

LEGACIES

OF



AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR: VOLUME 1

edited by Ameem Lutfi and Kevin L. Schwartz

LEGACIES OF 9/11

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Oriental Institute, Czech Academy of Sciences
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Legacies of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror: Volume 1

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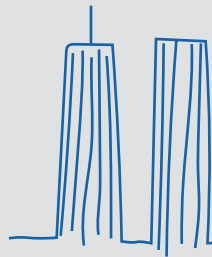
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Introduction

More than two decades since four airplanes were purposefully crashed at various points on the East Coast of the United States, the aftershocks from that fateful September morning in 2001 still reverberate across the world. The unprecedented attack on the foremost global power, orchestrated not by a rival state but by an ideologically motivated transnational network, led the United States and its coalition of the (un)willing into an amorphously defined Global War on Terror (GWOT). Under the Global War on Terror banner, the United States not only engaged in “forever wars” in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also disseminated an elaborate discursive, legal, and material infrastructure to root out those designated as enemies of humanity at large. The 2021 withdrawal of boots-on-the-ground in Afghanistan may have foreclosed the chapter on direct occupation, but the diffusive logics and structures of the GWOT continue

to intimately impact the lives of billions in the Muslim world and beyond, even absent the shock and awe of military campaigns. At a time when international headlines have moved on to depict the travails of a global pandemic and the reemergence of Great Power rivalry, this introductory volume of *Legacies of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror* highlights the subtle ways the war on terror continues to shape our future, coursing through our social relations, political language, and engagements with technology.

As postcolonial scholars have highlighted, long after the departure of European empires in the mid-20th century, the postcolonial world remained beholden to colonial-era structures and norms. The hierarchies of the international system, national, legal, and bureaucratic structures, and even local understandings of religion and community remained root-

ed in colonial governmentality. Despite nationalist and anti-colonialist fervor to the contrary, the imaginations and resources discarded at the border by departing colonial powers have left a lasting imprint. So it is true with the legacies of the Global War on Terror: its laws, cultural norms, political hierarchies, and material artifacts continue to reverberate on a global, national, and local level, despite claims that the era itself has ended.

Bullets, bombs, burn pits, and other toxins of war have mercilessly marred ecologies and bodies across Asia and Africa, causing birth defects and other health maladies. The suicide rate among U.S. active duty military personnel and veterans from the Global War on Terror is four times higher than combat deaths. Jobless veterans have turned to illicit gangs and private security companies, while third-country-nationals — once

tasked with securing U.S. military bases - now compete for precarious work elsewhere. The technological infrastructure built up and refined during decades of war, as seen now in the widespread use of facial recognition software at borders and airports and the proliferation of drones, has become so ingrained in our everyday lives as to become unremarkable. The now perfunctory usage of labeling one's enemy as a "terrorist" has led to the demonization of minorities, forced deportations and migrations, mass imprisonments, or worse.

The essays in this volume reflect on these understudied legacies. Their aim is not so much to provide a comprehensive account of the after-effects of the Global War on Terror as to serve as a brief record, adumbrating the contours of some lesser known phenomena in the service of enlivening future debate and research. Ranging from conceptual reflections on ideology, religion, politics, and surveillance to case studies of nations across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, the essays have been organized into seven general categories: *Muslim Networks*; *Counterinsurgency Strategies*; *Knowledge and Cultural Production*;

Capital Flows and Patronage Networks; *Rise of Authoritarianism*; *Semantics and the Language of Terror*, and *Islamism and Internationalism*. It is intended that these categories guide the reader in situating the variegated legacies of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror into more manageable areas of inquiry and exploration.

If the impacts of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror appear less discernible now because there are fewer sentries at the gate or forward operating bases, they are no less widespread and omnipresent. The ashen residue of the Global War on Terror is interwoven with the cultural and political fabric of our societies. It is our job to sift it out. We hope this modest introductory volume is a small step toward that endeavor.

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LEGACIES OF 9/11



**CAPITAL FLOWS AND
PATRONAGE NETWORKS**

Financial and political pathways in the Global War on Terror marketplace



How the “Forever Wars” Reshape Himalayan Villages

by Noah Coburn
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

On a hillside about an hour outside of Kathmandu sits a collection of well-built, freshly painted houses. The development is not in a particularly wealthy area, but houses men who have made their money by spending years — in some cases more than fifteen years — fighting America’s

wars in Afghanistan and beyond.

As America’s involvement in the so-called “Forever War” in Afghanistan comes to an end, almost exactly twenty years after the attacks of September 2001, it is remarkable the extent to

which the Global War on Terror has become truly global, extending far beyond the reach of the U.S. military presence to unpredictable places, like rural Nepal.

For instance, the U.S. Department of Labor tracks where reported injuries to Department of Defense contractors have occurred during the war. The [65,000 claims come from 137 different countries](#), with Iraq and Afghanistan at the top, and Portugal, Morocco, and Gabon at the bottom. The placement of Nepal on the list is a product of a long history of colonial labor that has been sped up in recent years by globalization.

In 2000, according to The Kathmandu Post, [55,000 Nepalis went abroad looking for work](#). By 2021 the number skyrocketed to three million. The legacy of British recruitment of so-called Nepali Gurkhas into the British military, begun in 1815, and the resulting association of Nepalis with martial prowess, meant that tens of thousands of these Nepalis have become a part of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere. They work as guards protecting fuel convoys and dignitaries, but also do much of the other labor of war: cooking food for the troops, building bases.

Since publishing my book [Under Contract: The Invisible Workers of America’s](#)

[*Global Wars*](#), which focused heavily on the plight of Nepali security contractors in Afghanistan, I have continued to track many of the workers in the book who returned to the war-torn country. During the course of my research, I spoke with contractors who had been imprisoned, kidnapped, stranded without passports, and subjected to an array of greater and lesser abuses. In recent years, the situation has only worsened. With the drawdown of U.S. troops, contractors find themselves more likely to be abused by negligent bosses and taken advantage of by brokers.

As the involvement of the U.S. war in Afghanistan ends, many of these Nepalis have begun to look for work elsewhere. Listening to them discuss job opportunities is to map out the future of global conflicts: some are looking for work in ongoing conflict zones in Iraq and Yemen, others are looking to protect business assets, like oil rigs off the west coast of Africa, while still others are considering serving as bodyguards for billionaires in Russia and China.

Two weeks after the Taliban retook Kabul, [according to The New York Times](#), several hundred Nepalis remained in the country. Many went looking for work in Afghanistan, but had not found it. Now they are trying to navigate their way out

of the Taliban controlled country.

Those that do manage to escape Afghanistan are unlikely to head immediately home. Most Nepalis who came to Afghanistan arrived in debt, owing money for plane tickets and for the bribes to secure contracts and visas. So those still in Afghanistan are likely to be looking for the next war, whether it is in Syria, Yemen or someplace else. And thus, America's forever wars spread farther out into far flung corners of the globe.

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SOURCE: Karolina Kluczevska



How 9/11 Reshaped the International Development Scene in Central Asia

by Karolina Kluczevska
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

The events of 9/11 and the subsequent Global War on Terror have profoundly transformed the landscape of international development in post-Soviet Cent-

ral Asia. The launching of the military campaign, Operation Enduring Freedom, in neighboring Afghanistan in October 2001 resulted in the region's strate-

gic importance for the U.S. and its allies. Until then, Central Asian states, which gained independence only a decade before following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, were “classical” recipients of humanitarian and democratization aid. In 2001, they suddenly became indispensable partners and service providers in fighting international terrorism.

The U.S., NATO, and allied countries used military bases in Uzbekistan (Karsshi-Khanabad and Termez) and Kyrgyzstan (Manas Transit Center), and stipulated transit and refueling arrangements with Tajikistan (Dushanbe Airport), Turkmenistan (Ashgabat TU) and Kazakhstan.¹ Due to an increasing risk of moving supplies to Afghanistan through Pakistan, an alternative route, the [Northern Distribution Network](#), was established in 2009 to fulfil this function – with its track, rail, and air routes crossing the Central Asian region. Central Asian countries have thus provided the U.S. and NATO with space to transfer troops, fuel, and military equipment, in this way becoming a logistical hotspot in the Global War on Terror.

Such a repositioning of Central Asia in international politics was accompanied by a boom of U.S. military aid allocated to this part of the world.² Provision of technical equipment and extensive training, which aimed at strengthening local defense institutions, resulted in raising the importance of local security agencies, the military and law enforcement bodies in the region. Such height-

ened international attention has also led to a sudden increase in international aid for non-military purposes. For example, while in 2000 the net official development assistance to Tajikistan amounted to 124 million USD, in 2004 it reached 249 million USD – a rise by 100% within only four years.³

This influx of funding was accompanied by a profound thematic shift. The meaning of development was redefined, along with the ways to achieve it. While in the 1990s international donors believed that development in Central Asia could be fostered by promoting democratic governance and a free market, in the 2000s the concept of development became inextricably linked with the broadly conceived notion of physical security, but not human security. Societal prosperity and well-being became secondary to the state's protective and coercive capabilities. Consequently, the early 2000s were characterized by a boom of donor-funded large, regional projects aiming at fostering border control, anti-trafficking, and counter-narcotics. The U.S. was not the only actor involved in this process. Here it is worth mentioning the two European Union (EU) flagship, multi-million programs: Border Management Programme in Central Asia ([BOMCA](#)), which in 2021 entered its tenth phase, and Central Asia Drug Action Programme ([CADAP](#)), which finished in 2019 after seven phases.

In the context of the Global War on Terror, security became an ubiquitous term, a buzzword which could be found in most

political and social contexts, even seemingly unrelated development projects in Central Asia. Importantly, it was a two-way process: such a type of development assistance was promoted by donors in a top-down way, but also largely supported from the ground up. This is because designing development projects by stressing large-scale security threats increased the chances to obtain funding from international donors, whether the recipient were international organizations operating locally, local civil society organizations, or government bodies.

While security-related aid strengthened homeland defense capacities, it had severe side effects on people's safety. The upgrading of border security has negatively influenced, for example, neighboring, cross-border communities living in the Ferghana Valley, which is divided between southern Kyrgyzstan, northern Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan. Another social group who experienced tangible threats are injection drug users. Previously, heroin addiction in the region has been predominantly tackled through health-related development projects aimed at minimizing harm related to the risk of contracting HIV through sharing needles and syringes among drug users. The Global War on Terror, however, has linked drug use to organized crime and terrorism. As a result of tightening anti-narcotics laws in the region, drug users found themselves on the radar of law enforcement agencies and risked persecution for possessing even milligrams of heroin.⁴

The Global War on Terror has had long-term effects on development aid in Central Asia. On the one hand, it has strengthened the position of Central Asian countries in the international arena. It has also brought more attention and funding to the region. On the other hand, security-focused international development often reflected the imaginations of donors rather than responding to the needs on the ground. Moreover, it exacerbated the everyday, existential insecurity of many social groups.

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¹ See chapter three in Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Power Contest in Central Asia*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

² Joshua Kucera, 2012. "U.S. Military Aid to Central Asia: Who benefits?" *Open Society Foundations, Occasional Paper Series* no. 7 (2012), pp. 13-21.

³ Calculated based on the World Bank's data: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD>

⁴ Karolina Kluczevska and Oleg Korneev, "Policy Translation in Global Health Governance: Localising Harm Reduction in Tajikistan," *Global Social Policy* 21.1 (2021), pp. 85-6.



The Sorcerer's Apprentice

U.S. Security Assistance after 9/11

by Daniel R. Mahanty
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

*The spirits that I summoned
I now cannot rid myself of again.*

- Goethe's "Der Zauberlehrling," 1797

Few images better reflect America's response to the attacks of 9/11 as well as Goethe's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Charged with mopping the floor, and eager to diminish the pains of his own labor, the title character conjures a solution in the form of a magical broom that makes the original task a much bigger problem. Almost immediately after 9/11, the United States began to "internationalize" the War on Terror, mobilizing a collective effort among nations to counter global terrorism and exporting its brand of solution far and wide. Among the most problematic, and the most difficult to counteract, was the rapid proliferation and growth of international security assistance and cooperation programs, which, like the sorcerer's magical mop, has created more problems than it has solved.

Since 9/11, the American budget for providing support to foreign security partners has nearly [doubled](#) — twice — since 2002 (from \$5 billion in 2001 to \$10 in 2003 and then to nearly \$20 billion in 2021). The number of countries receiving "some form of U.S. security assistance or support to contend with internal security problems has proliferated to the

point that many more countries receive assistance than do not. Unlike some of the more infamous programs and activities (think drone strikes, renditions, and torture), security assistance does little to stimulate popular or political resistance. Cloaked in the benign language of “international cooperation” and “local ownership,” and entrenched within a [massive bureaucracy](#) of programs, which includes a sprawling network of government offices and contractors, security assistance has a strong, bipartisan basis of support. And while intense scrutiny has — rightfully — followed the use of more direct forms of counterterrorism, security assistance has spread its blight in other, less obvious, ways that we would be well served not to forget if we wish to truly move past America’s endless wars.

First, American counterterrorism assistance to autocratic regimes has grown over the same period that the leaders of those regimes have increasingly cracked down on civil society and human rights defenders. Under the new legitimacy bestowed by a spirit of collective action to counter al-Qaeda, and a new language that could be used to obscure intent, [140 governments](#) around the world passed counterterrorism legislation between 2001 and 2018. [Much of it was intended to stifle political dissent](#) and restrict the conduct of human rights groups, suppressing the [one meaningful form of oversight](#) of security institutions globally. Rather than support civil society in the face of restrictions to enhance the legitimacy of accountable democracy,

the United States shored up security support to countries like Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Egypt, and the Philippines where [corrupt](#), rent-seeking elites in government have long used security institutions and state-sponsored violence to maintain control.

Second, analysts and academics — not to mention practitioners — had long ago identified the problem that, [like any form of aid](#), many if not most forms of security assistance [will always fail](#) to achieve the objective of enhancing partner capacity (or improving bilateral cooperation toward shared goals) in the absence of certain prerequisite conditions. But as a political strategy for reducing the cost in American lives by removing the need for “boots on the ground,” America’s political leaders doubled down on building partner capacity through security assistance in many places, like Iraq, where they simply [needed it to work](#), swearing to [outcomes that were simply not possible to achieve](#). Not only did the overstatement of effectiveness lead to massive amounts of waste and corruption, it also introduced significant moral hazard in places like [Mali](#) and [Afghanistan](#), where the local public, told to trust in the magical effects of security assistance, have too often paid the price for American perfidy with their lives as local security forces gave way to the so-called Islamic State or the Taliban. Meanwhile, in other places, like Nigeria, where the West made an early bet on security assistance and cooperation — rather than on good governance and human rights

— the challenge to national government from armed groups has only metastasized (to use President Biden’s [own language](#)) and grown.

The expansion of the security assistance bureaucracy from the War on Terror will do as all bureaucracies do: it will [shape-shift and find a new cause in this new era](#). With overwhelming bipartisan support, the Senate in June 2021 [proposed](#) adding an additional \$645 million to the foreign military financing account with the intent of supporting local partners in the Asia Pacific region as a means of competing with China. Meanwhile, secretive counterterrorism, security assistance, and irregular warfare programs continue to expand. The [“127e” and 1202 programs](#), for example, both received extensions and increases of \$5 million in funding in the [last Defense bill](#), along with a vague and troubling new authority to expend funds “for clandestine activities that support operational preparation of the environment.”

And so even as the United States ends the War on Terror in some ways, its poisonous tendrils will continue to spread and grow in others. Once summoned, magical solutions from Washington’s spell book can be difficult to put back.

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U.S. Pressure for Democratization and Political Opportunity Structures in Egypt since 9/11

by Clément Steuer
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

Following the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration launched the U.S. and its allies into a “Global War on Terror,” designed and inspired by a neo-conservative worldview. The purpose of the war was not only to destroy regimes – like the Taliban in Afghanistan, which offered a haven to terrorist networks – but to also bring democracy to the “Greater Middle East.” “The War on Terror” followed from the idea that the lack of freedom in this global region was the main root-cause for the growth of terrorist organizations. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the centerpiece of this project, which was met with strong opposition across the globe, especially in the Middle East.

Consequently, American interests regarding the political structure of Middle Eastern countries were contradictory: on the one hand, U.S.-backed autocrats were repressing movements contesting U.S. policies in the region (e.g. the military occupation of an Arab state and U.S. support to the Israeli government); on the other hand, the U.S. wanted these autocrats to adopt democratic reforms in order to legitimize such policies, which were supposed to ultimately bring democracy to the Middle East. As one of the main U.S. allies in the region – and as the second beneficiary of their foreign aid, after Israel – the Bush administration pressured Mubarak’s regime in

Egypt to concede some freedom to its opposition. Opposition actors, in turn, seized the moment and asked for more freedom.

In 2004, Egyptian activists from across the political spectrum gathered in an organization called *Kefaya* (“It’s enough!”).¹ Assuming that international media coverage would prevent repression, *Kefaya* led protests against a future candidacy of Hosni Mubarak for the presidency, as well as the prospect of a hereditary succession favoring his son, Gamal Mubarak. In response, Mubarak announced constitutional reforms that allowed, for the first time in the history of the Egyptian Republic, a plurality of candidates during the 2005 presidential election. Mubarak won the election by a landslide, and his party – the National Democratic Party – secured more than three quarters of the seats at the National Assembly. Nevertheless, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB) succeeded in having eighty-eight of its members – running as “independent” candidates – elected, which constituted the major block of opposition within Parliament.

By 2007, new constitutional amendments reversed all of the past decade’s democratic gains with the suppression of judicial supervision over parliamentary elections, which had been imposed

by the Constitutional Court in 2000. The Bush administration allowed this to happen, in part, because the move did not draw international media attention, and partly out of concern for a potential electoral victory of the Muslim Brotherhood. New parliamentary elections were held in 2010, but this time the MB, along with other components of the opposition, were forcefully excluded from the Assembly. This strengthening of authoritarianism [did not trigger any strong reaction from the West](#).

A few weeks later, however, on Jan 25, 2011, large demonstrations erupted in the heart of Cairo and several Egyptian cities. Demonstrators targeted the regime and its habit of police brutality. Eighteen days of demonstrations and violent confrontations followed with unprecedented international media coverage. The Obama administration could not afford to be seen as an accomplice in a bloody repression of democratic protesters. In turn, the administration did little to support Mubarak and welcomed his overthrow by the Egyptian army on February 11. Moreover, the U.S. supported the military road-map toward a democratic transition, in line with [Obama’s 2008 speech at Cairo University](#), which affirmed his administration’s support of democracy and human rights. The Obama administration differed with its

predecessor by refusing to go to war to impose regime change, but not in the commitment to democratization.

With Mubarak removed from power, the Muslim Brotherhood first gained power by parliamentary (January 2012) and then presidential elections (June 2012), with their victorious party candidate Mohamed Morsi. The latter, however, neglected to include non-Islamic political parties in his new administration and quickly faced a strong opposition in the streets, led by democratic and secular movements, but overtly supported by proponents of the old regime. The military overthrew Morsi on July 3, 2013, following several days of massive demonstrations. The Obama administration frowned upon the event, but did not dare to openly condemn it, or even to label it a coup (which would have legally compelled the U.S. administration to suspend its aid to Egypt). The Obama administration faced similar contradictions as their predecessor by attempting to apply pressure on Egypt regarding human rights, without taking the risk to sever their relation with the Egyptian military.²

At first, the new Egyptian regime tried to present some democratic appearances, but at the same time sought alternative foreign benefactors that were less

concerned with championing democracy. [Funding came from Gulf states \(like Saudi Arabia and UAE\)](#), France and Russia provided weapons, and [commercial relations developed with China](#). This quickly led to a loss of leverage for the U.S. administration. The Egyptian regime swiftly restored authoritarian practices with the bloody repression of an Islamic sit-in in August 2013, the passing of a law forbidding demonstrations in November 2013, and a crackdown on Islamist grassroots organizations, followed by similar restrictions on leftist and liberal groups.

In the final analysis, the Mubarak administration was able to regain the upper hand after the 2004-05 Kefaya movement by playing on U.S. foreign policy contradictions in the region, but without any change in its international alliances. Mubarak fell victim to the U.S. return to democratic concerns in 2011, under the pressure of mass demonstrations and international media coverage. The new military regime of 2013 retained the lessons from this experience by prioritizing the diversification of its international support to become less vulnerable to unilateral U.S. pressure toward democratization. Egypt soon after returned to authoritarian practices by silencing domestic opposition. By 2017, the Trump administration ceased

publicly advocating a democratic agenda in the region. But the Biden administration may change course yet again and reignite a democratization agenda, especially at a time when Egypt is looking for international support to strengthen its regional position against Ethiopia (regarding the [Renaissance dam dispute](#)). If so, political opportunity structures in Egypt during the post-9/11 era may come to be influenced by U.S. precepts once again.

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¹ See, Manar Shorbagy, "[Understanding Kefaya: The New Politics in Egypt](#)," *The Arab Studies Quarterly* 29.1 (2007), pp. 39-60.

² See, David D. Kirkpatrick, *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East*, Viking, 2018, pp. 241-2. During the second half of 2013, the U.S. government took some moderate measures in order to protest against human rights violations: it canceled joint military exercises with the Egyptian army and froze the delivery of certain military supplies and cash assistance. Saudi Arabia and UAE stepped in and funded an Egyptian-Russian arms deal. See, Yasmine Farouk, "More than Money: Post-Mubarak Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf," *GRC Paper*, Gulf Research Center, April 2014.

LEGACIES OF 9/11



RISE OF AUTHORITARIANISM

Can the Global War on Terror help explain the return of authoritarian strongmen?



Post-Soviet Central Asia after 9/11:

The Global War on Terror, Authoritarian Consolidation, and Religious Revival

by Tim Epkenhans
SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

In 1991, the Soviet Republics of Central Asia — including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan — suddenly and unexpectedly gained independence from the Soviet Union. The international community, however, paid little attention to

the enormous economic, social, and political challenges of this transition. Yet there were some peculiar differences.

Kazakhstan was arguably the country most attentively courted than the other republics due to its nuclear arsenal

(later transferred to Russia in 1995) and its vast natural resources. The relatively soft-spoken Kyrgyz President, Askar Akayev, attracted modest international development aid by presenting Kyrgyzstan as the “Switzerland of Central Asia” — perhaps more for its impressive mountain ranges than for its democratic statehood — while deliberately ignoring the overall disintegration of state structures. Turkmenistan was globally noticed, if at all, for its megalomaniacal president, Turkmenbashi, and his bizarre cult of personality, which included renaming months after family members and erecting golden statues of himself turning to the sun. International mockery, however, obscured the cruel plight and ordeal of the impoverished population. Many observers hoped that Uzbekistan — with a population of 30 million and thus the most populous country in the region — would become a driving force of regional integration and economic reform. Islom Karimov’s firm rule, however, bitterly thwarted these aspirations. Authoritarian inertia and mismanagement paralyzed industrial productivity and regional integration. Finally, Tajikistan, the smallest and least developed republics of the Soviet Union, was least prepared for independence and plunged into a bloody civil war in 1997.

When the Taliban conquered Kabul, international pressure eventually resulted in a peace agreement. Thus, Central Asia languished in a rather peripheral position, in terms of consistent political engagement, development, and cooperation during the decade after independence. This all dramatically changed with 9/11 and the commencement of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Suddenly, international journalists and aid experts flooded the tranquil capitals of Central Asian republics, new embassies were opened, and military delegations explored derelict Soviet airfields. Predominantly “Western” states and multilateral actors, such as the EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), or the UN drafted strategy papers that delineated the economic, social, and political future of the Central Asian post-Soviet republics.

Elections, democratic reform, transparency, and the rule of law became the buzzwords in the immediate post-9/11 years. With democratic transition and reform, the international community expected stability and liberal peace to diffuse transregionally. However, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the “return” of an authoritarian Russia under Vladimir Putin, and increasing Chinese economic engagement in Central Asia

fundamentally changed the prospects for this strategy. Both Russia and China dealt with Central Asian political elites and their insistence on sovereignty, stability, and (regime) security in their own ways. After the “Color Revolutions” in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), Central Asia became increasingly hostile toward Western discourses of political, social, and economic transformation.

By then, Central Asian autocrats and their entourage exploited the ambiguities of the “Western” approach to Central Asia. While being bogged down militarily in Afghanistan and overstrained by the challenges of violent transition in the Middle East, Western states gradually disengaged from Central Asia. They silently tolerated the “virtual politics” by Central Asian autocrats faking democratic processes and institutions.¹ Western diplomats and policy makers viewed Central Asia increasingly through the narrow lens of (regime) security and stability in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the Central Asian states expanded their capacity in governance and security by tapping into international security assistance.

The U.S. and various European governments provided military equipment and training, while the Shanghai Coopera-

tion Organization (SCO), which is dominated by China and Russia, organized large scale military exercises. The result was that Central Asian states saw their operational capacity and military readiness improved, thereby establishing greater regime security. The SCO reaffirmed their mission to combat any form of “[terrorism, separatism, and extremism](#),” as set forth in the organization’s charter, further reinforcing the alienation between the Central Asian autocrats and the Western international community. With regards to regime security, Islam and Islamist movements were already identified, by the 1990s, as the most imminent menace to Central Asian political elites. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relevance of religion in Central Asian societies, particularly with Islam, became a highly controversial topic.

While Central Asian regimes insisted on a secular statehood and implemented a range of hostile religious policies, the public observance of Islamic religious practices, as well as an Islamic habitus, significantly increased among Central Asian republics (albeit with some differences). Although surveys on religious issues in Central Asia often suffer from methodological inconsistencies,² the available information demonstrates that an increasing percentage of the Central

Asian population signifies Islam as an essential or “authentic” part of Central Asian and national identity. In the first decade after independence, a certain diversity within the religious field and a search for “normativity” of religious practice and thought characterized this “religious revival.” Conversely, 9/11 and the subsequent Global War on Terror facilitated an ambivalent process of co-option and alienation in the Central Asian religious sphere.

Initially, Central Asian governments insisted on secular identity politics based on ethnicity, language, and (pre-Islamic) history. They simultaneously securitized “Islam” and framed any form of political or social dissent in their republics as manifestations of “radical Islam,” “Islamist terrorism,” and so forth. Over the past decade, however, authoritarian regimes co-opted previously independent religious authorities and integrated a highly sanitized idea of a national Islam into their official identity politics (i.e., as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, or Turkmen).

The global trajectories of authoritarian, religious governance after 9/11 inspired this strategic change: notably, by the paragon of Turkey, where the initially post-Islamist AKP³ government empowered the national Directorate of Re-

ligious Affairs, via the Diyanet, with full control over the religious field and propagated a highly statist idea of Turkish Islam. Central Asian regimes carefully studied the Turkish model and eventually implemented policies that, according to James C. Scott, have made Islam “legible.”⁴ Turkey, vice versa, offered assistance in the implementation of this interventionist religious policy. Eventually, this policy restricted religious pluralism and imposed highly sanitized concepts of an exclusive “traditional” Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Uzbek, or Turkmen brand of Islam in each of the Central Asian republics. Ultimately, these national brands of Islam have reduced the complexities in the religious sphere with the ulterior intention to depoliticize Islam and fit it into the legitimization narrative of the authoritarian regimes. This policy of co-option and depoliticization, however, does not exclude a paradoxical outcome: as Islam often defies these processes of depoliticization. Post-9/11 Central Asia may offer a scenario for this development.

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¹ Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*, Yale University Press, 2005.

² See David W. Montgomery and John Heather-shaw, “Islam, Secularism and Danger: A Reconsideration of the Link between Religiosity, Radicalism and Rebellion in Central Asia,” *Religion, State and Society* 44.3 (2016), pp. 192-218.

³ Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or Justice and Development Party

⁴ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press, 1998.

LEGACIES OF 9/11



**COUNTERINSURGENCY
STRATEGIES**

Technology, surveillance, and techniques of counterinsurgency

SOURCE: Sommersby via Getty Images



The Evolution of Armed Drones for Targeted Killing after 9/11

by Alessandro Arduino
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

From Yemen to Libya, Syria, and Nagorno-Karabakh, armed drones delivering precision munitions or commercial drones re-engineered into flying bombs by insurgents are changing the security landscape. The Middle East conflicts have become opening acts for prolonged unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) warfare and remote-controlled terrorism.

Following 9/11, the United States opened the proverbial Pandora's Box by deploying armed UAVs for targeted killings. Since then, the evolution and diffusion of armed drones with increased capabilities and lower operational costs have ushered in a new type of deterrence by turning conventional military doctrine on its head.

Technically, drones have been used on the battlefield since at least 1991. Their early usage was, however, limited to reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. Following the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the role of drones shifted from scouting to targeted killing. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama advocated using drones as an efficient and precise tool in hunting al-Qaeda operatives.¹

In the years following 9/11, the U.S. established a near-monopoly on medium-altitude, long-endurance (MALE) drones — the costly, but highly-efficient, Predators and Reapers, which cost US\$4 and US\$16 million per unit, respectively. That monopoly, however, has ended. The past decade has seen several new producers enter the market.

Turkey and China, in particular, have emerged as key producers. While Chinese drones are reaching customers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the Turkish TB2s, aircraft that were battle-tested during the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, are making inroads from Poland to Ukraine. In sharp contrast to the U.S., both China and Turkey have been less concerned about safeguarding their proprietary technology and thus placed little regu-



latory barriers on foreign sales. As their market share shrinks with the entry of new players, we are likely to see the U.S. also [reassess its drone export policy](#).²

This increased market competition, as one would expect, has already greatly reduced both the economic and political barriers to drone purchases. The drone is no longer an exclusive province of national armed forces, for instance. Moreover, the ability to weaponize inexpensive commercial drones is gaining momentum. In fact, the new remote-controlled warfare cycle that arose out of 9/11 has shifted from military-grade drones in favor of relatively cheap, off-the-shelf hobby toys that can be weaponized for pennies on the dollar. Instead of a few multi-million-dollar military-grade UAVs, the new battlespace is being progressively saturated with cost-efficient and widely-available ones.

This development has put drones within the reach of a number of non-state militias. The so-called Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist groups, long a target of U.S. drones, have now gone from being the hunted to the hunter. They are refitting commercial drones into flying bombs capable of carrying out missions ranging from advanced scouting and surveillance to artillery spotting or “suicide” bombs. The use of professional photography drones by IS to capture video of its fighters in action for propa-

ganda purposes is a case in point.

The upper hand once held by national armies has been reversed in favor of insurgents.³ An example is Saudi Arabia’s ineffective efforts to combat armed drone incursions in Yemen and within its borders — witness the attacks on the Abqaiq oil facilities, which Riyadh was powerless to stop. While the Saudis have the American Patriot air defense system, using a missile worth US\$3.4 million to bring down a drone worth a few hundred dollars will be a costly and unproductive endeavor — assuming the American system is capable of doing so to begin with.

The French philosopher Grégoire Chamayou suggests that remote killing without the possibility of being killed suspends the rapport of reciprocity in armed conflict. He noted that “the seduction of the drone has been the promised inevitable invulnerability.”⁴ The sense of invulnerability enabled by drones, Chamayou argues, also lowers the threshold for conflict while increasing the propensity to aggression, and redefining the ethical and political norms of war in the process.

One very important norm redefined in the very early days of U.S. drone military operations was a willingness to accept collateral damage, thus normalizing the idea of civilian casualties.⁵ The psychological effect of drones has also not

been studied closely: the constant whine of drone engines overhead and the terror of not knowing where their payloads will land has extracted a terrible cost. As we enter the age of AI-controlled drone swarms raining death from above, the post 9/11 normalization of collateral damage and silencing of traumatized populations is set to taint our future.

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¹ [“In Search of Answers: U.S. Military Investigations and Civilian Harm,”](#) Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) and Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute, 2020.

² We are already seeing the signs of this with the U.S. designing in 2019 a new policy that facilitates all U.S.-origin unmanned aerial systems transfers, whether under the authority of the United States Munitions List (USML) or the Commerce Control List (CCL).

³ Alessandro Arduino, [“Chinese Commercial Drones Bring New Uncertainties to Old Conflicts,”](#) *The Arab Weekly*, July 22, 2018. *The Arab Weekly*.

⁴ Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*, The New Press, 2015.

⁵ Spencer Ackerman, [“41 men targeted but 1,147 People Killed: US Drone Strikes — The Facts on the Ground,”](#) *The Guardian*, November 24, 2014.

SOURCE: Yuri Arcurs via Getty Images



Surveillance Spotlight on Arab and Muslim Americans

An Enduring Legacy of the Global War on Terror

by Louise Cainkar
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

With the 20th anniversary of the September 11th attacks upon us, it is important to recall that millions of Arab and Muslim Americans, who had nothing to do with those attacks, suffered enormous civil rights violations, physical attacks, job losses, verbal smears, and more, because of them — or rather

because of how they were positioned by government and media in relation to them. I titled my book on their post-9/11 experiences “Homeland Insecurity” in recognition of this key aspect of the national tragedy: although the U.S. was their homeland too, Arabs and Muslims were treated not as members of an in-

jured nation but as suspects in a massive plot to undermine it. To this day, Arab and Muslim Americans remain under the Global War on Terror’s heightened security spotlight, not because there is any evidence showing that they collectively posed a threat,¹ but because of the ways they continue to be framed by the media, are characterized in popular culture and used to represent the “enemy” by certain political actors, and thought about by security and defense establishments. Arabs and Muslims have been cast as threatening human beings, a status that persists throughout the White-dominant global north. And so all of them, including entire nations, are held responsible for the acts of a few. This is precisely how racism works.

Indeed, the domestic aspect of the U.S. War on Terror was launched as a racial project tethered to imperial interests from the start. It began unofficially after the 1967 Israeli-Arab war through the dual deployment of potent ideological messages and invasive national security strategies. On the level of ideas, narratives of Arabs and Muslims as inherent terrorists permeated the U.S. media, popular culture, and school textbooks. Indeed, throughout the latter decade of the 20th century, it was nearly impossible to find any other characteristic associated with them, except for

the gendered variant: oppressed women. Meanwhile, national security agents actively surveilled pro-Palestinian activists, tactics later operationalized in Operation Boulder, a Nixon-era program to “subvert” domestic Arab terrorism, even though there had been none. Arabs studying in U.S. universities who were engaged in free speech activities opposing American policies toward Palestine were the program’s prime targets, resulting in the deportations of thousands of them. The Interagency Contingency Plan to detain “Alien Terrorists and other Undesirables” in a prison camp in Oakdale, Louisiana, was a 1980s proposal crafted to manage alleged domestic terror threats; thankfully, it was not implemented. However, many view the sensationalized 1987 arrests of the “LA 8” — pro-Palestinian activists framed as terrorists — as a test case to see how far the government could go in pre-emptive detentions, a step called for in the Contingency Plan.

When the 9/11 attacks occurred, it was thus easy — “common sense” to the majority of Americans — that millions of Arab and Muslim Americans should be treated as suspects. At the time, [Attorney-General John Ashcroft said](#):

The attacks of September 11 were acts of terrorism against America

orchestrated and carried out by individuals living within our borders. Today’s terrorists enjoy the benefits of our free society even as they commit themselves to our destruction. They live in our communities — plotting, planning and waiting to kill Americans again.

The notion that Arab and Muslim terrorists were hiding in U.S. communities, living undercover lives that had public veneers of normalcy while waiting to attack, provoked fear in the hearts of Americans. [Government statements](#) were clear in their directives: “The federal government cannot fight this reign of terror alone. Every American must help us defend our nation against this enemy.” Americans were told to closely observe Arabs and Muslims and consider their seemingly normal activities as suspect. Over time, the U.S. government rolled out more than twenty national security policies aimed specifically at them. These included mass arrests, preventive detentions, FBI interviews, registration and fingerprinting of tens of thousands of male foreign nationals, widespread wiretapping, secret hearings, closures of charities, criminal indictments, deportations, and reviews of private Internet, telecommunication, and financial records, which were secured through more

than 30,000 national security letters issued annually to American businesses after the passage of the PATRIOT Act.²

But the security spotlight did not dim a decade into the War on Terror, after tens of thousands of FBI interviews and hundreds of detentions revealed to the U.S. government that there was no domestic complicity in or support for the 9/11 attacks. Since then, and until today, a wide range of national security programs and systematic surveillance operations have targeted these communities. Some of these include the NYPD covert surveillance program, conducted in partnership with CIA operatives, that focused on Muslim communities in and around New York City.³ The Trump Administration implemented the “[Muslim ban](#),” restricting all migration to the U.S. from specific Muslim-majority countries based on an alleged “terror threat.” The ban, approved by the U.S. Supreme Court, was a product of candidate Trump’s promise to enact a “[total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States](#).” Another still-active strategy is the Department of Homeland Security’s Countering Violent Extremism Program, a terror prevention program run through schools and community organizations that focuses on Muslim youth, under the presumption that they are potential terrorists.⁴

Although White supremacists have long been a far [more serious domestic terror threat](#) than Arab and Muslim Americans, they have been spared the racialized status of collective threat — and its corresponding responses — that is shared by persons inhabiting Black and Brown bodies. National security responses to the January 6, 2021 siege of the U.S. Capitol made this abundantly clear; there were no roadblocks, barriers, reinforcements, tear gas, or widespread uses of force and very few arrests. The post facto search for culpable parties has insisted on evidence and focused on specific individuals, not on spurious suspicions of entire groups.

In response to the 9/11 attacks, the apparatus of U.S. empire, including a supportive media, leveraged a simplistic, criminalizing, and racialized “us and them” narrative to defend their collective punitive actions, both domestically and globally. Unfortunately, most Americans bought into this social construction, supporting both the deadly invasion of Iraq (which had nothing to do with 9/11) and severe abuses of the civil rights of Arab and Muslim Americans. Twenty years later, these dimensions of 9/11 must be central in our discussions about the meaning of that day. And as they are ultimately about how racism works, systematically casting some as threats and

others as the threatened, these conversations must be not only about 9/11, but also about ending the damaging racial logic of White supremacy, which continues to be deployed on a global scale.

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¹ See for example Charles Kurzman, [“Muslim-American Involvement with Extremism, 2017,”](#) Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, 2018.

² See Louise Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience after 9/11*, Russell Sage Foundation Press, 2019.

³ See Moustafa Bayoumi, *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror*, New York University Press, 2015.

⁴ See Nicole Nguyen, *Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Domestic War on Terror*, University of Minnesota Press, 2019.



War and State (Un)making in Tribal Borderlands of Pakistan

by Saifullah Nasar
SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

In August 2021, three soldiers from the gendarmerie Balochistan Levy Force were killed in a [landmine explosion](#) in Ziarat, a southwestern town of Pakistan. A *parlat* (sit-in) ensued as the deceased's relatives and well-wishers refused to bury the corpses and blocked a highway.

The protestors became further enraged by the arrival of a provincial government minister and his attempts at placating the situation. They demanded an immediate evacuation of the military and a roll back of its expanded presence in the region. They complained that

paramilitary forces regularly fire hundreds of rounds during training in close proximity to a civilian population, terrorizing children and not letting anyone sleep quietly at night. One of the [irate protestors wailed](#), “Who flies a drone over the village? What a blatant disregard to *chadar-o-chaardiwari* (honor of the house)!”

Refusing to bury the dead bodies and rejecting *khatir* (deference) of the minister are uncharacteristic actions in the honor-based Pashtun society that treats both the corpse and visitors with great respect. But such has been the norm in the northern and western tribal regions of Pakistan since the rise of a social movement, the Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement, four years ago. The preplanned and coordinated *jalsa* (political gathering) as the main mode of political expression has given way to *parlat* sit-ins that do not await a prior approval, announcement, or mobilization from leaders or political organizations. Such uncoordinated spontaneous efforts sometimes amass into large gatherings that outmatch *jalsas* from the past and attract leaders and followers from across political divides.

The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), earlier known as the Mehsud Tahafuz Movement, emerged in response to the

Pakistan military's many reckless operations in the northern tribal region. Among these, *Zarb-e-Azb*¹ (sharp strike), proved as the most lethal operation that took a heavy toll on the local populations who came to scathingly call it, *Zarb-e-Ghazb* (wrathful strike). The operations were launched by the Pakistani state in response to growing domestic pressure to limit the frequent militant attacks and in line with the [United States' "Af-Pak policy,"](#) which viewed expanding the Global War on Terror (GWOT) to Pakistan's tribal region — where the Taliban and other militants held hideouts — as crucial to its success.

Like the American-led war in Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond, the Pakistani military also indiscriminately rained bombs over civilian populations and continued to permit the U.S. to conduct drone strikes at a varying level of frequency in the northern tribal region. Mirali bazaar in the North Waziristan Agency, a sizable and bustling marketplace in the area, was left devastated like a ramshackle archeological site from the past. Those who got killed in the operations were reported as "militants" without proof or identification and those who went missing never returned. PTM claims that the missing person list surpasses [4,000](#) men, and this is not a definitive total. While accurate figures are hard to come by, the

operation resulted in the [displacement of about 800,000 people](#). Since 9/11, Pakistan has lost more than [80,000 lives](#) due to the war.

Beyond these deaths and destruction, the counter-terrorism operations put the Pakistani military in a new role to oversee civilian affairs even more meticulously. While there is nothing new about the Pakistani military interfering in civilian affairs, its operational capacity, influence, and spatial reach touched new limits during the war decades, particularly in the tribal region. In the past the military made a show of force, quelled local resistance, and returned to its cantonments. But during wartime it worked with and dominated the civil administration permanently. Visa and border control regimes have been established by the federal government with the assistance of the military to regulate hitherto free movement of people and goods in and out of the country at an unprecedented level. [Fencing and manning](#) of the borders with Iran and Afghanistan are near completion while military check-posts now dot the entire landscape in the North and Southwest of Pakistan.

Moreover, in the Baloch areas, international mining companies have been awarded lucrative contracts by the fed-

eral and provincial governments without consultation with the local populations, while the Pakistani military [provides security](#) at such sites including the security of Chinese engineers and laborers working on the Pakistan China Economic Corridor. The military's engineering of politics at the local level has reached new heights as well. In Balochistan, these efforts have culminated in the creation of a military-orchestrated political party, the Balochistan Awami Party.

The military, however, has been mindful of its rapid-paced intervention in tribal society. It has set up new military-run schools, increased recruitment intake from the troubled region, and, most importantly, provided security solutions to businesses and efficient dispute-resolution mechanisms to the mining industry run by locals. The civilian administration and courts have an outdated and compromising setup to deal with complex mining disputes in a society transitioning from tribal and family-owned land and enterprises to individual and private ownership. In this instance, at least, the ineptness of an unmotivated civil bureaucracy has allowed the military to build its legitimacy anew.

The military's capture of the civilian functions is but one aspect of state-making in the tribal areas; civilian institu-

tions too got overhauled. The civilian security setup got beefed up as new police units were launched to enhance the state's combat capacity. The [working perimeters](#) of the regular police were increased by adding areas from the control of tribal police, the Levy Force. These militaristic interventions have been supported by increased surveillance mechanisms, such as issuing [biometric identification cards](#).

In big towns, gun-toting men and the display of light weapons in the bazaar area is no longer a common sight as it used to be fifteen years back. The movement of people is now more closely tracked and regulated. Drones are being used for purposes other than war and combat. And the people of Balochistan and Northwestern frontiers are being increasingly subjected to the country's taxation regime, a feat that the British state could not achieve, which had to either waive taxes altogether or keep them at a minimum to not risk its authority.

But these invasive state-making efforts have attracted a nemesis in the tribal borderlands. The Baloch are militarily resisting the militarized capital-extractive state expansion with broad-based ethnic solidarity, unlike tribe-specific revolts of

the past. The Pashtuns, if less secessionist now than before, have become even more critical of the new security regime. They are resisting the military establishment through a social movement, PTM.

The current unrest is yet another episode of capitalist transformations and modern state intrusion in tribal society. Both modern state authority and capitalist interventions have emerged on the former imperial borderland in a perpetual war-like condition and continue to tightly knit "war and security" in a way that bears the hallmark of what Benjamin Hopkins calls "frontier governmentality."² As both the militants and the state are deploying new war technologies and tactics that are increasingly encompassing the civilian arena, the PTM and its allies among nationalist parties are emerging as the new hope for anti-war politics and a future without military domination.

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¹ Also, a namesake of Prophet Muhammad's sword.

² Benjamin D. Hopkins, "The Frontier Crimes Regulation and Frontier Governmentality," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74.2 (2015), pp. 369-89.

LEGACIES OF 9/11



ISLAMISM AND
INTERNATIONALISM

Competing universalisms and geopolitics of the Global War on Terror



SOURCE: The White House

The Global War on Terror and U.S. Relations with the Muslim World:

Technology, surveillance, and techniques of counterinsurgency

Reflections on Afghanistan

by Jonah Blank
SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

Afghanistan was already in the back of my mind, on the morning of September 11, 2001: I was supposed to be there. As I walked to my office on a crystal-clear Fall day, I was thinking about my cancelled visit. I barely noticed the plume

of smoke from across the Potomac.

I was the Senate Foreign Relations Committee official responsible for all of South and Southeast Asia. My proposed trip to Afghanistan had been denied be-

cause the country was not deemed sufficiently important — the only time in what would turn out to be a 12-year career that such a request would be turned down. I thought Afghanistan was important. By 9 a.m., others would too.

Anyone who followed counterterrorism issues immediately suspected that al-Qaeda was the culprit behind the morning's attacks. And al-Qaeda was based in Afghanistan. I figured that this would become obvious very soon, but that the United States would invade Iraq instead: top officials in the Administration of U.S. President George W. Bush had been advocating such action for years. We ended up invading both. America's relationship with the world's 1.8 billion Muslims would never be the same.

My boss was the Committee's Chairman: a senator named Joe Biden. As an anthropologist, I had conducted ethnographic fieldwork in a Muslim denomination spread throughout India, Pakistan, and elsewhere. In later years, Biden liked to say that he had brought me on board because he knew the importance of understanding global Islam. Until then, American policy makers had only a hazy notion of the world's second-largest religion. But what would this mean for the conduct of U.S. wars in Afghanistan and (later) Iraq? Or for

counter-terrorist operations in dozens of other nations? Or for diplomatic and political outreach to the 99.99% of the global Muslim population with no connection whatsoever to terrorism? Or America's own Muslim citizens and residents, who comprise a community larger than the population of Singapore?

The initial response from policy makers was better than I had feared. Less than a week after the attack, President Bush delivered a [speech](#) at the Islamic Center of Washington, DC. He urged Americans not to turn their anger against Muslims, and pointedly said, "Islam is Peace." I took Biden to a mosque in his home state of Delaware — the first time he had ever made such a visit — so he could hear from Muslims who were his own constituents. In October, Biden [gave a speech](#) insisting that U.S. actions should narrowly target al-Qaeda terrorists rather than the Afghan population. Biden warned that an air campaign conducted without regard for innocent civilians would make the U.S. look like a "high tech bully" and alienate Muslims around the globe. Biden was criticized for this, but it proved all too accurate. The tonnage of munitions dropped on Afghanistan has never been accurately tallied, but an estimated [7,423 bombs rained down in 2019 alone](#).

I pressed the importance of showing the people of Afghanistan that our battle was not against them, and my boss agreed. Biden was the first American political leader to propose a billion-dollar pledge of reconstruction aid. A billion dollars may not sound like much today: the U.S. has now spent one thousand times as much in Afghanistan.¹ But when Joe Biden [proposed it](#) on October 3, 2001, the sum was [more than triple](#) what the Administration had offered or would for many months.

For a while, it all seemed to work. I took Biden to Kabul just a few weeks after the Taliban fell and we found a populace hungry to build new lives. That summer, I went back without my boss. I travelled to Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i Sharif — wandering freely through the bazaars and mosques, accompanied only by relief-worker hosts. But the peace didn't last. I travelled back to Afghanistan about three times each year for a decade, each time protected by a security detail armed to the teeth. What changed after 2002? In a word, Iraq. In a few more words: Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, torture, drone strikes, and the Patriot Act. America's relationship with Muslims — both its own citizens and those of other nations — would be ruptured for years.

Since then, we have elected the first four Muslim members of Congress, and a President named (after his Muslim grandfather) Barack Hussein Obama. But anti-Muslim sentiment among Americans spiked during the Trump Administration, which fueled Islamophobia by intolerant statements and actions from the very top. An influx of Afghan migrants and refugees — many of them fleeing the Taliban after having risked their lives for American service members — could spark another backlash of bigotry. I am hopeful, however, that Americans will take a different course. That they will remember to follow their best instincts rather than their worst.

In sha'Allah.

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¹ Very little of that money has actually reached the Afghan citizens at most need. At least 90% was spent on the U.S. conduct of the war, and most of the remainder enriched a variety of middlemen in Washington, Kabul, and elsewhere.



How the Sands Have Shifted

Reflections on 9/11 as a Chapter in U.S.-Gulf Relations

by Clemens Chay
SEPTEMBER 1, 2022

Before the 9/11 tragedy struck American soil, U.S. facilities in the Persian Gulf region were placed on a [heightened state of alert](#), as U.S. authorities were informed that “American citizens abroad may be targeted by extremist groups with links to bin Laden’s organisation, Al-Qaeda.” The threats of terrorism were already

evident in the years prior, including the suicide attacks in 2000 targeting the USS Cole as it refuelled in Aden, and the 1996 Khobar Towers explosions in Saudi Arabia aimed at U.S. troops deployed under Operation Southern Watch. During the summer of 2001, the Pew Research Center found that terrorism was per-

ceived as a [greater threat](#) by the American public than China’s emergence as a world power or Saddam Hussein’s continued rule in Iraq.

Fast-forward to twenty years after 9/11. The Biden administration completed the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. More recently, President Biden [declared](#) that “justice has been delivered” after taking out Ayman al-Zawahiri, whose demise comes eleven years after his predecessor, Osama Bin Laden. The president’s words were crafted as if to signal a form of closure, earning him a [winning narrative](#) given the wider context of the war in Ukraine, spiking inflation, and competition with China. The reconfigured landscape of global affairs means that terrorism—as an existential threat—has fallen down the pecking order, at least for the U.S. public. The same Pew Research Center conducted a [survey for U.S. adults in early 2021](#) and found that: (1) protecting American jobs should be given top priority (at 75 percent), followed by (2) reducing the spread of diseases (at 71 percent). While “measures to protect the U.S. from terrorist attacks” comes in third, the share who believe countering China should take precedence in foreign policy has “increased from about a third to roughly half since 2018.”

Where do the Gulf Arab states stand then and now? The narrative of violent Islam, which became synonymous with the Arab-Muslim world, was compounded by the backgrounds of the 19 9/11 hijackers, who hailed from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, and Egypt. In the immediate post-9/11 era, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, as explained by Rory Miller, a Professor of Government at Georgetown University-Qatar, moved to deal with the regional terror threat with “three distinct but overlapping approaches”: (1) statements and declarations that set the parameters for counter-terror cooperation; (2) practical actions that restricted the transnational nature of terror acts; and (3) practical agreements that expanded cross-border intelligence cooperation.¹

In more recent times, the U.S. Committee on Foreign Affairs in 2016 asserted that, in analytical terms, the individuals who live in Saudi Arabia and financially support terrorism should be [separated](#) from the kingdom’s government, which has “adopted strict laws prohibiting terrorist finance.” The same committee hearing shared concerns about Saudi charities funding terrorist groups and foreign fighters. Yet, under the kingdom’s de-facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, analysts have

[indicated](#) that such a funding tap has now dried up. On the whole, the GCC states have, besides military efforts, addressed extremism [within their borders](#) by means of rehabilitation and reintegration, religious leader engagement, and countering the finance of terrorism. Tackling terrorism is but one of many priorities for the Gulf states, where their recalibration of foreign policy mirrors the Biden administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy. “Hedging” is the buzzword best used to describe the Gulf states’ geopolitical strategy amid U.S.-China rivalry and references the cultivation of ties with different states without disrupting an advantageous status quo. As Washington’s attention shifts towards China—as well as Russia—the Gulf states have made similar adjustments, with the understanding that their longstanding national security ensured by the United States is no longer as reliable as it once was.

Washington’s preference to downgrade its involvement in the Middle East continues from the [Obama administration](#) when the president said “there is no way we should commit to governing the Middle East and North Africa.” If words were insufficient as proof, the more recent Afghanistan withdrawal debacle had certainly left a bitter taste in the Gulf states’ mouths as they

rode to America’s rescue by helping to [facilitate](#) evacuation efforts. Then came the Russia-Ukraine crisis which brought the energy security—both at the global level and for Europe—into focus. Suddenly, the Gulf states have taken center stage again. President Biden’s climb-down in his stance toward Saudi Arabia (after the Khashoggi affair and labeling the kingdom a “pariah” state), encapsulated by his 2022 visit to Jeddah, is testament to the fact that neither Riyadh nor the rest of the Gulf states should be ignored in global affairs.

Returning to the rhetoric of the “war on terror,” [Emman El-Badawy](#), the Head of Research at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, writes that “with the habit of viewing the Middle East through the lens of intractable conflict, it is easy to miss the opportunities for constructing a new doctrine for Western engagement.” Even without the terrorism paradigm, rhetoric remains constructed, framed, and employed as the user deems fit. Iran’s indirect cooperation with the U.S. military after 9/11, for instance, helped topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and stabilize a new government in Kabul, but Tehran later found itself part of an “Axis of Evil” in President Bush’s [State of the Union address](#) in 2002. Barbara Slavin, Director of the Future of Iran Initiative at

the Atlantic Council, [lamented](#) this as a failure to “distinguish properly between those responsible for the 9/11 attacks and other U.S. adversaries.” Reneging on a promise bears an uncanny resemblance to President Trump’s pull-out from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), after it had taken the P5+1+EU rounds of arduous negotiations to reach an agreement.

The ghosts of both the distant and recent pasts will serve as a reminder to the Gulf states that the U.S. has, then and now, acted in a way that mirrors its own national interests. So too can the Gulf states reorganize their own priorities according to what is usually termed “sovereign decisions.” Although anti-terrorism rhetoric and associated operations persist, this paradigm has been superseded by other immediate concerns, notably a perceived diminishing of U.S. interest in the region. Two decades ago, anti-terrorism rhetoric and ideology compelled the Gulf states to pick sides when President Bush [famously declared](#), “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” Today, the Gulf states are picking from multiple “baskets” of partnerships. Strategic hedging is now the name of the game.

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¹ Rory Miller, “The Gulf Cooperation Council and Counter-terror Cooperation in the post-9/11 Era: A Regional Organization in Comparative Perspective,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 58.3 (2022): p. 436.



Bin Laden's Legacy Probably Surpasses His Wildest Dreams

by James M. Dorsey
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

At the very outset of the 21st century, Osama bin Laden positioned himself, wittingly or unwittingly, with the 9/11 attacks, as one of its likely most important figures. The attacks initially served to undermine multicultural policies in relatively ethnically and religiously

homogeneous European societies: which struggled with migration from other continents, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds. In doing so, the attacks reshaped global politics and attitudes toward large numbers of people fleeing political and economic collapse as “the

other”— instead of viewing them as victims of misconceived Western policies that backfired in countries governed and mismanaged by corrupt politicians and political and economic structures.

Its resulting fallout was evident in the West's recent failure to anticipate mass movement toward the Kabul airport in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban takeover of the country. The West's initial hesitancy to respond to the plight of those cooperating with Western forces and institutions in the last two decades compounded these failures. This undermined two decades of multiculturalism or open borders and further empowered populist, right-wing anti-immigration, and pro-nationalist forces in Europe as well as North America, Asia and Africa: particularly against Muslims, Jews, and people of color.

Western democracies pay the price; the brutalization of debate and dialogue through demonization of opposing views, abandonment of civility and etiquette and expressions of racist, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic attitudes becoming less socially taboo and more mainstream.

Changed attitudes have made Western societies more vulnerable to intolerant, anti-pluralistic, and counter-revolution-

ary [machinations by countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia](#). Alarmed by the strength of political Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, in the wake of the 2011 popular Arab revolts, the Gulf states have had little compunction about [fuelling anti-Muslim sentiment in Western countries, including France and Austria](#), to counter Islamists and their backers (Turkey, and Qatar).

Anti-Muslim sentiment is bolstered by the lack of support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as well as the rest of the Muslim world, for persecuted Muslim communities: such as the Uyghurs in China, the Rohingya in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and Muslims in India-administered Kashmir. Saudi Arabia and the UAE promote their socially more flexible, but autocratic version of a moderate interpretation of Islam that preaches absolute obedience to the ruler. The two states' use their interpretations to project themselves as moderate leaders in the Muslim world: in which Saudi Arabia and the UAE are [competing for religious soft power](#) with one another; as well as with Turkey, Qatar, Iran and Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country.

"The UAE's narrative was purposefully designed to appeal to a Western, particularly American audience," claims Gulf

scholar Andreas Krieg, "in the aftermath of 9/11, the Islamist surge during the Arab Spring, and the rise of the Islamic State." Yet, for Abu Dhabi, its crusade against Islam in the political space has another, more sinister objective: depoliticizing civil society, while monopolizing socio-political power and authority in the hands of the state. The irony is that the religious soft power rivalry unwittingly reinforces each other's efforts. The Emiratis and Saudis encourage Islamophobia, in cooperation with populists and Europe's far-right, which strengthen the Iranian revolutionaries and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan projects himself as a pious leader who defends the rights of marginalized Diaspora communities: who hail from 'black' Turks at home and are disenfranchised by the Kemalist Turkish elite; while Iran claims to represent the struggle of the downtrodden and disenfranchised.

The populists and right-wing nationalists in Europe and elsewhere are the perfect foil for Erdogan. In turn, Erdogan's calls on the Turkish Diaspora to reject assimilation is fodder for the very groups the Turkish president ostensibly opposes. "Ultimately, these are two right-wing currents that profit from each other," argues political scientist Thomas Schmidinge, "Turkish nation-

alism colored by Islamism on the one hand and anti-Islamic and anti-Turkish racism, which has spread throughout Europe and Austria in particular, on the other." Schmidinge discussed the situation in Austria as an example that repeats itself across Europe: in which the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey wage covert campaigns against one another. Bin Laden must have a grin on his face, as the current scene unfolds in Europe and the U.S.: irrespective of whether the former leader of al-Qaeda is looking at the world from above or from down under. He may bemoan the plight of Muslims in much of the world, but the disarray in the West is probably greater: in part to his lethal handiwork, which has probably accomplished more than his most imaginative dreams.

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9/11 and the Securitization of Political Islam in the Gulf

by Courtney Freer
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

After it was revealed that seventeen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers hailed from the Gulf (fifteen were Saudi citizens, two were Emiratis), the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) doubled down on rhetoric about the need to combat radical and militant Islam. Washington also added pressure on the GCC

states to reform their political and educational systems, as considerable blame was placed on the environments of these countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, for fostering the ideology of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Fatima al-Sayegh points out how the U.S. highlighted a lack of what it considered tolerance in

these states, which has arguably spurred actions like the [creation of a Ministry of Tolerance in the UAE in 2016](#).¹

Reforms to educational systems, in particular, involved changes to religious curricula, which had long been influenced by Muslim Brotherhood figures who arrived in the Gulf in the 1950s to staff nascent educational systems. It was during this period that any form of political Islam came to be linked to jihadism and, by extension, al-Qaeda, spurring overzealous policing of some religious groups. For instance, in the UAE, some 250 people were arrested following 9/11 on terrorism charges, most of whom were released by 2004.² Also after 9/11, the Emirati government redoubled efforts to convince its local Muslim Brotherhood branch to disband.³

9/11 has continued to color Emirati attitudes toward political Islam in the decades since the attacks. In a speech in 2017, UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash famously dubbed the Muslim Brotherhood “[the gateway drug to jihadism](#),” exhibiting the same attitude that prevailed post-9/11 about the need to oversee Islamist communities. In the same speech, Gargash explicitly linked the UAE’s anti-terrorism message to its experience with 9/11:

Two Emiratis were among the 9/11 hijackers. It was a lesson which we took seriously. We examined and overhauled our policy towards mosques, schools, and charities...and we started a long

and sometimes lonely battle against the ideology of grievance and jihad, which distorts our great religion and fuels terrorism [...] With this background I hope you understand why we regard it as necessary and urgent to shut down state support for extremism, jihadism and terrorism across the Arab world.

Such a statement illustrates the extent to which Emirati thinking, not just about terrorism, but about political Islam more broadly, was influenced by 9/11.

Since 9/11, attempts to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation have periodically taken place not just in the GCC, but also in the United States and United Kingdom, and the organization is outlawed in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Efforts to ban the Brotherhood have often aligned with endeavours to silence domestic opposition in the Middle East. In the West, on the other hand, these efforts have tended to arise out of different interpretations of the links between non-violent political Islam and jihadism across different political environments.

Qatar, for its part, has not made negative statements against the Muslim Brotherhood, and has supported Islamist movements linked to it when they came to power after the Arab Spring, much to the consternation of its Emirati neighbours. Qatar has also long hosted Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood figure Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal. Because none

of the 9/11 attackers was Qatari, Doha was under less pressure than some of its neighbours to implement reforms – a point which the country’s ambassador to the U.S. made in a 2018 [opinion piece](#) in *The Washington Post*. In it, he wrote that “nearly all the 9/11 hijackers came from Saudi Arabia or the UAE, and the UAE was singled out in the 9/11 Commission’s report for its role in laundering money for the terrorists.” Qatar explained its support for the short-lived government of Mohamed Morsi in Egypt by saying that it was duly elected, and not because of its support for the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, [its foreign minister said](#) at the time that “we do not, will not, and have not supported the Muslim Brotherhood, but rather we support any individual that assumes the presidency in Egypt in a clear and transparent manner.” In my personal conversations with members of the Qatari government, they have emphasized that the Qatari government cannot have a relationship with an independent movement like the Muslim Brotherhood because it is a non-state entity. Qatar’s experience with Islamists at home and abroad, then, appears to explain its willingness to work with elected Islamists, rather than eliminate them.

A [documentary released](#) in 2017 by Sky News Arabia entitled “Qatar...The Road to Manhattan” went so far as to argue that Qatar was complicit in the 9/11 attacks, since the planner Khalid Sheikh Mohammad visited Qatar in 1996 and according to some reports was shielded by a Qatari minister from the CIA. Con-

versations about 9/11, then, very clearly still come into play when accusations about support for terrorism are made by the various GCC states, showing how central the attacks remain in their formulations of policies towards Islamists more broadly.

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¹ Fatima al-Sayegh, “Post-9/11 Changes in the Gulf: The Case of the UAE,” *Middle East Policy Council* 11.4 (2004), p. 118.

² Marta Saldaña, “Rentierism and Political Culture in the United Arab Emirates: The Case of UAEU Students,” PhD. Dissertation, University of Exeter, 2014, p. 140.

³ Courtney Freer, *Rentier Islamism: The Influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gulf Monarchies*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 129.



SOURCE: The White House

The Rise and Fall of Moderate Islamism as a Political Project:

The Legacy of 9/11 in Turkey's Relations with the West

by Pelin Ayan Musil
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

When al-Qaeda framed the 9/11 attacks as an Islamic holy war (jihad) and the United States retaliated by invading Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) and initiating a Global War on Terror, Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis between "Islam" and "the West"

gained currency in the public debates of the early 2000s. Amid the debates, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or AKP) with roots in an Islamist movement came to power in a landslide victory in Turkey in 2002. The AKP's success came as a challenge

to the power of a secularist military, which had historically initiated multiple interventions against democratically elected governments.

Governing through the secular democratic institutions of the country, the AKP vowed to civilianize the Turkish regime and improve democracy and the market economy to fulfill the criteria for European Union (EU) membership. This domestic development in a gateway country for Europe and the Muslim world produced a new alliance between the neoconservatives in the United States, the liberal intelligentsia in the European Union, and the Islamists in Turkey, which commercialized the idea of "moderate Islamism" in the post-9/11 order. The goal was to prove that Huntingtonian theories were wrong and to legitimize the interests of the actors involved. Moderate Islamism was going to be promoted through a "Turkish model," which set an example for the co-existence of a market economy and secular democracy under the rule of an Islam-friendly government.¹

In the United States, the notion of moderate Islamism and the Turkish model fit very well into the neoconservative agenda for the Middle East. Through initiatives such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), launched in

2002 by the Bush administration, promotion of democracy and economic liberalization became an important rationale for the U.S. military intervention (in addition to the self-defense claims against the presumed weapons of mass destruction in Iraq).² As the debates on democracy and economic reform spread to Islamist movements in the Arab world, moderate Islamism justified the American interest in transforming the region in the political, social, cultural, and economic arenas.

The same notion likewise influenced the EU enlargement policy toward Turkey in the early years after 9/11. Turkey's projected accession to the European Union was framed as the acceptance of a Muslim country by an international community of Christian states. The idea that "Islam and democracy can co-exist" became a politically correct position. Turkey thus became a test case for showing the European Union's normative ability to initiate a dialogue between Muslim and Christian civilizations.³ Within this atmosphere, the liberal intelligentsia in the European Union supported Turkey's aspirations to become a full member as long as it conformed with EU norms, in contrast with the hardliner voices of the Austrian Chancellor, Wolfgang Schäussel, and the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, who argued that a Muslim nation,

with its 75 million people, had no place in Europe.⁴

For the AKP elite, the idea of "moderate Islamism" helped both their struggle against a staunchly secularist military and their ambition of becoming a main player in Middle East politics. The Turkish military, which used to be one of the most trusted institutions in Turkey's political history (and was skeptical of the notion of the "Turkish model" at that time), lost its influence over the government and society. Its interventionist attitude was strongly criticized by the liberal intelligentsia both within Turkey and the West. The U.S. administration then began to work more closely with the Turkish civilian government than with the armed forces with regard to its military policy toward Iraq.

Today, twenty years after 9/11, there are few signs of the effort to prove that Huntingtonian theories were wrong, which had set the common ground for Turkish and Western interests in the period of aftershock following the attacks. On the contrary, a sharp U-turn has occurred: the relationship between Turkey and the West (mainly the United States and the European Union) has evolved into an antagonistic one, dominated by populist rhetoric on both sides. In the West, radical right voices and Islamophobic

positions gained more visibility; in Turkey, the AKP began abusing its executive power and acting in an increasingly autocratic manner from 2011 onwards. Even though Turkey had made progress in complying with EU norms, the debate on its accession to the European Union was easily removed from the EU agenda when the negotiations stopped. Some observers fairly argue that those who were opposed to Turkey's accession in the European Union exploited Turkey's reluctance to recognize the Republic of Cyprus as grounds to silence the proponents of inclusion.⁵

Several other interrelated developments — from the outcomes of the Arab Spring and the refugee crisis to the rising power of China and Russia and the backlash against liberal values in Western democracies — had roles to play in circumventing the relationship between Turkey and the West. It is beyond the scope of this piece to examine this complex set of developments.

But an important lesson can be drawn from the collapse of the idea of moderate Islamism. The idea had never been clearly elaborated beyond the notion of the compatibility of Islam, democracy, and liberalism. It was nothing but an elitist political project that emanated from the power struggle within each the-

ater: “neocons” vs. the “pacifists” in the United States, “liberals” vs. “radicals” in the European Union, and “Islamists” vs. “secularists” in Turkey. “Moderate Islam” was a perfect ideological project for power holders to embrace for pragmatic reasons, similar to the role the populist rhetoric of the right would play a decade later.

In Turkey, the success of “moderate Islamism” simply faces too many hurdles. The AKP — as a political party — had never internally debated its meaning, but instead built party identity on the notion of “conservative democracy,” which included several inconsistencies.⁶ Moreover, the deep divisions within society, as well as the skepticism of the secular state establishment toward the AKP, prevented “moderate Islamism” from becoming a publicly acceptable project. Western powers paid scant attention to such domestic tensions when praising the Turkish model. Finally, just as in the rest of the Middle East, the democracy promotion policies of the United States never had public appeal or credibility. When the region was swept up in its own popular mobilization in 2011, it was as a result of socioeconomic grievances, collective demands for democracy, and the desire to hold rulers-for-life accountable.

The sound of “compatibility of Islam with democracy” is easy on the ear. But if it is no more than a slogan adopted by political elites, with little attention given to developments on the ground, it can easily be replaced by other empty slogans later on, especially during times of political pressure and rupture. The ideological realm — as the affair over “moderate Islam” testifies — simply cannot stand alone in defining foreign policy: the impact on the material needs of diverse political groups and civil society actors must be taken into account. This requires all-encompassing debates at the grassroots level.

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Turkey 10.1 (2008), pp. 97–110.

⁴ “[Austria Shows Red Light to Turkey’s EU Bid](#),” *Bianet*, August 4, 2004. “[Sarkozy’s Policy on Turkey’s EU Accession: Bad for France?](#)” *The Washington Institute*, January 1, 2008.

⁵ Frank Schimmelfennig, “Entrapped Again: The Way to EU Membership Negotiations with Turkey,” *International Politics*, 46.4 (2009), pp. 413–31.

⁶ Simten Cosar & Aylin Özman “Centre-Right Politics in Turkey after the November 2002 General Election: Neo-Liberalism with a Muslim Face,” *Contemporary Politics* 10.1 (2004), pp. 57–74.

¹ Even though the United States introduced the notion of the Turkish model right after the end of the Cold War, that idea had a bigger influence on the public agenda after 9/11. See Meliha B. Altunçelik, “The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 27.1&2 (2005), pp. 45–64.

² Katerina Dalacoura, “U.S. Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: A Critique,” *International Affairs* 81.5 (2005), pp. 963–79.

³ Bahar Rumelili, “Negotiating Europe: EU-Turkey Relations from an Identity Perspective,” *Insight*



SOURCE: Choo Youn-Kong/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Keeping Watch

Islamism in Indonesia after 9/11
and the Bali Bombing of 2002

by Tomáš Petrů
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 on American soil altered not only the international security environment but also the domestic power equilibrium in several Southeast Asian countries. The incumbent Malaysian and Philippine govern-

ments used the situation to beef up their positions by cracking down on militant Islamist groups.¹ But in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, the cabinet's response against Islamist extremists was both largely in-

sufficient and disappointing. The initial inaction of Megawati Soekarnoputri's administration may be explained by the president's desire to avoid antagonizing the country's popular Islamic circles. The same can be said of the Indonesian armed forces — *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* or TNI — which did not want to alienate the forces of political Islam that were growing increasingly powerful in the liberated milieu of post-1998 Indonesia.

It did not help that Vice-President Hamzah Haz, chair of a conservative Islamic party, openly sympathized with radical Islamist groupings and was critical when Megawati, a secular politician, showed a degree of willingness to cooperate with Western allies. But, on the whole, the country's leadership seemed to have been in denial of the threat arising from a large terrorist organization operating across the archipelago. Some leading politicians and top-brass generals even bragged about their friendly ties with hardline Islamists. Among them was the then speaker of the House of Representatives, Amien Rais, who mobilized a million-strong demonstration in support of Muslims fighting Christians in Indonesia's Maluku Islands in 2000. Megawati's cabinet kept underestimating the warnings from U.S. and Singaporean intelligence concerning

the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a terrorist network loosely linked to al-Qaeda. This disregard led to temporary friction in U.S.-Indonesia relations over what the United States must have perceived as Indonesia's failure to support their Global War on Terror campaign

The massive terrorist attack of 12 October 2002 on entertainment venues in the tourist resort of Kuta, known as the Bali Bombing, in which 202 people, including eighty-nine foreigners, were killed, came as a harsh wake-up call, following which the Indonesian government was forced to admit to the existence of terrorist groups on the country's soil. The cabinet's response was immediate, a result of finally realizing the country's vulnerability — the economic impact of the attack and drastic drop in tourism — and U.S. pressure. Megawati agreed to the formation of a joint team of Australian, British, and U.S. police to assist in the investigation. The security forces detained Abu Bakar Baasyir, the spiritual leader of JI, in a move the police had previously claimed as impossible owing to a lack of evidence. Furthermore, the cabinet issued a regulation boosting its legal powers to fight terrorism (PERPU 1/2002), which allowed detention of suspects up to six months without trial.

It was apparent that President Megawa-

ti had become serious about pursuing an anti-terrorism campaign. Soon after the bombing, thirty-three terrorist suspects were arrested, including the key figures behind the attacks — the brothers Mukhlas, Ali Imron, and Amrozi, as well as Imam Samudra. They were put on trial and the former three were sentenced to death, while the latter received a life sentence since he showed remorse.² By handing down these sentences, the Indonesian judiciary showed an uncompromising stance toward terrorism, but it is noteworthy that the convicts were given unprecedented media attention and treated as rock stars when interviewed before the execution. Abu Bakar himself got away with only a four-year sentence for treason, thanks to the support of the vice-president.

In spite of these controversies, the government showed determination by creating a special anti-terrorist police task force, known as Densus 88 (Detasemen Khusus 88, or "Special Detachment 88"), which hunted down other JI members and generally succeeded in disrupting the group's network. In addition, the Laskar Jihad militia, which joined in the ethno-religious strife against Christians in the Maluku, was disbanded in 2003 and its leader, Umar Thalib, sent to prison in the aftermath of the Bali Bombing.

Megawati's successor, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014), however, showed greater leniency towards Islamist radical movements. One of these was the high-profile vigilante group Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders' Front or FPI), which "specialized" in raids against "places of vice," such as night clubs, and waged a violent campaign against the Ahmadiyya sect and other religious minorities. The perpetrators of violence typically got away with severely low sentences, while the victims were often subjected to discrimination. This situation may be explained by the hardliners' cordial ties with high-powered patrons among the police, who did not wish to appear anti-Islamic. But there may be another explanation. While the Yudhoyono administration was convinced that international terrorism had to be stopped by any means possible, due to the tarnishing of Indonesia's international image and ruined economy, it also believed that Islamist radicalism cannot be completely eradicated and thus reasoned it was best to allow radical movements to redirect their aggressiveness toward domestic minority groups like the Ahmadiyya and Shia.³

The trend of hunting down terrorists by Densus 88 continued under the new president Joko Widodo (2014-). However, the influence of hardline Islamist

movements came to the fore in late 2016, when they mobilized half a million followers in Jakarta to protest against the Christian-Chinese governor of the capital city, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known as “Ahok.” A tampered video of his alleged blasphemy against Islam was circulated and, as a result of this concentrated pressure, Ahok not only lost the gubernatorial election in February 2017 but also was sentenced to two years in prison the following May.

Wary of radical Islam’s growing popularity after the Ahok protests, the Indonesian government, in another twist, once again started cracking down on Islamist groups. It banned one of these groupings, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which did not promote violence, but ideologically strove for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. In late 2020, a similar action was taken against the FPI. Following the return of its leader, Habib Rizieq, from exile in Saudi Arabia, the movement became re-energized, causing havoc in the capital. The group’s leader was apprehended for not complying with COVID-19 protocols and, on 30 December 2020, the group was banned.

The move against Rizieq signals that the Indonesian government is finally determined to crush not only terrorist networks *per se* but also other hardline Isla-

mist groups, especially those that cross the line by posing a challenge to the government and threatening to destabilize the country.

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¹ Marcus Mietzner, “Politics of Engagement: The Indonesian Armed Forces, Islamic Extremism, and the ‘War on Terror’,” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9.1 (2002): pp. 71-84.

² Leo Suryadinata. “Indonesia: Continuing Challenges and Fragile Stability,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2004 (2004): pp. 87-103.

³ Sydney Jones, “Indonesian Government Approaches to Radicalism Since 1998,” in *Democracy and Islam in Indonesia*, eds. Künkler and Stepan, Columbia University Press, 2013



Iran's Exclusion and Lost Opportunities in the U.S.-Led Global War on Terror

by Asif Shuja
AUGUST 16, 2022

Days before the U.S.-led forces invaded Afghanistan to avenge the attacks on 9/11, President George W. Bush [outlined his approach](#) to the Global War on Terror (GWOT): “Our war on terror begins

with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there.” What followed was a worldwide coalition, led by the United States, whose [primary objective](#) was to “destroy al-Qaeda’s grip on Afghanistan by driving the Taliban

from power.” Twenty years later, on August 15, 2021, Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan. A week later the [Pentagon contradicted](#) the statement of U.S. President Joe Biden and acknowledged that al-Qaeda was not completely eradicated from Afghanistan.

One of the more important factors behind the U.S. setback against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan – and perhaps the war in Afghanistan more generally – is Iran’s exclusion from this Global War on Terror. Iran’s exclusion was a lost opportunity, missed on two notable occasions: first, during the fight against al-Qaeda in 2001; and second, when a coalition was built in 2014 to fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The U.S. policy of isolating Iran has not only led to the augmentation of Shia extremism but also indirectly fueled Sunni extremist forces.

When the U.S.-led coalition started its operations against Afghanistan, Iran provided “[critical assistance](#),” including military and intelligence cooperation. Iran even provided [diplomatic support](#) in the efforts to establish a new government in Afghanistan through the 2001 Bonn Conference. But such cooperation

was short-lived due to George W. Bush's pronouncement that Iran was a part of the "Axis of Evil." The start of Iran's nuclear controversy in August 2002 also adversely impacted U.S.-Iran cooperation. As early as September 2003, *The Washington Post* [reported](#) that "after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the locus of al-Qaeda's degraded leadership moved to Iran." It is also [believed](#) that "Iran likely opened up communications with al-Qaeda in 2004 due to al-Zarqawi's targeting of Shiite holy sites in Iraq."

In recent years, Iran's ties with al-Qaeda were [highlighted](#) by *The New York Times* in its 2020 report that al-Qaeda's Abu Muhammad al-Masri – believed to be the "[next in line to lead al-Qaida](#)" – was secretly killed in Tehran. Iran officially [dismissed](#) this report and "strongly denied any presence of the terrorist group's members in Iran." This denial ran contrary to the [claim](#) of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who claimed in early 2021 that al-Masri was shot dead in Iran the previous year. Pompeo also claimed that "al-Qaida has a new home base: it is the Islamic Republic of Iran." It is of note that such comments were made days before Pompeo was about to leave office and are evidently in line with

the efforts of President Trump's administration to pre-empt Biden's stated objective of resurrecting the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Nonetheless, following al-Masri's death, *The Washington Post* [reported](#) that "the only remaining member of al-Qaeda's shura council — its core leadership — with operational al-Qaeda terrorist experience is Saif al-Adel, who is believed still to be in Iran," raising the prospect that an axis between Iran and al-Qaeda remained intact.

While one finds [ample controversy](#) over the relationship between Iran and al-Qaeda, there is no such controversy between Iran and ISIS. Iran and ISIS are bitter enemies and there is little evidence to suggest that the two have linkages of any kind. Still, when ISIS declared a Caliphate and an international conference was held in Paris on September 15, 2014 by the leaders of over 30 countries to discuss the modalities of countering ISIS, Iran was deliberately excluded from this forum.

Nevertheless, there was some tacit cooperation between Iran and the U.S. in their fight against ISIS, exemplified by U.S. air support for Iranian-backed

Shia militias in Iraq seeking to reverse ISIS advances. Iran also reportedly sent its Quds commander to Iraq in order to safeguard the country's Shia Muslims and [adopted](#) "an interventionist approach in Iraq and Syria, largely through the use of allied militias, including a largely Afghan Hazara group called the Fatemiyoun."

While U.S. President Barack Obama favored a strategy of strengthening moderate opposition forces in Syria to fight both ISIS and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Iran favoured the survival of al-Assad's regime and looked at the U.S. strategy with suspicion. Moreover, the global coalition against ISIS included many Arab countries; the U.S. feared that Iran's inclusion could have resulted in the abstention of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. President Obama may have further calculated that including Iran in a coalition against ISIS could have jeopardized its bargaining position in nuclear negotiations, opposed by U.S. regional ally Israel.

One year after the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, it is widely [perceived](#) that "al-Qaeda is regrouping and remains intent on becoming the leader of

the global jihadist movement.” Al-Qaeda has certainly [demonstrated](#) that it has “learned the secret of longevity.” Moreover, President Biden’s administration is [still engaged](#) in the fight against ISIS. If the U.S. and Iran could work on some modalities to cooperate in this regard, perhaps the challenges of Sunni extremism could have been tackled more expeditiously.

The U.S. policy of isolation has not necessarily led to the depletion of Iranian power or its geostrategic reach. The standoff over Iran’s nuclear program also resulted in an acceleration of its nuclear enrichment. U.S.-led sanctions have brought Iran closer to the two primary foes of U.S. power: Russia, and China. After four decades of rivalry with the United States, Iran has certainly devised a strategy to fight its enemies far away from its borders. Iran’s regional proxies are part of that strategy. Notably, Iran’s proxies are not confined to Shia groups, but include Sunni groups as well, such as Hamas. Under an environment wherein Iran and the U.S. continue to nourish their enmity, Iran’s asymmetric power and compulsion of hedging may cause it to widen the fold of its proxies. One must wonder whether some elements of the

U.S.-Iran rivalry might have been more easily resolved if that country had been brought on board in the Global War on Terror.

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LEGACIES OF 9/11



**KNOWLEDGE AND
CULTURAL PRODUCTION**

The Global War on Terror across media and academia



Visual Representations of Iran in Western Media after 9/11

by Angeliki Coletsou
SEPTEMBER 1, 2022

The year 2001 has been considered a turning point in the rapid increase of Islamophobia and Islamophobic depictions in Western media, especially concerning Arab and Muslim populations. This phenomenon largely stems from the tragic events of 9/11 that

resulted in the dissemination of the ideology of the Global War on Terror. While extensive scholarship and research has examined stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims, Iran has been less of a focus.¹ One of the consequences of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was

the consolidation of public impressions in the West of Iran as a backward, fanatical, and repressive society.² Such impressions have continued in Western cinematography in the post-9/11 era by depicting Iran as a fundamentalist state in films like *Not Without My Daughter* or *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, and television series propagating the War on Terror like *Homeland* or *24*.

In order to examine whether Hollywood, American television, and independent cinema not only portray Iran and its people in an Islamophobic and Iranophobic manner but also whether such portrayals relate to U.S. foreign policy actions over the previous twenty years, I analyzed fifteen films and four television series produced between 2003-2019.³ I sought to analyze the ideology of these films and TV programs on the micro-level (e.g. dialogue, cultural representations of Iran, character description, and plot development) as well as the macro-level (e.g. sociopolitical context of the films' narrative and production time, peak of negative representations, and differences between the conglomerate media industry and independent productions).

The findings of my ongoing study suggest that depictions and image constructions of Iran have been associated in the collective consciousness of American cul-



ture with the ideological doctrine of the clash of civilizations, the development of Iran's nuclear facilities, the complicated foreign affairs between Iran, the U.S., and Israel, and the oil crisis of 1973. A significant number of films affiliate Iran and Islam with terrorism (*Homeland*, *Syriana*, *Argo*) and human rights violations (*The Stoning of Soraya M*).

Several typical examples of Iranphobia in Western cinema can be found in the film *Argo*, which depicts the 1980 seizure of the U.S. embassy in Iran and won multiple Academy Awards, including the award for Best Picture presented by Michelle Obama. In *Argo*, there is no context explaining the motivations of the Iranian people for taking over the U.S. embassy. Unlike the film's American characters, who have names, family or community bonds, and motives for their actions, Iranians are simply portrayed as an angry mass of violent men and chador-clad women. Nor are the Persian slogans being chanted by Iranians translated for an English-speaking audience. Yet, when an element of the story appearing in Persian is deemed important to the advancement of the plot (e.g. a threat or attack is imminent), an English translation is provided by the film's American characters, who seem to command the language.

The depiction of the Iranian state in other artistic productions has been no more flattering. In *Homeland*, a series [favored by Barack Obama](#) and Hillary Clinton, Iran is depicted and described as an archterrorist state and the masterminds behind orchestrating an attack on CIA premises with a network of terrorists resembling al-Qaeda.⁴ Even when Iran is not directly linked to terrorism, images of violent demonstrations and severe state oppression predominate in films like *Argo* and a series like *Tehran*. Elsewhere, like in the series *The West Wing* and *Veep*, Iran is depicted as a faraway place stuck in the past, with its capital city Tehran appearing on screen as a technologically underdeveloped city, indirectly promoting the superiority of American technological achievements.⁵ All these images shape the portrait of a country perceived as radicalized or backward and, most importantly, in need of Western intervention to progress. Such narratives endorse American soft power and a neocolonial view of Iran that helps legitimize U.S. foreign policy.

There have been cinematic and television portrayals with neutral or positive Iranian characters, however, these usually fall under the category of post-racial media representations. Such representations include Muslim characters compliant with Western norms, those who

maintain religious practices that are not demonstrably evident, or characters depicted as victims of suffering and ridicule.⁶ For example, in the third season of *Homeland*, Farah, a CIA analyst with Iranian heritage, had to endure ridicule from the head of U.S. Intelligence Services Saul Berenson for wearing a hijab, which he considered an insult to the people who died at the fictional attack on the CIA.⁷ The implication is that had Farah *not* worn a hijab, her presence as a Muslim would have been fully accepted due to the absence of any outward cultural display of her religion.

Many positive and neutral cinematic or television portrayals of Iran make frequent reference to the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC) and their great kings, like Cyrus and Darius, in an attempt to revive the dynasty's pre-Islamic glory and differentiate ancient Persia from modern Islamic Iran. For example, in the 2015 film *September of Shiraz*, a prisoner in the newly formed Islamic Republic wonders if anyone remembers the time when the country was governed by just rulers, to which another replies: "Cyrus the Great. We were all equal. Muslim, Christian, Jew...didn't matter. We were a great empire." Of course not all Hollywood depictions of ancient Persia are positive. Films like *300* (2006) or *The 300 Spartans* (1962) tend to present Persia as

a totalitarian empire combating Greece, a synecdoche for the West, who is seeking to preserve the ideals of freedom and democracy. One of the truly rare films associating Iran and its people with positive connotations was the 2019 film *The Operative*, which addressed issues rarely discussed in Western cinema, like economic sanctions against Iran and the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists.

While negative representations of Iran increased after 9/11, it is worth noting that the peak of such cinematic portrayals took place between 2005-2015, that is, a period incorporating only three years of the Bush presidency and nearly the entire two terms of Barack Obama's presidency. It is quite possible that the increase in Iranophobic depictions can be attributed to the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), who was both frequently ridiculed in the international media and under whose presidency Iran's nuclear program developed significantly, leading to a spate of economic sanctions imposed by the Obama administration and the European Union. Indeed, the majority of the UN Security Council's resolutions against Iran took place during the same time period (2006-2015), making a linkage between the enforcement of economic sanctions against Iran and the country's negative representations by

the Western media possible. When the Iranian nuclear agreement was signed in 2015, and economic sanctions began to drop, the more biased cinematic portrayals of Iran decreased, demonstrating once again that the image construction of Iran in the entertainment industry is often in-line with American foreign policy. No matter its ebbs and flows, cinematic and media representations of Iran must be viewed critically. They have the potential to shape public opinion by reflecting the political stimuli of a certain era or by propagating favored government policies, thereby acting as agents of soft power.

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see Evelyn Alsultany, "[Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational Strategies for a 'Postrace' Era](#)," *American Quarterly* 65.1 (March 2013): pp. 161-169.

⁷ Berenson says: "You wearing that thing on your head is one big fuck you... to the people who would have been your co-workers...except they perished in a blast out there. So, if you need to wear it, if you really need to...which is your right, you'd better be the best analyst we've ever seen." See *Homeland* season 3 episode 2.

¹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Interlink Publishing, 2009.

² Ehsan Shahghasemi, *Iranians in the Minds of Americans*, Nova Science Publishers, 2017.

³ For more on Iranophobia see Haggai Ram, *Iranophobia: The Logic of an Israeli Obsession*, Stanford University Press, 2009.

⁴ See *Homeland*, season 2, ep. 12

⁵ See *The West Wing*, season 4, ep. 9 and *Veep*, season 4, ep. 4.

⁶ For more on post-racial media representations



Productive Discomfort

German Islamic Studies after 9/11

by Olmo Gölz
SEPTEMBER 1, 2022

The events of 9/11 shook up Islamic Studies ('Islamwissenschaft') in the German-language academy (including Switzerland and Austria) and left a deep imprint on the discipline. New institutions were founded, BA and MA programs were initiated, and multiple chairs were doled out to younger

professors with a more modern orientation. Student expectations of a rather niche field rose considerably.

German Islamic Studies have long been a somewhat odd construction. It has always been a small discipline, relatively free-floating in the canon of subjects of

study offered by social sciences and philological faculties in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Interestingly, this fact didn't change much after the groundbreaking publication of *Orientalism* in 1978. This might have to do with the fact that its author, Edward Said, explicitly excluded German Orientalists from his harshest criticisms, stating that "at no time in German scholarship during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century could a close partnership have developed between Orientalists and a protracted, sustained national interest in the Orient. There was nothing in Germany to correspond to the Anglo-French presence in India, the Levant, North Africa."¹ Annemarie Schimmel, one of the most famous German Orientalists in the 20th century, couldn't agree more when she wrote in her overview of the history of Islamic Studies in Germany: "Germany had no interest in the political field in the Islamic world. For the German orientalists, the study of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish was purely academic, a study aimed at finding the truth for truth's sake and hence Edward Said's verdict against the orientalists had nothing to do with the scholarly work of German scholars in the various universities."²

However, that Orientalism – as Said understood it – was actually constitutive



of German national culture is without doubt. As Jennifer Jenkins argues, while it might be true that “[b]ecause its empire came late and stayed small, Germany did not have a colonial empire on the model of either the British or the French,” the Orient was nevertheless “the site upon which and through which German national and imperial visions were articulated and acted upon.”³ This realization, however, only came in the early 2000s; until then the main representatives of a discipline that was neither in the public spotlight nor in the crosshairs of postcolonial criticism seem to have hardly exerted any self-reflection on their field, compared to their counterparts in the U.S. or elsewhere in Europe. Despite the emerging postcolonial criticism of the 1980s and 1990s, scholars in Germany were still focused on translating medieval Arabic texts and continuing the strong German tradition of research, especially on the Qur’an and early Islam.⁴ But 9/11 was a decisive turning point for German Islamic Studies. The attacks brought the subject into the public spotlight in Germany for the first time. Suddenly, there were calls for a more political orientation of the discipline. Shortly after 9/11, for example, the German Foreign Office circulated an advertisement that was looking for “Islamic Studies scholars and/or terror experts.”⁵ Moreover, the sudden and in-

creased media attention created a demand that scholars could hardly satisfy, as a new generation of students chose the subject with hopes of a career in political consulting or German security structures.⁶ Overall, 9/11 created an indefinable but productive discomfort across Islamic Studies. The lasting impact on the direction of the discipline’s curricula has not been resolved to this day.

The growing unease about the state of Islamic Studies found prominent expression in a 2008 collected volume that originated at my institute, the Oriental Seminar of the University of Freiburg.⁷ In the volume, titled “Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft” (“Discomfort in Islamic Studies”), the German-Iranian public intellectual Navid Kermani, himself a graduate of Oriental Studies at Bonn University, labeled German Islamic Studies a “monstrosity.”⁸ He criticized the spectrum of topics, disciplines, methods, and historical epochs bundled under the umbrella term “Islamwissenschaft” and noted they were far too broad to be meaningfully explored and taught in a single discipline. No one, he argued, would think of implementing a “Christian Science” curricula in which one would claim to study the religion, culture, history, language, literature, philosophy, politics, law, etc. of the

Christian-influenced world, alongside whatever else is deemed “connected” to Christianity. Kermani’s critiques capture the observation that Said’s Orientalism didn’t shake German Islamic Studies like it should have.

Islamic Studies, of course, was not abolished overnight, nor was the curriculum turned upside down. However, 9/11 can still be considered a crucial moment of reckoning for the field. Since 9/11, German language scholars have found themselves in the position of being asked to make their scholarship more “political” and “modern” so as to provide answers to recent events and explanations of contemporary developments. This somewhat uncomfortable predicament marked the beginning of a phase of self-reflection and new directions. As the Islamic Studies professor Albrecht Fuess, a specialist in the history of the early modern Middle East, put it recently, everyone “working in the field of medieval studies has to deal with the tensions in the Middle East, refugee issues, migration, [and] gender issues” and integrate these topics into their research and teaching.⁹

Perhaps on account of this newfound pressure after 9/11, scholars in the field started to define what Islamic Studies actually is and should be. There are

those that argue for a return to the philological core of the discipline and believe the deep and focused study of “Islamic languages” (especially Arabic, Persian, and Turkish) should take center stage.¹⁰ Others are trying to redefine Islamic Studies as a form of area or cultural studies.¹¹ These discussions have not concluded and the outcome is uncertain, but German Islamic Studies has reorganized itself in the past two decades. For example, in 2006 the federate state of Hessen bundled all subjects concerned with the Middle East in one center situated in Marburg ([Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies](#)), while in 2008, the [Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies](#) was established as a joint project of Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and the [Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient \(ZMO\)](#). By the same token, numerous programs of studies have been reoriented to the study of the modern Islamic world - including the MA program that I am responsible for in Freiburg, “[Islamic Studies – Modern Islamic World](#)”. The current popularity of the topic of Islam presents itself as double-edged sword for the field of Islamic Studies in the German academy. On the one hand, projects related to Islam in any way, shape, or form are much better funded than prior to the 9/11 attacks. On the other hand, there is an ongoing public demand for

scholars to research only the most current and pressing issues, running the risk that an entire field turns its whole-sale attention to the study of war, terrorism, migration, and so on. As Fuess laments, topics related to the radicalization and de-radicalization of Salafists or the so-called Islamic State are more likely to get funded “than research into the Mamluk art of the Middle Ages.”¹² Be that as it may, the strength of the German tradition in Islamic Studies is to be found in topics more like the latter.

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11. September,” in eds. Poya and Reinkowski, *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft*, p. 191.

⁷ *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft*, eds. Abbas Poya and Maurus Reinkowski, Transkript-Verlag, 2008.

⁸ “Das Fach, das sich der Erforschung der islamischen Welt widmet, ist ein Ungetüm.” Navid Kermani, “Zur Zukunft der Islamwissenschaft,” in eds. Poya and Reinkowski, *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft*, p. 299.

⁹ Fuess, “Islamwissenschaft,” p. 175.

¹⁰ See Benjamin Jokisch, “Islamwissenschaft. Globalisierung einer philologischen Disziplin,” in eds. Poya and Reinkowski, *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft*, p. 299.

¹¹ *Islamwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft: I Historische Anthropologie*, eds. Stephan Conermann and Syrinx von Hess, Bonner Islamstudien 4, EB-Verlag, 2007. Alp Yenen, “Wissenschaft und Bequemlichkeit,” SGMOIK Bulletin, 33 (2011), p. 4.

¹² Fuess, “Islamwissenschaft,” p. 175.

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Reprinted with a new preface, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 19.

² Annemarie Schimmel, “Islamic Studies in Germany: A Historical Overview,” *Islamic Studies* 49.3 (2010), p. 404.

³ Jennifer Jenkins, “German Orientalism: Introduction,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24.2 (2004), p. 98.

⁴ For an overview see Schimmel, “Islamic Studies in Germany.”

⁵ Albrecht Fuess, “Islamwissenschaft,” *Das Mittelalter* 26.1 (2021), p. 175.

⁶ Guido Steinberg, “Die Islamwissenschaft und der

SOURCE: Duncan1890 via Getty Images



The “War on Terror” Did Not Take Place:

“9/11,” Ahistoricity, and
the Infinite Apocalypse

by Julian Schmid
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

For the past twenty years, the September 11 attacks have been seen by American and international policymakers and populations alike as a breaking point of international politics and security. After

the attacks – known simply, and almost mythologically, as “9/11” – the “Global War on Terror,” as it was initially known, was and still is seen by many as a unique schism, a rupture or turning

point not only of U.S. foreign policy, but of the meaning of security, surveillance, and global struggles. The event seemed a clean cut from the old world and the old millennium and a conclusive ending to the Cold War, ushering in a new era. This was referred to often by policymakers to justify new interpretations of national and international law, a new state of “exception that has now become the rule”¹ and put in a historical continuity to, for example, the attack on Pearl Harbor. The question is whether this specific thinking about 9/11 makes sense, even twenty years on.

French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, while observing the Gulf War in 1991, came to the assumption that the war had not taken place, saying that since “the war was won in advance, we will never know what it would have been like had it existed.”² His provocative thesis does not suggest that there were no material expressions, no killings or deaths. What he argues is that the beginning, course, and ending of the war had already been decided and scripted by the media before it had even started. In a hyper-mediated age, this constantly blurs the line between *reality* and fiction. In a similar way, the beginning and the course of the War on Terror were already decided before it had actually begun – a war that would last forever, since a war on *terror*,

by definition, lacks any resolution. 9/11 was not a singular event that *changed everything* in U.S. society and American engagement in international affairs, even though many U.S. policymakers and a large part of both the domestic and international audiences of the event itself might have perceived it that way, and perhaps still do. The meaning of 9/11 did not unfold by itself, but had to be carefully molded, implemented, and eventually normalized. It was framed as a war of modernity, moral goodness, and the Western *way of life* against sociopathic evil-doers who aimed to destroy and ultimately roll-back enlightened civilization. The event also gave rise to inescapable logics from all-encompassing surveillance and airport security to military invasions and drone warfare, and vague concepts of counter-terrorism that would collapse under any form of closer academic or intellectual scrutiny, but somehow found their way into a collective common sense, fitting well into our contemporary period and its anxieties.

Apart from theoretical considerations, there are various empirical arguments against the War on Terror. For example, terrorism mostly affects the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and rarely displays an existential threat to the West. Furthermore, international terrorism

was a security issue before 2001 and was a central concern for previous administrations (e.g. Osama bin Laden had been on the FBI's Most Wanted List since 1999), but after 9/11, it was rhetorically redefined from a crime to an "*existential threat*" and an "*act of war*" by President George W. Bush, giving it a new dimension. This shows how powerful the construction of 9/11 was as a breaking point of history, a (ultimately ahistorical) reference point that signifies a moment of weakness and trauma from which the nation can rise again to greatness. Instead, it has ushered in a new, inevitable era for security and foreign policy. 9/11 and its aftermath were thus discursive constructions that continued longstanding features of international politics and U.S. foreign policy.

The interpretation of the 9/11 attacks by the Bush administration, and the way this narrative was continued by Presidents Obama and Trump (and potentially Biden), served a crucial purpose: It brought back a world in which American identity feels most comfortable, namely in an existential confrontation with a dark, ever-powerful enemy that has to be battled in a series of arenas and consecutive apocalyptic events until the day of reckoning. Thanks to the forceful and violent symbolism of 9/11, the U.S. could easily slip into a role all too famil-

iar: a non-aggressor or invader that is always a benign and benevolent defender against evil. Terrorists attacking an innocent nation created the space for the United States to pick up the sword of justice to fight alleged pre-modern demons of darkness.

But twenty years on, the infinite nature of the War on Terror seems more obvious than ever. The Middle East as well as Afghanistan and Iraq are not shining examples of a world *made safe for American democracy*, while the killing of leading terrorist figures, from Osama bin Laden to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the so-called Islamic State, did not solve the issue. Our world remains one driven by a perpetual state of exception that "functions in politics as cover for the suspension of the rule of law and the introduction of new executive powers justified by crisis,"³ violent counter-terrorism policies, and omnipresent surveillance which, rather than solving the ongoing crisis of the post-9/11 world, perpetuates violence as a main feature of international politics. The eschatological battle between good and evil is fought on an endless sequence of apocalyptic battlefields at different times and in different spaces, but never really leaving us. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq will not bring an end to the fight, one increasingly fought

by covert operations and drones, while even more security threats are created. Rethinking the way we make sense of 9/11 and to historically contextualise and learn from it could help develop the right solutions for the future, and break the circle of violence.

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¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 39

² Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 61

³ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, 2019, p. 66

LEGACIES OF 9/11



MUSLIM NETWORKS

Muslim societies between radicalization and Islamophobia



Bold Shi'is, Frightened Sunnis, and the Making of Sectarianism after 9/11

by Simon Wolfgang Fuchs
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

The Global War on Terror (GWOT) reshaped one of the most consequential intra-Islamic conflicts of our time, namely Sunni-Shi'i sectarianism. While the

20th century had witnessed some [sincere efforts to bridge the gaps](#) between the communities, it became increasingly clear since the 1960s that ecumenism

had reached a dead end. This had less to do with Islamic law – a field in which Sunnis and Shi'is don't differ much – but with supposedly irreconcilable theological views, a position which the rising trend in Salafi Islam pushed in particular.

Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, [these concerns obtained a further political dimension](#) with Iran suddenly (albeit briefly) emerging as a powerful manifestation of an Islamic state, [something that Sunni Islamists had been dreaming of for decades](#). Consequently, neighboring states with a Sunni majority banded together to contain the Shi'i "temptation" and became increasingly sophisticated along the way in [managing religion more broadly](#). Yet, this wall of containment suddenly burst in 2003 – with dire consequences until today.

After the American-led invasion of Iraq, the Middle East woke up to a novel political landscape. Sunni politicians were quick to paint the picture of a threatening ["Shi'i crescent" in the region](#). Even countries that barely had a Shi'i presence now [discovered "secret" Shi'i machinations](#): in the wake of the Egyptian Revolution, for example, newspaper reports emerged that [Iran had supposedly asked the government of Mohamed Morsi](#) (in power from 2012-2013) to fol-

low its lead. Egypt should not only impose the shari'a but also a form of government resembling Iran's "rule of the jurispudent" (vilayat-i faqih).

In the shadow of this increasing hysteria, the city of Najaf made an unexpected comeback as a global center of Shi'i learning, while Iran steadily and [skillfully enlarged its regional footprint](#).¹ Sunni fears were further kindled in 2006, when Hasan Nasrallah, leader of the Lebanese Shi'i group Hezbollah, [mesmerized TV audiences across the region](#) with his principled stance against Israel. The Shi'i appeal in the Middle East seemed unstoppable. These developments, we should recall, happened in a climate when Sunni terrorist groups in the form of al-Qaeda and its offspring were singled out as [the prime enemy of the West](#). Shi'i actors, on the other hand, managed during these years to largely avoid negative press (exceptions being Iranian politicians such as [president Mahmud Ahmadinejad](#), of course). On the contrary, they succeeded in presenting themselves as [sober and reliable rational actors](#), ready to do business with Western governments and [tolerant of religious minorities](#). Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, for instance, was unanimously praised as facilitating [democratic elections in Iraq](#).

Such tactical alliances with Shi'is became even more important for Western governments with the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS). Shi'i militias did a lot of the heavy lifting, in both Syria and Iraq, to defeat the group and did not shy away from publicizing [their successes on social media](#). The [attention devoted to IS](#) and its horrific [acts of violence](#), however, led many to turn a blind eye to [Shi'i militias and their own atrocities](#) committed against ordinary Iraqi Sunnis. Such brazen displays of Shi'i boldness further fueled a qualitative deepening of anti-Shi'i arguments online and offline.²

The post-2003 sectarian discourse has thus come to full fruition.³ Ecumenical initiatives to normalize Shi'ism have been rendered almost unthinkable in many parts of the Middle East and South Asia. Instead of sectarian conflict surfacing in debates over doctrinal minutiae, they now appear most prominently on the battlefield and in the realm of politics.

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¹ See Sabrina Mervin, Robert Gleave, and G raldine Chatelard (ed.s), *Najaf: Portrait of a Holy City*, Ithaca Press, 2017.

² See Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (eds.), *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, Hurst, 2017.

³ See Naser Ghobadzdeh and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Sectarianism and the Prevalence of 'Othering' in Islamic Thought," *Third World Quarterly* 36.4 (2015), pp. 691-704.

SOURCE: Wikipedia (Julian Nyča)



Islamist Radicalism in the Balkans

From Immigrant Arab Fighters to
Emigrant Combatant in Arabia

by Asya Metodieva
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

Twenty years after the 9/11 attacks, the Balkans struggle to shed the notoriety of being a radicalization hotspot. Although most states in the region have taken more concrete efforts at curbing

homegrown extremists than many North Atlantic states, the region continues to be perceived as a haven for terrorists.

In the 1990s, two events facilitated the

infiltration of al-Qaeda (and like-minded groups) in the Balkans and the regional revival of Islam: the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and the Kosovo War (1998-1999). These wars, triggered by the breakup of Yugoslavia, became a cause célèbre for Muslim populations across the world and attracted many aspiring jihadis.¹ The most famous of these was none other than Osama bin Laden. The leader of al-Qaeda is known to have visited Albania in the early 1990s to stir support for Bosnian mujahideen and the Kosovo Liberation Army.² He helped establish networks between the Balkans and other parts of the Muslim world, placing his operatives in charge of various humanitarian organizations and charities rebuilding mosques destroyed in the wars.

Osama bin Laden's visit to Albania further opened the door for other Arab mujahideen coming out of the Soviet-Afghan War. By the summer of 1992 Arabs arriving with money, military experience, and novel ideas of global jihad had created a thriving radical milieu in the Balkans. They popularized the idea of jihad and used the concept to justify violence as the only way to "defend" Islam from those portrayed as enemies, including modern society and ordinary Muslims. Their emergence was thus formative to today's violent Islamist activ-

ism in the Balkans. More importantly, they streamlined systems of financial and logistical support through a network of humanitarian organizations tied to public and private sources in the Arab world.³ For example, Al-Kifah and the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF), led by Osama bin Laden's associate Enaam Arnaout took donations to support foreign fighters in the Bosnian War.⁴ The efforts at propagating jihad were further energized by Osama bin Laden's visits to the mujahideen camps between 1994 and 1996, which eventually led to him [getting a Bosnian passport](#).

Humanitarian aid organizations played a vital role in the proliferation of Salafism and jihadi Salafism in the region. The Saudi High Commission for the Relief of Bosnian Muslims (SHC), established in 1992 and overseen by Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, was perhaps the most significant single Muslim donor. Following 9/11, media investigations pointed to the SHC and related organizations as supportive of extremism-related activities. This organization supported various Salafi NGOs on the ground, such as the Active Islamic Youth (AIO), operated by former members of the El-Mujahid unit.⁵

Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States pressured the Balkan states to

crack down on foreign-funded Islamic charities. The subsequent regulations gravely impacted the operations of major Islamic NGOs in the region. As the influence of Salafism was temporarily silenced, and foreign networks were squeezed, the movement itself began to fragment.

More specifically, it led to ideologically motivated foreign mujahideen and their affiliated international humanitarian organizations being replaced by local Bosnian radical influencers. Operating alongside Arabs during the 1990s, these Bosnians had developed their networks with the Middle East and even sought education at Salafi seminaries in the Middle East. The Bosnian influencers capitalized on this educational background and social networks to establish their own NGOs and support base amongst the local population.

These new local influencers, however, operated on a much tighter string. Due to aligned American and al-Qaeda interests during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, the Arab mujahideen and their NGOs had been given a free hand in establishing local influence. After 9/11, the circumstances changed dramatically with the U.S. pushing Balkan states to join their fight against terrorism.⁶ This foreign pressure led the Balkan states to

realize the danger that Islamist extremism posed to their countries.

Since then, countries of the region have actively participated in the U.S.-led Global War on Terror. Among other countries in the region, Albania cooperated closely with the U.S. in information sharing and investigating terrorist-related groups and activities. At the insistence of Washington, Bosnia and Herzegovina deployed a State Border Service throughout the country and established a State Investigative and Protection Agency (SIPA) tasked with investigating organized crime, terrorism, and illegal trafficking.

Post-9/11 domestic counterterrorism reforms made possible the prevention of several [terrorist plots](#) throughout the region. Yet, like in other parts of the world, the Balkan states have not won the fight decisively. As mentioned earlier, postwar instability and wartime al-Qaeda propaganda served as inspiration for a new wave of homegrown radical influencers. Some of these local jihadis have now found their way to Iraq and Syria. The Balkan states' inability to foresee and assess the threat of their citizens fighting wars abroad remains one of the biggest failures in their otherwise successful counter-terrorism efforts. Between 2012 and 2016, about a [thousand](#)

people from the Balkans are believed to have joined the so-called Islamic State (IS) or Al Nusra Front.

Yet, in relative terms, this latest manifestation of Islamist radicalization is still a marginal trend given how vast the idea of jihad had become during earlier decades, when foreign-based Islamist networks propagated their ideology and foreign aid. If anything, it proves that twenty years after 9/11, the Balkans have not turned into a large-scale hotspot of radical Islamization, and the states in the region continue to strongly support the Global War on Terror. By showing their strong commitment to anti-terrorism efforts, the Balkan states aspire to become bonafide members of the EU and NATO.

As proof of their commitment, the Balkan countries have made active efforts at [repatriation](#) of citizens who had joined IS. Kosovo, for example, repatriated eleven nationals from Syria recently and thus brought the total number of repatriated jihadis to 121. Public repatriation of jihadists and their families also took place in neighboring Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia.

In this regard, Balkan countries are seen as positive examples, especially in comparison to Western Europe, where gov-

ernments are [reluctant](#) to take their IS citizens back and further prosecute and reintegrate them. The approach undertaken by the Balkan states assumes that the governments seek to control the issue and not contribute to the further radicalization of their citizens by abandoning them in Syria. While Balkan states, with their difficult and painful legacy of Islamist extremism, understand the need to address security concerns, they remain dependent on international cooperation and U.S. support in the decision-making process concerning repatriation.

Given the decade-long history of jihad, frozen ethnic disputes, and proximity to Western Europe, the Balkans remain a vital region for IS, al-Qaeda, and other jihadist organizations. Yet, the situation is nothing like what it was in the 1990s. Twenty years after the 9/11 attacks, the threat of Islamist radicalization is much more decentralized and locally contained. Most importantly, Islamist extremism now must fight against the local state rather than through their support. With efforts undertaken to repatriate citizens fighting jihad abroad, the Balkan countries have given a clear message that they now want to be part of the solution rather than the problem. Dealing with the prosecution and the reintegration of jihadists is a challenge but, at the same time, a chance for the

Balkan states to show their resistance to radical actors.

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¹ See *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity*, eds. Roy and Elbasani, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

² See Christopher Deliso, *The Coming Balkan Caliphate: The Threat of Radical Islam to Europe and the West*, Praeger Security International, 2007.

³ See Colin P. Clarke, *After the Caliphate: The Islamic State and the Future of the Terrorist Diaspora*, Polity Press, 2019.

⁴ Clarke, *After the Caliphate*, pp. 27-8.

⁵ Ahmet Alibašić, "Bosnia and Herzegovina," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of European Islam*, ed. Jocelyne Cesari, Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁶ Aristotle Tziampiris, "Assessing Islamic Terrorism in the Western Balkans: The State of the Debate," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11.2 (2009), pp. 209-19.



9/11 and Sectarianism in Islam

Counter-Terrorism
Debates among Muslim
Groups of Kerala, India

by M Sihabudheen Kolakkattil
SEPTEMBER 1, 2022

Departing from the general trend in scholarly inquiries and popular investigations of the post-9/11 era that focus on the political, legal, religious, and social positionality of Muslims vis-à-vis the

West, political institutions in their home countries, or other religious communities, this article reflects on the effects of the Global War on Terror within Muslim communities themselves. The effort

here is to analyze how 9/11 and the Global War on Terror affected engagements among various religious groups and organizations of Muslims in [Kerala](#), India, a South Indian state reorganized in 1956 based on Malayali linguistic identity.

The Kerala state is religiously plural, with the Hindu community comprising 55% of the total population, and Muslims and Christians making up 27% and 18%, respectively. While 94% of the state's Muslim population identifies as Sunni and followers of the Shafii school of thought, they are organized into different religious and political groups constantly in competition to represent the interests of Kerala Muslims. In this competition, the groups were often guided by a reformist/modernist and traditional/conservative framing, both as aspirational claims and accusations on rivals. Understanding how debates around these categories were mobilized historically can help sharpen our understanding of what changed after the 9/11 attacks.

In the 1920s, after the collapse of the transregional Khilafat Movement, the religious loyalties of Kerala Muslims were largely divided between Samastha Kerala Jemiyathul Ulama (Samastha) and [Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen \(KNM\)](#). Samastha and KNM were both formed in the first half of the 20th century, but took on diverging positions vis-

à-vis sources of Islamic authority. While the former championed traditional local Malayali sources, the Salafi KNM shunned them for being adulterated by non-Islamic traditions. Despite espousing a puritanical vision of Islam, KNM for decades claimed the modernist title for itself and called out their larger rival Samastha as traditionalist/orthodox. Behind this position was not just their ideological beliefs, but also a political strategy to present themselves as the “good Muslims” better suited to the Indian state’s modernizing ambitions.

After Independence in 1947, the Indian Union Muslim League (Muslim League) brought both groups together under a shared umbrella, but in 1989 a group of Samastha members broke away due to growing concerns about KNM dominance and their staunch stance of promoting *bid’ah* (heresy) and neglecting traditional Muslims. At the same time, the Muslim League was struggling to hold on to its modernist claim and instead was associated more with a rigid conservatism and communalism that did not fit well with the country’s secularist ambitions. In fact, their claim as the modernist Islamic party was countered by the Maulana Maududi inspired party Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH). Alongside criticizing the Muslim League for having lost touch with the Muslim community, JIH rallied support by targeting

Samastha for its orthodoxy and framing itself as the progressive Muslim organization that could sit with leftist parties in countering imperialism globally and Hindu nationalist parties nationally. More importantly, just like KNM, JIH managed to present their Salafist interpretations as modernist and reformist.

However, the situation changed dramatically after 9/11, with Salafism being identified as a global threat and the ideological driver behind terrorism. As India jumped on board the Global War on Terror and quickly expanded its “anti-terrorism” bureaucratic and policing apparatus, Muslim groups within Kerala saw an opportunity to shift their internal hierarchies. Samastha and its break-away faction claimed the “good Muslim” badge by presenting themselves as the tolerant and culturally permissive group, while painting their rivals as rigidly orthodox with globalist visions. They organized a cross-state anti-terrorism rally in 2007, led [a three-month-long public awareness campaign](#) to discourage Kerala Muslims from joining ISIS in Syria, and frequently accused their rivals (KNM and JIH) of promoting violent jihadist tendencies. The Muslim League fought back and enthusiastically organized counter-terrorism programs and social-harmony initiatives in an effort to consolidate their own image as a moderate party.

This longer-term view of relations among different organizations of Kerala Muslims allows us to see the impact of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror in redefining the power dynamics among them. Throughout much of the 20th century, Muslim organizations in Kerala competed with one another over which group maintained the strongest nationalist/modernist bona fides and which ones were more traditionalist in nature and holding the country back. In the 21st century, the debate shifted slightly, with groups now vying for the “moderate” Islam label and rivals being lambasted as “conservative” or even terrorists. Overall, the legacy of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror may be best understood as facilitating the ability of traditional religious and political organizations, like Samastha and the Muslim League, to overcome the tag of orthodoxy and conservatism, while at the same time providing them with the necessary justification to damage the social profile of Salafi organizations in Kerala.

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LEGACIES OF 9/11



**SEMANTICS AND THE
LANGUAGE OF TERROR**

Lasting vocabularies and framings of the Global War on Terror

SOURCE: Jan Daniel



Myopic Visions of the War on Terror Era

Lebanon as a Post-9/11
Security Problem

by Jan Daniel
SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

The Global War on Terror (GWOT) defined Western engagement with many places in the Global South over the last two decades. Trying to deal with elusive

terrorist networks, Western countries have initiated numerous armed strikes, but also multiple development-oriented projects that were supposed to react to

local governance failures and limit the space that terrorists can use. This piece looks at two such forms of engagement connected to GWOT campaigns – initiatives oriented on strengthening sovereignty of failing states and those focused on preventing violent extremism. It looks specifically at the example of Lebanon – a country that has been caught in the crosshairs of GWOT for more than a decade. By sketching how different initiatives identified the problems of Lebanon, this essay documents the mercurial nature of the War on Terror as well as the problems of viewing political and social developments solely through a security-oriented GWOT lens.

From a failed state...

“State weakness,” “state failure,” and “non-state armed actors” are among the new words that gained increasing popularity and prominence in the years following 9/11. Spurred by worries about the [“safe haven”](#) al-Qaeda managed to establish in Afghanistan in the 1990s, the inability of some states to control their territory started to be perceived as a significant threat. As [state weakness](#) (or complete state failure) was thought to [be exploitable by terrorists](#), the U.S. and its allies initiated a range of so-called state building initiatives that were supposed to strengthen such weak states and “make them work.”¹

During the 2000s, Lebanon was identified as [one such country](#). While Lebanon was not perceived as being directly connected to al-Qaeda, the GWOT's focus on a state's capability to control non-state armed actors concentrated on Hezbollah and its armed wing. Elevating the issue of coexistence between the state and non-state armed forces from Lebanese and regional politics to the problem of international security, the undisturbed existence of Hezbollah – a peculiar combination of Shia militia, terrorist group, and political party with a wide network of non-state governance institutions – [became an epitome](#) of Lebanese falling sovereignty.² Such a perception reached its climax in 2006 during the [war between Hezbollah and Israel](#) and in 2008 when Hezbollah [used its armed forces](#) to exert pressure on its political opponents. As the problem was identified in the weakness of the state that enabled the existence of non-state armed groups, the solution was to strengthen state institutions. While in the south of the country this led to the deployment of UN peacekeepers, who were [tasked to ensure](#) the “return of the authority of the state,” elsewhere it meant [support for the Lebanese army](#) and [other security and governmental institutions](#).

...to failing trust in the state

In the mid-2010s the spectres of al-Qae-

da and failed states were superseded by a [novel challenge](#) posed by the so-called Islamic State (IS) and its ability to recruit members worldwide. This brought increased attention to individuals and groups who were considered prone to the propaganda and recruitment of violent extremists. The reasons why these efforts succeed [are multiple](#), but as [the UN study](#) on preventing the spread of violent extremism stated “recruiters focus their attention on vulnerable alienated groups in society, and manipulate their feelings of frustration and anger.” As the threat shifted from the lack of the Lebanese state's control over their territory to the population's potentially negative feelings toward the state, the proposed responses changed too. The new global approach called for increased control of potentially risky parts of the population and their reconnection to the state.

In the mid-2010s, with neighbouring war-torn Syria struggling with its own branch of the Islamic State, as well as other [Sunni extremist movements](#), Lebanon was once again identified as being on the frontlines of a (new iteration of) the Global War on Terror. This time, the main problem in the country was not so much Hezbollah or a weak state. Rather, the [problem was identified](#) in the political and social fragmentation of the Leb-

anese Sunni community and its grievances, exacerbated by the shockwaves of the Syrian conflict. These factors resulted in Sunni political [alienation](#) and the [rise of radical preachers](#), who were condemning state acquiescence to Hezbollah. These disparate issues were [translated into](#) a narrative about the missing trust of the Lebanese population in the state. While part of the envisioned reaction lay in armed strikes against violent extremist groups, the response proposed by international donors also emphasized limiting the conditions that enable these groups to attract new members.

Since the problem was related to Sunni communities as well as popular dissatisfaction with the Lebanese state and its performance, the solution was to be found in reconnecting the problematic parts of the population to the state once again. The [key Lebanese national document](#), wholeheartedly endorsed by Western donors, argued: “(p)romoting identity, citizenship and the sense of national belonging among all members of Lebanese society is a key goal for the strategy of preventing violent extremism.” Since 2015, numerous programs initiated in the name of this agenda aimed at improving state governance, but they also focused on vocational training or workshops that brought together representatives of the state and potentially risky

communities so as to better connect the state, job market and wider society.

Epilogue: Problems Seen and Not Seen

The mass protests that engulfed Lebanon in October 2019, which called for the removal of the political regime, showed [widespread discontent](#) with corruption, bad governance, and the handling of a deepening economic crisis. With the [subsequent disintegration](#) of the Lebanese economy, dependent for years on foreign investments, international aid, and financial engineering, the causes of [actual state failure](#) might have been hidden in plain sight. While the gaze of the War on Terror was fixated on the problem of non-state armed actors lurking in ungoverned territories, or on marginalized communities susceptible to jihadist propaganda, it did not (or chose not to) see the [slick Western-friendly political and financial elite](#) perpetuating a [system that brought](#) about mass poverty and collapse of the country.

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¹ Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff, and Ramesh Thakur, *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance*, United Nations University Press, 2005.

² For background see Karim Makdisi, “Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the ‘War on Terror’,” *International Peacekeeping* 18.1 (2011), pp. 4-20.



Redefining Terrorism

Iran, the U.S., and
the War on Terror

by Elena Fellner
SEPTEMBER 1, 2022

Mohammad Javad Zarif likes to lecture. That much is obvious to anyone who has ever read more than a handful of tweets by Iran's previous foreign minister (2013-2021), and it is especially striking when seeing him talk in the flesh. In a [video](#) taken at a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in July 2019, he enlightened his fellow attendees – who, mind you, are all high-ranking diplomats and senior statespersons – as to the nature of U.S. sanctions against Iran: “This is terrorism. Pure and simple. No question about it. [...] So please, friends, stop using sanctions. Sanctions are a means of imposing a lawful order. Sanctions have a legal connotation. [...] This is economic terrorism, pure and simple, [...] and we do not negotiate with terrorists.”

In the 20-odd years since 9/11, many countries have appropriated – sometimes, rather enthusiastically – the language of terrorism propagated by the U.S. for their own aims, be it staying in the U.S.' good graces [or cracking down on internal dissent](#). Iran, on the other hand, has chosen to go another way: turning the language of terrorism, including lessons learned from 9/11, against its most prominent propagator, who also happens to be Iran's sworn enemy. During his time as Iran's face to the world, Zarif regularly referenced 9/11 to paint a picture wherein the U.S. is not primarily

the victim of the one of the most deadly terrorist attacks, but a bumbling giant who makes all the wrong choices. In an almost conspiracy-like manner, he accused the so-called “B-Team” – that is, then-Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, then-National Security Advisor John Bolton, and a few others – of playing the US like a puppet on a string, manipulating it into throwing U.S. resources behind other people’s interests. B-Team participants, according to Zarif, “a) provided most 9/11 terrorists & b) pushed the U.S. into the Afghan/Iraq quagmires,” and now are willing to keep “[fighting to the last U.S. soldier](#)” in order to cow Iran. The fact that bin Salman was still a teenager in the early 2000s and that Netanyahu and Bolton did not play a central role in the decision to invade Afghanistan (unlike the [invasion of Iraq](#)), does not appear to bother Zarif much: his interest was in assigning blame, not historical accuracy.

In Zarif’s eyes, being manipulated does not absolve the U.S. of responsibility for the messes it made during the Global War on Terror; on the contrary, he often presented statistics about what the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – and the instability they created – cost [both the U.S. and the Middle East](#). He thereby placed the blame for the region’s strug-

gles entirely on U.S. shoulders and used it as an argument against any kind of U.S. intervention in the region, be it as guarantor of an “[illegal](#)” no-fly-zone in Libya (2011) or as “[uninvited](#)” advisor to Syrian/Kurdish forces fighting ISIS (ongoing as of September 2022). The U.S.’ knee-jerk reaction to 9/11 appears in this worldview as the original fall from grace, whereby calamities like Libya’s disintegration, Syria’s decade-old civil war, or Yemen’s humanitarian crisis all resulted from the U.S. government’s unabashed pursuit of the Global War on Terror across the Islamic world and beyond, hell or high-water. This mono-causal view, while not entirely misguided, is far too simplistic, not to mention that it robs people in the region of their agency. But such a view does have its advantages: it paints the world in broad black-and-white strokes and absolves Iran from its fair share of the blame for decades of bloodshed and suffering across the region. Having assigned the role of the villain(s), Zarif with his habitual explanatory demeanour now felt free to depict Iran as superior in every way: not only as the country that [knew better all along](#), but also as an empathetic nation that “[held a candlelight vigil as WTC was on fire](#).”

Playing further on this theme, Iran’s former top diplomat also included other

instances of U.S. transgressions against non-Muslim nations and its own population. Drawing a direct line from the [bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#) to the [murder of George Floyd](#), he suggested that the U.S. government does not care, and in fact has never cared, about the lives of innocent civilians no matter where they live. This adds another layer of wickedness to Zarif’s portrait of the U.S.: it might appear like the U.S. follows some grand, incredibly intricate strategy that solely serves its interests to the detriment of everyone else, but in reality, it is incompetent, short-sighted, and unable to learn from past mistakes. The U.S. is not Hannibal Lecter, but Godzilla, trashing everything in its path. Iran, on the other hand, gets to enjoy the moral superiority of victimhood and the chance to bond with other affected countries like Syria, Russia, or China, where the U.S. “[deliberately target\[s\] civilians](#), trying to achieve illegitimate political objectives through intimidation of innocent people.” This kind of rhetoric is therefore useful not only to rage against the U.S., but also to strengthen Iran’s relations with anti-U.S. forces and portray itself as a powerhouse of resistance against U.S. hegemony.

With the stage thus suitably set, Zarif redefined the targets and perpetrators of terrorism. Yes, terrorism is what al-Qae-

da did; but much more often, it is what the U.S. (and its regional middlemen, especially Saudi-Arabia) does to other nations, chief among them Iran. According to Zarif, it is not Iran that needs to learn how to behave [like a normal country](#), but the U.S., which violates internationally agreed upon principles with its careless “might makes right” attitude. To support his point, Zarif argued from a legal perspective – frequently citing international law – while advising U.S. politicians to not “[even bother](#) to open a law dictionary.” His personal attitude of schoolmaster superiority matches his portrayal of the Iranian nation, which as a principle does not “[base strategy](#) on ‘advice’ of foreigners—let alone Americans.” According to the worldview propagated by Zarif, a country like the U.S. that commits acts of terrorism is in no position to call other countries terrorists; a country like Iran, on the other hand – on the receiving end of terrorist acts for decades – has every right to act on the global stage as it sees fit. By redefining what terrorism consists of and who the true terrorists are, he therefore turned the tables on the U.S. and used the vocabulary of the Global War on Terror as a weapon against its originator.

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The 9/11 LEGACIES Project

As the formal infrastructure of the Global War on Terror retracts, the social relations, logics, and material resources from the planetary war are set to shape our collective futures. The 9/11 Legacies project presents a diverse set of perspectives from across academia, policy circles, and journalism to reflect on the more enduring, subtle, and (at times) pernicious legacies of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror. The project seeks to answer one overarching question: In what ways will our future be shaped by the Global War on Terror?

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