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Twentieth anniversary of September 11. The plot, the events and the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the USA

Al-Qaeda, by conducting a spectacular terrorist attack on the United States 20 years ago, indirectly caused changes in the domestic and foreign policies of the United States and many other countries in the world. 11 September 2001 was a turning point in the fight against terrorism, which became global in scale. Never before had the governments of so many countries in the world given at least verbal support to a party attacked by terrorists, in this case the US. However, this international unanimity can be justified by the categorical statement of President George W. Bush: “Who is not with us, is against us.” No country could officially afford to claim support for terrorism, with an exception of the so-called Axis of Evil. This phrase was used by President Bush in his famous speech on 29 January 2002 and addresses the governments of Iraq, Iran and North Korea. There was no mention of Afghanistan, which the Americans entered in October 2001, and none of Saudi Arabia, which had been supporting Islamic extremists for many years (15 citizens of this country were among the group of 19 who attacked selected targets in New York and Washington). A consequence of the 9/11 attacks was the US invasion of Afghanistan, and then Iraq. This in turn resulted in the escalation of Islamic terrorism that continues to this day. Terrorism threat level can vary now and then, but it is still present and will not simply disappear. In the United States, in order to justify the unintended negative effects of the government’s policies, the reality was described using the economic term: *black swan*, which refers to an unexpected and impossibly difficult to predict event that has potentially severe consequences. In reality, however, the fallout of the so-called war on terror were highly predictable. The Taliban takeover in Kabul on 15 August 2021 and the withdrawal of the last American soldiers

from Afghanistan, 20 years after their entry into the country, can be seen as a return to the previous situation, i.e. the reactivation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.¹

The purpose of the article is to present the complex process of preparations for the attack on the United States on 11 September 2001, the precise execution of the plan and the consequences that led to irreversible changes in global politics. The suicide hijackers who completed U.S. piloting courses belonged to a new generation of Islamic fighters. Most of them were educated representatives of the middle class with a stable financial situation. So, answering the question, what prompted them to perform a suicide operation and kill several thousand innocent people, would be purposeful. Al-Qaeda would not be able to plan and organize these attacks if it did not have the financial resources, the means to communicate with each other and, above all, a shelter where it was possible to conduct training and adequately inspire young people. Undoubtedly, it was this organization that initiated the course of events that led to the greatest terrorist attack in history. It is particularly significant to present the events and the surrounding circumstances that could have hindered or even partially halted the 9/11 attacks. Therefore, the author will try to answer the question whether it was possible to prevent these almost simultaneous attacks at all. The harbinger of the 9/11 attacks was the assassination carried out just two days earlier of Ahmed Shah Masud, the leader of the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan and the most reliable leader of anti-Taliban opposition, who was trusted by the West.² The elimination of Masud was part of the preparations for the US invasion of Afghanistan in retaliation against the 9/11 attacks, which al-Qaeda had correctly predicted.

Osama bin Laden and the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar probably had no doubts that, like the Afghan mujahideen destroyed the Soviet army after ten years of war, their militants would also cope with US forces if invaded. The author points out that the al-Qaeda forecast turned out to be fully correct, but the administration at the White House was not so clear-cut about sending troops to Afghanistan in the first moment after the attack. The author also raises the issue of conspiracy theories regarding the 9/11 attacks, which were propagated in the media, films and books for

¹ The Taliban offensive, which started in May 2021, accelerated at the turn of July and August 2021. The soldiers of the Afghan National Army almost without a fight handed over the main cities of Afghanistan. On 15 August, the Taliban took over Kabul. The pace at which this happened came as a surprise to many observers. President Ashraf Ghani fled to the UAE. Thousands of people, NATO staff, family members, representatives of the Afghan administration, international organizations and security forces occupied the Kabul airport, attempting to board Western planes that conducted a delayed evacuation. For many of these people, staying in Afghanistan is a death sentence at the hands of the Taliban.

² The murder of Ahmed Shah Masud was carried out by two young Moroccans holding Belgian passports. Passing off as journalists, they came to the Panjshir Valley in north eastern Afghanistan, which was the base of Masud and his militants, which was being unsuccessfully attacked by the Taliban for five years. They had a hidden bomb on the camera that exploded as one of the bombers was recording the interview conducted by another alleged journalist. Masud died several hours later as a result of his injuries.

several years. These had a significant impact on the consciousness of the American society, a large part of which recognized an alternative version of events.

The author of this article used a historical method that enables to show the chronological course of events that had led to the four attacks on 11 September 2001. The author also employed a behavioural method, consisting in analysing the behaviour of the participants in the anti-American plot, both at the time of preparations for the attacks and aircraft hijacking. The last method adopted for the purpose of this paper is a statistical one that allows to present in numbers the effects of the terrorist attack on the USA – the victims and material losses.

Planning for the 9/11 operation

The mastermind of the spectacular terrorist 9/11 plot was Kuwait-born Khalid Sheikh Mohammad³, the uncle of Ramzi Yousef⁴, who was responsible for the 1993 WTC bombing.⁵ Two years later they both devised a plan to bomb 12 American planes flying from Asia to the USA.⁶ In 1996, Mohammed met Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, to whom he presented various ideas for attacking the United States, including an air operation. Over the next three years, al-Qaeda analysed the possibilities of attacking the United States. One of the plans by Khalid Sheikh Mohammad involved the hijacking of two groups of planes: five from the US East Coast and five from Asia to the US. Nine of them were to be flown into previously selected targets, including buildings of the CIA, FBI and nuclear power plants. Mohammed intended to take the controls of the tenth plane, kill all adult male passengers on board, then make a statement condemning US policy in the Middle East and land in an undefined location, freeing

³ Khalid Sheikh Mohammad was arrested in March 2003 in Pakistan. He is currently in an American prison. In 2019, Mohammad made an offer to the families of the 9/11 victims, claiming that he would testify in their favour in their civil lawsuit against the government of Saudi Arabia. Mohammad, wanting to avoid the impending death penalty, made an offer of cooperation to the families of the victims. He promised to testify in their favour in the trial against Saudi Arabia. His trial is not over yet.

⁴ Ramzi Yousef was arrested in February 1995 in Pakistan. In 1998, the US court gave him a life sentence for the attack on the WTC of 26 February 1993 and the planting of a bomb on flight 435 Philippines Airlines on 11 December 1994.

⁵ On 26 February 1993, a truck filled with explosives was detonated in the underground garage of the WTC. Six people were killed and several hundred injured. After the attack, Ramzi Yousef left the USA.

⁶ As part of preparations for the terrorist plot known as “Bojinka” on 11 December 1994, Ramzi Yousef planted a bomb of his own construction on a plane flying from Manila to Tokyo. As a result of the explosion, one person was killed and 10 were injured. The plane was seriously damaged, but thanks to the experience of the crew and the short distance from Okinawa, it landed safely. The size of the explosive was several times smaller than the size of the ones planned for consecutive attacks on planes. The “Bojinka” plot was disrupted by an accidental fire in a hotel room rented by terrorists.

the women and children. The latter part of the hijack plot was firmly rejected by Osama bin Laden, but in the Spring of 1999, he gave approval for such an operation. Later that year in Kandahar, the head of al-Qaeda, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad and Mohammed Atef, alias Abu Hafs al-Masri met.⁷ The purpose of the secret meeting was to select the objects of the attack that would cause not only the greatest possible material damage, but most of all image damage, of symbolic importance for the United States. No one but these three attended the conference, but among Osama bin Laden's closest associates there was talk of the "plane operation".⁸

The al-Qaeda leader envisioned that an attack on such targets could lead to the collapse of the federal state. No wonder he wanted to destroy the White House and the Capitol. The Pentagon building was also on the list of targets. If these facilities had been destroyed, the collapse of the US would not have been such an unreal fantasy. Khalid Sheikh Mohammad also proposed the WTC skyscrapers, which his nephew Ramzi Yousef had not managed to demolish in 1993. There were also discussions about the Sears Tower in Chicago and the Library Tower in Los Angeles. Bin Laden assumed that attacks on these targets could be carried out later. As mentioned, Bin Laden took into account the probability that, in retaliation against the attack, the United States would sooner or later strike Afghanistan, where they would suffer severe losses, just like the USSR in the 1980s. He also did not rule out the possibility that after the attacks the USA would eventually withdraw all their Middle Eastern forces, as they did in Somalia after the failed attempt to capture Mohammed Farah Aidid in early October 1993. Nineteen American soldiers were killed in this operation.

Al-Qaeda did not have much money at the time, but in its ranks there was a significant number of young people ready to die a martyr's death. If the plan was aimed at only blowing up hijacked planes in the air, there would be no need to involve people trained as pilots. The concept of the attack was more complicated, and its implementation required a disciplined group of people, some of whom would be able to fly planes. Bin Laden assigned Mohammed four of his most reliable men. There were two Saudis in this group: Nawaf al-Hazmi, Khalid al-Mihdar and two Yemenis: Zuhail Abdo Anam Said al Sharabi alias Abu Bara and Tawfiq bin Attash alias Khallad. The group was joined by: Yemeni Ramzi bin al-Shibh (bin al-Shaibah), Egyptian Muhammad Atta al-Sayed, Lebanese Ziad Jarrah and Emirati Marwan al-Shehhi, who at the end of 1999 came from Germany to Afghanistan to meet Bin Laden. He informed them that they would be martyrs, and ordered them to return to Germany and enrol in flight schools in the USA.⁹ The "plane operation" plans involved two teams, each of which was to carry out an attack severe to the enemy. The group of men from Germany

⁷ Former Egyptian policeman, member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, one of the al-Qaeda commanders and one of Osama bin Laden's most trusted advisers. He was killed in a U.S. airstrike in Afghanistan in November 2001.

⁸ S. Coll, *Rodzina Bin Ladenów. Arabskie losy w amerykańskim stuleciu*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 435–436.

⁹ L. Wright, *Wyniosłe wieże. Al-Kaida i atak na Amerykę*, Wołowiec 2018, pp. 432–435.

reported stolen or missing passports so that attention was not paid to their stay in Afghanistan. The members of the later so-called Hamburg Cell came from well-to-do families and studied at technical universities in Europe. Jarrah and Al-Shehhi were engineers, Muhammad Atta was an architect (he studied town planning in Hamburg in 1992–1999), thanks to which they could easily blend in with American society during pilot training. Only Al-Shibh, who came from a disadvantaged background and without a specific profession, didn't fit in with the rest, yet, he knew the Koran well. However, none of them had an upbringing in a madrasa, which before 9/11, was often considered a source of Muslim terrorism. They all attended secular schools, and Jarrah was not even a practicing Muslim before joining the group.¹⁰ Atta was the operational leader of the group. After graduating, he rented an apartment at Marienstraße 54. This is where the future hijackers used to gather. It was typical for the Hamburg cell to conduct activities in a way that was imperceptible to outsiders. None of the soon-to-be hijackers came to notice as fanatical followers of Islam. Although the Federal Criminal Police Office wanted to investigate members of the Atta group who were interrogated in connection with suspected incidents, the Prosecutor General's Office did not agree to their detention as there was no justification for any legal action or for the issuing of an arrest warrant. Thus, Muhammad Atta lived a normal life, without hiding, he travelled a lot and made contacts from Hamburg to Afghanistan, which made it easier for him to carry out a large-scale terrorist attack on 11 September.¹¹

The abovementioned Saudis, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdar, had no problems with obtaining US visas, and from Kuala Lumpur via Bangkok they flew to Los Angeles, where they arrived on 15 January 2000. Yemenis, Abu Bara and Khallad, did not receive US visas. Khallad was the mastermind behind the attack on the destroyer USS *Cole* on 12 October 2000.¹² Saudis enrolled in the US flight school and were aided by a San Diego-based Saudi scholar, Omar Bajumi. Three members of the Hamburg group arrived in the US. Marwan al-Shehhi flew first in May and was followed by Muhammad Atta with Ziad Jarrah in June 2000. Ramzi bin Al-Sibh did not receive a US visa, so he became a liaison between the attackers in the US and al-Qaeda (he is currently in an American prison). Al-Shehhi and Jarrah pretended to be bodyguards of Atta, who in turn played the role of a member of the Saudi royal family. All three travelled to Florida and took flight lessons there in the city of Venice. Future terrorists spent many hours in a Boeing 727 flight simulator and flew small planes in Florida and

¹⁰ K. Armstrong, *Pola krwi. Religia i przemoc*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 532–533.

¹¹ W. Dietl, K. Hirschmann, R. Tophoven, *Terroryzm*, Warszawa 2009, p. 150; A. Lichtenberg, B. Dudek, "Zamachy 11 września: historia 'Grupy Hamburgskiej'" *Deutsche Welle*, <https://www.dw.com/pl/zamachy-11-września-historia-grupy-hamburgskiej/a-15379511> [access: 12 IX 2011].

¹² A motor boat filled with explosives detonated at the side of the ship moored in the port of Aden. The explosion caused a hole 12 m in diameter and many other serious damages. 17 sailors were killed and 39 were injured. The attack on the USS *Cole* followed a similar, unsuccessful attack on the destroyer USS *The Sulivans*, which was moored off the coast of Yemen. It happened on 3 January 2000. The boat was so overladen with explosives it sank before reaching its destination.

other states. The greatest progress was made by Jarrah, who obtained a license to pilot small aircrafts in August 2000. At the end of that year, he began training in piloting large jets. The training fees were paid by Pakistani Ali Abdul Aziz Ali alias Amar al-Baluchi through Emirates Bank International. The money was wired into the Sun Trust Bank, where Atta, al-Shehhi and Jarrah had opened their accounts.

At the end of January 2001, all three had to fly even more hours, do more exercises on flight simulators of large passenger planes (Boeing 747 and 767), and learn about security measures at airports. They broke their stay in the USA with trips to Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Jarrah left the United States six times, more often than any other conspirator. He visited, among others his girlfriend in Germany. Muhammad Atta, al-Shehhi and Jarrah also flew as passengers on American airlines, which allowed them to learn about the security at the airports. During one of these reconnaissance flights from New York to California, Al-Shehhi and Jarrah aroused the interest of airport security, but were not detained.¹³

On the other hand, the flight training of Saudi friends Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdar was problematic. In 1995, they had fought together in the Balkans on the side of Bosnian Muslims, and then in Afghanistan, they supported the Taliban fighting against the Northern Alliance of Ahmed Shah Masud. In San Diego, where they lived since January 2000, they attended a mosque whose imam was Anwar al-Awlaki.¹⁴ In San Diego, they also took flying lessons, but due to their poor command of English, they did not cope with practical classes. Instructor Rick Garza gave them six lessons on the ground before allowing them to fly together with him in a single-engine Cessna. Although Garza found them completely incapable of learning to fly, the Saudis were only interested in flying large airliners. They offered extra money for the course, which aroused the instructor's suspicions, but he did not inform the authorities about it. It was evident that neither of them had sufficiently mastered the flying skills.¹⁵ On 10 June 2000 al-Mihdar flew to Yemen to visit his wife, angering Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, who did not want al-Hazmi to be left alone in California. Mohammad even intended to remove al-Mihdar from the planned operation, but Bin Laden reportedly refused to do so. The Saudi man returned to the US. In September, al-Mihdar and al-Hazmi changed their address. They moved to the home of an FBI informant Abdusattar Sheikh, who did not provide the security service with any information about the suspects living in his home. After the attack on the USS *Cole* on 12 October 2000, the Prime Minister of Yemen, Abdul Karim al-Iryani, informed that al-Mihdar was one of the key planners

¹³ P.L. Bergen, *Osama bin Laden. Portret z bliska*, Warszawa 2007, p. 319.

¹⁴ Anwar al-Awlaki was a US citizen of Yemeni descent. In the United States, he became religiously radical and reportedly provided spiritual support to the operatives of the 9/11 attacks. He popularized his teachings on the website www.anwar-awlaki.com. Expelled from the US, he went to Yemen. There he became the spiritual leader of the Al-Qaeda Organization in the Arabian Peninsula. He died on 30 September 2001 as a result of a raid by an American unmanned aircraft.

¹⁵ J. Elsässer, *Jak dżihad przybył do Europy. Wojownicy Boga i tajne służby na Bałkanach*, Warszawa 2007, p. 232.

of the attack and was in Yemen at that time.¹⁶ At the end of 2000, al-Mihdar went to Saudi Arabia, and in early 2001, to Afghanistan, where he stayed for several months. It was here where he presumably met Bin Laden. He was appointed the organizer and coordinator of a group of suicide hijackers who were to terrorize the aircrews and passengers. In June 2001, al-Mihdar returned to Saudi Arabia and, apparently, gathered the remaining operatives there and prepared them for the trip to the USA. They travelled in pairs. Al-Mihdar easily obtained an American visa at the US consulate in Jeddah and on 4 July 2001 he landed in New York.¹⁷

While al-Mihdar was in the Middle East, in December 2000 Al-Hazmi met his compatriot Hani Hanjour. He was the only one of the future terrorists who stayed in the US with no connection to the attack. He first came to the USA in 1991 for a several-month-long English language course. After returning to Saudi Arabia, where he stayed for five years, he applied for a job with Saudi Arabian Airlines, but was rejected due to poor ratings. The airline offered to consider his application if he obtained a commercial pilot's license in the United States. Thus, he returned to the USA where he gained his pilot's license (with a poor rating) in April 1999, after three years of training. His application with Saudi Arabian Airlines was again rejected due to low grades in his pre-admission exam. In late 1999, he was to inform his family that he was going to the UAE to search for a job. In fact, he went to Afghanistan, but by December 2000 he was already in the US. He moved to Abdusattar Shaikh's house in San Diego. There he began his flying training again, but he turned out to be a poor pilot, and his poor knowledge of specialized English in the field of aviation disqualified him from obtaining a professional pilot certificate. Nevertheless, he began advanced training in a flight simulator in Mesa, Arizona, where he arrived with al-Hazmi. At the beginning of April 2001, they both settled in Falls Church, Virginia, in the Washington metropolitan area. At that time, the already mentioned al-Awlaki¹⁸ was appointed the new imam of the Dar al-Hijra mosque in Washington. Here they were joined by compatriots Majed Moqed and Ahmed al-Ghamdi, who came from Saudi Arabia. The four travelled to Patterson, Virginia, and rented an apartment there. From Virginia, they flew to various cities, checking airport security systems. They also travelled to Las Vegas on several occasions to have fun. In Paterson, they were joined by al-Mihdar, who had returned from the Middle East. In July, Hanjour obtained a US driving license on the basis of a false address certificate. In late June 2001, two more Saudis arrived in New York: Abdulaziz al-Omari and Salem al-Hazmi. For several days, the two were with other future hijackers in Paterson. There, al-Omari and al-Mihdar acquired false identity documents. They presumably bought them from All Services Plus in Passaic County,

¹⁶ "Piecing together the terrorist jigsaw", *The Guardian*, of 15 X 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/15/worlddispatch.brianwhitaker> [access: 17 I 2001].

¹⁷ L. Wright, *Wyniosłe wieże...*, p. 478.

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hani_Hanjour [access: 1 VI 2021].

New Jersey, a company that sold fakes.¹⁹ According to other opinions, Mohammad al-Atris²⁰, a US citizen of Egyptian descent, sold false documents to them. He was the leader of a criminal group engaged in the production and sale of false American identity cards.²¹ To get false documents, al-Omari went to Florida, there he rented a flat, where he stayed until September. Other Saudis were already in Florida at that time: Satam al-Suqami and the brothers Walid and Wail al-Shehri. Al-Sukami and Walid al-Shehri were among the nine people who opened SunTrust bank accounts with a cash deposit.²² Money was withdrawn from these accounts for current expenses. In May 2001, Mohand al-Shehri, Hamza al-Ghamdi and Ahmed al-Nami²³ arrived in Florida, followed by the Emirati Fayez Banihammad and Saudi Saeed al-Ghamdi at the end of June. Two al-Ghamdi: Hamza and Ahmed were brothers, while Saeed al-Ghamdi was not related to them. All three came from the same tribe in the Saudi province of Al-Baha to which Ahmed al-Haznawi also belonged. In 2000, all three Al-Ghamdi fought in Chechnya. They were also very religiously observant.²⁴ Saeed flew to Miami, Florida with Wail al-Shehri. The information concerning the nineteenth hijacker, Salem al-Hazmi, Nawaf's brother, is contradictory. He was first due to arrive in the US on 29 June 2001, according to both the FBI and the 9/11 Commission report, although there were numerous unconfirmed reports that he had previously lived in San Antonio, Texas with Satam al-Suqami. Al-Hazmi, like other Saudis, used the Visa Express program to enter the US. He then moved to Paterson, New Jersey, to live with Hani Hanjour. Both were among the five terrorists who submitted ID applications in Arlington, Virginia, even though al-Hazmi already had a New Jersey ID.²⁵

By the end of June 2001, all participants of the 9/11 attacks were already in the United States. Among them were 15 Saudis, two Emiratis, a Lebanese and an Egyptian. Three of the four forming the Hamburg cell: Marwan al-Shehhi, Ziad Jarrah and Muhammad Atta were the key operatives of the entire plot. Atta was supposed to be the operational leader. On 7 July 2001, he set out via Zurich to Spain. He travelled to various locations in the province of Tarragona in the north-east of the country, where a summit meeting was held. There is no doubt that it was attended by Ramzi bin al-Shebh, a member of the Hamburg cell who did not receive a visa to the US and remained al-Qaeda's liaison.²⁶ Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas alias Abu Dahdah, born in Syria, and

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdulaziz_al-Omari [access: 1 VI 2021].

²⁰ Mohammed al-Atris was arrested in August 2002 at John F. Kennedy Airport. During the search of his apartment, 75 false documents were found.

²¹ K. Izak, "Fałszywe dokumenty w rękach terrorystów", *Człowiek i Dokumenty* 2014, no. 32, p. 10.

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satam_al-Suqami [access: 1 VI 2021].

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmed_al-Nami [access: 1 VI 2021].

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmed_al-Ghamdi [access: 1 VI 2021].

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salem_al-Hazmi [access: 1 VI 2021].

²⁶ The investigation carried out after September 11 showed that Moroccans, Said Behaji, Zakariya Essabar, Abdelghani Mzoudi and Mounir al-Motassadeq, also belonged or could have belonged

the Moroccan Amar al-Azizi helped organize this meeting. It is also suggested that the meeting was attended by Khalid Sheikh Mohammad and Said Behaji, and later joined by Marwan al-Shehhi and two others, possibly the brothers Wail and Waleed al-Shehri, who stayed at a hotel in Salou, Costa Dorada on 16 July. During the meeting, Al-Shibh gave instructions from Osama bin Laden, including his appeal for the air operation to be carried out as soon as possible and to keep its goals secret. The al-Qaeda leader was concerned about the safety of the operation, as the real threat was the presence in the USA of a large number of participants in the planned attack. Atta informed that all participants of the plot, who were supposed to terrorize the crews and passengers of the hijacked planes, had already reached the United States without any problems. He claimed he needed another five to six weeks to finalize the details of the operation. Bin al-Shibh handed him the ultimate list of targets set by Bin Laden. These were the symbols of America: The United States Capitol, the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. The Twin Towers were two of the most recognizable buildings in the world and shaped the New York skyline. If any of the hijacker pilots would not be able to reach the target, they were supposed to crash the plane. Atta communicated his personal problems he had with Ziad Jarrah. He suspected that he might abandon preparations for the attack. If such a situation did occur, he would be replaced by Zacarias Moussaoui, who was trained as the next pilot.²⁷

French citizen Zacarias Moussaoui alias Abu Khalid al-Sahrawi from the end of February till the end of May 2001, completed approximately 60 hours of piloting in Norman, Oklahoma. Despite this, he never flew by himself and for unknown reasons left further training. Muhammad Atta and Marwan al-Shehhi were also in the same pilot school. From Oklahoma, Muossaoui travelled to Minnesota to continue his training at Egan, for which he received money from Düsseldorf and Hamburg sent by Bin al-Shibh. On 13 August he paid 6,800 USD to train on a Boeing 747 flight simulator at Pan-Am International Flight Academy. However, he aroused the suspicions of

to the Hamburg cell. The latter was the only member of the Hamburg cell who was sentenced to imprisonment in Germany. In January 2007, Motassadeq was sentenced to 15 years in prison for membership in a terrorist organization and for helping to murder 246 people. That's how many people flew on four US airline planes on 11 September 2001. In October 2018, Motassadeq left the Hamburg prison and was deported to Morocco without the right to return to Germany within 46 years. Abdelghani Mzoudi was arrested along with Motassadeq, but was acquitted in 2004. The other two Moroccans left Germany after 9/11 and went to Afghanistan. According to German law, the Hamburg cell was not an independent terrorist organization, as it was not able to carry out attacks in the USA neither financially nor personally (that was the reasoning then). According to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the attacks were not planned in Hamburg, but in Afghanistan. "Zamachy 11 września: historia Grupy Hamburgskiej", *Deutsche Welle*, 11 IX 2011, <https://www.dw.com/pl/zamachy-11-września-historia-grupy-hamburgskiej/a-15379511> [access: 12 IX 2011]; N. Werkhäuser, "Hamburg: pomocnik zamachowców z 11 września wydalony do Maroka", *Deutsche Welle*, 15 X 2018, <https://www.dw.com/pl/hamburg-pomocnik-zamachowców-z-11-września-wydalony-do-maroka/a-45895869> [access: 16 X 2018]; *The 9/11 Commission Report*, <https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>, pp. 160–164 [access: 6 VI 2021].

²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Atta [access: 1 VI 2021].

the instructor Clarence Prevost, who contacted the FBI field office on 15 August because he was concerned about the student's questions. Moussaoui asked questions about the air routes around New York and inquired if the cockpit door could be opened during the flight. The FBI quickly determined that Moussaoui was an Islamic radical who had previously lived in Pakistan and possibly Afghanistan as well. It was suspected that he might become a suicide hijacker in the future. As he was a French national who overstayed his visa, the Immigration Office issued a detention warrant. On 16 August Moussaoui was arrested in Eagan and charged with immigration violation.²⁸ After 9/11, it was hypothesized that Moussaoui was probably preparing for the second series of al-Qaeda attacks, which were to take place on the west coast of the USA.²⁹ He was the only participant of the preparations for the attack to be arrested before 11 September and was later called the twentieth hijacker. Ramzi bin al-Shibh was called by the same name, but wrongly because he never reached the United States.

On his return from Spain, Muhammad Atta met on 25 July with Jarrah, whom he drove to the Miami airport to depart for Germany. The next day he travelled to Newark, New Jersey by Continental Airlines. The purpose of the trip was probably to meet the participants of the attack who were there. He returned to Florida on 30 July. In August, he travelled again to New Jersey and twice to Las Vegas on observation flights, independent of the other members of the group. He met monthly with Nawaf al-Hazmi to discuss the state of preparation for the operation. On 10 September Atta picked up Abdul Aziz al-Omari from the Milner Hotel in Boston, Massachusetts (where other hijackers had checked in as well) and the two terrorists travelled in a rental car to the Comfort Inn Hotel in Portland, Maine, where they spent the last night. In the morning they boarded a flight from Portland to Boston. Before seven at the Logan airport in Boston, Atta received a call from Marwan al-Shehhi, most likely with the information that he and his companions were already at the same airport.³⁰ The operation entered its final phase.

The attacks

Boeing 767 aircraft American Airlines 11 flight from Boston to Los Angeles

At 7.59 a.m. Boeing 767 aircraft American Airlines Flight 11 took off from Boston to Los Angeles, California. There were 81 passengers on board, including Muhammad Atta, Abdulaziz al-Omari, the brothers Wail and Waleed al-Shehri, and Satam al-Suqami. 15 minutes into the flight, when passengers were served drinks, the hijacking operation began. Probably, the terrorists threatened to detonate an explosive. During

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zacarias_Moussaoui [access: 1 VI 2021].

²⁹ L. Wright, *Wyniosłe wieże...*, p. 490.

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Atta [access: 1 VI 2021].

this time, the pilots stopped responding to air traffic control signals. They were forced to leave the cockpit, and Atta took over the controls. The plane began to deviate from the planned route. At 8:18 a.m. two flight attendants: Betty Ong and Madeline Sweeney managed to establish a few minutes' contact from the rear of the plane via SBC Communications radio with the American Airlines office and flight attendants at Logan airport in Boston. The women informed about the hijacking of the plane, provided the numbers of the first-class seats taken by the hijackers after boarding the plane (in the following order: 2A, 2B, 9A, 9C and 9B). On this basis, their identity was quickly established. They also reported that a passenger, a female flight attendant and a male flight attendant had been injured with a knife. The perpetrators were the Al-Shehri brothers.³¹ Exactly at 8.23 a.m. Muhammad Atta tried to make an announcement to the passengers from the cockpit, but pressed the wrong switch and thus sent a message to the air traffic control service. He said: "(...) have some planes, just stay quiet and you'll be ok. We're returning to the airport." A minute later he added: "Nobody move. Everything will be okay. If you try to make any moves, they will endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet." The air traffic control service obtained confirmation that the plane was hijacked and informed the Federal Aviation Agency of this fact. At 8.33 a.m. Muhammad Atta announced: "Nobody move, please. We're going back to the airport. Don't try to make any stupid moves." Five minutes later, the Boston Air Traffic Control Service informed NORAD³², which in turn called on two F-15 Eagle planes from Otis base to take control of the flight. However, the order to take off the F-15 fighters was issued too late. The analysis of the time of informing the controllers indicates that the right decisions were not made on time, as NORAD was informed at 8:38, i.e. 20 minutes after the first hijack signal given by the flight attendant. The plane was already over New York's Manhattan.³³ At 8:46 a.m. terrified Sweeney said over the phone to manager Michael Woodward: "I can see water. I can see buildings. I can see buildings! We're flying low. We're flying very, very low. We're flying too low. Oh my God, we're going way too low. Oh my God!"³⁴ At that moment, the plane piloted by Atta hit the North Tower of the WTC at a speed of about 750 km/h (there were about 40,000 litres of jet fuel in the tanks).³⁵ The plane struck between the 93rd and 99th floor

³¹ https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Betty_Ong [access: 1 VI 2021]; https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Wail_al-Shehri [access: 1 VI 2021].

³² North American Aerospace Defence Command – a combined organisation of the United States and Canada that exists since 12 May 1958., https://pl.wikipedia.or/wiki/North_American_Aerospace_Defense_Command (editor's footnote).

³³ https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Hijackers_in_the_September_11_attacks#American_Airlines_Flight_11:_One_World_Trade_Center,_North_Tower [access: 3 VI 2021]; *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, "We have some planes", https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Ch1.htm [access: 3 VI 2021].

³⁴ https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Madeline_Amy_Sweeney [access: 1 VI 2021].

³⁵ The flight from Portland to Boston was delayed, so Atta's luggage did not make it onto Flight 11. It was retrieved later at Logan Airport. The luggage included airline uniforms, flight manuals, as well

of the building. Due to the massive destruction of the tower, people from the 92nd floor and above could not escape. 1,344 people were trapped because all stairs and elevators were impassable. Hundreds of people were killed by the impact, others died from fire or smoke, and still others died by jumping out of the building's windows. The first reports spoke of a mishap, but the narrative changed when the second plane, Flight 175, flew into the South Tower.³⁶

Boeing 767 aircraft United Airlines flight 175 from Boston to Los Angeles

On 9 September, Marwan al-Shehhi, Fayez Banihammad, Mohand al-Shehri and Satam al-Suqami departed from Florida to Boston. The next day, they rented a room at the Milner Hotel in Boston. So, al-Suqami shared a room with the hijackers of another plane, because he himself boarded flight 1137.³⁷ The brothers Hamza and Ahmed al-Ghamdi flew from Florida to Boston on 7 September. They checked into the Days Hotel, where they stayed until the day of the attack. On the morning of 11 September, they arrived by taxi at Logan International Airport. There a few minutes before seven Marwan al-Shehhi made a phone call to Atta, with whom he talked for about three minutes. Around 7.30, the hijackers: al-Shehhi, Banihammad, al-Shehri and the al-Ghamdi brothers took their places on the Boeing 767 aircraft United Airlines flight 175 to Los Angeles. There were 46 passengers and nine crew members on board. Approximately 30 minutes into the flight, between 8.42 and 8.46, the plane was hijacked. The al-Ghamdi brothers pushed passengers and the crew to the rear of the plane, threatening with an explosive. Banihammad and Shehri killed the pilots Victor Saracini and Michael Horrox. This allowed al-Shehhi to take control of the plane. One of the female flight attendants was stabbed. The plane piloted by al-Shehhi almost collided with the Delta Airlines aircraft Flight 2315. Several passengers called their relatives, informing them of the hijacking. At the same time, they found out about the Flight 11, which had already hit the North Tower of the WTC. At 9.03 a.m. the plane - flying at a speed of 950 km/h, which was faster than the plane piloted by Muhammad Atta - crashed into the southeast corner, striking through floors 77 and 85. There were about 38,000 liters of jet fuel. The impact of the crash into the building in such a place caused the South

as other items and a farewell letter, which was a kind of instruction from the martyr. The document consisted of three parts: instructions for the last night of a martyr, instructions for the time before boarding the plane and the last gave instructions about the flight until martyrdom. These instructions were supported by quotations from the Koran for future suicide bombers like him. Everything in the context of spiritual preparation with prayers and quotations from the scriptures. There is an interesting passage from Atta's will: "The people who will clean my body should be good Muslims. The person who will wash my body around my genitals should wear gloves so he won't touch them". The terrorist was unaware that his body would be atomized in the blast. P.L. Williams, *Al-Qaida - the brotherhood of terror*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 168–175.

³⁶ https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katastrofa_lotu_American_Airlines_11 [access: 1 VI 2021].

³⁷ https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Satam_al-Suqami [access: 1 VI 2021].

Tower to collapse at 10.28 which was earlier than the North Tower.³⁸ It is estimated that 637 people were killed or trapped in the building at the time of the disaster. Part of the fuselage and landing gear broke off the plane which hit the south tower and fell on the 47-story 7 WTC building (the twin towers are 1 WTC and 2 WTC), setting it on fire, and causing its collapse at 17.20.³⁹

Boeing 757 aircraft American Airlines flight 77 from Washington to Los Angeles

On 10 September, all hijackers of the Boeing 757 aircraft American Airlines Flight 77 to Los Angeles: Hani Hanjour, Khalid al-Mihdar, Majed Moqed and brothers Nawaf and Salem al-Hazmi checked into the Marriott Residence Inn in Herndon, Virginia, located nearby Dulles International Airport in Washington, DC. At the same time, Saleh ibn Abdul Rahman Hussayen, a prominent representative of the Saudi Arabian government, was staying at the hotel, but there is no evidence that he met or even knew about any of the future hijackers. The next day at approximately 6.20 a.m., the whole group left the hotel for the above airport. At 7:20 a.m. al-Mihdar and Moqed were selected for extra screening during security checks because of a metal object being detected. However, they both boarded the plane without problems, as did the other three members of the group. At 7.50 a.m. they took their seats on the plane. They were armed with plastic knives and wallpaper cutters. Besides the hijackers, there were 53 passengers and six crew members on board. The plane took off at 8:20 a.m. with a 10-minute delay. Exactly 30 minutes later, the pilots communicated via radio with air traffic controllers for the last time. In the next four minutes, the plane must have been in the hands of the hijackers as it deviated from its intended direction of flight. Hani Hanjour assumed control over the plane. In contrast to the hijackings of the remaining aircrafts, in the case of Flight 77, there was no information about a bomb threat and attack with sharp tools. Pilots Charles Burlingame and David Charlesbois were forced to take their seats in the rear of the plane. Using the intercom, Hanjour announced that the plane had been hijacked. The passenger Barbara Olson informed her husband Theodor Olson, the US attorney general, about the hijacking of the plane by phone. At 9.37 the plane crashed into the west facade of the Pentagon. 64 people in the plane and 125 people in the building were killed.⁴⁰

Boeing 757 aircraft United Airlines Flight 93 from Newark to San Francisco

On 7 September, Ziad Jarrah, Ahmed al-Haznawi, Ahmed al-Nami and Saeed al-Ghamdi were the first to leave Florida. They flew to Newark near New York. It is not

³⁸ https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Marwan_al-Shehhi [access: 4 VI 2021]; https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Hamza_al-Ghamdi [access: 4 VI 2021].

³⁹ https://pl.xcv.wiki/wiki/United_Airlines_Flight_175 [access: 4 VI 2021].

⁴⁰ https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Hani_Hanjour [access: 4 VI 2021]; https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Nawaf_al-Hazmi [access: 4 VI 2021].

known what they were doing till the plane hijacking. On 10 September, Jarrah wrote a letter to his fiancée in Germany, but she did not receive it. The parcel returned to the US and was seized by the FBI. It was a suicide terrorist letter containing phrases such as: "I did what I had to. It is a great honour. You will see the result and everyone will be celebrating."⁴¹ On 11 September, between 7:39 a.m. and 7:48 a.m., all hijackers boarded Boeing 757 aircraft United Airlines Flight 93 from Newark to San Francisco. They took their seats in business class in the front part of the plane. Excluding the hijackers, there were 33 passengers and seven crew members on board. The plane was supposed to take off at 8.00, but due to delays in other flights, it did not take off until 8.42 a.m. At 9.24, the crew was informed of two planes that had crashed into the WTC and warned against cockpit intrusion. Two minutes later, the pilot asked for confirmation of this information. Meanwhile, one of the hijackers, possibly al-Ghamdi, attacked one of the female flight attendants, and Al-Haznawi, the passenger, and showed a cardboard dummy bomb that he had attached to the body. At 9.28 a.m. a female flight attendant was forced to open the cockpit door. There, al-Ghamdi and al-Namni cut the throats of the pilots: Jason Dahl and LeRoy Homer, and killed the flight attendant. The air traffic controller heard the scream of the woman being killed and the voice of the terrorist shouting "Allah Akbar!". As the plane began to descend abruptly, Jarrah who was at the controls, tried to stabilise the flight and turn the plane towards Washington. Passengers were forced to sit in the rear of the plane. At 9.32 one of the hijackers ordered them to remain calm. Jarrah was instructing passengers from the cockpit, but because he pressed the wrong button, his voice was not heard on the plane, but in air traffic control. At 9.31 Jarrah gave the message:

Ladies and gentlemen, here the captain. Please sit down. Keep remaining seating. We have a bomb on board. So, sit. Eight minutes later he repeated: Here's the captain. I would like you all to remain seated. We have a bomb aboard and we are going back to the airport to have our demands. So, please remain quiet.

However, the passengers were not prohibited from using mobile phones. Thanks to this, they learned from their families about the attack on the WTC. The passenger, Jeremy Glick, told the family that the hijackers were Arabs and they had red bands tied around their heads. Together with the other passengers he concluded that their plane could also be used to attack an important object. As a result of a vote, they reached a decision to try to seize the plane from the hands of terrorists. The sight of the pilots' bodies lying in front of the cockpit probably helped confirm such a conclusion. They decided to attack with the use of weapons made of cutlery from the on-board kitchen and dishes with boiling water. The passenger attack caused the hijackers to lose control of the situation. Ziad Jarrah had serious problems with controlling the Boeing, but he tried to make it difficult for passengers to approach the cockpit door by rolling the machine left and then right. This caused passengers to lose their balance in the narrow aisles of the aircraft interior, but still they managed to near to the

⁴¹ https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Ziad_Jarrah [access: 4 VI 2021].

front of the aircraft. Most likely using a food cart, they rammed one of the terrorists standing in front of the cockpit door. The passengers managed to incapacitate or kill him. Meanwhile, the three other hijackers locked themselves in the cockpit. They were not prepared for this turn of events. When passengers began to force down the cockpit door, Jarrah most likely made the decision to crash the plane with the ground. For unknown reasons, he prolonged the moment of the catastrophe. As soon as the flight speed increased, the passengers managed to force the door open. They got into a fight with terrorists. The plane turned upside down with the landing gear up and at 10.03 (according to other sources, at 10.06 or 10.10), it crashed to the ground at a speed of 930 km/h. The disaster occurred near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.⁴² Because of the Flight 93 delay of more than 40 minutes passengers became aware of earlier attacks, which the terrorists had not taken into account. The passengers' resistance surprised them too. The target of the attack was the White House or the Capitol. The latter, however, seems more likely as Osama bin Laden wished to destroy it.

The aftermath of the attacks

In the events of 9/11, 2,996 people were killed, including 19 terrorists, and 6,291 were injured.⁴³ Six Poles were among the fatalities. 343 firefighters died in the rescue operation. Most of the rescuers, firefighters and policemen who were the first to come to the rescue and survived, began to develop cancer because of inhaling harmful substances. For some people, symptoms didn't appear until 10 years or even later. By 2017, 142 officers had died as a result of diseases related to the service in Ground Zero.⁴⁴ The media started writing about the 9/11 attack and talking about "mega-terrorism" because this incident had been the most successful attack of any terrorist organization until then. Psychologically, the United States and much of the world were undeniably shocked. In the US, in the period of several days after 9/11, the sale of weapons and ammunition for personal use increased by 10%, while in six months the number of weapons sold increased by 450,000 pieces more than in the same period before the attack. Patriotic spirit was mobilised. On the day of the attack, sales of US flags in Walmart stores increased by two thousand percent, and the next day by a further four thousand percent. At the beginning of October, 80 percent of Americans had flags displayed in front of their houses. When President George W. Bush announced "a monumental struggle of good versus evil" on 12 September, the crowd chanting "Kill all Arabs!" surrounded one of the largest mosques in Chicago, frequented mainly by

⁴² https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katastrofa_lotu_United_Airlines_93 [access: 4 VI 2021]; https://pl.melayukini.net/wiki/Hijackers_in_the_September_11_attacks [access: 4 VI 2021].

⁴³ https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zamach_z_11_września_2001_roku [access: 7 VI 2021].

⁴⁴ "Niesli pomoc po ataku na WTC, po latach ciężko zachorowali. Śmierć strażaków - ojca i syna - w wyniku nowotworów", *Polsat News*, 19 VIII 2017, <https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2017-08-19/niesli-pomoc-po-ataku-na-wtc-smierc-strazakow-w-wyniku-nowotworow/> [access: 6 VI 2021].

Arabs. Across the United States, anti-Muslim sentiment, acts of hatred and aggression directed at culturally alien residents increased. Police advised to close Muslim schools for a week, and Muslims not to participate in Friday prayers for their safety. Among the victims, including fatalities, were both Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.⁴⁵

The attacks caused enormous material losses. Particularly high costs were incurred by insurance and reinsurance companies, airlines and aircraft manufacturers, as well as the tourism industry. The enormous damage connected with the destruction of the New York City World Trade Center and the disruption of the financial system had to be covered by insurance companies linked with the lucrative American market. The airlines whose planes were hijacked and then destroyed during the terrorist attacks were also due compensation. Swiss reinsurance company Swiss Re estimated that the total losses of the insurance sector related to the 9/11 attacks amounted to 90 billion USD, of which 19 billion USD were direct costs. The insurance sector in order to secure itself for the future revised the policy and raised rates significantly, from 20 to 80 percent, mostly where the risk was particularly high. For airlines, the hijacking and destruction of several planes meant a sharp decline in travel interest. Fears of new terrorist attacks caused passenger traffic to decrease dramatically, which meant a considerable reduction in financial inflows for carriers. An even more severe blow turned out to be that the increase in insurance rates substantially raised the costs of air transport. As air transport struggled with the effects of a general downturn in the global economy, the 9/11 events plunged this service area into the deepest crisis since World War II. Total losses were estimated at 12–13 billion USD. Under these conditions, airlines had to suspend some connections, decommission hundreds of aircrafts and reduce personnel. Ticket prices were also lowered, in some cases by as much as 80 percent. Two companies that had been in financial difficulties for a long time - Swissair and Sabena - had to file for bankruptcy. After 9/11, the overall number of flights in the US, including private flights, decreased by 22.7 percent. In 2001, European airlines recorded a decrease in passenger traffic by 5%, and a year after the terrorist attack, it was lower by 11%. Domestic and international airports around the world handled 3 percent fewer passengers. Freight traffic also decreased. The crisis in the air transport had an impact on the situation of aircraft manufacturers. The airlines had largely limited orders, especially for Boeing and Airbus aircrafts. The entire tourism industry felt a decline in travel interest, involving both tour operators, hotels, gastronomy and various types of commercial and service companies. One example was the decline of the luxury goods trade, which basically took place at airports. As a consequence, the production of such articles also decreased.⁴⁶

However, the most critical were the international repercussions. By launching attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon, al-Qaeda influenced world politics by prompting

⁴⁵ D. Streatfeild, *Świat po 11 września*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 42–44.

⁴⁶ A. Krzemirski, "Rocznica 11 września. Olbrzymie odszkodowania i strach przed podróżami", *Parkiet* of 11 IX 2002, <https://www.parkiet.com/artykul/260530.html> [access: 6 VI 2021].

Washington to declare a “war on terror”. In a speech to the nation on 20 September 2001, President George W. Bush revealed the plans for this war. The United States demanded unconditional support from its people, allies and all nations for the war against terrorism, and the principle of “either with us or against us” resulted in the condemnation of neutral states and their recognition as enemies of the United States. In America itself, opposition to this war was viewed as a betrayal of those killed in Manhattan, Washington, and Pennsylvania, as well as a betrayal of the nation and the “values of civilization”.⁴⁷ At the same time, Washington devised a list of strategic goals. Among them, the possibility of an attack on Iraq was considered, although there was no indication of the country’s involvement in the terrorist act. Ultimately, Secretary of State Colin Powell’s moderate line of conduct prevailed, and after the Taliban’s refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden, on 7 October 2001, the US Operation Enduring Freedom began with a volley of 50 missiles fired from American warships in the Arabian Sea. One of the missiles hit the residence of Mullah Mohammed Omar, a Taliban leader, in Kandahar, killing his stepfather and a 10-year-old son. Another fell on the small village of Kuram, killing 100 civilians, and another destroyed a mosque in the outskirts of Jalalabad. By 9 November U.S. backed-Afghan Northern Alliance forces, fighting the Taliban had gained control of the strategic city of Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Balkh Province in northern Afghanistan. Thus, they put an end to Taliban rule. Two days later, the city of Herat, in the west of the country, surrendered almost without a shot. On 12 November, coalition forces entered Kabul, where they were greeted by cheering crowds of Taliban opponents. Contrary to all expectations, the first stage of the war of revenge against the Taliban turned out to be an undeniable success of the US Army. While the new Vietnam or the remake of the Soviet defeat of the 1980s was being announced, the US military, thanks to its air force and special forces and the help of troops hostile to the Taliban, crushed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in a matter of weeks. Al-Qaeda had to relinquish its close-knit structure in Afghanistan and remained a network structure and political ideology. The Americans did not manage to capture Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, who for many Muslims became a symbol of the fight against the US and a living legend.

The US war on terrorism was followed by the US invasion of Iraq on 20 March 2003. The dual threat of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction was only a pretext to eliminate an enemy that had long been on the target of the United States, especially of the so-called neoconservatives, politicians around Vice President Dick Cheney and Assistant Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz. Cheney took up the old concept of Reagan’s preventive war and made it the centrepiece of a new strategy to prompt a government change in Iraq. Prevention was replaced by deterrence. Since then, the theoretical notion of preventive war mixed in practice with the war on terror. It was a way of imposing American supremacy over the next decades and transforming

⁴⁷ 11 września. Przyczyny i konsekwencje w opiniach intelektualistów, P. Scraton (ed.), Warszawa 2003, pp. 14–15.

the United States into a hegemonic undisputed power by, inter alia, overthrowing the regime in Iraq and planning a US-style democracy there. In the longer term, it was supposed to change the system of government in other countries around the Persian Gulf and contribute to the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The rest of the events are well known. On 20 March 2003, coalition forces, mostly American and British (with the participation of Australians and Poles), quickly overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein, who was detained a few months later. American forces, however, remained stuck in both Afghanistan and Iraq for many years, did not solve any problems, but contributed to the development of Islamic terrorism on an unprecedented scale. Moreover, the invasion of Iraq turned out to be one of the most spectacular and deadly strategic mistakes in military history.

The terrorist attack on the USA was an impulse for the reform of the American secret services, the most far-reaching since 1947. Washington made a decision regarding the need to create a system that would adequately counteract terrorist threats and effectively warn about their occurrence. This involved strengthening of the structures with operational and reconnaissance powers, increasing the scope of their tasks and improving their ability to coordinate. According to some experts and FBI agents, it was the lack of cooperation between this federal service and the CIA, which did not provide them with important information, that prevented the detection of a terrorist plot in the US before the largest attack in history took place. The question that remains unanswered is whether the attack could have been prevented under different circumstances? It seems rather not. The American secret services had too little information to be linked into a logical sequence leading to the hijackers.

In addition to the secret service reform, new legal regulations were also introduced. They were included in the document of 26 October 2001, commonly known as the USA Patriot Act.⁴⁸ This law allowed the government to access private information, even if there was no proof that the person was involved in terrorist activities, with all the possible abuses that resulted from it. Numerous security measures were introduced on the territory of the US, with particularly strict controls at airports and public buildings. Border controls were tightened up, especially towards people from countries subject to visa requirements. Immigrants found to be suspects were arrested. The counterterrorism management apparatus was centralized. The Intelligence Community, which was internally divided with struggles for influence, competence and line of duty, underwent a process of reform. Washington granted the US judiciary the highest prerogatives. It is difficult to assess to what extent the actions taken on the basis of these decisions helped to eliminate the terrorist threat. They certainly contributed to some extent to the restriction of civil liberties and human rights, as symbolized by the internment of prisoners suspected of terrorist activity at the US military base in Guantánamo. Internationally, the new course in US foreign policy

⁴⁸ M. Szymańska, "Eksplzja terroryzmu w USA a przekształcenia w amerykańskich służbach specjalnych po 11 września 2001 r.," *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego* 2014, no. 10, p. 186.

distorted by the sympathies and provisional goals of the neocons who blacklisted Iraq for al-Qaeda support (even though there was no evidence for this), while omitting Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which are known to be supporting many terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda.⁴⁹ Much controversy in the United States was sparked by 28 secret pages (out of 838) of the 2002 report by the US Congress on the 9/11 attacks, to which the author already referred. Saudi Arabia flatly rejected accusations that it had anything to do with the attacks on New York and Washington. The basis for such allegations, made by some of the victims' families and American politicians, was precisely the classification of a part of the US Congress report. It was speculated that there is evidence of Saudi Arabia's ties to the attacks, and it was not just because 15 of the 19 terrorists were Saudis who belonged to al-Qaeda led by another wealthy Saudi - Osama bin Laden. After the document was declassified in July 2016, it was noted that there was no information in it indicating any links between the Saudi authorities and the attackers. At the same time, former Florida Senator Bob Graham, who co-chaired the Congressional investigation, found that it was very clear from the disclosed pages that Saudi Arabia was the main source of financing the attacks. Thus, doubts about Saudi Arabia's role in the 9/11 attacks still remained and gave rise to compensation claims by the families of the victims against Riyadh.⁵⁰

9/11 conspiracy theories

A large number of supporters of the 9/11 conspiracy theories suggests that the then US government stood behind the attacks which were planned and organized by the secret services. In a 2006 poll on the fifth anniversary of the attacks, more than a third of respondents said the Washington administration either had helped carry out the attacks or had not deliberately done anything to prevent them. In a telephone poll conducted in the same year, half of Americans replied that for President George W. Bush, the 9/11 attacks had been a pretext for a war with Iraq. Two years later, the number of people recognizing an alternate version of the 9/11 events increased even more. As much as 46 percent of Americans did not believe the government's version of the incidents, and nearly half of the American population, including many scientists and politicians, demanded a re-investigation of the attacks.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, the 9/11 Truth Movement,

⁴⁹ G. Chaliand, A. Blin, *Historia terroryzmu. Od starożytności do Da'ish*, Warszawa 2020, pp. 372–373.

⁵⁰ "USA: Kongres ujawnił tajną część raportu o zamachach z 11 września", *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 15 VII 2016, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/960454,usa-kongres-ujawnil-tajna-czesc-raportu-o-zamachach-z-11-wrzesnia.html> [access: 16 VII 2016]; "Rodziny ofiar zamachów na WTC z 11 września pozywają Arabię Saudyjską", *Bankier.pl*, 21 III 2017, <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Rodziny-ofiar-zamachow-na-WTC-z-11-wrzesnia-pozywaja-Arabie-Saudyjska-3668756.html> [access: 22 III 2017].

⁵¹ "Spisek World Trade Center", *Laif*, 9 V 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20090615224350/http://laif.co.uk/art,spisek_world_trade_center,1496.html [access: 9 VI 2021].

which supported the production of documentaries exposing Washington's alleged lies and neglect, and the publication of books, often written by recognized authorities, grew in power. However, the driving force for the movement was the Internet, which spread information that the government was jointly responsible or directly responsible for the attacks. A special role was played by the families of the victims, who could not understand "(...) why President Bush, after the news about the plane crash into the second WTC tower, sat idle with a thoughtless face among six-year-olds at a school in Florida."⁵²

In 2014, 2,300 architects and engineers affiliated with Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth (AE911Truth) demanded an independent re-investigation into the collapse of three WTC buildings. Currently, this organization already has 3,300 members.⁵³ In September 2019, a team of scientists from the University of Alaska Fairbanks published the results of a four-year study on the behaviour of the 7 WTC building structure at the time of the disaster. Based on, inter alia, computer simulations it was identified that the cause of the collapse of the 47-story building could not be a fire, but only the almost simultaneous damage to all columns inside the building. In the 1 WTC and 2 WTC buildings, the fire from the crash of the planes did not last long and did not result in a long-term rise in temperature, as all the fuel from the aircraft tanks burned out immediately after the crash. Computer simulations were to show that the temperature of the fires was over 1000°C, while steel and iron in this type of structures begin to melt only at a temperature of about 1500°C. According to the conspiracy theory, Twin Towers and 7 WTC were destroyed by the use of controlled detonation of explosives. The official report of the National Institute of Standards and Technology avoided any discussion about the possibility of planting explosives, as the possibility of using them was arbitrarily ruled out at the beginning of the investigation.⁵⁴

Even more questions arose in connection with the attack on the Pentagon. The giant Boeing that hit it was piloted by Hani Hanjour, who was rated low by instructors as a pilot of an only two-person plane. Meanwhile, on 11 September, he was piloting a large plane, with incredible composure and accuracy, steering the machine at the speed of almost 1000 km/h into a building at the height of only a few meters above the ground. No remains of the plane were found, and in addition, the damage found in the building after the accident was too small for the size of the plane. Although many eyewitnesses described the crash, the authorities were unable to show any video of the incoming plane silhouette, despite the fact that several dozen cameras were installed in the vicinity of the Pentagon. All but one of the victims' bodies were identified

⁵² M.A. Velez, "11 września: władza spisków", *Wirtualna Polska*, 7 IX 2006, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/11-wrzesnia-wladza-spiskow-6036234217149057a> [access: 11 IX 2006].

⁵³ M. Kucharczyk, "Wybuch, który miał zatrzeć ślady wielkiego spisku. Ta teoria o zamachach na WTC wciąż ma się dobrze", *gazeta.pl*, 11 IX 2020, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114881,26286855, kontrolowany-wybuch-ktory-mial-zatrzec-slady-ta-teoria-o-zamachach.html> [access: 12 IX 2021].

⁵⁴ Ibid.

by DNA analysis. It was unclear how the human remains were preserved since no significant fragments of the plane were found because they had “evaporated” due to high temperatures (information on the remains of the plane was included in the official version of the Commission report on September 11). These doubts arose due to the emergence of a theory that a missile hit the Pentagon. It was thus another piece of evidence of a neoconservative conspiracy to fabricate an excuse to invade Iraq.⁵⁵

Other conspiracy versions were based on the alleged prior knowledge of certain people about the September 11 attacks. This issue, concerning profitable financial operations carried out before the attack, was raised, among others, by Michael Moore’s *9/11 Fahrenheit*. In turn, the British BBC and the Reuters agency reported the collapse of the WTC 7 building more than 20 minutes before this event, which, according to supporters of conspiracy theories, was supposed to indicate prior knowledge about the attacks. On YouTube, you could find an excerpt of the BBC news in which the anchor reports the collapse of WTC 7, while in the background one could see a live panorama of Manhattan with the building still standing there. According to the BBC, it was a mistake of a reporter who had just arrived at the scene and the fault of misinformation from Reuters. The news agency released a statement that the information about the collapse of the 7 WTC building was reported by the local agency and passed on without verification. According to another conspiracy theory, Jews were allegedly warned about the attack earlier, because none of them died in the WTC, despite the fact that many of them worked there. This theory was supported by the fact that there was only one Israeli on the list of victims. Meanwhile, not every Jew is a citizen of Israel, and about 400 American Jews were killed in the attack on the WTC. In Muslim countries, however, the theory spread widely about the plot being prepared by Israel, as evidenced by the fact that on 11 September 2001 four thousand Jews did not come to work at the WTC because they had been warned by text message.⁵⁶

According to the testimony of Colin Powell, then secretary of state, part of the so-called war hawks around President Bush immediately wanted to use these events as a way to solve the problem with Iraq. In other words, 9/11 was to become a pretext for a war with Saddam Hussein. That is the crux of the 9/11 conspiracy theories. Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, brother of the President Jeb Bush co-founded in 1997 the Project for the New American Century - PNAC - an organization preparing the intellectual background of the future neoconservative administration. In the autumn of 2000, at the time of the election campaign, the authors of the project published a report entitled *Rebuilding America’s Defences*. It was a call to strengthen the US military domination in the world and for a kind of remilitarization after years

⁵⁵ P. Łepkowski, “11 września 2001 roku: Dzień, który zmienił świat”, *Rzeczpospolita*, 11 IX 2020 r., <https://www.rp.pl/Historia/309099993-11-wrzesnia-2001-roku-Dzien-ktory-zmienil-swiat.html> [access: 12 IX 2020].

⁵⁶ R. Nogacki, “World Trade Center – Czy Żydzi wiedzieli wcześniej?”, *Nasza Witryna*, 6 VI 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20130606091550/http://www.naszawitryna.pl/przewodnia_sila_19.html [access: 9 VI 2021].

of relaxation caused by the end of the Cold War. The authors expressed the opinion that without a new Pearl Harbor, such remilitarization would be a difficult and slow process. Without war, undisciplined Americans would not want to provide for a global empire. According to this logic, war is necessary, and in order to persuade the society to it, a “second” Pearl Harbor is required. The World Trade Center towers, America’s icons, were perfect for the “new” Pearl Harbor. The war in Iraq was supposed to be a milestone in the implementation of “Pax Americana” in the oil-bearing Persian Gulf.⁵⁷

The most incredible interpretations of the events of 9/11 have many supporters and dismiss some of the arguments of the more balanced conspiracy theoreticians. The respected politicians Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton - chairman and co-chairman of the 9/ 11 Commission did not believe in any conspiracy theories, but they were also unsatisfied with the attitude of the government. Two years after the Commission’s official report, they jointly wrote the book *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission*. Using moderate wording they wrote about the constant struggle with the Bush administration and about the constantly new obstacles that prevented the Commission from conducting an independent investigation. The Commission report condemned the lack of decisive action by the White House in response to the CIA information that had appeared long before the attacks that suspected people were planning to hijack passenger planes. “The system was blinking red” - this is the title of the chapter in the report on signs that the administration ignored, that a serious attack on the United States was looming. However, when the attacks were over, it was surprisingly quickly established who had done them, and for what purpose. Surprisingly efficiently and quickly, the scrap metal from the WTC wreckage was disposed. Straight from Manhattan, New York, it was shipped to Chinese steelworks. The American philosopher David Ray Griffin noted that it was the official version of the events of 9/11, promoted by the government, that bore the hallmarks of a conspiracy theory.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Both before and after 2001, terrorist attacks took place in the US and other parts of the world, but never on the scale of the 9/11 attacks. Its root causes lie in the spread of Islamic fanaticism, whose representatives usurp the right to present only themselves as “true believers” and call others “unbelievers” with whom they must fight. This was overlapped by the conviction, common in the Muslim world, that the USA was engaged on the side of Israel in the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict. On top of that, the attack and the sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1991 as well as Washington’s support

⁵⁷ M.A. Velez, “11 września: władza spisków”, *Wirtualna Polska*, 7 IX 2006 r., <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/11-wrzesnia-wladza-spiskow-6036234217149057a> [access: 11 IX 2006].

⁵⁸ Ibid.

for regimes in Muslim countries. Last but not least, facing the world socio-economic problems and the process of globalization, which Muslims are trying to counter, by exposing their religious distinctiveness and attachment to tradition. The United States, the richest and most economically powerful country in the world, is blamed by many communities, including Muslims, for the economic problems that have arisen in various regions of the globe. On the one hand, due to the expansion of American companies, and on the other, according to some, insufficient economic and technological aid for poor regions. Critics assume that the problem of poverty in the world is also an American problem in the sense that the United States, as a superpower, should feel even more responsible for the fate of the modern world, for example by providing aid in solving the aforementioned social and economic problems.⁵⁹ The attack on the WTC, a symbol of the economic power of the United States, was a kind of revenge for the lack of adequate US involvement in helping the poor regions of the world, primarily the Muslim one, and the attack on the Pentagon, a symbol of the US military power, was a revenge for military interventions in the Middle East.

The above comments should be followed by an explanation by Ayman az-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda ideologist and Osama bin Laden's deputy. In December 2001, in an Arabic-language newspaper issued in London, *Asharq al-Awsat (Middle East)*, he published a manifesto entitled "Fursan taht rayat al-Nabi" ("Knights under the Prophet's Banner"). He stated, inter alia, that in the 1990s the hopes that had arisen from the victorious jihad in Afghanistan were not fulfilled. Supporters of jihad then faced a complete defeat in the entire Muslim world, as they failed to mobilize masses of Muslims to jointly overthrow the rulers in Muslim countries, described as "near enemy". Only a radical change of strategy, a devastating blow to the United States, could bring success. The boldness and scale of this attack were to convince masses of undecided Muslims of the potent power of jihadist forces and the weakness of "great America", patron of "apostates" in the Middle East and North Africa. The worldwide media coverage of the attack on the US was to mobilize Muslims who would join al-Qaeda as a vanguard leading thousands of brothers in faith to a victorious jihad against both the "near" and "distant enemy", that is, the West.⁶⁰

The events on 11 September 2001 had a negative impact on the economy, primarily of the United States, but not only. As a result of the terrorist threat, for example, the number of tourists in the USA decreased. It was mainly the states that live off tourism, such as Florida, which - as estimated - only at the turn of 2001/2002 lost about 30 billion USD due to the decline in the number of tourists. Airlines and insurance companies also lost billions of dollars. The former owing to the reduced number of passengers, the latter due to the payment of compensation. There were numerous difficulties in international transport because of the tightening of security measures. Closer control

⁵⁹ However, it is rarely specified how this should be done. Financial aid from the US is most frequently expected. The lack of it in most cases has been the cause of anti-American riots.

⁶⁰ G. Kepel, *Fitna. Wojna w sercu islamu*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 11–12.

of international financial flows was exerted in order to identify and eliminate sources of terrorist organization financing. The 9/11 events made many countries aware that no one - even the most powerful state - can feel safe, and therefore close international cooperation is necessary in combating terrorism and in solving urgent problems of the modern world, the conflicts and tensions in the international arena.

September 11 attacks commenced a new period in the fight against international terrorism. It showed the previously unknown scope of threats posed by terrorist organizations, including the possibility of using weapons of mass destruction. The response to this type of terrorism had to be adjusted to the scale of the emerging danger. The events on 9/11 led to a breakthrough in American politics. The United States declared a war on terrorism. The first act was the attack on the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, i.e. the seat of the al-Qaeda ally. The US Operation Enduring Freedom complied with the United Nations Charter, which does not restrict the right to self-defence until the matter is taken over by the Security Council. The participation of other countries, including Poland, in this operation was an aid granted to the USA, as allowed by the UN Charter. In September 2002, a doctrine was adopted in the United States allowing for a preventive strike in the face of imminent threats of terrorists or possession of weapons of mass destruction by the so-called rogue states. The new doctrine was applied the following year against Iraq. However, the war on terror exposed major differences between Europe and the United States. It was not so much about the divergence in military potential and in the way of conducting warfare, but about a diverse perception of the role of international institutions and multinational forces, as well as different assessments of measures and scenarios of possible actions in the fight on terrorism.

The attack on the United States was so unexpected and shocking to both the Americans and the entire international community. Existing international security structures and organizations proved ineffective. The military force and the whole arsenal of the most advanced types of weapons were not able to ensure internal security. The United States and the world faced new threats. Many steps were taken to ensure security and eliminate international terrorism. The fight against it certainly became the main focus of the international community's activity, leading to a change in US foreign policy priorities, and intensifying the tendency towards unilateral preventive actions.

It should also be remembered that the war on terror brought enormous financial benefits to the US military-industrial complex. Already in September and October 2001, there was an increase in the share prices of such companies as Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon. Military equipment manufacturers also benefited unexpectedly, not only because the West took decisive action against countries, organizations and individuals suspected of terrorism, but also from the launch of aid packages for developing countries. Every major corporation benefited from President Bush's "stimulus" package to help revive the economy. Of the 100 billion USD spent

from this package in November 2001 alone, 75 percent was allocated to subsidies covering the taxes of enterprises, especially the largest corporations.⁶¹

The success of 9/11 backfired on Al-Qaeda. US forces in Afghanistan failed to eliminate the leaders of this organization, who escaped to Pakistan with the help of allied Afghans. Getting hold of al-Qaeda documents and videotapes in its safe houses made it possible to better understand the structure and dynamics of this organization, and to thwart the attack in Singapore in December 2001. US forces dispersed al-Qaeda leadership, liquidated training camps and greatly reduced the possibilities of mutual communication between its members and commanders and the headquarters providing logistic support to local operations. Osama bin Laden was not eliminated until 10 years later.

The attack of Islamic terrorists on the United States showed the true colours of the societies of Muslim countries. The collapse of the WTC towers was greeted with delight of millions of Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Oman, Yemen, Sudan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United Kingdom.⁶² The cheering residents on the streets of Arab cities became, in common perception, a symbol of undisguised hatred for the United States. These were shocking pictures for the Westerners, but they showed the impulsive and genuine attitude of a large part of Muslims towards America. The future has shown that Muslims who live in Europe also have a similar hatred for the whole of Western civilization. After 9/11 interest in Islam increased significantly. It was observed that many young people in Europe (and also in Poland) converted to Islam. More attention was paid to radical Islam, the ideology which gave rise to the existence and activity of extremist organizations in Muslim countries. Many of them, including al-Qaeda, had carried out bloody terrorist attacks before 2001, but it was the attack on New York and Washington that marked the turning point in the recent history of terrorism. Much of the attention of scientists and the media focused on the fundamentalist trend of Islam flooding the West with more or less reliable information. By the end of 2001 alone, about 800 books devoted to this issue had appeared in the English-language literature. The 2003 US attack on Iraq and the resurgence of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan reinforced these trends. NATO's intervention in both countries contributed to an increase in the terrorist threat in Europe, and its inhabitants became the target of Islamic extremists in Africa and Asia.

⁶¹ D. Whyte, "Interesy po staremu? Moralność wielkich korporacji i 'wojna z terroryzmem'", w: *11 września. Przyczyny i konsekwencje w opiniach intelektualistów*, P. Scraton (ed.), Warszawa 2003, pp. 193–194.

⁶² P.L. Williams, *Al-Kaida – bractwo...*, pp. 96–97.

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Abstract

The series of terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 in the USA, the largest in the history of the world, was carried out by 19 people. Among them were 15 Saudis, two UAE nationals, a Lebanese and an Egyptian. Three of the four formed the Hamburg cell, which was the backbone of the entire plot. It was led by the Egyptian Muhammad Atta el-Sayed. He flew Boeing 767 aircraft American Airlines Flight 11, which first struck the North Tower of the WTC. Marwan al-Shehhi was the pilot of Boeing 767 aircraft United Airlines Flight 175, which crashed into the South Tower of the WTC. Hani

Hanjour sat at the controls of the Boeing 757 aircraft American Airlines flight 77. It was the third machine to target the Pentagon. The pilot of the fourth plane - Boeing 757 aircraft United Airlines Flight 93 - Ziad Jarrah failed to reach his destination, possibly the Capitol, because the passengers decided to take over the control of the plane from the terrorists. The machine crashed in Pennsylvania. In the events of 9/11, a total of 2,996 people were killed, including 19 terrorists, and 6,291 were injured⁶³. Six Poles were among the fatalities. 343 firefighters died in the rescue operation.

The attacks caused enormous material losses. Particularly high costs were incurred by insurance and reinsurance companies, airlines and aircraft manufacturers, as well as the tourism industry. The huge losses related to the destruction of the New York City World Trade Center and the disruption of the financial system had to be covered by insurance companies involved in the operations on the American market.

The terrorist attack on the USA was the impetus for the largest reform of the American secret services since 1947. Washington made a decision regarding the need to create a system that would effectively counteract terrorist threats and effectively warn in the event of their occurrence. This was related to the strengthening of structures with operational and reconnaissance powers, increasing the scope of their tasks and improving their ability to coordinate. Most of the legal regulations were expressed in the document commonly known as the USA Patriot Act of 26 October 2001. The most critical, however, were the international repercussions. By the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon, al-Qaeda influenced world politics by prompting Washington to declare a “war on terror”. Within its framework, American forces, supporting the so-called Northern Alliance led to the collapse of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and then entered Iraq, which in the long run turned out to be one of the most spectacular and deadly strategic mistakes in the history of the military.

At the same time the September 11 attacks sparked many conspiracy theories. Their propagation in the media, in documentaries, as well as in articles, contributed to undermining trust in the American government. An organization called Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth which boasts 3.3 thousand architects and engineers from all over the United States, is still very active in researching the case of 7 WTC. Its mission is to establish the truth that the twin towers did not collapse due to the impact of terrorist-piloted planes, as well as the destruction of WTC 7 was not a result of the detachment of a fragment of the second plane. In the opinion of members of this organisation, the damage caused by the planes was far from sufficient to lead to such a catastrophe. They believe someone must have planted explosives.

Keywords: Al-Qaeda, terrorist attack, Hamburg cell, Pentagon, WTC.

⁶³ https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zamach_z_11_września_2001_roku [access: 7 VI 2021].