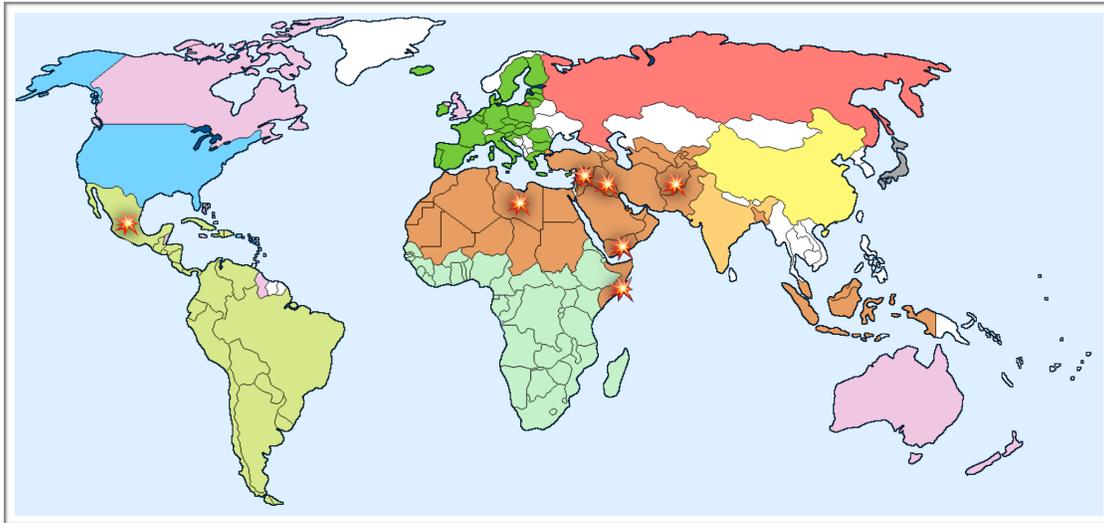


B. A Culture At War With Itself

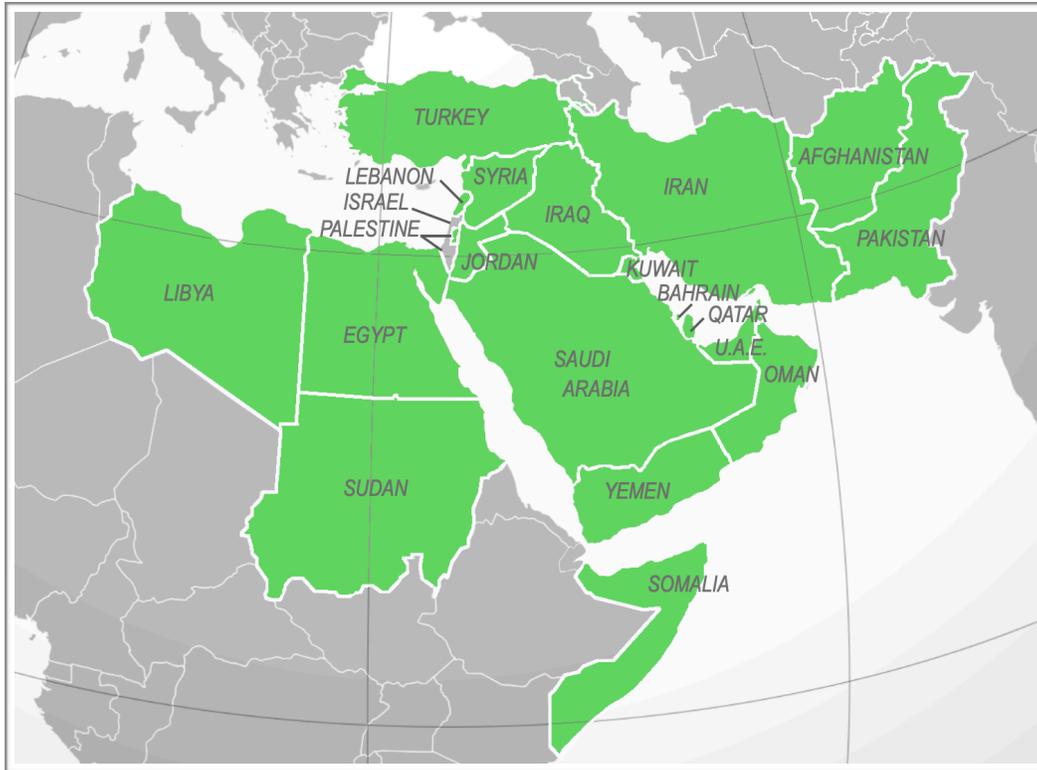
1. If we make a map of the world's cultural blocks and show where the major wars are occurring in the world today, something important becomes easily apparent:



2. With the exception of an exceptional situation in Mexico, where a unique kind of war has been ongoing between the Mexican government and a powerful group of criminal organizations, all the other wars in the world are in the Islamic World.
3. Two of these wars (in Afghanistan and Iraq) are a product of the *War on Terror* that the United States launched in response to the “9/11” terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in **2001**, but that “war” ended in 2021, and it is not the main cause of violence in either of those countries, nor is it the cause of the wars in the other countries.
4. There are also wars in Somalia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, which are mainly caused by rebellions against dictators (modern charismatic leaders) by different groups, which are now at war with each other (as well as the dictators, if they have survived so far).
5. To track all these conflicts is difficult. The fact that the cultural block of the Islamic World is made up of many countries is part of the challenge, and there is no easy way to overcome that. Luckily, the wars in this block are all in the area known as the “Middle East,” so we will focus on the geography of that area in order to learn more. (See map at the top of the next page.)

C. Islamism

1. The key to the violence in this cultural block is a modern way of thinking about Islamic Culture that is called *Islamism*. This word is related to the name of the religion accepted by the people in this block—Islam—but it is not the same thing. *Islamism* is the idea that Islamic Culture should try to conquer the rest of the world and that Islam can and should triumph over all other cultures, even if the world is large, complex, and filled with



technologically superior cultures and has a world police power (the United States). This *triumphalism* is not a new belief. As we will see, the original version of Islamic culture also believed in this, so Islamism is a revival of all old belief, but there was an important trend to the country during the intervening period.

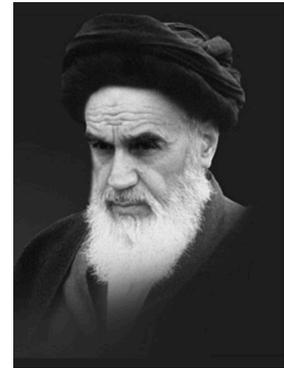
2. Because of the so-called “war on terror,” people often mistake *terrorism* itself as the most important theme in Islamic history. Terrorism is just a tactic used by people who are fighting for a cause. It involves using violence against ordinary citizens and parts of the government other than the military. This kind of violence is designed to terrorize people, and convince them to change their lives. Terrorism is certainly used by Islamists (people who accept Islamism), but the most important thing to understand is that the *cause* Islamists are using terrorism in order to promote is a *triumphal* view of Islam.

D. 1979 - The Year Islamic Culture Changed Into What It Is

1. Up until the year **1979**, Islamic culture was on a different path than it is today. Countries like Pakistan and Turkey (see map) had become democracies. Others like Saudi Arabia and Iran were still monarchies, but their rulers were on America’s side against communism.
2. Still others had dictators (modern military leaders) who promised to improve life for their people), and the quality of life in such countries (Iraq, Libya, Syria, are good examples) was not necessarily good, but these countries were not a threat to the outside world, and they were not at war with themselves. (In some cases, when a government is so

controlling of its people, it's possible that being at "peace" could be worse than being at war. North Korea and Cuba are countries in such a condition today. Some of the Middle Eastern countries were in comparably bad shape.

3. That said, having dictators in charge was not necessarily bad for the people (compared to their other options) or bad for peace. A great example is Egypt, where a military dictator named Anwar Sadat proved to be a great peacemaker. After a long series of wars with Egypt's non-Muslim neighbor Israel, in early **1979** Sadat made peace.
4. Overall, the way things looked in **1979** was that Islamic culture was moving in the direction of *cosmopolitanism* (which means a "live and let live" policy towards the wider world, and a willingness, especially, to tolerate religious differences).
5. And then came the **Iranian Revolution**. The monarchy of Iran was overthrown because it was no longer a benevolent despotism. What replaced it was a government controlled by the religious authorities of the country, especially a charismatic religious teacher known as the Ayatollah Khomeini.
6. By itself, this would not have necessarily changed the course of history, but as part of the Iranian Revolution, Islamists inspired by Khomeini stormed the American embassy in the capital of Iran, Teheran, and took the Americans hostage. They tied them up and paraded them on television for the world to see. They humiliated the United States during this **American Hostage Crisis** to show that terrorism was a way to strike at America.
7. If America had used its powerful military, or convincingly threatened to do so, then Islamism would have been stopped dead in its tracks. The world would have seen that America would not be intimidated by terrorism, and that the world police power was not just militarily strong, but strong-willed and self-assured. Instead, president Jimmy Carter failed in his duty to protect the life and rights of Americans in that crisis, and the Islamist terrorists triumphed. That was the moment history changed direction. Jimmy Carter was voted out of office by Americans who were very unhappy with his performance as president, and the day his successor Ronald Reagan was elected all the hostages were released.
8. Sadly, the damage was done. In 1981, Islamists assassinated Anwar Sadat for making peace with Israel.
9. In 1983, Islamists conducted two massive terrorist attacks in Lebanon, a small country north of Israel, where the United States was trying to prevent a civil war. The United States evacuated its peacekeepers, and the Islamists triumphed again.
10. This sequence of events in the short span after **1979** changed the direction of Islamic history. Islamism became stronger and stronger. Cosmopolitanism waned. The current state of widespread wars throughout the Islamic Middle East is the culmination of these trends.



Ayatollah Khomeini is the Deng Xiaoping of Islamic history. His message of Islamism changed Islamic culture into what it is today in the same way that Deng created Post-Maoism.