

MODERN CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The United States' involvement in the Middle East dates back hundreds of years. America has had significant political and economic interests in Southwest Asia since the 1800's when traders, missionaries, and tourists began to visit the region. Later, in the early 1900s, vast supplies of oil were found in the region. This oil is still critical to the United States' energy supplies today. Following WWI, the United States played an important role in diplomacy (*peacekeeping*) following the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. The United States also supported the creation of Israel in 1948. Unfortunately, over the years, the U.S. has become a target for terrorists who disagree with the role America plays in the region. Despite terrorist efforts to end America's involvement in the region, the U.S. still has a presence in the Middle East today.

PERSIAN GULF WAR

In August 1990, the country of **Iraq** invaded **Kuwait** in an effort to gain control of Kuwait's large supply of oil. The leader of Iraq, **Saddam Hussein**, claimed that Kuwait was taking more oil than they were allowed to from oil fields the two countries shared. He also claimed that when the Ottoman Empire was broken up at the end of WWI, the area that became the country of Kuwait should have been apart of Iraq. The creation of the country of Kuwait in 1920 meant that Iraq no longer had any coastline on the Persian Gulf.



Kuwait belonged to the **United Nations**, a world organization which will come to the aid of a member nation that is attacked without cause by another country. By December 1990, the United Nations voted to raise a military force to liberate (*free*) Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion. The United States was also concerned about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait because the United States gets a large portion of its imported oil from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, another oil-rich country in the area. Because of the threat to the oil supply, the president of the United States, **George H. Bush**, sent troops to be a part of this United Nations military force to drive Iraq out of Kuwaiti territory. This effort to free Kuwait from Iraqi control was know as the **Persian Gulf War**, or **Operation Desert Storm**. Thirty-nine countries joined in the U.S. effort and within three months, by February 1991, the Iraqi government accepted a truce and agreed to withdraw from Kuwait. As part of the truce, Saddam Hussein was also required to destroy all WMDs (weapons of mass destruction), such chemical or nuclear weapons.

SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS

see textbook pg. 152-153, read the section titled "Terrorism"



WAR ON TERRORISM (IN AFGHANISTAN) *(also see pg. 153 in textbook)*

In 2001, after the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City, the President of the United States, George W. Bush, began a military operation in **Afghanistan** aimed at capturing the people responsible for the 9/11 attack. U.S. intelligence sources, such as the CIA, identified an organization known as **al-Qaeda**, or the Force, as the group of terrorists that planned and carried out the attack. Its leader was a man who was born in Saudi Arabia named **Osama bin-Laden**. His family was very wealthy from oil and he had used his money to finance this terrorist organization. One of the aims of Al-Qaeda is to bring about an end to western influence and power in the Middle East.



Sources in the United States government believed that the radical Muslim government of Afghanistan, known as **the Taliban**, allowed Al-Qaeda to hide in the mountains of their country. The United States launched a series of attacks on these mountain hideouts in October 2001 in an attempt to capture bin-Laden and destroy Al-Qaeda. American troops were later sent in, and the government of the Taliban collapsed. Since 2001, United States troops have continued fighting in Afghanistan in an attempt to find bin-Laden and destroy his organization. This United States is still working to help the people of Afghanistan reorganize their government and keep Taliban rule from returning



IRAQ WAR *(also see pg. 153 in textbook)*

In 2003, the United States launched an invasion of Iraq after claiming that the Iraqi government, still led by **Saddam Hussein**, was a threat to United States. The United States called this military action **Operation Iraqi Freedom**. American President **George W. Bush** argued that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), such as nuclear bombs. President Bush also claimed that Saddam Hussein was offering aid to terrorists groups like **al-Qaeda**. Bush feared that al-Qaeda, with the help of Hussein, might try to carry out another attack on the U.S. similar to the 9-11 attacks.



After the U.S. invasion, the government of Saddam Hussein collapsed quickly because many Iraqis also felt he was a cruel leader. However, problems with the U.S. invasion soon followed as the United States did not have a plan ready to help reorganize the country once the old Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein was gone. American forces have remained in Iraq since the invasion began, trying to stop the fighting between the different religious (ex. Sunni & Shia) and ethnic groups (ex. Arab & Kurd) who are competing with each other for power as they try to organize a new, more democratic government.



For an update on the rebuilding of Iraq, read pages 176-177 in your textbook.