

The 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks

Terrorists struck several U.S. targets on Sept. 11, 2001.

BASIC This week is the 20th anniversary of the biggest terrorist attack in U.S. history. **What is a terrorist?** (Someone who uses violence against innocent people to try to make a point about something.) On September 11, 2001, a group of terrorists took over four U.S. passenger airplanes. They crashed two of these planes into the World Trade Center towers in New York City. People around the world watched the horrible sight of two buildings burning and crumbling to the ground. Soon after that, a third airplane crashed into the Pentagon. This is the government building in Washington, D.C.

GENERAL This week, the U.S. observes the 20th anniversary of the September 11th attacks. On that day in 2001, members of a terrorist group hijacked, or took over, four U.S. airplanes. Their plan was to crash all the planes into large buildings. The first crash came at 8:46 a.m. when a plane struck one of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. The second crash into the second tower came 18 minutes later. Many Americans were watching morning news shows and saw the terrible sight of these buildings collapsing and burning. **What do you think these attacks meant to U.S. citizens, and to the rest of the world?**

The third plane crashed into a building called the Pentagon. **What is the Pentagon?** (A five-sided building in Washington, D.C., where the U.S. Department of Defense has

ADVANCED Twenty years ago this week, an event took place that changed the U.S. and the world forever. Nineteen terrorists, most of whom were from Saudi Arabia, hijacked four U.S. commercial airliners on Tuesday, September 11th, 2001. Many Americans watching morning news shows saw a scene that seemed unreal: two commercial airliners crashing into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, 18 minutes apart. Live footage showed the 110-story towers, the workplace of many thousands of people, burn and crumble. A third plane crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. **What government department has its headquarters in this building?** (The Department of Defense.) The fourth plane crashed into a field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. From

that houses the U.S. Department of Defense. Passengers on the fourth airplane heard about what was happening. They fought back against the terrorists. That airplane ended up crashing into an empty field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. In all, nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks. **Have you heard of the 9/11 attacks? How would you have felt on that day?** NEXT



its headquarters.) We may never know where the fourth airplane was headed. Some of the passengers on that plane heard what had happened to the other planes. They fought back against the hijackers, forcing the plane to crash into an empty field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Everyone on all four planes was killed, as well as many people in the buildings. In all, nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks, including more than 400 police officers and firefighters. The 9/11 terrorist attacks remain the worst ever on American soil. They also made many Americans afraid that more terrorist attacks would happen. These events changed the country and the world forever. **What else have you heard, read, or remember about the September 11 attacks?** NEXT

flight recordings, we know that some passengers fought back against the hijackers, who crashed the plane rather than lose control. Some people think the hijackers intended to crash that plane into the U.S. Capitol. **Do you think we will ever know for sure?**

Crews spent more than a year combing through the wreckage in New York City, termed "Ground Zero," and the other sites. In the end, it was determined that nearly 3,000 people, from several dozen countries, were killed. This number includes more than 400 first responders. It was by far the worst terrorist incident on American soil. It was hard for people to grasp that 19 terrorists could do so much damage to the most powerful country in the world. **What else do you know about the September 11th attacks?** NEXT

The 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks (cont'd)

The 9/11 attacks led to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

BASIC

The 9/11 attacks were carried out by the terrorist group al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden was hiding in Afghanistan when the attacks took place. At the time, the extremist group known as the Taliban controlled that country. U.S. President George W. Bush announced a "War on Terror." He and other world leaders sent troops to Afghanistan to find bin Laden. These troops forced the Taliban out of power and chased al-Qaeda out of the country. But they did not find Osama bin Laden at that time. **Was he ever found?** (Yes, U.S. troops killed him in Pakistan in 2011.) In 2002, President Bush said Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein,

was helping al-Qaeda. In 2003, U.S. troops invaded Iraq and removed Saddam Hussein from

power. The war lasted for eight more years, causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. No dangerous weapons or links to al-Qaeda were ever found, but the Iraq War allowed new terrorist groups to move into the country.

What is the name of the group shown here? (The Islamic State, or ISIS.) NEXT



GENERAL

Not long after the attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush declared a "War on Terror." Soon, the world learned the name of the terrorist group behind the attacks: al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden. He was hiding in Afghanistan, as he had been forced out of his native country for his terrorist actions. **What was bin Laden's native country?** (Saudi Arabia.) The U.S. learned that bin Laden was hiding in Afghanistan, sheltered by the extremist group that controlled that country. **What is the name of this group?** (The Taliban.) In the fall of 2001, the U.S. and other countries sent troops to Afghanistan. They overthrew the Taliban and forced Al Qaeda out of the country, but they did not find bin Laden. **Was bin Laden ever found?** (Yes, U.S. forces killed him in Pakistan in 2011.)

Soon after the invasion of Afghanistan, the White House shifted its focus to the country of Iraq. President Bush said Iraq's cruel dictator, Saddam Hussein, was helping al-Qaeda, and that Iraq had, quote, "weapons of mass destruction." This phrase refers to nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons that could kill thousands of people. The U.S. and other nations invaded Iraq in 2003 and overthrew Saddam Hussein. But the war continued for another eight years, destroying much of the country. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died. **Did we ever find weapons of mass destruction?** (No.) Without Hussein, however, Iraq became a very weak country. This allowed new terrorist groups such as the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, to enter the country. NEXT

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Soon after 9/11, an extremist group called al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks. Al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, were based in Afghanistan, sheltered by another extreme Islamist group that had seized control of the country. **What was this group?** (The Taliban.) On September 20th, President George W. Bush declared a global "War on Terror." **Do you think a "war on terror" can ever be won?** Bush issued an ultimatum to the Taliban: turn over bin Laden or face an invasion. When the group did not comply, the U.S. and other countries invaded Afghanistan. This coalition overthrew the Taliban's government and destroyed al-Qaeda's network there. **Who knows the ultimate fate of bin Laden?** (He remained at large until he was killed at the orders of the Obama

administration in May, 2011 in Pakistan.)

While still fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, the White House turned its attention to Iraq. Officials in the Bush administration claimed that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was actively aiding Al-Qaeda. They also said Hussein had "weapons of mass destruction." **What does this phrase mean?** (Nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons that could kill thousands of people.) In 2003, the U.S. and several other countries invaded Iraq and overthrew Hussein. **Did we find links to Al Qaeda or any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq?** (No.) Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died in the eight years of this war. The war also made Iraq very unstable, which allowed terrorist groups such as the Islamic State, or ISIS, to gain a foothold there. NEXT

The 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks (cont'd)

The events of 9/11 changed the country in multiple ways.

BASIC

The 9/11 attacks had a big effect on the world. They also changed life in the United States. At right, you see the 9/11 Memorial in New York City. **What is a memorial?** (*Anything that honors the memory of an event or a person.*) On August 31st, the last American troops left Afghanistan. This ended the longest war in U.S. history. **What happened when the troops left?** (*The Taliban regained control of the country.*) More than 8,000 U.S. troops died in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. So far, these wars have cost the U.S. at least \$6.5 trillion. The U.S. also formed a new government agency called the

Department of Homeland Security. This group is in charge of keeping the United States safe. **Do you think this department has done its job well?** Congress also gave the government new powers. These included the power to spy on Americans by checking emails and phone calls. **Is this kind of spying okay if it keeps us safe? Why or why not?** END



GENERAL

The 9/11 Memorial in New York City is shown here. **What do you notice about it?** The walls around the memorial contain the names of all the victims of the attacks. The 9/11 attacks are still affecting the U.S. and the world in many ways. More than 8,000 U.S. troops died in Iraq and Afghanistan and many more suffered long-term injuries. **Do you know anyone who fought in these wars?** These wars have cost the U.S. \$6.5 trillion dollars so far. In the past, the U.S. has raised the tax rate for the richest Americans to pay for wars. But the Bush administration chose to cut these taxes. This meant the government had to borrow money, which it will have to pay back with interest. **What is interest?** (*Extra money charged by a lender to a borrower.*)

Another domestic effect of 9/11 was a renewed focus on security. New rules were put in place to provide more security at airports. The government also created a new agency to be in charge of making the country safer. **What is this agency?** (*The Department of Homeland Security.*) The White House and Congress also passed a series of laws called the USA Patriot Act. This Act gave the government the right to collect information from the emails and phone calls of all Americans. Some people said this went against the Constitution. **Do you think the U.S. has to sometimes trade freedom for security? Why or why not?** The Patriot Act was very controversial. It remained in place until December of 2020, when Congress allowed it to expire. **How else do you think the events of 9/11 have affected our country?** END

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The National September 11 Memorial & Museum was built to commemorate the attacks and honor the victims. It is located in New York City at the World Trade Center site. The walls around the memorial contain the names of all the victims of the attacks. While most U.S. troops left Iraq in 2011, the War in Afghanistan lasted for nearly 20 years. **What happened when the U.S. pulled out its troops this summer?** (*Taliban fighters quickly regained control of the country.*) More than 8,000 U.S. military personnel died in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many more suffered serious long-term injuries. The wars also had a huge financial cost for the U.S. **From the words here, how much will they end up costing?** (*More than \$6.5 trillion.*) While the government has financed previous wars either through war

bonds or tax increases, nothing similar was done for the recent wars. In fact, the Bush administration and Congress passed large tax cuts at the time, vastly increasing the national debt.

These attacks also put a renewed focus on security in the U.S. The government created the Department of Homeland Security to deal with all threats to the U.S. It also pushed the USA Patriot Act through Congress six weeks after September 11th. This series of laws gave the federal government much more power to spy on American citizens' emails and phone calls without warrants. Many people saw these powers as a violation of basic privacy rights under the Constitution. Congress let the Patriot Act expire in December of 2020. **What, if anything, should the U.S. government have done differently after 9/11?** END