



### **Introduction** - Conflict and Tension in the Gulf and Afghanistan, 1990-2009

A series of complex and diverse conflicts and tensions unsettled life in areas of the Middle East before, between and since 1990 and 2009, particularly the areas north of the Persian Gulf (including Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan). Wars in the region had left dangerous power vacuums. Furthermore, the rise of anti-west regimes, such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Taliban in Afghanistan, coupled with attacks by the militant Al-Qaeda group, deeply alarmed those in the west. Major events include the Gulf War 1990, the September 11th attack, the 'War on Terror', and the Iraq War of 2003.



### **September 11th Attacks (September 11th 2001)**

- The September 11th attacks were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks against the USA on the morning of September 11th, 2001.
- Four passenger airlines were hijacked by 19 Al-Qaeda militants.
- Two of the planes were crashed into the North and South towers of the World Trade Centre complex in Manhattan – causing them to collapse.
- A third plane was crashed into the Pentagon (the headquarters of US Defense) in Virginia, causing the collapse of the west wing.
- The fourth plane was flown towards Washington DC, but crashed in fields in Pennsylvania after passengers overpowered the hijackers.
- It is the single deadliest terrorist attack in history, with 2,996 people being killed and 6,000 others injured. 415 firefighters and police died.
- Al-Qaeda were immediately suspected. Despite initially denying involvement, bin Laden claimed responsibility for the attacks in 2004.





## KEY PEOPLE

### Osama bin Laden (1957-2011)

Osama bin Laden was a founder of the pan-Islamic military organisation al-Qaeda. Under his leadership, the Al-Qaeda group were responsible for the September 11th attacks in the United States, and many other mass-casualty attacks worldwide (including the suicide bombing of the US warship Cole off the port of Yemen on 12th October 2000). Bin Laden was born in Saudi Arabia to a wealthy and well-known family – his father was the founder of the construction company the Saudi bin Laden Group. In 1979, he joined Pakistani Mujahedeen forces fighting against the USSR in Afghanistan, helping to funnel money, arms, and fighters from the Arab world to aid the effort. He formed Al-Qaeda in 1988, and was banished from both Saudi Arabia (in 1992) and Sudan (in 1996). He then declared war on the USA from his new base in Afghanistan, initiating a spate of bombings and related attacks. He was placed on the FBI's 'Most Wanted' list after organising the 1998 US Embassy bombings. After the attacks of September 11th, 2001, bin Laden became a major global target. On 2nd May 2011, he was shot and killed inside a private residential compound in Abbottabad by US Navy Seals, during a covert operation under the orders of Barrack Obama.



### Mohammed Omar (c.1959-2013)

Mullah Mohammed Omar, widely known as Mullah Omar, was the leader of the Taliban, and Emir of Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. His refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden after the September 11th 2001 attacks prompted the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, which resulted in the removal of the Taliban from power. Details about Omar's life are sparse and inconsistent, but he is known to have fought with the Mujahideen against the USSR in the Afghan War (1978-92). He lost his right eye in an explosion during the conflict. Under his leadership in Afghanistan, strict Islamic laws were enforced, capital punishment was rife, and many sacred sites were destroyed. He is believed to have died in hiding in 2013.



### THE WAR ON AL-QAEDA

- The rise of Al-Qaeda and the role of the group/ Osama bin Laden in the September 11th attacks;
- Afghanistan the 'rogue state', the Taliban regime, and western/ Muslim attitudes to its policies;
- Bush and Blair's 'War on Terror' - the overthrow of the Taliban.

### Finding out:

What is known about the pilots involved in the attack? What other key events can be linked to these terrorists?