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Caleb Clayton

Alison Ringhiser

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Post-9/11 Protection and Policies

By Caleb Clayton and Alison Ringhiser

Introduction

Americans have had over two decades to reflect back on how the September 11th attacks shook our nation to its core. The psychological damage done to the American public had a drastic effect on attitudes toward responding to the threat of international terrorists targeting the United States and the potential for internal threats within their own communities. Being members of Gen Z, many of our generation only know the events of 9/11 and its aftermath in retrospect. With this in mind, we examined policies enacted under the Bush administration and their significance in response to 9/11, how they affected American society throughout the 2000s, and how they affect our lives today.

Question 1: What is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)? How did the formation of the DHS and the passage of the Patriot Act reshape security and surveillance in the United States?

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created on November 25, 2002, becoming a federal executive department to oversee and operate agencies directed toward law enforcement and public safety. Among these agencies include Customs and Border Protection, the Transportation Security Agency, the US Secret Service, and the US Coast Guard. The DHS works closely with its agencies as well as the Department of Justice at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure the overall safekeeping of the American people. Its conception marks one of the most significant institutional restructuring efforts in the US government since the Cold War, as it was given a wide discretion of authority and an immense channel of agencies and organizations to operate through. One of the massive undertakings the DHS was charged with in its infancy was anti-terrorism. The concern of international terrorism and internal threats necessitated action, and the DHS utilized this to its advantage, amassing a network of employees, finances, and assets far greater than previously witnessed domestically.

The Patriot Act was passed soon after the 9/11 attacks, placing the United States under a state of emergency and granting the DHS, Department of Justice (DOJ), and other law enforcement institutions with the power to respond to ensure national security. The DHS acted in conjunction with the National Security Agency to conduct regular monitoring of the American public. While surveillance helped monitor both international and domestic terrorist threats, a lack of transparency about this monitoring left many Americans concerned about what exactly this monitoring meant for them. The NSA paired with other security and intelligence agencies to cycle through communications of all sorts: emails, telephone calls, internet browsing, and many other forms of metadata. Revelations of such actions would lead the Patriot Act to be scrutinized

throughout its duration, with some suggesting that it amended criminal procedure and infringed upon the civil liberties of American citizens.

Question 2: What is the Transportation Security Agency? How has airport security changed under the TSA?

The Transportation Security Agency (TSA) was founded with the passing of The Aviation and Transportation Security Act on November 19, 2001. Its formation saw the DHS reevaluate security for public transportation, particularly, airport security. Prior to 9/11, federal regulations for airport security were scarce and many airlines used privately contracted security organizations. The average airline passenger could arrive just moments before takeoff, pass through a metal detector, and board their flight. On-flight safety measures were similarly less severe, as many safety advisors and air marshals could not envision anything like the events that would transpire on September 11, 2001. The immediate fallout of 9/11 saw a public downturn in travel by airlines, long waits at safety checkpoints, and people reporting a more unpleasant travel experience. The mission to reform airline safety hard-launched under the TSA.

The TSA placed many new measures on airport security, first and foremost requiring security screenings for one hundred percent of baggage. Carry-on screenings, checked bag screenings, and pat-down screenings were implemented to prevent dangerous paraphernalia from entering an aircraft or threatening the lives of passengers. They began using millimeter wave advanced imaging technology to safely screen boarding passengers while scanning for hard to detect weapons and explosives. On-flight safety saw improvements from increased air marshal presence, reinforced cockpit security doors, and secure flight pre-screening passenger programs. Improvements and adaptations became necessary for these security measures with threats like the shoe bomber. In December of 2001, Richard Reid packed explosives inside of his shoes which were enclosed in his baggage, but he was apprehended before he could ignite the explosive. Reid is now serving three consecutive life sentences and 110 years for terrorist-related charges, and all pre-flight security screenings ask passengers to voluntarily remove their shoes for inspection or require checks via millimeter wave scanning. Efforts via soft and hard security, thousands of workers, and billions of dollars invested annually allow the TSA to continue to ensure passenger safety on flights.

Question 3: How do the 9/11 terrorist attacks affect life in America today?

The legacy 9/11 leaves in the modern American consciousness is largely two separate phenomena, the event itself, and its connection to the subsequent “war on terror” that spanned the following two decades. Its enduring emotional impact ensures that every American has felt its effect. No matter where you find yourself, you know somebody who knows somebody who has endured suffering, loss, and grief at the hands of the attacks themselves and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Advancements in technology, military intelligence, and surveillance meant a conflict rife with brutality. The war proved financially costly, with federal spending surpassing billions of dollars being invested. While the war proved impactful on a

world fast tracking toward global economic recession, it still cannot begin to eclipse the impact of the estimated 4.5 million lives lost throughout the conflicts.

The post-9/11 world trudged through a fearful path with uncertainty, and it came out a safer place. That being said, the price of safety comes at a cost. 9/11 brought Americans together in its immediate aftermath in a way that perhaps no event could ever have hoped to, but a protracted war and a return to domestic policy worries saw political rivalries soon return to their pre-tragedy state. America's pledge to snuff out terrorism and any foreign actors who promulgated its usage proved mostly effective in discouraging another 9/11-level terrorist event on US-territory, but an unintended consequence we have faced due to this is the "forever war" on terror. While the US finally returned troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan, many American citizens have been left unsatisfied with the results of the war on terror, and cannot help but feel like the two decades we have spent in the Middle East have not produced the solutions hoped for at the outset of the war effort.

Life in post-9/11 America was disorienting, but we forged the path ahead by coming together in the face of fear. Twenty-two years removed from 9/11, we are uncertain yet again. If 9/11 has taught us anything, it has taught us that tragedy can help us find our cultural pulse, and that doing so is the first step in coming together as a nation. It is time, yet again, that we find common culture, because 9/11 also taught us that we accomplish more when we look out for each other.

Parting Thoughts

Time has given us distance to reflect upon 9/11 and its impact on American culture, but it is important to remember it as more than just a landmark event in our history. It will not soon be forgotten by those who lived it. Gen Z has experienced its coming of age in the post-9/11 world, meaning we have heard heartfelt accounts of the terror felt that day by parents, family members, teachers, community leaders, public servants, and many others who have their own story to tell about the morning of September 11, 2001. Now Gen Z will begin playing a part in preserving its memory through these stories and our own understandings of this event and its impact upon our early lives. This disastrous morning will live on in our hearts and minds. May we all hope it can inspire unity and appreciation for our nation in the America of tomorrow.

For more information about the events of 9/11 and its lasting impact on American society, please read [Reflections on the 20th anniversary of 9/11](#) from our Critical Questions series.