

LESSON H-UV-L3

# The 9/11 Commission Report

**Unit V: Post 9/11:** Challenges and Consequences

**Grade Levels:** 9–12

**Time:** 45–60 minutes



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## Objectives

- Examine the key findings of the 9/11 Commission Report.
- Compare the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission with the legislation that implemented many of them.

## Key Terms

- Millennium Plot
- Osama bin Laden

## Lesson Materials

- Study Guide: Key Findings of the 9/11 Commission Report
- Final 9/11 Commission Report (found at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/911/index.html>)
- Chart comparing the 9/11 Commission recommendations and the legislation that implemented the recommendations (found at <http://hsc-democrats.house.gov/SiteDocuments/20070727182653-51415.pdf>)

## Lesson Background

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, also known as the 9/11 Commission, was set up on November 27, 2002 “to prepare a full and complete account of the circumstances surrounding the September 11, 2001 attacks,” including preparedness for and the immediate response to the attacks. The commission was also mandated to provide recommendations designed to guard against future attacks. Chaired by former New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean, the commission consisted of five Democrats and five Republicans. The commission was created by Congressional legislation, with the bill signed into law by President George W. Bush.

## Lesson Plan

- Introduce the origins of the 9/11 Commission and its conclusions about the events leading to 9/11.
- Distribute the Study Guide: Key Findings of the 9/11 Commission Report. Have the students read the key findings and answer the critical thinking questions.
- Have the students discuss their responses to the questions and share comments on the 9/11 Commission Report. Discussion questions should focus on the following:
  - What weaknesses did the US have that were exploited by the terrorists on 9/11?
  - Is there any way to know if 9/11 could have been prevented?
- Conclude the lesson by asking students to write an essay or participate in a discussion with their peers about the following question: “Is the U.S. safer since enacting many of the 9/11 Commission Report recommendations?”

## Evidence of Understanding

### Formative Assessment

- Evaluate students’ examination and understanding of the key findings of the 9/11 Commission Report.
- Evaluate students’ responses to the critical thinking questions.

### Summative Assessment

Evaluate students’ essay or discussion of the question: “Is the U.S. safer since enacting many of the 9/11 Commission Report recommendations?”

## Additional Activities and Resources

Have students explore the PBS Frontline web site “Trail of A Terrorist” (found at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/trail/>) for information on the foiled Millennium Plot. Information links include the following areas:

1. Introduction
2. Inside Ressam’s Millennium Plot
3. Is Canada a Safe Haven for Terrorists?
4. Crossing Borders: How Terrorists Use Fake Passports.
5. Links and Readings

## Taking Action and Giving Service

Have students read the section of the 9/11 Commission Report titled “An Agenda of Opportunity” (page 377). Ask the class identify several potential projects, letters to the editor, or op-ed pieces based on the recommendations in the report for the education of young people across the globe. Have the students write to the authors of the 9/11 Commission Report (Governor Kean or Vice-Chair Lee Hamilton) and suggest ideas for young people to become more informed. (Note to Teacher: The exercise of “finding” the correct address will provide valuable insight into the process of reaching out to lawmakers.)

# Study Guide: Key Findings of the 9/11 Commission Report

By Jill McCracken

**Unit V:** Post 9/11: Challenges and Consequences

**Lesson:** H-UV-L3

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Period/Class \_\_\_\_\_

The U.S. 9/11 commission’s report is 576 pages in length. It outlines the intelligence that was gathered on Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, as well as U.S. responses to this intelligence. The conclusions in the report urge real changes on how American intelligence services, such as the F.B.I. and C.I.A., function and coordinate their missions. The full executive summary may be viewed at:

[http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report\\_Exec.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Exec.pdf).

The key findings include:

1. Development of al-Qaeda: Al-Qaeda was allowed to develop into a significant danger to the U.S., concluding that while the attacks “were a shock . . . they should not have come as a surprise as Islamist extremists had given plenty of warning that they meant to kill Americans indiscriminately and in large numbers.”
  - “The 9/11 attack was driven by Osama bin Laden” who “built over the course of a decade a dynamic and lethal organization” in al-Qaeda.
  - Events that preceded 9/11 that give indication that “Islamists were determined to kill Americans indiscriminately” included the
    - a. 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center;
    - b. foiled plot to blow up the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels and other New York landmarks;
    - c. 1993 Somali “Black Hawk Down” battle that killed 18 and wounded 73, were assisted by al Qaeda;
    - d. 1995 Ramzi Yousef plot to blow up dozens of U.S. airliners flying over the Pacific;
    - e. 1996 Riyadh, Saudi Arabia car bombing that killed 5 Americans;
    - f. 1996 truck bombing of Khobar Towers, Saudi Arabia that killed 19 U.S. servicemen and wounded hundreds of others (though this was carried out with Iranian backed Hezbollah terrorist group);
    - g. 1998 attacks on U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, killing 12 American and 224 others;
    - h. 1999 foiled attack on Jordanian hotels frequented by Americans;
    - i. 2000 foiled “Millennium” plot on the Los Angeles International Airport; and
    - j. 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole that killed 17 American sailors.
  - “What we can say with confidence is that none of the measures adopted by the U.S. government from 1998 to 2001 disturbed or even delayed the progress of the al-Qaeda plot.”

2. Missed opportunities: The report finds that the 9/11 plot might have been interrupted and deterred had the security services done their work more thoroughly. However, it accepts that “since the plotters were flexible and resourceful, we cannot know whether any single step or series of steps would have defeated them.” The report accuses “organizations and systems of that time” of:
  - Developing and planning to use the missile-equipped Predator aircraft to target bin Laden and his chief lieutenants. Those plans were on President Bush’s desk awaiting his signature on September 11, 2001.
  - Allowing two hijackers, Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaq Alhamzi, to enter and move about the U.S. without proper surveillance despite their known links to al-Qaeda.
  - “Not linking the arrest of Zacarias Moussaoui, described as interested in flight training for the purpose of using an airplane in a terrorist act, to the heightened indications of attack.”
  - Not discovering false statements on visa applications and not recognizing faked passports.
  - Not expanding no-fly lists to include names from terrorist watch lists and not searching airline passengers identified by computer-based screening.
  - Not hardening aircraft cockpit doors or taking other measures to prepare for the possibility of suicide hijackings.
  
3. Open to attack: While praising the response of members of the emergency services to the attacks, the report finds institutional weaknesses within the U.S. which both made it easier for extremists to attack and harder for the authorities to respond adequately.
  - During the abbreviated transition time from Clinton to the Bush administration, military options for dealing with bin Laden in Afghanistan remained unappealing. As summer 2001 reports that something “very, very big” was being planned, all indicators pointed overseas, where security was buffed up, but not domestically. The threat did not receive media attention comparable to the “millennium” alert.
  - “The hijackers had to beat only one layer of security - the security checkpoint process . . . Once on board, the hijackers were faced with aircraft personnel who were trained to be non-confrontational in the event of a hijacking.” The success rate was 19 for 19.
  - “The civilian and military defenders of the nation’s airspace . . . attempted and failed to improvise an effective homeland defense against an unprecedented challenge.” Existing protocols on 9/11 were ill-suited in every respect for an attack using hijacked jumbo jets.
  - “The chain of command did not function well. The president could not reach some senior officials. The secretary of defense did not enter the chain of command until the morning’s key events were over.”
  
4. Government and Policy: “Terrorism was not an overriding national security concern for the U.S. government under either the Clinton or pre-9/11 Bush administrations.”
  - America’s homeland defenders faced outward. NORAD itself occasionally...considered the danger of hijacked aircraft being guided to American targets from overseas.
  - “The most important failure was one of imagination. We do not believe leaders understood the gravity of the threat” to the American homeland. All previous attacks had occurred overseas.
  - “At no point before 9/11 was the Department of Defense fully engaged in the mission of countering al-Qaeda, even though it was perhaps the most dangerous foreign enemy threatening the United States.”

- “The FBI did not have the capability to link the collective knowledge of agents in the field to national priorities.”
  - “Congress gave little guidance to executive branch agencies on terrorism,” did not reform agencies to meet the threat and “did not attempt to resolve the many problems in national security and domestic agencies.”
  - “The terrorist danger from bin Laden and al-Qaeda was not a major topic for policy debate among the public, in the media, or in the Congress. Indeed, it barely came up during the 2000 presidential campaign.”
  - No single individual or organization was to blame, but both individuals and institutions had to take responsibility for failing to stop the attacks.
  - There was no operational link between al-Qaeda and ousted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and President Bush believed that “Iraq was not the immediate problem” following 9/11.
  - “Iraq’s long standing involvement in terrorism was cited as well as its interest in weapons of mass destruction.”
  - No Saudi nationals were flown out of the U.S. prior to the reopening of U.S. airspace on September 13, 2001.
5. Are we safer?: “Since 9/11, the U.S. and its allies have killed or captured a majority of al Qaeda’s leadership, toppled the Taliban, which gave al Qaeda sanctuary in Afghanistan, and severely damaged the organization.”
- “Al Qaeda remains an ideological movement, not a finite group of people that has transformed itself into a decentralized force.”
  - Because of offensive actions against al-Qaeda since 9/11, and defense actions to improve homeland security, we believe we are safer today. But we are not safer. Therefore, we make the following recommendations that we believe will make America safer and more secure.”
6. Key recommendations: The 9/11 Commission Report warns against complacency and makes detailed recommendations:
- To create a national counter-terrorism center “unifying strategic intelligence and operational planning against Islamist terrorists across the foreign and the domestic divide.”
  - To appoint a new Senate-confirmed national intelligence director to unify the intelligence community of more than a dozen agencies.
  - To create a “network-based information sharing system that transcends traditional governmental boundaries.”
  - To set up a specialized and integrated national security unit within the FBI; the report did not support creation of a new domestic intelligence agency.
  - To devote maximum effort of countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
  - To strengthen Congressional oversight.
  - To strengthen the F.B.I. and Homeland defenders.
  - To improve technologies associated with screening travelers and establish them as standard practices
  - To root out terrorist sanctuaries, actual and potential.
  - To develop global strategy of diplomacy and public relations to dismantle Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda terror network and defeat militant Islamic ideologies.

- To establish a better dialogue between the West and the Islamic world
7. Implementation of the 9/11 Commission Recommendations: Signed into law by President Bush on August 3, 2007, the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 codified into law many of the 9/11 Commission recommendations. A chart comparing the 9/11 Commission recommendations and the legislation can be examined at <http://hsc-democrats.house.gov/SiteDocuments/20070727182653-51415.pdf>.
  8. Department of Homeland Security: You can learn more at the Department of Homeland Security's Counterterrorism web site (found at <http://www.dhs.gov/files/counterterrorism.shtm>)

## Critical Thinking Questions

1. In your opinion, what were three key weaknesses cited in the 9/11 Commission Report that contributed to the success of the 9/11 terrorist attacks? Explain.
2. Give five examples on how we are safer and five examples of how we are not safer.
3. Of the recommendations that were implemented, which do you think has contributed the most to a safer homeland? Explain.
4. What remains to be done to improve the security of the U.S.?