A History of Terror Attacks

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Hijacked United Airlines Flight 175 crashes into the south tower, while the north tower burns, of the World Trade Center complex in New York City during the September 11, 2001, terror attacks. Photo from: Wikimedia

People who do acts of terror want to change the world. To do this, they create fear. They cause fear with violent acts. Today, many countries think terrorism is even more dangerous than enemy armies.

Not all people who carry out terror attacks want the same thing. Some want to change or overthrow a government. Others want a certain group to be free.

**Terror groups have many ideas**

In northern Spain, there is a group called ETA. It has been fighting for a homeland for the Basque people there.

The Palestinian people want to start their own country in the Middle East. To do this, some groups of Palestinians want to weaken or destroy the country of Israel.

Some people who carry out acts of terror are against other races and religions. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was started in the United States in the 1860s. They wanted to stop African-Americans from voting.
Sometimes the rulers of a country even kill their own people. This is another kind of terror. These rulers want to make people afraid to go against their power. Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union ruled using terror. Saddam Hussein of Iraq did too.

**Some people use terror to get what they want**

People who carry out terror often use bombs. They might carry bombs in cars or in packages. Some strap bombs to their bodies.

Some are suicide bombers. These people expect to die when they set off the explosives. Sometimes they release chemicals or other harmful substances.

People who use terror also kidnap or kill leaders in a country. Or they might hijack or take over boats or airplanes.

Sometimes they hold the passengers as hostages. They do not free the passengers until their demands are met.

**Airplanes made terror easier**

The word terrorism was first used in the French Revolution. It began in 1789. Terrorism described how the revolutionary leaders punished people who were against them.

Some people want to get rid of all governments. These people are called anarchists. They have performed acts of terror against government leaders. An anarchist killed U.S. President William McKinley in 1901. Anarchists have also killed some European leaders.

In the 1900s, more groups used terror than ever before. One reason is that deadly weapons were easier to get. Another reason is that airplane travel grew. It made it easier to do acts of terror.

**The United States is attacked at home**

In September 2001, a group called al-Qaeda attacked the United States. The group took over four airplanes. They crashed three of them into U.S. buildings. One was the World Trade Center in New York City. Another was the Pentagon, near Washington, D.C.

About 3,000 people were killed. Soon after, U.S. President George W. Bush declared a “war on terror.” It took just about 10 years, but U.S. forces found and killed al-Qaeda’s leader, Osama bin Laden, in 2011.