eyes of many Muslims in the 20th century. World War II was a very important factor. As Japan defeated the British, French, and Americans in the early years of the war, the Europeans did not seem as invincible as they once had.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamic movement that began in Egypt in 1928. Its founder, an Egyptian school teacher, observed the miserable lives of the poor people around him. He believed that the only way they could regain a sense of identity and self-respect was to be instilled with Islamic piety—devotion to religious duties and Islamic brotherhood. The movement grew rapidly and gained many followers. The Muslim Brotherhood taught that society in Egypt and in other Muslim countries was being destroyed by Western godlessness. The only remedy was to overthrow the Westernized political and social institutions and replace them with an Islamic governmental organization such as had existed at the time of the Prophet Mohammed and his immediate successors.

The Revival of Islam

As time passed there were deep feelings of discontent in the Muslim world. Western ways had not solved their problems. The common people had never really been touched by Westernization. The Muslim countries had no great accomplishments to show since independence. Therefore, why not return to Islam?

Several events reinforced this renewed interest in Islam. In 1969, Muammar al-Qaddafi came to power in Libya. Under his leadership the government became increasingly Islamic, using its growing oil profits to spread its beliefs both inside and outside Libya. The rise in oil prices brought power and prestige to Saudi Arabia, a religious fundamentalist state. The 1979 revolution in Iran brought the Ayatollah Khomeini and his religious followers to power. They set up a theocracy—a government run by religious leaders. All three countries share the same vision of a return to a pure Islam and the same desire that all aspects of life be ruled by Islamic law. Khomeini’s teaching was similar to that of Muslim Brotherhood. He denounced the West for its exploitation and imperialism. They said that Western constitutional democracy is a deception and a fraud.

The vision that these leaders offered their followers is that of a society modeled on what is thought to have existed in the first century of Islam. This vision is contrasted with present discontents: injustice, oppression, poverty. Khomeini was able to arouse the masses in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East to a fervor and frenzy unseen in recent years. The fact that his message found such a receptive audience showed that there was a deep feeling of discontent within the Islamic world.

Islam and Politics

One of the most important ideas upon which the American system of government is founded is the separation of church and state. This means that government and religion are two totally separate areas. Religious leaders cannot influence government decisions and the government can in no way interfere in religious matters. It also means that no official religion can be established in the United States. This same separation exists in many other countries today. But the idea is relatively new—a little more than 200 years old. Throughout history, in almost all societies, religion and government were closely connected.
Islam from its very beginning had a close association between religion and politics. Islam, more than other religions, is a political religion. Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, founded a state and governed it. Mohammed was a ruler—he made laws, collected taxes, raised armies, made war and peace, and dispensed justice. Thus politics, government, law, war, and peace are all part of the Holy Law of Islam. In Islam, God is the head of the state. The state is God’s state, the army is God’s army, the treasury is God’s treasury, and the enemy is God’s enemy.

Over the last few centuries there was some separation between political and religious matters in the Muslim world. However, at the present time there is a reassertion of this association between Islam and politics. One of the main arguments of Khomeini and other fundamentalist leaders is that the removal of religion from politics and public life has led to all kinds of evils. They desire to return to an Islamic society governed by Islamic law.

**A Revolution in Iran**

Iran, with 36 million people, is the third most populated nation in the Middle East. Iran has strategic importance because of its location on the Persian Gulf, where the world’s greatest concentration of oil reserves are found. (Iran is also one of the world’s largest producers of oil.)

Iran has a long political history and also a long history of unity in its cultural traditions. As we have already learned the early Persian Empire was strong (Iran is the modern name for Persia).

Iran developed into a modern nation under Riza Shah Pahlewi. Pahlewi was an army officer who made himself Shah in 1925. He tried to use Iran’s oil revenues to modernize his country.

During World War II (1939–1945), the British and the Russians, fearing German control of the Middle East, took over oil-rich Iran. The Allies forced Riza Pahlewi to give up the throne. In his place his young son, Mohammed Riza Pahlewi, became the new Shah.

After World War II, Iran became strongly nationalistic. In the early 1950s, the Iranian government nationalized the oil fields. However, Iran found it difficult to operate the fields, so in 1954 Iran made agreements with the Western nations to develop the oil. Under the agreements, half the profits went to Iran.

Investing money from the large oil profits, the Shah began a program of reform and industrial development. He built factories, schools, and superhighways. He gave women greater freedom, including the right to education and the right to vote. Over 100,000 students were sent to colleges in Europe and the United States.

Large areas of land that had belonged to the Shah and the clergy were given to the peasants. The income of the ayatollahs (religious leaders of Iran) was reduced. The clergy also feared that traditional values and customs were being destroyed. Most shocking was the sight of bars, gambling casinos, and women without the traditional veils and wearing Western styles.

The Shah moved quickly in trying to bring Western technology and lifestyles to Iran. The bazaar merchants worried about competition from foreign imports. The riches from the oil and economic development were divided unequally. The royal family’s use of public monies for personal use was much criticized.

The Shah used dictatorial and brutal methods to promote modernization. Those who opposed or criticized the Shah were arrested and then tortured by the secret police. Many who criticized him were members of the newly educated middle class that the Shah’s own modernization had created.
Islam and Freedom of Expression: 
The Case of Salman Rushdie

In February 1989, British author Salman Rushdie published the novel *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie, a Muslim, had been born in India but was living in Great Britain and was a British citizen. Religious Muslims immediately denounced the book. They called it "blasphemous" and "an insult to Islam." They said that references in the novel to Mohammed, his wives, and events in the Koran were offensive and dishonored the faith. Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of Iran, publicly condemned Rushdie to death and called on all Muslims to seek out and kill Rushdie and those responsible for the publication of the book. Rushdie apologized publicly, saying he meant no insult to Muslims. He went into hiding under the protection of the British government.

Demonstrations and riots broke out in many Muslim countries. In India and Pakistan the rioting involved tens of thousands of people, resulting in several deaths and many injuries. Most of the people who denounced the book had never read it because copies were banned in most Muslim countries. In Britain, Muslims paraded and burned copies of the book. There were threats against bookstores and bomb threats against the publishing company, Viking Press. In New York, bomb threats caused many bookstores to temporarily remove the novel from public display, fearing that employees or customers might be injured.

After repeated threats from the Ayatollah Khomeini, Western governments took action. Led by Great Britain, many European countries, as well as Canada, withdrew their top ranking diplomats from Iran in protest. President Bush called Khomeini’s death threat “deeply offensive to the norms of civilized behavior.”

In the West, the Rushdie affair was seen as a case of freedom of expression versus censorship. Westerners defended Rushdie’s right to express his views. They said freedom of speech and press must be upheld, that censorship is wrong, and that governments do not have the right to silence authors. Religious Muslims saw the issue differently. As expressed by Iran’s president, the West had made the mistake of confusing “freedom of expression with the freedom to insult one billion Muslims.”

Since 1989, Rushdie has apologized many times. In early 1991, Rushdie announced that he would not publish the book in paperback. He hoped that his announcement together with his apologies would pacify Muslims and make it possible for him to come out of hiding and return to a normal life.

Yet Khomeini’s death threat remains in effect and Rushdie is still in hiding. His Japanese translator was stabbed to death and his Italian translator was wounded in a knife attack. The Iranian government still refuses to remove the death threat.
In the mid-1970s, the Shah also began a program of military expansion. Millions were spent to make Iran the strongest power in the Persian Gulf. Inflation and high prices became a problem. Unrest began to grow.

The strongest opposition came from the Muslim religious leaders, the ayatollahs. In Iran, the Muslim religious leaders saw their authority being taken away by civil courts that had been set up to replace the religious courts. The religious leaders felt the Shah's program of national modernization and emancipation (the act of setting free) for women threatened traditional religious values. The religious leaders also resented the Shah's land reform program. It was their lands that were to be given to the peasants. Without the money from the rents collected the power of the ayatollahs would be weakened.

Violent rioting, strikes, and demonstrations broke out in late 1978 and continued into 1979. Finally, early in 1979, the Shah fled Iran, and an Islamic republic was set up. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became the power behind the new government. He and his followers did not reject all forms of modernization; they rejected the Shah's way as modernization that would destroy Islam.

The new government was anti-Western and viewed the United States with particular suspicion and hatred. This was due to the close ties that had existed between the Shah and the United States.

In October 1979, the Shah was allowed to enter the United States for medical treatment. Two weeks later, in November, Iranians violently invaded and took control of the U.S. embassy in Teheran and took 52 American diplomats hostage in violation of international law. The Iranians said they would release the hostages when the Shah was returned to Iran to stand trial for his "crimes" against the Iranian people. Both the United Nations and the International Court of Justice demanded the release of the hostages. The Iranians refused. Finally the American hostages were released in January 1981 after almost 15 months of imprisonment.

The Iranian Revolution left Iran in an unsettled and unstable condition. Iran's oil production dropped as its economy was disrupted by the revolution, and has not fully recovered years after the revolution. The ethnic minority groups in Iran—Kurds, Baluchis, and others—have become more active in their search for independence.

The War Between Iraq and Iran

In September 1980, Iraqi troops invaded Iranian territory. Within days Iraqi pilots flying Soviet-built MIGs were bombing military targets and oil facilities in Iran. Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, was convinced that Iran's revolution had left the country divided and its military forces weak. He believed that he could overthrow Iran's revolutionary government "in days."

Iran and Iraq are neighbors, but the differences between them are great. Both are Muslim nations; however, Iraq's population is Arab and Iran's people are Persians. Religious differences also exist. Iran is predominately Shi'ite Muslim; Iraq is made up of Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims. Over the centuries, differences in language, culture, religion, and history resulted in a great deal of enmity. When the Shah ruled Iran, efforts were made to resolve some of the problems dividing the two.
The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.
Causes of the War

After the Khomeini government came to power in Iran in 1979, tension between the two nations increased. Clashes along the border began and escalated into an all-out war. The immediate cause of war was a territorial dispute. Saddam Hussein sent Iran a list of demands. He claimed the Shatt al-Arab waterway that separates the two nations and demanded the return of three small islands in the Persian Gulf. Iran rejected Iraq's demands. The real reasons for the conflict, however, were much more complex.

1. Iran's frequent declarations that its Islamic revolution should be exported to other countries in the region aroused fears in the Arab states, including Iraq.
2. Iran began to meddle in the affairs of Shi'ite communities in Iraq and other countries. This caused much concern to the Iraqi government, which is dominated by Sunni Muslims though the Iraqi population is mainly Shi'ite.
3. Khomeini had spent 14 years living in exile in Iraq during the Shah's reign. But his dislike for Iraq's government was intense and he openly criticized it.
4. Iraq wanted to gain control of Iran's Khuzestan province. This province is rich in oil and has a predominantly Arab population. Khomeini accused Iraq of creating
unrest among the Arabs in the region. Khomeini in turn called on Iraq's Shi'ite Muslims to overthrow the "godless" regime of Saddam Hussein.

5. It was widely believed that Saddam Hussein hoped to make Iraq the most important power in the Persian Gulf region and perhaps in the entire Middle East. A quick victory over Iran could make this possible.

The War: A Danger to the Whole World

From the beginning the war posed a threat to the West and other countries. A war fought amid the oil fields and across the oil routes of the Persian Gulf could at any time cut off vital oil supplies as 60 percent of the oil used in the West passes through the Strait of Hormuz, at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Supertankers carrying oil from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the other Gulf States pass through this strait. If the Strait of Hormuz were closed to shipping due to a blockade or mining, the whole world could be affected. For this reason the United States was determined to keep the strait open. Another danger was that the war could spill over and involve other countries—the Gulf States or even the United States and the former Soviet Union.

The Key Targets: Cities and Oil Facilities

Iraq's initial blitz failed to produce the quick and easy victory that was anticipated. The military experts who predicted that the war would be over in a few weeks were wrong. The war lasted eight years. There were hundreds of thousands of casualties and enormous destruction.

What surprised everyone was the strength of the Iranian resistance. After getting over the initial shock, the country rallied enthusiastically behind the government's war effort. Khomeini told the Iranian people to fight until the "infidels" had been driven not only from Iran but from Iraq too. Iran also possessed superior weapons, mainly U.S. phantom jets that had been purchased by the Shah.

From the beginning cities and oil facilities were key targets for bombing raids. There were air strikes against Teheran, capital of Iran, and attacks on Baghdad, Iraq's capital. Iraq began a systematic bombardment of Abadan, Iran's largest oil refinery. Iraq continued to bomb Kharg Island, Iran's main oil exporting terminal. The Iranians hit at Iraqi oil installations at Basra and Kirkuk. There was severe damage to the oil refining and shipping facilities of both countries. This for a time sharply reduced the amount of oil exported by both nations. Efforts were made by the United Nations and the Conference of Islamic Nations to end the fighting. These efforts failed. Despite concessions from Iraq, Iran said it would not end the struggle until the government of Saddam Hussein was overthrown.

Attacks on International Shipping

A dangerous development began in 1984: attacks on international shipping in the Gulf. Each side tried to prevent oil tankers and ships from approaching the ports of the other. Vessels were hit by missiles or bombed from the air. Mines were placed in the Gulf. Several hundred ships were hit in the Gulf with the loss of hundreds of seamen. In May 1987, the U.S. frigate Stark was hit by an Iraqi missile; 37 American sailors died.

During 1987, there was a dangerous escalation of the war in the Persian Gulf. Iran placed more mines in the Gulf, which caused considerable damage to shipping. After a
Kuwaiti tanker was struck by a mine, the United States began a mine-sweeping operation. In July 1987, U.S. warships began escorting Kuwaiti oil tankers through the Gulf. The Kuwaiti tankers were flying the American flag because Iran had threatened to bomb Kuwaiti tankers in retaliation for Kuwait’s help to Iraq. Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti oil tankers led to U.S. attacks on Iranian oil installations. By the middle of 1987, there was a full scale naval confrontation between the United States and Iran in the Gulf. There were many incidents of Iranian gunboats and U.S. naval vessels firing at each other. A great tragedy occurred in July 1988 when a U.S. warship shot down an Iranian airliner over the Gulf, resulting in the death of 290 people.

Taking Sides

The Arabs

When the war broke out, most nations declared their neutrality. Most of the Arab states also proclaimed their neutrality, but all, except Syria and Libya, sided with Iraq. The Arabs were frightened by Khomeini’s Shi’ite Muslim fanatacism. This was especially true of the Arab Gulf States. Most of the Gulf States are ruled by Sunni Moslems. These nations however have Shi’ite minorities that could be influenced by Khomeini. Among the Arabs there was also the feeling of solidarity with their “Arab brothers” in Iraq.

As the war continued the Arabs began to help Iraq openly. By 1981, Kuwait was providing Iraq with financial aid and allowing it to use Kuwaiti ports. Iraq’s economy was in serious trouble. Its oil exports had fallen and it was running out of foreign currency. The war effort cost Iraq approximately $1 billion a month. Arab aid to Iraq became vital to Iraq’s survival. During the last years of the war a substantial part of Iraq’s war bill was paid by the other Arab countries, mainly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union was officially neutral at the beginning of the war and hoped to remain on good terms with both sides. In 1984, however, the Soviets moved solidly behind Iraq and began providing them with enormous amounts of new weapons, spare parts, and financial aid.

The United States

The main interest of the United States in the conflict was to keep the Persian Gulf open to international shipping so that vital oil supplies would reach the West. The United States soon began to side with Iraq, selling it weapons and advanced technology.

The Cease-fire—August 20, 1988

During 1988, the tide of war turned against Iran with Iraqi successes on the battlefield and in the air. Iran had suffered great losses of armor, aircraft, and missiles during the war. Its troop losses were enormous.

Moreover, Iran was losing in its confrontation with U.S. warships in the Gulf. The U.S. Navy had destroyed Iranian offshore drilling platforms and oil fields in the Gulf. Iran was also losing “the war of the cities.” Beginning in February, Iraq bombarded Teheran, the Iranian capital, Qom, and other cities in Iran with intermediate range missiles on a scale that Iran could not match. The Iranian economy had been crippled by the war. Oil exports had fallen greatly as a result of Iraqi air attacks on Iranian oil installation and oil tankers in the Gulf. There were problems of inflation, unemployment, low production, and enormous war damage.