Chapter

12 The new world order and the war against global terrorism

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

When communism collapsed in eastern Europe and the USSR broke up in 1991, the Cold War came to an end. *The USA was left as the world's only superpower.* Following its victory over communism, the USA was full of confidence and pride in the superiority of its way of life and its institutions. Optimists thought that the world could now look forward to a period of peace and harmony, during which the USA, which saw itself as the land of freedom and benevolence, would lead the rest of the world forward, wherever necessary, into democracy and prosperity. In addition, wherever necessary, the USA would act as the world's policeman, keeping 'rogue states' under control and making them toe the line. Francis Fukuyama, professor of political economy at Johns Hopkins University, even argued that the world had reached 'the end of history', in the sense that History, seen as the development of human societies through various forms of government, had reached its climax in modern liberal democracy and market-oriented capitalism.

However, the new world order turned out to be quite different. Much of the rest of the world did not wish to be led anywhere by the USA, and disagreed with the USA's world-view. Since it was so powerful both militarily and economically, it was difficult for small countries to challenge the USA in conventional ways. To the extremists, it seemed that terrorism was the only way to strike at the USA and its allies.

Terrorism was nothing new – anarchists were responsible for many assassinations around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; during the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries there had been many terrorist organizations, but these were mostly localized, carrying out their campaigns in their own areas. There were, for example, ETA, which wanted a Basque state completely independent of Spain; and the IRA, which wanted Northern Ireland united with the Irish Republic.

It was in the 1970s that terrorists began to act outside their own territories. For example, in 1972 Arab terrorists killed 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics; and there was a series of bomb explosions on aircraft. In the 1980s it became clear that the USA was the chief target:

- there was an attack on the American embassy in Beirut (Lebanon) in 1983;
- an American airliner flying from Frankfurt to New York crashed onto the Scottish town of Lockerbie after a bomb had exploded on board (1988);
- a bomb exploded in the World Trade Center in New York in February 1993;
- US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were attacked in 1998;
- there was an attack on the American battleship *Cole* in port at Aden in the Yemen (2000).

The culmination of this campaign was the terrible events of 11 September 2001 when the World Trade Center in New York was completely destroyed (see Illus. 12.1). The blame for

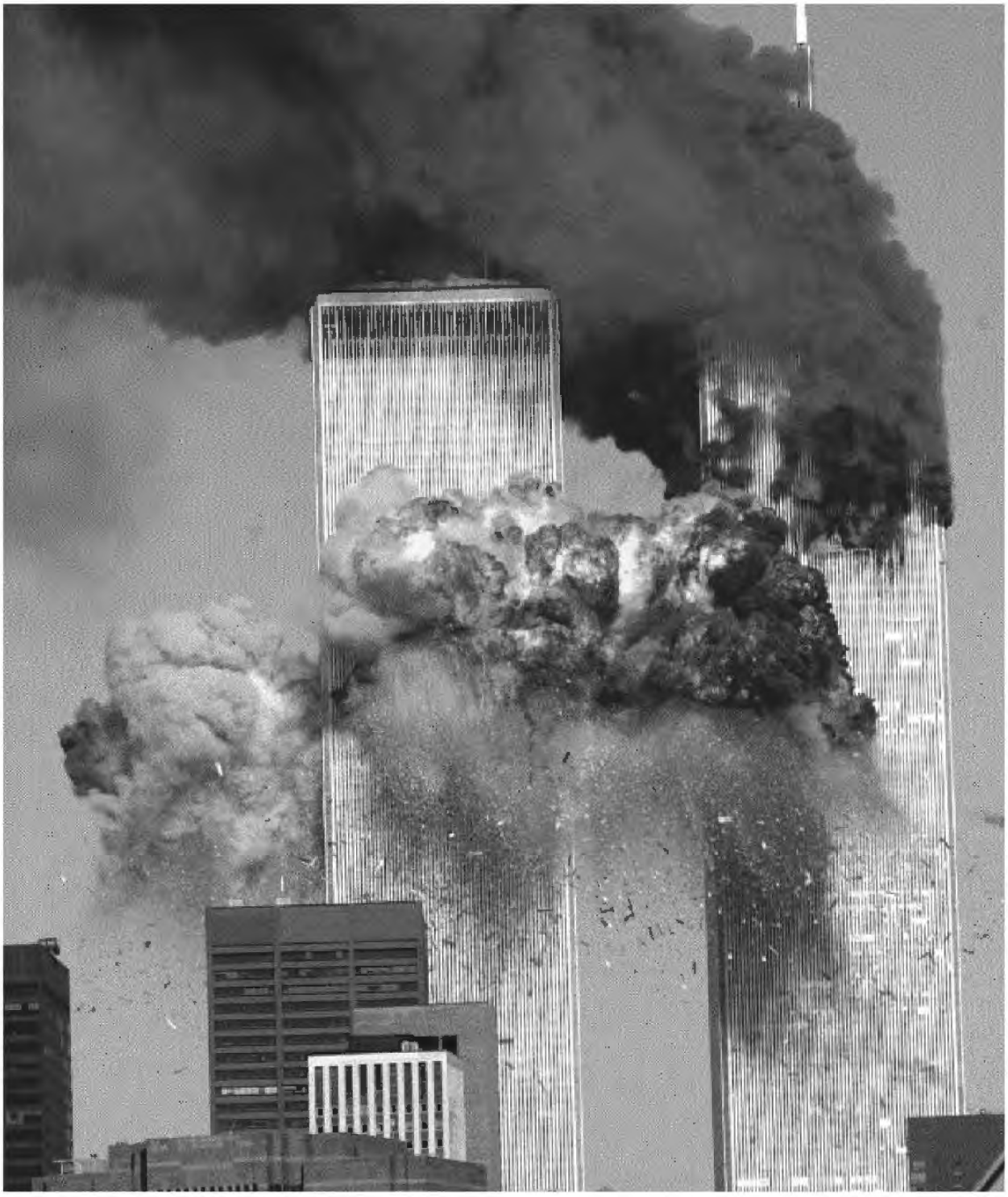

Illustration 12.1 **New York, 11 September 2001: a fiery blast rocks the south tower of the World Trade Center as the hijacked United Airlines flight 175 from Boston crashes into the building**

this attack was placed on al-Qaeda (meaning 'the Base'), an Arab organization led by *Osama bin Laden*, which was campaigning against Western or anti-Islamic interests. US president George W. Bush immediately announced 'a declaration of war on terrorism'. His aims were to overthrow the Taliban (students) regime in Afghanistan, which was thought to be aiding and abetting al-Qaeda, to capture Osama bin Laden and to destroy al-Qaeda. Bush also threatened to attack and overthrow any regime that encouraged or harboured terrorists. First on the list was to be Saddam Hussein of Iraq, and action was also threatened against Iran and North Korea – three states which, according to Bush, formed an 'axis of evil'.

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan was quickly overthrown (October 2001) and a national government led by Hamid Kharzai was put in place, supported by NATO troops. The USA, with British help, then moved on to deal with Iraq, where *Saddam Hussein was also overthrown (April–May 2003)* and later captured. Although these regimes were removed relatively easily, it proved much more difficult to replace them with viable, stable administrations which could bring peace and prosperity to their troubled countries. In Afghanistan the Taliban soon regrouped and in 2003 they began a new insurgency. NATO troops and the native Afghan army struggled to control the insurgency, but the violence continued and in 2012 Afghanistan was still in a state of civil war. And so the 'war on terror' continued.

At the same time there was increasing tension between the Islamic republic of Iran and the West. Since 1979 when the American-backed regime of the Shah Reza Pahlevi was overthrown in the Islamic revolution, Iran had been viewed with suspicion, partly because they were pursuing a nuclear programme. Although the Iranians insisted that their nuclear power was intended only for peaceful purposes – mainly to produce electricity - the West was convinced that they were planning to manufacture nuclear weapons. By early 2012 there was talk of American and Israeli pre-emptive strikes to destroy Iran's nuclear plants.

Meanwhile sensational events were taking place in other part of the Middle East and across North Africa. Beginning in Tunisia in December 2010, a series of anti-government protests and demonstrations quickly spread through the entire region. In little over a year the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen were overthrown and several other countries were forced to introduce important reforms and improvements, in a movement that became known as the 'Arab Spring'.

12.1 THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Soon after the US 'victory' in the Cold War, various American spokesmen announced that the USA was looking forward to a new era of peace and international co-operation. They implied that the USA, the world's only superpower – all-powerful and unchallengeable – was now committed to good works; support for international justice, liberty and human rights; the eradication of poverty; and the spread of education, health and democracy throughout the world. Understandably, Americans were full of pride in their country's achievements; in 1997 David Rothkopf, a minister in the Clinton administration, wrote: 'The Americans should not deny the fact that of all the nations in the history of the world, theirs is the most just, the most tolerant and the best model for the future.'

And yet, instead of being universally loved and admired, the USA, or rather US governments, ended up being hated so violently in certain quarters that people were driven to commit the most terrible acts of terrorism in protest against the USA and its system. How did this happen? *How did the post-Cold War era, which seemed so full of hope, turn out to be so full of hatred and horror?* In simple terms, there were millions of people in many countries of the world who did not share the advantages of the prosperous American lifestyle; nor did they see much evidence that the USA was genuinely trying to do anything to narrow the gap between the poor and the wealthy, or to fight for justice and human rights.

Many American writers were aware of the dangers of this situation. Nicholas Guyatt, in his book *Another American Century*, published in 2000, pointed out that

> many people around the world are frustrated by the complacency and impenetrability of the US, and by the fact that the apparent absence of political solutions to this (such as a genuinely multilateral and independent United Nations) is likely to drive many towards radical and extreme measures … [there are] large and dangerous pockets of

resentment towards the US around the world, grounded not in fundamentalism or insanity but in a real perception of the imbalance of power, and a real frustration at the impotence of political means of change.

'As long as the US remains insulated from the effects of its actions', he concluded, 'it will have little sense of the true desperation they produce in others.'

What were these actions of the USA that caused such desperation in others? Clearly there was a complex combination of actions and policies which led to such extreme reactions.

- *US foreign policy continued along the same interventionist course as during the Cold War.* For example, in December 1989 at least 2000 civilians were killed when US forces invaded and bombed Panama. This was an operation designed to arrest Manuel Noriega, the Panamanian military leader who was the power behind the presidents of Panama during the 1980s. He had worked for the CIA and had been backed by the US government until 1987, when he was accused of drug trafficking and money laundering. The heavy-handed US operation resulted in his capture and removal to the USA to stand trial. The Organization of American States proposed a resolution 'to deeply regret the military intervention in Panama'. The resolution was approved by a vote of 20 to1, the one being the USA.
- During the 1990s the Americans helped to suppress left-wing movements in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. In 1999 they took part in the controversial bombing of Serbia. Twice – in 1989 and 2001 – American agents intervened in the Nicaraguan elections, the first time to defeat the left-wing government, the second time to prevent the left returning to power. This sort of policy was bound to cause resentment, especially now that it could not be justified as part of the campaign against the advance of global communism. In the words of William Blum (in *Rogue State*): 'The enemy was, and remains, any government or movement, or even individual, that stands in the way of the expansion of the American Empire.'
- At other times *the USA failed to intervene in situations where international opinion hoped for a decisive US role.* In Rwanda in 1994 the USA was reluctant to play a full part, since no direct US interests were involved and intervention on a sufficiently large scale would have been expensive. Because of the delays, some half a million people were massacred. As Nicholas Guyatt puts it: 'Reluctant to give up its central role in world affairs but unwilling to commit troops and money for UN operations, the USA atrophied the cause of peacekeeping just as the situation in Rwanda required a flexible and dynamic response.' The other main example of US failure was the Arab–Israeli conflict: although the USA became involved in trying to bring peace, they were clearly on the side of Israel. George W. Bush refused to deal with Yasser Arafat, regarding him as nothing but a terrorist. This US failure to bring about a just settlement of the conflict is probably the main reason for the bitter Arab and Muslim hostility.
- *The USA often failed to support the United Nations.* In 1984 for example, President Ronald Reagan talked about the importance of international law and order: 'without law', he said, 'there can only be chaos and disorder'. However, the previous day he had rejected the verdict of the International Court of Justice which condemned the USA for its unlawful use of force by its mining of harbours in Nicaragua. Later the court ordered the USA to pay compensation to Nicaragua, but the government refused and increased its financial support to the mercenaries who were trying to destabilize the democratically elected Nicaraguan government. The UN was unable to enforce its decision.
- The USA had a long history of vetoing Security Council resolutions and opposing General Assembly resolutions. A few examples demonstrate the US attitude. In

1985 the USA was the only country to vote against a resolution proposing new policies for improving the safeguarding of human rights (voting was 130 for, 1 against). Similarly in 1987, the USA was the only member to vote against a resolution aimed at strengthening communication services in the Third World (voting was 140 for, 1 against). In 1996, at a World Food Summit organized by the UN, the USA refused to endorse a general view that it was everyone's right 'to have access to safe and nutritious food'. As Noam Chomsky succinctly puts it (in *Hegemony or Survival*): 'When the UN fails to serve as an instrument of American unilateralism on issues of elite concern, it is dismissed.' The USA even voted against UN proposals on the control of terrorism, presumably because it wanted to fight terrorism in its own way. All this – before 11 September – could only result in a weakening of the UN and of international law. In the words of Michael Byers, 'international law as applied by the US increasingly bears little relationship to international law as understood anywhere else … It is possible that … the US is in fact attempting to create new, exceptional rules for itself alone.'

- *President George W. Bush was less than enthusiastic about some of the agreements entered into by previous administrations.* During his first year in office – and before 11 September – he rejected the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, withdrew from the 1997 Kyoto Protocols on climate change, halted the new diplomatic contacts with North Korea and refused to co-operate in discussions about the control of chemical weapons.
- *The US economy was so powerful that decisions taken in Washington and New York had worldwide repercussions.* With the increasing globalization of the world's economy, American companies had interests all over the world. The Americans kept firm control over the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, so that states applying for loans had to make sure that their internal policies were acceptable to the USA. In 1995 the new president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, announced that he wanted the Bank to do more to promote debt relief, good government, education and health in the Third World. But Washington opposed this, arguing for strict austerity. In fact, according to Will Hutton, 'the international financial system has been shaped to extend US financial and political power, not to promote the world public good'. By the end of 2002 it was clear that the USA was pursuing what some observers described as 'an imperial grand strategy' leading to a new world order in which it 'runs the show'.

12.2 THE RISE OF GLOBAL TERRORISM

(a) How do we define 'terrorism'?

Ken Booth and Tim Dunne, in their recent book *Worlds in Collision*, offer this definition:

> Terrorism is a method of political action that uses violence (or deliberately produces fear) against civilians and against civilian infrastructure in order to influence behaviour, to inflict punishment or to exact revenge. For the perpetrators, the point is to make the target group afraid of today, afraid of tomorrow and afraid of each other. Terrorism is an act, not an ideology. Its instruments are assassination, mass murder, hijacking, bombing, kidnapping and intimidation. Such acts can be committed by states as well as private groups.

There are problems with any definition of terrorism. For example, are people engaged in a legitimate struggle for independence, like the Mau Mau in Kenya (see Section 24.4(b))

and the African National Congress in South Africa (see Section 25.8), terrorists or revolutionaries and freedom fighters? In the 1960s Nelson Mandela was regarded as a terrorist by the white governments of South Africa and kept in jail for 27 years; now he is respected and revered by both blacks and whites all over the world. What about Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader? President Bush refused to meet him because, according to the Americans, he was nothing but a terrorist. Yet when the Israeli government carried out similar attacks to those perpetrated by the Palestinians, this was classified not as terrorism, but as legitimate actions of a government against terrorism. Clearly it depends which side you are on, and which side wins in the end.

(b) Terrorist groups

Some of the best-known terrorist organizations were based in the Middle East:

The *Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)* was one of the earliest groups to make itself felt. Formed in 1974, it was an offshoot of Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was thought not to be sufficiently aggressive. The ANO was committed to a completely independent Palestinian state; it had bases in Lebanon and Palestine (in some of the refugee camps) and it drew support from Syria, Sudan, and at first from Libya. It was responsible for operations in about 20 different countries, including attacks on airports in Rome and Vienna (1985), and a number of aircraft hijackings. Since the early 1990s the ANO has been less active.

Hezbollah (Party of God), also known as *Islamic Jihad (Holy War)*, was formed in Lebanon in 1982 after the Israeli invasion (see Section 11.8(b)). Mainly Shia Muslims, they claimed to be inspired by the Ayatollah Khomeini, the ruler of Iran. They aimed to follow his example by setting up an Islamic state in Lebanon; they also wanted to expel the Israelis from all the occupied territories in Palestine. Hezbollah was thought to be responsible for several attacks on the US embassy in Beirut during the 1980s, and for seizing a number of Western hostages in 1987, including Terry Waite, a special peace envoy sent by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the 1990s they began to extend their sphere of operations, attacking targets in Argentina – the Israeli embassy (1992) and later an Israeli cultural centre (1994).

Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) was formed in 1987 with the aim of setting up an independent Islamic state of Palestine. It tried to combine armed resistance to Israel with political activity, by running candidates for some of the Palestinian Authority elections. Hamas has massive support in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; in the last few years it has specialized in suicide bomb attacks against Israeli targets.

Al-Qaeda (the Base) was the most famous terrorist group during the early years of the twenty-first century. Consisting mainly of Sunni Muslims, it was formed towards the end of the 1980s as part of the struggle to expel the Soviet forces which had invaded Afghanistan in 1979 (see Section 8.6(b)). Since this could be portrayed as part of the Cold War, al-Qaeda was actually financed and trained by the USA, among other Western countries. After the Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan was completed (February 1989), al-Qaeda extended its horizons. It began a general campaign in support of the establishment of Islamic governments. The special target was the non-religious conservative regime in Saudi Arabia, Osama bin Laden's homeland, which was supported by the USA and garrisoned by American troops. Al-Qaeda's aim was to force the Americans to withdraw their troops so that an Islamic regime would be able to come to power. A secondary aim was to bring an end to US support for Israel. The organization is thought to have around 5000 members, with cells in many countries.

Perhaps the best-known terrorist group outside the Middle East has been *the Tamil Tigers* in Sri Lanka. They were Hindus living in the north and east of Sri Lanka, whereas

the majority of the island's population were Buddhist. The Tigers campaigned since the early 1980s for an independent homeland, using suicide bombings, assassinations of leading politicians, and attacks on public buildings and Buddhist shrines. By the 1990s they had over 10 000 troops and the struggle had reached civil-war proportions. Their most notorious action was the assassination of the Indian prime minister, Rajiv Ghandi, in India in 1991. A truce was arranged in 2001, and although it was broken several times, by 2003 there were encouraging signs that a peaceful settlement could be found.

Probably the most successful terrorist group was *the African National Congress (ANC)* in South Africa. Originally formed in 1912, it only adopted violent methods in the early 1960s when *apartheid* became more brutal. After a long campaign, the white supremacist government eventually succumbed to pressure from world opinion as well as from the ANC. Nelson Mandela was released (1990), and multiracial elections were held (1994). Mandela, the former 'terrorist', became the first black president of South Africa. There have been scores of other organizations, for example *the Tupamaru Revolutionary Movement* in Peru, which aims to rid the country of US influence; *the Islamic Group* in Algeria, which aims to set up an Islamic state in place of the existing non-religious government; and *the National Liberation Army* in Bolivia, which aims to rid the country of US influence.

(c) Terrorism becomes global and anti-American

It was in the early 1970s that terrorist groups began to operate outside their own countries. In 1972 there was the murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, carried out by a pro-Palestinian group calling itself Black September. Gradually it became clear that the main target of the outrages was the USA and its interests. After the downfall of the US-backed Shah of Iran early in 1979, there was a great wave of anti-American feeling in the region. In November 1979 a large army of several thousand Iranian students attacked the American embassy in the capital, Tehran, and seized 52 Americans, who were held hostage for almost 15 months. The demands of the country's new ruler, the Ayatollah Khomeini, included handing over the ex-Shah so that he could face trial in Iran, and an acknowledgement by the USA of its guilt for all its interference in Iran prior to 1979. Only when the USA agreed to release $8 million of frozen Iranian assets were the hostages allowed to return home. This incident was seen as a national humiliation by the Americans and showed the rest of the world that there were limits to the power of the USA. But at least the hostages were not harmed; after that, the anti-American acts became more violent.

- In 1983 the Middle East became the focus of attention as resentment grew at the extent of American interests and interventions in the region. Especially unpopular was US support of Israel, which had invaded the Lebanon in 1982. In April 1983 a truck carrying a huge bomb was driven into the US embassy in Beirut, the Lebanese capital. The building collapsed, killing 63 people. In October 1983 a similar attack was carried out on the headquarters of the US marines in Beirut, killing 242 people. The same day another suicide lorry was driven into a French military base in Beirut; this time 58 French soldiers were killed. In December, action switched to Kuwait City, where a lorry packed with explosives was driven into the US embassy, killing four people. All four attacks were organized by Islamic Jihad, probably backed by Syria and Iran.
- Shortly before Christmas 1988 an American airliner carrying 259 people en route for New York blew up and crashed onto the Scottish town of Lockerbie, killing all those on board and 11 people on the ground. No organization claimed responsibility but

suspicion fell on Iran and Syria. Later it shifted to Libya; eventually the Libyan government handed over two men suspected of planting the bomb. In January 2000 both were tried in a Scottish court sitting in special session in Holland; one was found guilty of killing the 270 victims and sentenced to life imprisonment, the other man was acquitted. However, many people believe that the conviction was dubious – the evidence was extremely thin – and that Syria and Iran were the real culprits.

- In February 1993 a bomb exploded in the basement of the World Trade Center in New York, killing six people and injuring several hundred.
- American interests in Africa were the next target: on the same day – 7 August 1998 – bomb attacks were launched against the US embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania). In total, 252 people were killed and several thousand injured; but the vast majority of the victims were Kenyans, and only 12 of those killed were Americans. The Americans were convinced that al-Qaeda was responsible for the attacks, especially when the Islamic Army Organization, which was thought to be closely connected to Osama bin Laden, issued a statement claiming that the bombings were in revenge for injustices which the USA had committed against Muslim states; the statement also threatened that this was just a beginning – there would be even more attacks and the USA would meet a 'black fate'.
- President Bill Clinton ordered immediate retaliation – the Americans fired cruise missiles at complexes in Afghanistan and Sudan, which were said to be producing chemical weapons. However, this tactic seemed to backfire. One of the sites bombed turned out to be an ordinary pharmaceutical factory, and there was a violent anti-American reaction throughout the Middle East.
- October 2000 brought a new sort of terrorist action – the attack on the American destroyer *Cole*, which was refuelling in the port of Aden (in Yemen) on its way to the Persian Gulf. Two men rammed a small boat packed with explosives into the side of the ship, apparently hoping to sink it. They failed, but the explosion did blow a large hole in the *Cole*'s side, killing 17 sailors and injuring many more. The damage was easily repaired, but once again it was a humiliation that the world's supposedly most powerful nation had been unable to defend its property adequately in hostile regions. The message from the Islamic states was clear: 'We do not want you here.' Would the USA take heed and change its policies?

(c) Has the USA been guilty of terrorism?

If we accept that a definition of 'terrorism' should include acts committed by states as well as by individuals and groups, then we have to ask the question: which states have been guilty of terrorism, in the sense that their governments have been responsible for some or even all the terrorist activities mentioned – assassinations, mass murders, hijackings, bombings, kidnappings and intimidation? The list of candidates is a long one; the most obvious must be Nazi Germany, the USSR under Stalin, Communist China, the South African *apartheid* regime, Chile during the Pinochet regime, Cambodia under Pol Pot and Milošević's Serbia. But what about the shocking claim that the USA has also been guilty of terrorism? The accusation has been made not just by Arabs and Latin American left-wingers, but by respected Western commentators and by Americans themselves. It is linked to the question of why there have been so many terrorist acts directed against the USA.

Twenty years ago very few people in the West would have thought of asking such a question. But since the end of the Cold War, and especially since the 11 September attacks, there has been a radical reappraisal by a number of writers of the US role in international affairs since the end of the Second World War. Their motive in most cases is a genuine

desire to find explanations as to why US government policies have aroused so much hostility. According to William Blum in his book *Rogue State*:

> From 1945 until the end of the century, the United States attempted to overthrow more than 40 foreign governments, and to crush more than 30 populist–nationalist movements struggling against intolerable regimes. In the process, the US caused the end of life for several million people, and condemned many millions more to a life of agony and despair.

Sections 8.4–5 gave examples of such US actions in South America, South-East Asia, Africa and the Middle East; the first section of this chapter showed that US foreign policy continued on essentially the same lines after 1990.

Noam Chomsky (a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) pointed out (in his book *Rogue States*) that often 'terrorist' acts against the USA were committed in retaliation for US actions. For example, it seems highly likely that the destruction of the American airliner over Lockerbie in 1988 was a retaliation for the shooting down of an Iranian airliner by the Americans, with the loss of 290 lives, a few months earlier. Similar American acts which precipitated retaliation were the bombings of Libya in 1986 and the shooting down of two Libyan aircraft in 1989; in these instances, however, the Americans could claim that their actions were in retaliation for earlier Libyan outrages. One of the most horrific acts of terrorism was a car bomb placed outside a mosque in Beirut in March 1985. It was timed to explode as worshippers left after Friday prayers: 80 innocent people were killed, including many women and children, and over 200 were seriously injured. The target was a suspected Arab terrorist, but he was unhurt. It is now known that the attack was organized by the CIA with help from British intelligence. Sadly, these were the sorts of action which were likely to turn ordinary Muslims into 'fanatical' terrorists. In 1996, Amnesty International reported:

> Throughout the world, on any given day, a man, woman or child is likely to be displaced, tortured, killed or 'disappeared', at the hands of governments or armed political groups. More often than not, the United States shares the blame.

Lloyd Pettiford and David Harding (in *Terrorism*: *The New World War*) conclude that American foreign policies must take much of the blame for the increase in terrorism, since 'the US seems totally determined to ensure that the whole world is opened up to its unrestricted access and that any alternative form of society be regarded as strictly against the rules'. Noam Chomsky claims (in *Who are the Global Terrorists?*) that Washington created

> an international terror network of unprecedented scale and employed it worldwide with lethal and long-lasting effects. In Central America, terror guided and supported by the US reached its most extreme levels. … It is hardly surprising that Washington's call for support in its war of revenge for September 11 had little resonance in Latin America.

12.3 11 SEPTEMBER 2001 AND THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

(a) The 11 September attacks

Early in the morning of 11 September 2001, four airliners on internal flights in the USA were hijacked. The first one was deliberately crashed into the 110-storey North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York. A quarter of an hour later the second plane crashed

into the South Tower; about an hour after the impact the entire South Tower collapsed into a vast heap of rubble, severely damaging surrounding buildings; after another 25 minutes the North Tower also disintegrated. In the meantime a third plane was flown into the Pentagon, the building near Washington that housed the US Department of Defense, and the fourth plane missed its intended target and crashed in a rural area of Pennsylvania, not far from Pittsburgh. It was the most stunning atrocity ever experienced on US soil: it cost the lives of around 2800 people in the World Trade Center, well over a hundred in the Pentagon building, and some 200 who were passengers on the aircraft, including the hijackers. Television cameras filmed the second plane flying into the South Tower and the collapse of the towers, and these images, shown over and over again, only added to the horror and disbelief around the world at what was happening. Nor was it only Americans who were killed: it emerged that citizens of over forty foreign countries were among the victims, either in the buildings or as passengers on the aircraft.

Although no organization claimed responsibility for the attacks, the US government assumed that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were guilty. Certainly it must have been carried out by educated professionals with considerable financial backing, like the members of al-Qaeda, who were known to number perhaps 5000 highly-trained activists. Recovering quickly from the initial shock, President Bush announced that the USA would hunt down and punish not only the perpetrators of what he called 'these acts of war', but also those who supported and harboured them. The outrages were condemned by most of the world's governments, although there were reports of Palestinians and other Muslim groups celebrating at the humiliation of the USA. President Saddam Hussein of Iraq was reported as saying that the USA was 'reaping the thorns of its foreign policy'.

(b) Bush and the 'war against terrorism'

The American government immediately tried to build on the worldwide sympathy in order to create a coalition to fight terrorism. NATO condemned the outrages and stated that an attack on one member state would be treated as an attack on all 19 members; each country would be required to assist, if necessary. Within a short time a coalition of states was put together to enable the terrorists' assets to be frozen and to collect wide-ranging intelligence; some of the countries promised to help with military action against the terrorists and against the Taliban government of Afghanistan, which was accused of sheltering al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. Some of Bush's statements during this period were disturbing to other governments. For example, he stated that countries were 'either with us or against us' – implying that the right to remain neutral did not exist. He also spoke of 'an axis of evil' in the world, which would have to be dealt with; the 'evil' states were Iraq, Iran and North Korea. This opened up the possibility of a long series of military operations, with the USA playing the part of 'world policeman' or 'playground bully', depending on which side you were on.

This caused some alarm, and not only in the three states named. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of Germany stated that although Germany was prepared to 'make appropriate military facilities' available to the USA and its allies, he did not consider that there was a state of war with any particular country; and he added that 'we are not in a war with the Islamic world either'. This cautious response was because of doubts about whether a direct attack on Afghanistan was justified in international law. As Michael Byers (an expert in international law at Duke University, North Carolina) explains:

> in order to maintain the coalition against terrorism, the US military response had to be necessary and proportionate. This meant that the strikes had to be carefully targeted against those believed to be responsible for the atrocities in New York and Washington.

But if the US singled out Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda as its targets, it would have run up against the widely held view that terrorist attacks, in and of themselves, did not justify military responses against sovereign states.

It was for this reason that the USA widened its claim of self-defence to include the Taliban government of Afghanistan, which was accused of supporting the terrorist acts. Accordingly, the UN Security Council passed two resolutions which did not authorize military action under the UN Charter, but allowed it *as the right of self-defence in customary international law*. The USA then issued an ultimatum to the Taliban demanding that they hand over bin Laden and some of his colleagues directly to the US authorities. When this was rejected by the Taliban, the scene was set for the use of force, though Mullah Zaeef, one of the Taliban leaders, issued a press release strongly condemning the attacks and calling for those responsible to be brought to justice. No doubt he knew what to expect when he added: 'We want America to be patient and careful in their actions.'

(c) Background to the attack on Afghanistan

The history of the previous 30 years in Afghanistan had been extremely violent and confused. In 1978 a left-wing government seized power and began a modernization programme. However, in a country where Islamic authority was strong, changes such as equal status for men and women and the secularization of society were seen as an affront to Islam. Opposition was fierce, and civil war soon broke out. In 1979 Soviet troops entered the country to support the government; they were afraid that if the regime was overthrown by a fundamentalist Muslim revolution, like the one in Iran in January 1979, this would stir up the millions of Muslims who were Soviet citizens and destabilize those republics with substantial Muslim populations.

The USSR expected a short campaign, but the US government treated it as part of the Cold War and sent extensive aid to the Muslim opposition in Afghanistan. There were several rival Muslim groups, but they all worked together – known collectively as the *Mujahideen* – to drive out the Russians. By 1986 the Mujahideen (meaning 'those who wage *jihad*') were receiving large amounts of weaponry via Pakistan from the USA and China, the most important of which were ground-to-air missiles, which had a devastating effect on the Afghan and Soviet air forces. One of the organizations fighting with the Mujahideen was al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, who, ironically, received training, weapons and cash from the USA.

Eventually Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, realized that he was in a similar situation to the one in which the Americans had found themselves in Vietnam. He had to acknowledge that the war in Afghanistan could not be won, and by February 1989 all Soviet troops had been withdrawn. Left to fend for itself, the socialist government of Afghanistan survived until 1992 when it was finally overthrown. The Mujahideen formed a coalition government, but the country soon fell into total chaos as the rival factions fought for power. During the later 1990s the faction known as 'the Taliban' (meaning 'students') gradually took control of the country, driving out rival groups area by area. The Taliban were a conservative Muslim faction made up of Pashtuns, the ethnic group in the south-east of the country, especially in the province of Kandahar. By the end of 2000 they controlled most of the country except the north-west, where they were opposed by the rival ethnic groups – Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazara – known as the 'Northern Alliance'.

The Taliban regime aroused international disapproval because of its extreme policies.

- Women were almost totally excluded from public life, and were prevented from continuing as teachers and doctors and in other professions.

- Harsh criminal punishments were introduced. For example, women were often publicly beaten for showing their ankles. Mass executions took place in public in the Ghazi football stadium.
- Its cultural policies seemed unreasonable: for example, music was banned. There was worldwide dismay when the regime ordered the destruction of two huge statues of Buddha carved into rocks and dating from the fourth and fifth centuries AD. Cultural experts regarded them as unique treasures, but the Taliban blew them up, claiming that they were offensive to Islam.
- The government allowed the country to be used as a refuge and training ground for Islamic militants, including Osama bin Laden.
- Because of a combination of the ravages of years of civil war and three consecutive years of drought, the economy was in ruins. There were severe food shortages as refugees, who could no longer sustain themselves on the land, flocked into the cities. Yet when the UN tried to distribute food supplies in Kabul, the capital, the government closed their offices down. They objected to foreign influence and to the fact that Afghan women were helping with the relief work.

Very few states recognized the Taliban regime, and its unpopularity provided a boost to the American plan to use force against it. On the other hand the Taliban succeeded in eliminating much of the corruption endemic in Afghan ruling circles, and they restored security on the roads. Writing in 2010, a British journalist, James Fergusson, who spent 14 years in Afghanistan, argued that

> the Taliban were never as uniformly wicked as they were routinely made out to be – and nor are they now. … The Taliban made some terrible mistakes, and I do not condone them. But I am also certain that we need a better understanding of how and why they made these mistakes before we condemn them.

(d) The Taliban overthrown

A joint US and UK operation against Afghanistan was launched on 7 October 2001. Taliban military targets and al-Qaeda camps were attacked with cruise missiles fired from ships. Later, American long-range bombers carried out raids on the centre of Kabul. Meanwhile troops of the Northern Alliance began an offensive against Taliban positions in the north-west. On 14 October the Taliban offered to hand bin Laden over to an intermediary state, though not directly to the USA. In return they demanded that the USA should stop the bombing. However, President Bush rejected this offer and refused to negotiate. At first the Taliban forces put up strong resistance, and at the end of the month they still controlled most of the country. During November, under pressure from the continued US air attacks and the Northern Alliance forces, the Taliban began to lose their grip. On 12 November they abandoned Kabul and were soon driven from their main power base – the province of Kandahar. Many fled into the mountains or over the border into Pakistan. The USA continued to bomb the mountain region, hoping to flush out bin Laden and his al-Qaeda fighters, but without success.

The USA and its allies had achieved one of their aims: the unpopular Taliban regime had gone; but bin Laden remained elusive and was still a free man in 2004. On 27 November 2001 a peace conference met in Bonn (Germany), under the auspices of the United Nations, to decide on a new government for Afghanistan. It was not easy to bring peace to this troubled country. Early in 2004 the central government of President Hamid Karzai in Kabul was struggling to impose its authority over troublesome warlords in the north. He was supported by US troops who were still pursuing the 'war on terror', and by

NATO troops, who were trying to keep the peace and help rebuild the country. But it was an uphill task; the most ominous development was that the Taliban had regrouped in the south and over the border in Pakistan, financed partly by rising heroin production. UN officials were worried that Afghanistan might once again turn into a 'rogue state' in the hands of drug cartels. As the violence continued, even the aid agencies came under attack. In the summer of 2004 the Médecins sans Frontières organization, which had been active in Afghanistan for a quarter of a century, decided to pull out; this was a serious blow for ordinary Afghans.

Nevertheless, the promised elections, held in November 2004, were able to go ahead largely peacefully, in spite of threats of violence from the Taliban. President Karzai was elected for a 5-year term; he won 55.4 per cent of the votes, which was not as much as he had hoped, but enough for him to claim that he now had legitimacy and a mandate from the people (for what happened next, see Section 12.5).

(e) Is the 'war on terror' a struggle between Islam and the West?

From the beginning of his campaign, Osama bin Laden claimed that it was part of a world-wide contest between the West and Islam. As early as 1996 he had issued a *fatwa* (a religious command) to all Muslims that they were to kill US military personnel in Somalia and Saudi Arabia. In 1998 he extended the *fatwa*: 'To kill Americans and their allies, civilian and military, is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.' When the attack on Afghanistan began, he tried to present it, not as a war against terrorism, but as a war against Afghanistan and against Islam in general. He urged Muslims living in countries whose governments had offered to help the USA to rise up against their leaders. He talked about revenge for the 80 years of humiliation which Muslims had suffered at the hands of the colonial powers: 'what America is tasting now is only a copy of what we have tasted'. Bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, said that 11 September had divided the world into two sides: 'the side of the believers and the side of infidels. Every Muslim has to rush to make his religion victorious.'

(f) What was bin Laden hoping to achieve from his campaign?

- He had special interests in Saudi Arabia, the country where he was brought up and educated. After his exploits fighting the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, he returned to Saudi Arabia, but soon clashed with the government, a conservative monarchy which, he felt, was too subservient to the USA. He believed that as a Muslim country, Saudi Arabia should not have allowed the deployment of US and other Western troops on its territory during the Gulf War of 1991, because this was a violation of the Holy Land of Islam (Mecca and Medina, the two most holy cities in Islam, are both situated in Saudi Arabia). The government took away his Saudi citizenship and he was forced to flee to the Sudan, which had a fundamentalist Muslim regime. Bin Laden therefore hoped to get rid of the American military bases, which were still in Saudi Arabia at the beginning of 2001. Secondly, he wanted to achieve the overthrow of the Saudi government and its replacement by an Islamic regime.
- By this time the Saudi regime was beginning to feel concerned as its popularity dwindled. Many of the younger generation were suffering unemployment and sympathized with bin Laden's anti-Americanism; this prompted the government to try to reduce its co-operation with the USA. Although it condemned the 11 September attacks, it was reluctant to allow US military aircraft to use its bases, and it took no active part in the campaign against Afghanistan. This annoyed the USA,

which proceeded to remove almost all its troops from Saudi Arabia and set up a new headquarters in Qatar. Bin Laden's first aim had been achieved, and the second looked distinctly possible as unrest increased and al-Qaeda groups operating in Saudi Arabia became stronger. There were an increasing number of attacks on compounds housing foreign personnel. Without American troops to prop them up, the Saudi regime seemed likely to face a difficult time.

- He hoped to force a settlement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: he supported the creation of a Palestinian state, and, ideally, wanted the destruction of the state of Israel. This had not been achieved by 2011, when bin Laden was killed by American agents while living in hiding in Pakistan. A settlement of any kind seemed remote, unless the USA were to decide to use its political and financial influence over Israel.
- He hoped to provoke a worldwide confrontation between the Islamic world and the West, so that ultimately all foreign troops and influence in the Muslim and Arab world would be eliminated. Some observers believe this was the reason he planned the 11 September attacks on the USA: he calculated that the Americans would respond with disproportionate violence, which would unite the Muslim world against them. Once Western influence and exploitation had been eliminated, the Muslim states could concentrate on improving conditions and alleviating poverty in their own way, and they would be able to introduce Sharia law – the ancient law of Islam – which, they claimed, had been supplanted by foreign influence.

(For a further discussion of the 'clash of civilizations' between the West and the Islamic world see Section 28.4.)

12.4 THE DOWNFALL OF SADDAM HUSSEIN

(a) Background to the attack on Iraq

After his defeat in the first Gulf War (1990–1), Saddam Hussein was allowed to remain in power (see Section 11.10(c)). He defeated uprisings of Kurds in the north and Shia Muslims in the south, where he was especially brutal in his treatment of the rebels. When refugees fled into the marshes, Saddam had the marshland drained, and many thousands of Shia were killed. He had already used chemical weapons in his war against Iran and against the Kurds, and was known to have a biological weapons programme. By 1995 Iraq had a well-advanced nuclear weapons programme. Although they were reluctant to remove Saddam Hussein because of the chaos that might follow, the USA and the UK tried to restrain him by continuing the trade embargo placed on Iraq by the UN soon after Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait. In 2000 these sanctions had been in place for ten years, but they seemed to have had little effect on Saddam; it was the ordinary people of Iraq who suffered because of shortages of food and medical supplies. In September 1998 the director of the UN relief programme in Iraq, Denis Halliday, resigned, saying that he could no longer carry out such an 'immoral and illegal' policy. In 1999, UNICEF reported that since 1990 over half a million children had died from malnutrition and lack of medicines as a direct result of sanctions.

However, sanctions did ensure that Saddam allowed inspections of his nuclear sites by members of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), authorized by a UN Security Council resolution. It was discovered that the Iraqis had all the components necessary to manufacture nuclear warheads, and that construction was actually under way. In 1998 the IAEA team destroyed all Saddam's nuclear sites and took away the equipment. At this point, however, there was no talk of removing Saddam from power, since he was

keeping the Kurds and Shias under control, and thereby preventing the destabilization of the region.

(b) The USA and UK prepare to attack

The warning signals came with President Bush's State of the Union address in January 2002 when he referred to the world's rogue states, which were a threat because of their 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMD). He described them as an 'axis of evil'; the states named were Iraq, Iran and North Korea. It soon became clear that the USA, encouraged by its relatively easy victory in Afghanistan, was about to turn its attentions to Iraq. The US media began to try to convince the rest of the world that Saddam Hussein presented a serious threat and that the only remedy was a 'regime change'. *The justifications put forward by the Americans for an attack on Iraq were the following*:

- Saddam had chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and was working on a programme to produce ballistic missiles which could fly more than 1200 km (thus breaking the 150 km limit); these were the missiles necessary for the delivery of weapons of mass destruction.
- The entire world situation had changed since 11 September (9/11); the war against terrorism required that states which supported and encouraged terrorist organizations should be restrained.
- Iraq was harbouring terrorist groups, including members of al-Qaeda, which had a training camp specializing in chemicals and explosives. Iraqi intelligence services were co-operating with the al-Qaeda network, and together they presented a formidable threat to the USA and its allies.
- The longer action was delayed, the greater the danger would become. Khidir Hamza, an Iraqi exile who had worked on his country's nuclear programme, told the USA in August 2002 that Saddam would have useable nuclear weapons by 2005. Some supporters of war compared the situation with the 1930s, when the appeasers failed to stand up to Hitler and allowed him to become too powerful.

(c) Opposition to the war

Although UK prime minister Tony Blair pledged support for a US attack on Iraq, there was much less enthusiasm in the rest of the world than there had been for the campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan. There were massive anti-war demonstrations in the UK, Australia and many other countries, and even in the USA itself. *Opponents of the war made the following points*.

- Given that all his nuclear facilities had been destroyed in 1998 and that even more stringent trade sanctions had been imposed, it was highly unlikely that Saddam had been able to rebuild his facilities for producing WMD. Scott Ritter, the chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq, stated (in September 2002) that 'Since 1998 Iraq has been fundamentally disarmed. 90–95 per cent of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction have been verifiably eliminated. This includes all of the factories used to produce chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and long-range ballistic missiles; the associated equipment of these factories; and the vast majority of products coming out of these factories.' Clearly Iraq was much less of a threat in 2002 than it had been in 1991. There was a feeling that the dangers had been exaggerated by exiled Iraqi opponents of Saddam, who were doing their utmost to pressure the USA into removing him.

- Even if Saddam had all these WMD, it was most unlikely that he would dare to use them against the USA and its allies. Such an attack by Saddam would certainly have ensured his rapid overthrow. Nor had Saddam invaded another state, as he had in 1990, therefore that justification could not be used for an attack on Iraq.
- There was insufficient evidence that Iraq was harbouring al-Qaeda terrorists. US military intervention would make the situation worse by fostering even more violent anti-Western feeling. Congressional reports published in 2004 concluded that critics of the war had been right: Saddam had no stocks of weapons of mass destruction and there were no links between Saddam, al-Qaeda and 9/11.
- War should be the last resort; more time should be given for the UN inspectors to complete their search for WMD. Any military action should be sanctioned by the UN.
- It was suggested that the real motives of the USA were nothing to do with the war against terrorism. It was simply a case of the world's only superpower blatantly extending its control more widely – 'maintaining global US pre-eminence'. A group of leading Republicans (the party of President Bush) had already in 1998 produced a document urging President Clinton to pursue a foreign policy that would shape the new century in a way 'favourable to American principles and interests'. They suggested 'the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power'. If Clinton failed to act, 'the safety of American troops in the region, of our friends and allies like Israel, and the moderate Arab states, and a significant proportion of the world's supply of oil will all be put at hazard. … American policy cannot continue to be crippled by a misguided insistence on unanimity in the UN security council.' Having recently removed most of their forces from Saudi Arabia, the Americans would find Iraq the perfect substitute, enabling the USA to continue exercising control over the region's oil supplies.

(d) The United Nations and the war

In view of the doubts being expressed, and under pressure from Tony Blair, President Bush decided to give the UN a chance to see what it could achieve. In November 2002 the UN Security Council approved a resolution (1441) calling on Saddam Hussein to disarm or 'face serious consequences'. The text was a compromise between the USA and the UK on one side, and France and Russia (who opposed a war) on the other. The resolution did not give the USA full authority to attack Iraq, but it clearly sent a strong message to Saddam as to what he might expect if he failed to comply. The Security Council would assess any failure by Iraq to comply with the new more stringent inspection demands. Iraq accepted the resolution and Hans Blix and his team of 17 weapons inspectors arrived back in the country after an absence of four years.

Bush and Blair were impatient at the delay, and in January 2003 Blair began to push for a second Security Council resolution which would authorize an attack on Iraq. Bush stated that although he would be happy with a second resolution, he did not consider it necessary; he argued that Resolution 1441 already gave the USA authority to attack Saddam. The USA, UK and Spain pressed for another resolution, while France, Russia and China were adamant that the weapons inspectors should be given more time before military action was taken. By the end of February 2003, Blix was reporting that the Iraqis were co-operating and had agreed to destroy some missiles which had been discovered. The USA, UK and Spain dismissed this information as a 'delaying tactic' by Saddam, although, in fact, early in March, Iraq began destroying missiles; this was described by Blix as 'a substantial measure of disarmament'. President Georges Chirac of France now made it clear that he would veto any Security Council resolution authorizing war against Iraq (10 March).

However, the Americans dismissed the objections of France and Germany contemptuously as 'old Europe' – out of touch with current trends. The USA, UK and Spain were determined to go ahead: they issued a joint ultimatum to Saddam giving him 48 hours to leave Iraq. When this was ignored, US and UK forces began air attacks and an invasion of southern Iraq from Kuwait (20 March). The USA claimed that 30 countries had agreed to join their coalition, though in the event, only the UK and Australia made any military contribution. As the invasion began, American historian Arthur Schlesinger wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*:

> The president has adopted a policy of 'anticipatory self-defence' that is alarmingly similar to the policy that Japan employed at Pearl Harbor, on a date which, as an earlier American president said it would, lives in infamy. Franklin D. Roosevelt was right, but today it is we Americans who live in infamy. ... The global wave of sympathy that engulfed the United States after 9-11 has given way to a global wave of hatred of American arrogance and militarism ... even in friendly countries, the public regards Bush as a greater threat to peace than Saddam Hussein.

(e) Saddam Hussein overthrown

Initially the invading forces made slower progress than had been expected, since some units of Iraqi troops put up strong resistance. US forces were hampered by the fact that Turkey had refused to allow US units to take up positions on its territory. This meant that it was impossible for the USA to mount a significant advance on Baghdad from the north. Forces advancing from the south were hampered by heavy desert sandstorms. By the end of March the expected swift victory had not yet been achieved; it was announced that the number of US troops would be doubled to 200 000 by the end of April. Meanwhile the assault on Baghdad by heavy bombers and cruise missiles continued. It emerged later that during the first four weeks of the attack, as many as 15 000 Iraqis were killed, of whom about 5000 were civilians.

International reaction to the invasion was mainly unfavourable. There were protest demonstrations throughout the Arab world, where the US action was seen simply as a blatant empire-building enterprise. An Iranian spokesman said it would lead to 'the total destruction of security and peace', while Saudi Arabia called for military occupation of Iraq to be avoided. Condemnation also came from Indonesia (which had the largest Muslim population in the world), Malaysia, France, Germany and Russia. However, a few countries expressed support, including the Philippines, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands; so did some of the former communist states of eastern Europe, notably Poland. This surprised many people, but the reason for it was simple: the USA had enormous prestige in their eyes because of the vital role it had played in the defeat of communism.

In early April the sheer weight and strength of the invaders began to tell. Iraqi units began to desert and resistance collapsed. US troops captured Baghdad, while the British took Basra, the main city in the south. On 9 April it was announced that Saddam's 24-year dictatorship was over, and the world was treated to television pictures of an American tank toppling a statue of Saddam in Baghdad, cheered on by a jubilant crowd (see Illus. 12.2). Saddam himself disappeared for the time being, but was captured in December 2003. On 1 May, President Bush declared that the war was over.

(f) The aftermath

The events of the year following the overthrow of Saddam were not what President Bush had been hoping for. *No weapons of mass destruction were found.* Worse than that, in

Illustration 12.2 **The sculpted head of Saddam Hussein sits in the middle of the road in Baghdad, Iraq, 10 April 2003**

January 2004 Paul O'Neill, a former US Treasury secretary who was sacked at the end of 2002 because he disagreed with the rest of the cabinet over Iraq, made some sensational revelations. He claimed that Bush had been determined to oust Saddam as far back as January 2001 when he took office, and that 11 September provided a convenient justification. Talk of the threat of weapons of mass destruction was merely a cover, since the cabinet knew perfectly well that Saddam had no such weapons of any significance. Thus the main justification for the war given by Bush and Blair seemed to have been invalidated.

As the US and UK occupation of Iraq went on, *the Iraqis, most of whom had at first been grateful for the removal of Saddam, became impatient.* There seemed little evidence of attempts at 'nation-building' by the Americans, whose methods of keeping order were often insensitive. Nor did they seem to have any clear plan for the future of Iraq.

Inevitably, anti-American feeling grew and by June 2003 armed resistance was well under way. At first attacks were carried out just by Saddam loyalists, but they were soon joined by other groups: nationalists who wanted their country to be free and independent, and Sunni Muslims who wanted some kind of Islamic state.

In the Arab world outside Iraq *there was a wave of anti-Americanism*. Militants flocked into the country to support their fellow Muslims against the USA, which they viewed as the great enemy of Islam. The violence escalated as suicide bombers, using the tactics of Hamas and Hezbollah, targeted UN headquarters, police stations, the Baghdad Hotel, Iraqis who co-operated with the Americans, and American military personnel; by the end of 2003, 300 American soldiers had been killed – since President Bush declared the war to be over. So although al-Qaeda fighters were probably not active in Iraq before the invasion, they certainly were in its aftermath. The Americans hoped that the capture of Saddam would bring about a reduction of violence, but it seemed to make little difference.

What did the resistance movement want? A spokesman for one of the nationalist groups said: 'We do not want to see our country occupied by forces clearly pursuing their own interests, rather than being poised to return Iraq to the Iraqis.' One of the things that infuriated Iraqis was the way in which American companies were being awarded contracts for reconstruction work in Iraq, to the exclusion of all other contractors.

It seemed as though the whole focus of international attention was directed towards Iraq. What happened there would have repercussions throughout the Middle East and the whole sphere of international relations. The dangers were enormous:

- In a country where there were so many different religious, ethnic and political groups, what hope was there that a strong government with a working majority would emerge from elections? If the country were to descend into civil war, like the Lebanon during the years 1975–87, what action would the Americans take?
- The al-Qaeda organization had been strengthened by the increase in anti-American and anti-Western feeling. There were also a number of new networks of Islamic militants, with bases in Europe as well as the Middle East. In 2004, London was named as an important centre for recruiting, fundraising and the manufacture of false documents. Islamic militant cells were reported in Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic. Terrorist attacks continued: even before the Iraq War, a bomb exploded on the resort island of Bali (part of Indonesia) killing almost 200 people, many of them Australian holidaymakers (October 2002). Indonesia was again the target in August 2003 when a bomb blast outside a US-owned hotel in Jakarta (the capital) killed ten Muslims, but only one European.
- The next target was Turkey, where Istanbul suffered four suicide-bomb attacks in five days. Two went off outside Jewish synagogues, one near the London-based HSBC bank, while the fourth badly damaged the British consulate, killing the UK consul-general. The attacks on UK targets were timed to coincide with a visit to London by President Bush. Altogether in the four attacks, for which al-Qaeda was blamed, around 60 people were killed, most of them local Turkish Muslims.
- In March 2004, some 200 people were killed in Madrid in multiple bomb attacks on four morning rush-hour trains. At first it was thought by the Spanish government to be the work of ETA – the Basque separatist movement; but it later became clear that the terrorists responsible were a Moroccan group allied to al-Qaeda; they had presumably acted in retaliation for the fact that Spain had supported the USA and UK in their attack on Iraq. The attacks had unexpected political results: in the Spanish general election held three days later, the government of José María Aznar, which had supported the war and had sent troops to Iraq, was defeated by the socialists, who had opposed the war. Only four weeks later, the new prime minister, José Luis Zapatero, withdrew all Spanish troops from Iraq.

- It was London's turn in July 2005, when four Muslim suicide bombers killed 52 people and injured almost 800 more on three Underground trains and a bus.
- While the Palestinian–Israeli dispute remained unsolved and American troops were in Iraq, there seemed little chance of an end to the 'war against terrorism'. Some observers suggested, as a first step, the withdrawal of American and British personnel from Iraq and their replacement by an interim UN administration backed by UN troops – from any country except the USA and the UK! In this way, the move towards democracy could be planned carefully, a constitution could be drawn up and elections conducted under UN auspices.

In 2004 most of the seasoned observers of the Middle East were saying the same thing: the USA, the world's most powerful state, must listen to what moderate Iraqis were saying if it wanted to avoid complete chaos in Iraq and the Middle East, and the prospect of another Vietnam. The situation continued to deteriorate; in April the Americans were faced with a full-scale Shia uprising led by the radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who wanted Iraq to become a Shia Islamic state. The Americans suffered further embarrassment and worldwide condemnation when stories emerged of Iraqi prisoners being tortured, abused and humiliated by American soldiers. Many Iraqis were transferred to the US detention centre at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, and there were regular newspaper reports of torture, unfair trials and suicides. In 2003, 117 prisoners were transferred to Guantánamo, joining over 600 detainees from several countries already there. Although President Barack Obama talked of closing the centre, it was still functioning at the beginning of 2012, when there were 171 inmates from 20 countries. It had taken over six years of detentions at Guantánamo before the US Supreme Court ruled (June 2008) that detainees had the right to challenge the legitimacy of their detention in the US federal court. Since then 38 men have been released after the court declared their detention illegal.

One of President Bush's main concerns was that he was due to face re-election in November 2004. It was important for him to bring the American involvement in Iraq to an end before then, if possible. It was decided to transfer authority to the Iraqis at the end of June 2004. The handover of power to an Iraqi interim government went ahead as planned, and some attempt was made to include representatives of all the different Iraqi groups. For example, the prime minister, Ayad Allawi, was a secular Shiite and leader of the Iraqi National Accord party; the president, Ajil al-Yawer, was a Sunni; there were two vice-presidents, one a Kurd, the other a leader of the Shiite Islamist Da'wa party. The UN Security Council unanimously approved a timetable for Iraq to move towards genuine democracy. Direct democratic elections to a Transitional National Assembly were to be held no later than the end of January 2005. The Assembly would draw up a permanent constitution, under the terms of which a new democratic government was to be elected by the end of 2005. This went ahead as planned, and in the elections of December 2005, almost 77 per cent of eligible Iraqis actually voted.

The Shiite Islamic Iraqi Alliance emerged as the largest group, while the Kurdistan Alliance came second; altogether 12 different groups were represented, but ominously, most Sunni Muslims boycotted the elections. This meant that the Shia majority, who had been oppressed under Saddam, were now in a strong position, although they would need to form alliances with some of the smaller parties, since many important decisions required a two-thirds majority in parliament.

Unfortunately violence continued as Sunni militants, who included many Saddam supporters, fought Shias, and insurgents attacked American and British forces which were still there, ostensibly to support the Iraqi army. It was now clear that the Americans had made a bad mistake when, almost as soon as the occupation began, they had disbanded the Iraqi army. This meant that there were large numbers of men with military training with nothing to do except join in the insurgency against the foreigners. The situation also

attracted al-Qaeda supporters from outside Iraq, who were experts at terrorist acts and were quick to seize the opportunity to strike at the detested Americans. In 2007 President Bush sent more troops to Iraq, bringing the total American force to 150 000. For a time it seemed as though this 'surge', as it was called, was managing to reduce the violence; consequently in June 2009 American troops were formally withdrawn from the streets of Baghdad. Predictably, violence soon increased again, with bombings, shootings and kidnappings everyday occurrences. Before long, however, Iraqi security forces, trained by the Americans, seemed to be getting the upper hand, and by the end of 2009 the government reported that civilian deaths were at the lowest level since the invasion in 2003. In December 2011 the war was formally declared to be over, and American troops withdrew into Kuwait, fulfilling the commitment that President Obama had given at the beginning of his presidency.

Sadly, however, within a few weeks, the bright new democratic state that was meant to take over from the Saddam dictatorship was in grave difficulties. Various sectarian conflicts which had lain dormant for many years had now erupted again, and warlords and militias seemed to be out of control. In January 2012 the prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, a Shia, accused the vice-president, Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni, of organizing terrorist attacks. A warrant was issued for his arrest, forcing him to flee into the Kurdish area in northern Iraq. This was seen by the Sunnis as the beginning of Maliki's campaign to eliminate non-Shia rivals one by one, in order to strengthen the Shia grip on power. The Sunnis responded with a wave of attacks: in January alone 170 people were killed in car and suicide bombings. The dead were mainly Shia Muslims, some of them pilgrims travelling to visit holy sites. Although the level of violence was not as serious as in the dark days of 2006, Iraq was still facing a crisis. There seemed to be three possible ways forward:

- Partition the country into three separate states – for the Shia, the Sunnis and the Kurds. This would delight the Kurds, who have large oil reserves in their territory; but it would mean the end of the state of Iraq.
- Introduce a federal system in which the regions have more control over their internal affairs and Baghdad's power is much less. The two Sunni areas of Anbar and Diyyala are strongly in favour of this solution.
- Continue with the present system and try to make it work more efficiently. Malaki favours this alternative because that would preserve Shia control, always providing that the other groups can be forced or persuaded to co-operate.

There were economic problems, too. In August 2009 the *New York Times* reported that Iraq's rich agricultural system had been completely devastated during the American and British occupation. During the 1980s Iraq was self-sufficient in producing wheat, rice, fruit, vegetables, sheep and poultry. They exported textiles and leather goods, including shoes. 'Slowly, Iraq's economy has become based almost entirely on imports and a single commodity, oil.' In 2010 oil exports made up around 95 per cent of Iraq's revenue; this left the country vulnerable and dependent on highly volatile markets.

12.5 THE CONTINUING WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

President Karzai was elected in 2004 for a five-year term, and his task was a difficult one. His new slogan was 'national participation'. He aimed to build a government of moderates, and he immediately launched a campaign to sideline the warlords, to clean up the drug trafficking, and to persuade farmers to switch to other crops instead of growing opium poppies. But as the Taliban insurgency gathered pace, so did the return to opium as the main cash crop. By 2007 about half the country's gross domestic product came from

illegal drugs. The attempts by NATO forces to control the crop only led to further violence. By this time it was clear to many observers that it was highly unlikely that the Taliban could be defeated militarily; Karzai himself admitted that he had tried without success to open negotiations with the Taliban. His first message to newly elected US President Obama was a heartfelt plea to stop the bombing of civilians. This was soon after coalition troops had bombed a wedding party in Kandahar, allegedly killing 40 people. There was no reply from the White House. Some NATO members were beginning to think about reducing their troop numbers in the coalition force.

Presidential elections were due in 2009 and were held amid a major security operation mounted by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), established by the UN Security Council. There was a low turnout at only about 30 per cent; in some areas in the south the turnout was almost non-existent. In one district in Helmand province, four British soldiers were killed for the sake of just 150 votes. Karzai won a narrow victory over his main rival, Abdullah Abdullah, but the whole process was marred by massive fraud on all sides, most of all on behalf of Karzai, much to NATO's embarrassment. Meanwhile Taliban military successes continued and in many areas they set up shadow administrations with their own law courts. Karzai again called for peace talks with Taliban leaders, but this scandalized other opposition leaders who believed that the Taliban would insist on scrapping the democratic constitution. As violence continued, US president Obama announced the deployment of another 30 000 troops in Afghanistan in 2010, to stay for two years.

In May 2011 Osama bin Laden was killed by a US special operations unit. He had been living in hiding for some years with his family and al-Qaeda members in a large purpose-built compound in Pakistan. The American unit travelled by helicopters from Afghanistan, shot bin Laden and several others, and then flew out again, taking bin Laden's body with them. The assassination brought mixed reactions: there were celebrations across the USA, though a poll taken shortly afterwards showed that 60 per cent of those polled were afraid that it would increase the danger of terrorist attacks in America. A leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt said that the death of bin Laden completed the NATO mission in Afghanistan, and therefore all foreign troops should be withdrawn. One of the Hamas leaders in Gaza condemned the killing, describing bin Laden as 'an Arab holy warrior'. The government of Pakistan was criticized in the West because it had given shelter and protection to bin Laden (which it denied), and by Arabs for allowing the Americans into the country to carry out the killing.

The USA and NATO paid no heed to the Egyptian advice about withdrawing from Afghanistan. The war continued and by the end of 2011 the Taliban had acquired the support of another insurgent group, the Haqqani Network. This was based in the Waziristan area of Pakistan and operated across the frontier into Afghanistan. In response the Americans were training and arming local tribal militias in the hope that they would police their own communities. However, local people and the Taliban were soon complaining that these militias were out of control and were operating above the law. This did not bode well for the coalition forces, since it was to get rid of out-of-control militias that the Taliban came into being in 1994. Outright military victory over the insurgents seemed less and less likely. Even with the extra NATO troops in action there were still not enough of them to establish real security. A NATO summit meeting was held in Lisbon in November 2011 at which secret plans were drawn up for troop withdrawals. David Cameron publicly promised that all 10 000 UK troops would be withdrawn by 2015. By this time Washington had signalled its support for President Karzai's attempts to begin talks with the Taliban, though President Obama himself was not keen on starting direct talks. His problem was that, thanks to all the earlier misinformation and propaganda by US politicians and the media, most Americans made no distinction between the Taliban and al-Qaeda and therefore regarded both of them as nothing but terrorists; with an election

due in November 2012 he needed to be careful not to be seen to be appeasing terrorists. James Fergusson sums the situation up very well, though not everybody will agree with his conclusion:

> At least the possibility of talks is firmly on the table now – and neither side can afford to ignore indefinitely the wishes of the war-weary Afghan people, who have suffered more than any other group in this conflict. At least 11,400 civilians have been killed since 2001, and the casualty rate is still accelerating. No wonder 83 per cent of Afghans are now in favour of talks. Who would not choose compromise and the chance of peace over continued war, poverty and corruption? The alternative is to persevere with a war that looks increasingly unwinnable. If ordinary Afghans are ready to give the Taliban the benefit of the doubt, is it not time that the West did too?

12.6 THE PROBLEM OF IRAN

(a) The Islamic Republic

After the revolution of 1979 and the overthrow of the Shah, the charismatic Ayatollah Khomeini became leader. As a Shia Muslim cleric, he was soon able to transform the revolution, which had started as a protest movement against the Shah, into an Islamic revolution, culminating in an Islamic republic. But first there were sensational events. There was widespread fear in Iran that the Americans would try to restore the Shah to the throne, as they had done once before in 1953. In November 1979 a party of radical Khomeini supporters attacked the American embassy in Tehran and took 66 Americans hostage. Most of them were not released until early in 1981, after long negotiations and a failed rescue attempt in which eight Americans were killed and six helicopters lost. The two main characteristics of Islamic government, at least in Khomeini's view, were the primacy of divine law over all citizens, and the principle of democracy. However, in practice this meant that Khomeini acted as an autocratic ruler and became the symbol of opposition to the less desirable aspects of Western civilization and culture. Unfortunately most of Khomeini's time in power was dominated by the war with Iraq (see Section 11.9), which lasted from 1980 until 1989. At the end of it Iran was in a sorry state: the economy was in ruins, vital revenue from oil sales had been lost, much of industry had been put out of action and inflation was running at over 30 per cent. Khomeini died in 1989, before the attack on Iraq and the downfall of Saddam Hussein in 1991.

The new president, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, was able to take some advantage from this war. It meant that Iraq was removed from the political equation of the region for the time being, and it enabled Iran to rebuild and recover from the destruction of the earlier war. He won in the 1992 elections and shared power with the religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The economy gradually recovered, there were great improvements in public services, education and literacy and the government did its best to encourage birth control. But on the negative side, women were discriminated against regularly, wages were low and poverty widespread. In foreign affairs Iran was extremely hostile towards the USA and supported Hezbollah. In retaliation President Clinton condemned the Iranians on the grounds that they were organizing terrorism and harbouring terrorists. Meanwhile the Iranians were busy rearming and were considering developing nuclear weapons. It was felt that this was justified by the fact that so far Israel was the only state in the Middle East to possess nuclear armaments, so Iran needed them to act as a deterrent.

The 1997 presidential election was won by Muhammad Khatami, a more moderate leader than Rafsanjani; Khatami was in favour of liberalization and reform. He brought a more relaxed approach to both domestic and foreign policy. His government was more

tolerant towards ordinary people: he believed in freedom of expression and punishments were less severe. He was soon popular with the unemployed and with the younger generation, many of whom were tired of the strict religious regime of the Ayatollahs. Abroad he improved relations with the European Union and with the Arab states. He even adopted a gentler attitude towards the USA. However, he was hampered by the intolerant religious right and also by the slump in the world price of oil, which made up around 90 per cent of revenue from Iran's exports. Khatami was re-elected in 2001 but had to face increasing opposition from the conservative clergy in parliament who did their best to undermine his efforts at reform. Liberal newspapers were banned and in the end Khatami was able to achieve very little. His support dwindled and in July 2003 there were anti-government demonstrations in Tehran. Lack of progress resulted in a steady growth of political apathy among the younger generation.

The presidential election of 2005 was won by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had previously been Mayor of Tehran. He had caused controversy by reversing many of the reforms introduced by earlier mayors. According to Hooman Majd, an Iranian writer now resident in the USA, Ahmadinejad was a president in the 'common man' style. He represented the superstitions and prejudices of the ordinary Iranian – fiercely nationalist and conservative, but somewhat anti-clerical. 'At times,' Majd writes, 'he has seemed to be almost taunting the mullahs and ayatollahs.' However, he did kiss the Ayatollah Khamenei's hand during his authorization ceremony, to show that he acknowledged his superior status. Ahmadinejad soon set about reversing the few reforms that Khatami had managed to achieve. His foreign policy was uncompromising: Iran resumed its nuclear programme (see the next section), which he defended at the UN General Assembly soon after his election. Yet his domestic policies were not as successful as many had hoped. For example, his 2005 promise to put Iran's oil wealth 'on the people's dinner table or picnic rug' had not been kept by the time the next election arrived in 2009. The best that had been achieved in that direction was the distribution to the poor of surplus potatoes from government stocks. This provoked only ridicule: during the 2009 election campaign, opposition supporters carried banners which read: 'Death to Potatoes'.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the election of June 2009, taking 63 per cent of votes cast. The result was immediately challenged; millions of people simply did not believe it, and the regime was accused of fraud. Anti-government demonstrations began soon after the result was announced and within a few days, millions of people were on the streets, many of them dressed in green. The opposition became known as the Green Movement. Khamenei applauded the election result and warned that serious repercussions would follow if the streets were not cleared. When this was ignored, troops fired on the crowds and attacked a section of Tehran University where some of the Green leaders were based. Over a hundred young people were killed in one day. At least one highly respected jurist, Hossein Ali Montazeri, declared that the election was null and void and that Ahmadinejad had no authority. Demonstrations continued into 2010, but the regime did not panic. The Greens were eventually outnumbered, outmanoeuvred and overwhelmed. Gradually attention focused on external events, including the threat of Israeli expansion and American protests at Iran's nuclear programme. For a time this rallied support behind the regime, but in February 2011 thousands of Green supporters defied a government ban and staged a massive demonstration in support of the 'Arab Spring' uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. The fact that both these regimes were ousted later in the year did nothing to calm the Islamic republic.

In the spring of 2012 the situation was confused. People were tired of all the restrictions on civil liberty, for which they blamed the government. There were also economic problems caused by US and EU sanctions imposed in protest against Iran's nuclear programme. Most Iranians blamed the USA for this; American talk of attacks on their nuclear installations stimulated the Iranians' feelings of patriotism. Russia and China both supported Iran;

President Vladimir Putin of Russia claimed that the West's real motive was to overthrow the Islamic republic. One of the US aims was to spread democracy around the world; yet Iran already had a more or less functioning democracy and a democratically elected government, flawed though the 2009 election might well have been.

(b) Iran and its nuclear programme

Iran already had nuclear technology before the 1979 revolution. An atomic research centre was set up in 1967 under the auspices of Tehran University. The Shah himself was keen for Iran to have nuclear power, and in 1974 the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) was founded. The Shah insisted that the nuclear programme was for entirely peaceful purposes, and Iran signed the Non-Proliferation Treaties (NPT) which said that countries which already had nuclear weapons (the USA, the USSR, China, France and Britain) could keep them, but no other country could join. In return they would supply peaceful economic technology and would themselves move towards disarmament. The government of the new Islamic republic stopped the nuclear programme on the grounds that it was far too expensive and required foreign expertise to operate. Ayatollah Khomeini wanted Iran to be able to 'go it alone'. Before long, however, there were serious power shortages and the government was forced to announce a U-turn. But the situation had changed: following the kidnappings at the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979, the USA imposed economic and military sanctions on Iraq and put pressure on the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) not to get involved with Iran. In 1988 Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, who at that point was chairman of the Iranian parliament, appealed to Iranian scientists working abroad to come home – it was their patriotic duty to work on the nuclear programme. The government continued to insist publicly that it had no plans to acquire nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, as David Patrikarakos points out (in *Nuclear Iran: The Birth of an Atomic State*):

> Iran certainly had reason to want a bomb. It was extremely unpopular with one of the world's two superpowers and fighting a war with Iraq. The international community's silence about Iraq's invasion and its subsequent use of chemical weapons, as well as the tacit US and near universal Arab support of Iraq during the war, all seemed to confirm that Iran could trust no one. It is likely that Iran launched a covert weapons programme about this time.

He goes on to explain that during the 1990s the nuclear programme began to concentrate on uranium enrichment and plutonium production, both classic ways of making a bomb. The government also resolved that by 2005, at least 20 per cent of Iran's energy should come from nuclear power. In 1990 Iran signed nuclear co-operation agreements with Russia and China. By 2000 the AEOI was secretly well under way with its uranium-enriching programme at the nuclear plant at Arak.

However, not all Iranians were happy at the direction their nuclear programme was taking. In August 2002 an opposition group made public details of the Arak plant and of another nuclear site at Natanz. There was immediate consternation in the West, which was now convinced that Iran was on the verge of producing a nuclear weapon. Britain, France and Germany, encouraged by the USA, demanded that Iran should give up uranium enrichment, which was the quickest way of making a nuclear bomb. The request was rejected and since 2005 Iran has refused to negotiate about it. *President Ahmadinejad mounted a strong defence of Iran's policy at the UN General Assembly in 2005. He denounced what he called the West's 'nuclear apartheid';* throughout his two terms as

president (2005–13) he seemed to delight in irritating the Americans by making the enrichment programme into an icon of patriotism.

In fact, although support for the nuclear programme was more or less universal in Iran, there were disagreements over whether it should concentrate on producing bombs or whether the priority should be the production of electricity. During the 2009 election campaign there was criticism of Ahmadinejad's deliberately confrontational style which, it was felt, only further antagonized the West. Although he won the election, possibly fraudulently, many observers felt that he had become isolated and diminished. According to the IAEA, at the end of 2011 Iran had enough uranium at the Natanz site to make four nuclear bombs, but it admitted that there was no definite proof that they had actually produced a bomb. The Iranians insisted that the enriched uranium was intended for medical isotopes. By February 2012 the IAEA's tone had changed. An inspection in January had shown that the Iranians had experimented on making warhead designs and they had also significantly stepped up the production of enriched uranium. They had not co-operated fully with the investigation and had refused to allow inspectors to visit certain sites. Even so, *there was still no incontrovertible evidence of weapons production,* and some experts believed that working on its own, Iran would be unable to make a bomb before 2015 at the earliest.

Tensions mounted as threats and counter-threats flew around. The USA was said to have drawn up plans to attack Iran's nuclear sites. Iran announced that oil exports would be cut off to any country that backed the USA. This caused panic in Europe and sent petrol prices soaring. Israel threatened to make a pre-emptive strike against Iran, and Iran responded by promising to attack any country that allowed bombers of whatever nationality to use their bases for attacks on Iran.

12.7 THE ARAB SPRING

The series of anti-government protests and demonstrations known as the Arab Spring began in **Tunisia** on 18 December 2010; in less than a month, president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had fled to Saudi Arabia after 23 years in power (14 January 2011). Encouraged by the rapid success of the revolution in Tunisia, a wave of unrest and violence swept across North Africa and the Middle East in countries where the lack of democracy had enabled leaders to stay in power for many years. In **Egypt** president Hosni Mubarak resigned (14 February 2011) after 30 years in control. In **Algeria** the government survived after agreeing to allow more civil liberties and to end the state of emergency which had been in operation for 19 years (April 2011). King Abdullah II of **Jordan** responded to protests by sacking two consecutive prime ministers and promising reforms, though there was still dissatisfaction with the slow progress of change. President Omar Al-Bashir of **the Sudan** was forced to announce that he would not stand for re-election when his term ran out in 2015. In **Yemen** President Ali Abdullah Saleh hung on through almost a year of demonstrations and shootings, and an assassination attempt that left him seriously injured. Finally he was forced to stand down, though not before close on 2000 people had been killed. The agreement allowed him and his family safe passage into Saudi Arabia (November 2011). Even the apparently completely stable, ultra-conservative **Saudi Arabia** saw a few gentle protests which prompted the elderly King Abdullah to promise reforms. In **Bahrain,** a small island off the coast of Saudi Arabia, beginning in March 2011, there was a series of violent pro-democracy protests by the majority Shia who felt discriminated against by the ruling Sunni al-Khalifa dynasty. Reconciliation talks began in July and King Hamad promised reforms. But actual progress was slow, and civil war was still raging in January 2013.

Eventually the revolutionary protests spread to two of the largest states in the region – Libya and Syria. In **Libya** Colonel Muammar Gaddafi had been in power for 42 years and

had expressed support for both Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak before they were forced out. Time was running out for Gaddafi too: in October 2011 he was captured and killed in cold blood by revolutionaries, but it had taken a full-scale civil war in which around 30 000 people lost their lives. **Syria** had been ruled by the Baathist regime since 1963 and the state of emergency imposed at that time was still in place. Serious uprisings began in March 2011 when some children were arrested and allegedly tortured for writing anti-government slogans on walls in the southern city of Daraa. Protests rapidly spread to the capital, Damascus, and to other cities, including Homs. President Bashar al-Assad showed very little willingness to make concessions – security forces responded harshly and army tanks stormed several cities. By the end of 2011 the most determined opposition was concentrated in Homs, the third largest city in Syria with a population of about a million. Here the district of Baba Amr was occupied and controlled by revolutionaries. But in February 2012 Assad ordered a deadly all-out attack on Baba Amr, arousing condemnation and calls for him to step down from the West and from the UN. These were ignored, and in early March the revolutionaries were driven out of Homs. The situation is still ongoing.

(a) What caused the Arab Spring?

There were a whole host of causes and motives behind the protests. The lack of genuine democracy in most countries, except Iran and Turkey, meant that dictators and absolute monarchs had been able to stay in power for long periods, like Colonel Gaddafi, who had ruled Libya for 40 years. Inevitably there was corruption at the top levels, concentration of wealth in the hands of the ruling classes, and human rights violations. In the last couple of decades there had been some progress in most of these countries. Living standards had risen, education had become more widespread and the younger generation was computer-literate. This only added to the problem: these educated young people resented the lack of opportunities and jobs, the immense gap between the wealthy elite and the rest of the population, and the corruption, and now they had the skills, using social networking internet sites, to organise strikes and demonstrations more effectively. High food prices in 2010 caused great hardship among the already poverty-stricken unemployed workers. It was no coincidence that a number of the leaders under attack, including President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and President al-Assad of Syria, were pro-western dictators supported by the USA. Events in Tunisia leading to the rapid overthrow of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011 sparked off similar protests and uprisings that made up the Arab Spring. A closer look at four of these will show examples of the different forms and outcomes that occurred across the region.

(b) Tunisia

In December 2010 a young college graduate, Mohammed Bouazizi, who had been unable to find a job, was trying to sell fruit and vegetables at a roadside stand in the town of Sidi Bouzid. But he had no permit because they were expensive, and the police confiscated his goods. Driven to desperation, on 17 December he doused himself with petrol and set himself alight on the street. Although he was alive when passers-by managed to extinguish the flames, he was badly burned and died a month later. There were immediate protest demonstrations which quickly spread to other towns. In the capital, Tunis, demonstrators attacked police cars and set government buildings on fire. Their grievances were the high unemployment rate which stood at 30 per cent for those between 15 and 29, rising prices, general lack of freedom of expression and the obvious wealth and extravagant lifestyle of the president and his family. Tensions were increased when Wikileaks released a secret

cable sent from the US embassy in Tunis to Washington. This talked of corruption at the highest levels and claimed that the Ben Ali family ran the country like a kind of Mafia.

President Ben Ali appeared on television vowing to punish all rioters, though he did promise that more jobs would be created. He also complained that riots would damage the tourist industry, one of Tunisia's main sources of income. Tunisia had no oil revenue, which meant that the government could not afford to buy off the protesters by raising wages, paying unemployment benefit and building new homes, as King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia did. Consequently demonstrations and riots continued and at least 200 people were killed by police and security forces. With no prospect of an end to the violence, Ben Ali decided it was time to leave: on 14 January 2011, after 23 years in power, he fled the country and took refuge in Saudi Arabia.

A caretaker government was hurriedly put together, consisting mainly of members of Ben Ali's party (the Constitutional Democratic Rally – RCD) plus five members of opposition groups, with Mohammed Ghannouchi as prime minister. With the government still dominated by the 'old gang', very little progress could be made, and protests continued. The five new members soon resigned in exasperation, and on 27 January Ghannouchi reshuffled his government. All the RCD members were dropped, except Ghannouchi himself, who remained prime minister. The party was eventually dissolved and its assets were seized. But by this time the momentum was so strong that none of these moves satisfied the protesters. At the end of February Ghannouchi at last acknowledged defeat and resigned. A former opposition leader, Beji Caid el Sebsi, became prime minister; one of his first actions was to release all political prisoners, and almost immediately the situation became calmer.

In October 2011 people were allowed to vote for representatives to a constituent assembly which would draw up a new constitution. Ennahda, a moderate Islamist party, emerged as the largest single grouping. They formed a coalition with two smaller secular parties, Ettakatol and the Congress for the Republic Party. In December the new interim government elected Moncef Marzouki as president for one year. He was a secularist and a highly respected figure mainly because of his fearless opposition to Ben Ali. In 1994 he had been imprisoned for having tried to run against Ben Ali in the presidential election. After his release he was forced to go into exile in France. As president he would share power with Prime Minister Hamali Jebali of Ennahda. Many secularists were unhappy about this, complaining that the Islamists would undermine Tunisia's liberal values. However, Ennahda denied any such intention and insisted that they would rule in the same way as the successful moderate Islamic government in Turkey. In January 2012, as Tunisia celebrated the first anniversary of Ben Ali's overthrow, there were still serious problems facing the new government. The main one was high unemployment – the national average was just under 20 per cent, but in some inland areas as high as 50 per cent.

(c) Egypt

There were many similarities between the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings. Hosni Mubarak had been president in Egypt even longer than Ben Ali in Tunisia. Mubarak had come to power in 1981 after the assassination of the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Although he had been re-elected numerous times, only the 2005 election had been contested. In the parliamentary elections of November 2010 the moderate Islamic group, the Muslim Brotherhood, lost almost all its seats. They claimed that the election had been rigged, and it left Mubarak's party in almost total control. The next presidential election was due in September 2011 and it seemed clear that Mubarak would win. On 17 January 2011 a man set fire to himself outside parliament in Cairo, emulating the example of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia, who was now seen as a martyr. Six more self-immolations soon

followed and Mohamed El Baradei, an opposition leader and former UN nuclear weapons inspection chief, warned that this could unleash a 'Tunisia-style explosion'. Activists began to organize a national 'day of anger' to protest about unemployment, poor living standards, the tough methods of the security forces and the lack of genuine democracy.

On 25 January 2011 the protest was launched: in Tahrir Square in Cairo, and in other cities there were the largest demonstrations seen for a generation, and their demand was simple – 'Mubarak resign'. In response Mubarak ordered a crackdown. Security forces attacked the protesters, using tear gas and beatings, and hundreds were arrested. After four days of violence Mubarak appeared on television and announced that he had sacked his government, that he was committed to democracy, but that he would continue as president. This did nothing to satisfy the protesters, and on 30 January, as the crowds gathered in Tahrir Square to defy a night-time curfew, El Baradei called on the president to step down immediately. El Baradei was now in a strong position; he had gained the support of the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups and he called on the army to negotiate about a regime change, raising the possibility of the army playing a role in government.

By this time the USA and the EU were seriously concerned about the situation. President Mubarak was seen as an invaluable ally in the Middle East. So long as he remained in power, he would keep out the Islamists. 'What we don't want', said Hilary Clinton, the American secretary of state, 'are radical ideologies to take control of a very large and important country in the Middle East.' Yet they had to admit that the Egyptian people had genuine grievances. Both Americans and Europeans agreed that Egypt needed political reform and an orderly transition to democratic government. There seems no doubt that this decision was communicated to Mubarak himself and the first step in the transition must be the resignation of the president himself, though not necessarily immediately. Consequently on 1 February 2011, the 82-year-old Mubarak announced that he would stand down – but not yet! He would stay until the end of his term in September, so that he could oversee the transition himself. Even that was too long for the protesters, who were still camped in their thousands in Tahrir Square and made no effort to disperse. The following day thousands of Mubarak supporters invaded the square, attacking the activists with clubs, knives, bats, spears and whips, some of them riding camels and horses. Casualties were high, but the attackers failed to dislodge the protesters, who seemed to grow in number. Since the protests had begun in January about 800 people had lost their lives. This time the regime tried to bribe the revolutionaries by announcing wage and pensions increases of 15 per cent. For the first time in 30 years a vice-president, Omar Suleiman, was appointed. On 10 February Mubarak announced that he had handed over all presidential powers to the vice-president. Again it was all to no avail; as one spokesman said: 'Our main object is for Mubarak to step down. We don't accept any other concessions.' With his main supporter, the USA, becoming more and more restive at the apparent stalemate, Mubarak finally bowed to the inevitable: Suleiman announced that Mubarak had resigned and had handed power over the armed forces of Egypt (11 February 2011). A *Guardian* newspaper report described the scene as the news was broadcast: 'A few moments later a deafening roar swept central Cairo. Protesters fell to their knees and prayed, wept and chanted. Hundreds of thousands of people packed into Tahrir Square, the centre of the demonstrations, waving flags, holding up hastily written signs declaring victory, and embracing soldiers.'

The military immediately dissolved parliament and suspended the constitution, and on 4 March appointed a civilian, Essam Sharaf, as prime minister. But there was a long way to go before complete calm could be restored and a democratic and stable system introduced. The new government began well: Mubarak's National Democratic party was dissolved and its assets taken over by the state. The hated state security agency, which was responsible for most of the human rights violations, was abolished and the 30-year state of

emergency was lifted. A trouble-free referendum was held in which 77 per cent of voters supported changes to the constitution which would enable genuinely democratic elections to be held for parliament and the presidency within the next six months. But it gradually became clear that the generals had decided to keep permanent control. When further demonstrations were held protesting about the slow progress of reforms, the army clamped down again, arresting thousands and injuring several hundred people in Tahrir Square (29 June). Mubarak's emergency laws were reintroduced, causing yet more protests. The announcement that elections would be held on 28 November did nothing to soothe the opposition. They were convinced that any elections would be fixed to enable remnants of the old regime to stay in power.

In October 2011 there was an ominous new development. Between 10 and 15 per cent of Egypt's 82 million population are Coptic Christians. In the past they had often been attacked by Muslim fundamentalists, although Mubarak had been sympathetic towards them. During the anti-Mubarak demonstrations, Muslims and Christians had worked together and protected each other. Now there began a series of anti-Christian riots and attacks on churches in Cairo and Alexandria. It was reported that in some places soldiers had stood by and watched, or had even encouraged the attackers. Christians held a protest march in Cairo and were attacked by security forces; 24 Christians were killed and at least 500 injured. The Muslim Brotherhood, a moderate Islamist party, condemned the attacks on churches and criticized the military government for the lack of progress towards democracy. Consequently, the promised elections went ahead peacefully on 28 November, and as expected, the Muslim Brotherhood Freedom and Justice party won more seats than any other party in parliament. Together with the other smaller Islamist groups they formed a clear majority over the more liberal political groups that had emerged during the uprisings. The main function of this parliament, which was due to meet in March 2012, was to draw up a new constitution. However, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) announced that they, and not the MPs, would have the final say over the new constitution. This naturally brought them into confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood, and violent clashes followed in Tahrir Square. But the army had its way: under the new arrangements the president was to have much less power. In the presidential election of June 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohammed Morsi, won a narrow victory. It was not long before he took steps to bring the army under control: in August 2012 he dismissed two of the most powerful military men, making it clear that he intended to ensure that Egypt moved towards an effective democracy.

(d) Libya

Leading a small group of junior officers, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi seized power in Libya in 1969 in a bloodless coup. They took their opportunity when King Idris of Libya, who was regarded as being too pro-West, was away in Turkey for medical treatment. The Libyan Arab Republic was proclaimed and Gaddafi remained at the head of the government until his overthrow in 2011. Libya was fortunate to have large oil reserves, and Gaddafi, who described himself as a socialist, began to spend much of the oil revenues on policies to modernize and develop the country. By 1990 the Libyans could claim that their country was the most advanced in Africa. Everything was centrally planned: there were job-creation schemes, welfare programmes providing free education and healthcare; there were more hospitals and more doctors. There were vast housing projects – in some areas the populations of entire villages living in mud-hut-style shanty towns were moved into new modern homes complete with electricity, running water and even satellite television. Women were given equal rights with men, the literacy rate rose from something like 12 per cent to nearer 90 per cent and the child mortality rate fell to only 15 per thousand live

births, whereas the average for Africa was about 125 per thousand. Libya had the highest overall living standards in Africa, and it was achieved without any foreign loans.

In spite of all this success Gaddafi still had his critics. He was much less popular in the east of the country, which lagged behind the rest in social and economic progress. There were poverty-stricken areas without fresh water and efficient sewage systems. Gaddafi was accused of spending too much of Libya's income on his own family and his close circle of supporters, all of whom had conspicuously lavish lifestyles. He also faced hostility from abroad: during the 1970s it emerged that Gaddafi had stocks of chemical weapons, including nerve gas. He was known to be trying to buy weapons of mass destruction from China and later from Pakistan, though without success. The USA and the West were suspicious of his intentions, especially as he was known to be financing militant anti-Western Islamist and Communist organizations and made no secret of the fact that he was supplying the IRA with bombs. In 1984 the UK broke off diplomatic relations with Libya after a protest demonstration by anti-Gaddafi Libyans outside the Libyan embassy in London ended in violence. Shots were fired from inside the embassy, killing a British policewoman. Libya was now viewed as a pariah state by the USA and the West, and many countries imposed economic sanctions. More bomb outrages followed, including an attack on a nightclub in Berlin. Gaddafi denied any involvement in this incident, but US president Ronald Reagan used it as the pretext for bombing Tripoli, the Libyan capital, and Benghazi in the east, killing around a hundred civilians. A series of tit-for-tat incidents continued, culminating in the destruction of the American airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland in December 1988 (see Section 12.2(c)).

The collapse of the USSR and the fall of communism in eastern Europe changed the international situation. Gaddafi had usually been able to count on the support of the USSR in his anti-Western stance. Now he decided that it would be wise to try to improve relations with the West. He agreed to hand over two men alleged to have planted the bomb on the American airliner, and in 1999 they went on trial. He also promised to pay $2.7 billion as compensation to the victims' families, and this had mostly been paid by 2003. The UN responded by lifting the trade and financial sanctions on Libya. Then in December 2003 Libya promised to renounce weapons of mass destruction and Gaddafi invited the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) to inspect and dismantle their nuclear installations. It was no coincidence that this offer came after Saddam Hussein of Iraq had been overthrown by the Americans and British. US president George W. Bush claimed that it was a direct consequence of the war in Iraq, and it seems likely that Gaddafi was afraid that, given half a chance, they would overthrow him too. In 2004 the IAEA inspectors were shown Libya's stockpiles of chemical weapons, including mustard gas, and allowed to visit nuclear installations. Relations between Libya and the West gradually improved: Gaddafi had successful meetings with several European leaders, and was even hugged by Tony Blair! In July 2009 he attended the G8 Summit in Italy where he met US president Barack Obama. Western countries had their own motives for working with Libya – mainly that they wanted Libyan oil and opportunities of lucrative investment in Libya.

It was ironic that at a time when Gaddafi was co-operating with the USA in the war on terror, and was beginning to be regarded as an ally, his popularity among Libyans was on the wane. During the 1990s he had faced increasing opposition from Islamist extremists known as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which tried to assassinate him in 1996. Gaddafi then began passing anti-terrorist information to the American CIA and the British Secret Service. After some German anti-terrorist agents working in Libya were killed by al-Qaeda members, Gaddafi ordered the arrest of Osama bin Laden. During the presidency of George W. Bush (2001–9) the relationship became closer – the CIA began sending suspected terrorists to Libya, where they would be tortured to make them confess. This was known as the 'extraordinary rendition' programme; some of those 'rendered' were Libyan opponents of Gaddafi and some of them were members of extremist Islamist

groups. But all was not well with the Libyan economy – falling gas prices led to rising unemployment, and around Benghazi in eastern Libya there was resentment that the people were still not sharing in the general prosperity; nor were they likely to, in the present economic crisis.

It was in February 2011 that anti-government protesters in Benghazi, encouraged by the news from Tunisia and Egypt, decided to launch their campaign. Benghazi, in the neglected east of the country, is Libya's second largest city. Unemployment was disproportionately high, especially among men aged 18 to 34. The protesters, who were mostly unarmed, demanded jobs, opportunities and political freedoms and the demonstrations were peaceful. However, after four days Gaddafi decided that brute force was the way to deal with the problem. Troops fired on the unarmed crowds, killing at least 230 people. Saif al-Islam, one of Gaddafi's sons, appeared on television and blamed the violence on extremist Islamists. He warned that there would be a civil war if order was not restored. In fact, there was very little evidence of Islamist involvement. Appeasement of the protesters might have been a more successful option. Gaddafi's brutal assault only made the crowds more angry and more determined to continue. Nor was it just the masses who were horrified at the violence: Libya's representative to the Arab League and the ambassador to China both resigned; the latter called on the army to intervene on the side of the protesters and urged all the diplomatic staff to resign. Leaders of the uprising in the east announced that they would halt all oil exports within 24 hours unless the authorities stopped their violent suppression, a move that would be disastrous for the economy. By the end of February 2011 much of eastern Libya was under rebel control and an interim government, the Transitional National Council, had been set up in Benghazi. The USA, Britain and France called for Gaddafi to step down, claiming that he had 'lost the legitimacy to lead'.

Gaddafi had no intention of standing down. By mid-March his forces had counter-attacked and were on the outskirts of Benghazi. Civilian deaths numbered many thousands and Gaddafi warned that no mercy would be shown to any civilians in Benghazi who resisted. The UN Security Council voted in favour of taking all necessary action, including air strikes against Gaddafi forces in order to protect civilians. There was no mention of sending in ground troops, or of forcing Gaddafi from power. A coalition of the USA, European states and the Arab League was formed, and eventually NATO took overall control of the operation. NATO airstrikes targeted Gaddafi's troops surrounding Benghazi and forced them to withdraw, leaving their bombed tanks behind. The rebels then went on the offensive, advancing westwards towards Tripoli, only to be met by another Gaddafi counter-attack which recaptured most of the territory. Early in April the rebels received a boost when Moussa Koussa, for over 30 years one of Gaddafi's closest aides, defected to Britain. Stalemate was reached when the rebels managed to hold on to Ajdabiya. Meanwhile another combat zone had developed in the west where Gaddafi forces were besieging the port of Misrata, the third largest city in Libya. On 30 April Gaddafi offered a ceasefire and called for talks with NATO, but the rebels rejected the offer; they could not believe that the offer was genuine.

The civil war dragged on through the summer of 2011. NATO air strikes continued to keep up the pressure on the Gaddafi regime. Several countries, including the UK, officially recognized the National Transitional Council (NTC) as the legitimate government of Libya, claiming that it 'had proved its democratic credentials'. At times, however, there were ominous developments that did not bode well for the future, if and when Gaddafi departed. There were divisions among the different militias fighting for the rebel cause: on 30 July the most senior rebel commander, General Abdel Fatah Younis, was was shot dead by members of a militia linked to Islamists. In Britain there was criticism of the government's recognition of the NTC. There were fears that the NTC was full of potential for disunity and that 'the Libyan conflict would end with a government we don't like'.

Throughout August rebel forces attacked Tripoli and at the end of the month they forced their way in and captured Gaddafi's walled citadel and fortified compound. There had been fierce fighting as hundreds of Gaddafi loyalist snipers continued to resist. Gaddafi and many of his officials had withdrawn to his birthplace, the coastal town of Sirte. He refused to surrender and his diehard supporters put up a brave fight. The inevitable end came on 20 October when NTC troops finally gained control of Sirte. Gaddafi himself was captured and killed. His 42-year rule was over.

The removal of Gaddafi remains a controversial affair. In the USA, Britain and much of western Europe, it was welcomed as a triumph for NATO and the UN, and a significant milestone in their campaign to spread democracy around the world. For the liberal democrat revolutionaries of Libya it meant the overthrow of an autocratic tyrant. Gaddafi was said by Western leaders to have forfeited his right to rule because of the brutal way he had suppressed peaceful demonstrations and slaughtered his own people. After 42 years of Gaddafi's rule the people of Libya were not much further forward in political terms than they had been in 1969 when he seized power. Most Libyans now saw NATO as their saviour, and were looking forward to a democratic future.

However, some countries, including China, Russia, Brazil, India, Germany and Turkey, as well as many Western observers, held a rather different view. They believed that NATO should not have intervened and that the civil war should have been allowed to take its course. It was argued that Gaddafi still had a considerable measure of support, as witnessed by the huge demonstration of Gaddafi loyalists in Tripoli on 1 July and the fierce resistance that his forces put up. After all, he had given the Libyan people arguably the highest overall standard of living in Africa, with an annual per capita income of $12 000. There is evidence that reports of brutal behaviour by Gaddafi forces, including the bombing of peaceful demonstrators in Tripoli, were greatly exaggerated and may well have been rebel propaganda. It is now widely accepted that the Libyan government was not responsible for Lockerbie and the Berlin nightclub bombings; the reason why they agreed to pay compensation was not an admission of guilt, it was the Libyan government's attempt to 'buy peace'. Yet because of NATO's intervention, the combined uprising, civil war and then NATO bombing to 'protect civilians' killed around 30 000 people, left tens of thousands seriously wounded and caused massive damage to Libya's infrastructure.

According to some observers, contrary to what western political leaders claimed, there was a viable alternative that was never seriously attempted – a negotiated peace. Hugh Roberts (who was director of the International Crisis Group's North Africa Project from 2002 until 2007, and again during the Libyan civil war in 2011) explains how, on 10 March 2011, the International Crisis Group (ICG) put forward a plan for a settlement. This involved setting up a contact group made up of representatives from Libya's neighbouring states, who would help to arrange a ceasefire, and then bring the two sides together for negotiations leading to a peaceful settlement. An international peacekeeping force would be deployed once the ceasefire had been agreed. This was before the UN voted to approve military intervention; but only few days later, before there was time to act on the ICG plan, the Security Council voted to take 'all necessary measures' to protect civilians. In the words of Hugh Roberts:

> By inserting 'all necessary measures' into the resolution, London, Paris and Washington licensed themselves, with NATO as their proxy, to do whatever they wanted whenever they wanted in the full knowledge that they would never be held to account, since as permanent veto-holding members of the Security Council, they are above all laws.

However, the resolution did also demand a ceasefire and an end to all attacks on civilians, as a prelude to negotiations. Gaddafi, whose forces at that point were on the outskirts of

Benghazi, immediately announced a ceasefire and proposed a dialogue. As Hugh Roberts put it: 'what the Security Council demanded and suggested, he provided in a matter of hours'. The offer was immediately rejected by one of the senior rebel commanders, Khalifa Haftar, on the grounds that Gaddafi could not be trusted, and the Western powers simply accepted this. A week later Turkey announced that it had held talks with both sides and offered to help negotiate a ceasefire. Gaddafi once again agreed, but the NTC rejected the offer and demanded the resignation of Gaddafi before they would agree to a ceasefire. Gaddafi offered to call a ceasefire three more times – in April, May and June – and each time the offer was rejected. No pressure was brought on the NTC, no doubt because the mission of the Western powers was regime change.

Even before Gaddafi was so unceremoniously killed, there were disturbing signs for the West that genuine democracy might not be the outcome of the civil war after all. When Gaddafi claimed that al-Qaeda was involved in the uprising, he was probably exaggerating. But in fact the revolution did stir up and mobilize the Islamists. For example, when the NTC chairman, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, made his first trip from Benghazi to Tripoli, he announced that all legislation of the future NTC government would be based on the Islamic Sharia law. The newly appointed military commander of Tripoli was none other than Abdul Hakim Belhadj, a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. This extremist group had waged a terrorist campaign against Gaddafi and the Libyan state throughout the 1990s and had provided hundreds of recruits for al-Qaeda. The worry for genuine Libyan democrats and for the West, once the war was over, was that the various factions and militias that had combined to overthrow the Gaddafi regime now battled among themselves for control. By December 2011 the Libyan national army, commanded by Gaddafi's former generals, was finding it very difficult to disarm the militias, each of which controlled its own area. The militias were intensely suspicious of the intentions of the NTC, which was dominated by people from the east of the country. The NTC was acting secretively: although a cabinet had been appointed, nobody knew who its members were and its meetings were held in secret. When it was announced that the oil and economic ministries were being moved from Tripoli to Benghazi, there were anti-NTC protests across the country. In the background there was the possibility of an Islamist resurgence, with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group setting up a Taliban-style government. There was a long way to go before the Libyan people would be able to enjoy real democracy. However, during the first half of 2012 the situation became calmer, and the first elections for over 40 years were able to take place in July 2012. These passed off reasonably peacefully, except in the east where supporters of a federal state were demanding more seats in the national congress. Against expectations, the moderate National Forces Alliance won a comfortable victory, and its leader, Mahmoud Jibril, who had acted as interim prime minister for a time, became president. This was in marked contrast to what had happened in Tunisia and Egypt, where Islamists gained control. Mahmoud Jibril said he wanted to work with all parties in a grand coalition and rejected claims from some clerics that his party was too secular for the Islamists to work with. The next step was to prepare for parliamentary elections in 2013, and in the meantime the Jibril government concentrated on gaining control of the various militias still operating outside the law.

The difficulties involved in this task were clearly illustrated on 11 September 2012, the anniversary of the al-Qaeda attacks on the USA. A gang attacked the American consulate in Benghazi with guns and grenades, killing four Americans, including Chris Stevens, the American ambassador, who happened to be on a visit from Tripoli. It was believed that the attack was triggered by the showing on YouTube of the trailer for an American film called *The Innocence of Muslims*, which was extremely insulting to the prophet Muhammad. There were anti-American protests about the film in Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Gaza, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iran and in most other Muslim states. It was thought that the

Benghazi attack was carried out by an extremist Islamic militia called Ansar al-Sharia ('supporters of Sharia law') (see Section 28.4(c)) for further details). The killings overshadowed an important political event that took place the following day: the Libyan parliament elected a new president, Mustafa Abu-Shakour of the National Front Party. He narrowly defeated Mahmoud Jibril, the US-backed candidate, who had been expected to win.

(e) Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, a kingdom dominated by Sunni Muslims and run under strict fundamentalist laws, the situation was rather different. There were mild protests, mainly in the east of the country where a majority of the population are Shia. On the whole the 86-year-old King Abdullah was popular, although his rule was autocratic in the extreme, and unemployment was high, especially among young men. He was quick to respond, promising a multi-billion-pound programme of reforms. A total of 60 000 new jobs were created in the security forces, a clever move which helped to reduce unemployment as well as making the regime safer. The monthly minimum wage was raised to £500 and there was to be unemployment benefit of £160 a month. Half a million apartments were to be built for people on low incomes and more money was to be given to hospitals. All this was possible because, thanks to the oil revenue, the Saudi royal family were extremely wealthy.

There was another festering grievance in Saudi Arabia – women were denied civic freedoms, were not allowed to vote or play any public role, could not leave the house unless accompanied by a male member of the family, and were not allowed to drive. In September 2011 the king announced that women would be able to vote and stand as candidates in municipal elections from 2015. They would also be able to serve as members of the Shura council, a body that supervised legislation. This was apparently warmly received, but there was disappointment that women still could not drive; Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world where women were banned from driving. A campaign was launched in which dozens of women deliberately broke the rule. One woman was arrested and sentenced to ten lashes, but King Abdullah overruled the sentence.

Things were thrown into confusion in October 2011 when Crown Prince Sultan, King Abdullah's younger half-brother and heir to the throne, died, leaving Prince Nayef as the likely successor to King Abdullah. He was in charge of the security forces, an ultra-conservative and the man responsible for sending Saudi troops into neighbouring Bahrain the previous March to help crush the pro-reform demonstrations. King Abdullah himself was in poor health and there were serious doubts about what would happen to his reforms if and when Prince Nayef took over.

And so in 2012 'the new world order' was still far from settled. The 'Arab Spring' states were in a transitional phase and it was by no means clear where they would end up. It remained to be seen whether or not the 'war of civilizations' would materialize fully, or whether militant Islamic fundamentalism, as some predicted, would be eclipsed as moderate Muslims grew tired of its strict rules and restraints and its treatment of women. Taliban aggression in Afghanistan, where NATO troops were being killed every day, and al-Qaeda's activities in Pakistan continued to present a formidable challenge to the West. Many observers were moving towards the conclusion that dialogue between the two sides must come eventually (see Section 28.4(c) for further comment on the world situation in 2012).

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QUESTIONS

1 Examine the evidence for and against the view that in the early twenty-first century, the world was witnessing a 'civilization struggle' between Islam and the West.

2 Explain why the ending of the Cold War was not followed by a period of world peace and stability.

3 Explain why Afghanistan has played such an important role in international relations since 1979.

There is a document question about the USA and the New World Order on the website.