EXPLORVIA

September 11: the attacks, preparations and missed warnings

Prepared 2026-09-12

The September 11, 2001 attacks killed 2,977 people, excluding the hijackers. The records include the aircraft hijackings, passengers and crew, preparations, financial transactions, intelligence warnings, emergency response and subsequent investigations and proceedings.

The attacks and the lives lost

Two hijacked aircraft struck the World Trade Center, one struck the Pentagon, and Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania after passengers and crew resisted. The attacks killed 2,977 people, excluding the hijackers.

Sources: 9/11 FAQs, September 11, 2001 Timeline

From Afghanistan to the aircraft plot

The Commission traces bin Laden's Afghan-era organizing, the formation of al-Qaeda, its Sudan period and return to Afghanistan. KSM developed the aircraft proposal; bin Laden and Mohammed Atef provided organizational backing. Some planning details derive from detainee reporting.

Sources: 9/11 Commission, chapter 2: Bin Laden and the origins of al-Qaeda, 9/11 Commission, chapter 5: The aircraft plot and Hamburg group

American contacts and flight training

The cited records document US aid to anti-Soviet Afghan factions. The Commission described bin Laden’s group as having its own support and training. It recorded Ali Mohamed’s US Army service and later work with extremists. Commercial flight schools taught the pilot-hijackers.

Sources: 9/11 Commission, chapter 2: Bin Laden and the origins of al-Qaeda, 9/11 Commission, chapter 7: Preparations and the U.S. support network

Preparations in the United States

The chronology records entry, school, rental, travel and payment records from 2000 through September 2001 and identifies all 19 hijackers, grouped by flight.

Sources: 9/11 and Terrorist Travel: staff monograph, 9/11 Commission, chapter 7: Preparations and the U.S. support network

The Commission’s financing figures

The Commission estimated plot costs at $400,000-$500,000 and approximately $300,000 in US bank-account inflows. Six Ali transfers totaled $119,500. Approximately $26,000 was returned unused.

Sources: Terrorist Financing: staff monograph

Information was available; coordination failed

Oversight findings identify failures to evaluate, investigate and share important information. Hazmi and Mihdhar were not promptly tracked after intelligence identified their travel.

Sources: Review of FBI handling of intelligence: recommendations and conclusions, Staff Statement 2: Identification, Watchlisting, and Tracking, 9/11 Commission, chapter 8: Warnings and missed opportunities

Flight 93 and the emergency response

The Commission describes passengers and crew on Flight 93 learning of the other attacks and counterattacking before the crash. Its account also records the information available to the FAA and military and their responses.

Sources: September 11, 2001 Timeline, Staff Statement 17: Improvising a Homeland Defense, 9/11 Commission, chapter 1: The four flights and emergency response

Subsequent proceedings and health effects

The cited records include Moussaoui’s guilty plea and life sentence, a June 2026 Supreme Court petition in another proceeding, and accounts of long-term health effects.

Sources: 9/11 Investigation, Supreme Court docket 25A1072, World Trade Center Health Program statistics

Civil litigation and military proceedings

A November 5, 2025 court order stayed proceedings involving Saudi Arabia pending its interlocutory appeal and recorded an earlier denial of a jurisdictional-dismissal motion. The separately cited reporting describes the military trial setting.

Sources: Saudi civil litigation - stay pending appeal, Trial for accused mastermind of 9/11 attacks set for June 2028

Rescue on land and water

The emergency response included firefighters, police, building staff and civilian mariners. The Coast Guard’s retrospective interview adds the boatlift, its organizers and landing routes to the account.

Sources: 9/11 Commission - Heroism and Horror, Mike Day recalls the maritime evacuation

People aboard Flight 93

The public memorial entries identify passengers and crew aboard Flight 93. Linked records describe calls and resistance.

Sources: Flight 93 - crew and passengers, Flight 93 - historical questions and answers

NIST’s WTC 7 investigation

NIST’s engineering findings connect uncontrolled fires, interrupted water supply and the probable failure sequence at Column 79.

Sources: NIST WTC 7 investigation - questions and answers

Newly released warnings

The September 2026 release expands the public record of presidential threat reporting. It includes warnings about domestic attacks, hijackings, al-Qaeda’s reach and operational capabilities. The July 1998 brief called its sources highly questionable; the September aircraft warning was later described by the Commission as uncorroborated.

Sources: CIA: release of 71 presidential intelligence briefs, 9/11 Commission, chapter 11: failures of imagination

A financing claim and a different later finding

An October 1999 brief alleged investments in 57 narcotics laboratories. A February 2000 memorandum returned to the drug allegation. The Commission’s 2004 report found no reliable evidence that bin Laden participated in or earned money from drug trafficking.

Sources: CIA intelligence brief: Drug-financing allegation, 9/11 Commission, chapter 5: financing

Before and after the attacks

The August 6, 2001 brief described threats inside the United States, suspicious activity and ongoing FBI investigations. The September 12 situation report was a post-attack assessment. Its retrospective accounts of preparations are recorded with that publication date.

Sources: CIA intelligence brief: Determined to strike in the U.S., CIA intelligence brief: First post-attack situation report