



## 9/11: reflections on political leadership

*Reflecting on 9/11: 10 years on*

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Hello. My name is Richard Heffernan and I am a Reader in Government in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the Open University. We can all remember, quite easily, where we were and what we were doing on the terrible day of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. On that day terrorists seized control of four commercial aircraft, turned them into bombs, and destroyed the World Trade Centre in New York, severely damaged the Pentagon building in Washington DC, and killed some 3000 people (mostly civilians). September 11<sup>th</sup>- or 9/11 as it is also known- has had a considerable impact in the past ten years- not only in the United States, but throughout the world. Its consequences can, in many respects, be seen to have been a pivotal event in helping shape the contemporary world in which we live.

Modern terrorism has been witnessed at work both before and after 9/11 in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, India, Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Israel and Indonesia. It is a transnational problem. Terrorism – whether it is the product of freestanding groups or of groups allied with particular states – is an expression of ‘asymmetrical warfare’ because it reflects war between states and non state actors with vastly different military capabilities. In 2007 the US defence budget was some US \$439,300,000 (which was larger than the military budgets of some 168 other nations combined) but the US was attacked on September 11<sup>th</sup> by 19 people organised by al Qaeda armed only with boxcutters. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon only cost something in the region of US \$450,000 to execute, but the cost of September 11<sup>th</sup>, both in human and in financial terms, has been immeasurable.

Every country can be affected by what goes on inside other states, particularly those we define as ‘failing’ or ‘rogue’ states, which may possess weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and can be seen to pose a threat to their neighbours, their region and, quite possibly, the wider world. Trans-border terrorist violence therefore constitutes a direct challenge to the authority of all states, but it particularly challenges the right of a ‘great power’ such as the United States, currently the dominant world power, to regulate the international use of violence. In the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup> the United States and its allies, foremost among them the United Kingdom, re-orientated their foreign and defence policies to counter the threat posed by state and non-state actors who could use weapons of mass destruction and other nonconventional means to attack them. This strategy was evidenced, in different forms, in the ‘war on terror’, the intervention in Afghanistan from October 2001 and in the war in Iraq from March 2003.

September 11<sup>th</sup> raised questions not only about the United States’ foreign policy but also about its assumed dominance as the leading international superpower. Ten years on while much may have changed much of the geopolitical landscape remains much the same: The ‘war on terror’, even if that phrase is no longer in use, continues to be waged both at home and abroad. The US may now have a different president in the form of Barack Obama, elected in 2008, but it fell to Obama to order the military action that led to the killing of the organiser of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, in Pakistan in May 2011..... This podcast is based on an interview I recorded in 2008 with the OU’s Simon Bromley, author of *American Power and the Prospects for International Order*, in which we discuss the consequences of September 11<sup>th</sup> and its particular impacts on the United States’ hegemony, its global leadership and its diplomatic and military strategy. The interview took place when George Bush was still in power and Osama Bin Laden was still at large.