

## Student Handout #1 – Interaction and Conflict in Era 4

### Introduction:

Era 4 was a time of constant battles and conflict in Aforeurasia. Large, powerful societies fought for control over territories and trade routes. The Byzantine Empire, the Islamic caliphates, the Persian Sassanid Empire, The Tang Empire, the Carolingian Empire, and even the Vikings were all engaged in conflict with different societies at different times.

The Islamic caliphates were especially powerful in Era 4. They were the political-religious nations or states that were made up of Muslim people and the land under their control, ruled by leaders called caliphs, formed after the death of the Muhammad in 632 CE (caliph means “successor”). The Umayyad Caliphate was an important Islamic dynasty that lasted from around 661 CE to 750 CE. Internal conflict and civil war ended Umayyad rule, and the Abbasid family dynasty took over in 750 CE. The Abbasids ruled a large territory until they began to weaken in 861 CE, and by 945 CE they had lost almost all their power.

*The events and dates below make up part of the timeline of conflict for this time period. Using two different color highlighters, highlight VICTORIES and/or ADVANCES for the Islamic caliphates with one color and DEFEATS and/or SETBACKS for the Islamic caliphates with the other color.*

- Before 622 CE, there were hundreds of years of conflict between the Roman Empire (then later the Byzantine Empire) and the Sassanid (Persian) Empire.
- In 622, the Byzantine army left Constantinople and traveled to Asia Minor and won important battles against the Persians.
- 622 CE, the founder of Islam Muhammad and his followers left Mecca for the city of Medina. The first large Muslim community was developed there.
- During the year 624 there were more battles between the Persians and the Byzantines with Byzantine victories.
- In 626 CE, the Avars and Slavs (former nomadic societies), supported by the Persians besieged Constantinople, but they were unable to take it and the Byzantines held them off.
- In 627, the Byzantine Army defeated Persians again with the help of Turkish allies. This defeat left the Persian army weakened, and their government was weakened by internal conflict.
- In 629 CE, the new Persian ruler asked for peace with the Byzantines. Both empires were weakened by their wars and internal problems. Both empires had taxed their peoples to pay for war, and their peoples were not happy.
- 632 CE, Muhammad died, with most of the Arabian Peninsula under Islamic control.

- In 633 CE, the Muslim armies of the Caliphate attacked Sassanid territory, which led to years of ongoing conflict.
- In 642, the Caliph Umar ordered the invasion of the Sassanid Empire.
- 651 CE saw a complete victory for the Caliphate army and the defeat and end of Persian Sassanid empire (by 750, the Abbasid Dynasty, which had taken over caliphate from Umayyads, had its capital in Persia).
- The Byzantines continued to fight with the Muslim armies. The Byzantines lost much of their territory by 700 CE to the caliphates, which threatened, but never took over Constantinople during these years.
- In 718 CE the second siege of Constantinople by the Muslims failed. After that, the Abbasid caliphate maintained more normal political relationship with the Byzantine Empire. They had ambassadors and signed treaties. Even so, raids and battles continued, and by end of this era, around 975 CE, the Byzantines had regained some of their lost territory, but the conflict continued. Also, the Abbasids continually dealt with conflict from pastoral nomads during this era.
- In 732, at the Battle of Tours, Charles Martel, the Frankish leader in what would later be France and Germany, defeated a Muslim army coming from Spain into central Europe and stopped the expansion of Islam into this area.
- By 750 CE, Muslim soldiers and traders visited and even settled in China.
- In 751 CE, the Battle of the Talas River took place. In this battle, the Abbasid army faced the army of the Tang Dynasty and its allies, and defeated them.

### **Analysis Questions:**

1. Who were the major powers challenging each other for territory in Afroeurasia?
2. Which group seemed to have the upper hand by the **end** of this era? How do you know?
3. There were many battles during this time period. What do you think made some battles more important than others?