

Factsheet about 9/11



View of the World Trade Center, New York, under attack on 11 September 2001

What happened on 11 September 2001?

In the early morning of 11 September 2001, 19 hijackers took control of four airliners taking off from different airports in the US – Boston, Washington DC and Newark in New Jersey.

At 8.46am, American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York. Seventeen minutes later, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower. The third airliner, American Airlines Flight 77, crashed into the Pentagon in Washington DC at 9.37am, and the final plane, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed en route to Washington after passengers on board had fought with the hijackers. It is thought that the hijackers were aiming to hit either the Capitol building in Washington or the White House.

At 9.59am, the fire that had been started by the crash caused the South Tower of the World Trade Center to collapse; this was followed by the collapse of the North Tower at 10.28am. Nearly 3,000 people were killed – most of them instantly.

These horrific events were witnessed on TV by millions of people around the world, who by now had realised that the USA was coming under massive terrorist attack.

All US airports were quickly shut down and all aircraft on their way to the country were turned away.

The search for survivors at the sites of the attacks began immediately, although with little hope of success.



The Pentagon, Washington DC, minutes after it had been attacked on 11 September 2001



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At 8.30pm, US President of the George W. Bush addressed the nation on television and said: "Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong."

After the broadcast, he met his advisers to review the day. They already had evidence that the attacks had been organised by Osama bin Laden – the leader of the extreme terrorist group Al-Qaeda, which was based in Afghanistan.

Why did the attacks on the USA happen?

In 2004, Osama bin Laden finally admitted that Al-Qaeda, an extremist terrorist organisation, had been responsible for organising the 9/11 attacks. This confirmed what the US Government had believed all along.

For many years, Osama bin Laden had called on Muslims to attack US soldiers and citizens wherever they could. He saw the US as an arch enemy of Islam. His aim was to get the US military out of their bases in Saudi Arabia, where they had remained after the Gulf War in 1991. Saudi Arabia is home to Islam's most holy sites in the cities of Mecca and Medina, and bin Laden felt that America's presence there was an affront to all Muslims. He also strongly objected to America's support for Israel, which he believed wrongly occupied lands that belonged to fellow Muslims.

From his base in Afghanistan, bin Laden supported an increasing number of suicide missions against the USA during the 1990s. The attacks were planned with increasing care and attention to detail – and with a desire to capture the attention of the world.



**Osama bin Laden
in 1997**

Two massive suicide bombings at US Embassy buildings in Kenya and Tanzania killed hundreds of people in August 1998, but bin Laden felt that a similar attack on US soil would have an even more devastating impact. By then, bin Laden knew, of course, that planning for his 9/11 attacks was already under way.

Some historians believe that the causes of the 9/11 attacks go back much further than this and can be traced all the way to the late 19th century, when Western powers started to take an increasing interest in the Middle East. In 1869, the Suez Canal was opened and this provided a vital trade route from Europe to India. In the early 20th century, large oil fields were discovered in the region, which led to decades of Western interference in the Middle East and increasing Arab resentment.



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Who were the perpetrators of 9/11?

Although bin Laden has primary responsibility for the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, another Muslim extremist, is known to have been the mastermind. He came up with the original plan (eventually approved by bin Laden) to attack US targets using hijacked airliners. He chose the targets for the 9/11 attacks, selected some of the hijackers and helped them travel to the USA. He was eventually captured in Pakistan in 2003 and has been held captive by the US ever since while awaiting trial.



Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

The 9/11 attacks themselves were carried out by 19 hijackers led by Mohamed Atta. These suicide terrorists were formed into four teams. Each team included one hijacker who had been trained to fly; the other members of the team had the job of taking control of the aircraft by force.



Mohamed Atta, leader of the 9/11 attacks

American Airlines Flight 11 hijackers

- Mohamed Atta
- Waleed al-Shehri
- Wail al-Shehri
- Abdulaziz al-Omari
- Satam al-Suqami

United Airlines Flight 175 hijackers

- Marwan al-Shehhi
- Fayez Banihammad
- Mohand al-Shehri
- Hamza al-Ghamdi
- Ahmed al-Ghamdi

American Airlines Flight 77 hijackers

- Hani Hanjour
- Khalid al-Mihdhar
- Majed Moqed
- Nawaf al-Hazmi
- Salem al-Hazmi

United Airlines Flight 93 hijackers

- Ziad Jarrah
- Ahmed al-Haznawi
- Ahmed al-Nami
- Saeed al-Ghamdi

Fifteen of the hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, two were from the United Arab Emirates, one was from Egypt and one was from Lebanon. All were killed in the attacks.



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Who were the victims of 9/11?

In total, 2,976 people (excluding the hijackers) were killed in the 9/11 attacks. The overwhelming majority of casualties were civilians, including people from over 90 nations around the world.



Ground Zero, New York, September 11 2007: a memorial ceremony for the 9/11 victims

The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York resulted in 2,753 of all the deaths. Most were people who were either working or visiting the World Trade Center on that September morning. Also among the dead were 343 firefighters and 60 police officers from New York City who were in and around the buildings trying to rescue people when they collapsed. There were no survivors from American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175.

Another 184 people were killed in the attack on the Pentagon in Washington DC, and all 40 passengers lost their lives when Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania.

Other victims include all the relatives of those killed on 9/11 – thousands of people who have to continue their lives without their loved ones and who will never forget the the horrific events of that day.

What were the consequences of 9/11?

The USA's response to the 9/11 attacks was to launch the War on Terror, which began with the invasion of Afghanistan where bin Laden was based. The aim was to destroy Al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban regime which had harboured the terrorists. Although the Taliban regime has been replaced with a democratic government, the war against the Taliban, who still control parts of Afghanistan, continues to this day.

In 2003, the USA invaded Iraq and defeated Saddam Husain, who was suspected of having weapons of mass destruction that threatened the security of the West. President Bush also suggested that Saddam Husain had close ties to Al-Qaeda, although this was later proved to be mistaken. Weapons of mass destruction were never found, but Saddam Husain was eventually captured and executed by the new Iraq government. Although US troops are still present in Iraq, the plan is to eventually remove them, allowing Iraq to govern itself once more.



Images from the war in Afghanistan 2001–2011



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Images from the war in Afghanistan 2001–2011

The UK, along with various other countries, took part in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, believing that it was not only important to show solidarity with the US but that the scale of the 9/11 attacks meant that the threat of terrorism was now global. Since 9/11, there have been several more major terrorist attacks, including in Bali, Istanbul, Madrid and London – all linked to Al-Qaeda.

To combat the threat of terrorism back at home and try to prevent similar attacks occurring again, many countries have strengthened their anti-terrorism laws and tightened security at their airports. However, the threat of another major terrorist attack remains and Al-Qaeda has yet to be completely defeated.

The World Trade Center, which was totally destroyed on 9/11, has still not been completely rebuilt. The site, now known as Ground Zero, has become a shrine to the victims who lost their lives in New York on that fateful day.

The death of Osama bin Laden

Osama bin Laden had been on America's most wanted list of terrorists even before the 9/11 attacks, due to his involvement in previous suicide bombings against the US military and civilians.

After 9/11, he became the number one target in the US's War on Terror. For many years it was believed that he was hiding in remote parts of Afghanistan – where his Al-Qaeda organisation had been based – but he managed to evade capture. He was eventually located hiding in Pakistan in April 2011 after President Obama had ordered a secret operation to kill or capture him.

Once the US forces were certain of bin Laden's location, they carried out an assault on his secret hideout – a private house in an area called Abbottabad. Bin Laden was killed and shortly afterwards his body was buried at sea.



US President Barack Obama, along with members of the national security team, receive an update on Operation Neptune's Spear – a mission that resulted in the death of Osama bin Laden on 1 May 2011. Some people believe that the photograph was staged to make the events seem even more dramatic.



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Laden, President Obama addressed the nation on television and said: “For over two decades, bin Laden has been Al-Qaeda’s leader and symbol, and has continued to plot attacks against our country and our friends and allies. The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation’s effort to defeat Al-Qaeda.”

Al-Qaeda has vowed to retaliate in revenge for bin Laden’s death, and countries throughout the world have been placed on high alert in anticipation of more terrorist attacks. On 16 June 2011, Al-Qaeda appointed a new leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in place of bin Laden.

9/11 – ten years on

Countries all over the world commemorated the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks to remember the victims, commiserate with their relatives and reflect on how much the world has changed as a result.

In the UK, an artwork was created as part of these anniversary commemorations; it was made from the steel of the World Trade Center.



An artist’s impression of the 9/11 artwork in the UK

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