



INTRODUCTION

# What the War on Terror leaves behind: An introduction

Harmonie Toros<sup>1</sup> , Lee Jarvis<sup>2</sup>  and Richard Jackson<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Reading, Reading, UK; <sup>2</sup>School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK and <sup>3</sup>The National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, The University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

**Corresponding author:** Harmonie Toros; Email: [h.toros@reading.ac.uk](mailto:h.toros@reading.ac.uk)

This article was originally published with an error in the abstract. A notice detailing this has been published and the error rectified in the online HTML and PDF versions.

(Received 19 January 2024; accepted 26 September 2024)

## Abstract

This article serves as the introduction to a Special Issue of the *European Journal of International Security* titled 'What the War on Terror Leaves Behind'. In it, we seek to contextualise and summarise the diverse contributions of this collection, which is animated by four overarching questions: (i) More than 20 years after the attacks of 11 September 2001, is the War on Terror now, finally, over? (ii) What, if any, legacies remain from the post-9/11 way of thinking and doing counterterrorism? (iii) What is the significance of the War on Terror's legacies or absence thereof? and, (iv) How do the War on Terror's impacts and effects sit within other historical contexts and (dis)continuities? The article begins with a brief overview of some of the conceptual and political ambiguities of the War on Terror itself, before situating the issue in relation to issues of continuity and change anticipated by the four questions above. A second section then explores the urgency of these questions for academic debate, and in the 'real world' of international security as experienced by states, communities, and other subjects. A third section then summarises the argument and contributions of the articles in the issue –highlighting the lack of agreement on key issues within these debates.

**Keywords:** counterterrorism; discourse; terrorism; War on Terror

## Introduction

Few events have dominated global political life in the way that the War on Terror has dominated the past 20 years or so. A shorthand for military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and beyond; for counterterrorism operations and associated activities across dozens of countries; for extraordinary renditions; for enemy combatants and Guantanamo Bay; for the 'Axis of Evil'; for vast new institutions such as the US Department of Homeland Security; for international resolutions (and their noteworthy absence); for swathes of new counterterrorism policies and laws across the world; for Abu Ghraib and liberal democratic torture; for weapons of mass destruction; for Al-Qaeda; for ISIS; for 9/11 and its victims – the War on Terror has fundamentally, perhaps irrevocably, shaped international political life.

The challenge is, and the challenge always has been, the vagueness, perhaps deliberate, of this shorthand which connotes so much yet evades easy apprehension. What, most obviously, is the 'War on Terror'? Not strictly a war in any conventional sense, of course (although it has involved two major wars and numerous smaller military operations), but not straightforwardly akin either

to earlier metaphorical ‘wars’ on drugs, crime, obesity, or poverty.<sup>1</sup> A discourse, perhaps, or a security paradigm, albeit one with an emphatically material existence?<sup>2</sup> Where, too, are the limits of this paradigm, discourse, or ‘war’? Does the War on Terror stretch to all counterterrorism activity undertaken by states and international organisations in the years since the attacks of 11 September 2001? Alternatively, do we reserve the label for the counterterrorism actions of the United States and its most active allies in that period? Where might counter-insurgency<sup>3</sup> and counter-radicalisation<sup>4</sup> efforts fit in here, given the prominence of both within the contemporary counterterrorism toolkit? What, indeed, can be said of the War on Terror’s origins, when most, perhaps all, of the examples given above have significant antecedents and heritage – in the Cold War, in militarism, in European colonial projects, and beyond?<sup>5</sup> How new, how different, was (or is) any of this war?<sup>6</sup> Did it ever really begin? And what of its endings?<sup>7</sup> Does the War on Terror still exist when the phrase falls out of favour or becomes discontinued? Is it still recognisable when its workings are normalised as simply ‘the way’ that security is now done?<sup>8</sup>

The aim of this Special Issue is to investigate precisely such questions. Has the War on Terror finally come to an end? What does this end look like, and who or what does it leave behind? If it has, indeed, ended, what, if anything, has replaced ‘terrorism’ as ‘the main threat to international security’, and what might have replaced ‘War on Terror’ as the main way of doing international security? What can be learned from how terrorism was constructed and perhaps now deconstructed as a security threat? And, finally, what do we as scholars and students do when our primary object of inquiry – (counter)terrorism – finds its relevance altered, and perhaps even diminished in absolute or relative terms? As demonstrated below, the articles collected in this Special Issue take different approaches to these questions, focusing on the War on Terror’s diverse policy, geographical, and temporal domains. They do not, crucially, share a view on whether the War on Terror has actually ended. Neither do they share a view on what its (non-)ending means for scholars and scholarship in international security, terrorism research, and related fields. But debating these questions, and thereby opening them for sustained reflection and analysis, has perhaps greater importance than any agreement we might reach on their answers.

### Stakes: Academic, political, human

Questions around the War on Terror’s origins, legacies, endurance, and significance are important for at least two reasons. In the first instance, they have an academic importance in that such questions speak directly to the motivations, purposes, and challenges of Security Studies and its specialisms, such as terrorism research. Security Studies – in its diverse ‘traditional’ and ‘critical’ guises – has *always* been concerned with the interpretation and consequences of (dis)continuities of (in)security for states and other actors in the international system.<sup>9</sup> To select just a few examples,

<sup>1</sup>See Lori Hartmann-Mahmud, ‘War as metaphor’, *Peace Review*, 14:4 (2002), pp. 427–32.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Jackson, Lee Jarvis, Jeroen Gunning, and Marie Breen-Smyth, *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 250–6.

<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Gilmore, ‘A kinder, gentler counter-terrorism: Counterinsurgency, human security and the War on Terror’, *Security Dialogue*, 42:1 (2011), pp. 21–37.

<sup>4</sup>Alex P. Schmid, ‘Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: A conceptual discussion and literature review’, *ICCT Research Paper*, 97:1 (2013).

<sup>5</sup>E.g. Marina Espinoza, ‘State terrorism: Orientalism and the drone programme’, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 11:2 (2018), pp. 376–93; Rabea M. Khan, ‘The coloniality of the religious terrorism thesis’, *Review of International Studies* (2023) (first view), pp. 1–20, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210523000517>}.

<sup>6</sup>See Adam Roberts, ‘The “war on terror” in historical perspective’, *Survival*, 47:2 (2005), pp. 101–30; Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Nicholas Rengger, ‘Apocalypse now? Continuities or disjunctions in world politics after 9/11’, *International Affairs*, 82:3 (2006), pp. 539–52.

<sup>7</sup>See Michael Stohl, ‘“There’s only three things he mentions in a sentence – a noun, a verb and 9/11”: Terrorism, fear and the after, after 9/11’, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 12:1 (2019), pp. 63–77.

<sup>8</sup>Trevor McCrisken, ‘Ten years on: Obama’s war on terrorism in rhetoric and practice’, *International Affairs*, 87:4 (2011), pp. 781–801.

<sup>9</sup>E.g. Stephen M. Walt, ‘The renaissance of Security Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 35:2 (1991), pp. 211–39 (pp. 225–7).

such concern is evident in debate around the causes of war, the dynamics of alliance formation, the emergence of 'new security challenges', and so on and so forth. Changes in how we understand security actors, threats, and events, moreover, also help evolve our understanding of the field itself, which has, of course, transformed dramatically since its concretisation in the post–World War II period.<sup>10</sup>

More important, perhaps, is the wider political and normative urgency of the questions with which we began, and the likely 'real world' consequences of the War on Terror's various remnants. We need look no further than the devastating violence that mars the new phase of the Israel–Palestine conflict triggered by a series of attacks in Southern Israel on 7 October 2023. The widespread framing of the Hamas-led attacks as 'Israel's 9/11' by Israeli officials and others<sup>11</sup> points to the continuing resonance of 9/11 as a point of comparison or interpretive lens through which to make sense of subsequent atrocities. Metaphors, of course, often do important heuristic work in framing security threats and legitimising solutions to security problems.<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy, therefore, that an event like 9/11 – itself so frequently apprehended through metaphor, with World War II and the Pearl Harbor attacks a particularly rich source domain<sup>13</sup> – now does its own explanatory and normative work in shaping security discourse and action.

Moving from events to identities, the widespread condemnation of Hamas and its violences as 'terrorist' by members of the international community served similarly to highlight this lexicon's enduring, perhaps even increasing, power as a marker of opprobrium and otherness. Such power was apparent in UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's comments at a North London synagogue two days after the attack, mourning 'victims of an utterly abhorrent act of terror', in which he noted: 'The people who support Hamas are fully responsible for this appalling attack. They are not militants. They are not freedom fighters. They are terrorists. And their barbaric acts, are acts of evil. There is no other word to describe what we have seen.'<sup>14</sup> US President Joe Biden depicted the attack in similar language, condemning the 'terrorist assault' of the 'terrorist group Hamas', and comparing it to 'the worst ravages of ISIS, unleashing pure unadulterated evil upon the world.'<sup>15</sup> As he continued: 'There is no rationalizing it, no excusing it. Period.'<sup>16</sup>

And yet, notwithstanding the prominence of framings such as the above, the attempt by Sunak, Biden, and many others beyond and within Israel to reduce Hamas's attacks to 'terrorism' alone – rather than situating them within a complex conflict involving numerous actors and decades of direct, structural, and cultural violence – has been less successful. In the first instance, Israel's counter terrorist violence, which has led to the deaths of at least 35,000 people according to the United Nations, and 30,000 even by Israel's own count,<sup>17</sup> has generated considerable international criticism. For example, it has prompted numerous states – including powerful

<sup>10</sup>Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 8–10.

<sup>11</sup>See Raphael S. Cohen, 'Why the Oct. 7 attack wasn't Israel's 9/11', *RAND* (13 November 2023), available at: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/11/why-the-oct-7-attack-wasnt-israels-9-11.html#:~:text=Both%20events%20killed%20hundreds%20of,%2C%20if%20anything%2C%20more%20intense>.

<sup>12</sup>Kai Oppermann and Alexander Spencer, 'Thinking alike? Saliency and metaphor analysis as cognitive approaches to foreign policy analysis', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 9:1 (2013), pp. 39–56.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup>Rishi Sunak, 'PM speech at Finchley United Synagogue: 9 October 2023', 10 October 2023, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-finchley-united-synagogue-9-october-2023>.

<sup>15</sup>Joe Biden, 'Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People, Tel Aviv, Israel', 18 October 2023, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/18/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-october-7th-terrorist-attacks-and-the-resilience-of-the-state-of-israel-and-its-people-tel-aviv-israel/#:~:text=Hamas%20committed%20atrocities%20that%20recall,cuts%20deeper%20here%20in%20Israel>.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>See Jake Horton, Shayan Sardarizadeh, and Adam Durbin, 'Gaza war: Why is the UN citing lower death toll for women and children?', *BBC* (16 May 2024), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-69014893>.

Western countries that were at the forefront of the War on Terror – to stress the need to see the recent escalation of violence as precisely that: an escalatory phase in what Edward Azar called a ‘protracted social conflict’<sup>18</sup> triggered and sustained by the denial of human needs of multiple social groups.<sup>19</sup> Spain, Norway, and Ireland went as far as recognising the State of Palestine in a direct challenge to the ‘simply terrorism’ discourse.<sup>20</sup> And, at a more ‘everyday’ level, we have seen far more resistance and condemnation of Israel’s reaction to the 7 October attacks than was ever permissible of the violences and violations that marked the War on Terror’s post-9/11 immediacies. Such opposition is evident, among other things, in the wave of public and student protests, marches, peace camps, academic events, journalistic commentary, social media outrage, and beyond that has characterised this period.<sup>21</sup>

As this suggests, the exacerbation of terrorist and counterterrorist violence in Israel and Palestine gives us an important opportunity to explore transformations in the power of the ‘War on Terror’ discourse and its rhetorical components. It also offers an indication of significant continuities and evolution in the material practices of the War on Terror from the echoes of Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib that ring out in contemporary allegations of torture in Israel’s secret prisons,<sup>22</sup> through Israel’s use of targeted assassinations against Hamas leaders,<sup>23</sup> to its more general faith in military power as an effective instrument for terminating terrorist campaigns<sup>24</sup> – notwithstanding recent admissions that Hamas cannot be eliminated through military means.<sup>25</sup> And, of course, such issues raise questions around the relationship between discourse and materiality in this context: have the War on Terror’s practices – such as state and non-state violence – been affected or unaffected by changes in discourse, and, if so, what does this tell us about the power and role of discourses?

In addressing these issues, this volume goes some way beyond the sub-field of terrorism studies in order to take stock of whether and how the ‘War on Terror’ paradigm has transformed the thinking and practices of international security. It does so in three discrete, but related, ways. First, it sheds contemporary light on (dis)continuities in the politics of terrorism and counterterrorism, stretching dominant ways of thinking and doing (counter)terrorism both backwards into the pre-9/11 period and forwards into the present day. Second, the issue as a whole situates the security politics of (counter)terrorism in comparative context, exploring similarities and differences of rhetoric, logic, technology, and technique with other broad issue areas such as environmental security or nuclear weapons. Third, the issue also explores the War on Terror’s geographical stretching to regions of the world beyond the United States, with their own experiences and encounters of counterterrorism, such as South-east Asia and Eastern Africa.

<sup>18</sup>Edward Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflicts* (Dartmouth: Aldershot, 1990).

<sup>19</sup>A World Food Programme report of 18 March 2024, found that: ‘1.1 million people in Gaza – half of the population – have completely exhausted their food supplies and coping capacities and are struggling with catastrophic hunger ... and starvation; see World Food Programme, ‘Famine imminent in northern Gaza, new report warns’ (18 March 2024), available at: <https://www.wfp.org/news/famine-imminent-northern-gaza-new-report-warns>].

<sup>20</sup>James Landale, ‘Spain, Norway and Ireland recognise Palestinian state’, *BBC* (28 May 2024), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cl77drw22qjo>].

<sup>21</sup>See, for instance, Neha Gohil and Jon Henley, ‘Why have student protests against Israel’s war in Gaza gone global?’, *The Guardian* (8 May 2024), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/08/have-student-protests-campus-israel-war-gaza-global>]; Insaf Abbas and Aoife Walsh, ‘Thousands join pro-Palestinian march in London’, *BBC* (18 May 2024), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckkkww71py5o>].

<sup>22</sup>Frank Foley, ‘From Guantanamo to Gaza: Israel takes a leaf out of the US torture playbook’, *The New Arab* (4 June 2024), available at: <https://www.newarab.com/opinion/guantanamo-gaza-israel-embraces-us-torture-playbook>].

<sup>23</sup>Riley McCabe, ‘How Israel’s assassination campaign against Hamas could backfire’, *Foreign Policy* (27 February 2024), available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/27/israel-hamas-assassination-campaign-security-risks/>].

<sup>24</sup>For a useful overview of the way terrorist campaigns end, see Audrey K. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup>Le Monde with AFP, ‘“Hamas can’t be eliminated”, says spokesman for Israeli army’, *Le Monde* (20 June 2024), available at: [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/20/hamas-can-t-be-eliminated-says-spokesman-for-israeli-army\\_6675234\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/20/hamas-can-t-be-eliminated-says-spokesman-for-israeli-army_6675234_4.html)].

The 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States became a widely used temporal marker for international security – starting what was widely referred to as the ‘post-9/11’ period, and indeed the War on Terror. Will this familiar periodisation lose relevance or currency? Will it be replaced by what comes to be known as the ‘pre-Ukraine’ or ‘pre-Gaza’ period of international relations? Or, perhaps, the pre-cyber era? Was the focus on the War on Terror essentially a dangerous distraction from the real issues of international relations – as argued by realists such as John Mearsheimer for the past two decades,<sup>26</sup> as well as by Andrew Futter and Benjamin Zala in this issue? Or has the War on Terror transformed the security landscape in ways that cannot be easily reversed, as Charlotte Heath-Kelly and Sophie Haspelagh (also this issue) suggest? Did the War on Terror really mark a historical-political period everywhere, as question Yan Chang and Nicole Jenne? If this historical/political period is ever to be closed – and perhaps it is still too early to know whether that will happen – this collection of articles attempts to offer tools with which to embark upon a post-mortem.

### Summary of articles

The remainder of the issue is organised around nine articles that engage in different ways with the themes raised above. The issue begins with three contributions that caution us against prematurely obituarising the War on Terror and its logics. Charlotte Heath-Kelly, in her article ‘“Social Defence” and the resilience of the domestic War on Terror: A genealogy of social security, national security, and defence,’ argues that counter-radicalisation and counter-extremism imaginaries and programming are likely to remain with us even if there is a major shift in national and international security towards interstate war, as seen, for instance, with the 2022 escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war. This is because the War on Terror has led to such a high degree of integration of counter-radicalisation and counter-extremism logics and practices in *social* policy – from the national to more local municipal levels – that transformations in *security* policy will be unable to reverse this. In making this argument, Heath-Kelly’s article is important because it offers an untold history of how the War on Terror’s dispersion throughout social life has genealogical roots in largely neglected but long-standing approaches to pre-emptive intervention on non-criminal juveniles. Genealogical roots, put otherwise, in public policy domains some way beyond the traditional scope of Security Studies and International Relations.

Sophie Haspelagh’s article then turns our attention to the importance of listing, or proscription, as a specific counterterrorism tool that rose to prominence in the War on Terror period. Although recent work has begun to address the curious neglect of proscription in counterterrorism scholarship,<sup>27</sup> Haspelagh’s article is important for its focus on the reaction of, and consequences for, organisations and individuals who continue to be designated ‘terrorist’ even when any security rationale for their listing has long since passed. Using the examples of ETA, Hezbollah, and FARC, Haspelagh thereby concentrates our attention on the stickiness of security technologies, while drawing new connections between critical security scholarship and a wider literature on stigma and shame in world politics.<sup>28</sup>

The issue’s third article – by Henrique Tavares Furtado and Jessica Auchter – also suggests that many of the framings of the War on Terror are likely to live on past their contemporary policy relevance. In their article, ‘The management of monstrosity and the death of terrorism,’ Furtado and Auchter engage afresh with the concept of ‘terror,’ highlighting the recent re-emergence of state terror, particularly with reference to the Russian-Ukrainian war. They argue in favour of using the language of the ‘management of monstrosity’ – the regime of visibility dictating the apportioning

<sup>26</sup>John J. Mearsheimer, ‘America unhinged,’ *The National Interest*, 129 (2014), pp. 9–30.

<sup>27</sup>See Lee Jarvis and Tim Legrand, ‘The proscription or listing of terrorist organisations: Understanding, assessment, and international comparisons,’ *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 30:2 (2018), pp. 199–215.

<sup>28</sup>E.g. Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ‘Stigma management in international relations: Transgressive identities, norms, and order in international society,’ *International Organization*, 68:1 (2014), pp. 143–76.



of blame, immorality, and corruption in the wake of wrongdoing – to elaborate how the terrorism discourse is still widely used when it comes to the attribution of meaning to global suffering.

Jun Yan Chang and Nicole Jenne's article then turns to the implications of the War on Terror's ostensible rise and fall in the region of South-east Asia. Drawing on securitisation theory,<sup>29</sup> they argue, first, that South-east Asian states have been confronting what are often termed 'new' or 'non-traditional' security threats for many years, indeed often since political independence; and, second, that the region did not experience the 'return to geopolitics' that some authors have associated with the apparent decline and demise of the War on Terror in the Global North. In making this argument, their article cautions strongly against the idea of global or universalising security paradigms, highlighting the need for security scholars to engage with the nuances and details of local security priorities and approaches.

In the issue's fifth contribution, 'Africa is not a country: Opportunities in overcoming the ambiguity of the War on Terror mechanisms', Sam Oando returns us to the historical emphasis with which the issue began by connecting War on Terror practices to experiences of coloniality and the systematic exclusion of the subaltern voice in multi-country security policies and investments in Eastern Africa. For many African states, it would be more accurate to suggest, Oando argues, that the War on Terror never really began. Rather, War on Terror has always been part of the West's continuing relationship with Africa. He proposes that the mooted end of the War on Terror may, as a consequence, offer new opportunities to challenge the lack of recognition of African communities of practice, contextual specificities, and prevailing misconceptualisations of Africa.

In a direct challenge to statist approaches that dominated the War on Terror, Priya Dixit's article then encourages us to consider what counterterrorism might look like in the future if it were reimagined from an anarchist abolitionist perspective. Noting how the War on Terror links often unrecognised victims in a web of security across the world – from New York to Nepal – Dixit offers a powerful normative call for anti-statist, mutual aid-based practices to prevent and counter harm to communities, imagining what this could look like in a future United States and Nepal. In so doing, she asks: how can safety and security be re-imagined in state absence? And, what might come after the War on Terror?

The next two articles of the issue then turn our focus towards wider regional and global security contexts, asking how the War on Terror's legacies play out in policy areas outside of terrorism, radicalisation, and extremism. Matt McDonald's paper kicks us off here, asking whether the ostensible ending of the War on Terror will finally herald the recognition that climate change constitutes a real threat to international security and the national security of states. His article, 'Emergency measures? Terrorism and climate change on the security agenda', investigates why terrorism took on a prominent role in security policy in the post-9/11 period, while climate change remained decidedly marginal. To answer this, McDonald points to the key role played by ideology in this divergence, arguing that while the War on Terror might – by some indicators – appear to be over, the factors that enabled states to avoid acting on climate change remain troublingly strong.

Andrew Futter and Benjamin Zala's paper then focuses attention on the more traditional issue of nuclear politics within international security. Their focus is on the disappearance and recent return of great power competition in this arena after 20 years that were largely dominated by fears of nuclear-armed rogue states and WMD terrorism. The end of the War on Terror, in their analysis, has seen the revitalisation of nuclear weapons as a tool within international statecraft, and – given the emergence of a multipolar world and recent technological advances – a particularly vital one. Indeed, more than this, the War on Terror, they argue, was responsible for the overlooking of the interests and concerns of nuclear-armed great powers by Western states.

The issue comes to a close by exploring the consequences of the War on Terror's legacies for scholarship on security. Lee Jarvis and Michael Lister's article begins with the surprising degree of overlap between contemporary opinion on the War on Terror's repercussions and outcomes in Afghanistan and beyond within 'mainstream' media and political circles, on the one hand, and,

<sup>29</sup> See Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

on the other, long-standing arguments within critical scholarship on security and terrorism. The article examines whether this means that critical understandings have been more widely adopted and if this does away with the need for critical approaches to terrorism. Or, alternatively, whether these contiguities are narrow, superficial, and more limited than they appear. The emergence of such overlaps, they argue, also raises important questions for (counter)terrorism scholarship, providing opportunities and challenges for research communities who have historically been sceptical of proximity to policymakers and their counterparts in the mainstream media.

## Conclusion

The 'War on Terror' has been a central focus of scholarship within Security Studies, International Relations, and beyond for the past 20 years, with its violences, its impact on global politics' move from a bipolar state-centric world to a multipolar world filled with a variety of non-state actors, and its capacity to transform the lives of individuals and societies the world over, typically not for the best. Over these two decades, researchers – including ourselves – have become attached to our subject of enquiry, intellectually and personally. Just as neo-realists may have felt in the early 1990s when 'the Cold War was over', terrorism researchers today may feel a little adrift as their core topic – terrorism and counterterrorism – is sometimes put on the back burner by policymakers and media pundits in London, Washington, and Moscow. They may also have uncomfortable feelings of professional and personal security when terrorism returns to newspaper headlines and national security strategies – as it has with Israel's counterterrorism war to eliminate Hamas after October 2023. Is there a danger that we continue to study terrorism out of habit, ascribing greater importance to it in the academic world at the risk of being out of sync with the 'real world'? Or is the danger that we move on too quickly, ignoring continuities of state and non-state violence which is at the heart of what we study?

Indeed, for us as editors of this Special Issue – and, we suspect, for many of our contributors too – studying terrorism was often, and in no small part, a way to study state and non-state violence in international relations. That violence, we fear, continues unabated even if, policy-wise, it is sometimes focused on new areas or budgeted under new cost codes. As such, and notwithstanding Israel's US-supported attack on Gaza aimed at eliminating Hamas, whether we deem the War on Terror over or not, it is unquestionable that the paradigm leaves behind a landscape of state and non-state violence profoundly transformed by 20 years of terrorism and counterterrorism policies and practices. It also leaves behind laws, international agreements, programmes, operational logics, and institutions the world over. And, as we have seen in Israel and Palestine, it leaves behind a powerful and highly charged political discourse about the nature of the terrorist threat through which states continue their attempts to justify violences and to condemn the violences of their antagonists. This discourse, through long-running practices such as Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, extraordinary rendition, drone killings, and the like, has seriously destabilised the international legal-normative order around the use of force, human rights, and humanitarian law: a development which is arguably reaching its apogee in the war on Gaza as we write.

In numerous ways, then, the War on Terror has substantially altered politics, security, and established ways of living. This Special Issue, we suggest, therefore points at the need to continue to investigate these, and the effects they have on national and international security policy as well as on the lives of ordinary people. More specifically, the War on Terror also leaves behind stranded communities in detention centres, prisons, and refugee camps from Guantanamo Bay – yet to be closed despite 22 years of acting as a detention centre<sup>30</sup> – to camps of displaced people in Syria,

<sup>30</sup>Elizabeth Haight, '22 years of justice denied', *Amnesty International* (22 March 2024), available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/22-years-of-justice-denied/#:~:text=The%20Guantanamo%20Bay%20detention%20center,detention%2C%20Islamophobia%2C%20and%20injustice>).

Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> How the world addresses humanitarian emergencies such as these is a question running through several of the articles in this issue. What are the long-term security implications of ignoring these remnants of the War on Terror? Research presented here indicates that the costs are likely to be high in security terms, and even higher in human rights and humanitarian terms. We therefore end this introduction, and begin the issue, with an appeal to scholars to continue investigating state and non-state violence and the human, legal-normative, political, and cultural repercussions thereof nationally and internationally.

**Acknowledgements.** Our sincere thanks to Edward Newman and Andrew Mumford as current and former editors of EJIS for the support and guidance they have given this special issue. Thanks, too, to the anonymous reviewers for their expertise and insight. Earlier versions of some of the work collected in this issue were shared at the 2023 and 2024 annual conferences of the British International Studies Association, and our thanks to participants for their insight and input. Any errors remain, of course, our own.

**Harmonie Toros** is Professor in Politics and International Relations at the University of Reading, UK. Her research focuses on non-violent responses in terrorism-related conflicts, and the use of narratives approaches in the study of political violence and war. She is an editor of the journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism* and regularly advises national governments and international organisations on negotiations with non-state armed groups.

**Lee Jarvis** is Professor of International Politics at Loughborough University, UK, and holds honorary positions at the University of Adelaide (Australia) and the University of East Anglia (UK). He is author or editor of 16 books and over 50 articles on the politics of security, including *Times of Terror: Discourse, Temporality and the War on Terror*; *Security: A Critical Introduction* (with Jack Holland); and *Banning Them, Securing Us? Terrorism, Parliament and the Ritual of Proscription* (with Tim Legrand). Lee's work has been funded by the ESRC, the AHRC, the Australian Research Council, NATO, and others.

**Richard Jackson** holds the Leading Thinker Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Otago, New Zealand. He is the co-director of Te Ao O Rongomaraeroa | The National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and the editor-in-chief of the journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. He is the author and editor of numerous books, articles, and book chapters on critical terrorism studies, pacifism and non-violence, war, and international conflict management.

<sup>31</sup>For an overview of some of the War on Terror's financial, human, and other consequences, see Watson Institute, *Costs of War* (2024), available at: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/>.