

BIRTH OF THE 9/11 GENERATION: AN ORIGIN STORY

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“WE WATCHED, DISBELIEVING AND HELPLESS, ON THAT SAVAGE DAY. PEOPLE WE LOVE BEGAN FALLING, HELPLESS AND IN DISBELIEF.”



Matthew Warshauer

The Online Edition:

“A particularly brilliant way of remembering and re-contextualizing the impact of 9/11, which looms large in our collective memory.”

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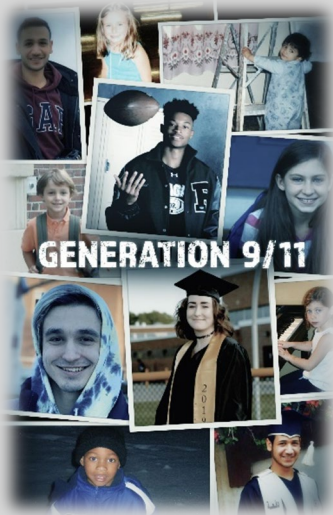
A Generation Is Born

The Children

Kenisha Green was a seven-year-old living in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania when 9/11 exploded into America's consciousness. Almost instantaneously, she sensed the fear at school and hid in a coat cubby until her mom arrived to take her home. Marissa Statler, an eighth grader from Hopewell Junction, New York, remembers, "I was 12 years old and I was petrified. All of my classmates were leaving one by one, their parents coming to get them. I wanted to go home. I wanted to be with my parents."



Florida fourth grader Michael Howard took one look at his teacher and knew something was horribly wrong. "The somber look on her face was striking, and has been etched into my mind ever since. She told us, 'We have been attacked.' The next day, I woke up to a different world. Terrorists and radical Islam and Afghanistan and, especially, *evil* were now concepts that I had to deal with."



These were but a few of the almost 50 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in 2001 who were shaped by that 9/11. For the youngest of the generation, that memory of being taken out of class, having school canceled, or returning from a very different sort of day, is perhaps the single most shared eight-hour experience for any generation in history.

For older kids, the experience was just as visceral, but perhaps even more real simply because they saw and understood just a bit more. "It was the first time I'd seen a grown man cry....I felt completely numb," remembered Allegra Vera Warsager. "I was 16 and this was the end of my childhood innocence – the end of American innocence. Our generation had to cope but, like most teenagers, we bottled up our emotions." Some kids recall a sense of unity and togetherness that swelled the nation's patriotism in the days and weeks after the attacks. "Despite the tragedy, it was also one of the best times to be

in New York,” said sixteen year old Noah Barrow. “You could look at anyone on the street and every person knew exactly what everyone else was going through. People were really together.”

Others remember a sense of loss. “In our lifetime, we had never been blatantly attacked on our land,” said thirteen year old Stella Bouzakis. “There was so much noise, prejudice and conspiracies. What sticks with me still is how divided the country got....Instead of figuring out what happened, we went to war. We stuck American flags on everything and changed French fries to freedom fries, like that was going to fix my broken city.”

Helplessness was another experience. Erik Erickson, twelve at the time, remembers, “I felt like I wanted to do something, but, as a kid and a civilian, I was completely powerless. I didn’t know who to be angry at. I lost my faith in government, and it dawned on me that the adults in charge didn’t really know what was going on.”



Other kids were told exactly what was happening. Deborah Hallen, a sixth-grade teacher in Brooklyn Heights, looked out over lower Manhattan from the windows of her classroom. “It was really traumatic.” She told the children that many people had died and they should close their eyes and be silent for a moment. “I gave them the date and the time and said that this was a day that they would never forget.”

For older students the experience was even harsher. High School senior Chris Davis of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania remembered people falling from the towers: “I didn’t understand why they were jumping — I thought they could go down through the building. I knew they were dying, but they looked like people on a screen.” The reality brought him to a simple reality – “we are vulnerable, even here.” Davis thought that “America is supposed to be number one and supposedly safe and have a great military, but even here we can feel the terror of people attacking us.”

The constant news coverage with the planes striking the second tower over and over again kept the moment of terror alive so that even those far too young to understand were drawn into the chaos. “I sat on the floor with my little toys,” remembers one little boy, “and it sounds so terrible now, but it was so innocent at the time. I was reenacting it with my little toys. I took my little airplane and flew it into the leg of the chair and I made all of the fire fighters come and save people and I was doing that and my mom turned to me and looked down at me and she said ‘this is not an accident. This is not anything to play about.’ For that toddler, “the whole mood of the day changed... I knew that things were beyond what I expected them or ever could have imagined them, being that young, only four and a half.” He concluded simply, “I can picture a world where 9/11 didn’t happen and I’d prefer to be there.”

America’s New Beginning

This is the noise of emotion that came with and followed September 11. The disbelief of what was happening naturally morphed into a confusion and disbelief of memory, an echo of emotion that many still don’t fully understand. Sonali Beaven, five when her father was killed on Flight 93 (the plane that

buried itself into the Pennsylvania countryside when passengers tried to wrestle control from the hijackers) reflected years later that her “life’s ambitions are centered on what I witnessed in the aftermath of 9/11. I saw suffering, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a failure of many to cope with these problems.”

In a lot of ways, America is still in the grips of 9/11 PTSD; it’s an event that has profoundly shaped our outlook on the twenty-first century. In a 2019 Twitter post, Dan Sheehan responded to a simple question about his generation:

**“Why do millennials complain all the time?”
His response was sharp and to the point –
“Idk [I don’t know] man, we watched 2000
people die on live tv when we were ten and
then literally nothing ever got better.”**

The post was retweeted 51,000 times and received 232,000 likes in only a few hours. 9/11 remains at the pivotal core of an entire generation.

Only three days after the attacks, journalist Nancy Gibbs wrote “it was clear that some things had changed forever. The attacks will become a defining reference point for our culture and imagination, a question of before and after, safe and scarred.” Jack Beatty wrote “we were expelled from Disneyland on September 11. That is the Fall in U.S. History. For lifetimes to come, we will not know a day of security from enemy attack on our homeland.” Threats from afar were unknown to Americans before 9/11. We had lived in a perfect fantasyland; everything was magical, happy, and safe.

The 9/11 Generation

The kids who remember the attacks and the ensuing terror are, I think, the front half, or the “*direct*” 9/11 Generation. Anywhere from age ten to about fifteen, they’re the tail end of the Millennials, violently separated from the rest of their generation. On the other side are the “*indirect*” 9/11 Generation – some mistakenly call them the post-Millennials or Gen Z – They’re too young or only vaguely remember because they were at most eight or nine. Many were far younger or born after the attacks.

But they all share disturbing commonality, having grown up in the shadow of towers that no longer exist. Author Justin Moreno spoke directly to this point, writing in 2017, “here I am, a 19-year-old with no memory whatsoever of 9/11 or what life was like before it.” He was only three, living in Brooklyn when the World Trade Center crumbled. “Post 9/11 isn’t just a timestamp,” he insists. “It’s a lifestyle that many of us don’t recognize as being a huge factor in our quality of life.”

KULTURE

Generation 9/11: Life after September 11th as a post- millennial New Yorker

BY JUSTIN MORENO

What have they grown up with? Police in full riot gear, cameras on every street, weekly terror drills in school, announcements about suspicious packages and behavior, school shootings, “see something, say something.” Moreno understands, “my world has always been overprotective,”

There’s science to back up what these kids are feeling. Dana Rose Garfin, a social psychologist at the University of California, Irvine, writes about “How the Pain of 9/11 Still Stays With A Generation,” explaining that “the events of 9/11 ushered in a new era of media coverage of collective trauma, where terrorism and other forms of large-scale violence are transmitted into the daily lives of children and American families.”

Mental health professionals have been especially keen to grapple with post-9/11 PTSD. On the tenth anniversary of the attacks the American Psychological Association dedicated a special issue of its journal, *American Psychologist*, to “9/11: Ten Years Later.” One essay insisted that “events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks are assaults against not only physical targets but also people’s expectations about and understanding of the world around them. After such attacks, survivors find themselves trapped between a comfortable but untenable and outdated worldview and a new, negative, and threatening view of the world.”



These ideas have been made that much worse by the mass violence in our society, especially school and public shootings. An overwhelming anxiety consumes parts of the 9/11 Generation. One of my students explained that her elementary and secondary schools had always commemorated 9/11 with moments of silence and reminders to remember the lost lives, but she felt “hardly had any emotional connection.” Yet still had an unsettling relationship with tragedy. “Growing up in Newtown [the Sandy Hook Elementary

School shooting] death is all around me. Between Sandy Hook and [the] suicide of friends...there’s no escaping it.” She and her peers are all too familiar with violence and death. In recent years, the number of mass shootings, especially at schools, has been overwhelming.

How can it be surprising that students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida had enough after a lone gunman slaughtered seventeen of their classmates and teachers, and wounded an equal number? How can it be surprising that these kids have determined that adults and the government can’t keep them safe, that they need to rise up and take charge? Is it any wonder that they are stressed beyond reason and arriving to college with their psychological baggage in tow? There’s simply no way to deny death, vulnerability, and the accompanying anxiety. These kids have truly been cast out of Disneyland and instead dumped in a post-9/11 America.

Statistics back up of the overwhelming stress among the 9/11 Generation. College campuses across the nation have seen massive spikes in anxiety and depression. An American Psychological Association survey revealed a 44% increase in “severe psychological problems” from 2013 to 2014, and that during the previous five years the rise of anxiety disorders was overwhelming campus counseling centers. In 2018, *Time Magazine* ran an article titled, “Record Numbers of College Students Are Seeking Treatment for Depression and Anxiety — But Schools Can’t Keep Up.”

Why have the mental health needs of so many college-age students exploded across America? Because the *indirect 9/11* Generation have been arriving to campuses and they're stressed out.

Witnessing Terror

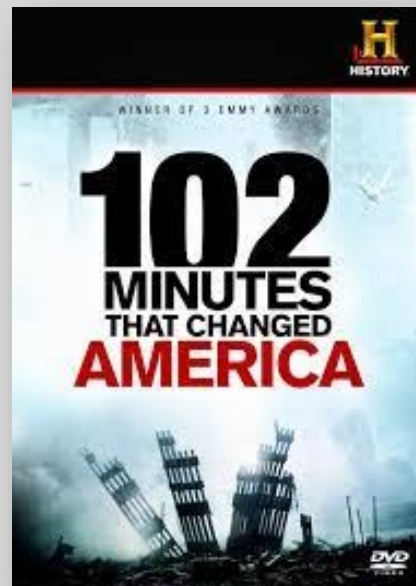
The many memories and feelings that all of these kids expressed can't do justice to what many actually witnessed that day. To truly understand the initial shock, simply watch the initial moments in the documentary film, *102 Minutes That Changed America*. After American Airlines flight 11 struck the North Tower, New Yorkers pulled out their cameras and started filming. The documentary is something of a collage, footage from lots of people who felt compelled to record the moment. One of them, Caroline Dries, was a senior at New York University, and reveals in real-time the nation's sense of disbelief in the short time between the first and second planes. Watching the billowing smoke and office papers floating from Tower One, Caroline and her roommate debated what they were seeing, wondering if the objects falling from the building were people. "Who's to say it's not, like, a chair," asks Caroline. She understood later that there was a "level of denial" at play. But when United flight 175 blew through the side of Tower Two there was a gasp – then wailing; screaming; total fear. "Oh my God, it's terrorists." The recognition was instantaneous, unqualified. "What do we do?" screamed Caroline as she and her roommate panicked to escape the high-rise building where they lived.

The same scene of shock and fear repeated itself throughout the day. There was no avoiding that death and war had come to American shores. The world watched as first responders arrived on scene and journalists pondered how fires on the 90th floors could be extinguished. When the towers ultimately fell, everyone knew that those same responders had died. Over the next days, months, and years, their stories have become the central focal point for understanding 9/11. America wrapped itself in a cloak of tragedy and triumph, one balancing the other.

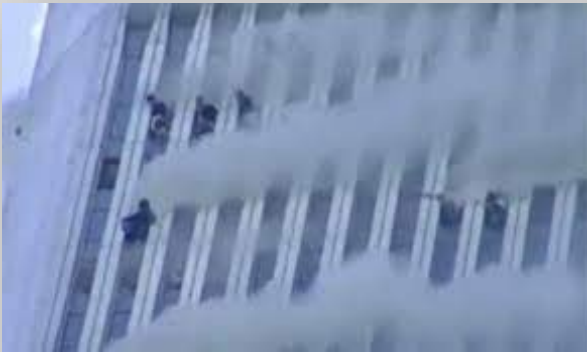
Even before the towers collapsed, the humanity of what was unfolding was apparent most explicitly in those who were falling from the towers. Although viewers knew that people had died when the planes hit the buildings, the horror of the situation was most shocking when they saw victims forced to escape the smoke and raging fires.

Still, Caroline Dries refused to believe what was before her eyes. It was too horrible to contemplate. Others couldn't not see. Those standing near the base or attempting to flee the towers were confronted with bodies hitting the ground. The first firefighter killed at the World Trade Center was Lieutenant Danny Suhr of Engine Company 216 – he was struck by a jumper.

In his book *Last Man Down*, New York Deputy Fire Chief Richard Picciotto told the story of his harrowing escape from Tower One. "Our beautiful day turned to shit," explained Picciotto. "Our world turned upside down and inside out and all over the place. Our lives changed forever." He repeatedly discussed how



firefighters feel about their jobs, saying that they were essentially a military organization and each job was like going off to battle. But September 11th was different.



As he arrived on scene and stepped from his vehicle, Picciotto remembered, “I saw the jumpers, a couple of dozen, falling from the sky, desperate to escape the smoke and suffocating death, and this was one sight that threw me. Really, I wasn’t expecting to see people falling from the sky.” He continued, “the mere fact of their jumping was incomprehensible.

All that day, all through what was to come, and on into all the days since, I could close my eyes and imagine the faces of these falling bodies, imagine the terror that drove these good people to leap, but at the same time all I could think was, Shit, I don’t want to get hit by one of these jumpers.”

Other fire fighters, first responders, and witnesses also remember. As people frantically fled the buildings in search of safety, emergency personnel directed them to not look down, to just keep moving. Still, they had to walk around and over bodies, body parts, and pools of blood. Many remember hearing the thuds and small explosions as people hit the pavement. Firefighter Kevin McBride explained the mayhem in a World Trade Center Task Force interview: “I remember one person actually hitting a piece of structural steel over a glass canopy and that just disintegrated. Just the most horrific thing I ever saw.” He continued, “You watched it in somewhat disbelief, but you just – I can’t believe what I’m watching. I remember the reaction of the guys behind me. Like oh, my god, they are jumping, they are jumping.” McBride remembered the “loud echo, just boom, boom.”

No one knows exactly how many fell to their deaths, but estimates are at least 200. *USA Today* concluded that “between 7 and 8 percent of those who died in New York City on September 11, 2001, died by jumping out of the buildings; it means that if we consider only the North Tower, where the vast majority of jumpers came from, the ratio is more like one in six.” *Daily Mail* columnist Tom Leonard reported that the fall from ninety floors up was estimated to take about ten seconds with the victims reaching a velocity of around 125 mph. He rightly concluded, “Nothing more graphically spells out the horror of the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers than the grainy pictures of those poor souls frozen in mid-air as they fell to their deaths.”

Tony Bristow, a construction worker from the Bronx, said, “I saw three people jump holding hands. Then the wind took them in different directions. It was boom, boom, boom, as they hit different buildings coming down.” James Gilroy witnessed a woman standing on the edge of a window, “She had a business suit on, her hair was all askew. This woman stood there for what seemed like minutes, then she held down her skirt and then stepped off the ledge.” Kevin Horan, a World Trade Center fire-safety worker, said “there were body parts for blocks....And jumpers. Tons of them.” Aron Kirsch, a twenty-eight-year-old city planner, said, “It was more than horrible to watch.” Joshua Fifer, a twenty-one-year-old student agreed. “It’s the sickest thing you’ve seen in your whole life.” Mike Frankel, just nineteen, and also a student, told to his mother, “Ma, I saw 50 people die. I saw the buildings drop right in front of me. I came

out of school and saw people jumping out of the buildings. I saw everything.” Michael Elam ran towards Trinity Church to escape the falling debris. When the second plane struck Tower Two, bodies rained down from the sky. At first, he thought they had come from the plane itself, but quickly realized they were jumping to escape the smoke and fire.

The first images of the jumpers appeared on page seven of the *New York Times* and were quickly syndicated in hundreds of papers throughout the world. Associated Press reporter Richard Drew was in Manhattan photographing fashion week, but, like so many others, turned his lens on the horror unfolding at the World Trade Center. At 9:41:15 seconds, he snapped a dozen frames of a man falling vertically, head down. Forever known as “the Falling Man,” the media quickly began hunting for his identity, which has never been officially confirmed.

The image outraged Americans. As journalist Susie Linfield explained, “the photographs of the so-called jumpers have been rendered taboo, vilified as an insult to the dead and an unbearably brutal shock to the living.”

David Friend, writing for *Vanity Fair*, captured the full scope of the historical and emotional moment: “The 9/11 attacks, in fact, were the most widely observed breaking-news event in human history, seen that day in still photos, on the Internet, or on television by an estimated two billion people, nearly a third of the human race.” He continued, “the world was able to witness, understand, and respond to the horrors of September 11 largely through the medium of photography.” Some of those images were controversial and unwelcome.

Susan Linfield’s calling people who fell from the buildings “so-called jumpers” is telling. It points to wider cultural issues in a religious, hero-obsessed nation.



Reporter Tom Leonard described them as “the 9/11 victims America wants to forget,” and psychology professor David Lester said that “Americans want to focus on patriotism and courage, and those who chose to jump do not epitomize this. Furthermore, many in America consider suicide to be a sin, a shameful act that will condemn you to Hell.”

Reflecting on all of this, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of New York City classified these victims of 9/11 “as fallers rather than jumpers.” “We don’t like to say they jumped. They didn’t jump. Nobody jumped. They were forced out, or blown out.” Lester offered historical context to explain why Americans averted their eyes. “America had never been attacked by an enemy for over a hundred years. The shock of the attack and the fear that it generated in Americans was great. Removing the images of the attack helped Americans avoid confronting the reality.”

Yet try as some might, they could not hide the Falling Man from the public. He was embedded in the meaning of the moment, and Americans, in particular artists, struggled with how to make sense of it. On the first anniversary of 9/11, artist Eric Fischl unveiled a bronze sculpture called “Tumbling Woman,”

a representation of one of the many people who fell from the towers. It lasted only one week in Rockefeller Center before it was covered and later removed.

Spokeswoman Suzanne Halpin stated, “We apologize if anyone was upset or offended by the display of this sculpture.” This, even though Fischl had created the piece as a sincere expression of sympathy and grief, including a poem that defined his meaning:



**“We watched, disbelieving
and helpless, on that savage day.
People we love began falling,
helpless and in disbelief.”**

In a powerful way, Fischl’s description of the Falling Man or Tumbling Woman may be the best representative symbol of the 9/11 Generation. They have grown up and remained in a sort of chaotic, disbelieving helplessness for most of their lives as the world around them tumbles, seemingly out of control. They are suspended, always floating, waiting for the next calamity, whether it be a terrorist attack, a shooter, or Covid 19.

It took years before Fischl’s sculpture and other artwork about 9/11 was displayed at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in an alcove titled “Rendering the Unthinkable: Artists Respond to 9/11.” A *New York Post* reporter questioned if people were ready for the sculpture even years later, calling it a cultural Rorschach test.





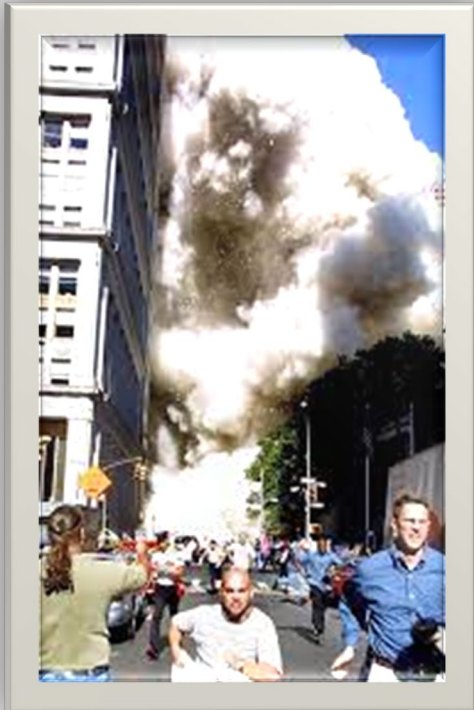
The work of Manju Shandler. Each of these paintings were approximately 4" x 9" and arranged in a palette, but randomly in terms of subject. There were many different themes represented. One was the Falling Man.

<http://rendering.911memorial.org/artists/manju-shandler/>

Novelists and scholars have also wrestled with the meaning of the Falling Man. Don DeLillo's novel by that name offers a fictional account that is all too real for readers. "There is September 11 and then there are the days after, and finally the years," he writes in the preface, calling the day a "global tremor." In evaluating the many works that have tackled the raw nerve of the Falling Man concept, author Aimee Pozorski concludes, "On the one hand, they [the public] demand that artists address the big questions and problems of the times. On the other hand, they have a tendency to dismiss such works, often judging them inappropriate, inadequate, untimely, disrespectful, opportunist, too clean, or too violent."

Even years after the attacks, as students who are members of the indirect 9/11 Generation learn about the event, they express heartfelt sadness at the notion of jumping from 110-story buildings over 1,360 feet high. Just to observe my students' body language as they watch the film *102 Minutes That Changed America* is profoundly disturbing. Hands fly to cover the mouth, but just a moment too late. The gasp already seeped out. The hands stay there anyway, sometimes for the better part of the film.

The other moments the 9/11 Generation find most troubling are the collapse of the towers – 9:59 for Tower One and 10:28 for Tower Two. It's not just the collapse, but the debris cloud that roared outward at over twenty miles per hour, consuming everything and everyone in its path. I often tell my students in preparation for watching the film *102 Minutes* that it's as close as any of them will ever get to understanding what it was like to sit in front of the television and feel what Americans witnessed in 2001. I deliberately push back the film viewing until about a month into the semester so I have time to develop a rapport and build a level of trust with my students. It would be unfair and irresponsible to ask them to watch it too soon. The jumpers and the dust cloud are always points that students raise during the post-film discussion. Some talk about their overall anxiety and others say they feel claustrophobic watching New Yorkers get swallowed by the debris cloud. "I just can't imagine it," remarked one student. "How could they breathe? How could they survive? I couldn't breathe just watching it."



There are no easy answers to such questions. Survivors simply did the best they could, holding shirts, jackets, or scarves over their mouths, running, tripping, falling, helping others, all in a mad dash to escape. Still, the debris cloud engulfed many of them. It couldn't be outrun. What I can tell students is that scientists have studied the effect of the collapses.

Not long after the attacks, a panel of Boston area-based civil and structural engineers met on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Each event created a (modest-sized) magnitude 2 earthquake, as monitored at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Observatory, which is located about 30 kilometers away from New York City," the panel said. Seismologist Won-Young Kim, who worked at the lab, stated that the first collapse (the South Tower) generated seismic waves comparable to a magnitude 2.1 quake.

The North Tower corresponded to a magnitude 2.3 earthquake. "Most of the energy did not reach the ground as seismic waves; it was mainly used up converting steel, concrete—and human beings—to dust." He said the event resembled the energy released by a pyroclastic flow, a lethal explosion of hot gases and debris running down the slopes of an exploding volcano.

People also wonder about what it took to clean it all up. The debris cloud, a fine dust of pulverized concrete, dry wall, asbestos, windows, office furniture, computers, and every other sort of thing that exists in a modern building, including people, had blown throughout lower Manhattan, coating everything in its path. And it wasn't just outside. It was inside. Inside every apartment, every business, and every person, in both their lungs and their minds. In a 2016 essay, "I can still smell the smoke from the World Trade Centre as I write this," John De Vore discussed the impenetrable cloud, reporting, "in the subsequent days and weeks, I talked to friends who had not been spared the horror. One had vomited ash." Some said the dust was like nuclear fallout, periodically kicked up by the wind so that it recoated everything in its path.

Ground Zero

Work to excavate what had now become known as Ground Zero began almost immediately, once the search-and-rescue operation for possible survivors had ceased. Twenty people were pulled or rescued themselves from the rubble in the two days following the attack. Cleanup was no simple matter. Pockets of fire burned for 99 days, often reignited by a sudden rush of oxygen as cranes lifted away what was left of the mangled buildings. It took 3.1 million hours of labor, 108,000 truckloads totaling 1.8 million tons

of debris and \$750 million to clear the World Trade Center site. The speed of the cleanup was remarkable; it took only eight months, completed on May 30, 2002.

But that was just Ground Zero. The rest of lower Manhattan took longer. In July 2002 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which had wrongly assured New Yorkers that there was nothing to fear from the air, began cleaning and testing thousands of apartments. *The New York Times*, reporting that the EPA effort raised all sorts of issues, noted that the “emotional residue from the disaster swirls as much as the dust that people still wipe from their window sills and from the clothes in their closets.” Even a year later, debris, including human remains were found in the city, some on the roof of a bank tower and others in a manhole. That prompted the city to begin a new search, which found 1,500 pieces of human beings.

As the streets and buildings surrounding Ground Zero were purged of ash and rubble, nothing could be done about what had become known as the WTC cough, a respiratory issue that afflicted first responders, laborers at the cleanup site, and New Yorkers who continued to live in the area. As time went on, it became clear that the effects of the dust went far beyond those at the site of the collapse, and beyond a mere cough. In 2016, *Newsweek* ran an article entitled “9/11’s Second Wave: Cancer and Other Diseases Linked to the 2001 Attacks Are Surging,” explaining that “as many as 400,000 people are estimated to be affected by diseases, such as cancers, and mental illnesses linked to September 11.” There are nearly seventy different types of cancer from the dust.

News agencies report that the 9/11 death toll will soon be surpassed by those dying from the toxic debris that encased lower Manhattan. One reporter noted starkly, “It’s like Bin Laden is still reaching out from the grave.” The bearded cleric of terror had announced only a month after the attacks that “their repercussions are not yet over.” He couldn’t have known that the health effects of the destroyed towers would linger for so long, but he certainly envisioned a new beginning for America – a period darker and more disturbing than Americans could have imagined. It began at Ground Zero.

The term itself denotes the epicenter of something new, something deadly. The primary definition is “the point on the earth’s surface directly above or below an exploding nuclear bomb.” The secondary definition is “a starting point or base for some activity.” The atomic bombs detonated over Japan, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were literally the sites of “ground zero,” both in the sense of a location and in that they represented a new and never-before-seen type of weapon. In Japan, ground zero demonstrated the immensity of American power. It marked the end of World War II and the beginning of a new American role in global affairs. It was truly the beginning of American empire, or what some have called “the American Century.”

With 9/11, “Ground Zero” has taken on a whole new meaning, both literal and deeply symbolic. It is the site of the world’s most devastating terrorist attack and a new beginning for America. – In stark contrast to the display of American power at Japan’s ground zero, the Ground Zero of 9/11 revealed a direct challenge to American power. “Ground Zero” is used, as one commenter put it, “to denote American soil....THIS is where it happened. THIS is where people were killed. It memorializes the tragedy itself, and

9/11 DUST EXPOSURE RELATED TO CANCER

20 YEARS LATER

The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City changed America forever. In the two decades since, researchers have linked the toxic dust from the WTC debris to deadly conditions such as lung cancer, mesothelioma and other respiratory diseases.



Sources: WTC Health Program, FealGood Foundation, CNN

the explosion and chaos and death it unleashed, not the actual people who perished there. It localizes the hurt. Puts it literally on the map, where we can draw a pinpoint bead on the exact speck of bipartisan



dirt containing all our sorrows.”

This is the place that magnetically drew bystanders after the attacks. Those who needed to see the “where” of 9/11, as well as the rescue workers and family members who needed to see where their loved ones were lost. In 2002, the *Washington Post* ran an article entitled “A Heart’s Ground Zero,” telling the story of retired firefighter John Vigiano, as “he’s standing on the edge of a 70-foot-deep crater, the footprint of the World Trade Center, and watching the tedious work down below.” Vigiano lost both of his sons on 9/11, one a New York City police officer, the other a firefighter.

There are some who don’t like the term “Ground Zero,” especially firefighters. Deputy Chief Richard Picciotto insisted that, “the place was sacred ground and shouldn’t be reduced by the negative connotation.” His concern was that “it sounded as if the World Trade Center complex itself was the source of the terrorist attack on our freedom....[and] all of us here at home were somehow responsible for such a monstrous, unthinkable act of violence.” Picciotto and other firefighters, as well as the many workers who searched for remains and dug out the crumbled towers preferred to call it what it was, “the pile.” He also knew that it was a place of pilgrimage. “Without even realizing it, folks were pulled to that sixteen-acre complex, and I suspect they will continue to be pulled there for as long as we remember the events of that day.” In 2019, the 9/11 Memorial & Museum was the number two most visited site in the world, second only to the Louvre in Paris. By the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, the Memorial & Museum will surely be number one. As Chief Picciotto said, people will be pulled to the site for as long as we remember.

Others also dislike the term “Ground Zero” because it focuses strictly on the attack. At the tenth anniversary of 9/11, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg insisted, “We will never forget the devastation of the area that came to be known as ground zero. Never. But the time has come to call those 16 acres what they are: The World Trade Center and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum.” Larry Silverstein, the owner of the site agreed, saying, “Ground Zero is a reference for yesterday, but World Trade Center is the reference for tomorrow. Ten years from today, I suspect very few people will remember it as Ground Zero....It’s inevitable, that’s life.”

Both men are wrong. The site continues to be known as Ground Zero. One commentator explained exactly why. For “those who were directly affected by the attack, 9/11 has remained as raw and painful as ever over the last ten years. And changing the name would symbolize not only a premature desire to move on, but also the desire to forget. That’s just not possible for the families of a lost loved one.”

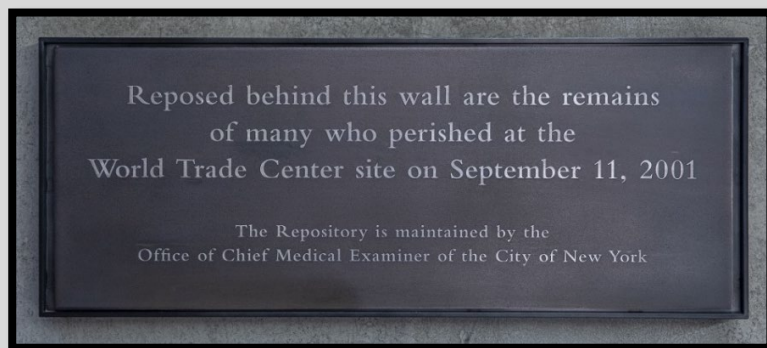


Moreover, the author concluded, the difference of opinion over the name “comes between those who see ‘Ground Zero’ merely as a name and those who see it as an enduring symbol.” That’s exactly right. Bloomberg’s conclusion that the site should be known as the September 11 Memorial & Museum didn’t take into full consideration how people feel about those places and what they represent.

The Memorial plaza is dominated by two square voids with cascading waterfalls symbolizing the footprints of where the mighty towers once stood. Each is ringed by bronze parapets with the names of those who lost their lives. As the designers intended, the “memorial proposes a space that resonates with the feelings of loss and absence.” For those who come to see and mourn, this is the place – this is Ground Zero.

The Museum holds the same compelling pull, and the same meaning. Descending into the cavernous space, visitors are confronted at once by what was and now is. One can walk along the perimeter of where the towers stood, the remains of the massive steel box columns, the skeletal structure that launched World Trade One and Two high into the Manhattan sky. All that’s left is the concrete-encased bases with the still ragged saw marks from where workers spent a full day cutting just to remove one mangled beam. It’s a stark, visceral reminder.

Even more disturbing, and what many visitors likely never really know, is the unremarkable door that leads to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner’s repository, where the remains, the pieces, of so many people lost that day still reside, waiting for new DNA technology that will



identify and return them to their loved ones.

Only 40% of these remains have been identified. – No, this is still Ground Zero. It's where it happened. It's a place of remembrance. It's a place of mourning. It's a gravesite. It's a new reality for America. It's a place where Americans go to gasp again. It's a reminder of how the 9/11 Generation came to be.

This reality marks a distinct, new beginning for most Americans. It's the starting point for America's War on Terror, when the clock began ticking for what is now the nation's longest conflict. It marks the loss of American innocence, when we recognized that our oceans could not stop attacks generated from within. The terrorist assault on our homeland left us with a profound sense of loss and fear – that's what bin Laden meant it to do. It also generated intense anger and a desire for revenge.

America had faced Middle Eastern terror long before 9/11, but we had, perhaps, failed to pay sufficient attention because the violence had not occurred on U.S. soil, or we had forgotten that it did. In 1993, a truck bomb detonated in the basement of the World Trade Center's North Tower. Six people died and over a thousand were injured. It seems that all we learned was the need for better evacuation protocols in the towers, and that did save lives on September 11, 2001.

On that day, Osama bin Laden forced Americans to pay attention. We couldn't not watch as planes crashed into iconic buildings and rural fields. For most of that day, both in the U.S. and throughout the world, the clock stopped. America shut down, gripped by the horrible reality of death and violence. We would never be the same, and the generation that was just entering its adolescence, and those just about to be born into a new millennium, were irrevocably shaped by those 102 minutes. The 9/11 Generation was born.



We are now decades past the moment that changed America. Those born so long after 9/11 have no memory of that day. Yet each year they stand in classrooms throughout the United States and are told to remember, to not forget. That's impossible – all they can do is learn. The only question that remains is what they should be taught? What are the integral lessons of 9/11? What can September 11 – what came before, during, and after – tell us about who we are as a nation? Are there lessons for the 9/11 Generation? Ones that might be learned in the hopes of helping to forge a better world? Are we capable of learning those lessons?

What Really Happened?

Those Who Remember

Those who remember that Tuesday morning know some of the answer. We watched the Towers burn. We witnessed the second plane smash through the glass and steel of World Trade Center Two, launching debris into the streets of Manhattan as a giant fireball flashed against the deep blue sky. We collectively gasped.



We found out soon after that nineteen America-hating terrorists had hijacked four commercial jets and turned them into missiles. They were motivated and sponsored by a “goat-herding” fanatic who lived in a cave. All of America soon learned his name – Osama bin Laden. The 9/11 Generation’s bogeyman.

But how did these jihadi suicide-hijackers do it? This became the paramount question in the aftermath of the attack, as the Towers smoldered in ruin, the gaping tear in the Pentagon’s side spewed noxious smoke, and the remnants of what was once a Boeing 757 lay scattered in a Pennsylvania field. Bin Laden’s fundamentalist Islamic terrorist network, Al Qaeda, had achieved a spectacular success, out maneuvering the world’s most powerful military and an intelligence network second to none. And it was all done on a shoe string budget, a mere \$400,000 to \$500,000. The return on investment would have excited any New York hedge fund manager. The comptroller of New York City estimated the cost to the city at somewhere between \$83 and \$95 billion. And that was just New York. What about the costs of shutting down the entire airline industry for a week, closing the New York Stock Exchange, claims against insurance companies, the trillion dollars spent on increased security, or the trillion dollar wars in Afghanistan and Iraq? Even worse, the attack initiated a nation-wide economic recession that lasted for well over a decade. Talk about a return on investment.¹

The instability of post-September 11 economics is something the 9/11 Generation has had to contend with for most of their lives. Whether they were old enough to see the financial disaster up close or grew up watching their parents uncertainty, the seemingly unstoppable bull economy of the 1990s had come to a grinding halt; the economic shock wave was real and lasting. Even as the economy improved in the second decade of the twenty-first century, most of the 9/11 Generation has seen little reason to celebrate. Whether they are going to college and amassing crushing student debt in a country with enormous wealth, or they're working multiple jobs and just trying to get by, there's little in the post-9/11 economy that has offered much promise. Even as America's financial system rebounded, it fared best for those who had most. The stock market finally has soared and large tax cuts have swelled the profits of top earners, yet all while many states are close to insolvency, the nation's infrastructure is falling apart, and school systems in every part of America are underfunded. How is this an economy to celebrate?

The economics of September 11, of course, paled in comparison to the loss of life and the resulting shock wave that rip through American society. There were family members who never returned home, and a new generation born of chaos. The direct members of the 9/11 Generation saw adults and a government incapable of safeguarding them from harm. It was a psychological blow, especially to the youngest members of society; they thought the United States was invincible. The "indirect" members of the 9/11 Generation, those born after the attacks, have grown up with a distinct cultural insecurity – America is, they are, vulnerable.



While the rubble still burned at Ground Zero, the nation's security and investigative apparatus went into overdrive, unsure of whether a follow up attack was coming. The media hunted for answers too. Everyone wanted to determine how Islamic fundamentalists had so easily bypassed security, from entering the country to boarding planes with weapons. Why had the government failed to detect the plot? What were the terrorists' ultimate goals, beyond death and destruction? Why those buildings? And the greatest question of all, why, why would a group of men hate America so much that they ended their own lives to end ours?

This was the dilemma adults found so difficult to explain. Bad, or evil people, was an almost reflexive response and what much of the 9/11 Generation came to believe.

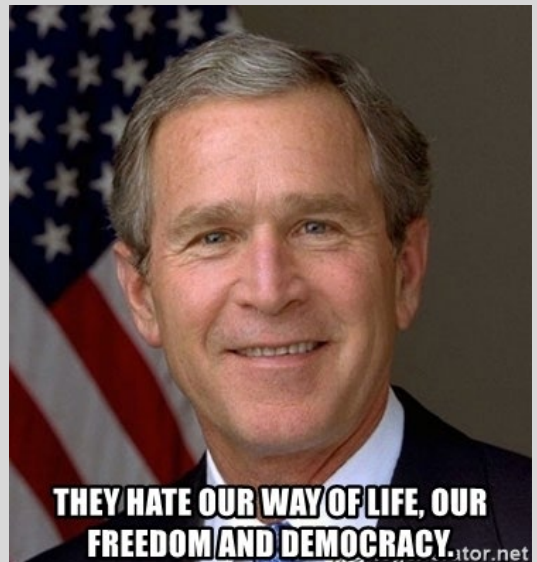
By now, one might expect the majority of Americans to have arrived at more definable conclusions, but the reality is that for most, the memory of 9/11 is more emotional than factual. Those who lived through the attacks know how they felt. That impression lay just below the surface of their lives, driving upward on an anniversary that seems less solemn with each passing year, especially for a generation with no memory of the day. For those really interested in understanding the how and why, the story plays out like a made-for-TV mini-series.² There's the plot, the secret training, the spy tradecraft – then the counterespionage and special agents,

dubious alliances, and liaisons with foreign actors. There were fleeting diplomatic missions with far away governments and an ever-ticking clock.

In my “9/11 Generation” course students explore all of this, and their answers to the varying questions bubble to the surface in end-of-the-semester projects – fifteen-minute documentaries in which students interview mainly family, friends, and co-workers, asking what they remember and, importantly, what they believe about what the terrorists attacked and why. It generally takes two full class periods, almost three hours, to agree on and hone just four questions that all students use for their films. Over the years, the questions have varied, but always focus on a few core ideas: Where were you and what do you remember? What led to the attacks and were there warning signs? Why did Osama bin Laden attack America? What was his goal in targeting particular buildings? Could the government have done anything to stop the attacks? What do you think of the government response following the attacks, the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq? Are we safer now? Will there be another attack? Will we always remember 9/11, or will it fade into history?

The way that people answer these questions reveals a jumble of muddled understanding. After teaching a dozen courses for more than five years, with hundreds of interviews conducted by students, there are remarkably similar reactions and answers in most films. Emotion, both sadness and anger, is clear. Some people agree to the interview, only to decline once the camera is set up. Ignorance and uncertainty are obvious. Students often comment in post-film discussions that they’re surprised at how little people know. They quickly find that, for most, that any understanding of 9/11 is largely emotional. There are always a few people who know more, but they’re the exception, not the rule.

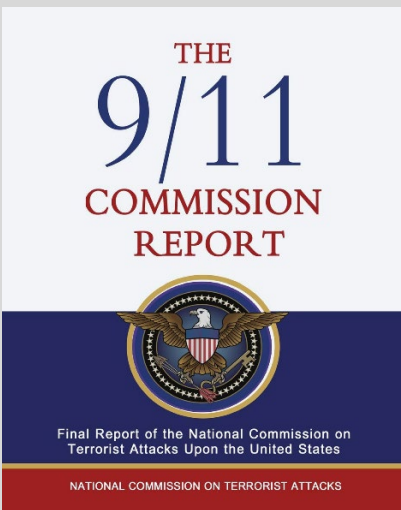
Every interviewee knows that suicide hijackers took over planes, but the motives behind those hijackings, why jihadists targeted America and particular buildings is another story. Some answer that the “why” may have something to do with U.S. involvement in the Middle East, especially American foreign policy. Others are certain of that, but most fall back on an official rationale – they hate our freedom. President George W. Bush was firm in the weeks, months, and years after the attack. He always came back to the original statements made in the immediate aftermath of the attacks and in his September 20, 2001 speech to the nation, insisting, “on September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country.”³



When asked why certain buildings were targeted or about bin Laden’s goals, most people interviewed for the student films have no answer, or provide only oversimplifications – bin Laden was a fanatic and wanted to kill as many people as possible.

Everyone interviewed knows who bin Laden was. They can identify his image and know instantly he was responsible for 9/11, but they know little else. Most Americans have never read a word of his writings. Some probably think doing so is an insult to the memories of those who died. Most conclude that bin Laden was little more than a “goat-herding” troglodyte operating from a mountain cave. He simply got lucky in pulling off the attack of the century. My students learn quickly that there’s much more to bin Laden than that, and they’re often shocked. George W. Bush’s claim that bin Laden’s only reason for attacking America was hatred of freedom did a disservice to the nation. It simplified a problem that was decades in the making and refusing to wrestle with that problem made it impossible for the United States to follow any path other than never-ending war. Dealing with bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and Islamic extremism required more than a powerful military.

The Commission



The idea that hatred of American freedom was the only reason for bin Laden’s attack was quickly dispelled by the single largest investigative study ever conducted on 9/11. The 9/11 Commission, made up of ten elected officials, five Republicans and five Democrats, spent eighteen months and twelve million dollars reviewing more than 2.5 million pages of documents and interviewing some 1,200 people from ten countries. The Commission made its mission clear in the opening sentences of its massive report: “September 11, 2001, was a day of unprecedented shock and suffering in the history of the United States. The nation was unprepared. How did this happen, and how can we avoid such tragedy again?”⁴

To learn the answer, the Commission held nineteen days of public hearings, with testimony from 160 people, including government officials from the Clinton and Bush administrations. Some of the interviews, such as those with President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, were conducted behind closed doors with no recorded transcripts. Even that brief, three-hour joint interview took a fair amount of wrangling. From the beginning, the President insisted that a formal commission was unnecessary, that Congress should deal with the matter because of sensitive information. Cheney expressed concern that the investigation would take resources and personnel away from the War on Terror.⁵

Republicans in Congress tried to block the Commission’s creation by proposing a series of amendments to the legislation that created the Commission, but they couldn’t withstand the

political pressure in Washington from the media and the 9/11 families. “As family members who lost loved ones on 9/11,” wrote the group *Voices of September 11th*, “we support full implementation of the 9/11 Commission recommendations. We are writing out of grave concern that your recent introduction of highly provocative, irrelevant amendments will jeopardize the passage.”⁶ By pushing back, the Bush administration revealed misgivings about what the Commission might find. The attacks had shown that the homeland was vulnerable, and everyone wanted to know why. It was a justifiable concern, as the Commission report soon made clear.

On July 22, 2004, some three years after the attacks, the Commission released its 600-page tome. The publisher, W.W. Norton, was surprised at the level of sales, noting that the initial run of 600,000 sold out quickly.⁷ Many Americans wanted to know what happened, or at least have a piece of history on their bookshelves. For the Commission, the looming question was always “how did this happen, and how can we avoid such tragedy again?”



The main conclusion was bureaucracy. With dozens of agencies, and even more competing departments within those agencies, the system was too cumbersome and unwieldy to act with any alacrity. It churned its way ever so slowly through mountains of data, with various organizations refusing to communicate with one another, share information, or connect the many dots that were readily visible. As the Commission co-chair, former Indiana Congressman Lee Hamilton said after completing the report, “Intelligence reform was our big recommendation. The principal conclusion we reached was that the 15 or 16 agencies of the intelligence community did not share information.”⁸

The Commission provided the American people with a detailed, painstaking account of what happened and how. But deciphering the meaning of 9/11 required more than a play-by-play on “how” terrorists managed attack the United States. The most important question was understanding “why,” especially since one of the Commission’s stated goals was how to avoid another attack. Why was a group of men so dedicated to killing Americans that they would sacrifice their own lives and know that doing so was the beginning of a generational war? They may have hated our freedom, as many Americans believe, but why? It’s a question that America has never fully confronted and a looming unknown for the 9/11 Generation.

The Commission report never really explored this essential question, but they nailed the “how.” Based on classified documents, interviews with key government officials, and interrogations of Islamic fundamentalists (many of whom were incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and were involved in the attacks or plotted in other ways against the United States), the report is the essential source for understanding “how.” It’s also critical for understanding what the government focused on and how it chose to tell the 9/11 story.

The Day



Airport security cameras show two al Qaeda terrorists, Mohamed Atta and Abdul Aziz al-Omari, passing through security at the Portland International Jetport in Maine at 5:45 a.m. There, they boarded a commuter flight to Boston's Logan International Airport, where they met with three other hijackers and boarded American Flight 11, bound for Los Angeles.

Atta served as the operational commander of the 9/11 plot. In all, there were nineteen men, although it's believed that a total of twenty were meant to take part, five for each flight. One or two men on each plane was responsible for piloting the flight into its target, while the others served as muscle to take control of the plane and stop anyone, crew or passengers, from interfering. Flight manifests show that most of the hijackers sat in either First or Business Class, as far forward in the plane as possible. On each flight, at least one hijacker sat directly next to the cockpit door.⁹ The hijackers had done their homework by flying around the nation, observing in-flight routines, and challenging airport security by carrying or placing knives and other items in their toiletry kits. They knew exactly how to beat the system. Most importantly, they were willing to die.

The actor James Woods was on one of the hijackers' test flights and notified both flight attendants and the FBI about what he witnessed. No one took him seriously enough to investigate, until the day of the attacks. Only after the twin towers lay in ruins did the FBI show up on Woods' doorstep.

Less than two hours after Atta and his co-conspirator were videotaped in Portland, security footage recorded three other hijackers, Nawaf al Hazmi, Khalid al Mindhar, and Majed Moqed, pass through airport screening at Washington Dulles International Airport, headed for American Flight 77. All of the men, including Atta in Portland, were selected by the CAPPs (Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System) for additional security protocols, which



Required only that their checked bags be held until the men actually boarded the plane. In Boston, Hazmi, Mindhar, and Moqed set off the metal detector, calibrated to detect metal equivalent to a .22 caliber pistol. Security searched each man with a hand-held wand, but found no weapons. A flight agent at the gate later noted that Atta was “sweating bullets...his forehead was drenched.”¹⁰

It’s hard to imagine the primitive security of those times, days that the 9/11 Generation has never experienced, when passengers walked through a simple metal detector, rather than a full body scanner. The Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) run by the federal government didn’t exist. Airlines hired contractors to conduct security. There was no need to take off shoes or a belt, and those picking up friends or family could go to the gate instead of waiting at a security checkpoint. It was a time when walking into an airport didn’t evoke memories of hijacked planes and burning buildings, or cause passengers to question the motives of other passengers.

It’s likely that the metal detectors went off because at least some of the hijackers carried box cutters and knives. Amazingly, knives with a four-inch blade or less were legal at the time. Today, TSA will confiscate a pair of sewing scissors. The men also carried some sort of chemical spray, either pepper or mace. Incidentally, the hijackers bound for flights 11 and 77 are the only ones recorded on video. Boston’s Logan Airport and Newark International Airport didn’t have this type of surveillance equipment. Today, cameras are so common we should assume that we’re always being watched.

American Airlines flight 11 lifted-off out of Boston at 7:59 a.m. with eleven crew members and eighty-one passengers, among them five hijackers seated at the front of the plane: Wail al Shehri (2A), Waleed al Shehri (2B), Mohamed Atta (8D), Abdul al Omari (8G), and Satam al Suqami (10B). They seized control only fifteen minutes after take-off, at 8:14. Within minutes, at 8:19, the American Airlines Flight Center in Cary, North Carolina received a call from flight attendant Betty Ann Ong. She was remarkably calm, even as the flight center personnel showed confusion.



Ong explained repeatedly that she was a flight attendant, third in command among the crew: “Number three in the back. The cockpit’s not answering. Somebody’s stabbed in business class. And I think there’s mace—that we can’t breathe. I don’t know. I think we’re getting hijacked.”¹¹ She reported that at least two flight attendants had been stabbed, as well as a passenger. Hijackers claimed they had a bomb.

The stabbed passenger, Daniel Lewin, an American-Israeli who had spent four years in the Israeli Defense Force and spoke Arabic, was seated in Business Class 9B, directly in front of Satam al Suqami. Lewin may have attempted to stop the hijacking unfolding before his eyes. Suqami sunk a knife into his throat.¹²

Just five minutes later, at 8:24, Atta pressed the wrong button when trying to make an announcement to passengers. He instead broadcasted only to air traffic control. In heavily accented English, he stated, “We have some planes. Just stay quiet, and you’ll be okay. We are returning to the airport.” Seconds later, he added, “Nobody move. Everything will be okay. If you try to make any moves, you’ll endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet.” No one listening on the ground caught that he had said “planes,” not plane.

At 8:26, Betty Ong reported that the plane was “flying erratically.” One minute later, it turned sharply south, towards New York City. At 8:34, Atta relayed another message: “Nobody move please. We are going back to the airport. Don’t try to make any stupid moves.” Four minutes later, at 8:38, the plane went into a rapid descent. At 8:44, air traffic control lost contact with Ong. Her fellow flight attendant, Amy Sweeney, was on a different phone line and recognized that the plane was over Manhattan. She took a deep breath, “Oh my God!...We are flying low. We are flying very, very low. We are flying way too low.”¹³

This was a time before Americans understood that commercial jetliners could be used as fuel-laden missiles. Standard hijackings almost always saw the plane returning home or proceeding to another airport, where a ground standoff ensued, and hijackers made political or financial demands. This time was different; it was a suicide hijacking. Flight 11 plunged into the north face of the North Tower at 8:46, killing all 92 people onboard and an unknown number in the building.

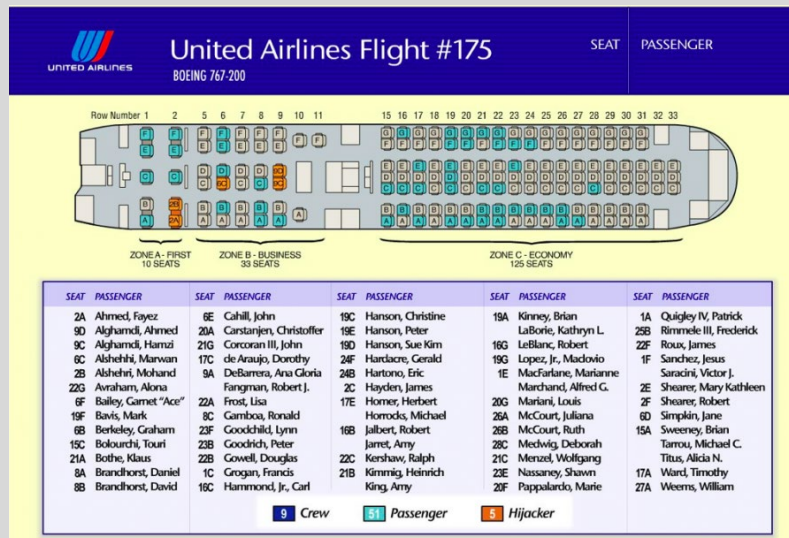


It had screamed down the center of Manhattan, seemingly skimming the tops of buildings before it barreled into World Trade Center One at 429 miles per hour.¹⁴

Many Americans are familiar with the video footage of the second plane, the most watched event in world history – the moment of the collective gasp. They aren’t as familiar with video of the first plane because it wasn’t broadcast live for all the world to see. Instead, it was recorded while New York City firefighters tested manhole covers with gas meters. The grainy, unsteady, handheld camera picks up the roar of the engines, the crash and ensuing fireball, and the simple, but all too clear response from one of the firefighters: “Holy shit!”¹⁵

One of Atta’s transmissions had actually been picked up by Victor J. Saracini, a pilot onboard United Flight 175, who immediately notified the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) just minutes before his own plane was hijacked, sometime between 8:42 and 8:46. That flight originated out of Boston, taking off at 8:15 with nine crew members and fifty-six passengers, among them five hijackers seated forward in the plane: Fayed Ahmed (2A), Mohand al Shehri

(2B), Marwan al Shehhi (6C), Hamzi al Ghamdi (9C), Ahmed al Ghamdi (9D). By 8:33, the flight reached its cruising altitude of 31,000 feet, and flight attendants had probably started cabin service.



At 8:47, air traffic control noticed something strange when the plane changed its transponder beacon code twice in one minute. Four minutes later, at 8:51, the flight deviated from its cruising altitude. At 8:52, a flight attendant, believed to be Robert John Fangman, reached a United Airlines operator in San Francisco. He reported the hijacking, said that both pilots were dead, a flight attendant had been stabbed, and hijackers were flying the plane. At almost the same time, at least three passengers reached their families by phone.

Peter Hanson called his father, Lee, in Easton, Connecticut, saying, "I think they've taken over the cockpit....The plane is making strange moves."¹⁶ At 8:58, the plane veered towards New York City. At 8:59, passenger Brian David Sweeney, a thirty-eight-year-old former U.S. Navy pilot who had flown in Gulf War I, reached his home answering machine and left a message for his wife: "Jules, this is Brian—listen, I'm on an airplane that's been hijacked. If things don't go well, and it's not looking good, I just want you to know I absolutely love you, I want you to do good, go have good times, same to my parents and everybody, and I just totally love you, and I'll see you when you get there. Bye, babe. I hope I call you."¹⁷ Sweeney then called his mom, Louise, told her about the hijacking, and said some of the passengers were considering storming the cockpit.

At 9 a.m., Peter Hanson called his father again: "It's getting bad, Dad - A stewardess was stabbed - They seem to have knives and Mace - They said they have a bomb - It's getting very bad on the plane - Passengers are throwing up and getting sick - The plane is making jerky movements - I don't think the pilot is flying the plane - I think we are going down - I think they intend to go to Chicago or someplace and fly into a building - Don't worry, Dad - If it happens, it'll be very fast - My God, my God."¹⁸

At 9:03, this second plane, United Flight 175, plunged into the south face of Tower Two at 586 miles per hour. Sixty-five people onboard the plane died instantly; how many in the building is unknown. This was the instant of America's collective gasp, when everyone watching TV instantly understood it was an act of terrorism. It was the instant that the 9/11 Generation was born. Before that moment, those watching the billowing smoke from the North Tower (even those at the Port Authority, which managed the World Trade Center) thought the first plane was an accident. At 8:55, a fire safety employee announced to the occupants of the South Tower, "Your attention, please, ladies and gentlemen. Building Two is secure. There is no need to evacuate Building Two. If you are in the midst of evacuation, you may use the reentry doors and the elevators to return to your office. Repeat, Building Two is secure." It took only eight minutes to reveal the error of that announcement.

The first two targets had been successfully set ablaze. Two other planes were inbound. American Flight 77 took off at 8:20 from Washington Dulles International Airport with six crew members and fifty-eight passengers, among them five hijackers seated at the front of the plane: Hani Hanjour (1B), Salem al Hazmi (5F), Nawaf al Hazmi (5E), Majed Moqed (12A), Khalid al Mindhar (12B). Nawaf al Hazmi set off two metal detectors in security, causing a secondary check with a hand wand and the swiping of his carry-on bag with an explosive detector. Video footage shows an unidentified item clipped to his back pocket. A screening expert who later reviewed the tape determined that the security check was "marginal at best" and it should have been determined what set off the metal detector. A later interview revealed that the security guard who was checking Hani Hanjour was distracted by a pretty woman and waved Hanjour through. He had box cutters and razor blades in his pockets.¹⁹

At 8:46, the flight reached a cruising altitude of 35,000 feet. At that very same moment, F-15 fighter jets were launched from Otis Airbase in Falmouth, Massachusetts. It was a seemingly positive sign, but confusion won out. No one knew where to send the jets because the hijacked planes' transponder beacons had been turned off. An exasperated controller made clear, "I don't know where I'm scrambling these guys to. I need a direction, a destination."²⁰

As flight attendants began cabin service on Flight 77, the pilots transmitted their last routine communication at 8:51. Within minutes, by 8:54, the hijackers made their move. The plane suddenly veered south; two minutes later the transponder went dead. At 9:12, flight attendant Renee May called her mother, telling her that the flight was hijacked and the passengers and crew, including the pilots, had been forced to the back of the plane. A few minutes later, another passenger, Barbara K. Olson, called her husband, U.S. Solicitor General Theodore Olson at the Department of Justice, and told him that hijackers had taken over the plane using knives and box cutters.

At 9:29, the autopilot was disengaged. The plane was thirty-eight miles from Washington, DC, flying at just 7,000 feet. A few minutes earlier, at 9:24, fighter jets were scrambled out of Langley Air Force base in Virginia. Again, they didn't know where they were supposed to go, and headed due east over the Atlantic Ocean instead of towards D.C.

At 9:32, controllers at Dulles Airport, where flight 77 originated, “observed a primary radar target tracking eastbound at a high rate of speed.”²¹ Two minutes later, at 9:43, it was only five miles from the Pentagon and began a 330-degree turn, descended to 2,200 feet, and throttled up to maximum power. At 9:37, the plane plowed into the west side of the Pentagon traveling at 530 miles per hour. Sixty-five people on board died, as did 125 civilian and military personnel in the building.



The fourth 9/11 plane, United Flight 93, is the only suicide-hijack that failed to hit its target, either the White House or the U.S. Capitol building. The more accessible of the two potential sites was the Capitol, which sat on a hill at the end of an easy flight path down the Washington Mall, where the nation’s largest obelisk, the 555-foot high Washington Monument, stands like a beacon at the heart of the city. A year after 9/11, interviews with the planners of the attack left no doubt that the Capitol building was the target.²²

One reason Flight 93 failed to reach at its target was the typical morning delay at Newark Airport in New Jersey. Scheduled to depart at 8 a.m. and bound for San Francisco, the plane didn’t lift off until 8:42. On board were seven crew members and thirty-seven passengers; four were hijackers. The fifth hijacker, likely Mohamed al Kahtani, had been refused entry by an immigration agent at Florida’s Orlando International Airport in August. The hijackers who did make it through were seated forward in the plane: Ziad Jarrah (1B), Ahmed al Nami (3C), Saeed al Ghamdi (3D), and Ahmed al Haznawi (6B). Haznawi had been selected by CAPPs and his bag screened for explosives, but nothing was found. The flight ran smoothly for the first forty-six minutes.

News of multiple hijackings had begun to filter through the Federal Air Administration (FAA) and the airlines companies, although both were slow to react. During the 9/11 Commission hearings, FAA officials tried to push responsibility onto the airlines, arguing they were responsible for notifying planes of security problems. The Commission determined that “such statements do not reflect an adequate appreciation of the FAA’s responsibility.” At 9:19, a United flight dispatcher, Ed Ballinger, took initiative and transmitted warnings to his transcontinental flights: “Beware any cockpit intrusion- Two a/c [aircraft] hit World Trade Center.” Flight 93 received that warning at 9:23. The flight was proceeding as scheduled and pilot Jason Dahl responded to the transmission with a simple, “Ed, confirm latest mssg, plz – Jason.”²³

By 9:28, confirmation was too late. Traveling at 35,000 feet, the plane suddenly plummeted 700 feet. Eleven seconds into the drop, air traffic control received two radio transmissions: “Mayday.” – “Hey get out of here – get out of here – get out of here.” The hijackers had forced

their way into the cockpit. It's unlikely the pilots could have done anything to stop the intrusion. Both were strapped into their seats. They may have been killed instantly; a flight attendant in the cockpit was also killed. The flight data recorder documented everything. By 9:32, Ziad Jarrah, the hijacker pilot, made an announcement: "Ladies and Gentlemen: Here the captain, please sit down keep remaining sitting. We have a bomb on board. So, sit."²⁴ All passengers were forced to the back of the plane, while Jarrah reprogrammed the plane's autopilot to turn the aircraft around and head back east.

Over the next twenty minutes, several people on the flight, at least ten passengers and two crew members, made phone calls. They reported the hijacking, said there might be a bomb on board, and learned about the two planes that had crashed into the World Trade Center. This made things starkly clear. These weren't ordinary hijackings.

Alice Hoagland called her son, Mark, and left a message on his voicemail: "Mark, this is your mom. It's 10:54 a.m. [actually 9:54 a.m.]. The news is that it's been hijacked by terrorists. They are planning to probably use the plane as a target to hit some site on the ground, so if you possibly can, try to overpower these guys if you can. Cause they'll probably use the plane as a target. So, I would say go ahead and do everything you can to overpower them cause they're hell-bent. Try to call me back if you can. You know the number here. Okay, I love you, sweetie. Bye."²⁵



Alice and Mark Hoagland

This is the heartbreak of 9/11. It could have been any of us. Any American, on any flight headed for the West Coast. The voice of passengers on the planes and family on the ground was filled with concern over what was happening. The passengers on Flight 93 now understood their role in a much larger plot, and they refused to play it. At least five relayed messages that they had voted to rush the cockpit in an attempt to take back the plane. Passenger Todd Beamer tried to contact his wife, but instead reached a GTE phone supervisor and spoke with her for thirteen minutes, explaining the plan to retake control of the plane. His last audible words were, "Are you guys ready? Let's roll!"²⁶ The last part of the phrase, "let's roll," later became a rallying cry for President Bush and the military.

At 9:57, they surged forward. The cockpit voice recorder picked up the muffled sounds of a fight. Jarrah rolled the plane from side to side, hoping to knock the passengers off their feet. At 9:58:57, he ordered another hijacker to block the door. At 9:59:52, he repeatedly pitched the nose of the plane up and down. The 9/11 Commission report states, "The recorder captured the sounds of loud thumps, crashes, shouts, and breaking glasses and plates."²⁷

At 9:59:57, Jarrah asked in Arabic, “Is that it? Shall we finish it off?” A hijacker answered, “No. Not yet. When they all come, we finish it off.” The struggle continued, as did Jarrah’s attempt to throw the passengers off their feet by plunging and lifting the plane. At 10:00:26, a passenger shouted, “In the cockpit. If we don’t we’ll die!” Sixteen seconds later, a passenger yelled, “Roll it!” At 10:01:00, Jarrah shouted, “Allah ‘akbar! Allah ‘akbar!” (Allah is the greatest). He again asked, “Is that it? I mean, shall we put it down?” This time, his fellow jihadist answered, “Yes, put it in it, and pull it down.” Flight 93 twisted hard to the right, rolled onto its back, and, traveling 580 miles per hour, plowed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, just a twenty-minute flight to Washington, D.C. All forty-four people on board died. The Commission report stated solemnly, “We are sure that the nation owes a debt to the passengers of United 93. Their actions saved the lives of countless others, and may have saved either the Capitol or the White House from destruction.”²⁸



The story of Flight 93 in some sense buoyed American spirits. It was, to be sure, a tragedy, but the passengers had shown American resilience and heroism in the face of terror. They had saved the halls of democracy. Like the first responders who had perished while attempting to save civilians in the burning towers, the passengers on United 93 had refused to stand idly by while enemies attacked the

homeland. Such are the tales of heroism and sacrifice that the 9/11 Generation has been taught to revere and remember.

¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 169; Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan, *The Eleventh Day: The Full Story of 9/11* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2012), 76; Gail Makinen, “The Economic Effects of 9/11: A Retrospective Assessment,” September 27, 2002, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, <https://fas.org/irp/crs/RL31617.pdf>.

² Indeed, it has become exactly that. Based on Lawrence Wright’s Pulitzer Prize winning work, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage, 2006), see HULU, *The Looming Tower*, a ten episode mini-series.

³ George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001, White House Archives, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>

⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, xv.

⁵ Pete Brush, “Bush Opposes 9/11 Query Panel,” CBS News, May 23, 2002, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bush-opposes-9-11-query-panel/>; “Bush asks Daschle to limit Sept. 11 probes” CNN, January 29, 2009 - <http://www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/inv.terror.probe/>; Philip Shenon, “Bush to Limit Testimony Before 9/11 Panel,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/26/us/bush-to-limit-testimony-before-9-11-panel.html>; Elisabeth Bumiller and Philip Shenon, “Bush-Cheney 9/11 Interview Won’t Be Formally Recorded,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/28/us/bush-cheney-9-11-interview-won-t-be-formally-recorded.html>.

⁶ Bob Geiger, “9/11 Families Demand GOP Stop Blocking Commission Recommendations,” Huffington Post, March 12, 2007, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-geiger/911-families-demand-gop-s_b_43224.html.

⁷ “Success of 9/11 Commission Report Surprises,” American Book Sellers Association, July 28, 2004, <https://www.bookweb.org/news/success-911-commission-report-surprises>.

⁸ Hamilton quoted in Cullen Murphy and Todd S. Purdum, “Farewell To All That: An Oral History of the Bush White House,” *Vanity Fair*, December 28, 2008, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/02/bush-oral-history200902>.

⁹ Seating locations, the timing of flights, and interaction between the planes and those on the ground are gleaned from two main sources: *The 9/11 Commission Report*; the report is also available on line. For the timeline of the hijackings, see, “We Have Some Planes,” National Commission On Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Ch1.htm. See also, “September 11 Attack Timeline,” 9/11 Memorial and Museum, <https://timeline.911memorial.org/#Timeline/2>. Other pertinent information not taken from these sources is duly cited.

¹⁰ Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 13.

¹¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 5; “September 11 Attack Timeline,” 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

¹² Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 15.

¹³ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 6; Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 16-17.

¹⁴ Brian Dakss, “Speed a Likely Factor in WTC Collapse,” February 25, 2002, CBS News, accessed January 25, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/speed-likely-factor-in-wtc-collapse-25-02-2002/>. The government calculated the speed of flight 11 as 494 mph. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology estimated the speed of the two planes as 429 mph and 537 mph, respectively.

¹⁵ “The Only Existing Footage of 1st Plane Hitting WTC,” You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3shmfKOZ9g>.

¹⁶ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 7.

¹⁷ “September 11 Attack Timeline,” 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

¹⁸ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 8.

¹⁹ Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror: The Truth Behind the Most Devastating Attack the World Has Ever Seen* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2003), 143.

²⁰ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 20.

²¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 9.

²² Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, 157.

²³ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 11.

²⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 28.

²⁵ “September 11 Attack Timeline,” 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

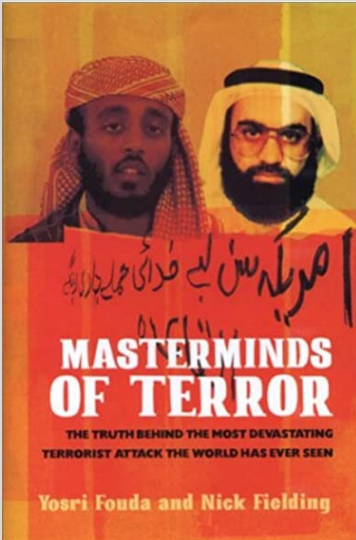
²⁶ “The phone line from Flight 93 was still open when a GTE operator heard Todd Beamer say: ‘Are you guys ready? Let’s roll’,” *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, September 16, 2001, <http://old.post-gazette.com/headlines/20010916phonecallnat3p3.asp>.

²⁷ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 14.

²⁸ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 14, 45.

A New Age of Terror

The Masterminds of Terror



The hijackers had done their homework and expertly carried out the plan conceived by their Al Qaeda masters. It was simple, brilliant, despicable, and devastatingly effective. They easily bypassed security, chose transcontinental flights loaded with fuel, and turned commercial airliners into missiles. The attack revealed a new age of terrorism, when enemies could brazenly hit the U.S. mainland and use America's technology against it. Just as frightening, Al Qaeda had outsmarted the most sophisticated intelligence network in the world. The CIA had failed. So too had the FBI, the National Security Agency, and every other government organization tasked with safeguarding the homeland. This is just one example of the government failure that the 9/11 Generation has grown up facing.

The effectiveness of our government – perhaps even the salience of democracy itself – has forever after been questioned. Not just because of 9/11, but because other pressing issues, such as school shootings and climate change, have repeatedly shown the government's inability to solve some of the most important issues of our time. Since the start of the new century, government has seemed like little more than a place of partisan gridlock and ineffectiveness.

One of the reasons for the government's 9/11 failure were the changing international times. Another was the rise of a different kind of enemy. Since the end of World War II, America had dealt mainly with the great Soviet threat, the Cold War between two superpowers. If one attacked the other, the ensuing conflict promised mutually assured destruction (MAD), as waves of nuclear missiles hit the one another's cities, obliterating everything and everyone. More than forty years this realities had taught the U.S. government that threats to America always came from outside the homeland, from foreign missiles, air strikes, or a smuggled biological, chemical, or radiological weapon. The enemy had to cross our mighty oceans, the natural moats that had kept the America safe for centuries. Osama bin Laden took advantage of a weakness. While America's defenders faced outward, with their backs to the nation, a new generation of terrorists plotted quietly and carefully, changing the way the America thinks about political violence.

The execution of Al Qaeda's plan may have taken only a few hours, but its conception and planning were years in the making. The 9/11 plot began as "the planes operation." Its mastermind was a man most Americans have never heard of, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, known to the U.S. intelligence community as KSM. Born in Baluchistan, a region that straddles the Iran/Pakistan border, he grew up in Kuwait and then, in 1983, moved to North Carolina, where

he attended North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro. In 1986, he received a degree in mechanical engineering, then moved back to the Middle East.¹

KSM's connection to the World Trade Center was long and notorious. His nephew, Ramzi Yousef, was the bomber in the 1993 attack on Tower Two, which killed six and injured hundreds of others. KSM had limited involvement. He sent \$660 and talked on the phone about his nephew's progress on the 1,300-pound bomb designed to send the South Tower careening into the North Tower.



After the bombing, Yousef quickly fled the U.S. and a year later, in 1994, he and his uncle met up in the Philippines, where they hatched a plan to bomb twelve American commercial jets over the Pacific Ocean. They also focused on hiding bombs aboard U.S.-bound cargo planes, and even contemplated assassinating the Pope and President Bill Clinton during trips to Manila. The bombing plots were foiled when a small fire in the men's apartment alerted Philippine authorities and they found Yousef's bomb-making factory. Neither Yousef nor KSM were captured, but the plans for attacking American planes were found and shared with the FBI and CIA.²



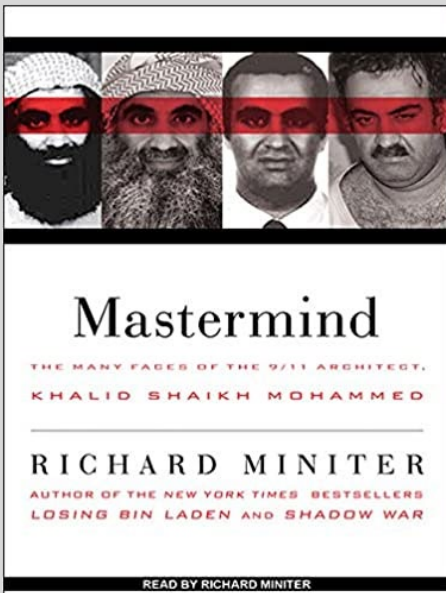
World Trade Center 1993

Neither man abandoned his ideas about attacking the World Trade Center or destroying American planes. When the North Tower failed to fall in 1993, Yousef wrote, "Unfortunately, our calculations were not very accurate this time. However, we promise you that the next time, it will be very precise and WTC will continue to be one of our targets."³ It didn't take long for

for the two men to merge their ideas – planes and buildings could be combined for spectacular effect.

By 1995, KSM had a grand vision. Hijack ten commercial airliners and fly nine of them into iconic American targets. Among them were the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, either the White House or the U.S. Capitol Building, CIA and FBI headquarters, the tallest buildings in California and Washington state, the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Sears Tower in Chicago, and even Disneyland or, worse, a nuclear facility. KSM reserved the tenth plane for himself. He would land at a U.S. airport, kill all the male passengers, then deliver a triumphant speech to American media denouncing U.S. foreign policy. The 9/11 Commission report referred to KSM as "the model of the terrorist entrepreneur" and "the principal architect of the 9/11 attacks." In an article titled "Mastermind," author Terry McDermott insisted that KSM "was the essential figure in the 9/11 plot." This was true even though months after the

attacks, the CIA still didn't have him on the list of important Al Qaeda operatives. KSM flew, as it were, under the radar.⁴



Any of the proposed targets would have been a blow to the United States, but the idea of a nuclear facility was in a different orbit. Even if the World Trade Center had gone as planned and tens of thousands had perished, it wouldn't have come close to the devastation caused by a nuclear detonation. The death toll would have been astronomical, and the American response, too horrible to contemplate. If 9/11 and the deaths of 3,000 Americans was the catalyst for a massive invasion of the Middle East and the longest war in U.S. history, how would the United States have reacted if hundreds of thousands, or even millions, died when a jet flew into a nuclear reactor?

Al Qaeda, or at least KSM, considered this. A year and a day following the attacks, on September 12, 2002, the Al Jazeera news network released a two-day interview conducted with some of the 9/11 planners during the previous summer. KSM was among those interviewed. "We had large surplus of brothers willing to die as martyrs," he explained. "As we studied various targets, nuclear facilities arose as a key option." They excluded them for fear that things would "get out of hand."

Many Americans believe, and some of the terrorists, such as KSM, have argued that the goal was to inflict as many casualties as possible, but even Al Qaeda had a limit, and a rationale. Not only did the organization want to drag the U.S. into a long, grinding conflict, they also wanted to cause Americans to question why the attack had occurred at all. The journalist who conducted the Al Jazeera interviews, Yosri Fouda, produced a documentary film, *Top Secret: The Road to September 11*, and ended it with a looming statement: "Westerners, Americans in particular...should now question what would drive a group of young men, some of them highly educated...some among the richest Arabs, and all in their youth, to voluntarily throw themselves into what Americans see as perishment, but to them is paradise."⁵



Equally important, why did the terrorists choose the targets they did? They weren't selected at random. My students often get answers in their documentary films that the goal was to kill as many people as possible, and on an average day there are upwards of 50,000 people in the World Trade Center complex. Again, if mere numbers were the goal, a nuclear or chemical facility would have been far more devastating. No, the targets were symbolic, a message to the American people. The World Trade Center, the core of American capitalism, was targeted not once, but twice. It represented wealth and financial power, standing in the heart of Wall St. and the New York Stock Exchange. The Pentagon, designed as a fortress, is the heart of American military power. The Capitol building is the core symbol of our democracy, our political might.

Such buildings were not random, haphazard objectives. They were messages about U.S. power. As journalist Nancy Gibbs wrote so eloquently after the attacks, "If you want to humble an empire it makes sense to maim its cathedrals...it tells us we are not so powerful and we can't be safe."⁶ The 9/11 Generation has learned this last point all too well, but far too many Americans have missed the symbolism of the attack, concluding instead that the terrorists hated our freedom and desired to kill as many Americans as possible.

The 9/11 Commission's goal was to connect the dots, to figure out the "how" of a devious and effective plot. It turned over every stone, revealing a story of intrigue, international espionage, near misses, and failed governmental bureaucracy.



The trail inevitably led to KSM and Al Qaeda. KSM possessed plenty of diabolical ideas, but he couldn't achieve them without financial and operational support. Enter Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. In 1996, KSM met with bin Laden in Afghanistan, where, in the mid-1980s, they had fought against the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion. KSM discussed the World Trade Center bombing perpetrated by his nephew as well as the Manila commercial and cargo airplane plans. He also proposed training pilots to fly passenger jetliners into American buildings. KSM wasn't a member of Al Qaeda yet, but quickly recognized its importance for his own aspirations. He joined the organization in late 1998 or early 1999.⁷

Bin Laden approved the "planes operation" during this same time-period and even considered a series of hijackings in Asia, making the attacks worldwide. He scrapped the idea in the spring of 2000 because of its complexity. Once they determined that the focus was America, KSM, bin Laden, and Al Qaeda's military commander, Mohammed Atef, selected the targets. All of the

men wanted to hit the Capitol, bin Laden wanted the Pentagon and the White House, and KSM was still intent on the World Trade Center.

Bin Laden initially chose four men as suicide operatives. Two of them, Khalid al Mindhar and Nawaf al Hazmi, saw the plot through to the end. The other two, both from Yemen, couldn't get American visas. Mindhar and Hazmi were from Saudi Arabia, a country that held a special and long-standing post-World War II relationship with the United States, and visas for Saudi nationals were easy to obtain. That likely explains, in part, why fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers came from Saudi Arabia.⁸

With the plan firmly established, training began. The men who were initially selected studied firearms and hand to hand combat at a camp in Afghanistan, then traveled to Karachi, Pakistan, where KSM schooled them in Western culture and travel. He showed them aviation magazines, American telephone directories, brochures for flight schools, airline timetables, and how to use the internet to locate flight schools. They also used flight simulation software and watched movies about hijackings.⁹

During this same time-period, in late 1999, bin Laden was quickly recruiting other men for the 9/11 mission. Mohamed Atta, the operational commander, and several other co-conspirators had gone to school in Hamburg, Germany. They were ideal candidates. Educated, familiar with Western culture, proficient in English, and devoted to jihad. The Commission report noted the "remarkable" speed with which these new men became central to the plot. They were to be the pilots. After some initial combat training in Afghanistan, they returned to Germany and began their transformation, which included avoiding radical extremists and mosques, shaving their beards, wearing Western clothing, and applying for American visas. They ordered flight simulation programs and, in March of 2000, Atta contacted thirty-one U.S. flight schools.¹⁰

Hazmi and Mindhar, two of bin Laden's original choices for the mission, were seasoned jihadists but poorly equipped for life in the United States. Both struggled with English, which, as the Commission report noted, "became an insurmountable barrier to learning how to fly." They still arrived in California in January of 2000 and tried a variety of schools, but each ended in failure. Flight instructors questioned after the 9/11 attacks remembered that the men were interested in controlling the aircraft once off the ground, "but took no interest in takeoffs or landings." By May, the two had quit trying to fly. Instead, they became part of the muscle for the hijackings. During interrogations following his capture, KSM explained that bin Laden had an uncanny ability to assess new trainees, often in just ten minutes. He and Atef personally selected all of the muscle between summer 2000 and April 2001.¹¹

The core of the Hamburg pilots arrived in the U.S. in early summer of 2000, settling in Florida to begin flight training. They had also spent time checking out other schools, in North Carolina, New York, California, Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, and Oklahoma. Each did far better than Hazmi and Mindhar, passing their commercial pilot exams by mid-December and graduating to larger planes. The Commission report stated, "by the end of 2000, less than six months after their arrival, the three pilots on the East Coast were simulating on large jets."¹²



Zacharias Moussaoui

Nor was the Hamburg cell the only jihadists learning to fly. At the Pan Am International Flight Academy in Egan, Minnesota, a young man named Zacharias Moussaoui had aroused suspicion in August of 2001, and a manager contacted the FBI field office in Minneapolis. There's some question about Moussaoui's role. He wasn't one of the men coordinated by KSM, but he was funded by Al Qaeda, possibly as a replacement pilot if one of the four backed out or were unable to fly.

When an alert FBI agent found that Moussaoui's visa had expired, he was arrested. Getting a warrant to search his computer and other belongings was another matter, and one that stymied the Minneapolis field office for critical weeks.

They had two options: a standard criminal search warrant, which seemed unlikely because no actual crime had been committed, or a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) warrant, which required proof that Moussaoui was a terrorist or the agent of a foreign government. His connection to Al Qaeda was uncovered only after the attacks.¹³

Neither of these ways of getting a warrant was successful, even though the lead agent and his supervisor contacted the Radical Fundamentalist Unit at FBI headquarters, the Counter Terrorism Center, the CIA, and other agencies for help. At one point, on August 27, just fifteen days before the 9/11 attacks, the Minneapolis FBI supervisor complained to headquarters that he was trying to make sure that Moussaoui "did not take control of a plane and fly it into the World Trade Center." The headquarters agent allegedly responded, "[T]hat's not going to happen. We don't know he's a terrorist. You don't have enough to show he is a terrorist. You have a guy interested in this type of aircraft - that is it." The lead agent also went in person to the local FAA office to make sure they understood the full scope of the potential threat. Nothing was done.¹⁴

The Moussaoui case was just one of many in which the U.S. government bureaucracy failed to run down leads. Weeks before the Minnesota FBI agent forwarded his concerns to superiors, another agent in Phoenix, Arizona, sent an eight-page memo to FBI headquarters, including four members of the FBI bin Laden unit. Minnesota agent Kenneth Williams wrote, "The purpose of this communication is to advise the Bureau and New York of the possibility of a coordinated effort by Osama bin Laden to send students to the United States to attend civil aviation universities and colleges. Phoenix has observed an inordinate number of individuals of investigative interest who are attending or who have attended....These individuals will be in a position in the future to conduct terror activity against civil aviation targets."¹⁵ Again, nothing was done. And, again, it wasn't the only misstep.

Another was the arrival of Hazmi and Mindhar into the United States. The CIA knew about both men and had tracked them, only to lose their trail in Bangkok. They were last known to have departed for Los Angeles in January 2000. Yet the CIA failed to notify the Counterterrorism

Center, the FBI, or the State Department's Terrorist Watch List.¹⁶ In *The Eleventh Day*, authors Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan surmise that Hazmi and Mindhar may have been groomed by the CIA to serve as double agents inside Al Qaeda and this was the reason the agency didn't share information about their arrival in the U.S.

The Commission report focused extensively on bureaucratic missteps, of agencies failing or outright refusing to share critical information, neglecting to notify other agencies of dangers, and ignoring the warnings of impending catastrophe. This was all true, even though the nation's security apparatus knew by 1998-99 that something big was coming, and that Osama bin Laden was at the heart of it.

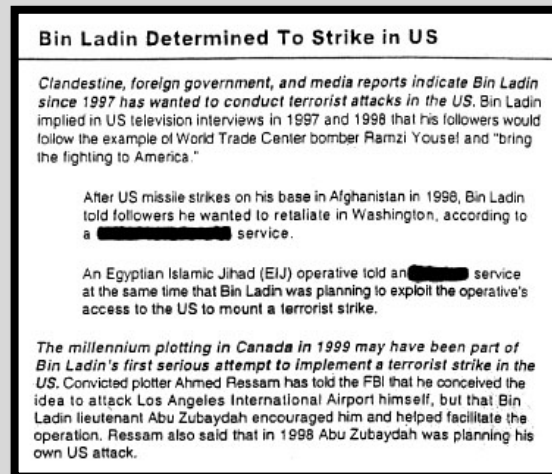
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- ¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 145-6.
- ² *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 147; Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 231.
- ³ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 251.
- ⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 148-9, 153-4; Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 255; Terry McDermott, “The Mastermind: Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the Making of 9/11,” *The New Yorker*, September 13, 2010, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/09/13/the-mastermind>.
- ⁵ “Al-Jazeera Offers Accounts of 9/11 Planning,” CNN, September 12, 2002, <http://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/meast/09/12/alqaeda.911.claim/>; “We Left Out Nuclear Targets, For Now,” *The Guardian*, March 3, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/04/alqaida.terrorism>; Peter Maas, “When Al Qaeda Calls,” *New York Times*, February 2, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/02/magazine/when-al-qaeda-calls.html>; Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, 157.
- ⁶ Nancy Gibbs, “If You Want to Humble an Empire,” *Time Magazine*, September 14, 2001, <http://time.com/3313113/if-you-want-to-humble-an-empire/>.
- ⁷ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 149-50.
- ⁸ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 155.
- ⁹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 157.
- ¹⁰ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 156, 167.
- ¹¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 221-2, 235.
- ¹² *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 222, 227.
- ¹³ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 246-7.
- ¹⁴ “The FBI’s Handling of the Phoenix Electronic Communication and Investigation of Zacarias Moussaoui Prior to September 11, 2001,” Eleanor Hill, Staff Director, Joint Inquiry Staff, September 24, 2002, the Federation of American Scientists, Intelligence Resource Program, https://fas.org/irp/congress/2002_hr/092402hill.html; *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 246-7, 275; Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 332-3.
- ¹⁵ Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 317; “The FBI’s Handling of the Phoenix Electronic Communication and Investigation of Zacarias Moussaoui Prior to September 11, 2001.”
- ¹⁶ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 181-2.

Hunting Bin Laden

The System Was Blinking Red

By 2000 and 2001, the warning signs grew more ominous. Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet said, the “system was blinking red.”¹ They even knew that planes might potentially be involved. Worse yet, starting in 1998, Al Qaeda had increased attacks against U.S. targets. The government tracked the incidents and tried to determine a course of action. The American people, on the other hand, remained largely oblivious to the storm that was blowing from the Middle East. The Commission’s ultimate conclusion as a result of all these warnings? 9/11 was a shock, but not a surprise.

It’s also clear that the intelligence community wasn’t treating the bin Laden threat seriously until his 1996 “Declaration of Jihad against the United States.” The CIA responded by creating a special bin Laden Unit. They had originally believed he was strictly a terrorist financier, but, by 1997, learned he was much more than that. In early 1998, the U.S. Counterterrorist Center warned that, “Sooner or later Bin Laden will attack U.S. interests, perhaps using WMD [weapons of mass destruction].” In February of that same year, bin Laden issued another declaration, a fatwa, against the U.S. American intelligence now began contemplating operations to neutralize bin Laden.



How best to do it became something of a puzzle. Much of the planning reads like a *Mission Impossible* spy film, with secret agents, high tech gadgets, double-dealing diplomacy, and liaisons with dubious foreign emissaries. Even the American name for the project, “Operation Infinite Resolve,” smacked of a cowboyish muscle-flexing.²

The first plan involved working with local Afghans, the long-ago allies who had helped the United States destroy the decades-old Russian invasion of the 1980s. The idea was for Afghans to kidnap bin Laden, take him into the desert and turn him over to a different set of locals, who would then turn him over to the CIA, which would whisk him away on a plane bound for New York or some Arab capital to be arraigned on charges of terrorism. The complexity of the operation made it impossible. Government officials worried that a gun battle might ensue, causing “collateral damage,” the death of innocent Afghans or bin Laden’s extended family. The U.S. acted with caution. In the late 1990s, concerns over a volatile Middle East caused American leaders to tread carefully. Agents who had devoted years to tracking bin Laden were frustrated.³



The U.S. also continued a fruitless diplomatic dance. Agents and envoys pressed the Taliban, the fundamentalist government that claimed rule over Afghanistan, as well as its neighbor, Pakistan, for help in capturing or at least hindering support for bin Laden. Nothing came of such efforts. Bin Laden was popular in both countries; many approved of his jihad against America. Then came a 5:35 a.m. phone call on August 7, 1998. National Security Advisor Sandy Berger woke President Bill Clinton.

Two American embassies in Africa had been bombed, one in Nairobi, Kenya, and one in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The devastation was massive. Truck bombs packed with explosives detonated within ten minutes of one another, killing 213 and wounding some 4,000 in Nairobi, and killing 11 and injuring 85 in Tanzania. Twelve U.S. personnel died.⁴

Here was a direct message from Al Qaeda to America: we can hit you simultaneously in two different countries. We have a sophisticated network, money, and outreach – we don't fear your reprisals. By August 20, President Clinton and top advisors retaliated with submarine-launched Tomahawk Cruise Missiles aimed at one of bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan as well as at a chemical factory in Khartoum, Sudan, which the CIA believed was producing nerve gas. The missiles failed to kill bin Laden or his lieutenants, and the Sudanese factory turned out to be a pharmaceutical plant that supplied medicine to the region. It was, at the time, America's largest military assault against an independent, non-nation state terrorist organization.⁵ Clearly, Al Qaeda was a palpable threat, and one that continued to stymie U.S. efforts. The nation's top decision makers continued to act with caution.

Yet some didn't see it that way. One journalist called the destruction of the Sudanese factory "Bill Clinton's Act of Terrorism." The *New York Times* wrote that inside the administration "the voices of dissent were numerous" on targeting the factory. Another reporter said that the idea of the factory producing chemical weapons was "desperate conjecture."⁶ Others claimed the attack was a case of "wag the dog," reference to a movie in which a president drums up a war to hide personal indiscretions. Clinton was in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal, an affair that tarnished his presidency and severely limited his ability to respond effectively to Al Qaeda. He was stuck between looking like he was trying to pivot away from the Lewinsky affair and worrying about the very real potential for inflaming the Middle East. In an analysis of the pharmaceutical factory bombing, *The Economist* magazine pinpointed the issue by wondering "if they have created 10,000 new fanatics where there would have been none." This was always a key concern. The author concluded, "America will have to take care to keep public opinion on its side and not to dissipate the world's sense of outrage [over the embassy bombings]. That means explaining its actions in full, and showing convincing evidence for all the claims it makes to justify them."⁷ This is something that the U.S. failed at in the coming years.

The concern over fall out kept the U.S. from acting more aggressively in pursuit of bin Laden, even though he continued to target America. And the government knew it. On December 4, 1998, Clinton received his Presidential Daily Briefing: "Subject: Bin Laden Preparing to Hijack US Aircraft and Other Attacks" – "Bin Laden and his allies are preparing for attacks in the US, including an aircraft hijacking" – two members of the operational team had "evaded security checks" during a "recent trial run" at a New York airport – "Bin Laden could be weighing other types of operations against US aircraft."

What to do? Top government officials continued to spin their wheels, fearing collateral damage. On December 20, they considered another cruise missile attack. During these many months, at least one American submarine silently plied the waters of the Arabian Sea awaiting orders for a chance to strike. Still, no action. One agent in the CIA bin Laden Unit warned, "I'm sure we'll regret not acting last night," and criticized senior decision-makers for "worrying that some stray shrapnel might hit the Habash mosque and 'offend' Muslims." CIA field officer Gary Schroen concluded, "We may well regret the decision not to go ahead."⁸



Gary Schroen

Instead, the U.S. contemplated other options – using an AC-130 gunship that could fly at high altitude and fire a variety of highly accurate projectiles; continued diplomacy; or do nothing. All of this stretched well into 1999, the same year that bin Laden was placed on the FBI's "Most Wanted" list with a \$5 million reward on his head. Still, the reports of Al Qaeda's evil intentions continued.

Great Britain warned that bin Laden was planning attacks in which airliners could be used in "unconventional ways." The Commission on National Security wrote that America "will become increasingly vulnerable to hostile attack on our homeland....Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers." The Library of Congress Research Division stated that bin Laden wanted to retaliate for the post-embassy missile attacks and "could crash-land an aircraft packed with high explosives (C-4 or Semtex) into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency, or the White House."⁹

As the millennium approached, so too did the mounting threats to the United States. On December 14, 1999, a jihadist named Assam Ressaam, unaffiliated with Al Qaeda, was caught on a ferry traveling from Victoria, Canada, to Port Angeles, Washington with explosives hidden in the spare tire of his vehicle. His plan was to attack the Los Angeles Airport on January 1, 2000.

Bin Laden also had a New Year's gift in the form of a suicide attack against an American naval vessel, the USS *The Sullivans*, in Yemen. It failed only because the dinghy carrying the explosives was overloaded and sank. The plan itself wasn't discarded, only delayed.¹⁰

Within a week or so of these episodes, the first of the 9/11 hijack team, Hazmi and Mindhar, entered the United States. Mohammed Atta and the Hamburg contingent arrived a few months later. American intelligence continued to spin, wondering about cruise missiles, placing American boots on the ground, or even placing a powerful long-range telescope on a mountain to watch one of bin Laden's Afghan training camps. The CIA was looking for actionable intelligence that placed bin Laden in a specific spot where he could be killed. A novel answer soon appeared in the form of the Predator.



Drones are common technology in today's world, but in 2000 they were new and largely untested for surveillance. Their potential offered a unique opportunity if the CIA and Defense Department stopped bickering over who would pay for it. The White House eventually came up with a cost-sharing formula and the first drone flight over Afghanistan occurred on September 7, 2000;

another fifteen flights followed. At least two missions recorded images of a "tall man in a white robe at bin Laden's Tarnak Farms compound outside of Kandahar."

That initial success led to the idea of attaching Hellfire missiles to the Predator and finally ending the bin Laden conundrum. Two problems existed. First, the missile technology wasn't quite ready, and, second, the perennial doubt – should we do it?¹¹ Should an unseen, unmanned piece of technology execute an enemy without warning? Now, many years after 9/11, the U.S. government barely acknowledges such philosophical quandaries, with drone pilots stationed in Ohio or some other American location unleashing death in the Middle East with the push of a button.

The drone surveillance flights pre-9/11 certainly didn't stop Al Qaeda from blowing a gaping hole in the side of the USS *Cole* on October 12, 2000, while it refueled in Yemen. Seventeen crew members died and another forty were wounded. Everyone in the intelligence community knew it was Al Qaeda, but it still had to be proven. Bin Laden himself expected an immediate American military response, but it never came. He constantly moved from place to place in Afghanistan and made sure that he and his senior operatives were never together. The Commission report even notes that he longed for retaliation: "Bin Laden wanted the United States to attack, and if it did not he would launch something bigger."¹² Of course, many of his clandestine operatives were already in the country and the "planes operation" was well underway. Something bigger was coming, but bin Laden was impatient. He kept stinging the American giant, anticipating its lumbering reaction and its inevitable march into the heart of the Middle East where his jihadists could more easily target U.S. forces. His trap was almost set.

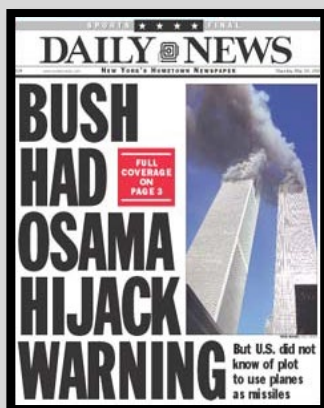
American intelligence agents also longed for retaliation. A State Department representative for the Counterterrorism Security Group, Michael Sheehan, exploded at counterterrorism coordinator Richard Clarke over the administration's failure to act. "What's it gonna take, Dick?...Who the shit do they think attacked the Cole, fuckin' Martians?...Does Al Qaeda have to attack the Pentagon to get their attention?"¹³ The agents who worked incessantly on the bin Laden threat, who obsessed over it, grew more and more frustrated, more disturbed over the attack they knew was coming. The agents who devoted themselves to safeguarding America were stonewalled by the very bureaucracy that they worked for.

A New President

The bombing of the *Cole* was the last terrorist attack that Bill Clinton endured as president. On January 20, 2001, George W. Bush was inaugurated America's 43rd chief executive. On the way out, Clinton offered prescient advice: "I think you will find that by far your biggest threat is Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda." It was advice not taken. Although the transition to a new administration after eight years of Democratic rule would surely take time, the new Bush administration showed no sense of urgency or even interest



about terrorism. "Their policy priorities differed from those of the Clinton administration," stated the Commission report. Richard Clarke understood the danger all too well and struggled to make clear the terrorist danger just five days after Bush's inauguration, writing to the new National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice: "We urgently need...a Principals level review of the *al Qida* network," meaning the senior administrators, including the president needed briefing. That meeting didn't occur until September 4, just seven days before 9/11.¹⁴



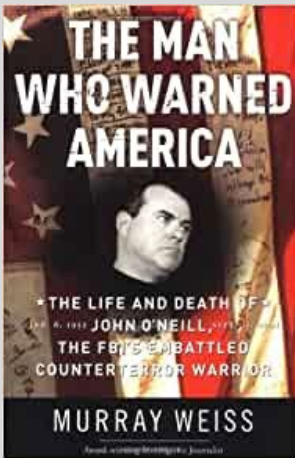
Between his inauguration and September 10, George W. Bush received more than forty intelligence reports related to bin Laden in his Presidential Daily Briefing. "Bin Laden public profile may presage attack" – "Bin Laden network's plans advancing" – "UBL: Operation Planned in U.S." – "Bin Laden Attacks May be Imminent" – "Bin Laden Planning High-Profile Attacks" – "spectacular...severe blow...very, very, very, very" big – "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US." During his testimony to the 9/11 Commission, Director Tenet stated, "the system was blinking red."¹⁵

The CIA and FBI continually warned senior administrators. On July 12, acting FBI director Thomas Pickard tried yet again to approach Attorney General John Ashcroft. “I don’t want to hear any more,” Ashcroft snapped. “There’s nothing I can do about that.” When Pickard suggested Ashcroft speak with the CIA, the retort was the same: “I don’t want you to ever talk to me about Al Qaeda, about these threats. I don’t want to hear about Al Qaeda any more.” In his official testimony to the Commission, Ashcroft denied Pickard’s statements, given as official testimony under oath.

What is painfully clear is that Ashcroft did nothing to prepare. He did nothing about the mountain of warnings, stating to the Commission that he “assumed the FBI were doing what they needed to do.” The Commission’s conclusion? “In sum, the domestic agencies never mobilized in response to the threat. They did not have direction, and there was not a plan to institute. The borders were not hardened. Transportation systems were not notified. Electronic surveillance was not targeted against a domestic threat. State and local law enforcement were not marshalled to augment the FBI’s efforts. The public was not warned.”¹⁶



When Director Tenet finally managed a meeting of the principals on September 4, he penned a personal note to Condoleeza Rice, posing, as he saw it, the “real question.” “Are we serious about dealing with the al Qida threat?...Is al Qida a big deal?...*Decision makers should imagine themselves on a future day when the CSG [Counterterrorism Security Group] has not succeeded in stopping al Qida attacks and hundreds of Americans lay dead in several countries, including the US...What would those decision makers wish that they had done earlier? That future day could happen at any time.*”¹⁷

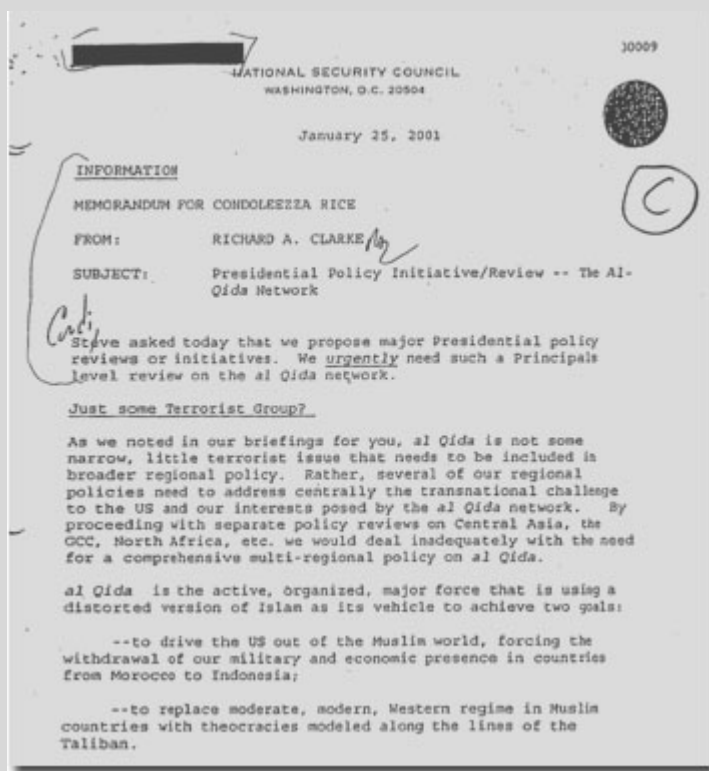


This was Clark at wits end. Only a few months earlier, in May or June, he had requested transfer to another division because, as the Commission reported, he was “frustrated with his role and with an administration that he considered not ‘serious about Al Qaeda.’” Nor was he the only person exasperated. In mid-August, New York Counter Terrorism Chief John O’Neill resigned from the FBI after more than thirty years. He had helped capture Ramzi Yousef in the years following the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, headed the investigations of the African embassy bombings in Kenya and Nairobi, as well as the attack on the USS *Cole*. He was, essentially, “the” Al Qaeda counter-terrorism man. In a supreme case of irony, O’Neill

died on September 11; he had just started as the new head of security at the World Trade Center.¹⁸

For her part, Condoleezza Rice and the rest of the Bush administration occupied the unenviable position of not paying attention to the mountain of warnings. To be fair, President Clinton had proceeded too cautiously and severely compromised his reputation and ability to act because of the Lewinsky sex scandal, but that didn't change the fact that the intelligence community never wavered in their repeated attempts to relay the looming reality of the bin Laden threat. Critics later raised "the sad issue of dereliction of duty on the part of the Bush administration, particularly the president and his national security adviser." Nor did they want that dereliction trotted out before the American public. Just as Bush had pushed back against the Commission's creation, he argued against allowing National Security Advisor Condi Rice to testify before the Commission on the grounds that it might compromise national security.¹⁹ Still, she, like the president and vice president, ultimately testified.

During that testimony, Rice and her predecessor, Sandy Berger, explained that they had discussed the threats. Berger counseled Rice that she and the administration would "spend more time on terrorism in general and Al Qaeda in particular than on anything else." Rice acknowledged the warning, stating that Berger had said "she would be surprised at how much more time she was going to be spending on terrorism." The problem is, she didn't. Lawrence Wilkerson, a top aide to Secretary of State Colin Powell, was tasked with preparing Rice for her Commission testimony. "Condi was not gonna do it, not gonna do it, not gonna do it, and then all of a sudden she realized she better do it," reported Wilkerson.



Preparing her testimony "was an appalling enterprise. We would cherry-pick things to make it look like the president had been actually concerned about al-Qaeda. We cherry-picked things to make it look as if the vice president and others, Secretary Rumsfeld and all, had been." Wilkerson concluded harshly, "They didn't give a shit about al-Qaeda. They had priorities. The priorities were lower taxes, ballistic missiles, and the defense thereof."²⁰

When two award-winning journalists, Michael Hirsh and Michael Isikoff, published a *Newsweek* article titled "What Went Wrong: The inside story of the missed signals and intelligence failures

that raise a chilling question: did September 11 have to happen?," they speculated, "The question is not so much what the President knew and when he knew it. The question is whether the administration was really paying attention." One senior counterterrorism official interviewed for the article stated bluntly, "If I were an average citizen, I'd be pissed at the whole American government."²¹

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, it wasn't so much anger towards the U.S. government that resonated among the public. It was fear that the government was incapable of keeping the nation safe. That was a feeling that has never fully abated, especially for members of the 9/11 Generation. That sense of distrust grew as time went on and the Bush administration focused its ire on Iraq. For Al Qaeda's part, the planes operation had gone almost exactly as planned. Hundreds of hours of testimony before the 9/11 Commission, a mountain of documents, and the records of the perpetrators themselves, all pointed to a simple but brilliantly conceived plan to attack American symbols of U.S. economic, military, and political power. 9/11 was a devastating, merciless attack. It was also a symbolic message – and a trap.

Yet what America learned from its political leaders was simplistic at best. "They" hate our freedom; they hate Western culture. The Commission report wasn't much better. Consumed by "how" radical Islamic extremists had beaten the greatest security apparatus in the world, the Commission focused almost exclusively on the means that bin Laden and his henchman had used to carry out the attacks. Its conclusion was bureaucratic – fix the bureaucracy. It wasn't enough. America also needed to understand "why." For members of the 9/11 Generation, the failures of government to act in the face of overwhelming evidence will come as no surprise. They've seen this same inaction their entire lives; when it comes to gun violence, undeniable climate change, and a host of economic problems, not the least of which are the costs of higher education and massive student debt. For these members of the American body politic, the politics of America is a dismal failure. The salience of democracy questionable. Perhaps worse is the government's narrow focus on the bureaucratic failures that led to 9/11 rather than exploring the essential rationale for bin Laden's hatred of America and his attack on the homeland. These are the lessons of history to which Americans should be paying attention. These are the lessons that the 9/11 Generation must learn.

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- ¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 259.
- ² *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 134.
- ³ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 112.
- ⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 115; James C. McKinley, Jr., “Two U.S. Embassies in East Africa Bombed,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1998, <http://movies2.nytimes.com/library/world/africa/080898africa-bombing.html>; “The Bombings the World Forgot,” *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/21/the-bombings-the-world-forgot/>.
- ⁵ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 116-8; “U.S. Missiles Pound Targets in Afghanistan, Sudan,” CNN, August 20, 1998; James Bennet, “U.S. Cruise Missiles Strike Sudan and Afghan Targets Tied to Terrorist Network,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1998, <http://movies2.nytimes.com/library/world/africa/082198attack-us.html>; James Astill, “Strike One,” *The Guardian*, October 2, 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/02/afghanistan.terrorism3>.
- ⁶ Nathan J. Robinson, “Bill Clinton’s Act of Terrorism,” *Jacobin*, October 12, 2016, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/10/bill-clinton-al-shifa-sudan-bombing-khartoum/>; James Risen, “To Bomb Sudan Plant, or Not: A Year Later, Debates Rankle,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1999, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/africa/102799us-sudan.html>; Timothy Noah, “Khartoum Revisited, Part 2: The only new evidence on Clinton’s Sudan bombing weakens the case for it,” *Slate*, March 31, 2004, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2004/04/more-on-clinton-s-sudan-bombing.html>.
- ⁷ John F. Harris, “Strikes Planned in Midst of Scandal,” *Washington Post*, August 21, 1998, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/eafricabombing/stories/decision082198.htm>; Guy Gugliotta and Juliet Eilperin, “Tough Response Appeals to Clinton Critics,” *Washington Post*, August 21, 1998, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/stories/react082198.htm>; “Punish and Be Damned,” *Economist*, August 27, 1998, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/1998/08/27/punish-and-be-damned>.
- ⁸ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 128-9; 130-1.
- ⁹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 135; Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 284-5.
- ¹⁰ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 176, 180.
- ¹¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 189-190.
- ¹² *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 191.
- ¹³ Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004,) 224.
- ¹⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 199-201; Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, chapter 26.
- ¹⁵ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 256-8.
- ¹⁶ Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 318-9; *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 265.
- ¹⁷ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 212.
- ¹⁸ Summers and Swan, *The Eleventh Day*, 358; Robin Pogrebin, “John O’Neill Is Dead at 49; Trade Center Security Chief,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2001; <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/23/nyregion/john-o-neill-is-dead-at-49-trade-center-security-chief.html>; Lawrence Wright, “The Counter-Terrorist: John O’Neill was an F.B.I. Agent with an Obsession: The Growing Threat of Al Qaeda,” *The New Yorker*, January 14, 2002, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/01/14/the-counter-terrorist>.
- ¹⁹ John Gershman, “9/11 Commission Testimony Reveals Bush Administration Lacked Focus on Terrorism Prior to Attacks,” Melvin Goodman Institute for Policy Studies, October 2, 2005, <https://ips-dc.org/911-commission-testimony-reveals-bush-administration-lacked-focus-on-terrorism-prior-to-attacks/>; “Of Privilege and Politics,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/31/opinion/of-privilege-and-politics.html>; Mike Allen and Dan Eggen, “President to Let Rice Testify About 9/11,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 2004, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2004/03/31/president-to-let-rice-testify-about-911/127e8dd4-bca1-4511-bef5-80c9555af42c/?utm_term=.a94af4e8c8c1.
- ²⁰ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 199; Wilkerson quoted in, Murphy and Purdum, “Farewell To All That: An Oral History of the Bush White House.”
- ²¹ Michael Hirsh and Michael Isikoff, “What Went Wrong: The Inside Story of the Missed Signals and Intelligence failures that Raise a Chilling Question: Did September 11 Have to Happen?” *Newsweek*, May 27, 2002.

Why?

Do They Hate Our Freedom?

Perhaps the most serious question that the 9/11 Generation must contend with is the “why” of September 11. George W. Bush believed it was simple – Osama bin Laden and his terrorist legion hated American freedom. They were evil. These ideas became imbedded in the 9/11 Generation’s psyche. Much of their world revolved around good versus evil, the forces of freedom engaged in battle for truth, justice, and the American way. – If only 9/11 were that simple. On the surface, if we consider only the suffering dealt out on that blue-skied September morning, evil seems the perfect term for the destruction, chaos, and death that rained down in the 102 minutes of 9/11. But the day doesn’t – it can’t – live in a vacuum devoid of cause and effect.



The path that led to September 2001 is long and winding. It’s a story about the waning days of World War II, the idea of American exceptionalism, and a new belief that the United States should expand its role in the world. All of this entails understanding something about American foreign policy, a subject that usually induces eye rolls or a quick nodding off in history classes across the country. To most students it seems boring, esoteric, and generally unnecessary because America is a nation largely shielded from foreign influence. Our great oceans have always separated and protected us from abroad. But 9/11 changed all of that. Suddenly a tiny group of radical terrorists could threaten the mightiest nation in the world. The need to understand their motives has never been greater, and my students quickly wake up to this fact when challenged with the “why” of 9/11. Suddenly, American foreign policy is fascinating, even critical. It’s also a key lesson for the 9/11 Generation, for one thing is certain – the problems that inspired the 9/11 attacks have not been dealt with nor have they simply gone away. They continue to fester, and Al Qaeda has given way to an even more ruthless terrorist threat in the form of ISIS.

Bush’s Folly

“Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom.” George W. Bush’s words came just on September 20, 2001, just nine days after the 9/11 attacks. Appearing before

“Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done.”

—President George W. Bush

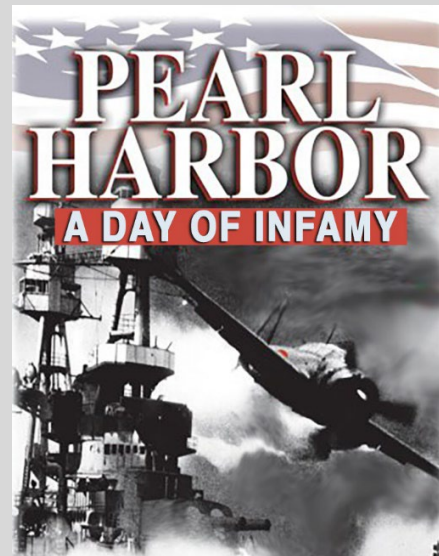


a packed congressional hall, the President explained what had happened, who was responsible, and addressed an essential question: “Americans are asking, why do they hate us?” He assured the nation it was because “they hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with

each other.” It was an echo of his previous remarks on the evening of September 11, when he declared that “freedom came under attack,” and that “the enemies of freedom committed an act of war.”¹

As the fires at Ground Zero continued to smolder, Bush embodied his September 20 speech with a grit and determination that a damaged American needed badly. “Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment.” That mission was freedom itself. He insisted that “Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom – the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time – now depends on us. Our nation – this generation – will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail.”

It was a speech the American people needed – forceful, confident, compelling. It defined a struggle between good and evil. Bush spent the rest of his administration talking about a generational mission. Just four days after the speech, a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll announced that President Bush had the highest job approval rating in presidential history. Ninety percent of Americans supported his actions – his words.² It’s understandable. People were frightened. 9/11 was unprecedented. Americans needed a “Day of Infamy” moment like the one Franklin Delano Roosevelt offered in the hours after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Bush’s speech helped to fuel a patriotic fire already burning amidst the chaos and sadness. American fear was being harnessed into anger.



If only the President’s simple explanation matched the deeper reasons behind 9/11. And Osama bin Laden had heard Bush’s words, even in the far off caves of the Afghanistan/Pakistan border. He scoffed at the constant refrain about freedom, dismissing “Bush’s claim that we hate freedom. Perhaps he can tell us why we did not attack Sweden?”³ Even the 9/11 Commission report didn’t mention the hatred of freedom as a rationale for 9/11. Only six pages out of the six hundred report mentioned in passing some of the economic and religious conditions in the Middle East

that had contributed to hatred of the West and bin Laden's popularity. The Commission did list that his "grievances against the United States [were] widely shared in the Muslim world." These included "the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, the home of Islam's holiest sites...the suffering of the Iraqi people as a result of the sanctions imposed after the [first] Gulf War...[and] U.S. support of Israel." The report commented on the region's history and on bin Laden's "promises to restore pride to people who consider themselves the victims of successive foreign masters."⁴

There was truth in all of these pronouncements. Not the truth of the Commission reporting on such issues (six out of six hundred pages hardly stands out as robust consideration), but truth in bin Laden's complaints against the West, in particular, the United States. The Commission report also discussed bin Laden's twisting of Islam, that he, his ideological mentors, and his protégés had twisted Islam's teachings toward an extreme outlook that justified killing any non-Muslim, and even Muslims who were considered not devout enough or wrong in their religious interpretations. Bin Laden's views represented a tiny fraction of the wider Muslim world, but his complaints against the West were still shared widely. Many Muslims understood the underlying issues that had pushed bin Laden and others towards extremism. Part of it was governmental corruption within their own countries as well as a legacy of Western colonial occupation over the course of the 20th century and beyond. There were plenty of complaints against the West's influence in the region.



The smoldering of this long discontent was fanned into a fanatic Islamic flame when the United States decided to finance, train, and arm the most radical Mujahedeen fighters. It became a key part of American Cold War policy when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Suddenly, the U.S. had an opportunity to give the U.S.S.R. its own Vietnam, a war of such devastating loss that would rock the communist nation to its core. The problem for America was the

long-term effect of training the Mujahedeen to be killers. It was a Pandora's Box that unleashed itself on a Tuesday morning in September 2001.

Virtually every American knows who Osama bin Laden was, but few have read a word that he uttered. Some might argue why bother. It only tarnishes the memory of those who died on 9/11. Bin Laden was little more than a killer, a goat-herding fanatic who lived in a cave and merely got lucky on 9/11. Nothing could be farther from the truth. His was a strategic mind, one that outwitted the most advanced security agencies in the world and unleashed terror on the streets of America. He didn't do it simply because he hated America. Over the course of many years, bin Laden wrote and recorded his many complaints against the West and the United States. Understanding those views is critical for any understanding of 9/11.

The 9/11 Commission report said as much. Its final chapter, “Reflecting on a Generational Challenge,” noted that America had two enemies: Al Qaeda *and* extremist ideology. By 2004, when the report was issued, the U.S. had weakened Al Qaeda, but the report warned that extremism would last long after bin Laden and his followers were captured or killed. Combatting terrorism demanded that American first understand it. Only then could we begin “dismantling the Al Qaeda network and prevailing in the longer term over the ideology that gives rise to Islamist terrorism.”⁵

History Lessons for a Generational Challenge

Too many Americans have forgotten the importance of history, and there are certain lessons that can only be learned from our past. It’s as true for nations as it is for people. We’ve all had friends and family who have experienced stress or trauma and come to understand that moving forward requires confronting those depth of those challenges. That always means exploring the past. That was understandably impossible for Americans in the days and months after 9/11. There was too much grief, too much anger. But President Bush’s question about why bin Laden hated America required that we consider the past. Those days and months have turned into years and the nation seems no closer to understanding its long past that led to September 11. This is a critical lesson for the 9/11 Generation.

It may be even harder for earlier generations, those who grew up believing in the greatness of America – the notion of American exceptionalism – that the road to 9/11 was paved over decades that had extended out from World War II . Many in the 9/11 Generation have never understood the idea of American exceptionalism simply because they’ve grown up in a nation beset by problems. Problems that the government seems incapable of addressing much less solving. For them, 9/11 was the beginning of this chaos, though most certainly don’t recognize it as the catalyst for their generational worldview. But 9/11 was the beginning. It’s ground zero, the crossroads of the 20th and 21st centuries, a hard boundary between Millennials and the 9/11 Generation.



The term “ground zero” has two meanings. One is a new beginning, a defining moment that marks a cataclysmic shift. The other is a more literal definition; the area where a nuclear detonation occurred. Both meanings are embedded in the reality of 9/11 because the world’s original ground zero was in Japan, where atomic bombs detonated high above Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and then at Nagasaki two days later. They ended World War II and were instantly the defining moments 20th century American power. The victory over the Axis powers and the harnessing of the atom as a weapon both played a part in America’s exceptionalism. The United

States was the greatest force in the world – militarily, economically, politically. Our nation had soundly defeated the Nazis and forced unconditional surrender on the Japanese. The atomic bombs ensured that submission and sent a daunting warning to our newest foe, the Soviet Union. Ground zero in Japan was an integral part of the burgeoning Cold War and a decisive statement about the beginning of American empire.



It was a statement totally different from the message that ended World War I. In 1919, the U.S. Senate refused to join the new League of Nations and rejected the Treaty of Versailles that ended the war. Doing so embraced an isolationist view, one that said America won't be led into another European conflict. The aftermath of World War II embraced a totally different vision for America's role in the world. We invited the new United Nations to establish its headquarters in New York City, a clear statement that America was now committed to global leadership.

We announced the Truman Doctrine and later launched the Marshall Plan; both provided unprecedented economic investment to rebuild Europe and other parts of the world. Today, many Americans bemoan the idea of the U.S. as the "Policeman of the World." This is when it began.

The U.S. decision to engage the world in a new leadership role was spurred by both militarily and economic motivations. Returning to isolationism following World War II might have caused the same outcome as what followed World War I: another global struggle and the death of millions. After the first "great war," some in the U.S. walked away disgruntled and unsure if America's involvement was a good idea. Europe had seen countless wars over the centuries and the American Founders had cautioned the young nation to be wary of Old World conflicts. George Washington's famous "Farewell Address" warned of entangling alliances, and that warning echoed across centuries of American foreign policy. When World War II broke out in the 1930s, many in the U.S. wanted nothing to do with it, viewing the war as merely another European quarrel. Pearl Harbor changed everything. Americans were instantly ready to fight.

Many rightly see World War II as America's finest hour, its most noble war, when the nation proved itself as a force for good in the world. We were, as Abraham Lincoln had once said in the midst of his generational crisis, "the last best hope of earth," a constitutional republic plying seas traditionally dominated by monarchs, emperors, and military despots. WW II was a time when most Americans supported the mission. They planted victory gardens, bought war bonds, and participated in scrap metal drives. It was a massive unified effort at home and overseas. The journalist Tom Brokaw called them the "Greatest Generation." It seemed natural that America

would continue its leadership in the aftermath of the war, to rebuild the world in its image, both politically and economically.

American exceptionalism was at its high point. An idea born with a fledgling republic in 1776, it became a nation that heralded freedom through representative government, liberty, human rights, and the eventual demise of governments that opposed such ideals. It began with the Declaration of Independence, which espoused inherent universal rights bound in the laws of nature – life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness – freedom. It was the right of people everywhere to create their own forms of government that upheld these basic convictions.



These core values are what have always set the United States apart. This is the exceptional of American exceptionalism. We are the indispensable nation – the Declaration our most seminal document – our gift to the world. Translated into countless languages, it has served as a template throughout the globe for people fighting repression.



Whether or not they can explain American exceptionalism or its historical roots, most Americans have internalized the idea in some way. For many, it remains in a post-World War II mindset, wedded to the belief that the U.S. is a force for good. That era, including the 1950s, was presented as a golden age.

Ronald Reagan harkened back to it in the 1980s, and in 2016 Donald Trump ran an entire presidential campaign on a call to “Make America Great Again.” Trump never defined a specific time of greatness, but he surely meant this post-World War II era, when the United States was without equal. And Trump’s message was readily embraced, revealing that a good portion of Americans believed that something had happened that required the country to reclaim its lost greatness. What had caused the loss?

Part of the answer lay in the failure of Vietnam, America’s first defeat in war. It was a conflict halfway around the globe that many didn’t understand. Americans of the late 1960s and 70s watched with horror as the war unfold on their televisions. U.S. casualties mounted along with national protests. The failure in that war tarnished America in some way; we’re still recovering. It was the first chink in our armor, our greatness. But the real source of America’s modern chaos – our loss in greatness – came on September 11, when passenger-airliners-turned-missiles decimated buildings and with them the nation’s morale. We were shocked into a new reality,

one that revealed our vulnerability. *That* was ground zero – the birth of the 9/11 Generation, born into a world of fear, chaos, and uncertainty. The children of 9/11 learned instantly that the U.S. was not invincible, perhaps not the greatest anymore.

It was also a time of intense anger. One study concluded that anger was the most powerful and steadfast emotion on 9/11, noting, “in contrast to anxiety, anger never returned to its baseline level. Instead, anger accumulated over the course of the day and reached a level that was almost 10 times as high as at the start of September 11.”⁶ Although the study didn’t report all the ways in which anger manifested itself (surely many Americans embodied a general anger at the attack and loss of life), yet some must have also felt incensed – even betrayed – by a world the United States had helped over and over again, beginning with WW II. President Bush’s question, “Why do they hate us?” surely spoke to such a feeling. As an exceptional, benevolent nation, the United States shouldn’t have been the victim of such treachery.



But Americans’ vision of the U.S. isn’t always the same as how others see us. This is particularly true in the Middle East. American may have “saved the world” in WW II, but we came to the end of the conflict with distinct political and economic goals. Freedom and capitalism, the fraternal twins of American democracy, are intertwined.



That isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Many rightly argue that capitalism has done more than any economic system to help the masses, create a stable middle class, and modernize societies. But its dark underbelly has always been insatiable greed and a corporate rapaciousness that makes it seem as though all Americans care about is money and power. Some worry that profit over people, not freedom, is the true mantra of the United States.

Americans certainly understand such criticisms. We struggle with an economy where the rich get richer and corporations pay little to no taxes. The wealth gap continues to grow rapidly and the middle class seems squeezed just a little more each year. Much of the 9/11 Generation knows this story all too well. They are constantly confronted by an economy that doesn’t seem to be in their favor. They worry about debt, especially from college tuition. Many watched their parents struggle in the wake of the post-9/11 economic recession and couldn’t help by absorb that anxiety. The financial crash that came only a few years later in 2008 – the government response with massive bailouts, bonuses to corporate leaders who had contributed to the collapse, and not a single prosecution for what was clearly economic malfeasance – made the system seem rigged. And if Americans at home worry about unprincipled capitalists who game the system and

cause it to fail, what must those overseas think when they have little or no recourse and no federal regulations with which to fight back?

Then there is the issue of U.S. foreign policy, which is almost always designed to aid American corporations and U.S. economic dominance in the world. Again, the post-World War II era is critical, when the U.S. committed itself to building a new world order with itself on top. The very idea defines empire, and for many around the globe the American flag has come to represent aggressive greed as much as it represents freedom. And there is an age-old truth about empires. Those who feel they are unfairly dominated, manipulated, or occupied generally don't like it. They will complain and protest. They will issue declarations. When these go unheeded, they pick up weapons and kill those they consider enemies. They may hijack planes on a crisp September morning and destroy them over the streets of Manhattan, in Virginia, or the fields of Pennsylvania.

¹ George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001, White House Archives, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>; George W. Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Terrorist Attacks,” September 11, 2001, The American Presidency Project, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=58057>.

² Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001; David W. Moore, “Bush Job Approval Highest in Gallup History,” September 24, 2001, Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/4924/bush-job-approval-highest-gallup-history.aspx>; David Gartenstein-Ross, “Our Politicized Fight Against Terrorism: An Excerpt,” September 30, 2011, *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/09/our-politicized-fight-against-terrorism-an-excerpt/245933/>

³ Osama bin Laden, “The Towers of Lebanon,” October 29, 2004, in Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World* (London: Verso, 2005), 238.

⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 48-50.

⁵ More than 2,000 years ago, the Chinese warrior and strategist Sun Tzu counseled in the *Art of War* to “know the enemy.” American military commanders have embraced such admonitions within counter-insurgency strategy going back to, at the very least, Vietnam, when they focused on winning hearts and minds. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 363.

⁶ Mitja D. Back, Albrecht C.P. Kűfner, Boris Egloff, “The Emotional Timeline of September 11, 2001,” *Psychological Science*, 21 (10) (August 30, 2010): 1417-1419, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0956797610382124#articleCitationDownloadContainer>; Jeffrey Kluger, “Charting the Emotions of 9/11 – Minute by Minute,” September 3, 2010, *Time Magazine*, <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2015528,00.html>.

A Question of Policy

A Question of Policy

Amidst the hurt and outrage of an attack on the homeland, it's difficult to recognize that any understanding of 9/11 must confront decades of foreign policy. During a May 2007 Republican presidential candidate debate, Texas Congressman Ron Paul insisted that American foreign policy in the Middle East was at the heart of 9/11. "Have you ever read the reasons why they attacked us?" asked Paul.



"They attacked us because we've been over there; we've been bombing Iraq for ten years. They don't come here to attack us because we are rich and free." Rudolph Giuliani, the mayor of New York City during 9/11, expressed outrage. "That is an extraordinary statement, as someone who lived through 9/11, that we invited attack because we were bombing Iraq. I don't think I have heard that before, and I have heard some pretty absurd explanations for September 11. And I would ask the congressman to withdraw that comment and tell us that he really didn't mean it."¹ Paul didn't withdraw the statement. There was no reason to do so.

President Bush held the same opinion as Giuliani, insisting in a Veteran's Day speech in 2005 that "we're not facing a set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed....No act of ours invited the rage of killers." Bush and his advisors continually refused to consider that U.S. policy was at the heart of 9/11. One of the President's speech writer, David Frum, said, "There was no whining on September 20. Bush's speech to the joint session of Congress was remarkable equally for what it did not say and for what it did say. Here is the most important thing it did not say: It did not accept—it did not even acknowledge—the argument that the United States somehow brought the terror attacks on itself."²

Such an opinion wasn't held by everyone in government. A 2004 report on strategic communication for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense outlined the key issue regarding America's conflict in the Middle East: "we must understand the United States is engaged in a generational and global struggle about ideas, not a War between the West and Islam." The Defense Science Board Task Force, which issued the report, insisted that "nothing shapes U.S. policies and global perceptions of U.S. foreign and national security objectives more powerfully than the President's statements and actions, and those of senior officials." The report added that "worldwide anger and discontent are directed at America's tarnished credibility and ways

the U.S. pursues its goals. There is consensus that America’s power to persuade is in a state of crisis.” Quite pointedly, the report stated, “Muslims do not ‘hate our freedom,’ but rather, they hate our policies.”³



There are important lessons here, lessons that Americans, especially the 9/11 Generation, must confront if we are to avoid future 9/11s and reclaim the greatness that we know is within the American story. There are also lessons about the importance of studying history. The reality is that many don’t understand the nation’s interaction with the world and haven’t necessarily felt a need to learn how our policies impact others. They see the United States as the top dog, the purveyor

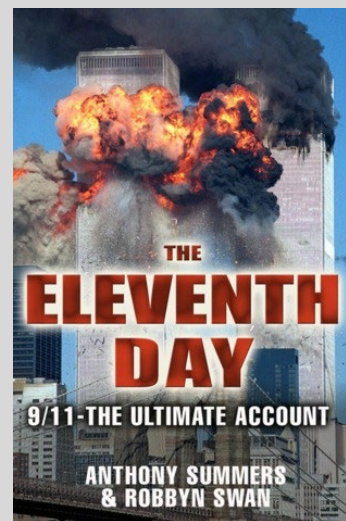
of right and the American Dream, the world’s ethical and humanitarian leader.

Because we’ve always been protected by our great oceans and superior military, many dismiss the need to understand foreign policy – as long as the homeland is safe. 9/11 changed that. It was meant to.

When I teach undergraduates about American foreign policy and world affairs in a typical college survey course, I often watch students’ eyes roll back or see the distant stare of irrelevance. But when I begin the discussion with the “why” of 9/11, there’s a different dynamic at work. Suddenly, gaining a greater appreciation of our role in the world becomes the most important question of the 21st Century. Why did 9/11 happen?

In a wonderful book titled *The Eleventh Day: The Full Story of 9/11*, authors Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan begin their first chapter with some essential questions: “Did the story begin twenty years ago during the Gulf War, when a great American army was installed in Saudi Arabia, a land sacred to Muslims? Did it begin in 1948, when the United States recognized the declaration of a Jewish state to be known as Israel? Or on the day in 1938 when Americans discovered in Saudi Arabia one of the largest oil reserves on the planet?”⁴

The truth is that the story began with all of these events and more. Again, understanding the immediate aftermath of World War II is critical – ground zero in Japan is one of the keys. WW II wasn’t over



before the next great generational struggle began, the Cold War battle against communism. That conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union justified an increase in the American military around the world. In the Middle East, the U.S. worked quickly to replace Great Britain as the strategic colonial power. Saudi Arabia was to be our greatest ally. It began with foreign aid to the Saudi kingdom in the midst of WW II (part of the lend-lease program), and the relationship expanded quickly, when in the same week that Japan surrendered, King Ibn Saud signed an agreement to lease the Dhahran air base to America.



The U.S. had learned during the war that airpower was essential to U.S. strategic interests, and FDR had lobbied the king for access to the base. President Harry Truman took up the cause following FDR's passing. With both presidents, King Saud had expressed concern that allowing American forces into the kingdom, the site of Islam's two most holy places – Mecca and Medina – would allow critics to argue that he had failed to keep the sites “free from the taint of foreign occupation.”⁵

The presence of non-Muslims, especially military personnel, on holy land is one of the issues that Osama bin Laden complained about bitterly. It should be no surprise, then, that on June 25, 1996, almost fifty years after the initial agreement to lease the Dhahran base, bin Laden's followers attacked it with a truck bomb outside of the Khobar Towers. Nineteen American airmen were killed, and hundreds injured, along with Saudi nationals and others. It was Al Qaeda's first attack inside the kingdom and a statement about foreign troops on sacred soil.

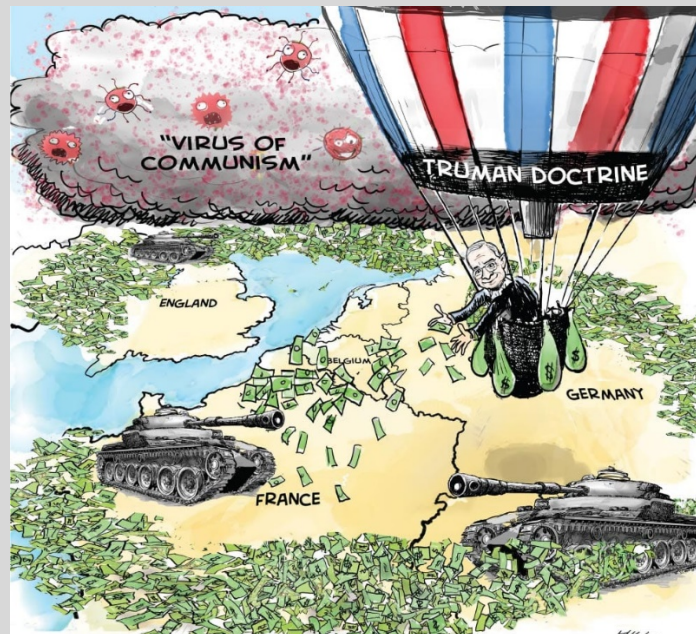
But it's the story of what happened in the decades between the leasing of the airfield and bin Laden's attack fifty years later that helps to tell the “why” of 9/11, and provides the lessons that the 9/11 Generation must learn. The trail begins at the end of World War II, when the United States steadily increased its presence in the Middle East. There were four primary goals: 1) expanding America's political and economic influence; 2) countering the Soviet Union; 3) capitalizing on massive oil reserves; 4) supporting the newly established state of Israel. From the late 1940s through the 1990s, and well into the present, all of these issues have spiraled in a vortex of American foreign policy that has challenged the stability of the Middle East.

America in the Middle East

President Harry Truman opened the way for America's role in the region during his pivotal March 12, 1947 speech before a joint session of Congress, when he first announced the Truman Doctrine. The President advocated \$400 million in emergency funds for Greece and Turkey, citing imminent economic collapse and the inability of Great Britain to continue its support of those

nations. As Truman said, “One of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion.” He worried most about the influence of communism, and about “countries which sought to impose their will, and their way of life, upon other nations.” Truman insisted that his doctrine was “an investment in world freedom and world peace,” and warned that “if we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world – and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation.” He warned that if the U.S. did not act by providing money to Greece and Turkey, “confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East.”⁶

The address defined the key ideals of American exceptionalism (it mentioned free or freedom twenty-four times), advocated U.S. support for struggling peoples, and mentioned our commitment in being a “leading part in establishing the United Nations.” The speech was big on freedom, but left out its fraternal twin, capitalism, even though the Truman knew full well that economic supremacy was a major U.S. goal. An earlier draft of the address had discussed concern over the world economy and the importance of “free enterprise,” but those ideas were removed because Truman complained,



“the whole thing sounds like an investment prospectus.” Better to focus broadly on justice and threats from communism – on freedom. And so the U.S. expanded its political and economic footprint around the world, including the Middle East, where massive oils reserves meant energy and big money for American corporations.

The changes to the Middle East post-WW II era were astounding. The Zionist movement that advocated for a Jewish homeland led to the establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948, and its recognition the next day by the United States.



Many believe that Jerusalem, one the oldest cities in the world, is home to some of the most sacred religious sites of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Disputes over the region reach back centuries, to the Crusades, and were reignited with the creation of a Zionist state on what many Arabs claimed was rightfully Palestinian land. Colonial powers in the aftermath of WW I, mainly the British and French, had

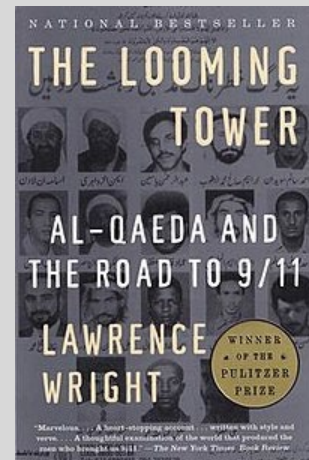
split portions of the Middle East into zones and the creation of Israel seemed to many Arabs yet another land grab. Conflict between Arabs and Jews erupted almost immediately after Israel's creation, and followed with a series of wars, skirmishes, and terrorism that have continued into the 21st century. The Six-Day War in June 1967 was particularly damaging to Arab morale and borders. A victorious Israel grew considerably, occupying the West Bank, the Golan Heights, as well as Sinai and Gaza. Both the creation of Israel and its expansion have been leading sources of tension in the Middle East, and an essential complaint of Arabs, who resent U.S. support of Israel. For those who came to lead Al Qaeda, and other Islamic extremist groups, Zionism and the plight of Palestinians is a primary reason for jihad, or holy war.

For Mohamed Atta, the ringleader of 9/11, it was everything. When the Defense Science Board Task Force issued its report to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, determining that "Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,' but rather, they hate our policies" it followed with the point that "the overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights."⁷ Most Americans surely haven't read the Task Force report. They instead relied on President Bush's conclusion about freedom and good versus evil.

Another great challenge in the Middle East is "modernity." The most basic definition is the transition from an older to a newer way of life. Modernity often involves shifting from a more rural, agrarian lifestyle to one that is industrial. Every nation that modernizes grapples with the economic, social, cultural, and religious effects of such changes. Even in the United States today, we struggle with the impact of global economic competition (globalism) in our lives. Imagine living in Saudi Arabia in the midst of the great post-WW II oil boom, with the vast riches and many changes that arrived with the production of "black gold." As Lawrence Wright explained so effectively in the *Looming Tower*, "Desert princes who had lived all their lives on dates and camel's milk were suddenly docking their yachts in Monaco."

Foreign companies arrived to build roads, ports, schools, and hospitals – all the trappings of modernity. "No country," said Wright, "had ever experienced such rapid, overwhelming transformation."⁸

As with the history of modernity in virtually every country, there are those who look back longingly to a simpler time, one they see as more traditional, more pure. The excessive oil wealth and the frills of distinctly Western pleasures – yachts, palaces, private jets, lavish casino outings, alcohol and prostitution – in short, greed – appeared to devout Muslims as a betrayal of the prophet Muhammed's teachings and flying in the face of a life devoted to Allah. If this is what modernity offered, they wanted nothing of it. In the eyes of some, Muslim interaction with the West had opened the door for an assault upon Islam, both in the form of Zionism and the evils of capitalism. In the twenty-five years that followed the end of WW II, this rapid change fueled a deepening anger. The 1970s revealed troubling signs for Muslims and those they blamed for the problem.





Abdullah Azzam

Nineteen seventy-nine was a critical year. A series of conflicts erupted across the Middle East that placed America and the region on a long and disastrous path. First, Osama bin Laden visited the United States for the only time in his life. He met in Indiana with his old teacher, Abdullah Azzam, from King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. There, bin Laden had studied economics and management, but most importantly found in Azzam a religious mentor.

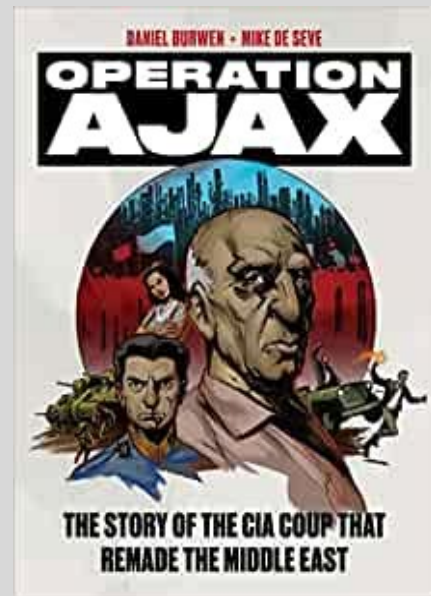
Azzam was a Palestinian whose village had been taken over by Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967. He despised the State of Israel and the West, speaking out openly against both. At the university, he had worked closely with Mohammed Qutb, the brother of the famous Sayyid Qutb, one of the most important Islamic thinkers and writers of the 20th century. Sayyid had spent two years in the 1950s living in the United States and came to loath what he viewed as the intense materialism, racism, and obsession with sex and violence among Americans. His voluminous writings on the Koran and Islamic thought have influenced what many westerners view as the emergence of radical Islam because he advocated violence against those he believed had corrupted Islam. Both Azzam and bin Laden were heavily influenced by Mohammed and Sayyid Qutb.

How strange it was, then, that the United States welcomed Azzam, with his anti-Zionist message. It was a classic foreign policy example of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” for 1979 was also the year that the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The U.S. viewed it as an opportunity to give the Soviets their own Vietnam, and poured billions of dollars, weapons, and personnel into Afghanistan and Pakistan to train Mujahedeen fighters. This was an integral piece of the Middle East puzzle that led to extremism across the region, and ultimately to 9/11.



Another piece was the 1979 Iranian Revolution. This, too, was years in the making, beginning in the early 1950s with Iran's attempt to take control of and nationalize its oil fields. This would have removed foreign involvement in the country's most important natural resource. Iran's plan challenged British and American economic interests, and both nations determined to stop it at any cost, even if it meant interfering in the affairs of a sovereign country. The U.S. solution was to remove Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq, through a 1953 CIA coup called "Operation Ajax."

With \$1 million, carefully orchestrated mob action, and plenty of bribes, Mossadeq was removed from power and imprisoned. The U.S. supported Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, regained his full power and nominated the CIA-chosen General Fazlollah Zahedi as prime minister. The Shah quickly scrapped oil nationalization and returned control, and large profits, to British and American firms. The CIA coup remained one of the agency's best-kept secrets of the 1950s. In 2000, the United States released classified documents that resulted in a series of *New York Times* articles.⁹ Many inside Iran, however, already knew that the U.S. had interfered to overthrow the democratically elected Mosaddeq and reestablish the Shah's power. American and the Shah were now wedded to a growing repression and instability within Iran, one the led down a dangerous road.



The danger erupted in 1979 with an Iranian Revolution that overthrew the Shah and replaced him with the Islamic rule of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The crisis also resulted in the Iran hostage crisis, when on November 4 revolutionaries overran the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held 52 American hostages for 444 days. It's a harsh memory for the American government, a bitter pill that continues to poison relations between the two nations.



The difficulties of 1979 extended well beyond Afghanistan and Iran. Saudi Arabia also faced challenges when in November insurgents claiming divine revelation seized the Grand Mosque at Mecca, one of Islam's holiest sites. They called for the overthrow of the Saudi royal family because they believed it to corrupt, ostentatious, and too pro-Western. The siege lasted for two weeks

Saudi Special Forces, Pakistani, Jordanian, and French military units tried to retake the mosque on more than once occasion.

When the smoke cleared, hundreds were dead and wounded. The Saudi royal family was shocked, but instead of cracking down on Islamic extremists, it pulled them closer in an attempt to prove that the government was sufficiently Muslim.

The attack on the mosque led to other problems. Radio reports wrongly claimed that America was responsible for the assault, and crowds in Pakistan stormed the U.S. Embassy at Islamabad on November 21 and burned it to the ground. Two American military personnel and two Pakistani embassy staff were killed. The incident showed that anti-American sentiment existed throughout the Middle East.

¹ Debate recorded in Michael Scheuer, *Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam After Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 216.

² George W. Bush, "President Commemorates Veterans Day, Discusses War on Terror," Tobyhanna Army Depot, Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania, November 11, 2005, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051111-1.html>; David Frum, *The Right Man: An Inside Account of the Bush White House* (New York: Random House, 2005), 145;

³ Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense For Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, September 2004, 3, 14, 40, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dsb/commun.pdf>.

⁴ Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan, *The Eleventh Day: The Full Story of 9/11* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2011), 11.

⁵ Lloyd C. Gardener, *Three Kings: The Rise of American Empire in the Middle East After World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 33.

⁶ President Harry S. Truman's Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, March 12, 1947, available via The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp.

⁷ Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication, 40.

⁸ Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 74.

⁹ James Risen, "Secrets of History: The CIA in Iran," June 18, 2000, *New York Times*, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/mideast/041600iran-cia-index.html>; Malcolm Byrne, "The Secret History of the Iran Coup, 1953," National Security Archive, November 29, 2000, George Washington University, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28/>; Donald Newton Wilber, *Regime Change in Iran: Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952-August 1953* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006).

Opening Pandora's Box

Operation Cyclone

For America, the many events of 1979 were seen through the lens of a much larger global conflict. It was about maintaining American influence and economic power, protecting sources of oil as an important strategic interest, and defeating communism. It was all viewed through a Cold War mindset, and from that point of view, the most important event was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. No aspect of American foreign policy is more important for the 9/11 Generation to confront than the nation's fateful decision to support the Mujahedeen in a war to expel Russian forces.

This meant the U.S. supplying money, weapons, and training through a clandestine CIA operation that worked closely with both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The Saudis matched U.S. financing dollar for dollar, and the Pakistanis coordinated the flow of cash, training, and arms. Journalist George Crile made the point in his book, *Charlie Wilson's War*, that it was "The Largest Covert Operation in History," and journalist Dan Rather commented in a review that "Tom Clancy's fiction pales in comparison with the amazing, mesmerizing story told by George Crile."¹ Arabs from across the region flooded Afghanistan in a call for jihad – religious war – against these non-Muslim, foreign Russian invaders. U.S. support meant aid to the most extreme of the jihadists, but it was more than that. The CIA actively stoked that extremism, helping to create Al Qaeda and paving the road for 9/11. Jihad against foreign invaders was not for Russians alone.



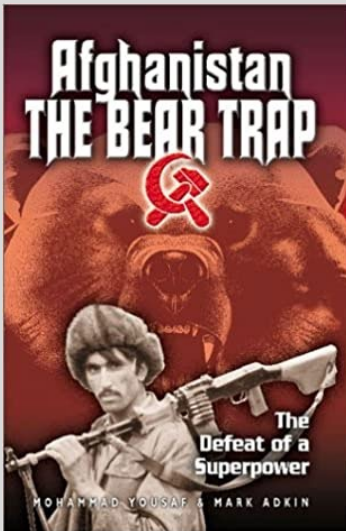
Perhaps the two best accounts of the CIA's activities in Afghanistan and the rise of Islamic terror groups are Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars* and Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower*. Each provide a detailed and disconcerting account of American involvement in the region and the extent to which the U.S. fanned the flames of extremism. Wright's work was made into a television mini-series produced by Hulu in 2018, making it accessible, but seemingly fictional for a 9/11 Generation often more devoted to entertainment than history.

In Coll's account, he stated bluntly that, at the start of the Soviet Afghan War, "the CIA had no intricate strategy." He detailed the story of Howard Hart, a CIA station chief in Islamabad,

Pakistan, who was responsible for acquiring weapons and training the Mujahedeen. As he understood it, his mission was simple:

“You’re a young man; here’s your bag of money, go raise hell,” and, “don’t fuck it up, just go out there and kill Soviets, and take care of the Pakistanis and make them do whatever you need them to do.”

From such unsophisticated beginnings developed an operation that grew exponentially. CIA approval for the plan, Operation Cyclone, began, ironically, on July 3, 1979, only a day before the celebration of America’s own fight for independence. President Jimmy Carter signed a secret Presidential Finding approving covert aid to anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The timing of Carter’s approval was critical. It actually before the December invasion by the Soviets, and it was specifically designed to cause that invasion. The United States wanted Russia to attack Afghanistan so that America could, in the words of then-National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, “have the opportunity of giving the USSR its Vietnam War.” Not long after this secret directive, the president announced a major new policy, the Carter Doctrine, which stated that the United States would use military force in the Persian Gulf to protect its national interests. The biggest interest was oil.



The Polish-born Brzezinski certainly supported such initiatives and held a particular hatred towards the Soviets, in part because they had invaded his homeland at the end of World War II. In a 1998 interview, French journalist Vincent Jauvert asked Brzezinski if he regretted the decision to send secret American aid to Afghanistan. “Regret what?” responded the former security advisor. “This secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of attracting the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it?” Jauvert pressed further: “You do not regret either to have favored Islamic fundamentalism, to have given weapons, advice to future terrorists?” Brzezinski bristled. “What is most important in the history of the world? The Taliban or the fall of the Soviet empire? Some excited Islamists or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?” When challenged

on the idea of “some excited Islamists” and the existence of a global Islamic threat, Brzezinski dismissed both. “Silly things!” he announced. “It’s stupid: there is no global Islam.”²

Brzezinski may have been correct about no global Islam in 1979, but he was woefully wrong at the time of the interview, in 1998. The World Trade Center had already been attacked in 1993, and the forces of Al Qaeda had significantly increased their assaults on American targets

throughout the 1990s. When the jihadists finished with the Russians, they turned their anger on the very people who had trained them – the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

And that training was robust, the money always increasing. The U.S. Congress authorized annual budgets each year for the Afghan program, from approximately \$30 million in 1981 to \$200 million in 1984. The program also evolved from a covert Carter operation to open support under President Ronald Reagan, who was known for his hawkish anti-communism. In 1981, he reauthorized Carter’s Presidential Finding, and, by 1982, publicly supported Afghanistan.

On March 10 of that year, Reagan issued a proclamation called “Afghanistan Day,” in which he charged that “the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan without provocation and with overwhelming force.” This, of course, was untrue based on Brzezinski’s later interview, but it allowed Reagan to place the entire Afghan war in the context of a battle for freedom. He insisted that “the Afghan people have paid a terrible price in their fight for freedom,” and that “the freedom fighters of Afghanistan are defending principles of independence and freedom that form the basis of global security and stability.” Reagan ended his speech with a rousing declaration:



“Afghanistan Day will serve to recall not only these events, but also the principles involved when a people struggles for the freedom to determine its own future, the right to be free of foreign interference and the right to practice religion according to the dictates of conscience.”³

It was a remarkable statement given the American trap, and stood in direct opposition to Iran’s creation of an Islamic republic that could practice religion and government according to the dictates of its conscience. Reagan’s statement about freedom was a line straight from the Truman Doctrine, and one that future presidents like George W. Bush didn’t hesitate to borrow 9/11 sent buildings crashing into the streets.

One year later, on March 21, 1983, President Reagan issued another Afghanistan Day proclamation and again championed “the resistance of the Afghan freedom fighters.” He commented on the millions who had been displaced and killed. “We will probably never know the numbers of people killed and maimed, poisoned and gased [sic], of the homes that have been destroyed, and of the lives that have been shattered and stricken with grief.”⁴ The truth, of

course, was that the United States had put the Afghan war in motion so that it could bleed the Soviet Union. It was, as Brzezinski, had stated, “the Afghan trap,” their Vietnam.

And the U.S. commitment continued to increase. In 1985, President Reagan signed National Security Directive 166, titled “Expanded U.S. Aid to Afghan Guerillas,” which allowed the CIA to use satellite photos in helping the Mujahedeen to plan attacks. The agency also fanned the fires of extremism by distributing what one author described as “thousands of Wahhabi-glossed Korans” (extremist versions) into northern Afghanistan to radicalize Muslims closer to Soviet Central Asia. The CIA actually took the extraordinary step of having these Korans translated into Uzbek, the language of the Central Asian region.⁵

The next year, in 1986, funding increased to \$470 million, and then to \$600 million in 1987. In both of those years, Reagan invited representatives from the Mujahedeen to the White House for a photo op and press conference. The money they received didn’t count the matching funds from the Saudi government. Over a billion dollars was spent in 1987 alone. Afghanistan was awash in weapons and blood. In a 10-year period, between 1979 and 1989, the U.S. and the Soviet Union shipped more weapons to that mountainous, dusty nation than any other country in the world. It was a killing zone, where jihadists learned the craft of modern warfare, sabotage, and spying.⁶ America was training the Mujahedeen to be killers.

The range of weapons and tactics were extensive. The CIA taught Afghan and Arab fighters how to use RPGs (rocket-propelled-grenades) to shoot the tail rotor on helicopters, a technique they taught Somali fighters. In 1993, Somalis destroyed American Black Hawk helicopters in Mogadishu, an event made famous by the film *Black Hawk Down*. In 1986, Americans added to the jihadist arsenal a sophisticated infrared heat-seeking ground-to-air missile, the Stinger. It



was first used on September 26 and the team that shot down Soviet helicopters was also equipped with a video camera. The recording was sent to Washington, where President Reagan screened it at the White House. At the end of the Afghan War, the CIA tried to get the unused Stingers back and even set up a costly buyback program. Today, hundreds of these sophisticated missiles are scattered across the Middle East.

One of the other primary weapons taught to jihadists was the use of C-4 plastic explosives with high-tech detonators and timers. One seasoned CIA agent who had been heavily involved in the American/Afghan weapons program said an incredible amount of explosives passed through Pakistan: “we could have probably blown up half of New York with the explosives that the Paks

supplied.”⁷ This sort of training was of inestimable value to men like Ramzi Yousef, who detonated a device in the basement of the World Trade Center in 1993.

Yet as amazing as the training in Pakistan and Afghanistan was, its dual track in the United States is particularly astounding. The organizing and instruction in jihad did not occur solely in the Middle East. When Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden first visited the United States in 1979, it was the beginning of an intricate network of extremist cells throughout America and the world. Azzam traveled extensively throughout the U.S., establishing a network called the Services Office for the Mujahedeen, or Makhtab al-Khidimat (MAK) – in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Jersey City, Pittsburgh, Tucson, and thirty other American cities as well as in Europe and the Middle East. It was a global network designed to expand extreme Islam, and the flagship of the MAK was, remarkably, in Brooklyn, New York.



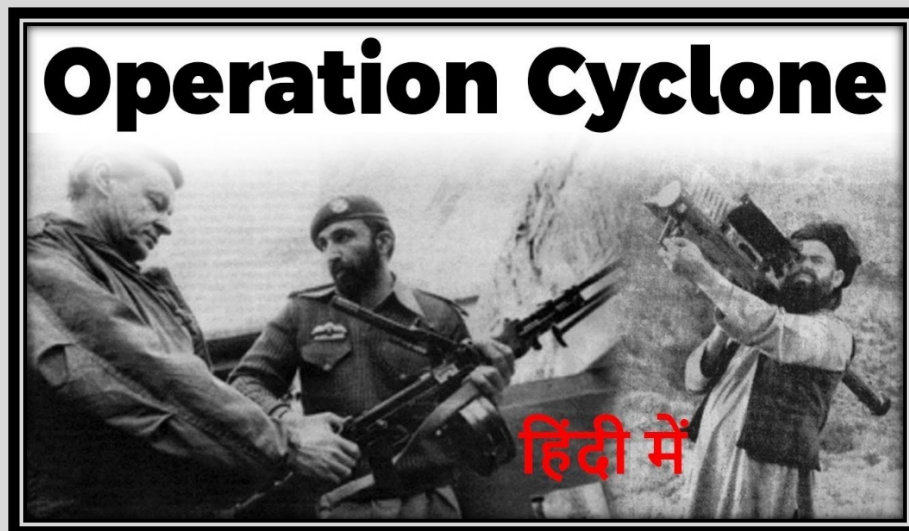
There, in 1988, as the Soviet Union was on the verge of defeat in Afghanistan, the First Conference of Jihad was held at the Al-Farooq mosque. Standing before a crowd of hundreds, Azzam exhorted them to embrace his violent vision, proclaiming “Every Moslem on earth should unsheathe his sword and fight to liberate Palestine....The jihad is not limited to Afghanistan.”⁸ Thousands of would-be fighters flocked to MAK centers, where they began their trek on the path to violence. Part of that journey led some to train inside the United States.

In a British Broadcasting Company (BBC) interview on June 11, 2001 – just three months before 9/11 – Michael Springman, the former head of the American visa bureau in Saudi Arabia, explained, “I was repeatedly ordered by high level State Dept officials to issue visas to unqualified applicants. These were, essentially, people who had no ties either to Saudi Arabia or to their own country. I complained bitterly at the time there. I returned to the US, I complained to the State Dept here, to the General Accounting Office, to the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and to the Inspector General’s office. I was met with silence.” He continued, “What I was protesting was, in reality, an effort to bring recruits, rounded up by Osama Bin Laden, to the US for terrorist training by the CIA. They would then be returned to Afghanistan to fight against the then-Soviets.”⁹

Springman wasn’t the only person who recognized danger from the extensive American support of jihadists. Ed McWilliams, a U.S. special envoy to Pakistan, sent a cable in October of 1988, explaining that “There is a growing frustration, bordering on hostility, among Afghans across the ideological spectrum and from a broad range of backgrounds, toward the government of Pakistan and towards the U.S....The extent of this sentiment appears to be intensifying.” One secular Afghan was even more to the point, warning McWilliams, “For God’s sake, you’re financing your own assassins.”¹⁰

Warnings also came from outside of U.S. intelligence. By late 1987, the Soviet Union quietly admitted to the United States that it would withdraw from Afghanistan, both cautioning the U.S. and asking for help regarding the ever-increasing Islamic extremism. Seeing failure and self-interest in such Russian entreaties, Americans ignored the warnings. Yet Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto also recognized the threat, telling President George H.W. Bush in 1988, "I'm afraid we have created a Frankenstein's monster that could come back to haunt us in the future."¹¹

By the mid-1990s, the extent of the extremist threat was becoming more widely understood. An article in *The Atlantic* magazine titled "Blowback" included an interview with a Western diplomat who said, "Even today you can sit at the Khyber Pass [the artery in the mountainous region that links Afghanistan and Pakistan] and see every color, every creed, every nationality...These groups, in their wildest imagination, never would have met if there had been no jihad. For a Moro to get a Sting missile! To make contacts with Islamists from North Africa! The United States created a Moscow Central in Peshawar [an anti-Soviet Islamic meeting place] for these groups, and the consequences for all of us are astronomical."¹² The simple reality is that America created global, fundamentalist Islam.



With all of these warnings, the United States should have paid more attention to what was coming. But once the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, American policymakers abruptly walked away from the extremist bloodbath they had provoked. With Russian defeat and total Soviet Union's total collapse only a year later in 1989, U.S. goals had been achieved beyond anyone's wildest imagination. For America, Afghanistan suddenly became inconsequential, forgotten. Funding evaporated, but the weapons and battle-hardened fighters remained. Pandora's box was left wide open and jihadists poured out, having fully developed their ideas about infidels invading sacred lands and persecuting Muslims.

The path to 9/11 was paved with American dollars and CIA training. Such lessons should have been obvious in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, but all Americans heard was that the attacks

happened because Islamic fanatics hated freedom and because evil was real. History had been forgotten, or more accurately, ignored.

¹ George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003); Dan Rather, Review of *Charlie Wilson's War*, Grove Atlantic, <https://groveatlantic.com/book/charlie-wilsons-war/>.

² Vincent Jauvert, "Les Révélations d'un Ancien Conseiller de Carter: 'Oui, la CIA est entrée en Afghanistan...,'" *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 15-21, 1998, 76. Translation available: Ursula Gauthier, Vincent Jauvert, "Yes, the CIA has entered Afghanistan before the Russians..." Arrêt sur info, December 8, 2015, <https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=https://arretsurinfo.ch/oui-la-cia-est-entree-en-afghanistan-avant-les-russes/&prev=search>.

³ Ronald Reagan, "Proclamation 4908 – Afghanistan Day," March 10, 1982, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/31082c>.

⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Proclamation 5034 – Afghanistan Day," March 21, 1983, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/32183d>.

⁵ Peter Dale Scott, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 72.

⁶ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 65, 125, 151, 233; President Reagan's Photo Opportunities in the Oval Office on June 16, 1986. President Reagan Meeting with Freedom Fighters from Afghanistan (Mujahedin) in the Oval Office.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaK_CZk-0Rg; President Reagan's Remarks and Chairman Yunis Khalis Remarks Following a Meeting With Afghan Resistance Leaders and Members of Congress in Roosevelt Room on November 13, 1987 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9RWtx8myQc>.

⁷ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 135.

⁸ Steve Emerson, *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us* (New York: Free Press: 2003), 129-130.

⁹ Greg Palast "Has Someone Been Sitting on the FBI?" BBC News, June 11, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/newsnight/1645527.stm>.

¹⁰ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 182-3.

¹¹ Benazhir Butto, *Daughter of the East* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), 410.

¹² Mary Anne Weaver, "Blowback," *The Atlantic*, May 1996, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1996/05/blowback/376583/>.

The Bearded Cleric of Terror

Bin Laden the Killer

Osama bin Laden was a killer. There's no denying it. No excuses. His conservative, extreme ideology had been laid well before 1979. Before the rise of the Mujahedeen and before U.S. Cold War policy led to a Pandora's Box out of which poured American-trained jihadists.

The roots of bin Laden's world view and Islamic intolerance reached all the way back to the 18th century teachings of Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahhab, who believed that Muslims had drifted away from the teachings of the prophet Mohammed. Wahhabism held a special power in Saudi culture, and combined with the extreme ideology of bin Laden's teacher Abdullah Azzam and the justifications offered by the formidable Islamist scholar Sayyid Qtub, bin Laden was nurtured with a narrow view of his religion, his world, the role of women, and the treatment of the kufir, or non-believers. His intolerance of infidels, especially those he believed had wronged the Muslim people, was intractable and deadly. As was his treatment of those Muslims who failed to follow his path.

These are indisputable facts, but they don't the reality that bin Laden's ability to harm the U.S. and that the rise of global Islam were heavily influenced by American support. Nor does bin Laden's extremism justify dismissing his criticism of the West, of Europe's long colonial legacy in the region, of foreign manipulation over territory and oil, and of the U.S. rise to power in the Middle East following WW II. These are common concerns among many Muslims throughout the region, not just extremists. Most who follow Islam didn't join bin Laden, but they understood some of his complaints. Most didn't travel to Afghanistan, where grievances against the West were cultivated into a toxic, deadly new movement called Al Qaeda. It was the Afghanistan piece, with the robust support of America, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan that brought it all together.



When bin Laden returned home to Saudi Arabia following the Russian defeat in Afghanistan, it was one part of the ending Cold War. But it soon morphed into the new War on Terror. For the very same fighters who the United States had trained to defeat the Soviet Union were about to turn their sights on America. The cauldron was bubbling. The ideas that had proliferated among the jihadists about non-Muslims on holy land and the ability to defeat a superpower with one's devotion to Allah and a commitment to violence had metastasized. It needed only a catalyst to be unleashed fully.



As it turned out, Iraq became the fuel that ignited the Middle East. In August 1990, Saddam Hussein's military forces invaded Kuwait, making a variety of justifications – crippling debt from the 1980s Iran-Iraq War; Kuwaiti overproduction of oil that kept prices low and made it more difficult for Iraq to pay its debt; accurate charges that Kuwait was slant drilling under the shared border and stealing Iraqi oil; and a belief that Kuwait actually belonged to Iraq but had been bargained away with redrawn maps by colonial powers in the aftermath of WW I.

Whatever the justification, Iraqi forces easily overwhelmed their neighbor in 1990 and set the stage for further conflict.

Saudi Arabia shared a border with both nations and the kingdom worried that it might be the next Iraqi target. With decades of massive oil profits and the purchase of high-tech American weapons, one might think Saudi Arabia was capable of its own defense. But the Saudi king blinked in the face of Iraqi aggression and accepted help from his long-time post-WW II partner, the U.S. It was a decision that brought Osama bin Laden and America to the crossroads of 9/11.

When the Iraqi threat to Saudi Arabia arose with the invasion of Kuwait, bin Laden quickly offered Mujahedeen fighters to defend the kingdom. King Fahd flatly refused and instead welcomed U.S. forces. It was a monumental decision considering the long-held concern about non-Muslim soldiers on holy land.

Fahd believed he had solved the problem by requiring the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, to issue edicts allowing American and other foreign troops into the kingdom and permitting Muslim troops to fight alongside. The edicts and the arrival of the U.S. military precipitated a crisis of faith in Saudi Arabia. Although the war against Iraq was decisive, first with U.S. deployment in Operation Desert Shield, and then with the actual conflict in Operation Desert Storm, the American



presence was seen by many as a failure of the royal family and a renunciation of Islam. Just as concerning, American troops remained in Saudi Arabia long after the war, imposing a no-fly zone over Iraq and enforcing crippling economic sanctions.

By May of 1991, well after Iraqi troops had been forced back within their own borders, Saudi dissenters sent petitions to ibn Baz protesting his edicts, and one year later, in July of 1992, the King received a 46-page “Memorandum of Advice” from clerics who questioned the government and criticized the continued presence of U.S. troops on holy land. The King responded harshly, cracking down on and jailing perceived dissidents. Osama bin Laden also acted, speaking out against the Grand Mufti and the King, denouncing both for corruption and failure to abide by Islamic law. Bin Laden left Saudi Arabia for Sudan in 1991 because of his opposition to the King, and to prepare for his next battle. In 1996, the Saudi government stripped bin Laden of his citizenship.



It didn't matter. The once loyal Saudi had already made his decision, nurtured in the mountains of Afghanistan, that Western influence and corruption were a cancer on the Middle East and that mighty superpowers would crumble in the face of devout opposition. In August of 1996, bin Laden released a remarkable document: “Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holiest Sites.”

At just over twenty pages, it was a lengthy statement to the world expressing his devotion to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, as well as his faith in the Islamic people, or umma. With extensive quotations from the Koran, it outlined in painstaking detail the Muslim world's grievances over decades of Western colonial oppression, aggression against Islamic nations, and what bin Laden believed was the existence of a “Zionist Crusader alliance” perpetrated by Israel and the U.S. The document included three distinct sections: 1) a list of grievances against Saudi rulers and the U.S.; 2) a call for Muslim unity and a strategy for fighting; 3) the demands of Muslim duty.

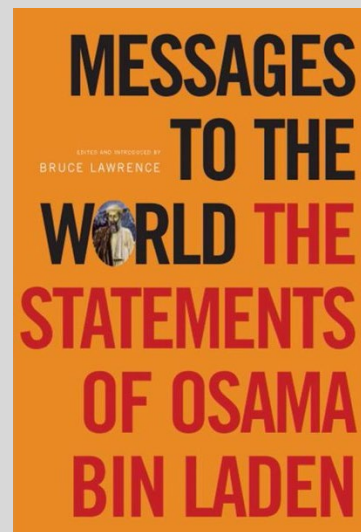
For Americans schooled in the firm belief that bin Laden is little more than a cave-dwelling goat herder, a man of pure evil who desired nothing less than Islamic world domination, the Declaration is a shock to the system. My students who study 9/11 are always stunned after confronting bin Laden's treatise. It doesn't read like the ravings of a lunatic. Rather, it stands out for its clarity, intelligence, and organization.



Even Michael Scheuer, bureau chief for the CIA bin Laden Unit, was dumfounded when he first read it, commenting that “Bin Laden’s 1996 declaration of war specifies U.S. actions causing him to incite war. His declaration is a neutral, factual statement, parts of it like Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence.”¹

This, Scheuer understood, made bin Laden dangerous. He was more than a mere financier or fighter. He could effectively define political grievances, organize followers, and engage in debate; he could argue from a well-structured, Muslim point of view. These are exactly the conclusions that my students arrive at. They also recognize that bin Laden’s justifications don’t diminish or dismiss his twisting of Islam into a murderous ideology or his attacks on America, but the Declaration does place in context bin Laden’s and much of the Muslim world’s grievances against the United States. It certainly wasn’t about hating freedom.

In the introduction to a book of bin Laden’s writings, scholar Bruce Lawrence wrote that bin Laden’s messages “speak in the authentic, compelling voice of a visionary, with what can only be called a powerful lyricism.” Lawrence continued, “Beyond the organizer and polemicist, lies, finally, the hero. To Westerners for whom bin Laden is the incarnation of villainy, this may seem the last word in perversity. But for millions of Muslims around the world, including many who have no sympathy with terrorism, bin Laden is an heroic figure.”² Americans will never accept such a notion. Bin Laden is no hero. Rather, he is the archetype of evil. For the 9/11 Generation he is the bogeyman, the monster under the bed. Americans will never accept such a notion. Bin Laden is no hero. Rather, he is the archetype of evil. For the 9/11 Generation he is the bogeyman, the monster under the bed. The attack that he masterminded was something new and terrible, an assault that demanded swift and unyielding retribution.



For many in the Muslim world who had seen America tighten its mighty grip on the Middle East since the end of WW II, 9/11 was a new ground zero – a decisive challenge to American power.

September 11 revealed America's vulnerability. It should have also been a lesson to consider more fully the roots of Muslim anger.

Bin Laden believed he could defeat a superpower. Afghanistan and the failure of the Soviet Union had shown him so. He actually considered his Declaration of Jihad to be defensive, a final option against corruption at home and aggression from abroad. He said nothing about hating freedom, but wrote in detail about what had happened in the Middle East and what he planned to do about it. Explaining that the earlier Memorandum of Advice to the King had used "soft words and very diplomatic style," it "was rejected and those who signed it and their sympathisers were ridiculed, prevented from travel, punished and even jailed." "Why," asked bin Laden, "is it then the regime closed all peaceful routes and pushed the people toward armed actions?!! which is the only choice left for them to implement righteousness and justice." Reaching back to the colonial division of Muslim lands, he insisted that "it is essential to hit the main enemy who divided the Ummah [the people] into small and little countries and pushed it, for the last few decades, into a state of confusion."

Repeatedly referencing the Zionist-Crusader alliance, bin Laden declared that

"there is no more important duty than pushing the American enemy out of the holy land," explaining that since "it is not possible to push back the enemy except by the collective movement of the Muslim people, then there is a duty on the Muslims to ignore the minor differences among themselves."

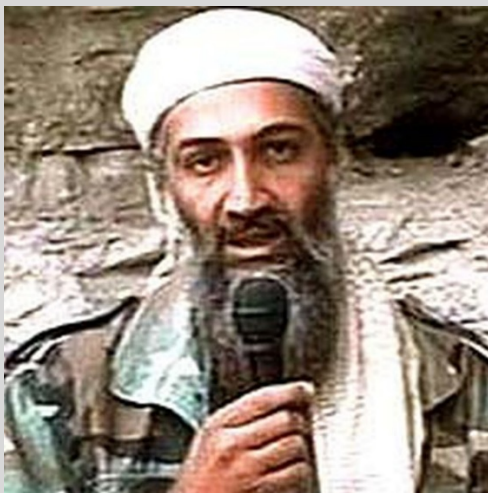
He recognized the immense wealth of Saudi oil and warned both Muslims and the U.S. to avoid destroying it. "The presence of the USA Crusader military forces on land, sea and air of the states of the Islamic Gulf is the greatest danger threatening the largest oil reserve in the world....Protect this (oil) wealth and not to include it in the battle as it is a great Islamic wealth and a large economical power essential for the soon to be established Islamic state, by Allah's Permission and Grace. We also warn the aggressors, the USA, against burning this Islamic wealth."

Bin Laden reminded readers of King Fahd's failure to defend Saudi Arabia, noting "The country was widely opened from the north-to-the south and from east-to-the west for the crusaders. The land was filled with the military bases of the USA and the allies. The regime became unable to keep control without the help of these bases. You know more than any body else about the size, intention and the danger of the presence of the USA military bases in the area....It is out of date and no longer acceptable to claim that the presence of the crusaders is [a] necessity and only a temporary measure to protect the land of the two Holy Places....Today it is seven years since their arrival and the regime is not able to move them out of the country."

The Declaration also defined the means of fighting, counseling, that "due to the imbalance of power between our armed forces and the enemy forces, a suitable means of fighting must be

adopted i.e. using fast moving light forces that work under complete secrecy. In other word to initiate a guerrilla warfare....spread rumours, fear and discouragement among the members of the enemy forces.” Bin Laden also advocated against buying American goods. The money “will be transformed into bullets and used against our brothers in Palestine and tomorrow (future) against our sons in the land of the two Holy places. By buying these goods we are strengthening their economy while our dispossession and poverty increases.”

He also assured Muslims that they could defeat a superpower, reminding readers of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and of the U.S. in Vietnam. Bin Laden explained that even more recently Americans had suffered losses and then withdrawn. There was Beirut, Lebanon in 1983 when a Marine barracks was destroyed and 241 soldiers were killed, after which U.S. forces left the region. “But your most disgraceful case was in Somalia,” wrote bin Laden, recalling the shooting down of Black Hawk helicopters, “where- after vigorous propaganda about the power of the USA and its post cold war leadership of the new world order...you left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you.” Finally, he put the matter of jihad into his own distinctly justifiable terms:



“Terrorising you, while you are carrying arms on our land, is a legitimate and morally demanded duty....The coward is the one who lets you walk, while carrying arms, freely on his land and provides you with peace and security.” Bin Laden also revealed his understanding of America’s history concerning potentially unpopular wars: “Your problem will be how to convince your troops to fight, while our problem will be how to restrain our youth to wait for their turn in fighting.”

Bin Laden ended his Declaration with a plea: “My Muslim Brothers of The World: Your brothers in Palestine and in the land of the two Holy Places are calling upon your help and asking you to take part in fighting against the enemy –your enemy and their enemy– the Americans and the Israelis. They are asking you to do whatever you can, with one own means and ability, to expel the enemy, humiliated and defeated, out of the sanctities of Islam.”³

It was a masterful document – lucid, historical, calculating – and wholly underestimated by the United States. Most Americans never learned of Osama bin Laden until 9/11. Those in the intelligence community, especially those in the CIA and FBI bin Laden units, understood the danger, but couldn’t get others to listen. Michael Scheuer, the bureau chief of the CIA unit, clearly held a grudging respect for his nemesis, writing, “For nearly a decade now, bin Laden has demonstrated patience, brilliant planning, managerial expertise, sound strategic and tactical sense, admirable character traits, eloquence, and focused, limited aims.”⁴

The Declaration was not bin Laden's only message. He continued to release tapes and video recordings, faxes and hand-written letters that were distributed through news organizations and other outlets. Together, they provide a trove of information into bin Laden's outlook and motives. Interviewed by CNN reporter Peter Arnett in 1997, bin Laden insisted that it was America who first targeted civilians and that his actions were merely following suit. He also blamed the citizens of the U.S. for the government's actions.



Bin Laden with Peter Arnett



“As for what you asked regarding the American people, they are not exonerated from responsibility, because they chose this government and voted for it despite their knowledge of its crimes in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and other places.” He also argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union had made “the US more haughty and arrogant, and it has started to see itself as a Master of this world....The US today, as a result of this arrogance, has set a double standard, calling whoever goes against its injustice a terrorist. It wants to occupy our countries, steal our resources, install collaborators to rule us with man-made laws, and want us to agree on all these issues. If we refuse to do so, it will say we are terrorists.”

Remarkably, bin Laden also harkened back to the original ground zero, charging that, “the US does not consider it a terrorist act to launch atomic bombs at nations thousands of miles away, when it would not be possible for those bombs to hit only military troops. Rather, those bombs were dropped on entire nations, including women, children, and elderly people.” He made the same assertion about U.S. actions in Iraq, insisting that “hundreds and thousands of our sons and brothers in Iraq died for lack of food or medicine” when UN sanctions were put in place following the first Iraq War. When asked by Arnett about Ramzi Yousef and the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, bin Laden made his own plans very clear: “I say if the American government is serious about avoiding the explosions inside the US, then let it stop provoking the feelings of 1.25 billion Muslims. Those hundreds of thousands who have been killed or displaced in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon, do have brothers and relatives....The US will drive them to transfer the battle into the United States. Everything is made possible to protect the blood of the American citizen while the bloodshed of Muslims is permitted everywhere. With this kind of behavior, the US government is hurting itself, hurting Muslims and hurting the American people.” Here was a very distinct warning.

Bin Laden ended the interview by asking if he could send a message through Arnett: “It is a message I send to the mothers of the American troops who came here with their military uniform

walking proudly up and down our land while the scholars of our country are thrown in prisons....To these mothers I say that if they are concerned for their sons, then let them object to the American government's policy and to the American president.”⁵

In many other interviews and writings, bin Laden continued to protest American troops on Islamic land, “plundering its wealth, dictating to its leaders, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors and turning its bases into a spearhead with which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples.” He complained that innocent Palestinian children were killed by Israel, that America had “taken over the media sphere” and manipulated it, and that it was surprising to see “how angry America gets when it attacks people and those people resist!” He also believed that Americans had no values, save the love of money, and that from early on he had come to hate Americans for their abuse of others, especially their deep-seated hatred of non-whites.⁶



In two October messages following 9/11, bin Laden reveled in the destruction on September 11, arguing that Muslims had “retaliated on behalf of their poor, oppressed sons, their brothers and sisters in Palestine and in many other lands of Islam.” He ended his October 7 message with an ominous warning: “I have only a few words for America and its people: I swear by God Almighty...that neither America nor anyone who lives there will enjoy safety until safety becomes a reality for us living in Palestine and before all infidel armies leave the land of Muhammed.” In his October 21 message, titled “Terror for Terror,” he again claimed self-defense, but stated that if this meant he was a terrorist, he accepted the label: “If killing those that kill our sons is terrorism, then let history witness that we are terrorists.”⁷

In later messages, bin Laden decried the history of the Middle East in the aftermath of World War I, insisting that ever since the region had fallen under the control of outside powers, of “Crusader banners,” Islamic peoples had suffered. He also explained why he had targeted the Twin Towers, stating that in 1982 the U.S. had aided Israel in an assault on Beirut, Lebanon.

American planes “started bombing, killing, and wounding many, while others fled in terror. I still remember those scenes: blood, torn limbs, women and children massacred. All over the place, houses were being destroyed and tower blocks were collapsing.” And then it hit him. “As I looked at those destroyed towers in Lebanon, it occurred to me to punish the oppressor in kind by destroying towers in America, so that it would have a taste of its own medicine.”

Bin Laden especially protested the United Nation's partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel, asking, "Aren't our tragedies actually a result of the United Nations' actions?" He believed, however, that the 9/11 attacks had awakened the American people to such realities, writing in February 2003 that "for the first time, most of the American population is aware of the reality of the Palestinian issue, and that what happened to them in Manhattan was a result of the unjust policies of their government."⁸



Except the American people weren't aware. Most never considered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the first place and surely didn't draw a line between 9/11 and Israel. The majority of Americans in the aftermath of 9/11 were shell shocked by fear, anger, and a desire for revenge. No lessons were learned. No history was considered. Ground Zero in Manhattan was a new beginning, not bin Laden's defensive jihad decades in the making. The American people's leaders certainly didn't complicate matters by discussing policy. When George W. Bush asked "why they hate us," he provided a resoundingly simple answer – "they hate our freedom." And, as the Defense Science Board Task Force, insisted, what the president said matters. Many Americans took him at his word. 9/11 had nothing to do with the past or with foreign policy. It was

about good versus evil, freedom versus tyranny. How was the 9/11 Generation to draw any other conclusion? Their worldview is dominated by good and evil.

Nor did the 9/11 Commission report, tasked with explaining why and how the attacks had occurred, help to provide clarity, focusing almost exclusively on the *how*, not the *why*. Even then, the Commission said nothing about hating freedom, and carefully ignored Palestine as a major cause. After the Commission's work was completed, co-chairs Lee Hamilton and Thomas Kean published *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of The 9/11 Commission*, in which they wrote candidly about what they did and didn't want to tell the American people. Some commissioners argued that "Al Qaeda was motivated primarily by religious ideology—and not by opposition to American policies—[so we] rejected mentioning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the report" because it might indicate "that the United States should reassess that policy."

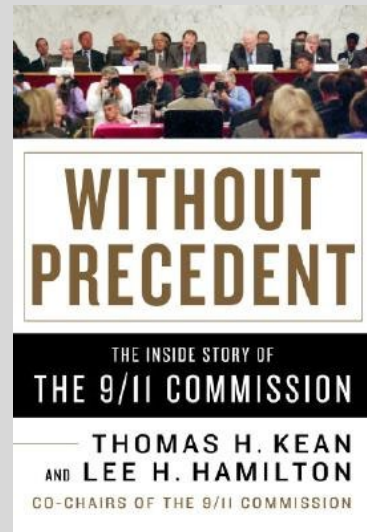
Other commissioners, Hamilton, in particular, desired a fuller assessment of Al Qaeda's motivation, insisting "that a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was vital to America's long-term relationship with the Islamic world, and that the presence of American forces in the Middle East was a major motivating factor in Al Qaeda's actions." Still other commissioners added, "We had to acknowledge that the American presence in Iraq had become the dominant

issue in the way the world’s Muslims viewed the United States.” Disagreements between the commissioners made discussing such issues contentious, and rather than get to the root cause of 9/11, the Commission bureaucratically concluded that “since neither U.S. policy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict nor U.S. policy in Iraq was covered by our mandate, we were not required to discuss the issues at length.”⁹

Hadn’t the Commission concluded that bureaucracy was the problem in the failure to detect the 9/11 plot? Yet here they were relying on bureaucracy to avoid getting at the hard truth of “why?” It was a cop out – it failed to explain honestly to the American people what had happened on September 11 and why it might happen again. There was nothing for the 9/11 Generation to hold onto, no way to understand the historical reality of Islamic grievances or offer any alternative to never-ending conflict.

Of course, by March 2003, well before the Commission released its report, the United States had already retaliated against Afghanistan and overthrown the Taliban there, launched a massive manhunt for bin Laden, and made the decision to invade Iraq for its alleged involvement in 9/11 and its reported possession of weapons of mass destruction. Freedom had been attacked. It was still in danger from evil. Many Americans remained consumed by the dust cloud and chaos of collapsed buildings, the death of innocent civilians, and the attack on the homeland. As Ground Zero smoldered, they demanded retribution. There was little further contemplation about the “why” of 9/11. President Bush had made clear that it was about hating freedom and the American people were assured that the U.S. military would easily defeat Saddam Hussein and the forces of terror, ushering in a new era of democracy in the Middle East and freedom from fear. But that didn’t happen. Iraq became yet another foreign policy disaster.

There is darkness and discomfort in much of this history. Some of it may challenge our patriotism and our perceptions of America as a force for good in the world, as a benevolent nation devoted to human rights. Readers may wonder what the 9/11 Generation can do to address the daunting scope of this history and the related problems that face the world. There is real fear in all of this terror. That’s the point. Yet there are also choices. There are always choices, and any positive direction forward requires coming to grips with the past. This is the real point of understanding what led to 9/11. It’s equally important to understand what came after, when America responded to bin Laden’s assault on the homeland.



¹ Anonymous [Michael Scheuer], *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Potomac Books, 2004), 250.

² Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), xvii.

³ There are many abbreviated versions of bin Laden's 1996 address, but it is the full version that must be read. Unfortunately, not even Lawrence includes the full version, which was originally published in *Al Quds Al Arabi*, a London-based newspaper, and located at

https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2010/MVZ203/OBL_AQ_Fatwa_1996.pdf

⁴ Scheuer], *Imperial Hubris*, 114.

⁵ Osama bin Laden, "From Somalia to Afghanistan," March 1997, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 47, 51-51, 53, 57.

⁶ Osama bin Laden, "The World Islamic Front," February 23, 1998; Osama bin Laden, "A Muslim Bomb," December 1998, 70, 75, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*.

⁷ Osama bin Laden, "The Winds of Faith," October 7, 2001, 105; Osama bin Laden, "Terror for Terror," October 21, 2001, 70, 75, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*.

⁸ Osama bin Laden, "Crusader Wars," November 3, 2001, 135-136; "The Towers of Lebanon," October 29, 2004, 239, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*.

⁹ Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of The 9/11 Commission* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 284.