

Teaching guide: Conflict and tension in the Gulf and Afghanistan, 1990–2009

This resource outlines the key contextual information relevant to the specification content for this topic. It is designed to be used as a preparation and teaching tool to help teachers who are unfamiliar with this topic boost their subject knowledge in this area. It is not intended to be used as a teaching resource in lessons, though it may be adapted by teachers for use in the classroom.

Part one: Tensions in the Gulf

Due to its strategic location and oil reserves, the Gulf (see glossary) was always likely to become the focus of tension, not only between Arab states but also between foreign powers. From the 1920s onwards, for example, when Britain created the boundaries of modern Iraq without taking into account the ethnic or religious groupings in the area, tension had existed within and across borders in the Gulf States. Several factors served to increase regional instability in the years directly prior to 1990.

The Iranian Revolution

On 16 January 1979, Persia's monarchy came to an end and the Shah and his family left the country for good (see glossary). They had been forced out due to a widespread belief that they were corrupt and irreligious; as they were supported by the USA, this cast a serious shadow on Iranian/USA relations from this point onwards. The removal of the Shah heralded an Islamic Revolution in Iran led by 76 year old Ayatollah Khomeini (see glossary) and further created instability which cast a shadow over the region for decades. Initially, the Iranian Revolution caused a war between Iran and Iraq, reflecting dangerous tensions within the Muslim world. In the long term, it was the preface to the 'War on Terror'.

Why was this such a dangerous event for the Gulf? As a largely Shiite state, Iran embraced what has come to be known as Islamic militant 'fundamentalism'. The Ayatollah led millions of devoted supporters who declared their intent to create a state inspired by a fundamentalist reading of Koran. They also made no secret of their desire to export its beliefs, laws and practices throughout a divided Arab world and beyond. For example, Khomeini had also called for the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime and an Islamic revolution in Iraq, which angered and concerned Iraq's President, Saddam Hussein, greatly (see below).

Sunni and Shia Muslims

Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (see glossary) in around 632 AD, Muslims divided into two sects, Sunnis and Shias, each with a different theological basis for their beliefs. By the 1980s, Shias formed the minority amongst Muslims worldwide, probably numbering around 15% of the total global population. However in Iran this was not the case, as Shias formed the bulk of the population. Under Khomeini, Shia supporters of the revolution were enthusiastic about exporting their version of the Islamic Revolution, pouring scorn on Sunni rulers, who they regarded as traitors to Islam (see glossary for further definition of Sunni and Shia).

The origins of the Iran-Iraq War (see glossary)

Neighbouring Iraq was vulnerable, even though most of its population was Shia. It was the focus of a campaign, originating in Teheran, to spread trouble between Iraq's Sunni dominated government and a Shia population that were treated as second class citizens and deliberately excluded from power. To Khomeini, Sunni governments in general (and Iraq in particular) had to be destroyed. He believed that they were corrupted by their relationship with the United States, referred to as the 'Great Satan', with whom they cooperated to maintain their grip on power. This idea would resonate through the Gulf for years to come, because militant Islamic fundamentalists felt it was their duty to sweep aside these Sunni governments and replace them with ones run along strict religious principles and a strict morality based on Shia law.

Iraq's President, Saddam Hussein, was aware of the threat posed to his own position by an energetic, radicalised Shia population that formed the majority inside his state. Iraq went on the offensive and in September 1980 invaded Iran. An eight year long struggle took place, during which neither side seemed able to win a decisive victory despite slaughter on an appalling scale.

Reactions to the Iran-Iraq war among Arab states

- Neighbouring countries were fearful of the prospect of heightened volatility in the region, not least because Iranian Shia fundamentalists might stir up Shia minorities in countries which had Sunni rulers.
- 43 Muslim states (plus the Palestinian Liberation Organisation delegates) attended a conference in Kuwait in 1987 to try to restore stability to the Arab world and safeguard the status quo, but little was achieved in Iran's absence. The lack of a resolution was hardly surprising as consensus amongst leading Arab nations was notoriously difficult to achieve.
- Opinions had always been divided about Iran; some were sympathetic, while others such as the Gulf States (including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) were so horrified that they sent Saddam arms and money. As events entered the next phase, the reactions of the Arab states to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait would assume considerable importance.

Western and Russian interests in and attitudes towards Iran and Iraq

- Saddam was aware that neither bloc welcomed the prospect of Iranian-style militant Islamic fundamentalism spreading in a region which held much of the world's reserves of oil.
- During the Iran-Iraq war, Khomeini's Revolutionary Iranian Guards also proved a potent threat to Iraq's cities such as Basra, while its gunboats attacked oil tankers in the Gulf. As a result the USA, Britain and France sent arms shipments to Saddam, and from 1984 US, Russian, British and French naval forces were deployed in the Gulf to protect the oil tankers.
- US warships also took direct military action against Iran. Therefore, Saddam had every reason to think that the West and USSR were sympathetic towards him.
- The USSR had a particular interest in preventing the expanding influence of Iran. Since 1979 its troops had been fighting the mujahideen (see glossary), groups of radical Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan, who threatened to provoke the millions of Muslims who lived in the Soviet Union and thereby cause disorder. The similarities between Iran and Afghanistan were not lost on the Soviet leadership.

Consequences of the Iran–Iraq War

Iran

- Iran had failed to remove Saddam from power and had not been able to spread its form of Shia revolution. This failure to utilise its resources and manpower (Iran had a population three times the size of Iraq's) made Iran look weaker internationally.
- Khomeini attempted to use Shias within Iraq to carry out uprisings in order to undermine the Sunni/Baath government. However, this did not work because the majority of Iraqis remained loyal to their government.
- Iran was exhausted by the war, with an estimated 1 million casualties, huge military expenditure and declining oil sales which meant they were facing bankruptcy. When Khomeini died in June 1989, his son vowed to continue the Iranian Revolution's antipathy towards Iraq and the West.

Iraq

- Iraq's oil revenues had been cut by 50% and with foreign debts approaching \$80 billion, Saddam looked for opportunities to re-finance, rearm and reconstruct his economy.
- Iran and Iraq's quarrel over shared use of the Shatt al-Arab waterway – which both countries needed for exports for oil by sea – was unresolved. Iraq had suffered an estimated death toll reported to be just below half a million.
- Iraq's armed forces, like those of Iran, had borne the brunt of an appalling desert war characterised by aerial bombing, the use of chemical weapons and years of attritional fighting. If the experience of this kind of warfare was meant to deter further militarism then this too failed. Both sides wasted no time in rebuilding their armed forces.
- Saddam Hussein was undaunted. His propaganda machine spoke of a great victory over what he regarded as a fanatical enemy possessing military superiority. Saddam claimed to have stopped the spread of Islamic fundamentalism to Baghdad. In the circumstances, it was possible to understand these triumphalist claims, especially since he thought he continued to have the support of the West.

Other countries

- Neither regime had fallen, despite the length and scale of the war, which entrenched their internal power further. However, both had fought each other to a stalemate which suited both Western and Communist nations (generally the latter supported Iran, but the USSR did supply both sides), as it prevented either from becoming too powerful.
- The USA was also happy that neither Iran nor Iraq had won an outright victory. It had been more obviously active in terms of supporting Iraq during the war, but the Iran-Contra affair revealed that it had also been supplying weapons to Iran. The confusing messages that this produced arguably encouraged Saddam to think that the USA would not wish to do anything when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

- The rest of the region had supplied arms and allowed oil access to the two countries in a similar way; although most were more clearly in favour of Iraq, Syria publicly supported Iran. The long war had caused tension throughout the region, which its indecisive conclusion did little to alter.

The Israeli - Palestinian conflict: contribution to tension in the Gulf

It would be impossible to place events in the Gulf into their historical context without acknowledging the shadow cast over the Middle East by the continuing conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours, including the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (see glossary):

- Ever since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, its very existence was challenged within the Arab world, particularly Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. This was due to a combination of religious disapproval to the creation of a Jewish country (there had not been a Jewish country in the Middle East since 1st Century AD) and anger at the loss of territories that the creation of Israel had caused. Despite military campaigns against it in 1948, 1956 and 1973, Israel had survived and expanded its territories, notably on the West Bank, Golan Heights (which once belonged to Syria) and the Gaza Strip.
- The Camp David Agreement (1978–79) led to peace between Egypt and Israel, but this was not uniformly well received across the Arab world. By the end of the 1980s there was no prospect of peace between Israel and Syria and Jordan – nor with the PLO (see glossary) which still demanded a homeland on territories controlled by Israel, while other Arab leaders still called for the eradication of the State of Israel.

The Israeli - Palestinian conflict: motives for global terrorism

The support provided for Israel by Western countries fuelled resentment and distrust in many Muslim majority countries, particularly relating to the financial and military assistance given to Israel by the USA. In this context, Islamic fundamentalists' anti-Western rhetoric found a willing audience and was a cornerstone of support for global terrorism at the end of the twentieth century (see Part Two of this course).

The Gulf War, 1990 (see glossary)

In August 1990, Saddam Hussein's forces attacked and occupied Kuwait. By 19 August, it was announced that Kuwait had become Iraq's 19th province. The ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah, had no choice but to flee to Saudi Arabia as the Kuwaiti army disintegrated in the face of an Iraqi army over six times its size. The world had been taken by surprise but Saddam was dazzled by the prospects of victory. What were his motives?

The reasons for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait

Kuwaiti wealth

- Iraq was rearming with sophisticated weaponry and maintaining an army of around 1 million, regardless of the state of its finances. The takeover of Kuwait – an oil rich and militarily weak nation with a small army of around 16 000 men – was an obvious solution to Iraq's serious financial problems. Military opportunism was therefore combined with a powerful economic incentive.

- Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had loaned Iraq \$40 billion during its war with Iran. Saddam's request that these loans should be written off were refused, as was his request for new loans which might enable him to deal with inflation and shortages on the home front.
- Saddam was also suspicious that Kuwait had boosted its oil production beyond OPEC quotas (see glossary), effectively reducing prices and thereby Iraq's oil revenues, put at around \$1 billion a month. He was keen to recoup his losses and occupying Kuwait was a way to do it.

Saddam Hussein's ambitions for status and power

- The prospect of winning Kuwait's territory and coastline would provide more of a tangible propaganda victory than that gained over Iran. Despite claiming to have halted the Iranian Revolution and survived the onslaught of a larger state, Saddam was aware that opposition groups aimed to overthrow his regime, and needed to divert attention away from the impact of eight years of warfare, rationing, inflation, and human loss. A successful invasion of Kuwait would be a welcome boost for Saddam's reputation, allowing him to pose as the hero who had expanded Iraq's borders and coastline.
- Saddam had always been keen to be the leader of the pan-Arabic world (as opposed to Egypt) and more land under his control would help to move towards this; his relative success in the Iran-Iraq war had also encouraged him to think that the Iraqi army was of a higher standard than was really the case.
- Saddam justified the invasion by claiming that Kuwait was historically part of Iraq. It is doubtful that there was much substance to this historic territorial claim. While it is true that Kuwait had once formed part of the province of Basra (now an important Iraqi city) during the time of Turkish rule, the Emirate of Kuwait had existed before it became a British protectorate in 1899, long before Iraq had been created as an independent state. References to the ancient state of Persia ignored significant historical and boundary differences between that and modern Iraq.

Expectation of international disinterest

- Saddam assumed that Western nations – and the USA in particular – would be, if not sympathetic, then disinterested. The USA had armed him during the war against Iran. From Saddam's perspective, as far as President Bush (Snr.) was concerned Iraq was the lesser of two evils as Khomeini had displaced the Shah, who was a long established US ally. Indeed, the USA appeared to be sending mixed messages regarding Iraq, with some suggesting that Saddam a regional force for good in the eyes of the US, a counter weight to the instability caused by Iranian militancy.

The reactions and roles of Bush and Thatcher and the UN campaign against Saddam Hussein

Saddam's expectation was that the rest of the world would allow Iraq to invade Kuwait without any serious intervention. In this he was mistaken. The idea of Saddam as a new colossus astride the Gulf caused alarm far beyond the region - particularly in the UK and USA - something Iraq's self-confident military regime had

failed to appreciate. The ensuing conflict was coordinated by the UN and involved dozens of countries, though the leaders of the USA and UK - George Bush Snr and Margaret Thatcher - played key roles in organising the international response to the invasion of Kuwait. The campaign took place in two distinct phases.

1. Operation Desert Shield (see glossary)

Immediately following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, President Bush and his officials insisted on a total Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait before any negotiations would take place. Bush was concerned that giving any concessions to Saddam Hussein would lead to greater Iraqi influence in the region, or contribute to the impression that Iraq benefitted from its military campaign.

Margaret Thatcher was in the US on a state visit when Iraq invaded Kuwait. She shared President Bush's concern that Iraqi aggression could do untold political damage to the region. There was also the matter of oil. If Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was allowed to take place, it could destabilise the world's oil supplies and cause regional and international economic damage. Bush and Thatcher were particularly concerned about the threat that Iraq posed to Saudi Arabia, particularly after Saddam began to verbally attack the Saudis after the conquest of Kuwait. Bush decided to send US troops to Saudi Arabia in early August 1990.

Thatcher was instrumental in this decision. During their talks, she put pressure on Bush to deploy troops in the Middle East to drive the Iraqi Army out of Kuwait. Despite his concerns about the safety of Saudi Arabia and the damage that the invasion could do to the region, Bush was apprehensive about the plan, prompting Thatcher to remark to him during a telephone conversation that "This is no time to go wobbly!" Thatcher's government also supplied military forces to the international coalition in the build-up to the Gulf War, but she had resigned by the time hostilities began on 17 January 1991

However, without Arab support the venture would be perceived as yet another example of Western powers intervening against a Muslim state, which would allow Saddam to claim that they must be resisted by Jihad or holy war (see glossary). Initially Arab reaction to the Saddam's invasion of Kuwait was mixed. While Arab League called for a solution to the conflict, they warned against outside intervention. The Arab states of Yemen and Jordan – a Western ally which bordered Iraq and relied on the country for economic support – opposed military intervention from non-Arab states, while Sudan openly supported Saddam.

However, some Arab leaders were nervous of Iraq's ambitions and were open to joining the UN coalition (see glossary). For example, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia was concerned that Iraqi troops on Kuwait's soil would extend Saddam's power towards the Saudi border and its vast oil fields. Similarly, President Mubarak of Egypt was furious with Saddam for his invasion of Kuwait, and for the fact that Saddam had assured Mubarak that an invasion was not his intention. Saddam caused further anger when news of the brutal treatment of Kuwaitis and westerners, including the use of civilians as human shields, circulated amongst the world's media.

Bush was therefore able to persuade Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan and Bangladesh to support the UN campaign and contribute to the international force of 600 000 military personnel assembling in Saudi Arabia. In all, thirty countries contributed to the build-up, although contemporary observers warned of the fragility of the coalition (see glossary).

The UN imposed sanctions on Iraq, including embargoes on Iraqi oil and foreign trade, while Iraq's assets abroad were frozen. A UN ultimatum announced that

Saddam should evacuate his troops from Kuwait by 15 January 1991, otherwise 'all necessary means' would be used to remove them.

2. Operation Desert Storm

Operation Desert Storm began on 17 January 1991, two days after the deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait had passed. The first part of the campaign consisted of an air war during which the UN Coalition attacked Baghdad and military targets in Kuwait and throughout Iraq. This lasted five weeks.

The second and final part of the UN Coalition campaign began on 24 February and lasted less than five days. This consisted of ground attacks which successfully drove 42 Iraqi divisions out of Kuwait. Estimates put Iraqi losses at 90000, including 10000 killed during the retreat to Basra along the so called 'Highway of Death' (see glossary). A desperate Saddam retaliated by firing Scud missiles (see glossary) at Israel and Saudi Arabia and, in a final act of vengeance, destroyed 90% of Kuwait's oilfields. Significant amounts of crude oil were deliberately allowed to poison the waters of the Gulf with catastrophic environmental consequences. Operation Desert Storm concluded on 28 February when Bush triumphantly announced Kuwait's liberation.

The Iraqi army had been defeated and removed from Kuwait. However, a dilemma faced Bush, the new UK Prime Minister John Major (Thatcher had resigned as PM in late 1990) and the rest of the coalition in the immediate aftermath of the war. Should they invade Iraq and remove Saddam from power? Or should they wait for Iraqi opposition groups to depose Saddam?

There was no hiding the fact that Saddam had escaped with over half of his army, but due to Arab disagreements about the direction of future policy doubts existed as to whether the Coalition would survive a further campaign into Iraq. The USA was also unsure about what would occur should they have to occupy Baghdad, as they had not planned for this.

Unsure of Arab support and opinions within the UN, Bush called a halt to the campaign. Contemporaries wasted no time in pointing out that Saddam's continuing hold on power still had the potential to pose a threat to stability in the Gulf.

The Consequences of the First Gulf War

Saddam Hussein had suffered a defeat on a monumental scale. Kuwait had been liberated and Arab coalition members - especially Saudi Arabia - were reassured, initially at least.

However, the outcome of the war was unsatisfactory to both the US and UK. Saddam remained in power. Iraqi opposition groups failed to remove him and Shia and Kurdish risings within Iraq were violently suppressed through a combination of air and chemical attacks.

Iraq faced severe penalties as the price of peace.

- In addition to paying war reparations, coalition bombing had reduced oil production to a trickle, costing the Iraqi economy billions of dollars.
- The West (via the UN) also imposed 'no-fly zones' over Iraqi airspace, preventing further attacks on Kurds (see glossary) in the North and on Shia groups in the South.
- Iraq was also forced to comply with UN Resolution 687 – the elimination of biological and chemical weapons and the abandonment of its nuclear

programme. UNSCOM (UN Special Commission – see glossary) was set up and tasked with ensuring that Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs – see glossary) were eradicated.

- Sanctions would remain in place until the work of UNSCOM was complete. US officials at the UN also hinted that the price for lifting sanctions imposed prior to the war was Saddam's exile, though the US and UK were unwilling to take direct action to achieve this.
- The impact of sanctions on the Iraqi people was catastrophic. Even if Iraq had the currency to purchase food from abroad, imports were blockaded. Price inflation was out of control and wages plummeted. Deprived of chemicals necessary for sewage disposal and fertilizing agricultural land, international observers reported that ordinary people faced malnutrition and disease.

Arab reactions and US influence in the region

As the leading member of the Coalition, the USA played an active role in the politics of the Gulf and had clearly demonstrated that it was prepared to use military force. US forces would remain stationed in the Gulf throughout the 1990s. The USA committed to maintaining its armed forces in the Gulf and their presence indicated a greater commitment to and direct involvement in the region than had been the case in the previous decade.

Some Arab leaders found the USA's presence reassuring (as Saddam still remained in power and was thus a possible threat). However, America's presence in the region - and the ongoing failure to resolve the issue of Palestine - meant that some countries were unhappy with the consequences of Iraq's defeat. Concern over US troops and influence in the area saw growing unhappiness during the 1990s (see Al-Qaeda below).

Part two: the War on Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda: early aims

In 1979 Soviet forces entered Afghanistan to support the Communist government who were attempting to introduce secular reforms. This angered Islamic fundamentalists in the country. It was not in the USSR's interests, given that millions of its citizens were Muslims, to allow radicalism and unrest on its southern border. Insurrection followed, as huge parts of the country fell under the control of armed groups which became known collectively as the mujahideen. Al-Qaeda was one of these armed groups.

The formation and growth of Al-Qaeda in the late 1980s owed much to a young military commander, Osama bin Laden. He had set up 'the Base' (ie Al-Qaeda) for recruiting and training Muslims (largely Sunnis) to support the guerrilla campaign to expel the Soviets. Volunteers from Egypt, Saudi-Arabia, Pakistan and other nations in the Muslim world arrived in large numbers, while money, arms and intelligence was provided by Pakistan, America, Britain and other Arab powers. This diverse collection of tens of thousands of jihadis had a single focus: to expel Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

It is important to note the influence of Khomeini's Iranian Revolution on the formation of groups such as Al-Qaeda. The revolution had a powerful appeal to some Arabs and others from the Muslim world who were driven to protest against poverty, social inequality, political suppression and heavy-handed policing. For example, dispossessed Arabs could not ignore the ever widening gap between rich and poor despite an abundance of oil. Dissident voices could make themselves heard through Islamic preachers who operated a vast network of Mosques, while recordings also served to spread radical ideas.

Al-Qaeda: later aims

As the conflict continued throughout the 1980s the USSR, facing its own version of the Vietnam War, found it near impossible to quell the insurgents who were being armed and trained by the USA and other Arab states. As crippling costs mounted - both human and financial - the USSR under Gorbachev began to withdraw its forces in 1988, a process that was completed the following year.

Arab governments were reluctant to re-absorb mujahideen into their states following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, in case they took the struggle back to their homelands. In the absence of a welcome to the returning 'heroes', the jihadis were ready to take on new challenges elsewhere. In the 1990s the focus of protest shifted towards the West in general and the US in particular. If the Soviets could be defeated, then why not the US, or indeed those Arab leaders who were seen by jihadis as traitors to Islamic nationalism? They aimed to instigate a global Islamic revolution, with the goal of one nation of a billion Muslims.

Despite American support for the mujahideen during their fight against the Soviet Union, the USA became a particular target of Al-Qaeda for a number of reasons:

- Many commentators have drawn a direct link between the end of the Cold War and the USA's increasingly interventionist approach in the Gulf. No longer pre-occupied by the Soviet Union, the US increasingly acted and was regarded as the 'world's policeman', which helped to fuel anti-American resentment.
- The presence of the American military in the Middle East also caused anger. For example, US planes were stationed in Turkey, and two aircraft carrier groups and

25000 US troops routinely operated in the Gulf. Significant garrisons of US forces were also stationed in Saudi Arabia (Osama bin Laden's homeland and the country containing the holiest Muslim cities, Mecca and Medina), symbolising what supporters of al-Qaeda found unacceptable. Jihadi propaganda demonised them as the 'infidel', the 'crusader armies', the 'ungodly', and argued that it was the duty of true believers to rise up against them.

- Decades of US support for Israel and the 'Jewish occupation of Palestinian land' was a key message driving fundamentalist ideology and literature.

The role of Osama bin Laden and development of Al-Qaeda in the 1990s

From where did Al-Qaeda's supporters originate? Many came from countries where Arab rulers acted in sympathy with US wishes. More interestingly, given the grievances felt by ordinary people, many leading activists were educated, well-off and from prominent Arab families. Osama bin Laden himself was from a wealthy Saudi family and used private sources of income to fund the growth of Al-Qaeda. He would now play a key role in shaping the future of the Islamic fundamentalist movement, alongside the educated cohorts of inspired young followers who embraced its theory, practices and strategy.

- Bin Laden dreamed of an Islamic nation, free of US influence, corruption and able to impose Sharia law within its borders. He was driven by the resentment of seeing US soldiers stationed during and after the Gulf war in his homeland, Saudi Arabia, near the holiest Muslim sites of Mecca and Medina.
- His campaign against the US had a wider perspective because he thought that, if the West's support for Israel could be weakened, then there was more chance of advancing the cause of Palestinians.
- Such was the vehemence of Osama bin Laden's language that he was hounded out of Saudi Arabia (which withdrew his citizenship in 1994), and then Sudan in 1996.
- In 1996 he travelled back to Taliban-dominated Afghanistan ready to export Holy War supported by thousands of veterans. In the same year, he issued a Fatwa (see glossary) which demanded US soldiers quit Saudi Arabia. Following car and truck bombings on US targets in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996, the Saudi royal family became increasingly reluctant to cooperate with the Americans.
- In 1998 a second Fatwa declared that it was the duty of Muslims to kill Americans and their allies, whether they were civilians or members of the military, citing the continuing US presence in Saudi Arabia and US support for Israel. Whilst Britain was also the subject of this Fatwa, Islamists used London as a meeting place for planning, publicity and recruitment.
- The threat from Al-Qaeda to the US continued to escalate towards the end of the decade. The FBI put bin Laden on its most wanted list for bombing US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. In 2000, Al-Qaeda made an attempt to sink the USS Cole, a Navy destroyer, while it was docked in Yemen.

11 September attacks and the War on Terror

The World Trade Centre in New York had previously been bombed in 1993 by a group with strong links to Al-Qaeda, killing six people. However, what happened on

11 September 2001 was on a completely different scale, when four airliners on internal US flights were hijacked. Three hit their targets, the North and South Towers of the Centre and the US Department of Defence building known as The Pentagon; the fourth crashed en route to its target, which is assumed to have been the White House. In all, 2 996 people perished, while 6 000 others were injured. In a little over 90 minutes both towers of the World Trade Centre had collapsed.

Estimates of the financial damage caused vary, but even crude estimates topped \$10-15 billion. 15 of the 19 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, with the others from the Lebanon, Egypt and the UAE. Although it would not be until 2004 when Osama bin Laden finally claimed responsibility for the attacks, it was long suspected that Al-Qaeda was responsible. It aimed to provoke the US into a hostile reaction which itself would unite Islamists; some commentators have referred to this as a pan-Islamic revolution. President George W Bush's response was to launch the 'War on Terror', calling the events of 9/11 an "act of war". He was soon supported with a chorus of denunciations from across the Western and Muslim world.

Afghanistan: its reputation as a rogue state and the Taliban regime

Afghanistan's reputation as a 'rogue state' in the eyes of the International community owes a great deal to the actions of the Taliban (see glossary). Who were they, and how did they rise to power?:

- Following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, armed conflict broke out between Mohammad Najibullah's communist government and mujahideen groups which were expanding their control over large parts of the country. It has been estimated that the ensuing civil war claimed the lives of half a million Afghan civilians as tens of thousands of radicalised fighters travelled to Afghanistan to continue the struggle.
- Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden were part of the insurrection which, in 1992, toppled Najibullah's communist government, leaving a power vacuum. Afghanistan descended into lawlessness as rival factions of mujahideen sought to fill the vacuum and seize control. The country's administrative, judicial and police structures as well as the economy collapsed.
- Traditionally, Afghanistan was led by different tribal groups in different areas of the country. The Taliban, whose supporters were Pashtun tribesman from the south-east of the country and who were led by Mohammed Omar, was one of the groups that sought land and power after the removal of Najibullah. It enjoyed Pakistan's support on a large scale; Pervez Musharraf (later President of Pakistan but then Chief of the Army) openly supplied it with arms and cash.
- The ranks of the Taliban were augmented by tens of thousands of largely Sunni students from Islamic seminaries across the border in Pakistan. They were fuelled by poverty, starvation and a sense of injustice against government corruption and Western interests which, to them, represented global capitalism and the exploitation of the Muslim world.
- By 1996, the Taliban controlled four fifths of Afghanistan and they had forced the leader of the government, Ahmad Shah Massoud, to flee the capital.

During the five years of Taliban rule (1996–2001), Afghanistan - now an Islamic Emirate (see glossary) - gained a reputation as a 'rogue state'. Western governments claimed that the Taliban were sponsoring violent jihad, a claim strengthened by evidence that Al-Qaeda, as well as its leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, enjoyed favoured status within Afghanistan, including areas of refuge

where young militants could be trained. There was also strict enforcement of Sharia law:

- Under Sharia law, women were excluded from sport and education, with girls forced to abandon their schooling. They were forbidden employment except in the health sector, so women were removed from professional jobs and told to remain at home. When they appeared in public, decrees ordered that they should wear the burqa and be accompanied by a male relative. Punishments included public executions or lashings.
- Cultural conservatism included the rejection of 'modern' forms of media and social norms, including music, film, painting and TV. Men were meant to cover their heads and were banned from shaving their beards. Alcohol was forbidden.

The Taliban regime was also concerned with imposing social, political and military control over this new Emirate. Taliban warlords had a mission not just to enforce Sharia law, but also to consolidate their power. After all, Afghanistan was still an unstable state that faced armed resistance from Massoud and other ethnic groups. For example, the 'Northern Alliance' (see glossary) of Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras – a disparate mix of Turkish and Persian speaking people, some Shia, some Sunni – joined the cause to fight the Taliban.

The problems faced by ethnic groups

- The Taliban refused to accept Shias as true Muslims. This meant that the Shia Hazara ethnic group, which accounted for 10% of the population, were considered unacceptable.
- Buddhists were similarly oppressed; for example, unique 1500 year old Buddhist statues were destroyed by the Taliban in acts of cultural vandalism.
- Abuses of human rights were widespread and caused further international outrage. UN emergency food aid was used as a weapon of control because it was denied to opposition ethnic groups. UN offices in Kabul were closed because they brought foreign influences into the country. The employment of female aid workers by UN agencies was not tolerated by the Taliban, and their removal meant that its own civilians were denied food aid.
- Refugees from these ethnic groups added to the chaos. Amnesty International, for example, reported on the systematic massacre of between 4000 and 6000 Hazaras in September 1998 (exact estimates vary). The Taliban not only denied these claims but issued their own propaganda accusing warlords from this 'Northern Alliance' of committing acts of genocide against Pashtun Taliban. These largely Shia ethnic groups had long been subject of human rights abuse, and had survived attempts to drive them out of their tribal villages for decades. The Taliban accused them of collaborating with the US, and began taking more extreme action against them.

Many other problems were created by economic collapse and the denial of humanitarian aid. Little attention was paid to developing the economy. For example, agriculture failed to modernise and struggled to meet the basic nutritional needs of the population. The transport infrastructure deteriorated. Afghan assets abroad were seized. UN sanctions strangled trade and estimates claim that income per head of population fell to \$200 a year. This didn't prevent the Taliban, who needed to fund military operations, from raising taxes and resorting to dramatic increases in opium production and smuggling (i.e. to create and sell heroin).

Western and Muslim attitudes to the Taliban

Due to their policies, attitudes to the Taliban among Western countries were overwhelmingly negative, even prior to the 11 September attacks. For example, no Western countries recognised the Taliban government in Afghanistan. The relationship between the UN and the Taliban was also fractious. UN reports accused the Taliban of ethnic cleansing and war crimes as well as human trafficking, as demonstrated by women who were forced across the Pakistan border and coerced into the sex industry. The UN also documented massacres against Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras at the hands of the Taliban, while in 1998 the UN Security Council went as far as to unanimously to ban commercial aircraft flights to and from Afghanistan, and freeze its bank accounts worldwide.

Attitudes in Muslim majority countries to the Taliban were similarly negative. For example, after the killing of 10 Iranian diplomats and intelligence officers by the Taliban in the Afghan city of Mazar in the 1998, the Iranian government amassed up to 200,000 soldiers on the Afghan-Iranian border, though war was eventually averted. Only the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and, most significantly, Pakistan acknowledged the Taliban's government in Afghanistan and established diplomatic ties with them. Indeed, although it is officially denied by Pakistan, there is widespread agreement that the Taliban gained crucial early military economic support from Pakistan.

The attacks of 11 September led to open hostility from the international community towards the Taliban, due to the safe haven that they provided for Al-Qaeda in the years leading up to the attacks. The leaders of Muslim majority countries had reacted to the attacks with a mixture of horror and self-interest: horror because Al-Qaeda had committed a mass-murder of civilians on US soil in the name of a divinely ordained will, even though in the eyes of the majority of Muslims the crime committed on 9/11 had nothing to do with true Islam; self-interest because they were willing to support a US led anti-terrorist campaign against jihadis who had the potential to threaten ruling elites throughout the Middle East, including themselves. Even President Musharraf of Pakistan offered assistance to US counter-terrorism in return for generous financial aid, despite claims that Pakistan was a major financial donor to the Taliban.

Bush's war against terror; Bush's aims

President George W Bush announced his intention to attack Afghanistan and drive Al-Qaeda out of its bases. The scene was now set for military intervention. President Bush demanded justice for 9/11 by demanding the extradition of Osama bin Laden from Afghanistan, having accused the Taliban of harbouring terrorists. The Taliban declined the US extradition request, arguing that that they wanted further proof of Osama bin Laden's guilt and presence in Afghanistan. Even though no group at the time had come forward to claim responsibility for 9/11, the US was intent on building a coalition as part of a 'War on Terror', with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda as the initial targets.

Blair's support for intervention – the 2001 US/UK operation

The USA received British support for this plan. As early as 16 September 2001, Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that Britain would stand alongside the US because of what he called "the worst terror attack on British civilians since the Second World War". He argued that whatever were the "technical and legal issues" of military action, the fact was that Britain was "at war with terrorism". The Prime Minister referenced the hundreds of British deaths caused by the 9/11 attacks, as

well as the 'special relationship' which existed between Britain and the US and the close personal bonds he had forged with President Bush.

There were those who counselled caution, as fears were raised about the potential for a long and unpredictable campaign of seemingly huge scope. The UN Security Council's resolutions supported the US's right of self-defence but fell short of supporting military action. Unlike the Gulf War, this would not be a UN mission. However, backed by NATO (see glossary) and the Northern Alliance within Afghanistan, Bush and Blair pushed forward with their plan for military intervention in Afghanistan. Their operations were intended to:

- find Osama bin Laden
- remove the Taliban from power
- prevent the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist haven.

Overthrow of the Taliban and collapse of its regime

On 7 October 2001 US bombing raids on Kabul and other Taliban targets began while the 'Northern Alliance' made advances against Taliban-held villages. By 12 November, the Taliban were fleeing from Kabul and were retreating into the mountains which formed their Southern heartland or across into Pakistan. Despite the collapse of the Taliban regime, outright victory was not achieved and neither was Osama bin Laden captured. The Taliban proved resilient and capable of increasingly bold attacks as part of their insurgency against coalition forces. The tribal structure of Afghanistan held strong and the Taliban utilised guerrilla warfare techniques, especially in mountainous regions (these had earlier proved successful against invaders such as the USSR and even further back in Afghan history). The failure to thoroughly dismantle the Taliban would allow them to later regroup and fight back.

UN Peace Conference and the Taliban resurgence

At a UN peace conference that took place in Bonn in November 2001, plans were made for a transition to a new government for Afghanistan, based on the democratic model of fair and free elections. However, the Taliban - reorganised by Mullah Omar and financed by huge increases in opium production - continued to cause problems for the Coalition:

- After their initial collapse, the Taliban regrouped quickly, establishing training camps and launching ambushes, guerrilla raids, suicide attacks. This insurgency overshadowed attempts at reconstruction.
- So serious was the escalating violence that, in August 2003, NATO took over command of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) which, at its height, involved 51 countries in the conflict. The US always remained the major partner and part of the force remained under its direct control. British forces took the lead in the south of Afghanistan, centred on Helmand province.
- Taliban resilience resulted in combat which became increasingly deadly, characterised by rocket attacks on Coalition bases and by the use of improvised explosive devices.
- Humanitarian agencies, accused of being agents of Western governments, found it almost impossible to operate in parts of the country, while Afghan politicians themselves were the subject of attacks.
- The launch of the attack on Iraq in 2003 (see Part Three, the Iraq War) split US, UK and NATO forces, meaning that manpower and resources were no longer focused fully on Afghanistan, seriously reducing their effectiveness. Indeed, the

Taliban's resurgence owed something to US policy which put Iraq first— and this limited ISAF's capability. The UK's contribution proved valuable, given the small size of its military, and numbers were expanded to around 8 000 in 2007–8.

Warlords from the 'Northern Alliance' were also proving difficult to control. They were keen to exert their influence over the government led by newly appointed Afghan leader, President Hamid Karzai. In 2004 Karzai won a five year term in government with just over half the vote; as leader of the re-named Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Hamid Karzai and the problems faced by his government

Opinions about Karzai remain sharply divided. He was reliant on US support, both militarily and financially, and was therefore seen by some as an American 'stooge'. Even though he was a strong ally of the US, the relationship at times could be uneasy:

- While in receipt of billions of dollars in aid, Karzai put pressure on his Western allies and urged his allies to do more to persuade Afghan farmers to switch to other crops away from poppy production.
- Karzai also called on more effort to neutralise the terrorist threat by cutting off supplies of arms, finance and recruits to the insurgents, which flowed into Afghanistan from all over the Middle East.
- He also made attempts to improve trade, and deals were struck with Pakistan and other neighbouring nations.

On the other hand, Karzai was blamed for lack of progress:

- The country remained very poor, despite international aid.
- When Coalition forces caused civilian casualties, discontent boiled over into anti-US and anti-Karzai protests. No less than four assassination attempts on him took place between 2002 and 2008 - evidence of his unpopularity.
- Most damaging of all were accusations of corruption and fraud, not only aimed at the Karzai family but also encompassing election malpractice and intimidation. Only slowly did Karzai's Presidency acquire the authority to rule the country.

Meanwhile the security situation went from bad to worse; ISAF/NATO operations made small scale gains but the Taliban survived. Each successive year troop numbers had to be increased, while estimates of terrorists fighting in Afghanistan suggested numbers approaching 10 000 in 2008. The scope of Taliban attacks showed that they had capabilities both inside Afghanistan and across the border into Pakistan – evidenced by repeated raids on ISAF/NATO supply convoys. By 2009, an end to the insurgency seemed as far off as ever when President Obama reinforced the US garrison by another 17 000 personnel. It would take another five years before NATO and the US could plan an end to their combat role.

Part three: The Iraq War

The treatment of Kurds and Shia Muslims by Saddam Hussein's regime, and religious divisions in Iraq

The immediate aftermath of the Gulf War saw a series of popular uprisings against Saddam take place in Iraq. After initial successes that saw many of the major cities in Iraq fall to rebel forces, Saddam Hussein's regime managed to regain control of country and launched a brutal campaign of repression that mainly aimed at two of the main groups involved in the uprising, Kurds and Shia Muslims.

Saddam's regime had a history of persecuting the Kurdish population of Iraq, due to their support of Iran in the Iran-Iraq war and their long-standing demand for an independent Kurdish state. This included the use of chemical weapons and the destruction of hundreds of Kurdish villages, resulting in hundreds of thousands of Kurds becoming refugees in Iran, Turkey and other neighbouring states. Following the failure of the 1991 uprisings, Saddam Hussein's forces continued their repression of the Kurds, resulting in a further refugee crisis. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that about 750,000 Iraqi Kurds had fled to Iran and 280,000 to Turkey, with 300,000 more gathered at the Turkish border.

Despite being the majority in Iraq, Shias were kept from power in Saddam's regime. In the aftermath of the 1991 uprisings, Saddam's forces targeted the Shia population, as many of the cities that took part in the uprisings were predominantly Shia. For example, following the failure of the 1991 uprisings Saddam's government targeted the Marsh Arabs – Shia Muslims who lived in the wetlands south and east of Iraq – by diverting the flow of the Tigris River and the Euphrates rivers. This converted the wetlands into a desert, eliminating food sources and forcing the region's residents out of their settlements. Villages in the marshes were attacked by Saddam's forces and burnt down and there were reports of the water being deliberately poisoned.

International attitudes to Saddam Hussein

Saddam's regime was becoming notorious for brutal crimes visited upon Kurds and Shias and its use of torture. It was widely reported that Saddam not only had a chemical and biological weapons capability, but also was willing to use it on both groups. However, little by way of direct support was provided to the Kurds, Shias or any other group that sought to overthrow Saddam Hussein in the years following the Gulf War. The United States, which had urged Iraqis to rise up against Saddam, did nothing to assist the 1991 rebellions in order to avoid becoming embroiled in Iraq's internal affairs. There were also wider strategic reasons for US non-intervention. The Kurdish risings in the north of Iraq were meant to advance their claim for autonomy – a claim they were also pursuing in Turkey. This caused a problem for the US because Turkey was a key player in US strategy due to its particularly sensitive geo-political position in the region, for which they received a great deal of financial and military aid. Turkey lies between Europe and the Arab states of the Middle East, so the US was keen that it should be supported. As Turkey wished to suppress the Kurds, the US was unwilling to support Kurdish claims for independence in either Turkey or Iraq.

The US and UK governments spent the 1990s coming to terms with Saddam Hussein's survival as Iraq's dictator. The argument was made that regime change had been rejected as Saddam's removal might increase instability in the region rather than decrease it, though he still faced sanctions from the UN.

The role of the UN

The UN had come to the view that Saddam Hussein could not be allowed to continue in this manner without being constrained in some way, and decided to act.

- UN Resolution 688 created a 'safe haven' for the Kurds under the protection of US troops.
- The US, Britain and France unilaterally decided to impose 'no fly zones', airspace from which the Iraqi air force was prohibited, in an effort to protect innocent people from further attacks.
- Evidence was collated about Iraq's nuclear weapons programme – the international community was keen to know whether or not Iraq had the necessary components for warheads and the expertise to assemble them. As a result, under UN Resolution 687 a Special Commission (UNSCOM) was appointed to inspect Iraq's nuclear sites and destroy its WMDs.
- Saddam was further weakened by the imposition of trade and military sanctions, including food and medical supplies. These sanctions, combined with a severe reduction of Iraq's oil output, had a significant impact.

For ordinary Iraqis, sanctions brought starvation, disease and poverty. UN humanitarian agencies reported malnutrition, high levels of child mortality and hospitals struggling to meet basic needs. Without the revenue from oil exports, Iraq could not afford to import food and medicines; nor could the transport, electricity and sewage disposal infrastructure be rebuilt.

Throughout the Arab World (see glossary), the US was primarily blamed for the suffering of ordinary Iraqis. Links between Saddam's regime and its neighbours were being restored – including Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran. Borders were being reopened, airline flights resumed and, surprisingly, a member of the Iranian government visited Baghdad.

Iraq's reputation as a rogue state

A decade of sanctions, sporadic bombing and air exclusion zones had not undermined Saddam's hold on power. Iraq's conventional forces had certainly been weakened – increasingly out of date and denied spare parts, their capability was undermined. And in 1998, inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA – see glossary) could report to UNSCOM that they had confiscated nuclear components and machinery as well as destroyed 90% of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons' manufacturing sites. Nonetheless, Saddam was undeterred; his grip on Iraq actually tightened and the levels of aggressive rhetoric aimed at the West, and the US in particular, increased.

Relations between the Iraqi regime and UNSCOM were deteriorating; inspectors were initially hindered from visiting sites by angry crowds of Saddam's supporters. The quarrel escalated to breaking point when the weapons inspectors were ordered out (failure to allow proper inspections was against UN resolutions and used as evidence in the later case for war). No more weapons inspectors set foot on Iraqi soil until 2002. American U-2 spy planes flew repeatedly over known military and manufacturing sites, but the West was unsure to what extent Saddam was restoring his weapons programme.

The issue of Weapons of Mass Destruction

When George W Bush (son of George Bush Snr) took office in 2001, regime change in Iraq came back onto the agenda. Along with Iran and North Korea, Iraq was included in Bush's 'axis of evil' speech (see glossary) following the 11 September attacks in America speech. The US case for intervention in Iraq was consistently supported by Britain's Prime Minister, Tony Blair. As far as both Bush and Blair were concerned, the arguments for military intervention were compelling, and focused on the issue of the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs):

- Saddam had a proven history of attempting to build WMDs, and had the technology to build missiles which could deliver warheads, as well as the scientific expertise to manufacture enriched uranium as well as chemical and biological weapons. US and UK intelligence claimed that they had information from sources that Saddam might have WMDs ready for use within 2 or 3 years.
- He had also continually frustrated the weapons inspectors when they came to Iraq, which raised suspicions that he was hiding an illegal weapons program (although some thought that this was because he did not want the world to know how limited his resources really were).
- Saddam posed a credible threat to the US and its allies. For example, he continued to call for jihad to liberate Palestine and destroy the Israeli state. As Israel was the US' main ally in the region, this was particularly alarming to American politicians. Further delays in dealing with this threat by regime change might only increase the danger. It was essential to maintain the balance of power in favour of the US; the Gulf not only supplied oil but also was the area where significant US military forces were stationed.

On the other hand, counter arguments were voiced by those who opposed military intervention.

- There were still doubts as to whether Saddam had the capability to build WMDs following years of damaging sanctions and since 1998 when the weapons inspectors had last been able to verify the destruction of manufacturing facilities and existing stockpiles. Concerns were also raised about the reliability of the intelligence reports which suggested the existence of WMDs.
- Due to the doubts about the intelligence reports, members of the UN demanded that weapons inspectors should return and disarm Iraq. In late 2002, a UN resolution (1441) was passed to this effect. It wasn't clear what the consequences of Iraq failing to comply might involve, but it was difficult not to draw the conclusion that this meant more punitive action. Saddam gave in and allowed Hans Blix and his weapons inspectors back into the country. At least three members of the UN Security Council (France, Russia and China), said that Blix should be given time to complete his work, especially since the inspectors reported in February 2003 that the Iraqis had agreed to destroy a small amount of chemical munitions. However, up to that point, no WMDs had been discovered.
- It was argued that the US and UK should only proceed with a consensus of agreement within the UN Security Council. Only after a UN vote which specifically authorised military intervention would a proper legal framework be established.

Western interests in Iraq, including oil

Throughout the 1990s, Western countries' interests in Iraq's oil exports were developing. The UN had set up an oil-for-food deal; in exchange for food and other vital supplies, the UN controlled its oil exports. By the end of the 1990s, the UN was allowing Iraq to increase production significantly – and the US, always keen to secure supplies at a time of rising fuel prices, had become a major destination for Iraqi oil via the UN. With large reserves at its disposal (Iraq had the fifth largest reserves globally), the future of Iraq had become bound up with America's determination to maintain its global power through enhancing its strategic position in the Gulf and throughout the Arab world.

Arms sales from the rest of the world to Iraq had continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s; for example, the Soviet Union, France, and China together accounted for over 90% of the value of Iraq's arms imports between 1980 and 1988. Due to this, some in the USA and UK questioned the objectivity of France and Russia's refusal to support the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (see below).

The debate about Iraq's links to Al-Qaeda

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair were also determined to deal with rogue regimes which might be supporting Al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks. Bush suspected that Saddam had links with Osama bin Laden, possibly to provide training, arms and intelligence, and were worried that Saddam would provide Al-Qaeda with chemical and biological weapons.

Evidence for this included the following:

- Saddam had supported terrorist organisations in the past, for example the group Islamic Jihad, which made it possible that he would support a group like Al-Qaeda
- There was some evidence of communication between members of Iraq's intelligence services and members of Al-Qaeda, while a member of Saddam Hussein's government met with representatives of Al-Qaeda in Sudan in 1995.

However, there were those that doubted that a relationship between Iraq and Al-Qaeda existed:

- Intelligence had failed to prove conclusively that Saddam had sponsored Al-Qaeda. Later investigations by the 9/11 commission and the US Senate found that there was no cooperative effort between Al-Qaeda and that Saddam did not support the 9/11 attacks.
- None of the 9/11 terrorists were of Iraqi origin. In fact, most of the 9/11 terrorists were of Saudi Arabian origin and Saudi Arabia remained an ally of the US in the region.
- Saddam Hussein's religious views were far less fundamentalist than those of Osama Bin Laden. This difference in ideology between Saddam and al-Qaeda made cooperation in any terrorist attacks unlikely.

Despite the issues that existed with the evidence about Saddam's capability to build WMDs and his regime's links to Al-Qaeda, Bush and Blair decided to push on and began to plan for the invasion of Iraq.

Opposition to the invasion

There was opposition to the plans for war internationally. In March, for example, France announced that it would veto any resolution put before the UN Security Council which might authorize an attack on Iraq. The governments of other countries such as Germany and New Zealand - which were allies of the US - also expressed concerns about the legality of intervention in Iraq. Meanwhile, there were worldwide protests with thousands of people taking to the streets in anti-war demonstrations.

Arab states were increasingly perturbed by aggressive stance taken by the USA and UK. Some of the largest protest rallies took place in 2002/3 outside US consulates in Damascus and Riyadh. Saudi-US relationships had cooled – the presence of the US military in Saudi Arabia was no longer regarded as desirable. In Arab capitals across the Middle East, American rhetoric was being interpreted as evidence of US imperialism looking to maintain its global dominance and consolidate its strategic hold over a significant quota of the world's oil supplies, rather than the US stopping a dangerous rogue state. Many came to see this as an anti-Muslim strategy, with Bush's ill-advised use of the word 'Crusade' adding to concerns about this across the Muslim world.

Nonetheless, Bush was able to count upon the support of 48 countries in what was termed the 'Coalition of the willing'. Of these, the US, UK, Australia and Poland were willing to contribute troops to the invasion.

The invasion of Iraq 2003: the military campaign

As the US claimed growing support for its anti-Saddam coalition, and with mobilisation nearing completion, on 17 March, President Bush announced from the White House that he was giving Saddam and his sons 48 hours to leave Iraq or face war. Failure to comply would, he said, lead to the forceful disarming of Iraq. On 20 March 2003, when Bush's ultimatum had been ignored, US, UK, Australian and Polish forces invaded Iraq. Around 160,000 troops were involved, advancing from the south and initially making for Basra. There were airstrikes on key targets while, six days later, US airborne brigades launched attacks in the north around Kirkuk where they joined with Kurdish rebels. At the beginning of the war, Saddam ordered the use of Scud missiles. Technically these could be considered to be illegal WMDs, but they were certainly not the level of weapon which the US and UK had claimed Iraq had before the invasion of Iraq. Such weapons have never been found.

Downfall of Saddam Hussein

The invasion of Iraq appeared to be completed quickly, even though sandstorms and some stiff resistance from Saddam's Republican Guard held up the Coalition advance (see glossary). Nevertheless, most of Iraq's forces collapsed in the face of the Coalition's Operation Iraqi Freedom (see glossary). Baghdad was occupied on 9 April by the main body of Coalition forces and it was a little over two weeks later that the Coalition claimed to have occupied the country. On closer examination it appeared that there were still large urban areas which needed to be 'swept' of Saddam's forces. Saddam and other Iraqi leaders went into hiding. Saddam Hussein was captured in December 2003. A Special Tribunal was set up to consider the charges of murder and torture which were made against him. He was found guilty in November 2006 and hanged the following month.

President Bush's announcement that victory had been accomplished was premature, as Iraq began to disintegrate. As the whole machinery of Saddam Hussein's government collapsed, it created a vacuum of power. With no detailed blueprint for

interim rule, the US realised that tribal warlords and a whole array of religious leaders were seeking opportunities to extend their authority. The artificial boundaries created by colonial powers after the First World War contained many disparate elements which had been thrown together to form nation states such as Iraq. These elements now began to pull the country apart instead.

The civil authorities and police authorities were dissolving, government offices were ransacked, and factions emerged that had no interest in maintaining a united Iraq. Saddam Hussein's brutal regime had ruled solely in the interests of the Sunni minority, his close family and the leaders of the Ba'ath party while Kurds were persecuted and Shias lived in poverty outside the gates of Saddam's palaces. Therefore, the Kurds in the north took steps to set up and extend their own province towards the oilfields round Kirkuk, Shias' growing militias asserted their rights, while Sunnis took steps to defend themselves as sectarian violence soon erupted.

In order to maintain order and stability, powers were transferred in June 2004 to an Interim Government (see glossary) which aimed to bring together competing factions: the Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, was a Shiite; the President, Ajil al-Yawer, a Sunni; one of the Vice Presidents was Kurdish. The most pressing question was could the sectarian violence be tamed? US forces were struggling to stop Iraq sliding into civil war as Sunnis fought a rear-guard action against Shias.

Elections and the transfer of power

Iraq had 15 million Shias, which made them very much the largest group in Iraq. With National Assembly (see glossary) elections planned for January 2005, their hold on the country through parliament and the influence of the Shia clerics seemed assured.

The influence of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani was pivotal in paving the way for democratic elections. Much revered, and later nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, Sistani told Shias it was their religious duty to take part in these elections. Shia clerics read out his Fatwas which pointed out their obligation to try and make democracy work – in other words: cement Shia power. For this Sistani proved successful, not least in persuading his followers to show restraint in the face of Sunni provocation. Suicide bombers, shootings, car bombs became a daily part of life for Baghdad's crowded Shia communities. Officers of the old Republicans Guard encouraged and headed local militias, while an influx of jihadis in to Iraq led to fresh attacks on Western forces. Not only did they create a 'Triangle of Death' amongst Shia communities south of Baghdad, they also posed a significant danger to foreign officials, including the UN, whilst humanitarian agencies became the target for Sunnis. Open revolts from 2004 onwards were fracturing Iraq and the Coalition was struggling to cope. US led Coalition forces were themselves accused of using excessive force during anti-insurgency operations and causing civilian casualties. Despite all this, millions of Iraqis turned out and voted for the Transitional Government headed by Ibrahim al-Jaafari as Prime Minister (2005-6).

The insurgency

However, not all Shias had shown Sistani's faith in the ballot box. Between 2004 and 2008 Sistani faced a powerful rival, Muqtada al-Sadr who urged his Shia followers to rise against US forces and force their withdrawal from Iraqi soil. Sadr was not without support and his rabble-rousing hit a chord with the impoverished Shia population. He became associated with a militia force known as the Mahdi Army (see glossary) which was reported to have strength in the region of over 50 000 armed followers, and which proved powerful enough to seize control of towns throughout the south including Basra, Sadr City, and Baghdad.

Facing opposition from Sadr, and tarnished by his association with the US, al-Jaafari's Transitional Government fell. This allowed Nouri al-Maliki to assume power and dominate Iraqi politics from 2006. Maliki - who was vetted closely by the CIA and whose authority depended on US troops - promised to crack down on the insurgency, though in this he was not successful.

Hitherto, Sistani's appeals for Shia restraint had largely been heeded. However, in January 2006, 345 people were killed when Pilgrims stampeded on hearing that suicide bombers may have been present in the crowd during the annual Hajj (see glossary) pilgrimage near Mecca. In February, 165 were killed at the al-Askari mosque. The tragedy was compounded in the following year when jihadis attacked a much revered Shia shrine in Samarra.

These actions were the beginning of an even worse phase of violence. Shia militias and security forces took their revenge. Thousands of Sunnis were killed, thousands more fled, and whole areas which were once composed of a mix of religious sects were subjected to what could be regarded as a form of 'ethnic cleansing'. One estimate put a figure of 2 million Sunnis as having fled. As their population ebbed away, so did the Sunni insurgency.

2007 US troop surge

In 2007 the much publicised 'US troop surge' took place, heralded by Bush as decisive in reducing the scale of the insurgency. US backing, both financial and military, enabled Maliki to arrange deals with Sunnis, encouraging them to end their boycott of parliament and bribe Sunni fighters to join the US in its 'Sons of Iraq' Campaign against Al-Qaeda (see glossary).

2008 offered a more positive outlook. Casualties received at Baghdad's hospitals were reducing in number. As for al-Sadr and the Mahdi Army, US forces led a successful campaign in the Battle of Basra to bring about a peace deal. Sadr agreed that the Shia warlords, with whom he was associated, would disarm. His anti-western rhetoric continued; however, it increasingly took the form of just civil disobedience rather than open armed conflict.

By 2009, Maliki and the US led Coalition could plan western troop withdrawals. He was to remain in power for a further term despite criticisms that he should do more to create a more 'inclusive' government by showing less favouritism to the Shia majority.

The stability in Iraq by the end of Bush's Presidency

As more peaceful conditions prevailed, there were some signs that the reconstruction of Iraq was taking place.

- On 1 January 2009, Iraq's forces took over control of the Green Zone (see glossary) from the US military. Maliki hailed this symbolic moment as a turning point, as Iraqi sovereignty had finally extended to the heart of Baghdad, the area which included not only US and Iraqi officials but also Saddam Hussein's Presidential palaces.
- Plans were made for the withdrawal of US troops. Bush's 'US-Iraq Status of Forces' agreement set December 2011 as the date for combat troops to make their exit. President Obama who took office in January 2009 wasted no time in shortening the timescale to 2010, although he envisaged that a transitional force would provide a further year's support to train Iraqi forces and lead counter terrorism operations.

- 2009 also witnessed the lowest death toll since the invasion. Oil production, while not yet having exceeded pre-war levels, was recovering. Iraq also possessed vast natural gas reserves which in the long run offered potential as a reliable source of wealth.

But in other ways, reconstruction and recovery seemed a long way off.

- Gas reserves were being 'burned off' and wasted. Corruption and bribery were endemic, and oil output was inadequately metered and in the hands of foreign contractors. Iraq's wealth was growing but not for the benefit of ordinary Iraqis.
- The failure of reliable electricity supplies was a major hindrance to efficient public services such as clean water supplies and efficient sewage disposal. Indeed, despite its oil reserves, Iraq's refining capacity had suffered years of neglect, sabotage and poor maintenance. Food supplies had improved but UN sources still estimated 6% of the population remained malnourished.
- The human cost of the war and its aftermath was devastating. There are widely differing estimates as some sources put deaths resulting from the insurgency between 100,000 and 150,000, although others put the figures much higher, even up to 400,000. Terrorism and other associated violence remained common in Iraq.
- Iraq faced a refugee crisis; estimates of displaced persons exceed 2.7 million. While there had been grounds for optimism in 2009, the drawdown of US troops in 2010 led to yet another surge in sectarian violence and the re-emergence of death squads. Public opinion polls provided evidence of widespread opposition to the West's continued involvement in Iraq.

Global anti-US and anti-UK terrorism

Questions about the legality of the war remain to this day. Bush and Blair's justifications for going to war have been criticised and debated. Stories of human rights abuses, for example at Abu Ghraib prison where terrorists were allegedly tortured, undermined the standing of coalition forces. Some commentators made the case that the 'War on Terror' had to be pursued by whatever means, while others wondered if regime change had led to the supplanting of one authoritarian government by another.

As for the 'War on Terror', global jihadis appeared capable of repeated attacks, for example on transport systems in Madrid (2002), London (the 2005 event known as 7/7) and Mumbai (2006); foreign residences and financial institutions were also attacked, eg Riyadh (2003), Istanbul (2003), and tourist centres such as Bali and Jakarta.

The opening year of Obama's Presidency in 2009 led to a reappraisal of the costs incurred during the Iraq campaign – possibly between 2 and 4 trillion dollars. With Coalition military casualties high, a balanced assessment of the Iraqi campaign will await the judgement of future generations.

Glossary

- Al-Qaeda:** A militant Sunni Islamist multinational organization founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam and several other Arab volunteers who fought against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. It operates as a network made up of Islamic extremist, Salafist jihadists. It has been designated as a terrorist group by the United Nations Security Council, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union, the United States, Russia, India, and various other countries.
- Arab World:** Consists of the 22 Arabic-speaking countries of the Arab League. The 22 include Palestine which, although not an official state, is considered as such by the Arab League. These Arab states occupy an area stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Arabian Sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean in the southeast.
- Axis of Evil:** The term 'Axis of Evil' was used by U.S. President George W. Bush in his State of the Union address on 29 January 2002 to describe governments (Iran, Iraq and North Korea) that his government accused of sponsoring terrorism and seeking weapons of mass destruction. The axis became the foundation of the War on Terror.
- Ayatollah Khomeini:** Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Mūsavi Khomeini, known in the Western world as Ayatollah Khomeini, was an Iranian Shia Muslim religious leader, revolutionary and politician. He was the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution that saw the overthrow of the monarchy, the Shah of Iran.
- Ba'ath Party:** The Iraqi Ba'ath party was used by Saddam Hussein to maintain control of his country. In Iraq, all major decisions went through Saddam Hussein who from 1979 was President and secretary general of the Ba'ath party.
- Coalition:** On 29 November 1990, the UN Security Council authorized the use of force against Iraq if it did not withdraw from Kuwait by 15 January 1991. The allied Coalition against Iraq had reached a strength of 700 000 troops, including 540 000 US personnel and smaller numbers of British, French, Egyptians, Saudis, Syrians, and several other national contingents. The military offensive against Iraq began on 16-17 January 1991.
- Coalition Mission:** This was 'to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people', as defined by US President George W. Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA):	The transitional government of Iraq following the invasion of the country on 19 March 2003 by the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Poland, forming the Multinational Force (or 'the Coalition'). The CPA was to act in a 'caretaker' role in Iraq until the creation of a democratically-elected civilian government.
Emirate:	An emirate is a political territory that is ruled by a dynastic Islamic monarch, called an emir.
Fatwa:	An Islamic religious ruling.
Green Zone:	This is the name for the International Zone of Baghdad, which contained the Coalition Provisional Authority during the occupation of Iraq after the American-led 2003 invasion and the area where international agencies, companies and foreign diplomats are based.
The Gulf:	The Persian Gulf is an extension of the Indian Ocean (Gulf of Oman) through the Strait of Hormuz and lies between Iran to the northeast and the Arabian Peninsula to the southwest.
Gulf War:	The Gulf War 1990–1991, occurred in two distinct phases. Operation Desert Shield lasted from 2 August 1990 – 17 February 1991, and encompassed the build-up of troops and defence of Saudi Arabia. Operation Desert Storm took place from 17 January – 28 February 1991, and was the combat phase of the war. It was waged by UN coalition forces from 34 nations led by the United States against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait.
Hajj:	The Hajj is an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, the most holy city of the Islam, in Saudi Arabia.
Highway of Death:	The main road north from Kuwait to the southern Iraqi city of Basra along which Iraqi trucks, tanks and armoured vehicles were forced to retreat. Allied forces bombed them from the air, killing thousands of troops in their vehicles in what became known as the 'Highway of Death'. An estimated 25,000 to 30,000 Iraqis were killed during the ground war alone.
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):	An international organisation formed in 1957 that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to restrict and restrain its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.

Iran-Iraq War:	An armed conflict between Iran and Iraq lasting from 22 September 1980, when Iraq invaded Iran, to August 1988. It was caused by rivalry over which would be the dominant country in the Persian Gulf, decades of border disputes and Saddam Hussein's fears that Iran would cause a rebellion amongst Iraq's long-suppressed Shiite majority.
Iraqi Interim Government:	In 2004, the Iraqi Interim Government took over from the Coalition Provisional Authority and, with the support of the US-led coalition, ruled Iraq until elections had taken place for new Transitional Government in 2005.
ISAF/NATO:	The International Security Assistance Force was a NATO-led mission in Afghanistan to train Afghan security forces to keep law and order and fight the Taliban, established under the United Nations Security Council in December 2001 by Resolution 1386.
Jihad:	An Islamic term meaning the religious duty of Muslims to maintain and spread the religion. A person who, in the words of the Quran, is 'striving in the way of God' (jihad) is called a mujahid, the plural of which is mujahideen. Jihad can mean any form of striving, but fundamentalist groups have promoted a violent version which they see as a form of holy war.
Kurds in Iraq:	People born in or residing in Iraq who are of Kurdish origin. The Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Iraq, comprising between 15% and 20% of the country's population. Under Saddam Hussein they were oppressed and denied any political status.
Mahdi Army:	The Mahdi Army is a militia force created by the Iraqi Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in June of 2003. In 2004, it was conspicuous in taking part in the first major armed confrontation against the US-led occupation forces in Iraq after the banning of al-Sadr's newspaper and attempts to arrest him. In 2005 it was persuaded to enter into a truce, despite being frustrated by the continued presence of US military on Iraqi soil.
Muhammad (Prophet):	Muhammad is the central figure of Islam and widely regarded as its founder by non-Muslims. The word of God as revealed to the prophet and messenger Muhammad and repeated verbatim in the Quran is the basis of Islamic religious beliefs.
Mujahideen:	Mujahideen is the plural form of mujahid, the word used for one engaged in Jihad. The term became prominent when it was often applied to Muslim Afghan warriors in the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

Muslim:	Sometimes spelled Moslem, a person who follows or practises Islam, the religion which is based on the Quran. Islam is more important to its practitioners than national boundaries.
Northern Alliance:	In 1996, the Afghan Northern Alliance, officially known as the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, was formed to fight the Taliban after the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan took over Kabul.
National Assembly:	The National Assembly of Iraq was the parliament of Iraq during the occupation of Iraq, chosen in the Iraqi parliamentary election, January 2005.
NATO:	The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is an intergovernmental alliance, led by the USA, initially set up as a bulwark against communist expansion. Article 5 requires states to come together if one is attacked: the only time this has been invoked was after 9/11.
OPEC:	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is an intergovernmental organization of 13 nations, founded in 1960 in Baghdad and which has a key role in oil prices and production.
Operation Desert Shield:	see Gulf War
Operation Iraqi Freedom:	The Iraq War, also known as the Occupation of Iraq, The Second Gulf War, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or Operation New Dawn, is the term for the military campaign which began on 20 March 2003, with the invasion of Iraq by a multinational force led by troops from the United States and the United Kingdom.
Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO):	An organisation founded in 1964 with the aim of the 'liberation of Palestine' through armed struggle with Israel. As the representative of the Palestinian people it has had observer status at the United Nations since 1974. The PLO was considered by the United States and Israel to be a terrorist organization. However, in 1993, the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist in peace, accepted UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and rejected 'violence and terrorism'. As a result, Israel officially recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.
Persia:	Historic region of southwestern Asia associated with the area that is now modern Iran.

Regime Change:	The replacement of one government regime with another, a term associated with Bill Clinton and George W. Bush when referring to Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. This is not normally considered an adequate justification for war.
Republican Guard:	The Iraqi Republican Guard was a branch of the Iraqi military from 1969 to 2003, primarily during the presidency of Saddam Hussein. The Republican Guard were mainly Sunnis, and were the elite and privileged troops of the Iraqi army directly reporting to Saddam Hussein.
Revolutionary Guards:	The Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, often called Revolutionary Guards - a branch of Iran's Armed Forces, founded after the Iranian revolution on 5 May 1979. The Revolutionary Guards have a prominent and powerful role in Iran as the guardians of the Iran's Shia Revolution, and probably number over 100 000.
Scud missiles:	Tactical ballistic missiles developed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
Shah:	A title given to the emperors or kings of Iran (historically known as Persia). The last Shah was a particular ally of the USA and wanted to modernise Iran; he was overthrown in the Iranian Revolution (1979).
Sharia Law:	(Sharia, Islamic sharia, Islamic law) the religious law governing the members of the Islamic faith. It is derived from the religious beliefs of Islam, particularly the Quran and the Hadith. Many Western commentators consider it to be particularly repressive and not in line with Western views of the law.
Shia or Shiite:	A member of one of the two great religious divisions of Islam that regards Ali (Ali ibn Abi Talib), the son-in-law of Muhammad, as the legitimate successor of Muhammad. See Sunni for the alternative view in Islam.
Sons of Iraq:	The Sons of Iraq were supported and paid by the US and is used to describe tribal Sunnis and ex-Saddam Hussein's military officers who played a part in bringing more peaceful conditions to Iraq during the Insurgency.
Sunni:	One of the two great religious divisions of Islam (see Shia). Following the death of Muhammad, Sunnis believe that the Muslim community acted according to his Sunnah (translated as 'teachings, deeds and sayings') in electing his father-in-law Abu Bakr as the first caliph – see Shia for the alternative view in Islam.

Taliban:	A Sunni Islamic fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan. From 1996 to 2001, it held power in Afghanistan and enforced a strict interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law, of which the international community and leading Muslims have been highly critical.
Triangle of Death:	The 'Triangle of Death' is a name given during the 2003–2010 occupation of Iraq by US and allied forces to a region south of Baghdad which saw major combat activity and sectarian violence from early 2003 into the autumn of 2007. The 'Triangle of Death' is inhabited by one million, mostly Sunni civilians, and containing a huge power plant which was the target of attacks during the Insurgency.
UNSCOM:	A UN Special Commission set up in the wake of Security Council Resolution 687 in April 1991 to supervise Iraq's compliance with the destruction of Iraqi chemical, biological, and missile weapons facilities and to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency's efforts to eliminate all nuclear weapon facilities following the Gulf War.
War on Terror:	Refers to the international military campaign that started after the September 11 attacks on the United States. US President George W. Bush first used the term 'War on Terror' on 20 September 2001. At that time its focus was Islamic terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and countries or regimes who were considered to be sponsoring them
Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs):	Nuclear, chemical, biological or other weapons that are capable of great destruction, and usually associated with Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. Whether or not Iraq possessed these weapons or the capacity to build them became the focus of international attention prior to the Iraqi war.