What caused 9/11?

(Version A)

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The images of the terrible 9/11 attacks on the USA are famous. The horror of the day itself is clear. But what lay behind the attacks? Why did they happen?

At the time, President George W Bush gave an immediate, simple explanation of why the attacks had been made:

“America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.”

President Bush decided that this was not the time for complicated details and lengthy explanations. But he knew that the causes of the attacks were much more complicated than that.

This topic asks you to think seriously about the question, “Why?” This booklet should help you to understand the roots of 9/11 that President Bush chose to leave out of his broadcast. You will have to come up with your own short, clear and fair explanation.

It soon became clear that the 9/11 attacks were the work of extremist Muslims from the Middle East. They were acting under orders from a terrorist called Osama bin Laden. But even when we know who was responsible for the attack and how it was carried out, we still need to understand why it was done in the first place.

Like the roots of a tree, the causes of major historical events go deep and wide. They are often tangled together and it is not clear which ones matter most.

There are still people today who reject these explanations and believe all sorts of different theories about what happened on 9/11 and why. You may be able to think about some of those at another time.

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Early involvement

To understand the causes of 9/11, we need to know why the USA became involved in the Middle East. For hundreds of years, Western Europe and America had largely ignored the region, but this map shows two reasons why the Middle East became important to them around 1900.

Britain became closely involved in the Middle East after the Suez Canal opened in 1869. She wanted to keep her ships safe as they used the canal route to India.

By 1910, huge oil fields were discovered in the Gulf region. This gave Britain (and America) another reason to try to control what happened in the Middle East. They wanted oil from the Gulf to power ships and machines. They also knew that their companies could make profits by selling oil to the rest of the world.

Most people living in the Middle East are Arabs, most of whom are Muslims. The Arabs had once ruled a great empire all over the Middle East and beyond. By 1900, however, the Arabs lived in separate kingdoms and were part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. But the Turks were quite weak and the region was poor.

Activity

Your teacher will give you a diagram showing some “roots” of the 9/11 attacks on the USA.

Find the root marked “Early Western involvement in the Middle East”. It has some smaller roots leading into it. Copy each of these words or phrases onto one of those smaller roots:

- The Suez Canal
- Oil fields
- Profits

For each word or phrase, prepare a short, clear explanation of how it helps to explain why Britain or America became involved in the Middle East.
Promises made ... and broken

In the First World War (1914–1918) the Ottoman Turks ended up on the losing side. The winners, led by Britain, France and the USA, met in Paris in 1919 to decide what should happen to Turkey’s lands in the Middle East.

During the war, Britain persuaded the Arabs to fight against the Turks by promising to give them their own single great nation once the war had been won. But although the Arabs kept to their side of the deal, the British broke this promise at the peace conference. They organised Arab lands into separate countries and said these must be controlled by Britain or France until the Arabs were ready to rule themselves (see the map).

There was another complicating factor in the Middle East. This concerned the Jews. At the time of Christ, all Jews lived in the area shown on the map as Palestine, but the Romans drove them away around 70AD. Over the next 1,800 years, Jews spread all over the world.

Then, at the end of the 19th century, a Hungarian called Theodor Herzl started the Zionist Movement. This aimed to set up a new home for Jews back in Palestine. Zion is a name for the old “Promised Land” in Palestine where, they believed, God wanted them to live.

In 1917, a British Government minister, Lord Balfour, promised that the British Government would help the Jews to win a homeland in Palestine. He may have made this “Balfour Declaration” to gain support in the war effort from some in the Jewish community.

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Britain had now offered the same land to both the Jews and the Arabs – and the land did not even belong to her!

The numbers of Jews in Palestine rose rapidly. Britain was responsible for running Palestine at that time and the area became more and more tense as Jews and Palestinians argued over who should own the land.

Many Arabs believed Britain and America had betrayed them at the Paris peace conference. They were also angry that Britain and America encouraged Zionism. Some Arabs became “Islamists”. This name has been given to people who want all Muslims to live in one powerful nation following ancient Muslim laws.

They studied history and wanted to rebuild the great Arab empire from the early days of Islam. Some were sent to prison for daring to criticise their modern rulers.

Activity

Find the TWO roots marked “Zionism” and “Islamism” on your diagram.

Decide which of these phrases helps to explain the growth of Zionism or Islamism. Then copy each phrase where you want it to go.

- The “Promised Land”
- Paris peace conference
- Balfour Declaration
- A sense of history

Remember to prepare a short, clear explanation of how the phrases help to explain Zionism or Islamism.

Seeking refuge

The situation in Palestine reached a crisis after the end of the Second World War. During the war, over six million European Jews died in the Holocaust organised by Nazi Germany. When the war ended in 1945, Jews from all over the world rushed to Palestine. They wanted a homeland for themselves there where no one could ever again attempt to wipe them out.

In 1947, the United Nations Organisation tried to solve the Palestine crisis. As the number of Jews rose, the United Nations decided to split the land into two separate states: one for the Jews and the other for the Palestinians.
The Palestinian Arabs believed all the land was theirs. They refused the United Nations deal, but the Jews happily accepted it. On 14 May 1948, the new nation of Israel was born. The USA was the first nation to recognise Israel and has remained its closest ally since then.

The USA supported Israel because:

- Israel was a democracy, like the USA
- the USA has a large Jewish population
- many Arab states were friendly with America’s great enemy, the Soviet Union (Russia).

In 1948, 1967 and 1973, there were wars between Israel and the Arab states. If the Arabs had won, they would probably have destroyed Israel. The Israelis feared that this would lead to another Holocaust. However, they never lost a war and were actually able to take even more Arab land. In 1967, the United Nations ordered Israel to give back the land it had won in the war. Israel refused.

During these wars, many thousands of Palestinians fled from the land they once owned to refugee settlements in nations such as Jordan, Egypt and Syria.

Some formed the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO). Since 1964, it has used both terrorism and talk to try to get Israel to return their homeland to them.

A young Saudi Arabian called Osama bin Laden was angry that Israel, supported by the USA, could not be defeated. At university in the 1970s, he followed the teachings of a few extreme Arab nationalists. He called for a violent “Jihad” (struggle) against weak Muslim leaders and non-Muslim (“infidel”) powers that he called enemies of Islam. These included Israel and the USA. Other Islamists wanted to use peaceful methods.
Activity

Find the TWO roots marked “The growth of Israel” and “Arab anger at Israel” on your diagram.

Decide which of these phrases helps to explain the growth of Israel or Arab anger at Israel. Then copy each phrase where you want it to go.

- The Holocaust
- Extremist teachers
- Arab–Israeli wars
- The United nations
- Refugees

Remember to prepare a short explanation of how each phrase helps to cause the growth of Israel or Arab anger.

Violence breeding violence

In 1979, a new enemy stirred Osama bin Laden into action. The Soviet Union (Russia) invaded the Muslim land of Afghanistan. Afghan Muslim warriors from local tribes tried to turn the Russians back. It seemed an impossible task as Russia was a superpower. Bin Laden and thousands of other extreme Muslims travelled from all over the world to fight against the Russian infidels.

Amazingly, the Russians lost the war in 1989. Bin Laden believed this was a sign that God was on his side and that nothing was impossible.

He stayed in Afghanistan and built up a secret group to support attacks on the enemies of Islam. He called the group “Al-Qaeda” (“The Base”).

In 1990, the Muslim leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, invaded another Muslim state, Kuwait. This cut oil supplies to the wider world. Within a few months a massive United Nations force, made up mainly of American troops, quickly restored Kuwait’s freedom. Most Arab states supported the United Nations action as they feared Saddam Hussein would cause more wars.

During this “Gulf War”, the leaders of Saudi Arabia invited American troops and aircraft to be based there while the war against Iraq went on. They also allowed American forces to stay there afterwards, in order to stop Iraq causing more war.
Two of Islam’s most holy sites are found in Saudi Arabia. These are in the cities of Mecca and Medina. Bin Laden felt that the presence of the US Army in Saudi Arabia was unclean. He vowed to drive the Americans out.

After the war ended in 1991, the United Nations wanted to stop Saddam Hussein from re-building his army, so it put strict sanctions (controls) on trade with Iraq. Bin Laden believed that Iraqi children were dying, as sanctions cut medical supplies. He pointed out that the United Nations did not do this to Israel even though it had never obeyed the United Nations’s orders to give back Palestinian land. It was American ships and planes that enforced the sanctions. Bin Laden’s hatred of America grew.

Activity

Find the TWO roots marked “The rise of Al-Qaeda” and “US forces in the Middle East” on your diagram.

Decide where these phrases should be added. Then copy each one where you want it to go.

- Russia
- Saudi Arabian rulers
- United Nations sanctions
- Defending Afghanistan
- Iraq

Remember to prepare a short explanation of how each phrase helps to cause the rise of Al-Qaeda or the growth of US forces in the Middle East.
Suicide and murder

Bin Laden believed that the USA could be beaten. He had seen examples of this. In 1983, a suicide attack on an American base in the Lebanon killed 241 US soldiers. Soon afterwards, the Americans withdrew their troops. They did the same in 1993, after 19 US soldiers were killed in Somalia. Bin Laden decided that the USA did not have the stomach for a fight if it suffered severe losses.

The number of suicide bombings grew rapidly from the 1980s. Terrorist leaders told suicide bombers that they would gain a special place in paradise by dying for Islam, but most Muslim religious leaders condemn suicide attacks as mere murder.

Al-Qaeda supported more and more suicide missions against the USA during the 1990s. The power of the US army would always win a normal war, but bin Laden believed suicide attacks would make the Americans leave the Middle East and end their support for Israel.

Activity

Find the last root on your diagram. It is marked “Suicide attacks grow”. As usual, it has some smaller roots leading into it. Copy each of these words or phrases onto one of those smaller roots:

- The power of the US Army
- Al-Qaeda
- Lebanon, 1983
- Beliefs

For each word or phrase, prepare a short, clear explanation of how it helps to explain why the number of suicide attacks grew in the 1990s.
Dreadful warnings

In February 1998, bin Laden published a statement claiming that the USA had declared war on God. He called on Muslims to murder any American anywhere on earth. A few months later, he was interviewed in a secret location by an American television news team. Here are a few of his statements:

“Remember how the United States rushed out of Somalia in shame and disgrace.”

“We believe that the worst thieves in the world today are the Americans. We do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets.”

“If the present injustice continues … it will inevitably move the battle to American soil.”

By then, bin Laden was already planning the 9/11 attacks.

The American Government took the warnings seriously but they may have believed that no one would be able to hurt them in their own country.

If so, the awful events of 11 September 2001 proved them wrong.
What caused the 9/11 attacks on the USA?

By now, you should be convinced that the roots of 9/11 go very deep, very wide and are very complicated! President Bush could not possibly have tried to explain all this to his shocked nation after the attacks on the USA in September 2001.

But how would you sum up the reasons for the 9/11 attack in a sentence or two? Before you attempt this almost-impossible task, look back over the evidence.

You may want to use the prompts in the boxes below to remind you what you have learnt so far. The events are jumbled up, so you could start by trying to work out the order in which they happened. You may also want to add new ones in the blanks.

Whatever words you choose for your own short summary, be sure they match the evidence you have studied in this topic. You won’t be able to cover everything in your summary, but try to ensure it is fair and gives an honest, clear answer to the question “Why?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The United Nations treated Iraq severely after it attacked Kuwait in 1990.</th>
<th>Some Muslims have come to believe that suicide bombers go to paradise.</th>
<th>America withdrew troops from Lebanon (1982) and Somalia (1993) after suicide attacks.</th>
<th>US security missed clues that might have prevented the 9/11 attacks.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabs kingdoms were set up after the First World War.</td>
<td>Oil fields lie below the Gulf region of the Middle East.</td>
<td>Israel refused to return land taken from Arab states in the war of 1967.</td>
<td>The state of Israel was set up in Palestine in 1948.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Muslim scholars taught that Islam must return to its original ways.</td>
<td>The Palestinian Liberation Organisation used terrorist attacks against Israel.</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia invited the USA to set up armed bases on its land in 1991.</td>
<td>The Russians invaded Afghanistan in 1979.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>