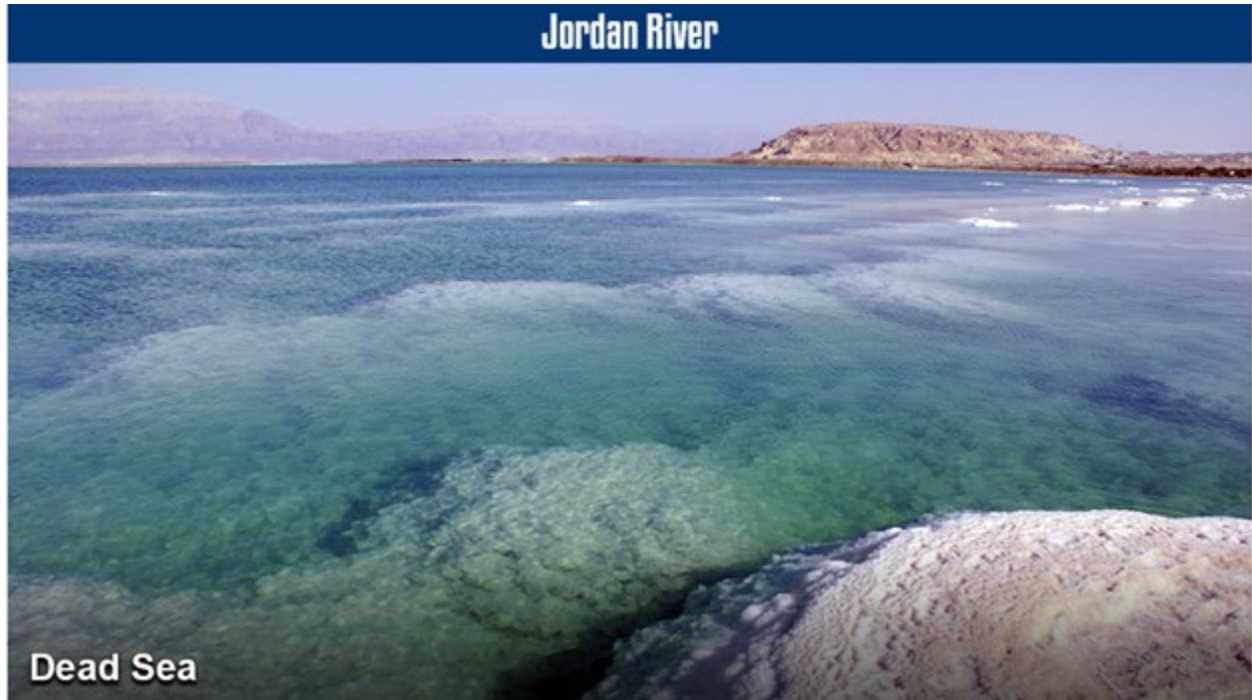
**Tigris and Euphrates Rivers**



The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers form an important river system in Southwest Asia. The Tigris River is the eastern river. It begins in eastern Turkey and flows through Iraq before emptying into the Arabian Gulf. The Euphrates River is the western river. It begins in eastern Turkey and flows through Syria and Iraq before combining with the Tigris River. The area between these rivers was once known as Mesopotamia, and supported the world's oldest known civilization.

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**Jordan River**



The Jordan River is another important river in Southwest Asia. It is located between the countries of Israel and Jordan. The Jordan River holds religious significance in Judaism and Christianity. The river flows south from the Golan Heights through the Sea of Galilee. It empties into a saltwater lake named the Dead Sea. The surface of the Dead Sea is the lowest point on Earth, besides the oceans. No water flows out from the Dead Sea. Instead, the water evaporates, leaving salt and other minerals behind. Because of this, the Dead Sea is one of the saltiest bodies of water in the world.

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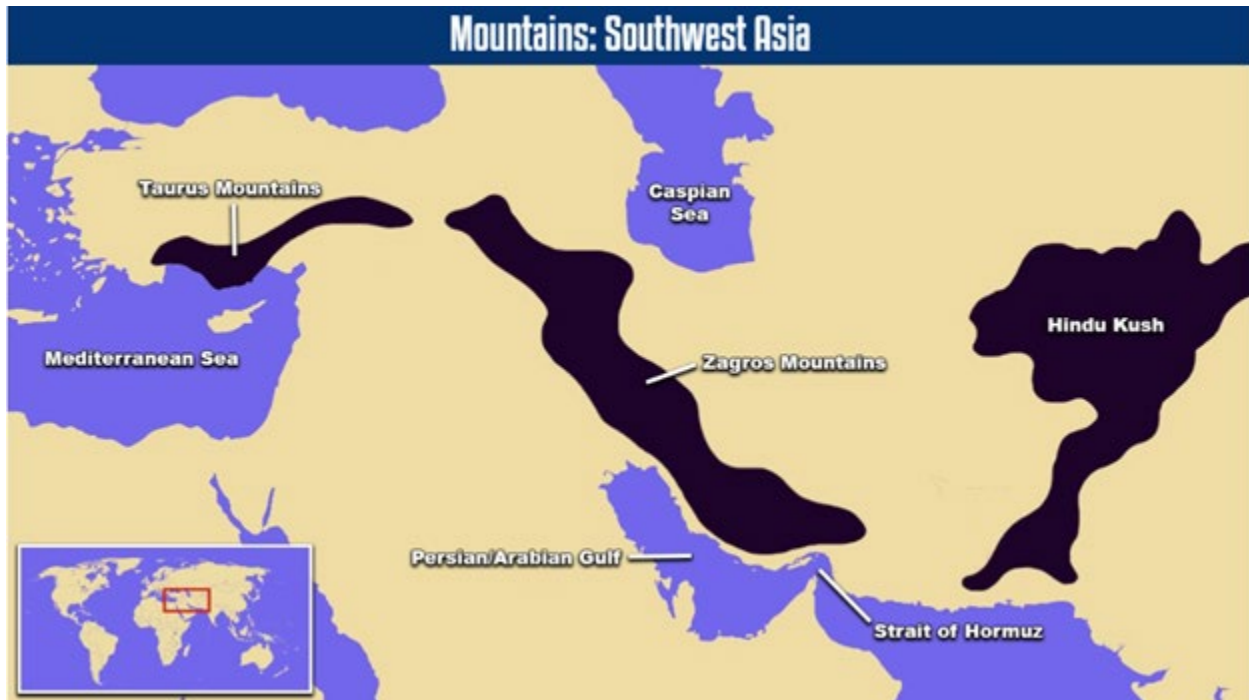
**Mountains: North Africa**



The Atlas Mountains are located in northwestern Africa. These mountains run along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and extend through the countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. There is a Mediterranean climate north of the Atlas Mountains, along the Mediterranean coast. The Sahara is located south of the Atlas Mountains.

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**Mountains: Southwest Asia**



The Taurus Mountains are located in southern Turkey. These mountains run along the Mediterranean Coast of the Anatolian Peninsula toward southeastern Turkey. The Taurus Mountains form the southern boundary of the Anatolian Plateau. They are also the source of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

The Zagros Mountains are a long mountain range that begins in eastern Turkey, east of the Tigris River. The Zagros stretch through northern Iraq, along the western border of Iran, to the Strait of Hormuz in southwestern Iran. These mountains form the western boundary of the Iranian Plateau.

Part of the Hindu Kush mountain range is located in Southwest Asia. The western area of the Hindu Kush extends into Afghanistan, which is located east of Iran.