

September 11, 2001

Operational Environment, Principal Actors, and International Context

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were among the deadliest acts of terrorism in modern history. Nineteen hijackers associated with the terrorist organization al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial airliners, striking the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. A fourth aircraft, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed in Pennsylvania after passengers attempted to regain control of the aircraft. Nearly 3,000 people were killed.

Enemy Forces

The attacking force consisted of members of al-Qaeda, an international Islamist terrorist organization led by Osama bin Laden.

Characteristics included:

- Foreign terrorist organization
- International extremist network
- Overseas planning and training
- Covert operational cells
- Suicide hijacking teams
- International financial and logistical support
- Safe havens in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan prior to the attacks
- International recruitment and facilitation network

Operational planning occurred over several years and involved travel through multiple countries before the attackers entered the United States.

Allied and Defensive Forces

The immediate response involved cooperation among federal, state, local, military, intelligence, emergency management, and civilian organizations.

United States Military

- United States Armed Forces
- North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)

- United States Northern Command (created following the attacks)
- National Guard
- Military intelligence organizations

Federal Agencies

- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Department of Justice
- Department of the Treasury
- Numerous additional federal departments and agencies

State and Local Responders

- Fire departments
- Police departments
- Emergency medical services
- Emergency management organizations
- Public works personnel
- Volunteers and civilians

International Allies

Many allied nations provided:

- Intelligence sharing
- Military cooperation
- Financial sanctions targeting terrorist organizations
- Airspace access
- Logistics support
- Counterterrorism cooperation
- Humanitarian assistance

Following the attacks, NATO invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty for the first time in its history, recognizing the attacks against the United States as an attack against the Alliance.

Overseas Operational Environment

Subsequent military and intelligence operations extended into multiple regions, including:

- Afghanistan
- Central Asia
- Arabian Sea
- Horn of Africa
- Middle East
- Global counterterrorism operations

These efforts focused on dismantling al-Qaeda's leadership, disrupting terrorist financing, collecting intelligence, conducting military operations, and supporting allied governments.

Principal Government Leaders (2001)

United States

- President George W. Bush
- Vice President Dick Cheney
- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld
- Secretary of State Colin Powell
- CIA Director George Tenet
- Attorney General John Ashcroft

Enemy Leadership

- Osama bin Laden
- Ayman al-Zawahiri
- Mohammed Atef
- Additional senior al-Qaeda commanders

Russia

The Soviet Union had no role in the September 11 attacks, having dissolved in 1991.

There is no official finding by the United States government that the Russian government participated in planning or carrying out the attacks.

Russia had been combating Islamist extremist organizations for years before 9/11, particularly in the North Caucasus. Following the attacks, Russia publicly expressed support for the

United States, expanded intelligence cooperation, and supported operations in Central Asia associated with the campaign in Afghanistan.

Russia also experienced significant terrorist attacks in subsequent years, reinforcing its own domestic counterterrorism efforts.

Israel

There is no official finding by United States investigations that the Government of Israel participated in planning or carrying out the September 11 attacks.

Prior to the attacks, Israel possessed extensive experience combating terrorism and maintained intelligence-sharing relationships with the United States concerning international terrorist organizations. Following the attacks, cooperation expanded in areas including intelligence, aviation security, financial investigations, and counterterrorism practices.

Intelligence and Policy

The attacks prompted major reforms to the United States national security structure, including:

- Creation of the Department of Homeland Security
- Creation of the Director of National Intelligence
- Intelligence-sharing reforms
- Aviation security reforms
- Expanded terrorist financing investigations
- International counterterrorism partnerships
- Military operations against al-Qaeda and affiliated organizations

Subsequent investigations examined intelligence failures, communication barriers among agencies, terrorist financing, travel patterns, and operational planning. Historians and researchers continue to study these issues to better understand how the attacks were successfully carried out and how similar attacks might be prevented.

Policy, Advocacy, and Political Participants

The response to September 11 involved numerous governmental and non-governmental participants, including:

- Congress
- Executive Branch officials
- Military leadership

- Intelligence leadership
- Federal agencies
- State governments
- Local governments
- Think tanks
- Academic researchers
- Civil liberties organizations
- Victims' advocacy organizations
- Defense industry representatives
- Media organizations

These groups often held differing perspectives regarding military operations, surveillance authorities, intelligence reform, detention policies, aviation security, and homeland security legislation.

Summary of the "Dancing Israelis"

One topic that has received sustained public attention is the case commonly referred to as the "Dancing Israelis."

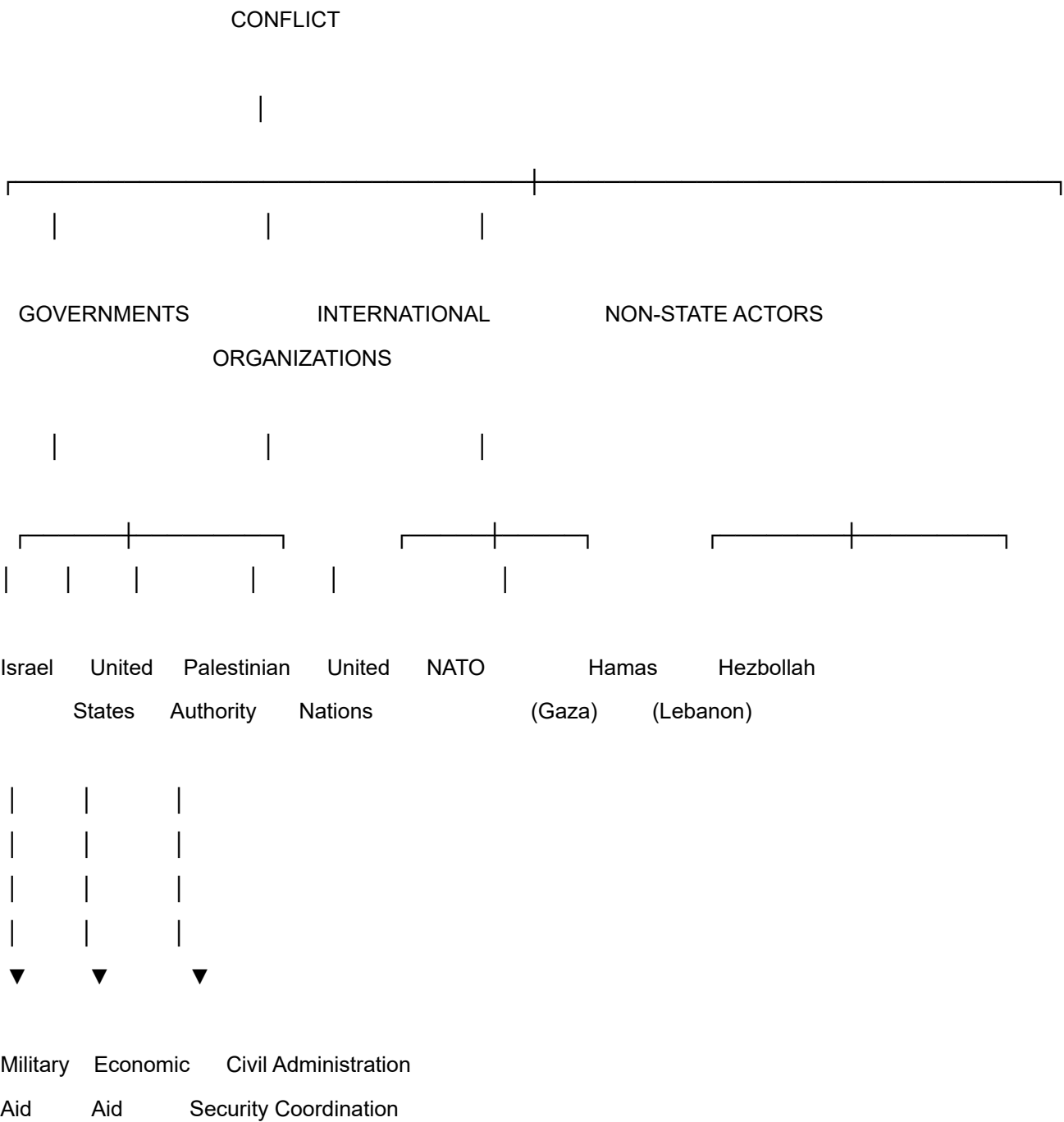
On September 11, 2001, five Israeli nationals employed by a moving company were observed by witnesses in New Jersey. Reports from witnesses described behavior that they considered unusual following the attacks, and the individuals were detained by law enforcement.

The FBI conducted an investigation into the matter. The men were held for several weeks, questioned extensively, and investigated for possible intelligence or criminal connections. Ultimately, no charges related to participation in the September 11 attacks were filed against them, and no official U.S. investigation concluded that they were involved in planning or carrying out the attacks. The individuals were later deported to Israel, primarily for immigration-related reasons.

The case continues to be discussed in books, documentaries, and online forums because some observers believe questions remain about the purpose of the group's activities and whether they possessed prior knowledge of the attacks. However, the official findings of U.S. investigations did not conclude that they participated in the attacks themselves. As with many aspects of 9/11 history, it is important to distinguish between documented investigative findings, unresolved questions, and theory.

Modern Conflict Relationship Map

Government, Military, Financial, and Advocacy Relationships



FINANCIAL SUPPORT

United States Government

- |— Military assistance to Israel
- |— Missile defense cooperation
- |— Intelligence cooperation
- └— Humanitarian assistance for Palestinian civilians through approved programs

European Governments

- |— Humanitarian aid
- |— Development assistance
- └— Refugee support

Arab States

- |— Humanitarian assistance
- |— Reconstruction funding
- └— Diplomatic initiatives

International Organizations

- |— Humanitarian relief
- |— Medical assistance
- |— Food assistance
- └— Refugee programs

Private Charities

- |— Medical organizations
 - |— Faith-based charities
 - |— Educational organizations
 - └— Humanitarian NGOs
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ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

Pro-Israel Advocacy

- Jewish community organizations
- Christian organizations
- Policy institutes
- Civil rights organizations
- Campus organizations

Pro-Palestinian Advocacy

- Palestinian community organizations
- Human rights organizations
- Student organizations
- Faith organizations
- Policy institutes

Neutral / Mixed Advocacy

- Peace organizations
- Conflict resolution groups
- Humanitarian organizations
- Academic institutions

MILITARY / SECURITY RELATIONSHIPS

Israel

- └— Israel Defense Forces
- └— Intelligence services
- └— Allied military partnerships

Palestinian Authority

- └— Security forces

└ Civil administration

Hamas

└ Armed organization governing Gaza

Hezbollah

└ Armed organization based in Lebanon

INFORMATION AND DIPLOMACY

Governments

Media

Universities

Think tanks

Research institutions

International courts

Human rights organizations

Diplomatic missions

Notes

- Governments, advocacy organizations, humanitarian organizations, and armed groups each play different roles.
- Financial support can include military aid, humanitarian relief, economic development, reconstruction assistance, or private charitable donations.
- Advocacy organizations generally seek to influence public opinion or government policy and are distinct from governments or military actors.
- Humanitarian organizations often provide assistance to civilians regardless of political affiliation.

Modern issues include:

- → American Taxpayer Exploitation
- → American Political Taxpayer Slavery