

Conflicts in the Middle East

September 11

On the morning of September 11, 2001, terrorists captured four American airplanes. Suicide pilots guided two of the planes into the twin towers of New York City's World Trade Center, while another was guided into the Pentagon near Washington, D.C. The Pentagon is the home of the American Department of Defense, the government agency responsible for the American military. Reports indicate that a group of passengers forced a fourth jet to crash in Pennsylvania. The passengers apparently gave their lives to keep the terrorists from harming any other innocent people. America had been unrivaled as a military power since the breakup of the Soviet Union more than a decade before the attacks. If America could be attacked, anyone, anywhere in the world might be at risk.

Terrorism is the use of violence against civilians. A civilian does not belong to the military. Terrorists often view themselves as part of a resistance movement who hurt innocent people to advance what they believe is a more important cause.

The Middle East is often called "the crossroads of the world." This sparsely populated region produced three religious faiths practiced by half of the world's inhabitants; Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The Middle East is a gateway to India, the Far East, sub-Saharan Africa, and southeast Europe.

In recent years, this region has been one of the most chaotic parts of our world. Many brilliant ideas came from the Middle East, but it is also a land of long standing hatred and revenge. This unit is an attempt to explain some of the causes of the many conflicts in the Middle East.

The Ottoman Empire

In the fourteenth century, a Turkish military leader named Osman defeated other Turkish tribes to become ruler of a small kingdom. A dynasty is a family or group that maintains power for

generations. Osman's dynasty conquered what was left of the old Roman Empire, which historians call the Byzantine Empire. The Turkish Ottoman Empire, whose name derives from Osman, eventually conquered most of the Middle East and North Africa. At its strongest point it also controlled Greece, the Balkan Mountains, and most of southeast Europe. The Ottoman Empire lasted until the early 20th century, a span of almost six hundred years.

The Ottoman Turks were Muslims, but they did not impose Islamic law on non-Muslims. The Ottoman Turks generally allowed Christians, Jews, and people of other faiths to practice their beliefs in peace, although the Armenian Massacre of 1915-1917 is a cruel exception. Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Maronites, and Armenians all maintained strong cultural identities within the Ottoman Empire.

Two wars in the early twentieth century (the 1900s) resulted in Greece, Crete, Serbia, Romania, and Macedonia leaving the empire. The weakened Ottoman Empire was often compared to a "sick man." European colonial leaders had recently seized most of Africa and were eager to exert their influence in the Middle East.

World War I broke out in 1914. Britain, France, the United States, and Russia were united as the Allied forces. They fought the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Ottoman Turks assumed the Central Powers would win the war. The Turks believed Germany would keep Russia from taking land from their declining empire, so the Ottoman sultans joined the Central Powers. Russia lacked a "warm water port," where they could ship goods in all seasons. All of Russia's western seaports are in regions that are frozen for at least part of the year. The Russian people revolted in 1917 and Russia withdrew from the war. Even without the Russians, the Allied Powers won.

The Allied Powers of World War I were eager to assert their influence in the Middle East and North Africa at the end of the war. They hoped to sell their manufactured goods to the people of the



The World Trade Center on September 11, 2001

region. They also hoped to exploit the natural resources of the region. Oil had not yet been discovered, but the Middle East and North Africa had many exotic spices. Britain also controlled India at that time, and they hoped to secure a safe route to India and other colonial lands in East Asia. Britain, France, and the United States carved up most of the Ottoman Empire and left only what we now know as the modern nation of Turkey.

Kemal Ataturk

Ottoman sultans ruled Turkey for almost 700 years. After World War I, a period of chaos within Turkey ended when a popular, charismatic general named Mustafa Kemal took control. He was named Mustafa at birth and had no surname. As a child, he was nicknamed Kemal by his mathematics teacher. Kemal means “the perfect one.” He earned his nickname because he was able to memorize his lessons faster than any of the other students.

Kemal was convinced that Turkey needed to become a modern nation. He believed that if the Turkish people continued to follow their traditions, they would again be attacked by another western power. The popular Kemal often traveled the countryside to encourage the people “Let science and new ideas come in freely,” he often said. “If you don’t, they will devour you.” Greece attacked Turkey in 1921 and 1922, but Kemal led the Turks to victory. By the mid 1920s, the Turkish leader began a modernization program in Turkey:

- Kemal said that in a modern nation, men and women must be equal. He ordered that girls be allowed to attend school. Kemal also gave women the right to vote and take jobs in business and government.
- Kemal set aside religious law and established a western system of justice. Turkey had been governed by Shariah until Kemal set up a legal structure that was similar European nations. He also forbid men from taking more than one wife, although the practice of polygamy is allowed by the Quran.

- Kemal forbade the Turkish people to wear fezzes, veils, or other traditional Turkish clothing. The fez is a tasseled, cone shaped traditional hat. Many Muslims men wore fezzes so they could touch their forehead to the ground when they prayed. “The people of the Turkish republic,” Kemal said in 1919, “must prove that they are civilized by the way they appear.” And that, he explained, meant boots and shoes, trousers, shirt, and tie, jacket and vest. “And to complete these, a cover with a brim on our heads. I want to make this clear. This head covering is called a hat.” Turks who continued to wear traditional clothing were arrested and imprisoned.
- Kemal introduced a western alphabet and ordered all newspapers, books, and street signs printed in the new script. Kemal believed the difficulty of the Arabic script his nation used led to illiteracy in Turkey and was difficult for merchants and traders from other nations to learn. He traveled the Turkish countryside with a blackboard and chalk to personally explain how the letters should be pronounced. Many of the people Ataturk personally taught had never before held a pencil or a piece of chalk.
- Kemal decreed that everyone must have a surname, or family name. In 1934, the Turkish assembly gave Mustafa Kemal the name Ataturk, or “Father of the Turks.”



What is ironic about this picture of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk?

Ataturk was a very popular leader. Most Turks accepted his changes, but some people disagreed because Ataturk’s changes created a more secular society. Secular means non-religious.

It didn’t matter if people disagreed with Ataturk. The Turkish leader allowed only one political party and did not permit people to openly disagree with his policies. Ataturk died in 1938, but he is considered a national hero to this day.

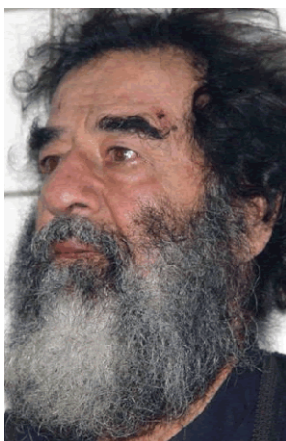
Shariah

In many western governments, particularly the United States, there is a separation between religion and government. Many Muslims believe in Shariah, a term that means “path” in Arabic. Shariah law tells many devout Muslims what to eat, how to pray, and how to behave in public. Muslims believe the Shariah are commandments from God (Arabic *Allah*).

Under Shariah law, people may not consume alcohol, borrow money at interest, or allow women in their family to go out in public without a veil. Shariah law allows a man to take as many as four wives, provided his first wife agrees and he is able to support all of his wives and children. This provision of the Shariah is not often employed in even the most traditional Muslim societies.

Saudi Arabia is the only nation that closely adheres to Shariah law. Criminals who are convicted of murder, rape, or other violent crimes in Saudi Arabia can face public amputation of arms or legs, or beheadings. Westerners often argue that Saudi justice is cruel, but most observers agree that violent crime is less common in Saudi Arabia than in America.

Devout Muslims defend Shariah because their values have served them well for over one thousand years. Saudi professor Dr. Hend Khuthaila said, “The West may be more advanced in some areas like science, but I have never believed for a minute that your culture is better than ours... We go to the United States and see playgrounds, so we build swings for five thousand dollars and our children don’t use them. Swings are not part of our culture. We would rather spend time with our families than be on a playground with strangers.”¹



Saddam Hussein shortly after his capture

¹ Quoted in *The Arabs* by David Lamb, Random House 1987. Pages 265-6.

The War on Terror

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were a stark reminder of how vulnerable the world was to terrorist acts. The Global War on Terror is an ongoing campaign by the United States and its allies to prevent international terrorism.

America’s most notable foe in the war on terror has been Al Queda, a violent organization that seeks to end western influence in Muslim countries. Al Queda’s terrorist operations have been funded largely by Osama bin Laden, a member of a wealthy construction family. Bin Laden was last seen in public at his son’s wedding in January, 2001, and is believed to be in hiding in Central Asia. He is the subject of a \$25 million reward offered by the American State Department.

The Taliban controlled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. The Taliban continued to allow Bin Laden to live in Afghanistan after he was accused of funding the attacks of September 11, 2001. The United States, aided by Great Britain and other allies, attacked Afghanistan a month after September 11 and removed the Taliban from power. The Taliban remain a terrorist organization fighting the American-backed elected government in Afghanistan.

Saddam Hussein led Iraq from 1979 until his removal from power in 2003. In 1980, Saddam began a bloody war with Iran, hoping to seize control of oil rich land. Iran and Iraq fought for nine years, and as many as one million people died, but the war ended without either side able to claim victory.

The war with Iran left Iraq with huge debts. Saddam needed funds to maintain his army, which he used to control the Iraqi people. In 1990, he decided to invade the tiny oil-rich nation of Kuwait. A multinational military force, led by the United States, responded to the invasion and liberated Kuwait in January 1991.

As part of the peace settlement after what became known as the Gulf War, Saddam agreed to allow inspectors to ensure that he was not building weapons of mass destruction. Saddam was already responsible for the deaths of millions in

the Iran-Iraq war, and if he had access to nuclear weapons, the results may have been disastrous for the entire world. In a speech to the American people in 2002, President George W. Bush stated that it was his goal “to prevent regimes (governments) that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction.” When Saddam refused to allow weapons inspectors into Iraq, the United States Congress gave President Bush the authority to invade.

The United States its allies forced Saddam from power in 2003. The dictator was later captured and put on trial by the newly elected government of Iraq for “crimes against humanity.” He was found guilty and executed in 2006. Weapons inspectors later determined that Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

In December 2005, the Iraqi people held elections for the Iraqi National Assembly. Nouri al-Maliki was chosen by the Assembly to be the nation’s Prime Minister. Unfortunately, several armed groups continue to fight for control in Iraq. Some observers believe that the resistance within Iraq is strong enough to be considered a civil war, or a war within a nation, but President Bush disagrees.

Iran

Shah Reza Pahlavi ruled Iran until 1979. Shah is a Persian word that means king. Iran is an oil-rich nation. The Shah used his oil wealth to modernize his nation as Ataturk had done in Turkey. He allowed women to vote and hold jobs, built big cities, and created a more secular or non-religious society.

The Shah was very unpopular with many Iranians. Iran is a very traditional Muslim nation, and many of the Iranian people were displeased with the changes the Shah imposed upon them. Many people close to the Shah were corrupt. Anyone who disagreed with the Shah was forced to leave the nation or face SAVAK, the Shah's brutal secret police. In 1971, the Shah held a three-day celebration that is believed to have cost

over \$50 million. The Shah hosted leaders and celebrities from around the world as parts of his nation was struggling with poverty and drought.

In January 1979, religious leaders gained control of Iran in a revolution and forced the Shah to flee. Iran became an Islamic republic. Boys and girls were no longer allowed to attend classes together. Alcohol and western music were forbidden. Men could not wear T-shirts, short sleeved shirts, or neckties. Women and girls had to wear long, dark garments that covered their hair and body. Religious police severely punished anyone suspected of opposing the revolution.

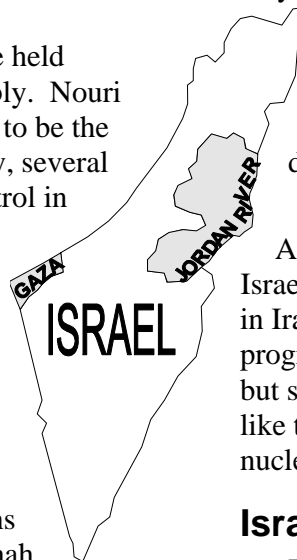
America supported the Shah, and the leaders of Iran’s revolution denounced the United States as the “Great Satan.” Shortly after the United States allowed the Shah to come to New York City for cancer treatment, Iranian students stormed the American embassy and held 52 Americans hostage for more than a year. Iran has also supports the violent Hezbollah, a group that has called for the destruction of Israel.

The current leader of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has called for the destruction of Israel and the development of a nuclear program in Iran. Ahmadinejad argues that a nuclear program would allow Iran to produce electricity, but some observers believe Ahmadinejad would like to use Iran’s nuclear program to create nuclear terror in other nations.

Israel

The Hebrews were the ancestors of the Jews. They lived on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea until AD70, when the Roman army forced the Jews to leave. For almost the next two thousand years, the Jews lived as minorities in different lands. Through the centuries, they were often unwelcome guests in their new countries.

The Jews faced pogroms, or organized massacres, particularly in Russia and Eastern Europe. In the late 1890s, writer Theodor Herzl formulated the ideas of Zionism. Zionists felt that the only way Jews could be safe would be to



recreate a Jewish state. The ancient homeland of the Jews was at that time known as Palestine and was populated by Arab-speaking people.

The British took control of Palestine after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. By this time, many Jews had settled on land their ancestors called home. Violence broke out between the Jewish settlers and the local Arab-speaking people known as Palestinians.

At the end of World War II in 1945, representatives of fifty countries formed the United Nations to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” In 1948, the United Nations created the modern state of Israel as a homeland for Jews. Five Arab states immediately invaded Israel. The Jews fought back and extended the borders of their new nation. After a second war in 1967, Israel occupied formerly Arab lands along the West Bank of the Jordan River, near the city of Gaza, and the Sinai Peninsula.

In 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat became the first Arab leader to agree to a peace treaty with Israel. Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and the long dispute between the nations ended. Many Arabs saw Sadat as a traitor for making an agreement with Israel. Five years later, Sadat was assassinated by Egyptians who did not believe he should have agreed to peace with Israel.

Hamas

The Israeli government had encouraged settlers to move to land they occupied after the 1967 war. The occupied territories included land along the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip. The Gaza Strip is a narrow piece of land along the Mediterranean Sea. Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in the late 1980s became known as the First Intifada. Intifada is an Arabic word that means uprising. The violence declined after Israel signed a 1993 peace agreement with some Palestinians that allowed the Palestinians to have limited self-government in the occupied territories. The government in the occupied territories is known as the Palestinian Authority.

A Palestinian group known as Hamas objected to the 1993 peace agreement because they did not believe Israel has the right to exist on land they consider to be theirs. Hamas encouraged a second intifada and has sponsored several violent acts against Israel. Radical Palestinians strapped bombs to themselves and detonated the bombs in crowded Israeli areas. Hamas provided financial support to the families of the suicide bombers.

In 2006, the Palestinians living in the occupied territories elected Hamas to run their government. International aid to the Palestinians from Israel and most western nations stopped because of Hamas’ sponsorship of violence against Israel.

Israel ended decades of occupation in the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements in 2005. Many Israelis hope to see a Palestinian nation that can co-exist peacefully with Israel. Other people in Israel believe that withdrawal from the occupied territories will give terrorists more freedom to attack Israel.

Israel built fortified barriers along its borders with the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Supporters of the barrier argue that the barriers are a necessary tool to prevent future terrorist attacks on Israel. Opponents argue that the barriers isolate Palestinians and will be the cause of more discontent and violence in the region.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a poor, mountainous, landlocked nation in Central Asia. Many armies have invaded Afghanistan, but no army has ever been able to survive the rugged land or dominate the fierce, proud Afghan people for a significant period.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. More than 100,000 Soviet troops used sophisticated weapons and brutal repression to control the cities and transportation routes, but the Soviet army was no match for the mujahedeen, the Afghan warriors who used their knowledge of the land to inflict damage on the Soviet forces. The Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 and would soon cease to be a world power.

The war was a tremendous drain on Afghanistan, and about a third of the population fled. The Soviet legacy in Afghanistan would be thousands of land mines. The small explosives were designed to control the mujahedeen, but today the weapons continue to destroy many lives as the Afghan people search for firewood or tend to their animals.

The withdrawal of Soviet troops led to a civil war in Afghanistan. A civil war is a war within a nation. Several competing interests fought for control of Afghanistan after the Soviets withdrew their troops. A group of Islamic militants known as the Taliban became popular with many Afghan people. Taliban is an Arabic word that means “students.” Many Afghan people initially supported the Taliban. The Afghan people hoped that returning to the traditional customs of their ancient land would erase the unhappiness of the civil war.

Afghanistan is a traditional nation, where many women wear burquas. A burqua is a cloak that covers all but your hands and feet. A small crocheted area allows one to see, but covers their body in modesty. In the last fifty years, many women have stopped wearing burquas, and have gone against the traditional customs of Afghanistan by being educated or taking jobs outside the home.

Once the Taliban took power in most of Afghanistan, they began a violent rule. The Taliban outlawed television, radio, even kite-flying; under rule of the Taliban, Afghan women seen in public without their burqua faced severe beatings or death.

When the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, the American government traced the incident to Osama bin Laden, who had taken refuge in Afghanistan. The Americans demanded that the Taliban turn over bin Laden and other suspected terrorists, but the Taliban refused. The United States led a multinational bomb attack in 2002 that forced the Taliban from power in Afghanistan.



A woman wearing a burqua

The Afghan people held national elections in 2004 and chose Hamid Karzai as President of a democratic government. A democracy is a type of government where people citizens choose their leaders. Women were allowed to vote and run for office for the first time in the nation’s history. Afghanistan continues to face many challenges. The nation is very poor and does not have a good road or railroad system to transport goods. The Taliban and Al Queda remain threats in the nation.

Americanization

Since the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, many Americans are confused. Why would anyone hate us? The answer may partly lie with how America is perceived in many parts of the world.

The United States is the world’s richest nation. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union more than a decade ago, America is the only military superpower. America is a model for tolerance, diversity, and democracy. Nevertheless, many people disagree with American values.

In traditional cultures with low crime and a strong family structure, many people around the world see America as a violent, permissive society. In his book *Jehad vs. McWorld*, Benjamin Barber argues that the culture of the United States and other western nations has replaced the traditional values of some societies. Young people around the world are wearing western clothes, listening to western music, and adopting western attitudes.

In 1873, Jules Verne wrote an adventure story titled “Around the World in Eighty Days.” Today it is possible to circle the globe in less than a day. People who were once isolated from one another are now part of a global community. Through television and the Internet, we have instant access to almost any part of the world. With that access comes a responsibility to understand other people and cultures. By learning about and understanding one another, we can hope that the citizens of the world can develop a sense of tolerance and respect for one another.