



Foreign Intervention Is the Primary Cause of Conflict in the Middle East. William O. Beeman. *The Middle East*. William Dudley. Opposing Viewpoints®. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2004. From *Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center*.

Foreign Intervention Is the Primary Cause of Conflict in the Middle East

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"Why a Military Response Won't Work—Historic Roots of Middle East Grievances," *Pacific News Service*, September 19, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by *Pacific News Service*. Reproduced by permission.

The following viewpoint was written shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in which nineteen people from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern nations hijacked jetliners and crashed them into the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. In the following viewpoint, William O. Beeman argues that this act of terrorism has causes stemming from decades of meddling by Western nations, including the United States, in the Middle East. These actions, he argues, have led to divisiveness between Middle Eastern regimes and their people, initiated wars between Middle Eastern nations, and created in the region widespread antipathy toward the West. Beeman is an anthropology professor and specialist in Middle Eastern culture at Brown University in Rhode Island.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. Who was the original leader of Islamic opposition to the West, according to Beeman?
2. How was the Middle East affected by the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, in the author's view?
3. What role did the United States play in the creation of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, according to Beeman?

The Bush administration's projected war on terrorism is designed to eradicate and delegitimize terrorists. Both aims are futile. The grievances of the terrorists who committed the horrendous attacks on New York and Washington on September 11 [2001] have deep and persistent roots going back more than 150 years. The terrorists harbor a hatred that will not die, and their grievances cannot be delegitimized through military attacks.

Middle Eastern opposition to the West is far from being a phenomenon invented by Osama bin Laden,¹ or the Taliban,² or for that matter Iran, Iraq or the Palestinians. It has grown consistently since the beginning of the 19th Century as an effective oppositional force both to the West and to local secular rulers. Western powers were blind to Middle Eastern opposition forces throughout the 20th Century because they were preoccupied with their own great power rivalry during this period.

The original leader of the opposition to the West was Jalal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897). Called the "Father of Islamic Modernism," Al-Afghani was educated in Iran, Afghanistan

and India. He traveled throughout the Islamic world promulgating an "Islamic reform movement." Using an Islamic ideology helped him to transcend ethnic differences in the region, and preach a message all would understand. He sought to mobilize Muslim nations to fight against Western imperialism and gain military power through modern technology. Al-Afghani claimed that Britain, France and Russia in particular were operating in collusion with Middle Eastern rulers to rob the people of their patrimony through sweetheart deals for exploitation of natural and commercial resources in the region.

As a direct result of the efforts of Al-Afghani and his followers, groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood evolved throughout the region. These groups generally espoused three methods in their political and religious activity: personal piety coupled with evangelism, modernization without sacrificing core Islamic beliefs, and political resistance to secular regimes.

Crimes of Western Nations

The Western nations have committed a litany of crimes against the Muslim world according to the Islamic opposition. After World War I, the Middle Eastern peoples were treated largely as war prizes to be divided and manipulated for the good of the militarily powerful Europeans. The British and the French without consent or consultation on the part of the residents created every nation between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf for their own benefit. This increased the resentment of the fundamentalists against the West and against the rulers installed by Westerners.

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union fought over the Middle East nations like children over toys. Governments such as those of Egypt, the Sudan, Iraq, and Syria were constantly pressed to choose between East and West. The choice was often prompted by "gifts" of military support to sitting rulers. With ready sources of money and guns in either Washington or Moscow, Middle Eastern rulers could easily oppress the religious fundamentalists who opposed them. This added to the anger of the religious reformers. At this point the oppositionists abandoned political action through conventional political processes and turned to extra-governmental methods—terrorism—to make their dissatisfaction felt.

The United States became the sole representative of the West after 1972, when Great Britain, poor and humbled, could no longer afford to maintain a full military force in the region. Anxious to protect oil supplies from the Soviet Union, Washington propped up the Shah of Iran and the Saudi Arabian government in the ill-fated "Twin Pillars" strategy. This ended with the Iranian revolution, leaving America with a messy patchwork of military and political detritus. When Iran went to war with Iraq, the U.S. supported [Iraqi leader] Saddam Hussein to prevent Iran from winning. Anxious about Soviet incursions into Afghanistan, it propped up the Taliban. These two forces—Saddam and the Taliban—are very much an American creation.

The Final Blow

The final blow came when America finally had to confront its former client, Iraq, in the Gulf War. Americans established a military base on Saudi Arabian soil—considered sacred by pious Muslims. Saudi officials had been resisting this move for years, knowing that it would be politically dangerous both for them and for the United States. This action was the basis for Osama bin Laden's opposition to the United States.

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Persian Gulf War

The Persian Gulf War of 1990–1991 consisted of two main phases: Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. The latter operation resulted in the liberation of Kuwait, denied control of a large portion of the Middle East oil reserves to Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and showed the ability of a multinational coalition to succeed in the post-Cold War world.

In early 1990, Iraq had recently ended the long Iran-Iraq War, which had left the country deeply in debt, primarily to other Arab states. The largest creditor was Kuwait, which had huge oil reserves and was just south of Iraq on the Persian Gulf. Assuming that no nation would seriously contest him, Hussein launched an invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990.

Iraq quickly achieved victory, but its blatant aggression and the cruel nature of its occupation of Kuwait aroused anger around the world. British prime minister Margaret Thatcher made the first major speech of condemnation, but U.S. president George Bush was not far behind. He announced that fundamental U.S. interests were involved and that Hussein could not be allowed to control Kuwait and its oil wealth. In addition, evidence was strong that Iraq was nearing its goal of acquiring nuclear military power, and the Western powers agreed that such weaponry in the hands of an unstable personality had to be curbed.

Acting through the United Nations (UN), the United States organized a multinational coalition to restore Kuwait's sovereignty. Under the code name Desert Shield, the coalition force was led by U.S. major general Norman Schwarzkopf. Assuming that the experienced Iraqi Army was more than ready for a long, hard fight, Schwarzkopf and his immediate superior, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, assembled a more massive force than actually proved necessary.

When Hussein ignored a deadline for withdrawing from Kuwait, President Bush ordered the beginning of Desert Storm. At 3:00 a.m. on January 17, 1991, U.S. stealth bombers and fighters easily penetrated Iraqi radar and proceeded to destroy Iraq's air defense network. Soon, follow-up strikes took out peripheral radar sites as well, which gave coalition forces complete air superiority. Iraqi aircraft were destroyed on the ground, in air-to-air combat, and in their bunkers before Hussein ordered the surviving planes to flee to Iran. Hussein then responded by attempting to drive a political wedge into the coalition. With intermediate-range ballistic missiles, Russian-designed Scuds, he launched attacks on Israel in the hope that that nation would respond and bring Arab support to Iraq. Attacks on Saudi targets were intended to demoralize the Saudis and force their withdrawal from the coalition. Neither strategy worked.

For two weeks, coalition aircraft roamed at will across Iraq and Kuwait and destroyed much of Iraq's armor and personnel. Another deadline for Iraqi withdrawal came and went, and on February 24, coalition leaders were convinced that the time had come to launch the land campaign.

More than 500,000 British, French, Kuwaiti, Saudi Arabian, and U.S. troops participated in the ground phase of Operation Desert Storm. The weeks of pounding from the air had taken their toll, and the Iraqi soldiers in many cases could not surrender fast enough. Kuwait City was soon in U.S. hands, and Iraqi forces streamed north, harassed by air strikes the entire way out of the country. The UN force suffered very few casualties, and within 100 hours, it had ousted the Iraqi force from Kuwait. Hussein responded by setting the Kuwaiti oil fields on fire and

opening the pipelines to pour crude oil into the Persian Gulf. That first attempt at environmental warfare failed, as the pollution in the end was much more limited than Hussein had hoped.

With his military in ruins and with no outside support to aid him, Hussein asked for a cease-fire on February 28. Exact numbers of Iraqi casualties are unknown but have been estimated at 60,000 killed and 175,000 prisoners. Coalition casualties numbered fewer than 500.

The long-term results were not quite as spectacular. Because the coalition had not destroyed the Iraqi Army, sufficient troops (especially the loyal Republican Guard) remained under Hussein's control, which allowed him to maintain power. He quickly employed his troops to crush uprisings of rebellious Kurds in the northern part of the country as well as Shiite Muslims in the south. Meanwhile, U.S. troops suffered postwar illnesses, and some have suggested that they are linked to chemical or biological weapons or their antidotes, although it's never been proven that Hussein actually did employ such weapons.

In sum, Desert Storm has been depicted as a huge military success with mixed or negative political results. Debates are still going on as to the wisdom of stopping the war so soon, of not capturing Baghdad, and of not ensuring Hussein's downfall.

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50 years of US policy in the Middle East

Compiled by Julie Finnin Day

1947-48 UN votes to partition Palestine into two states - one for Jews, one for Palestinian Arabs. Arab states invade; 300,000 Palestinians fled or were forced to flee Jewish-controlled areas. Jewish forces prevail, declaring Israeli independence. US recognizes Israel.

1953 CIA helps Iran's military stage a coup, deposing elected PM Mohammad Mossadeq, whom US sees as communist threat. US oversees installation of Shah Mohammad Reza Pavlavi as ruler of Iran.

1956 Israel attacks Egypt for control of Suez Canal. Britain and France veto US-sponsored UN resolution calling for halt to military action. British forces attack Egypt.

1960 Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela form Organization of Petroleum Exporting Nations (OPEC).

1966 US sells its first jet bombers to Israel, breaking with a 1956 decision not to sell arms to the Jewish state.

1967 Six-Day War. Israel launches preemptive strike against Arab neighbors, capturing Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. Kuwait and Iraq cut oil supplies to US. UN adopts Resolution 242, calling on Israel to withdraw from captured territory. Israel refuses.

1968 First major hijacking by Arab militants occurs on El Al flight from Rome to Tel Aviv, marking decades of hostage-takings, hijackings, and assassinations as a strategy by Arab militant groups.

1969 Muammar Qaddafi comes to power in Libyan coup and orders US Air Force to evacuate Tripoli.

1972 Eight Arab commandos of Palestinian group Black September kill 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games.

1973 Egypt and Syria attack Israel over its occupation of the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. US gives \$2.2 billion in emergency aid to Israel, turning tide of battle to Israel's favor. Arab states cut US oil shipments.

1974 UN General Assembly recognizes right of Palestinians to independence.

1976 The UN votes on a resolution accusing Israel of war crimes in occupied Arab territories. US casts lone "no" vote. US Ambassador to Lebanon Francis Meloy and an adviser are shot to death in Beirut. US closes Embassy there.

1978 Egypt and Israel sign US-brokered Camp David peace treaty. Eighteen Arab countries impose an economic boycott on Egypt. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin receive Nobel Peace Prize.

1979 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini leads grass-roots Islamic revolution in Iran, deriding the US as "the great Satan." Iranian students storm US Embassy in Tehran, taking 66 Americans hostage for next 15 months. US imposes sanctions. Protesters attack US Embassies in Libya and Pakistan.

1981 Israel bombs Iraqi nuclear reactor. Muslim militants opposed to Egypt's peace treaty with Israel assassinate Egyptian President Sadat.

1982 Israel invades Lebanon to expel the Palestine Liberation Organization, facilitate election of friendly government, and form 25-mile security zone along Israel's border. Defense Minister Ariel Sharon permits Lebanese Christian militiamen to enter the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps outside Beirut. The ensuing three-day massacre kills 600 or more civilian refugees. US and other nations deploy peacekeeping troops in Lebanon.

1983 A truck bomb explodes in US Marines' barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 241 soldiers. US forces withdraw.

1986 US bombs Libya in retaliation for the bombing of a Berlin nightclub frequented by US servicemen. The airstrike kills 15 people, including the infant daughter of leader Muammar Qaddafi. All Arab nations condemn the attack.

1987 Start of the Palestinian intifada, or uprising, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

1990 Iraq invades Kuwait. Saddam Hussein links pullout to Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories. UN imposes sanctions that continue to hobble Iraq's economy in effort to force Iraqi compliance with weapons resolutions.

1991 US and coalition launch attacks against Iraq from Saudi Arabia. Gulf War ends after some three months, but US deployment continues even now, with 17,000 to 24,000 US troops in region at any time.

1993 World Trade Center in New York is bombed, killing six. US Special Forces, deployed as peacekeepers in Somalia, attempt to capture warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid. Eighteen US servicemen are killed. Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat sign historic peace declaration in White House ceremony with President Clinton.

1994 Jordan and Israel sign peace treaty. Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak Rabin, and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres receive Nobel Peace Prize for 1993 agreement.

1995 US announces trade ban against Iran, reinforcing sanctions in effect since 1979. Rabin is assassinated, two years after peace deal with Palestinians. In Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a car bomb explodes outside an office housing US military personnel. Seven are killed, including five Americans. Three Islamist groups claim responsibility.

1996 A truck bomb explodes outside a US military barracks in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, killing 19 US airmen. UN reports that sanctions cause 4,500 Iraqi children under 5 to die each month.

1997 Egyptian Islamic Group massacres 62 people, mostly foreign tourists, in Luxor, Egypt. The group claims it is retaliation for US imprisonment of Sheikh Omar Abdel al-Rahman, who is later convicted in 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

1998 Bombs explode outside US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people. US launches cruise-missile attacks on sites in Sudan and Afghanistan allegedly linked to Osama bin Laden. US indicts bin Laden for committing acts of terrorism against Americans abroad.

1999 Islamic militants, traced to bin Laden, are arrested for plot to bomb tourist sites during millennium celebrations.

2000 Camp David negotiations fail. Sharon visits Temple Mount in Jerusalem, sparking current Palestinian uprising. USS Cole bombing in Yemen's Aden harbor kills 17 American sailors. Bin Laden denies responsibility, but applauds the act.

2001 Hijackers crash two planes into World Trade Center in New York, one into Pentagon, and one in Pennsylvania. More than 7,000 people are dead or missing.

Sources: "The Middle East" (Congressional Quarterly), news reports. Photos by ap and reuters.

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Osama bin Laden

Osama bin Laden is perhaps the world's most notorious terrorist. He has been blamed for several terrorist attacks against the United States, including the U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania and the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

Osama bin Mohammad bin Laden was born in 1957 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the 17th son of the owner of Saudi Arabia's largest construction company. He has more than 50 siblings, but his position made him among the least regarded of the clan. Raised as a pious Muslim, bin Laden turned to religion after the death of his father in 1967.

In the 1970s, bin Laden studied management and economics at King Abdul Aziz University, and there he became interested in fundamentalist Islamic groups. He was deeply influenced by a teacher, Sheikh Abdallah Azzam, a Palestinian who had become disillusioned with the Palestine Liberation Organization and felt Islam needed to return to its roots.

In 1979, bin Laden joined many other young Muslims in fighting against the Soviet Union's Afghanistan invasion. The rebels of the Islamic Alliance of Afghan Mujahideen were supported by the U.S. government, then led by President Ronald Reagan. Although it is not entirely clear, bin Laden probably went to Afghanistan and then returned to Saudi Arabia to raise money for the mujahideen, or "freedom fighters." In Pakistan, across the border from Afghanistan, he used his expertise in construction to manage logistics for what was becoming a jihad, or holy war. By the mid-1980s, he was working inside Afghanistan, building roads and hideouts. He also established a base and training camp for the mujahideen.

When the Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia a hero, full of religious zealotry, enriched by the family fortune, and well trained by U.S. forces. He was not a supporter of the United States, however. His zeal was reserved for Islam, and he bore some of the resentment common to soldiers returning from a bloody and punishing war. Seeing in Saudi Arabia a nation that catered to the United States and that was moving away from Islamic principles, bin Laden became an outspoken critic of the Saudi royal family. He also established a charitable organization to support veterans of the Afghan war, many of whom went on to fight in other wars in Chechnya, Somalia, and Bosnia.

In 1990, Iraqi troops under Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia. The Saudi royal family accepted the help of U.S. troops to defend the nation. Bin Laden was infuriated and was vocal in his opposition and criticism of the royal family. In response, they revoked his citizenship. Bin Laden left Saudi Arabia in April 1991 and made his way to Sudan.

Working from Khartoum, bin Laden established terrorist training camps where he passed on the skills and techniques he had learned from American troops to religious zealots who would conduct a jihad against the United States. Although he refrained from publicly calling for attacks on the United States, the U.S. government identified him as a major financier of terrorist organizations. Cut off from his family in 1994, bin Laden nonetheless has a fortune estimated at \$400 million.

In February 1993, two terrorists bombed the World Trade Center in New York City. The suspects were connected to the Maktab-al-Khidamat, a sort of recruiting office originally established to support the Afghan mujahideen and

connected to bin Laden. Also in 1993, 18 American soldiers were killed in Mogadishu, Somalia. Bin Laden claimed responsibility. Two years later, a bomb in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia killed five U.S. soldiers. Nineteen more were killed when a bomb exploded at a military barracks in Dhahran.

In 1996, under pressure from the United States and Saudi Arabia, Sudan forced bin Laden to leave the country. He moved to Afghanistan, where his quiet opposition to the United States became defiant and loud. On August 23, 1996, bin Laden issued a fatwa, a religious decree, calling for jihad against the United States.

Two years later, bin Laden convened a meeting of terrorist leaders and called for attacks on American interests anywhere in the world. The response was quick and severe. In August 1998, on the anniversary of U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf War, two bombs exploded at American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. Although no conclusive evidence was found to link bin Laden to either bombing, the U.S. government openly pointed the finger at him.

In 2001, the U.S. government accused bin Laden of orchestrating the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the most destructive acts of terrorism in history. Claiming finally to have evidence that implicated bin Laden, the United States, along with the support of the United Kingdom and many other countries, declared a war on terrorism and launched an attack on Afghanistan on October 7. U.S. officials claim that from his base there, bin Laden leads a loose confederacy of terrorist groups known as Al Qaeda, although some critics question whether he can manage the movements of terrorist cells a world away from an isolated outpost in an undeveloped, war-torn country.

The massive bombing campaign by the United States in Afghanistan has decimated Taliban and Al Qaeda forces and enabled the Northern Alliance to regain control of most of the country. The United States believes bin Laden is hiding in caves in the mountains near Kandahar and is using special forces and marines on the ground to hunt him down.

After the attacks on the East Coast of the United States, bin Laden has become a portrait of evil to much of the Western world. In many Islamic countries, however, he is more of a folk hero, fighting against unbelievers who would trample on Islam.

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Al Qaeda

The terrorist organization Al Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, are determined to end all U.S. influence in Islamic nations. Al Qaeda is believed to be responsible for many of the worst acts of terrorism of the late 20th century and early 21st century, including the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks in the United States, which killed nearly 3,000 people.

Bin Laden founded Al Qaeda in his native Saudi Arabia in the late 1980s after he helped bring an end to the Afghanistan invasion by the Soviet Union. His initial aim was to use Al Qaeda to overthrow all pro-Western governments in Islamic nations, and he was able to recruit many of the members of the Islamic Alliance of Afghan Mujahideen that fought side by side with him in Afghanistan.

Bin Laden's goal for Al Qaeda began to change during the Persian Gulf War, when he became incensed at the presence of U.S. soldiers in Saudi Arabia. He decided to use Al Qaeda to eliminate all U.S. influence in Islamic nations around the world, as well as to destroy Israel. In 1991, he was expelled from Saudi Arabia and quickly established Al Qaeda's headquarters in Khartoum, Sudan. Under pressure from Saudi Arabia and the United States, Sudan expelled bin Laden in 1994, and he switched Al Qaeda's base of operations to Afghanistan.

Under the protection of the ruling Taliban, bin Laden used his extensive personal wealth to help set up several terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. Most estimates suggest that several thousand Islamic militants from such countries as Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia trained at those camps and then disappeared into terrorist cells all over the world. Disillusioned youth from such Western nations as France, Germany, and Sweden have also joined Al Qaeda and participated in terrorist acts against Western targets. Bin Laden issued a declaration of war against the United States in August 1996 and then issued a fatwa (religious decree) in 1998 that proclaimed it the duty of all Muslims to wage jihad (holy war) on the United States and its citizens, as well as against all Jews.

Even before bin Laden issued his proclamations, U.S. military forces and citizens were the victims of several terrorist acts believed to be linked to Al Qaeda, including the killing of U.S. soldiers during the Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia in 1993 and the World Trade Center bombing that same year. Al Qaeda continued to focus on U.S. targets throughout the 1990s, and it is suspected of being involved in the U.S. Embassy bombings in Africa in 1998 and the bombing of the USS *Cole* in Yemen in 2000. However, its most notorious act of terrorism, the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, has led to an all-out war on terrorism led by the United States, with bin Laden and Al Qaeda as the primary targets.

Following the September 11 attacks, the United States used U.S. special forces and an extensive bombing campaign to overthrow the Taliban. It then sent in ground troops to hunt down all suspected terrorists, and they have killed or captured hundreds of Al Qaeda members in Afghanistan, including several top lieutenants. Worldwide, more than 3,000 extremists with suspected ties to Al Qaeda have been arrested in about 90 different countries. U.S. officials believe that military committee commander Muhammed Atef was killed during a November 2001 air strike in Afghanistan. In March 2002, Abu Zubaydah, who is reportedly Al Qaeda's top operational commander, was captured in Pakistan. In March 2003, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind behind the September 11 attacks, was captured and has been held at an undisclosed location since that time.

However, U.S. officials admit that there are still potentially thousands of Al Qaeda members hiding in terrorist cells

all over the globe. So far, bin Laden has evaded capture and is still assumed to be in command of Al Qaeda. Also uncaptured is one of bin Laden's most trusted advisers in Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, an upper-class Egyptian doctor who is Al Qaeda's theological leader and helps oversee Al Qaeda's loosely organized network of terrorist cells that operate independently of each other, which makes it hard for authorities to capture more than one cell at a time. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who fomented much of the anti-U.S. and anti-Shiite insurgency in Iraq after the start of the Iraq War in March 2003, was killed by a U.S. air strike in June 2006.

Bin Laden and his advisers control four committees: a finance committee, a media committee, a military committee, and a religious/legal committee. In addition, Al Qaeda serves as an umbrella organization for a worldwide network of terrorist groups that have similar aims.

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