

9/11 (SEPTEMBER 11, 2001)



Ground Zero, September 17, 2001

When people use the phrase “9/11” they are speaking of the four attacks by the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001. These attacks killed 2977 people in New York City, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

Nineteen terrorists from al-Qaeda hijacked four airplanes on the morning of September 11, 2001. American Airlines Flights 11 and 175 were purposefully crashed into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center, killing 2753 people and causing the towers to collapse from fire and structural damage. American Airlines Flight 77 collided with the Pentagon in Arlington, VA, killing 184 people. United Airlines Flight 93 crashed into a field in western Pennsylvania when the passengers attempted to fight back against the hijackers; 40 people were killed.

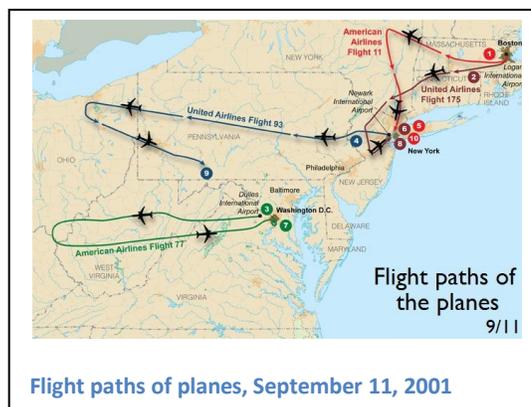
Al-Qaeda, the terrorist group responsible for the 9/11 attacks, was founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s to expel the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. After the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, the goals of al-Qaeda changed. Their purpose then (and still today) is the overthrow of Middle Eastern governments that do not strictly adhere to a “religiously-sanctioned political and social order” and are pro-Western. They also aim to destroy Israel and unite all Muslims (by force if necessary) and create their version of an Islamic nation.

Attacks against Americans were seen as a way to lessen the United States support of these pro-Western nations. Al-Qaeda saw the United States’ support of Israel, its presence in Saudi Arabia and sanctions against Iraq as additional reasons for attacks against America. As an Islamic extremist group, al-Qaeda believes that a country’s law and its social and cultural life should be based only on literal obedience to religious law and that violence is a justifiable and legitimate means to an end.

Because it would be impossible to attack the United States militarily, al-Qaeda attacked places symbolic of what they found objectionable about the United States and its foreign policy. The Twin Towers were seen as a symbol of the United States’ power and prosperity and the Pentagon, as the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense was the perfect symbol of American military power. It is believed that Flight 93 was headed towards the Capitol Building (the seat of government) before it crashed in Pennsylvania. Al-Qaeda hoped these attacks would cause Americans to be fearful, as well as shift American foreign policy by hurting their international standing.

The immediate response to the tragedy was overwhelming. Hundreds of fire fighters, police officers and civilians risked and gave their lives to rescue victims of the attack. Over 460 first responders were seriously injured or killed in their rescue efforts. Money, supplies, and people began arriving almost immediately.

Recovery efforts lasted for months and the aftermath of the attacks saw the beginning of the United States’ War on Terror as well as a new emphasis on domestic issues. Part of this War on Terror included invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The Department of Homeland Security was created to protect the territory of the United States and the Patriot Act was passed to aid in intelligence gathering. Osama bin Laden was found and killed on May 2, 2011 by Navy Seals.



Flight paths of planes, September 11, 2001