LOWY
INSTITUTE
DEBATE FEATURE

DID 9/11 DEFINE OUR WORLD?

SIX EXPERTS DEBATE THE LEGACY OF SEPTEMBER 11

EDITOR: LYDIA KHALIL

SEPTEMBER 2021

The Lowy Institute is an independent policy think tank. Its mandate ranges across all the dimensions of international policy debate in Australia — economic, political and strategic — and it is not limited to a particular geographic region. Its two core tasks are to:

- produce distinctive research and fresh policy options for Australia's international policy and to contribute to the wider international debate

- promote discussion of Australia's role in the world by providing an accessible and high-quality forum for discussion of Australian international relations through debates, seminars, lectures, dialogues and conferences.

INTRODUCTION

In 2001, Afghanistan was ruled by the Taliban. They governed the country through rigid interpretations of Islamic law and were notorious for their human rights abuses and abhorrent attitudes and rules restricting the freedom of women. They had also given sanctuary to al-Qaeda, a transnational jihadist terrorist organisation that had opposed the United States and its military presence in the Muslim world. It was from the mountains of Afghanistan and the border cities along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border that Osama bin Laden and senior al-Qaeda operatives conceived of and launched the September 11 attacks against the United States — hijacking domestic aircraft and flying them into targets including the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. It was the most successful and spectacular terrorist attack ever conducted. It was also the largest attack by a foreign entity on US soil, at a time when the United States was, arguably, at the peak of its power.

In response, on 7 October 2001, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. This began a two-decade campaign of military involvement in Afghanistan where the mission expanded into reconstruction and nation building by transitioning to an elected Afghan government so that the country would never again be used as a terrorist safe haven. It also spawned the War on Terror — a global, US-led military and intelligence effort that spanned several conflicts and campaigns.

However, Operation Enduring Freedom never managed to completely rout the Taliban. Four US presidential administrations, multiple Afghan governments, trillions of dollars, and many thousands of lives later, freedom has not endured in Afghanistan, but the Taliban certainly have. In a cruel symmetry, almost 20 years to the day — after US President Joe Biden announced the unconditional withdrawal of US troops following negotiations with Taliban forces — the Taliban is once again in control of the country.

The world is now left asking, what was it all for? The United States' intervention in Afghanistan — despite gains made in expanding rights for women, and educational and economic opportunities — did not

achieve its broader strategic goals and laid bare the limits of American military power.

Al-Qaeda, too, had world-changing ambitions when it carried out the September 11 attacks. For al-Qaeda, the attacks were not merely an act of vengeance against the United States, they were part of a broader campaign of violence targeting the United States and its allies to undermine the nation state system, which, they believed, would usher in a global caliphate to unite the world's Muslims. Like the United States' Operation Enduring Freedom and the broader War on Terror, bin Laden's wider geostrategic aims remain unfulfilled. But did the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing War on Terror have other far-reaching consequences?

The coordinated operation committed by al-Qaeda against the United States on September 11, 2001 was an extraordinary attack and a major point in history. It is often perceived as a world-defining event — similar to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the launch of Sputnik, or the fall of the Berlin Wall. But what legacy did the September 11 attacks have if the strategic objectives of neither the United States nor al-Qaeda were met? Did the aftermath of the spectacular, coordinated attacks and the ensuing War on Terror create a paradigm shift in the international system that still reverberates today? If so, how? If not, what were the more significant effects and trends that have shaped international relations and global power politics today? Did the War on Terror not only upend US foreign and national security policy, but have deeper, more far-reaching consequences on global affairs?

These are the questions we posed to six experts, asking them to assess the legacy of the 9/11 attacks 20 years on.

In many ways, the world has moved on from 9/11. There are new preoccupations and challenges — great power competition between the United States and China, the COVID pandemic, disinformation and democratic decline, and the imperatives of addressing climate change, along with the territorial defeat of the Islamic State caliphate in 2017, have all shifted terrorism down the priority list. And yet, the world still lives under the long shadow of the September 11 attacks and the consequences of the War on Terror.

Preoccupation with counterterrorism and military interventions as part of the global War on Terror overrode other concerns held by governments around the world. The War on Terror was one of the few

mechanisms that animated global cooperation. At the same time, there have been momentous global transformations — including rapid advances in technology, a rise in economic inequality, and significant shifts in the global balance of power — that may have obscured the continuing influence of 9/11 and the War on Terror. After two decades, it is important to properly understand the impact of the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror on global affairs.

We asked our experts, "Did 9/11 define our world? If so, how? If not, what did?" After each of their responses to these questions, editor Lydia Khalil challenges the experts with questions that delve deeper into their rationales and reasons.

EMMA SKY

**FOUNDING DIRECTOR,
YALE INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP CENTER**

The decline of democracy

In response to the question: *September 11 changed America, but did it change the world?*

In its response to the 9/11 attacks, the United States undermined the rules-based international order that it had established after the Second World War and which fundamentally reflected its power, principles, and preferences.

The 9/11 attacks were launched from Afghanistan. But Iraq also came into the crosshairs over claims that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, allegations that were later proven to be false. Unable to gain the agreement of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, the United States led a coalition of the willing (which included both the United Kingdom and Australia) to war with Iraq — an invasion that the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described as illegal and in breach of the UN Charter.

President George W. Bush asserted that America's liberty depended on the liberty of others, because repressive states produce terrorists. Spreading democracy became a national security imperative to remove the conditions that foster terrorism. The cornerstone of Bush's Freedom Agenda was to be the transformation of Iraq into a democracy. The architects of the Iraq war envisaged it would lead to a new regional democratic order and peace with Israel.

However, in order to set Iraq on new democratic foundations, the US-led coalition dissolved Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party and dismissed the security institutions. In so doing, it unintentionally created a power vacuum, leading to a breakdown in social order and Iraq's descent into civil war.

In its obsessive hunt to eradicate terrorists and prevent further attacks, the United States held thousands without due process, tortured

detainees in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, kidnapped suspects in one country and sent them via extraordinary rendition to another, and sanctioned assassinations even in countries where it was not at war.

The Iraq war mobilised a new generation of jihadis with a vision not of democracy, but of a caliphate. Among the chaos, al-Qaeda established itself in Iraq. Its successor, ISIS, took advantage of the refusal of the Syrian regime to respond to the Arab Spring demands of its youth (for dignity, better governance, and jobs) to expand its control over ten million people in Iraq and Syria, bulldozing the border between the two countries.

The Iraq war changed the regional balance of power in Iran's favour, exacerbating a geopolitical struggle between it and Saudi Arabia. Across the wider region, the two powers gave their support to sectarian extremists, turning local grievances over poor governance into sectarian civil wars in which hundreds of thousands of Muslims were killed.

In Syria, a total disdain was shown for international norms and the very notion of an international community was allowed to die. While all sides committed atrocities, the regime — aided by Iran and Russia — was by far the worst offender. More than half a million Syrians were killed, and over half the population displaced from their homes. No agreement could be reached in the UN Security Council on how to stop the bloodshed.

Hundreds of thousands of people fled the region, crossing the Mediterranean Sea on flimsy boats to seek refuge in Europe. ISIS conducted horrific terrorist attacks in European cities, seeking to provoke a backlash against Muslims to show that the West was at war with Islam.

Western public confidence in globalisation as well as in political elites and experts was eroded by policy failures at home (including the 2007–08 financial crisis in which millions of ordinary people lost their homes while governments bailed out the bankers) and abroad (including the wars in the Middle East, the outflow of refugees, and terrorism). Regaining control of borders to limit immigration was a key driver of Brexit, the British decision to leave the European Union.

Donald Trump's hostility to trade alliances, international law, and multilateralism — and his tirades against Muslims, immigrants, and terrorists — propelled him to the White House.

Democracy is no longer on the move. In fact, the number of liberal democracies has been declining since 2006. Externally-driven regime change did not lead to liberal democracy in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Libya.

Instead, authoritarianism is on the rise. Contrary to hopes and expectations, China has not integrated into the US-led order. Rather, China is offering an alternative model where wealth and power can be amassed by opening to the global economy, but without a corollary political opening. The jury is still out on whether a totalitarian regime can self-correct in the face of crises. But for now, the "China Model" of authoritarian state-led capitalism is appealing to autocrats everywhere.

Today, the primary US national security concern is no longer terrorism, but rather great power competition. The rivalry between the United States and China is ultimately over which country offers a better road to progress. Although America remains powerful both militarily and economically, its international reputation and legitimacy as the standard-bearer of democracy has been greatly tarnished by two decades of fighting without winning since 9/11, by its hypocritical human rights violations, and by its own political dysfunction. As a result, the world's democracies are in a weaker position than they otherwise might have been to face the challenge posed by a rising China.

Challenge the expert

Lydia Khalil, Lowy Institute's resident expert on terrorism and extremism, challenges Emma Sky's key arguments.

We now know that the Bush administration was committed to prosecute the Iraq war regardless of UN Security Council approval. You write that, as a result, "the United States undermined the rules-based international order that it had established after the Second World War", yet doesn't the fact that it put so much diplomatic effort into legitimising the invasion via the UN — even though it didn't ultimately succeed — and the involvement in the UN post-invasion and running the subsequent elections mean that the United States was committed to maintaining the rules-based order?

I disagree that the United States put much effort into gaining UN approval. It was important to the United Kingdom, but not to the United States, that there was a specific UN resolution to authorise the war. The Bush administration did not hold the UN in high regard and did not

want the UN to have a large role post-invasion, even if the UN had been willing to take on such a role, which it was not. The Bush administration viewed the United States — and not the UN — as the supreme international authority. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described the Iraq war as illegal precisely because there was no UN Security Council authorisation. On 22 May 2003, the UN Security Council formally recognised — but did not endorse — the United States and the United Kingdom as occupying powers with UN Security Council Resolution 1483. Sergio Vieira de Mello, appointed as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, urged that real powers be given to an Iraqi transitional administration, but he was assassinated on 19 August 2003 in the bombing of the UN headquarters.

You argue that the Iraq war, as part of the broader response to the 9/11 attacks, actually ended up spawning the Islamic State and the next generation of jihadists, who emerged in response to the US invasion. Yet couldn't you argue that persistence and growth of jihadism in the Middle East has more to do with regional dynamics and dysfunction, such as ongoing political repression, corruption, sectarianism, and state-based regional competition?

Many regimes in the Middle East are repressive and corrupt — and have been for decades. But it was the collapse of the Iraqi state — following US decisions to implement "de-Ba'athification" and dissolve the security forces — that led to civil war and created the chaotic conditions that enabled jihadist groups to take root and flourish in Iraq. Membership of jihadist groups swelled as they were perceived as the most effective in their opposition to the US occupation and the new regime. They were able to recruit followers locally who were driven by grievances, threats, income, and ideology. And thousands of Western-born Muslims were attracted to their cause.

We are in a period of global democratic deficit, which you argue is due to the decline in the US's reputation as the standard-bearer of democracy via "two decades of fighting without winning since 9/11". How much is democratic backsliding due to the effects of 9/11 and the War on Terror? Doesn't the current situation have more to do with domestic political dysfunction in the United States and other Western democracies?

In its pursuit of the War on Terror, the United States undermined the image of democracy abroad with its failed national building efforts and violations of human rights, as well as domestically, with the Patriot Act infringing on civil liberties. American exceptionalism went into

overdrive after 9/11. No one was held to account for the decision to go to war, nor the way in which the occupation was mishandled. The threat to the United States was exaggerated. Congress failed to critique policy. The military was glorified and put on a pedestal. The media failed to hold government to account. Vested interests perpetuated a war economy. Democracies are generally lauded for their ability to self-correct due to their openness. But the two decades of fighting without winning since 9/11 can be seen as emblematic of the decline in the quality of US democracy. It was the "forever wars" and the 2007–08 financial crisis (in which millions of ordinary people lost their homes, while government bailed out the bankers) that led to many people losing faith in the competence of elites and the subsequent rise of populism. The flood of refugees from the wider Middle East into Europe further aroused nativist and anti-immigration sentiments.

Emma Sky is the founding Director of Yale's International Leadership Center. She is a lecturer at the Jackson Institute where she teaches great power competition, global affairs, and Middle East politics. She is a member of the Wilton Park Advisory Council and a trustee of the HALO Trust. She is the author of the highly acclaimed *The Unravelling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (2015) and *In a Time of Monsters: Travels through a Middle East in Revolt* (2019).

MICHAEL COX

EMERITUS PROFESSOR,
LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

9/11 undermined trust in the competence of government

In response to the question: *September 11 changed America, but did it change the world?*

A year after 9/11, I got into an academic spat with a colleague about how to make sense of the attack and whether it would have a significant long-term impact on world politics. I tended to the view that its consequences were likely to be great; that it would indeed 'shake the world'. My colleague rated its importance much less highly, insisting that unlike the Cold War, it would not define the state system, or like the end of the Cold War, change the structure of the international order.

We did, however, agree on one thing: that it would have been almost impossible to have anticipated the precise way in which the Bush administration decided to respond to 9/11. There was no logical reason, for instance, for it to have interpreted the attacks as constituting the beginning of a "long war". It could just as easily have viewed 9/11 as a one-off. Nor was there any necessary connection between 9/11 and the US decision to invade Iraq 18 months later. If anything, this action was less determined by 9/11 than by the nature of the Bush administration, the people in it, and their reading of the past, not to mention their idiosyncratic understanding of the Middle East and its problems. Indeed, another US administration, led by Al Gore, would almost certainly not have invaded Iraq. But we are still forced to ask the question: how did those few hours on 11 September 2001 change the world?

The climate crisis, for one thing, had nothing at all to do with what occurred in September 2001. We all did that. Nor was globalisation much changed by 9/11; global business just went on and on! It is true that economist Jim O'Neill came up with the idea of the BRICs economies (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) in the wake of 9/11 and because of 9/11. But their later development had little to do with the attack itself. Asia's economic rise also had little to do with 9/11; and

unless I have been reading the wrong books, the great crash of 2008 was more determined by financiers and bankers than terrorists.

But, even if we accept that 9/11 did not define the world in, say, the same way as the Cold War — my colleague was therefore correct in issuing a health warning — its impact nonetheless was immense.

First, 9/11 changed the United States itself, and not for the better, making it less tolerant towards others, more nationalistic, and increasingly more divided against itself. Moreover, when the war in Iraq began to go badly wrong, which many in the wider international relations community predicted it might, it undermined trust in government or, more precisely, in the competence of those who ruled. In any functioning democracy, scepticism of those in power is no bad thing. But when a lack of trust segues into a complete distrust of all established politicians — something Donald Trump exploited to the full in 2016 — then the way is left open for the populists. And we know what followed when they took over the White House.

The 9/11 attacks, followed by the Iraq war, also impacted on British politics by destroying the reputation of Prime Minister Tony Blair. However, it was not just Blair's reputation that suffered. So too did the "Third Way" project and along with it the whole idea of New Labour. And we all know to whom the Labour Party then turned in 2015: Jeremy Corbyn, an avowed enemy of New Labour and of what for decades had been mainstream Labour Party thinking on foreign policy which hitherto had included a "special" relationship with the United States, strong support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and for Britain's independent nuclear deterrent. Corbyn turned all this on its head and pushed the Party in a completely new direction. This was no doubt popular with his left-wing supporters, but proved much less so with the British electorate, and in 2019 Labour suffered a crushing defeat from which it might take at least a generation to recover.

Finally, in terms of the wider world, there is, I suggest, a link of sorts between 9/11 and perhaps the most important development of the following 20 years: China's explosive entry onto the world stage. China would no doubt have risen in power and stature without the attacks. But in the War on Terror, the United States was prepared to make every concession to build bridges to potential rivals —defined as "responsible stakeholders" — such as China. This may have been a wise and necessary policy back then. But while the United States remained bogged down fighting wars across the Middle East, from which it has been trying to extract itself ever since, China steadily progressed along

its trajectory towards major power status unimpeded, that is until the United States woke up to the fact that it might have a serious long-term challenge on its hands; one that will prove every bit as difficult to deal with — if not more so — as 9/11.

One can only hope it does a better job responding this time round.

Challenge the expert

Lydia Khalil, Lowy Institute's resident expert on terrorism and extremism, challenges Michael Cox's key arguments.

Were the 9/11 attacks and the execution of the War on Terror really the things that undermined trust in democratic governance and gave rise to populism, as you argue? What about other events or factors such as the 2007–08 financial crisis and the rise in inequality from decades of neo-liberal economic policies? Could those events and factors possibly be more consequential?

I think I was referring more to the Iraq war than 9/11 itself, and here there is little doubt that what one writer has called a "blunder" has certainly raised questions in many people's minds about the trustworthiness of those who made the case for it. But as you rightly suggest, many things have undermined trust in government over the past 20 years, including the fallout from the 2008 economic crisis, a realisation that globalisation does not benefit all, and a feeling that there is, to use an old-fashioned term, "one law for the rich and another for the rest of us". I would also now have to include the ineffective ways (and that's putting it politely) in which a number of Western governments have dealt with the COVID crisis. Populist distrust has also fed on a deep strain of nativism in Western countries, which has looked for scapegoats to explain away society's ills — from unemployment through to low wages and poor job prospects — and found them, unfortunately, in immigrants and refugees.

You say 9/11 didn't exactly define our world in the way the Cold War did. Will the new era of great power competition between the United States and China be more defining in the way that the Cold War was?

I am not sure about it being "more defining" or less. This will all depend on how this particular competition works out over the longer term. But there is no doubt that the relationship is in crisis, and neither side looks like it sees a way of returning to the "good old days" when the United States saw China as a "responsible stakeholder" and China viewed the

United States as a useful "partner". All that has now gone out of the window, to be replaced by a great deal of fevered rhetoric on both sides, made all the more dangerous because of domestic politics and the playing up of enemy images of the "other". It is worth recalling though that the Cold War proper did in the end remain "cold", and unlike some analysts, I still think there are powerful incentives on both sides to manage the relationship with great care. It is simply too important — and "too big to fail".

You point to the War on Terror — the Iraq war in particular — as setting back the cause of New Labour and damaging the cause of centre-left politics across democracies. Is it really fair to lay the blame on the Iraq war for the crisis facing centre-left political parties? What about the structural decline of the traditional Labour voter base?

I was primarily talking about the United Kingdom and Tony Blair, not centre-left parties more generally, which have had a hard time defining a role for themselves, partly for the reason you give and partly because it is no longer easy to know what a left-leaning government would do differently from a conservative one. Look at the United Kingdom, where even Boris Johnson has talked of "levelling up". But all is not lost. Indeed, post-COVID, there is a broad agreement that we will need to "build back better", which in plain language means that we can no longer rely on the market alone to address the challenges ahead. As a recent International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds panel put it, in the future the state is going to have to "step in to support a weakened private sector get the economy on its feet. In emerging markets, where the private sector and the savings base are small, government participation in the economy is critical to support and develop existing sectors, but also to catalyse the creation of new sectors, such as renewable energy, technology and healthcare that will help the country thrive in the future". In such a challenging environment, centre-left parties could easily play an important role. Perhaps Joe Biden is showing us all the way?

Michael Cox is Emeritus Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, and co-founded LSE IDEAS, a foreign policy centre based at the LSE which aims to bring the academic and policy words together. He is currently Visiting Professor at the Catholic University in Milan and is the author, editor, and co-editor of several books, including most recently *The Post-Cold War World* (2018), a new centennial edition of Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (2019), a reissue of E. H. Carr's 1945 classic *Nationalism and After* (2021), and forthcoming *Agonies of Empire: American Power from Clinton to Biden*.

FARAH PANDITH

SENIOR FELLOW,
HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL

The world was changed by bin Laden's horrific plan

In response to the question: *September 11 changed America, but did it change the world?*

Could Osama bin Laden have imagined the global upheaval he unleashed with his evil scheme? Could he have anticipated years of intense distrust in governments and fear of "the other"? Could he have predicted that the spectacular imagery of the World Trade Center towers collapsing would create a shared global moment that would be replayed time and again, to heighten emotions, increase fear, and spur outrage — all of which lingers to this day?

Maybe not. But what is certain is that the attacks in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania that killed 2977 people from 93 countries changed the very character of nations — especially concerning identity and belonging — and unleashed decades of unforeseen circumstances including the rise of ISIS, the displacement of an estimated 50 million people, and a surge of hate and extremism amplified by the technological revolution.

The political and cultural fallout from the attacks has shaped our human experience, the dynamics of political relationships, and the strategic frameworks that hold them together.

The vast majority of today's global decision-makers were old enough when 9/11 occurred to understand the long-term effects of seeing passenger planes used as physical and psychological weapons. This critical fact affects the willingness of nations to advance new cooperative frameworks and factor-in the might of non-state actors. It explains the motivation to take protective, collective action around the "us versus them" ideologies used by terrorist recruiters. It also reflects how, from that day forward, the one-quarter of human civilisation that is Muslim underwent a new scrutiny based on religious affiliation.

The massive US military response to the 9/11 attacks drew a global reaction through new coalitions, combined military training, intelligence sharing, and allied security operations. Nations expanded friendships, recalibrated enemies, and altered international dynamics. A sophisticated new threat environment required multilateral organisations to work differently to combat illicit financial networks, terrorist exploitation of technologies, and other tools that terrorist groups use to attract new recruits and conduct operations.

While nations have cooperated in the past on international crises, such as famine or climate events, after 9/11 the international priority became security, relegating resources to these other global issues to second. In parallel, this period birthed a new urgency to contemplate how we interact with those who are "different".

Through it all, "the West hates Islam" narrative of al-Qaeda has had staying power, motivating new recruits to terrorist organisations and causing nations to become less accepting of differences and weary of immigrants. In the years since the attacks, the ability of non-state actors to terrorise has accelerated through their intimate understanding of age demographics and technology, allowing them to form unprecedented new alliances, influencing Gen Z and Millennials from Dhaka to Detroit.

The 9/11 attacks also ignited something far bigger: an overall rise of fear and distrust in governments, individuals, and corporations. Hate, distrust, and fear existed well before 9/11, but the attacks brought forward a new generational wave of uncertainty, passed on from those who experienced the event. How this new generation feels about safety and security is crucial: fearful societies combined with a deep distrust of government will continue to influence issues from trade and health to climate and economics.

These sentiments have driven hate-motived violence, both physical and emotional, on ethnic and religious populations worldwide. They also shape the way nations think about their internal Muslim populations and their foreign policy. Islam and Muslims are part of national equations in a way they were not prior to the attacks. Hate crimes have transformed the global landscape, emboldened former political outliers, fuelled new extremist movements, and altered diplomatic relations and political ties with nations where Muslims are the majority or where they live as minorities. The attacks put a single religion under the microscope and magnified a sentiment that Muslims everywhere continue to experience.

This matters. A tiny minority of bad actors does not represent an entire religion. Muslims have been forced to contemplate aspects of their faith that they did not before the attacks. Asking them to answer for the results of an audacious act of violence by a small band of extremists 20 years before is unreasonable. With so much of the global Muslim population regarded differently now, a new layer of reality and complexity has been thrust upon a quarter of the world's population.

The consequences of the 9/11 attacks are more far-reaching than the steady evolution of global terrorism. They have affected the very way our world operates and how people think about who they are. They have raised questions about our knowledge on the foundational issues of identity, trust, and fear — matters far beyond the realms of foreign policy. Whether bin Laden knew it or not, his brazen plan has had repercussions far beyond the horrors of that day.

Challenge the expert

Lydia Khalil, Lowy Institute's resident expert on terrorism and extremism, challenges Farah Pandith's key arguments.

You write about the particular consequences that the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror have had on global Muslim populations, but has the impact been uniform? And has the scrutiny subsided over the ensuing two decades?

The impact of 24 hours/7-days-a-week scrutiny on global Muslim populations can't be dismissed. The attacks changed the dynamics of ordinary life. The identity of someone who is, or is perceived to be, Muslim has transformed in societies all over the world. Where once no one cared if there was a mosque in a town, today there is interest. *What kind of Muslims are they? What are they doing there? Are they secretly plotting against us?*

The fear of hate-activated violence, the overwhelming unwanted attention, and the need to "prove" they are not terrorists, among other issues, are common concerns throughout the globe. Muslims are worried about their safety and well-being; some have even changed their outward appearance, by removing headscarves or wearing Western clothes, to blend in. The way attitudes are displayed may vary, but the common connective tissue is that the Muslim population is invariably in the spotlight without wishing to be so.

The impact of this scrutiny manifests emotionally and psychologically, as noted in a recent US study on Muslims and suicide. Hate crimes against Muslims in America are five times more frequent than before the 9/11 attacks. New realities around Muslim identity appear in surround sound — one can't escape; the world sees you and responds.

You argue that "'the West hates Islam' narrative of al-Qaeda has had staying power", but by most measures the Salafi jihadist project and ideology has been a failure. How do you account for its staying power when the broader Salafi jihadist project has so far not fulfilled its goals of establishing a global caliphate?

A key goal of bin Laden's plan was to create a scenario where America would have no recourse but to remove its military presence from Muslim-majority nations. By that measure, indeed, the al-Qaeda "project" did not meet the goal outlined by its leader.

However, the ideological dimension of terrorist groups like al-Qaeda have not been a failure. Groups such as al-Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State, al Shabab, or the Taliban — groups that use the narrative of "the West hates Islam" as part of their ideology — have gained adherents over the world in the last 20 years. It is a magical potion for them. They can use it in any way they wish to illustrate their point, for example to vilify Western actions around trade or security, or domestic treatment of Muslims within Western nations. They use the narrative that the reason something bad is happening to Muslims is because of "the West" and their effort to demonise Islam.

In 2012, the Taliban claimed polio vaccines given by the United States were in fact sterilisation shots because they wanted to prevent Muslim women from becoming pregnant. Local terrorist groups in Indonesia claimed that tsunamis occurred because America had the ability to inject a technological device into the global weather system to cause harm to Muslims. With social media's advances and saturation, the claims have increased, the power of the narrative has ripened, and more and more young people are being taught conspiracy theories around this framework.

The so-called Islamic State's ability to recruit from countries as culturally different as Canada and Tajikistan shows the tremendous resilience of their ideology and narratives. If recruitment to groups had diminished and conspiracy theories about "the West" and "Islam" were hard to find, we would be in a very different situation. The success of this narrative shows its ability to deepen mistrust and widen the "us

versus them" gap. The ideological appeal of this narrative has remained strong.

Was it the attacks themselves that resulted in these far-reaching consequences and impacts you describe, or was it the US-led response to them, as many of our contributors have argued? In other words, would the 9/11 attacks by al-Qaeda have had such an impact if the United States responded differently?

An attack of such scale as 9/11 would inevitably have unleashed a broader set of actions by the United States and galvanised a global coalition. The United States would have obviously reviewed its intelligence sharing procedures, scrutinised its prior assessment of the terrorist threat, and recommend fundamental changes to its national security infrastructure -- as it did with establishment of the 9/11 Commission. Its recommendations would have set the stage for wider changes — and questions about building a security infrastructure that would be more alert to this type of catastrophe. The inculcation of fear of the other, growth of "us versus them" movements, and other consequences of a terrorist group claiming to speak for Islam would have undoubtedly had an impact on American societies (as did the Iranian hostage crisis) and other communities around the world. The far-reaching consequences were not just about the US military response.

Farah Pandith is a Senior Fellow, Future of Diplomacy Project, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, an adjunct Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, the former State Department Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and author of *How We Win: How Cutting-Edge Entrepreneurs, Political Visionaries, Enlightened Business Leaders, and Social Media Mavens Can Defeat the Extremist Threat* (2019).

ANATOL LIEVEN

**SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW,
THE QUINCY INSTITUTE**

Limited impacts on global geopolitics

In response to the question: *September 11 changed America, but did it change the world?*

The most significant result of 9/11 by far was due not to the attack itself, but the American response to it; and it took place not in the United States itself, but in the Middle East. Outside that region, the effects of 9/11 have been surprisingly limited: existing features were accentuated, existing developments delayed or accelerated, but little fundamentally changed. The US response to 9/11, too, was critically shaped by longstanding traditions in US political culture and institutions.

The reason for this lack of change is that 9/11 proved to be a malignantly brilliant one-off, not the start of a series of major attacks. The monstrously expensive apparatus of Homeland Security was, therefore, created to combat an enemy that failed to appear. The measures that prevented further attacks — and would have prevented 9/11 and its consequences if they had been in place on 11 September 2001 — were low-key, inexpensive, and indeed obvious. They ranged from stronger airport security to better co-ordination between the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to monitor potential foreign terrorists entering the country.

Although no single Islamist terrorist attack in Europe has so far come close to the scale of 9/11, the impact of Islamist terrorism has been much greater in Europe than in the United States because it feeds into wider and ongoing fears of Muslim immigration and lack of Muslim integration into European societies. As a consequence, 9/11 contributed to a surge in support for nationalist parties, which threatens to overturn the existing European political order. In the United States, where the Muslim population is much smaller and on the whole much more assimilated, this impact, though real, has been less significant.

In the United States, the long-term impact of 9/11 does not compare to the great underlying tensions that have shaped American life over generations and centuries: racial tensions and oppression, fears created by immigration, concern about cultural change and the threat to religion and morality, fears about the impact of alcohol and drugs, and the Cold War. The impact of 9/11 rather resembles one of the "moral panics" analysed by James A. Morone in *Hellfire Nation*; a wave of public hysteria that, like Prohibition and McCarthyism, has receded again, leaving behind a new layer of US security institutions and practices.

The impact of 9/11 on global geopolitics has also been limited. In the case of US–Russia relations, the resulting thaw lasted literally three months, until in December 2001 the Bush administration announced the abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and went on to launch the invasion of Iraq and attempted to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to Georgia and Ukraine.

In the case of US–China relations, 9/11 — or rather the US embroilment in Iraq and Afghanistan that followed — delayed by a decade US moves to contain China's growing power and influence. The Bush administration came to power in 2001 with this strategy high on its agenda. Its implementation, however, did not begin until the Obama administration announced the "Pivot to Asia" in 2011. How much difference this time lag made to China's rise, however, is not clear.

Oddly enough, the impact of 9/11 has also proved limited in Afghanistan, where it all began, and despite all those who have died there. The US attempt to create a modern Afghan state has failed, like others before it. The Taliban have retaken power in Afghanistan, though we may hope in a somewhat more pragmatic form than before 9/11. Afghan developments will be managed — or not — by the countries of Afghanistan's region, with the United States playing a relatively minor role.

In the Middle East, by contrast, the impact of 9/11 has been colossal, and not just in terms of lives lost. A US invasion of Iraq had been long desired by sections of the US establishment, but it is very unlikely that the Bush administration could have gained the necessary public support for the move without the mass hysteria caused by 9/11, and the administration's resulting ability to fabricate a link between Saddam Hussein, Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and Islamist terrorism.

The destruction of the Ba'ath Iraqi state led to a vast increase in Shia and Iranian influence, and to ferocious conflict between Shia and Sunni.

Increased fear of Iran pushed Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states into de facto alliance with Israel, with dangerous consequences for their domestic legitimacy. The appearance first of al-Qaeda in Iraq and then of ISIS as a result of the US invasion of Iraq fed into the Syrian civil war, which brought Russia back into the Middle East. The US alliance with the Kurds to fight ISIS contributed greatly to the radical alienation of Turkey from the Western alliance. All future histories of the Middle East will therefore give an important place to 9/11 and the catastrophic US strategy that it enabled.

The events of 9/11 have not, however, defined the world in general, and certainly not "our" world in the West. The truly defining factors are quite different: the growing geopolitical struggle with China; the domestic troubles of Western democracies, exacerbated by socio-economic inequality; mass migration and its social, cultural and political consequences; the uncertain but probably immense impact of artificial intelligence and genetic engineering; and above all climate change, that is literally altering the world in which we must go on living.

Challenge the expert

Lydia Khalil, Lowy Institute's resident expert on terrorism and extremism, challenges Anatol Lieven's key arguments.

You write that after the 9/11 attacks, "The monstrously expensive apparatus of Homeland Security was therefore created to combat an enemy who failed to appear" and that the attacks were a one-off. But did the threat fail to appear, or did the Homeland Security apparatus prevent another attack?

The measures that prevented a repetition of anything on the scale of 9/11 were simple and low cost. They did not require the immense apparatus and expense of the Department of Homeland Security. Its most useful role was probably to create better cooperation between the FBI, CIA, and National Security Agency (NSA), the lack of which was largely responsible for the failure to identify the 9/11 terrorists. Such coordination, however, did not require a vast new government department. It may be noted that Western European states, which are much more exposed to Islamist terrorism than the United States because of their proximity to the Muslim world, and much larger and more radicalised Muslim populations, have contained this threat (though not, of course, ended it) with a fraction of the money spent on the Department of Homeland Security.

The Iraq war exposed sectarian tension and conflict in Iraq and the wider region, as you outline in your essay. But the regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been an enduring feature of the region at least since the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79. How much can we really blame the Iraq war for the "furious conflict" between Shia and Sunni blocs in the Middle East?

Hostility between Sunni and Shia dates back more than 1700 years, almost to the very birth of Islam. It has flared up periodically since, notably in the wars between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and Shia Safavid Persia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia have been bitterly anti-Shia since their emergence in the eighteenth century, and it is quite correct that the Iranian Revolution stoked this hostility still further.

However, it is also clear that the new Shia ascendancy in Iraq resulting from the US invasion, and fears of a "Shia Crescent" that this created, inflamed still further the fears of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states (as well as Israel). The Iraqi Sunni backlash against the Shia and the US occupation also gave birth to the savagely sectarian forces of al-Qaeda in Iraq and its offspring ISIS, which in turn helped to turn the conflict in Syria from an anti-regime uprising to a ferocious sectarian civil war. So although sectarian conflict was not the intention of the US planners of the invasion of Iraq (they were in most cases shamefully ignorant of Iraqi history and society), they cannot escape a share of responsibility for these outcomes.

In your conclusion you point to a number of other factors that could redefine our world, such as geostrategic competition, climate change, and technological change. Other contributors have argued that the War on Terror was a distraction from dealing with those challenges. Because of that distraction, could 9/11 have been more impactful than we think?

As I argued, 9/11 did delay by a decade the US pushback against rising Chinese power, and this was a significant effect — though how significant is not clear and perhaps never will be.

In Britain, as noted by Professor Cox, an indirect result of 9/11 — Tony Blair's decision to support the United States in the invasion of Iraq — did have a very important result. It discredited Blair's "Third Way" strategy in the Labour Party, bitterly divided that party, and led to a revival of its radical wing. This in turn led to a new hegemony of the Conservative Party in British politics, and contributed to Brexit.

However, 9/11 did not have any significant impact on action against climate change. In the United States, the Bush administration (like the Trump administration) came to office with an agenda of climate change denial, and in the months prior to 9/11 had already cancelled as much as it could of the climate change measures of the previous Clinton administration. These policies continued regardless of 9/11.

It is possible to argue that embroilment in the Iraq and Afghan wars (and the dilemma of what to do about the Syrian civil war) distracted the Obama administration from quicker and stronger action to limit climate change.

This cannot however be proved, as a much more formidable obstacle to legislative action on climate change was created by the hostility of several key Democratic senators, as well as virtually the entire Republican Party in Congress (especially after the Republicans regained control of the Senate in 2010). The growth of fracking, leading to US energy self-sufficiency, also removed part of the argument for alternative energy on the grounds of national security.

As for the other key global emitters of carbon gases (China, Europe, India, Japan, and Russia), 9/11 and its consequences either had no visible effect on their climate change policies, or in some cases may to a limited degree have spurred moves to alternative energy because of increased fears about the security of Middle Eastern oil and gas supplies.

So, my argument stands: in the Middle East, the impact of 9/11 — or rather, the misguided and disastrous Bush administration *response* to 9/11 — was indeed momentous. Outside that region, despite its tragic and horrific effects, historians are likely to say that the attacks of 9/11 had only a very limited real impact.

Anatol Lieven is Senior Research Fellow on Russia and Europe at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. He was formerly Professor at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Visiting Professor in the War Studies Department of King's College London, and Senior Fellow of the New America Foundation in Washington, DC. He was previously a journalist in South Asia and the former Soviet Union, and is the author of several books on the latter region. He is also the author of *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (2012). He has a BA in history and a PhD in political science from the University of Cambridge.

YUN SUN

**SENIOR FELLOW,
STIMSON CENTER**

China's rise post-9/11

In response to the question: *September 11 changed America, but did it change the world?*

The 9/11 attacks in 2001 are perhaps the most consequential events of the post-Cold War era that, for the time being, changed the trajectory of international politics. They have had a major impact on China and its relations with the United States and the rest of the world. However, 9/11 did not define the world, or China, or what China was to become.

The world plunged into the War on Terror after 9/11, the events of which dramatically changed the course of US security policy. For almost 20 years, counterterrorism dominated the country's national security strategy, until the recalibration of strategic priorities by the Trump and Biden administrations. The recalibration began in 2017, and by 2021 great power competition, especially with China, re-emerged and replaced counterterrorism as the top priority of the United States government. These recent developments in US strategy illustrate that the defining power of 9/11 over the world, therefore, has been temporary rather than permanent.

Although 9/11 did create external contexts that influenced China's path in important ways, the attacks barely changed the trajectory of China or its national security strategy. Even without 9/11, the world is still most likely to have witnessed China's growing assertiveness and the same shifts in power equilibrium between the United States and China. However, in many ways, 9/11 expedited, propelled, and strengthened the momentum that was already in place.

First, 9/11 offered what Beijing defined as a "window of strategic opportunity" to develop its strength while the United States was acutely distracted. Many Chinese strategists saw 9/11 as the breathing space that bought China another decade to focus on its development without being identified and targeted as the priority challenge for

America. During the 2000 US election campaign, presidential candidate George W. Bush had sharply criticised President Bill Clinton's notion of a "strategic partnership" with China and proposed instead that the United States and China were "strategic competitors". The United States would not have waited almost another two decades to define China as the most important strategic challenge and vigorously engage in what President Joe Biden now calls the "extreme competition" with China had 9/11 not taken place.

Second, 9/11 and the War on Terror were indeed painful wars of attrition that bogged down US resources and arguably waned its comprehensive national power. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost the United States trillions of dollars and thousands of casualties, as well as tainting its credibility and leadership globally. Meanwhile, China has been able to capitalise on the opportunity to bide its time and build its strength. The power balance between the United States and China most likely would have evolved in the same direction without 9/11. However, the resources, focus, and time the United States poured into the War on Terror certainly expedited the shift.

Third, 9/11 has had a direct impact on the Uyghur issue and China's policy towards Xinjiang. The War on Terror offered China a perfect opportunity to shape the narrative about the Uyghur terrorist threat. By leveraging China's acquiescence to the War on Terror, Beijing inserted Uyghur organisations such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) into the US terrorist exclusion list, a designation the United States dropped only in November 2020. Without 9/11, China would not have had such an easy time shaping the narrative about the Uyghur issue and consequently would have faced more international pressure and scrutiny over its Uyghur policy.

Although 9/11 has had a significant impact on China's strategic posture, it has had little impact on China's subsequent domestic and foreign strategies. As many of China's developments over the last two decades can be traced to changes in the country's leadership and elite politics, it is clear that China's domestic policies were and are beyond the effects of 9/11. Developments post-9/11, especially the US focus on the War on Terror, have aided a momentum that already existed. The events had little effect on the direction of either China or great power politics. They did not change China, but they did alter the environment in which China would arrive at its predestined outcome.

Challenge the expert

Lydia Khalil, Lowy Institute's resident expert on terrorism and extremism, challenges Yun Sun's key arguments.

You argue that the 9/11 attacks and the US response to them did not change China's strategic goals, but altered the environment in which China would arrive at a "predestined" outcome. How can we be sure that China's outcome was predestined, just because it was China's ambition to be a major power (or the major power) on the world stage?

When China looks at its history and China's status in the world, it sees itself as the most powerful country in terms of military and economic might for most of the past 2000 years. Therefore, for Chinese leaders and strategists, China's current path is a return to its "rightful" place in the world after the "century of humiliation". That victim mentality imbues China's experience and mandate with a self-perceived tragic heroism.

As outside observers, we don't have to agree with the Chinese belief in their country's destiny, but we must understand that the Chinese believe this is its destiny. Perceptions matter, not only because they determine China's strategic agenda, but also because they decide how China perceives and interacts with other states. When Beijing sees another state as hindering its return to a predominant role in the world, it is more likely to react with vengeance. Again, it doesn't mean that other states should succumb to China's self-appointed great power status, but it does mean that without careful calibration of how to influence China's view, we could end up with a conflict.

Whether China desires to be a major power or *the* major power is a great question. In this case, it also significantly depends on the reception of the outside world. If the PRC believes that it will constantly, if not permanently, be singled out as a threat by Western countries because of its cultural or political modality, it might believe that becoming the major power is the only way to ensure its survival.

You say that 9/11 provided an opening for China to aggressively address its "Uyghur issue" absent scrutiny by framing its policies towards the Uyghur community as part of the War on Terror. Yet it could be argued that the Uyghur cause and China's human rights abuses in Xinjiang have received intense scrutiny now and have severely impacted China's global reputation. Could that be a negative effect of the War on Terror on China's soft power?

I think it would be a little bit of a stretch because, with or without the War on Terror, China's policy on the Uyghur issue was becoming harsher. And to argue that the War on Terror has negatively impacted China's global reputation and soft power will require the acknowledgement that the War on Terror did facilitate China's treatment of the Uyghur in the first place by including Uyghur organisations such as the ETIM on the terrorist list, which provided China the justification for its policies. Given the circumstances, I think it is a difficult case to make.

The United States dropped ETIM from the designated terrorist exclusion list last November and many observers have questioned whether ETIM as an organisation still exists. At least we know historically that ETIM did exist, did target China, and with recent events in Afghanistan presents an ongoing threat.

Your essay is built on the premise that geopolitical competition and China's rise are the defining factors that will shape international affairs into the future. But what about other factors that our contributors pointed to, such as climate change or technological advancements? How do you place China's rise in comparison?

This is a terrific point, and a point that many observers outside the orbit of the US–China great power competition have been advocating. After all, it is not just about the narrow self-interests of the United States and China as nation states, but should be about the survival and welfare of the human race. And we can only imagine how much could be changed or advanced in terms of common global challenges if great powers decided to work with, rather than against, each other.

Yet this might be why we call it "the tragedy" of great power politics. Although everyone, including the great powers themselves, recognise the tremendous benefit their cooperation will bring, the structural conflict in the international system and the powers' conflicting value systems and worldviews simply confirm that the diverging interests significantly outweigh the converging interests.

Issues such as climate change or technological advancement certainly will shape the world and influence world politics. But nation states remain the fundamental component of world politics. And great power politics defines how issues such as climate change and technological advancement will be discussed and approached. It is within that framework that China's rise and US–China great power politics have become the defining issue of international affairs today.

Yun Sun is a Senior Fellow and Co-Director of the East Asia Program and Director of the China Program at the Stimson Center. Her expertise is in Chinese foreign policy, US–China relations, and China's relations with neighbouring countries and authoritarian regimes. She was previously a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution and China Analyst for the International Crisis Group, based in Beijing.

ANDREW BACEVICH

**EMERITUS PROFESSOR,
BOSTON UNIVERSITY**

The shattering of illusions

In response to the question: *September 11 changed America, but did it change the world?*

The 9/11 attacks occurred at a moment in history when a set of insidious illusions held Americans in their grip. Those illusions stemmed directly from Washington's preferred interpretation of what the end of the Cold War just two decades prior had signified. That interpretation in turn derived from and seemingly affirmed the meaning that Americans assigned to the Second World War as a Manichean struggle in which freedom, democracy, and basic human rights were at stake. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, as with the collapse of Hitler's Germany in 1945, good once again had triumphed over evil.

During the Cold War, sustaining this view had entailed equating the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany. It also meant giving the Anglo-American allies the lion's share of the credit for defeating the Third Reich, while minimising the Soviet role in achieving final victory. By further extension it meant soft-peddling or ignoring morally suspect US and British practices, including the denial of basic human rights to populations deemed racially inferior.

Reading the outcome of the Cold War as a sequel to victory in the Second World War found expression in a belief that the United States had definitively achieved unprecedented ideological, political, economic, and military primacy on a global scale.

Enamoured with this conceit, various observers, analysts, and even policymakers during the 1990s devised a new vocabulary to describe the post-Cold War global order and the role of the United States atop that order. A "unipolar moment" had arrived over which the United States presided as the sole superpower or the "indispensable nation". The "end of history" itself was at hand, with American-style liberal

democratic capitalism the only plausible model for designing a functioning society.

Take those claims seriously and an incident such as 9/11 — nineteen radical Islamists armed with boxcutters terrorising an entire nation — becomes implausible. When the implausible occurred, in broad daylight and witnessed by the entire world, it became essential for the United States to demonstrate that this was a one-off event — murderous and despicable, but devoid of any larger significance.

To affirm that the various claims to US primacy remained fully intact, the administration of George W. Bush immediately embarked upon an ill-conceived military undertaking that it dubbed its War on Terror. Undertaken pursuant to the administration's Freedom Agenda, the War on Terror initially targeted a so-called "axis of evil". For policymakers in Washington, the evil character of the enemy provided sufficient rationale for the United States to grant itself the authority to wage preventive war — a radical departure from existing international norms.

In practice, however, victory proved elusive as US forces struggled unsuccessfully to impose their will on ostensibly inferior adversaries. Within a matter of years, this spectacularly misguided undertaking gave rise to its own distinctive vocabulary, including phrases such as "forever wars". The War on Terror proved to be a costly diversion from far more pressing concerns, and a classic illustration of the wrong war fought in the wrong place against the wrong adversary.

Two decades after 9/11, the significance of that terrible day now comes fully into view. The attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon set in motion events that exposed US claims of global primacy as fraudulent. Chief among those events are failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which together have cost the United States trillions of dollars while producing little of value. The nations that the United States vowed to "liberate" remain mired in corruption and instability. Terrorist organisations have proliferated.

In effect, Washington's misuse of military power has accelerated the emergence of a multipolar order. The post-Cold War order, if it ever existed, is today gone for good. The defining characteristics of the emerging order may not be entirely clear, but one thing is certain: no single nation-state will dominate it.

Also increasingly clear is the reality that the emphasis on military power and military activism in which the United States is deeply invested is of

minimal relevance to the emerging problem set that threatens the planet. The national security paradigm devised at the outset of the Cold War, and to which Washington remains devoted, is obsolete. Thus far, however, there exists little evidence that the US national security establishment is willing to make the necessary adjustments required. Meanwhile, the strategic initiative is passing into other hands.

If the War on Terror has produced a "victor", the People's Republic of China (PRC) is best positioned to lay claim to that title. That American folly contributed directly to that outcome is a truth to which the US foreign policy establishment refuses to own up. With the phrase "great power competition" once more in fashion, Washington appears intent on gearing up for a new Cold War, with the preservation of US global primacy the ultimate goal.

This will prove to be a fool's errand. The primary threats to the security and well-being of the American people are not "out there" in the so-called Indo-Pacific. They are "back here" where Americans actually live. Those threats include disease, the climate crisis, the deterioration of the natural world, cyber-criminality, economic inequality, insecure borders, and extreme partisanship reflecting the absence of an operative conception of the common good. To persist in treating such matters as afterthoughts will be to underwrite America's decline.

Challenge the expert

Lydia Khalil, Lowy Institute's resident expert on terrorism and extremism, challenges Andrew Bacevich's key arguments.

You argue that the 9/11 attacks exposed the United States' claim to global primacy after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc as fraudulent. But by many military, economic, and institutional measures (see Lowy Institute Asia Power Index), the United States was the primary power at the time, and arguably remains so. In what way can you argue that US primacy was an illusion?

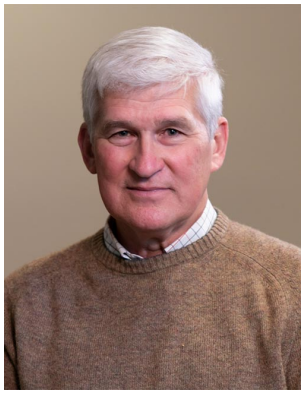
One only need examine domestic trends within the United States. My country is mired in crisis, primarily related to race, but involving a fully-fledged culture war. The need to set our own house in order is of paramount importance. In that sense, the US response to 9/11 has exacerbated that crisis and inhibited efforts to address it in a meaningful way.

In your essay, you write, "If the War on Terror has produced a victor, the People's Republic of China is positioned to claim that title. Washington's misuse of military power has accelerated the emergence of a multipolar order." Are you saying that China's rise wouldn't have happened otherwise? Fellow contributor Yun Sun argues that "Even without 9/11, the world is still most likely to have witnessed China's growing assertiveness and the same shift in power equilibrium between the United States and China."

China's "rise" stems primarily from developments within China. The folly of US policy after 9/11 has merely accelerated the changes in the international order. It is a fact, in my view, that members of the foreign policy establishment are unwilling to acknowledge that the era of American global primacy — if it ever existed — has now ended for good. That reason alone suffices to cripple US policy going forward.

The consensus is that the current and evolving strategic competition between the United States and China is the primary driving force in international affairs. You write that "the emphasis on military power and military activism in which the United States is deeply invested is of minimal relevance to the emerging problem set". How can it be that military power is irrelevant to US–China strategic competition and the future security of the United States and democracies across the world?

I do not see the military balance as "irrelevant". However, other issues are of greater immediate importance to the well-being of the American people. Among them: the climate crisis, environmental degradation, disease, open borders, and the erosion of privacy. Collaboration between the United States and China — however difficult — is a precondition to addressing these issues. Simply shovelling more money to the Pentagon will solve nothing.



Andrew Bacevich is President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. He grew up in Indiana, graduated from West Point and Princeton, served in the army, became an academic, and is now a writer. He is the author, co-author, or editor of more than a dozen books, the latest being *After the Apocalypse: America's Role in a World Transformed* (2021). He is Professor Emeritus of International Relations and History at Boston University and has held fellowships at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, the John F. Kennedy School of Government, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the American Academy in Berlin.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Lydia Khalil

Lydia Khalil is a Research Fellow in the West Asia Program at the Lowy Institute and manages the Lowy Institute's core partnership with the Global Network on Extremism & Technology.

She has a broad range of policy, academic and private sector experience, and has spent her career focusing on the intersection between governance, technology and security — understanding the rationales behind terrorism and counterinsurgency, how to create governance systems that lead to functioning societies, effective policing strategies or the security and policy effects of new technology. She is also currently a director of Arcana Partners, a strategic consultancy firm, a research associate at Deakin University's Alfred Deakin Institute and a fellow with the Centre for Resilient & Inclusive Societies.

She has professional background in politics, international relations and security has focused on US national security policy, Middle East politics, counterterrorism and intelligence. She was international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York where she analysed political and security trends in the Middle East. She also served as a political advisor for the US Department of Defense in Iraq. In Australia, Lydia held fellowships with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and Macquarie University, specialising in intelligence, national security and cyber security.

Lydia has extensive national security and law enforcement experience, most as a senior policy advisor to the Boston Police Department, working on countering violent extremism, intelligence and counterterrorism, and community policing strategies. She has also worked as a senior counterterrorism and intelligence analyst for the New York Police Department.

Lydia is a frequent media commentator and conference speaker and has published widely on her areas of expertise. She holds a BA in International Relations from Boston College and a Masters in International Security from Georgetown University.

LOWY INSTITUTE

31 Bligh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Tel. +61 2 8238 9000
Fax +61 2 8238 9005

lowyinstitute.org
@LowyInstitute