

A WOMAN'S PLACE

Dr. Joana Cook explores the changing role of women in US counter terrorism since the events of 9/11

In September we remembered the 18th anniversary of 9/11. 18 years. We now have a generation coming into universities that do not remember the day of 9/11 because they weren't even born. Yet, the events of 11 September continue to prove to be some of the most formative for the 21st-century global landscape.

We have now seen two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, old threats like al-Qaeda continue to expand their footprint around the world and new threats like ISIS becoming the most wealthy and successful terrorist group in history. We have

seen the US train, equip and partner with countries around the world to manage terrorism better in their own neighbourhoods. We have seen both successful initiatives, but also dark practices that have deeply tarnished the reputation of the US, and which have even been counter productive to its own aims.

The financial and human cost of this ongoing campaign has also been exponential – it's estimated the US has now spent as much as \$6.4-trillion in response to the events of 9/11. Beyond the nearly 7,000 US servicemen and women, and many others including from countries like Canada and the UK who have lost their lives fighting in these wars, nearly 500,000



Women's roles in security continue to evolve in unique ways for a number of diverse reasons

persons have also died from war-related violence in countries like Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan. These figures are truly hard to fathom.

This campaign against terrorism has fundamentally impacted how my generation, and that coming up now, understands concepts like security, terrorism and what we should do to keep our countries safe. It continues to shape these perceptions today. Yet, despite all these global efforts, resources and losses, terrorism has not declined, but expanded, diversified and terror groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS have only seen their membership, physical presence and influence increase. It raises questions about what strategy has been employed over these years to confront and prevent terrorism and where (and why) it was fallen short.

What these 18 years have also highlighted is just what significant gaps in knowledge, policy and practice there has been in relation to women. There has been an absolute shortfall in tracing and understanding women's roles in this period at every step, and there have been significant consequences from this thus far. This is the focus of my new book, *A Woman's Place: US Counterterrorism Since 9/11*, which attempts one small step towards remedying this gap and building off a growing body of research looking at different aspects of women in relation to US counter terrorism.

IMPACT OF 9/11

A Woman's Place looks at 9/11 and the subsequent international counter terrorism response by the US through a neglected lens and considers how women have been agents, partners and targets of counter terrorism since. 9/11 has impacted the roles of women in relation to counter terrorism and terrorism in largely unrecognised and undocumented ways, with profound effects on the efficacy, impact and support of these efforts to prevent, address and recover from terrorism around the world. It is the aim of the book to examine how, where and why women have become visible in the discourses and practices relating to counter terrorism through the lens of international US efforts from 2001 to early 2019. It focuses on US and local women in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Syria, and does a number of things in relation to telling the story of women and counter terrorism over these 18 years.

First, it looks holistically at full-spectrum counter terrorism efforts. By full-spectrum I mean the 'soft' or 'indirect' approaches often associated with preventative measures – countering violent extremism and preventing persons from becoming associated with terrorist actors in the first place. It moves through how we respond to terrorism in foreign policy terms through country partnerships, aid and support; to 'hard' or 'direct' efforts such as offensive military, special forces operations, policing or intelligence efforts in place to stop a specific threat. Finally, it considers recovery efforts, including reconstructing and stabilising societies impacted by conflict to prevent their return as terrorist safe havens, which is often how they have been framed.

Second, it traces how women's roles in counter terrorism have evolved under President's Bush, Obama and Trump. What have their strategies and approaches to countering terrorism been? How have these evolved? How were women's roles understood within these, both within counter terror efforts, but also in the

groups the US was targeting? There are both notable similarities and distinctions that become visible across these three administrations.

Third, it looks at how this understanding of women has trickled down into the Department of Defense, Department of State and USAID. Each of these institutions are examined in a separate chapter. One of the key arguments I make is that it is particularly at this institutional level we have to look at more closely as this is where women's roles become visible in policy and practice on the ground and evolve in unique ways for diverse reasons. Each of these chapters draws on interviews with key actors, case studies and examples, and highlights new policies, practices or units set up since 9/11.

In the DoD, these include American programmes such as Team Lioness, Female Engagement Teams, and Cultural Support Teams, programmes that developed as the US faced new challenges in the field such as growing insurgencies and had to overcome lack of capability to engage 'half the population' in their counter-insurgent efforts. It also looks at new programmes established that engaged and impacted local women, such as the development and training of all-female counter terrorism or special forces units established in Yemen and Afghanistan with women from those countries, or programmes like the Daughters of Iraq. It also touches on dubious cases of women, such as Lynndie England who became

TERROR GROUPS HAVE INCREASED THE TACTIC OF SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

infamous for the abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib.

In the Department of State these programmes focused on women's rights and empowerment through the lens of democracy promotion, where democratic societies were understood as most resilient against terrorist appeals. It discusses programmes like the Middle East Partnership Initiative, and shifts in State to start thinking more about engagement with women in civil society, or the promotion of women in policing, in relation to countering terrorist groups. It also considers women in the development of the first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security which began emphasising women in all aspects of foreign policy; steps to elevate diplomacy and development in full spectrum counter-terrorism efforts; and increased partnership with the DoD in inter-agency counter terrorism-relevant initiatives.

In USAID, this considers how an agency once largely outside of security becomes increasingly integral to this fight against terrorism, as the links between development and security become more emphasised, particularly in preventative CVE efforts challenging what are referred to as 'the underlying drivers' of terrorism. It also looks at the increasing interaction of civil and military actors during reconstruction and stabilisation work for example, or efforts to support female victims of terrorism, particularly as terror groups have increased the tactic

of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in their activities as seen by groups like Boko Haram against local women or ISIS in relation to Yazidi women.

Fourth, it examines simultaneously how the roles of women in al-Qaeda and ISIS have evolved, and how this has been understood and responded to in counter terror efforts. We cannot develop effective counter terror efforts unless we fully understand these groups that engage terrorism, and their members, tactics, strategies and objectives. The book highlights how particularly as these groups have attempted state-building projects, how they engage women in their own efforts increasingly mirrors that of the state, and in fact at times draws off similar language discussing for example women's rights, or even debates about roles for women in their organisation.

Finally, it has created a framework or map that researchers, policymakers and practitioners can use to inform their own work. It outlines the primary *roles* women were often discussed in, in relation to counter terrorism. It highlights the key factors related to language, operational and institution-specific aspects around counter terrorism that drove evolutions to this. It also displays how the engagement of women was often justified by key actors. This is meant to help clarify thinking in terms

of how or why women may be emphasised in certain ways, in certain periods, and for certain ends, and to question the implications of this when considering women more in our own policies and practices.

I hope to demonstrate how looking at the Global War on Terror through the lens of women actually helps clarify key shortfalls in this comprehensive approach to counter terrorism thus far, and drives us to envision a more effective, holistic approach to this concern going forward. This book is for academics and researchers, policy makers and practitioners. I believe we can do better going forward in how we understand women in all aspects of international security, and what we can do to consider, engage and support women at every step.

It is important that we learn from the mistakes of the past to strengthen responses to new and continued challenges we face today – whether it be the rise of far-right extremism, the continued concerns from jihadist groups or the thousands of women and minors affiliated with ISIS we continue to refuse to repatriate and deal with, there are many substantial concerns ahead. I fundamentally believe that better understanding, engaging and supporting women at every step in relation to responding to these groups, ideologies and actions will be crucial going forward, and I hope to convince you of the same ●

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