



BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War

AFGHANISTAN

Area: 252,000 square miles, slightly smaller than Texas
Population: 28.7 million-
Median age: 19 years
Life expectancy: 47 years
People living with HIV/AIDS: Unknown
Refugees: 1.9 million
Government type: In transition
Capital: Kabul
Independence Day: August 19, 1919
Internet use: One Internet provider. Number of users is unknown.

DATES

1973

A military coup sends King Zahir into exile. The Monarchy is abolished and the country becomes a republic. Badly needed social and economic reforms and new constitution follow, but it is not enough. Political instability prevails.

1979

In 1978, the Afghan Communist Party took over the government. A series of bloody coups follows and the nation careens towards chaos. The Soviet Union invades under the pretext of stabilizing the country. Tens of thousands of Afghans escape to Pakistan and Iran. In 1984, the U.S. and other countries provide arms to the Mujaheddin resistance.

1989

Facing deadly resistance, the Soviet Union withdraws from Afghanistan. An estimated one million Afghans and 14,000 Soviets have been killed since the invasion. The Mujaheddin take over, but fighting soon breaks out between factions. Anarchy reigns, thousands of civilians die and Kabul is slowly bombed into rubble.

1994

The Taliban forces from Pakistan slowly but surely take control of Afghanistan. They unleash great cruelty and misery on the suffering Afghan people. Schooling for teen girls is banned. The Taliban face weak resistance from the Northern Alliance. The Taliban provide safe haven to Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda terrorist organization.

2001

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the U.S. attacks Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The Taliban government crumbles. A new Afghan transitional authority is established with the help of the United Nations. 2.5 million refugees return home. Among other issues, landmines from the decades of war present a huge problem.



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IRAQ

Area: 169,235 square miles, slightly bigger than California

Population: 24.6 million,

Median age: 19 years

Life expectancy: 67.8 years

People living with HIV/AIDS: Less than 1,000

Refugees: 580,000

Government type: In transition

Capital: Baghdad

Independence Day: October 3, 1932

Internet use: One Internet provider, 12,500 users

DATES

1958

King Faisal is overthrown by Arab nationalists and the country becomes a republic. The government changes heads in a series of coups for the next ten years. Twenty-two-year-old Saddam Hussein flees the country after a failed coup attempt.

1968

The Baath party, a secular Arab nationalist party, comes to power with General Ahmad Bakr as its head. Saddam Hussein is the number two man in the government. Internal dissent is stifled in the country and Hussein earns a fearsome reputation.

1979

Saddam Hussein succeeds Bakr as the president of Iraq. He quickly executes all his opponents. Fearing the impact of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Hussein attacks Iran in 1980 over a land dispute. Chemical weapons are used on Iranian troops and Kurdish civilians. A million people die in the eight-year war. Twenty thousand Kurds are killed.

1990

Iraq seizes Kuwait, but is evicted in 1991 by a U.S.-led, UN coalition force. The UN Security Council imposes economic sanctions and dispatches inspectors to verify the destruction of banned weapons. By 1998, the inspectors conclude that Iraq has not revealed the extent of its weapons program. Coalition forces bomb known weapons sites. The inspectors are not allowed back.

2002

The inspectors return under a new UN mandate but conclude that Iraq is not cooperating. In March, U.S. and British coalition troops invade Iraq and topple the Hussein regime. A government in transition is being formed.



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SIERRA LEONE

Area: 27,699 square miles, slightly smaller than South Carolina

Population: 5.7 million,

Median age: 17.5 years

Life expectancy: 42.8 years

People living with HIV/AIDS: 170,000

Refugees: 2 million (one third of the population)

Government type: Constitutional Democracy

Capital: Freetown

Independence Day: April 27, 1961

Internet use: One Internet provider, 20,000 users

DATES

1967

In the second general election, Siaka Stevens wins and becomes the prime minister. Within hours he is overthrown in a military coup. A series of coups follow until Stevens is restored as prime minister in 1968. Stevens bans all political parties except his own and rules until 1985.

1991

Prime Minister Momoh restores the multi-party system. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) starts a rebellion under Foday Sankoh. In 1992, a coup brings the military to power, but they are unable to stop the advancing RUF. The rebels forcibly recruit children to fight, kill and rape. Sankoh starts a campaign of amputating the limbs of captured civilians.

1996

The military agrees to hand over power and elections are held. Ahmad Kabbah wins and becomes president, but is overthrown in a military coup. The military and the RUF form a new government. West African peacekeepers reinstate Kabbah. Fighting continues.

1999

Sankoh and President Kabbah sign the Lome Peace agreement. The two form a new government. The peacekeepers leave and soon the RUF violates the agreement. Sankoh is arrested and the fighting continues.

2002

Peace is restored and President Kabbah declares the 11-year civil war over. Fifty thousand people have died in the war and two million have become homeless. A special court begins investigating war crimes and human rights violations during the war. Sankoh is indicted for crimes against humanity.



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LIBERIA

Area: 38,250 square miles, slightly larger than Tennessee

Population: 3.3 million,

Median age: 18.1 years

Life expectancy: 48.1 years

People living with HIV/AIDS: 125,000

Refugees: 245,000

Government type: Republic

Capital: Monrovia

Independence Day: July 26, 1847

Internet use: Two Internet providers, 500 users

DATES

1980

Liberia's history is fairly peaceful and the Republic is ruled for 133 years, mostly by people of Americo-Liberian descent. In 1980, this ends in a coup by Sgt. Samuel Doe. The president and several members of the government are executed.

1985

Samuel Doe's party is declared the winner in a fraudulent national election. Soon human rights abuses and ethnic tensions are on the rise. The economy starts to fall apart. Rebel armies attempt to depose Doe, but fail.

1990

Rebels led by Charles Taylor enter from Sierra Leone and quickly reach Monrovia. West African troops intervene and negotiate a unity government with the rebels. But peace is not at hand. Taylor refuses to participate in the government and continues fighting. Child soldiers are forcibly recruited by all sides.

1997

Taylor agrees to participate in a new government. The rebels are disarmed and elections are held by the UN. The civil war has claimed 200,000 lives and displaced a million people. A weary population, fearing war, elects Taylor as president. He continues to influence the war in Sierra Leone. Fighting soon breaks out in Liberia.

2003

Charles Taylor is indicted for war crimes by the Sierra Leone Special Court. The rebels reach downtown Monrovia and Taylor is forced into exile in Nigeria. A transitional government is installed with elections due in 2006.



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SUDAN

Area: 967,490 square miles, slightly more than one-quarter the size of the U.S.

Population: 38.1 million

Median age: 17.1 years

Life expectancy: 57.7 years

People living with HIV/AIDS: 450,000

Refugees: 490,000

Government type: Military dictatorship

Capital: Khartoum

Independence Day: January 1, 1956

Internet use: Two Internet providers, 56,000 users

DATES

1956

Sudan attains independence from Britain. The Arab-led government does not follow through on a promise to create a federal style government. This results in a civil war between the Arab North and Christian South. The government is overthrown by the military in 1958.

1965

The military is forced to relinquish power and elections are held. A coalition government is formed. A series of civilian governments follow but none are capable of solving the ethnic conflict and economic problems. A second military coup brings Colonel Nimeri to power. He bans political parties and shuts down the Parliament.

1972

A peace agreement is reached in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and the 17-year civil war ends. Ten years of relative calm follow. Political prisoners are released.

1983

President Nimeri introduces traditional Islamic Shari'a Law into the penal code. The move is criticized by Muslim as well as Christian parties. Dissenters are swiftly imprisoned by the government. The civil war starts up again. Nimeri is deposed two years later in a coup. Civilian rule is restored.

1989

A military coup by General al-Bashir replaces the government with a Revolutionary Command Council. Shari'a based law is imposed on the entire country with exemptions for the South. The continuing civil war kills two million and displaces four million people. The war and peace talks continue.



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YUGOSLAVIA

Area: 98,766 square miles, slightly bigger than Oregon
Population: Bosnia – 3.9 million, Serbia – 10.6 million
Median age: Bosnia – 35.5 years, Serbia – 36.2 years
Life expectancy: Bosnia – 72.3 years, Serbia – 74 years
People living with HIV/AIDS: Bosnia – unknown, Serbia – 10,000
Refugees: Bosnia – 426,000, Serbia – 159,625
Government type: Dissolved state. Spilt into independent republics.
Capital: Bosnia – Sarajevo, Serbia – Belgrade
Internet use: Bosnia: Three Internet providers, 45,000 users
Serbia: Nine Internet providers, 400,000 users

DATES

1945

The Republic of Yugoslavia is formed as a federation by the six republics of Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Montenegro. Two autonomous regions (Kosovo and Vojvodina) in Serbia are also included. Josip Tito becomes the head of a socialist government. He maintains a relatively open and free society.

1980

Josip Tito dies and the collective leadership arrangement between the republics fails. An economic crisis spins out of control and the country begins to unravel along nationalist and ethnic lines.

1991

Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia declare their independence in 1991. Bosnia follows suit. Serbia and Montenegro form a new republic. The break-up is bloody and civil wars break out in Bosnia and Croatia. Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic sponsors military efforts to unite Serbs in these republics into a "Greater Serbia." Ethnic cleansing practiced by all factions results in thousands of civilian deaths and human rights crimes.

1995

The Dayton Peace accord is signed by all groups, bringing an end to the devastating civil wars. Bosnia's international boundaries are retained. A NATO-led international peace keeping force arrives in Bosnia to ensure the implementation of the accord.

1999

Serb paramilitaries forcibly evict thousands of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. The international community responds with the NATO bombing of Serbia. Hostilities end as peacekeepers arrive in Kosovo. In 2000, Milosevic loses the presidential elections in Serbia. He is sent to The Hague to face charges of crimes against humanity.



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SOMALIA

Area: 246,200 square miles, slightly smaller than Texas

Population: 8 million

Median age: 17.6 years

Life expectancy: 47.3 years

People living with HIV/AIDS: 43,000

Refugees: 441,238

Government type: No national government

Capital: Mogadishu

Independence Day: July 1, 1960

Internet use: Three Internet providers, 200 users

DATES

1960

Somalia emerges from UN trusteeship as an independent nation. A new constitution is adopted by the people and a multi-party parliamentary democracy is established. Political parties reflect ethnic, clan and geographical loyalties.

1969

A military coup by Major General Siad Barre ends the democratic state. A military council under Barre moves the country towards a Soviet model of governance. Barre supports Somali rebels in Ethiopia and eventually invades that country in 1977. The Soviets switch their support from Somalia to Ethiopia.

1982

Ethiopia invades Somalia and the U.S. sends military supplies to the government. The country establishes closer security ties with the U.S. By 1989, Barre faces mounting rebellions in the North and begins bombing rebel and civilian targets.

1990

The rebellion in the North succeeds and the Somali national army breaks up into warring factions. Barre flees in 1991 and the country falls apart. Thousands flee as a famine spreads and rebel militias fight. Child soldiers are recruited by all factions. The UN and U.S. troops arrive to stop the war and end the famine, which have resulted in over 250,000 deaths.

1995

The U.S. and UN leave Somalia in the face of mounting casualties. The country remains divided into ethnic enclaves and warring factions. The chaos contributes to the growth of radical Islamic groups. Peace talks about forming a national government continue in Kenya.

Sources: *Washington Post*, U.S. State Department country profiles, CIA World Fact Book, UNHCR country reports, UN.org, MSN Encarta, and *Britannica Online*



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