

Chapter 20: Culture and Community in the Global Age: 20-3c Regime Change in the Muslim World
Book Title: The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History 7th Edition Update, AP® Edition
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20-3c Regime Change in the Muslim World

ISIS took root in the heart of the Arab world because an American invasion of Iraq in 2003, ostensibly in retaliation for the attacks of 9/11, had failed to establish an orderly and effective government there. And a civil war triggered by the “Arab Spring,” a wave of popular anti-regime movements that struck five Arab countries in 2011, continued to wrack Syria.

The Taliban regime’s provision of a safe haven for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda clearly justified the American invasion of Afghanistan in December 2001. However, the rationale for invading Iraq was less clear. Leading up to the war the American government contended that Iraq was a clear and present danger to the United States because it possessed **weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)** (Nuclear, chemical, and biological devices that are capable of injuring and killing large numbers of people. (p. 599)) : nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons that it might supply to terrorists like bin Laden. When United Nations inspectors failed to find any banned weapons, a split widened between those nations wanting to continue inspections and those, led by the United States, wanting to intervene militarily. Deciding to go it alone, an American-led “coalition of the willing” opened the invasion of Iraq with a spectacular aerial bombardment of Baghdad on March 20, 2003. Twenty-five days later the United States declared that “major fighting” had ended, little realizing that guerrilla insurgency, sectarian violence, and economic devastation would continue for years.

Refugees from Civil War in Syria

Though refugees from Afghanistan, Libya, and elsewhere play major roles in a growing world refugee crisis, Syrians have achieved special prominence because many of them travel through Turkey or across the sea to reach havens in Europe. This has intensified long-standing animosity toward Muslims among Europeans who believe they threaten their national cultures.



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While Iraq fell into a state of turmoil because the coalition army was too small or otherwise poorly equipped to prevent the looting and destruction of government facilities and other lawlessness, a thorough search for WMDs came up empty, and intelligence analyses failed to uncover any evidence that Saddam Husain, Iraq's fallen dictator, had played a role in the 9/11 attacks. American troops finally withdrew from the country in 2010, leaving behind an elected government divided by strong animosity between a Shi'ite majority and a Sunni minority. ISIS, a Sunni organization, took advantage of the turmoil and also attracted Sunni military officers who had been part of Saddam Husain's disbanded army. One-sided government policies favoring the Shi'ites added to the turmoil.

As for Syria, where the Islamic State was centered along the Euphrates River, the "Arab Spring" that toppled the rulers of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen had failed to unseat the ruler Bashar al-Assad. With Russia and Iran supporting the Shi'ite al-Assad and fundamentalist (*salafi*) Sunni Muslims openly or covertly supporting the Islamic State and some smaller resistance groups, chaos reigned in Syria and millions of refugees took the road into exile. The decision by the United States to steer clear of most military operations in Syria that did not specifically target ISIS opened President Barak Obama to political attack as the refugee crisis and civilian death toll swelled and Russian president Vladimir Putin stepped forward as a decisive leader willing to use force to keep Bashar al-Assad in power. Syrian refugees flooding into Europe by way of Turkey exacerbated popular fears of terrorism and immigration there.

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