**War in Iraq**

**2004-2006 Turmoil in Iraq**

**2004- Weapons of Mass Destruction**

* **David Kay**- leader of the U.S. weapons inspection team known as the Iraq Survey Group.
* In less than one year, Kay tells a Senate committee that no WMD have been found in Iraq. "It turns out that we were all wrong,"
* Kay maintains that he still believes the war was the right thing to do in light of the continuing threat by Saddam.
* Kay says in an interview that Iraq never gave up its ambition to obtain WMD and in fact "had a large number of WMD program-related activities."

**2004- al Qaeda in Iraq**

* In early February, U.S. forces had stormed a house in Baghdad and found a computer disk containing a letter addressed to senior Al-Qaeda figures by the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq
* **Abu al-Zarqawi**- Sunni Leader of al Qaeda in Iraq who waged a civil war of religious extremism in Iraq and claimed to be behind 25 attacks on Shi'ites and coalition forces.
* U.S. officials point to the letter as evidence that "there is clearly a plan on the part of outsiders to come into this country and spark civil war."
* On the holiest day of the year for Shi'ite Muslims, nearly 180 worshippers are massacred in a series of coordinated car and suicide bomb attacks at shrines in Baghdad.
* U.S. officials blame the March 2 attacks on Jordanian Sunni al-Zarqawi; Shi'ite religious leaders blame the U.S. for allowing the horrific attacks to take place.

**2004- Abu Ghraib**

* **Abu Ghraib Scandal-** photographic evidence of American military personnel's abuse and torture of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison are made public, sparking a huge public protest
* The shocking images of smiling soldiers and humiliated prisoners come to symbolize everything that has gone wrong with the war that was supposed to spread freedom in Iraq.
* An American freelance telecommunications contractor named Nick Berg is abducted and beheaded in Iraq by militants in retaliation for U.S. abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison.
* **Operation Phantom Fury-** joint U.S.-Iraqi attack against insurgent strongholds in Fallujah, which results in a military victory for the U.S.

**2005- Democratic Elections**

* On January 30, Iraq holds its first democratic elections in fifty years.
* Though plagued by violence and a Sunni party boycott, the legislative elections attract high turnout from Iraqis.
* The biggest winner is the United Iraqi Alliance, a broad coalition of Shi'ite politicians, which wins a large number of seats in the national assembly.

**2005- Sectarian Conflict**

* **Sunni Muslims**- An Islamic sect that was the minority of the Iraqi population that held power under Saddam Hussein before the U.S. invasion
* **Shi'ite Muslims**- An Islamic sect that was the majority of the Iraqi population that was discriminated against under Saddam Hussein and gained power after the U.S. invasion
* **Operation Lightning**- Iraqi forces launch the toughest crackdown in Baghdad which seeks to root out insurgents and terrorists through hundreds of checkpoints and house-to-house searches.
* In the long run, Operation Lightning is generally unsuccessful: Baghdad continues to be plagued by sectarian killings.
* The bombings around Baghdad against Shi'ites are followed by immediate raids on Sunni mosques and sparks a deadly series of sectarian counter attacks.
* Despite a round-the-clock curfew imposed for a few days in Baghdad, more than 1300 Iraqis die.

**2006-Change in Iraq**

* In various interviews with news outlets, six retired U.S. generals call for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to resign, accusing him of creating an arrogant Iraqi administration
* Rumsfeld continues serving until stepping down on November 3, 2006 after the public's dissatisfaction with the handling of the war helps the Democrats regain control of Congress.
* **Nouri al-Maliki-** Iraq's new Prime minister who believes the country's security forces will be able to keep the peace by the end of 2007 and that the U.S. should withdraw troops
* Maliki's firm timeline is welcomed by some officials but others express frustration that Maliki is not doing enough to stop Shi'ite militias contributing to the violence

**2006- Zarqawi Killed**

* Sunni insurgent leader Zarqawi, who U.S. authorities say is responsible for a large number of kidnappings, beheadings, and bombings, is killed in an airstrike north of Baghdad in June
* The Jordanian-born Zarqawi was a leader of al-Qaeda's Iraq insurgency campaign, which sought to widen the divide between Iraq's Sunnis and Shi'ites to prolong the conflict.
* The U.S. hopes his death will be a blow to the insurgency, but those hopes turn out, for the most part, not to be answered.

**2006- Saddam Hussein Becomes a Martyr**

* Saddam Hussein is hanged on December 30.
* An apparent cell-phone video of the execution is leaked shortly after
* The execution is controversial for the release of the video and for the fact that it occurs on the day that Sunnis celebrate the Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha (Shi'ites celebrate it a day later).
* The rushed and chaotic nature of the execution helps turn Saddam from a once brutal dictator into an Arab martyr in much of the Middle East.