

September 11, 2001–2026: Twenty-Five Years and No Way Out

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)
 Theme: [Law and Justice, US NATO War Agenda](#)



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There dates that do not simply mark time, they devour it. September 11, 2001, is one of those. I write from Laghouat, in the Algerian Sahara — a city massacred by French colonial forces in 1852 and erased from Western memory as thoroughly as the rubble of Fallujah or the ruins of Gaza. From here, the view of September 11 is unobstructed by the illusions that comfort those who have never been on the receiving end of a righteous war.

Twenty-five years have passed since the towers fell in Manhattan. The world that emerged from that day's smoke and ash is not a world that healed. It is a world that was deliberately reshaped. The anniversary we mark today is not a commemoration. It is an indictment.

The Architecture of Exception

Within hours of the attacks, before any forensic investigation, before any judicial process, the machinery of a new order was already being assembled. The “War on Terror” was not a response to September 11. It was a project waiting for a pretext. Guantánamo, black sites, extraordinary rendition, coercive interrogation, the Patriot Act signed in 45 days — these were not emergency measures. They were a structural transformation. The emergency became permanent. The exception became the norm. The dragnet thrown in 2001 to catch terrorists caught instead the privacy of billions. The world did not become safer. It became more watched, more controlled, and more willing to accept the unacceptable.

The Cartography of Ruin

The “War on Terror” produced a map. It is the map of the Arab and Muslim world in ruins.

Afghanistan invaded, occupied for twenty years, abandoned in 2021 to the Taliban. Iraq invaded on fabricated intelligence — no weapons of mass destruction, no operational link to September 11, as the 9/11 Commission itself confirmed — producing a sectarian catastrophe and the birth of ISIS in the ruins of Abu Ghraib. Libya, the most prosperous country in Africa in 2010, transformed into a failed state and open slave market. Syria drawn into catastrophic war through both internal repression and external intervention.

Brown University's Costs of War Project estimates at least 940,000 direct deaths and between 3.6 and 3.8 million indirect deaths across all post-9/11 theaters — a combined total of 4.5 to 4.7 million human beings. Thirty-eight million displaced. Eight trillion dollars spent. Eleven million dead. Thirty-eight million uprooted. These are not statistics. They are the biographical destruction of a civilization.

Five Presidents. One Direction.

The most revealing fact of the past 25 years is not which American president was responsible for what came after. The deeper question is why, despite five presidencies and radically different political personalities, the same historical direction survived.

George W. Bush gave the post-9/11 order its original vocabulary: pre-emption, permanent war, security without geographical limits. **Barack Obama** arrived promising another America. The drone replaced the occupying soldier. The wars changed form; the architecture did not. **Donald Trump** rejected the conventions of the liberal order while retaining its foundational assumption — that American power could determine the political structure of other regions. **Joe Biden** restored the vocabulary of multilateralism without restoring the strategic balance that had existed before September 11. Then Trump returned. But Trump II is not simply Trump I repeated. He is the product of the accumulated consequences of the previous twenty-five years: a more polarized, more indebted America, less confident in the institutions and international order it once claimed to lead.

Not one of these four presidents who ordered wars in at least nine Muslim-majority countries was ever called a terrorist. Two received the Nobel Peace Prize. This is the clinical definition of the privilege of violence: the right to kill at industrial scale without the word that describes that act ever being applied to you. When a Muslim man with a knife is called a terrorist, and a president with a drone fleet is called a commander-in-chief, the language itself has become a weapon of war.

Who Benefits?

The oldest question in jurisprudence is also the most revealing in geopolitics: *cui bono* — who benefits? The documentary record is unambiguous on one point: Israel was the principal strategic beneficiary of the weakening of Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, and every other force capable of challenging

its regional position. Netanyahu told the U.S. Congress on September 12, 2002 — one year and one day after the attacks — that removing Saddam would produce “enormous positive reverberations” for the region, while falsely claiming there was “no question” about Iraqi nuclear ambitions.

Image: General Wesley Clark

The 1996 policy paper “A Clean Break,” prepared by American neoconservatives for Netanyahu’s incoming government, had already called for the removal of Saddam Hussein, the weakening of Syria, and the rollback of Iranian influence. **General Wesley Clark** later recounted being told of a plan to “take out seven countries in five years” — Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Iran. His account rests on a verbal briefing and has not been corroborated by primary documentation. But the strategic pattern requires no classified document to observe: **Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi, Bashar al-Assad** — each a declared opponent of Israeli policy — were eliminated or removed. Hezbollah decapitated. Hamas methodically destroyed. Iran under sustained pressure.

Twenty-five years after September 11, the Middle East has been largely cleared of forces capable of challenging Israeli regional dominance. The pattern is too consistent to dismiss as coincidence. Whether it constitutes evidence of orchestration or the convergence of separately motivated interests, the historical record does not yet definitively resolve — but history will continue to investigate.

The War Without End

In Gaza, a genocide is unfolding in real time — documented by the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and every credible institution that has examined the evidence. The Gaza Ministry of Health reported at least 73,651 killed by September 5, 2026. A peer-reviewed *Lancet Global Health* survey estimated 75,200 violent deaths to January 5, 2025 alone — 34.7% above the official count for that period. At least 209 journalists confirmed killed by Israel, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists — more than any single country has killed in one conflict since CPJ began keeping records.

The West, which wept for 3,000 dead in Manhattan — and rightly so — has watched more than 73,000 dead in Gaza with studied indifference and active complicity. The United States supplied the bombs. Germany supplied the weapons. The United Kingdom supplied the diplomatic cover. These are the same governments that spoke, after September 11, of civilization against barbarism, of universal human dignity. They have forfeited every claim to that vocabulary. The double standard is not a contradiction. It is a revelation.

In Lebanon, Israel assassinated **Hassan Nasrallah** on September 27, 2024 — the leader who had built the only Arab military force that had ever compelled Israel to a strategic withdrawal, in May 2000 — and launched a ground invasion devastating the south and Beirut’s suburbs. In Syria, more than 480 Israeli strikes followed the fall of Assad in December 2024, methodically destroying Syrian military infrastructure and expanding Israeli presence beyond the 1974 ceasefire line in violation of Security Council Resolution 497. In Iraq, the United States dissolved the army, created conditions from which ISIS emerged, fought ISIS, and now targets those who destroyed ISIS — because they are aligned with Iran. Iran itself remains the last entry on the seven-country list: under sanctions, its allies dismembered, its nuclear file weaponized as permanent strategic pressure.

No Way Out

Twenty-five years. Between 4.5 and 4.7 million dead. Thirty-eight million displaced. Eight trillion dollars spent on wars that produced not security, but its opposite. And perhaps this is the final lesson of September 11: empires do not necessarily decline when their armies are defeated. They decline when the ideas that justified their power cease to convince the world — and eventually cease to convince themselves.

The reckoning has not come. But history is not only the record of power. It is also the record of those who refuse to let victims disappear. The 3,000 killed in Manhattan, the dead of Kabul, Baghdad, Tripoli, Damascus and Gaza City — they belong to the same humanity.

September 11 was a tragedy. What was done in its name was a choice, choices have authors, and authors, unlike fate, can be held to account.

I write this from a city that France erased and history forgot — until we refused to let it be forgotten. That is the only answer I know to organized darkness: the refusal to look away, the insistence on naming, the work of bearing witness when the powerful would prefer silence. Gaza will not be forgotten. Lebanon will not be forgotten. The day we accept that some names matter less than others is the day we forfeit our right to call ourselves civilized.

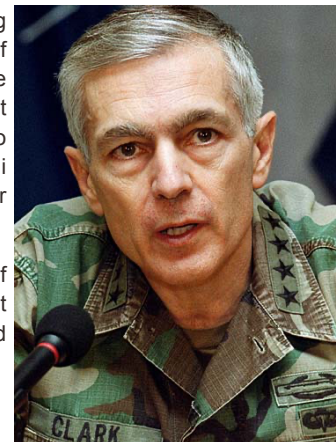
We have not yet reached that day. But we are very close.

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