



The Aftermath of September 11th

9/11 Attacks: U.S. Reaction

Shortly after the Twin Towers fell on September 11, 2001, the nation began to mourn, and around the country Americans began to commemorate the victims and demonstrate their patriotism. Some flew the American flag from their front porches and car antennas. Others pinned it to their lapels or wore it on t-shirts. Sports teams postponed games. Celebrities organized benefit concerts and performances. People attended impromptu candlelight vigils and participated in moments of silence. They gathered in common places to post tributes to the dead and to share their grief with others. "I don't know why I've been coming here, except that I'm confused" one young man in Union Square told a reporter from the New York Times. "Also a sense of unity. We all feel differently about what to do in response, but everybody seems to agree that we've got to be together no matter what happens. So you get a little bit of hope in togetherness."

Meanwhile, people turned to their faith to help them make sense of the attacks. "We join with our fellow Americans in prayer for the killed and injured," the imam at the Al-Abidin mosque in Queens told his congregation. At the Washington National Cathedral, the Reverend Billy Graham implored his listeners "not to implode and disintegrate emotionally and spiritually as a people and a nation" but to "choose to become stronger through all the struggle to rebuild on a solid foundation."

Americans tried to bolster the rescue effort in any way they could. Cities and towns sent firefighters and EMTs to Ground Zero. Lines to donate blood at Red Cross offices and other blood banks were incredibly long—an entire day's wait in Madison, Wisconsin. New and established charities raised money for the victims and rescue workers. It was possible to donate to the Red Cross with just one click on Amazon.com, and the organization raised \$3 million that way in just two days.

But for some Americans, their grief manifested itself as anger and frustration, and they looked for someone to blame for the attacks. And sadly, some anger erupted into attacks on people of Arab and Muslim descent, with nearly 600 incidents in the first 10 days after the attacks.

Political leaders urged calm and promised aid. New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, who rose to national prominence thanks to his leadership in the wake of the attacks, urged decisive action against terrorism and encouraged New Yorkers to try to return to their normal lives. He appeared on "Saturday Night Live" with several firefighters on September 29 (in the opening monologue, Lorne Michaels asked if it was okay to be funny at such a sad time; Giuliani replied, "Why start now?") and orchestrated a major promotional campaign designed to lure tourists back to his beleaguered city.

Meanwhile, President George Bush was able to win a broad mandate to act in the nation's defense. In a speech on September 20, he asked citizens to be "calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat" and promised that the United States would triumph over terrorism—"stop it, eliminate it, destroy it where it grows." After the United States began military operations in Afghanistan in October, the president's approval rating soared to 90 percent. Congressional leaders responded too: They passed a \$40 billion disaster relief bill in September and, the next year, the USA Patriot Act, which gave investigators a great deal of leeway in their domestic surveillance activities and made immigration laws more stringent.

Despite such anti-terrorist measures, many Americans continued to feel uneasy. According to a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, nearly half of all Americans reported symptoms of stress and depression after the attacks. Many thousands of Americans lost loved ones on September 11. Millions more watched the unrelenting news coverage of the attacks, looked at the wrenching photographs in the newspaper and listened to heartbreaking interviews with firefighters, survivors and relatives of victims, feeling that, at least in some small way, the trauma of the day was theirs too. Memorials, commemorative ceremonies and time have helped many to begin to heal, but for others the shock and horror of that day in September remains painfully fresh.

9/11 Attacks: International Reaction

“Today,” the French newspaper *Le Monde* announced on September 12, 2001, “we are all Americans.” People around the world agreed: The terrorist attacks of the previous day had felt like attacks on everyone, everywhere. They provoked an unprecedented expression of shock, horror, solidarity and sympathy for the victims and their families.

Citizens of 78 countries died in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania on September 11, and people around the world mourned lost friends and neighbors. They held candlelight vigils. They donated money and goods to the Red Cross and other rescue and relief organizations. Flowers piled up in front of American embassies.

Meanwhile, statesmen and women rushed to condemn the attacks and to offer whatever aid they could to the United States. Russian president Vladimir Putin called the strikes “a blatant challenge to humanity,” while German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder declared that the events were “not only attacks on the people in the United States, our friends in America, but also against the entire civilized world, against our own freedom, against our own values, values which we share with the American people.” He added, “We will not let these values be destroyed.” Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien denounced the “cowardly and depraved assault.” He tightened security along the border and arranged for hundreds of grounded airplanes to land at Canadian airports.

Even leaders of countries that did not tend to get along terribly well with the American government expressed their sorrow and dismay. The Cuban foreign minister offered airspace and airports to American planes. Chinese and Iranian officials sent their condolences. And the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, visibly dismayed, told reporters in Gaza that the attacks were “unbelievable, unbelievable, unbelievable.” “We completely condemn this very dangerous attack,” he said, “and I convey my condolences to the American people, to the American president and to the American administration.”

But public reaction was mixed. The leader of the Islamic militant group Hamas announced that “no doubt this is a result of the injustice the U.S. practices against the weak in the world.” Likewise, people in many different countries believed that the attacks were a consequence of America’s cultural domination, political meddling in the Middle East and interventionism in world affairs.

On September 12, the 19 ambassadors of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) declared that the attack on the United States was an attack on all of the member nations. This statement of solidarity was mostly symbolic—NATO did not authorize any specific military action—but it was still unprecedented. It was the first time that the organization had ever invoked the mutual defense section of its charter (intended to protect vulnerable European nations from Soviet invasion during the Cold War).

But these declarations of support and solidarity didn’t mean that other countries gave the United States a free hand to retaliate however, and against whomever, it pleased. Allies and adversaries alike urged caution, warning that an indiscriminate or disproportionate reaction could alienate Muslims around the world. In the end, almost 30 nations pledged military support to the United States, and many more offered other kinds of cooperation. Most agreed with George Bush that, after September 11, the fight against terrorism was “the world’s fight.”