

## 9/11 and the term terrorism

At 8.46 am on 11 September 2001, American Airlines Flight 11, a Boeing 767, crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York. The immediate belief was that this was a horrifying accident, not least because there had been a similar incident in 1945 when a military aircraft crashed into the Empire State Building. However, sixteen minutes after the North Tower was struck, United Airlines Flight 175, also a Boeing 767, struck the South Tower. This was followed at 9.37 am by American Airlines Flight 77, a Boeing 757, crashing into the Department of Defense headquarters, the Pentagon, in Washington, DC. Just under half an hour later, United Airlines Flight 93, also a Boeing 757, crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, after passengers had attempted to take over the plane from hijackers. Both of the World Trade Center towers collapsed, and the toll in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania was 2973 people killed and 24 missing presumed dead.

Within minutes of the North Tower being struck, live television coverage was available throughout the United States and the rest of the world, and tens of millions of Americans saw the towers collapse. The impact has been compared with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, but many would argue that it was substantially greater. The administration of President George W. Bush responded to the atrocity with great vigour, starting what was termed the 'global war on terror'. All four planes had been taken over by people associated with the radical Islamist group al-Qaeda, and the Bush administration made clear its intention to bring those behind the attacks to justice. This would clearly involve punishing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan if it did not cooperate, since it was harbouring the leaders of al-Qaeda. Although the Bush administration was confident in its determination to destroy the al-Qaeda movement, early progress in the war on terror, including the termination of the Taliban regime, was not matched by the subsequent developments. [...] The 9/11 attacks and the robust American response have continued to raise questions over the nature of terrorism in the early twenty-first century and whether the approach of the Bush administration was effective or even appropriate.

A commonly used definition of terrorism is: "the threat of violence and the use of fear to coerce, persuade, and gain public attention" (National advisory board, 1976). A more widely used definition, and one that is regarded as being particularly helpful, is that of Wardlaw (1982): „political terrorism is the use, or threat of use, of violence by an individual or group, whether acting for or in opposition to established authority, when such action is designed to create extreme anxiety