

Cause & Effect: The War on Terror

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Cause & Effect: MODERN WARS





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“History is a complex study of the many causes that have influenced happenings of the past and the complicated effects of those varied causes.”

—William & Mary School of Education,
Center for Gifted Education

Understanding the causes and effects of historical events, including those that occur within the context of war, is rarely simple. The Cold War’s Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, resulted from a complicated—and at times convoluted—series of events set in motion by US, Soviet, and Cuban actions. And that crisis, in turn, shaped interactions between the United States and the former Soviet Union for years to come. Had any of these events not taken place or had they occurred under different circumstances, the effects might have been something else altogether.

The value of analyzing cause and effect in the context of modern wars, therefore, is not necessarily to identify a single cause for a singular event. The real value lies in gaining a greater understanding of history as a whole and being able to recognize the many factors that give shape and direction to historic events. As outlined by the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California–Los Angeles, these factors include “the importance of the individual in history . . . the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs; and . . . the role of chance, the accidental and the irrational.”

ReferencePoint’s Cause & Effect: Modern Wars series examines wars of the modern age by focusing on specific causes and consequences. For instance, in *Cause & Effect (Modern Wars): The Cold War*, a chapter explores whether the US military buildup in the 1980s helped end the Cold War. And in *Cause & Effect (Modern Wars): The Vietnam War*, one chapter delves into this question: “How Did Fear of Communism Lead to US Intervention in Vietnam?” Every book in the series includes thoughtful discussion of questions like these—supported by facts, examples, and a mix of fully documented primary and secondary source quotes. Each title also includes an overview of

the event so that readers have a broad context for understanding the more detailed discussions of specific causes and their effects.

The value of such study is not limited to the classroom; it can also be applied to many areas of contemporary life. The ability to analyze and interpret history's causes and consequences is a form of critical thinking. Critical thinking is crucial in many professions, ranging from law enforcement to science. Critical thinking is also essential for developing an educated citizenry that fully understands the rights and obligations of living in a free society. The ability to sift through and analyze complex processes and events and identify their possible outcomes enables people in that society to make important decisions.

The Cause & Effect: Modern Wars series has two primary goals. One is to help students think more critically about history and develop a true understanding of its complexities. The other is to help build a foundation for those students to become fully participating members of the society in which they live.

IMPORTANT EVENTS OF THE WAR ON TERROR



2003
US military forces invade Iraq and remove dictator Saddam Hussein from power.

2002
A terrorist group with links to al Qaeda bombs a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia, killing twenty people.

1979
The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, setting in motion events that will lead to the formation of the terrorist group al Qaeda.

1998
Al Qaeda operatives bomb the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya.

1980 1985 1990 1995 2000 2005

1988
Saudi political activist Osama bin Laden establishes al Qaeda.

2001
On September 11, nineteen al Qaeda operatives hijack four US airliners, crashing three of them into buildings in New York City and Washington, DC. The fourth crashes into a field in Pennsylvania. On September 14, Congress authorizes the use of force against those held responsible for the terrorist attacks, thereby launching the War on Terror. On October 7, the United States and its allies invade Afghanistan.





How Did the War on Terror Contribute to the Founding of ISIS?

Focus Questions

1. In your view, can a mission to control others through the use of violent means ever succeed in the long run? Why or why not?
2. What information about Iraq might have helped US leaders make better decisions in 2003?
3. Why do you think efforts to create democracies in Iraq and Syria failed?

ISIS is a group that has replaced al Qaeda as the best-known and perhaps most dangerous terrorist organization in the world. The group goes by several names. Its acronym stands for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Some Western experts call it ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant); others prefer the shorter version IS (the Islamic State); and many residents of Arabic countries refer to the organization as DAESH, which is an acronym for the Arabic translation of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

The Goals, Methods, and Roots of ISIS

Whatever one chooses to call it, ISIS is best described as a fundamentalist (ultraconservative) group made up mostly of Sunni Muslims. (Sunnis compose one of the two leading sects of Islam, the other being Shia Muslims, or Shiites. The two divisions disagree on some aspects of basic Islamic doctrine and frequently come to blows over their differences.) ISIS, with its main centers of power

in Syria and Iraq, regularly employs extreme methods to advance its goals.

Chief among those aims are to expel all Westerners from the Middle East and ultimately to convert all of humanity to its views and ranks. Among the extreme methods that members of ISIS use to further these goals are violence, including bombings, beheadings, and other terrorist acts; intimidation; ethnic cleansing (ridding selected areas of ethnic and religious populations); political propaganda; and blatant civil rights abuses.

ISIS originated within areas of Iraq that were predominantly Sunni before the United States invaded that nation in 2003. One of the many developments of that invasion was the fragmentation of Iraq's population into politically opposing groups. ISIS grew from one of those groups. Therefore, historians and antiterrorism experts say, its formation was a by-product of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which itself

ISIS fighters parade through northern Syria where they have strong support among conservative Muslims opposed to the government of Bashar al-Assad. Besides taking part in the Syrian civil war, ISIS has claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist activities throughout the world.



was an offshoot of the War on Terror. As Birmingham City University scholar John Badahur Lamb puts it, 9/11

changed history by leading to two American-led invasions as part of the Global War on Terrorism: Afghanistan and then Iraq. Whilst the Afghan campaign was initially successful and had the backing of the international community, the Iraq campaign would lead to a long-running insurgency and widespread sectarian violence between the two dominant strands of Islam present in the country.⁴²

The members of one of those sects, Lamb continues, subsequently evolved into ISIS.

The Invasion of Iraq

When US forces entered Iraq in 2003, few people foresaw that a later development of that action would be the formation of a terrorist group even more lethal than al Qaeda. But as historians often point out, all of

“The terrorists have made it clear that Iraq is the central front in their war against humanity.”⁴³

—President George W. Bush in December 2005

the wars humans have waged over the centuries have had at least some unintended consequences. To properly appreciate how ISIS was born, therefore, it is essential to begin with the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

That military action was intended to be an integral part of the War on Terror.

This fact was best expressed by the man who initiated both of those actions. In a speech delivered in Philadelphia in December 2005, President George W. Bush stated,

The war on terror will take many turns, and the enemy must be defeated on every battlefield, from the streets of Western cities, to the mountains of Afghanistan, to the tribal regions of Pakistan, to the islands of Southeast Asia and to the Horn of Africa. Yet the terrorists have made it clear that Iraq is the central front in their war against humanity. So we must recognize Iraq as the central front in the war on terror.⁴³

Bush Links Iraq to the War on Terror



Though historians say that ISIS's rise to power was a direct consequence of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, President George W. Bush argued at the time that the invasion was necessary. In a December 2005 speech, he stated,

By fighting the terrorists in Iraq, we are confronting a direct threat to the American people. And we will accept nothing less than complete victory. We are pursuing a comprehensive strategy in Iraq. Our goal is victory. And victory will be achieved when the terrorists and Saddamists can no longer threaten Iraq's democracy, when the Iraqi security forces can provide for the safety of their own citizens, and when Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists to plot new attacks against our nation. Our strategy in Iraq has three elements. On the economic side, we're helping the Iraqis restore their infrastructure, reform their economy and build the prosperity that will give all Iraqis a stake in a free and peaceful Iraq. On the security side, coalition and Iraqi forces are on the offense against the enemy. We're working together to clear out areas controlled by the terrorists and Saddam loyalists, and leaving Iraqi forces to hold territory taken from the enemy. And as we help Iraqis fight these enemies, we're working to build capable and effective Iraqi security forces.

Quoted in *Washington Post*, "President Bush Delivers Remarks on the War on Terrorism, December 12, 2005." www.washingtonpost.com.

At the time that Bush ordered the incursion into Iraq in 2003, American society was sharply divided about whether it was a good idea. On one side were those who thought the invasion was necessary, as the president claimed, to fight terrorism. Others argued that terrorists were mostly in Afghanistan and elsewhere and that invading Iraq would be an unnecessary diversion from the War on Terror. Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator, they admitted. But he was

not a terrorist who might use nuclear weapons against the West, and, moreover, al Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein actually despised each other.

As it turned out, those who were against Bush's invasion of Iraq were on the right side of history. The present consensus of the vast majority of historians and military experts is that the Iraq war was a mistake that actually ended up creating far more terrorists than it eliminated. National security researcher Loren Thompson sums up that view, saying that Iraq

is a country of warring ethnic and sectarian communities, and our military involvement there resulted from an ad hoc response to faulty intelligence in the aftermath of the 9-11 attacks. The first lesson we learned after toppling Saddam Hussein was that our main reason for invading the country—Iraq's nuclear-weapons program—didn't exist. We soon determined that another big reason for going, the supposed presence of Al Qaeda elements, was largely imaginary. But the really big and enduring lesson was that the Iraqis were not by nature a peaceful people. They had longstanding scores to settle, not only with each other but also with us, and they proved remarkably persistent in pursuing that purpose. If anything, our presence helped spur recruiting by sectarian militias [opposing military factions] and local supporters of al Qaeda.⁴⁴

The Rise of AQI

Thompson's point about long-standing opposition between local Iraqi political and military factions is essential in understanding how ISIS eventually arose. Those conflicting groups were somewhat divided on political and social issues, but their most serious differences were religious in nature. As had been the case throughout the Middle East for many centuries, Iraqi Sunnis and Shias harbored deep-seated disagreements and hatreds. Because the dictator, Saddam Hussein, was a Sunni, his party enjoyed political and social dominance for decades, and Shia Iraqis had little or no say in how the country was run.



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