

## SUGGESTED READINGS

# The Legacy of 9/11

Compiled by Dr. Shannon Nash, Postdoctoral Fellow and NAADSN Director of Operations

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At a time when many of us find ourselves working from home in social isolation, NAADSN has invited various academic subject matter experts to suggest core readings on topics related to North American and Arctic Defence and Security.

The internet is filled with perspectives and opinions. These lists are intended to help direct policy makers, practitioners, and academics to credible, open-access sources, available online, free of charge, that reflect leading-edge research and thinking. The compilers of each list have been asked to select readings that are accessibly written (i.e. they are not filled with excessive jargon), offer a diversity of viewpoints, and encourage critical thinking and debate.

**Daniel L. Byman, [Who is a terrorist, actually?](#) *Brookings Institution*, September 22, 2020.**

Daniel L. Byman engages with the question of *who is a terrorist?* Examination of this question, posed at a time of social polarization and skewed threat perceptions, helps to frame how we understand the terrorism label and contemporary threats nearly twenty years after 9/11. Not all violence is terrorism, but for many, the terrorism label is often a way to distinguish who is in the wrong. He engages with what “terrorism” means and how there is no real agreement on the definition or agreement, even among close allies, as to which groups are terrorists. Byman explains that serious terrorism definitions have several factors in common: 1) terrorism involves violence or the threat of it (he encourages maintaining a high bar when using the label), 2) terrorism is inherently political, 3) terrorism is perpetrated by non-state actors, 4) the purpose of the violence, is not only to hurt and destroy, but to convey a message. Some definitions use the criterion that targets are civilians or non-combatants, but this can get complicated if an attack is on military forces but outside of a war zone. Terrorism definitions are muddy and Byman goes on to apply these definitional criteria to individuals and groups, such as antifa, Black Lives Matter, and Kyle Rittenhouse. He concludes by discussing why the label matters beyond semantics and this is partly a question of demonization and agencies and authorities invoked to deal with threats. Abusing the label in a post-9/11 world makes overreaction more likely.<sup>1</sup>

**Author Biography:** [Daniel L. Byman](#) is a Professor in Georgetown University’s Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service with a concurrent appointment with the Department of Government.

**William A. Galston, [How America's Response to 9/11 Contributed to our National Decline](#), *Brookings Institution*, August 27, 2021.**

William A. Galston likens the U.S. reaction to the 9/11 attack to the cytokine storm that can occur when COVID-19 attacks us: the defensive measures our bodies mount go too far and damage the vital organs our antibodies were meant to protect. In his long war against America, Osama bin Laden has won a sweeping if posthumous victory. Galston writes that the U.S. is weaker, more divided, and less respected than it was two decades ago, and the country has surrendered the unchallenged pre-eminence it once enjoyed. Although not solely responsible, the response to 9/11 certainly contributed to this, including what Galston frames as the misjudgements by four successive presidents. He says we had to react forcefully to al Qaeda's murderous assault, and we did. But counterfactual history helps us understand how badly the reaction went astray. The excessive focus on the Middle East diverted America from the geopolitical forces that were reshaping the world to its disadvantage. America must now face the consequences of a recovered Russia and rising China with a weakened hand and deep divisions between the U.S. and some of its allies. As debates over the treatment of detainees and the invasion of Iraq escalated, bipartisan unity gave way to bitter recriminations that exacerbated Americans' mistrust of government and undermined confidence in the role of foreign policy, defence, and intelligence expertise. In addition, partisan divisions over Islam and Muslim immigrants steadily widened. Galston writes that 9/11 has left America with a legacy of fear – on the right, the fear of more terrorist attacks; on the left, fear that our response to this possibility will infringe civil liberties and open the door to discrimination against Muslims and other minorities. He concludes that we should close the book on the 9/11 era and do what is necessary at home and abroad to arrest America's decline.

**Author Biography:** [William A. Galston](#) holds the Ezra K. Zilkha Chair in the Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program, where he serves as a Senior Fellow.

**Global Memo featuring Rohan Gunaratna, Patrycja Sasnal, Wesley Wark, John B. Bellinger III, and Anne Koch, [The 9/11 Effect and the Transformation of Global Security](#), *Council of Councils*, September 1, 2021.**

This memo features a series of briefs discussing how 9/11 transformed global security. In "The Full Circle of Counterterrorism", Rohan Gunaratna discusses how the counterterrorism response to 9/11 evolved in waves and he concludes that the global threat of terrorism is as bad or worse than it was twenty years ago. U.S. counterterrorism needs to be resilient, and he argues that a greater commitment by other countries, especially great powers like China and Russia, is vital to stabilizing conflict zones and preventing and pre-empting terrorist attacks worldwide. In "The War on Terror's Lasting Scars on Human Rights", Patrycja Sasnal concludes that in the two decades since 9/11, the international human rights system has been abused and weakened. The global war on terror has blurred the lines of war, terror, and human rights. Wesley Wark writes that the growth of surveillance for intelligence and war fighting is a prime legacy of the 9/11 attacks.

In “The New World of Surveillance”, he discusses the required shift in surveillance targets from traditional state threats and their militaries to much more amorphous terrorist networks, the advent of mass data collection and analytics which raised new global tensions, and the rise of surveillance capitalism. In “The Legal Legacy,” John B. Bellinger III looks at how the U.S. and global responses to the 9/11 attacks have resulted in significant changes in interpretation to international law rules and state practice governing the use of force against terrorists. These include the use of force against nonstate groups and the application of international laws of order, the pre-emption doctrine, the detention of terrorists captured by a state outside its territory, and Guantanamo Bay, which Bellinger concludes could be the most obvious legal legacy of 9/11 for several more decades. In the final brief in the series, “The Mirage of Perfect Border Control”, Anne Koch writes that the 9/11 attacks prompted a significant and lasting impulse to securitize migration and an emphasis on closure rather than on openness. The mirage of – and subsequent fixation on – perfect border control continues to skew European governments’ perspectives on current crises.

**Author Biography:** [Rohan Gunaratna](#) is Professor of Security Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

[Patrycja Sasnal](#) is Head of Research, Polish Institute of International Affairs.

[Wesley Wark](#) is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Ottawa’s Centre on Public Management and Policy.

[John B. Bellinger III](#) is an Adjunct Senior Fellow for International and National Security Law, Council on Foreign Relations.

[Anne Koch](#) is an Associate with the Global Issues Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

**Karen J. Greenberg, [To End a War, Start at the Beginning](#), *Bloomberg Law*, August 27, 2021.**

Karen J. Greenberg argues that the brutal chaos with the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan after nearly 20 years is not the result of poor last-minute planning, but of the broad and vague mandate in the original authorization of force in 2001. She says the failure was built into the original premises for the war and the wrongful premises set out in the original declaration for sending troops to Afghanistan after 9/11. The authorization for the use of military force passed by Congress on September 18, 2001 was tied specifically to neither al Qaeda nor bin Laden. It also left the geographical scope undefined. Instead, the president was authorized to use force against “those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons.” Successive presidents have relied on this to launch attacks with ever-widening scope. Using historical

examples, Greenberg makes the case that this was a departure from prior wars and conflicts. She concludes that the authorization, with its vague terminology and unstated goals, set the foundation for the current messy and tragically danger-laden withdrawal and uncertain future.

**Author Biography:** [Karen J. Greenberg](#) is the Director of the Center on National Security at Fordham Law.

**Tore Refslund Hamming, [IntelBrief: The Evolution of the Globalist Jihadist Movement from a One-Headed Monster to a Hydra](#), *The Soufan Center*, July 2021**

Tore Refslund Hamming discusses the evolution of the global jihadist movement. 9/11 was a watershed moment for the movement and the attacks catapulted al Qaeda to the forefront of the West's security agenda, monopolizing Western security policy for most of the past two decades, with global repercussions. Since then, the jihadist movement has transformed in several important ways. Hamming explains how it is not the revolutionary vanguard movement that Osama bin Laden once imagined, but rather a widely popular protest movement. Experiencing both *hybridization and salafization*, the jihadist movement has substantially evolved over the years to represent a more complex phenomenon that manages to prioritize targeting both its local and global enemies to varying degrees over time. The emergence of the so-called Islamic State enhanced the sophistication of jihadism as a political project outlining the contours of a "jihadi proto-state." Countering the terrorism threat stemming from jihadists is dependent upon grasping the nature of the movement's evolution and formulating new political and military responses. Jihadism no longer exclusively represents religious extremists, but now presents itself as a more general ideology of rebellion. Hamming concludes that twenty years after the 9/11 attacks, the jihadist movement appears, at least in terms of geographical presence and numerical support, stronger than ever before.

This piece is part of a [9/11 anniversary IntelBrief series](#) at the Soufan Center.

**Author Biography:** [Tore Refslund Hamming](#) is a political scientist and a fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College

**Bruce Hoffman, [How Has the Terrorism Threat Changed Twenty Years After 9/11?](#), *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 12, 2021.**

Bruce Hoffman provides context to the important question of how has the terror threat changed since 9/11? According to Hoffman, al Qaeda of today is nothing like the al Qaeda it was on 9/11 with Osama bin Laden long dead and nearly every single senior leader killed or captured. However, the ideology and motivation espoused by the organization is unfortunately as strong as ever. This includes al Qaeda's unimpeded growth in Africa, entrenchment in Syria, and its presence in Afghanistan with close relations to the Taliban. U.S. counterterrorism response to the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attacks yielded some remarkable successes and disastrous failures in hunting al Qaeda. One great success was the thwarting of

attempts to carry out subsequent attacks on the U.S. homeland on the scale of 9/11, yet in responding to this, the government abased some core American values and principles of justice. The worst failure was the 2003 invasion of Iraq which diverted critical resources and inadvertently set off a chain of events that led to the emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. A vast counterterrorism bureaucracy was created in the aftermath of 9/11, but Hoffman indicates that the U.S. potentially overreacted by creating redundancies and granting sweeping powers to various agencies. Although the threats posed by the Islamic State and al Qaeda have not disappeared, Hoffman concludes that twenty years after 9/11, the top terrorist threat is domestic rather than foreign. The shared destiny that unified after 9/11 has been replaced with political polarization that effects preparations for the next generation of threats.

**Author Biography:** [Bruce Hoffman](#) is a Professor in Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.

**Bruce Hoffman, Mitch Silber, and Colin Clarke, [The Risk of Terrorism at Home and Abroad](#), *The Cipher Brief*, August 31, 2021.**

Bruce Hoffman, Mitch Silber, and Colin P. Clarke engage in a question and answer with the Cipher Brief about the risk of terrorism at home in the U.S. and abroad after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan. According to Hoffman, Afghanistan is again becoming a jihadi magnet with a multiplicity of terrorist groups present and will likely continue to be so into the future. He highlights how terrorism thrives in condition of chaos and instability and terrorists hope to spread to other countries and eventually across regions. He warns that America is vulnerable to attacks on the homeland and that terrorists may see distraction to the various domestic issues the country is grappling with as an opportune time to strike. Silber believes that networks and capabilities could be reconstituted in the coming months. Clarke thinks an attack on the U.S. homeland is unlikely with present counterterrorism tools, but this could change and there is a worry of inspired attacks. The three experts agree that the re-conquest of Afghanistan and routing of the U.S. military in advance of the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks to be a serious boost for the global jihadist movement which validates the strategy articulated by Osama bin Laden.

**Author Biographies:** [Bruce Hoffman](#) is a Professor in Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.

[Mitch Silber](#) is executive director of the Community Security Initiative and former Director of Analysis with the New York City Police Department

[Colin P. Clarke](#) is the Director of Policy and Research and a Senior Research Fellow at The Soufan Group.

Richard Just, et al., [How 9/11 Changed TV, Art, Sports, Education, Millennials, Bigotry, Country Music, Fiction, Policing, Love - and More](#), *The Washington Post*, September 1, 2021.

In this piece, twenty-three writers and five artists reflect on some of the less-obvious ways 9/11 altered our lives. From music to architecture, Islam to journalism, New York to immigration, the authors reflect on the changes caused by 9/11 in America and the world. In TV, the win-at-all-costs ethos mirrored what would come to define too much of the prevailing mood about the War on Terror. After initial wariness, museums went to great lengths to educate the public about both the richness of Islamic artistic traditions and the complexity of contemporary Islamic visual culture. In sports, the patriotic displays at major sporting events went to another level after 9/11 and now what once seemed like a compassionate reaction to tragedy keeps growing more complicated and divisive. Following 9/11, hate crimes against Muslim Americans rose and many Muslims feel insecure because the burden of proof was put on their shoulders to show innocence. For New Yorkers, that feeling of being a city of witness, the ones who must remember the humans who died and the humanity that rose up around them, will always remain and is bonded by collective memory and heartache. This piece is a snapshot of the enduring legacy of 9/11 and how it has shaped the last twenty years in powerful and understated ways.

**Author Biography:** Biographies of the various contributors can be found within the article.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss, [Extremism Has Spread Into the Mainstream](#), *The Atlantic*, June 15, 2021.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss discusses how the extremism in the U.S. that is “post-organizational” and characterized by fluid online boundaries and a breakdown of formal groups and movements with violence mostly perpetrated by lone actors influenced online cannot be fought with the tools from yesterday’s crisis. In the two decades since 9/11, the U.S. concentrated on law-enforcement and intelligence readiness to fight terrorism and extremism, with experts focused on disruption of fringe groups before they carried out violence. However, Miller-Idriss argues that this Band-Aid approach is ill-suited to combatting modern far-right extremism that has spread into the mainstream. She describes the threat as an amorphous kind of radicalization that has moved from our post-9/11 era focus on security to a whole-of-society problem and a public-health issue. This calls for a paradigm shift that the U.S. federal government has not been capable of in large part because of partisan gridlock and too much government focus on security and not enough on preventing radicalization in the first place. She provides examples from Norway, New Zealand, and Germany of plans that emphasized resilience as much as risk to integrate the fight against systemic racism with efforts to combat extremist ideas. While the government hasn’t completely ignored prevention, the best hope for combatting extremism is to empower local communities and pair local initiatives with clear, national evidence about what works. This calls for local community funding, innovative ideas, and evidence-based models for

programming and federal support that recognizes extremism must be fought locally, in a holistic way, is vital.

**Author Biography:** [Cynthia Miller-Idriss](#) directs the Polarization and Extremism Research Innovation Lab (PERIL) at American University and is a Professor at the School of Public Affairs and the School of Education.

**Shannon Nash, [The Terrorist Sleeper in an Age of Anxiety](#), *Defence and Security Foresight Group and Women in International Security Canada Working Paper*, April 2021.**

In this Working Paper I engage with the concept of a sleeper agent, the idea of a terrorist laying low, blending in, and waiting to be called upon to carry out an operation. Terrorist sleepers received attention in North America around the millennium when a bombing plot by Ahmed Ressam targeting LAX in 1999 was foiled at the Canadian border. By attempting to solve one kind of problem – the under-diagnosis of al Qaeda’s operational security before 9/11 and a failure of imagination – officials and the media created another problem after 9/11: an excess of imagination and the over-diagnosis of al Qaeda’s use of sleeper agents. Ascendant fears of an enemy within after 9/11 were rooted in an age of anxiety that shaped perceptions and obscured the reality of the threat as it evolved. The fear of sleepers has been politicized and co-opted to oversimplify an extraordinarily complex phenomenon: that “Islamic terrorists” could be living among us. Although the terrorist threat shifted around 2005 to homegrown plots and attacks, an exaggerated concern about sleepers further sustained the narrative that terrorists operating within are a threat to North America. I conclude that the concept of terrorists as “foreign” or “other” intersects with the search for sleepers to contribute to a “Muslimization” of terrorism after 9/11.

**Author Biography:** [Shannon Nash](#) is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Trent University and the Director of Operations of the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network.

**Farah Pandith, [The U.S., Muslims, and a Turbulent Post-9/11 World](#), *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 1, 2021.**

Farah Pandith writes about how the 9/11 attacks affected American Muslims. She discusses areas of progress, lessons from global outreach efforts to Muslim communities, and what the U.S. has learned from its nearly two-decade effort to curb the appeal of extremist ideology. Pandith explains how the 9/11 attacks created upheaval for Muslims worldwide as they faced intense scrutiny and distrust. Physical assault, emotional abuse, and discrimination, alongside often-politicized conversation about “real Islam”, have created a toxic environment for American Muslims ever since. The powerful message that Muslims are not be trusted has been created by voices of hate, deliberate misinformation, and genuine misunderstandings. This fostered multilayered societal unease that changed the life that many American Muslims knew prior to 9/11. Since the attacks, divisions in American society have deepened and Muslims, like other minorities, have become caught up in the sometimes-bitter national conversation about

history, race, religion, ethnicity, and heritage. Successive U.S. administrations have attempted to debunk al Qaeda's anti-West narrative and improve relations with Muslims with some important areas of progress, but challenges continue twenty years later. The U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and other activities related to the U.S. declared war on terrorism fed al Qaeda's narrative that U.S. foreign policy was "proof" of American hostility toward Muslims. Critically, Muslims all over the world were eager to push back against terrorist organizations trying to radicalize and recruit their youth. Pandith concludes that one of the biggest lessons is that the U.S. needs to bring far more resources and attention to confront the challenge with a multi-layered and whole of society approach, right down to the community level at home and abroad.

**Author Biography:** [Farah Pandith](#) is an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, foreign policy strategist, and a former diplomat.

**Ben Rhodes, [The 9/11 Era Is Over](#), *The Atlantic*, April 6, 2020.**

Ben Rhodes reflects on why it is time to finally end the chapter of American history that began on September 11, 2001. He contextualizes the last nearly two decades through his own story and involvement in government and policy. According to Rhodes, the reframing of the Iraq War as an effort to bring democracy to the Iraqi people punctured his trust in the words spoken by his leaders and what was once rousing seemed cynical, a post facto justification for a catastrophic mistake. Democracy was being debased, not promoted. He frames his thoughts around a sign that hangs in a room in the bowels of the CIA that reads "Every day is September 12<sup>th</sup>." However, he concludes that by the end of Bush's presidency, it was impossible for him to ignore the fact that America's response to 9/11 had done more harm than good. As former deputy national security advisor to President Obama, Rhodes observed that there was a tug-of-war in the last three years of the administration between Obama's desire to move into a new era and the pull of post-9/11 America. He explains how Donald Trump drafted on the dark currents at the time and tapped into America's post-9/11 fears of a faceless "other" and the frustrations of Americans who had been promised great victories in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead of reckoning with the ways we might have gotten the response to 9/11 wrong, Trump scapegoated enemies within and social media mainlined these fears en masse and made America an easy mark for Russian influence. Trump himself was a president of the 9/11 era in his attitude and approach. Rhodes, writing early in 2020, addresses the effects of COVID-19 on the world order and calls for a transformation of what has been our whole way of looking at the world since 9/11. To meet the challenges of today, he calls on us to rethink the current orientation of government and society and move past a post-9/11 mindset.

**Author Biography:** [Ben Rhodes](#) is a former deputy national security adviser to President Barack Obama.



Alex P. Schmid (Ed.), [Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness](#), *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague*, November 2020.

The Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness (edited by Alex P. Schmid) is a thirty-five chapter online publication with forty diverse scholars and (former) counterterrorism practitioners sharing their insights. The dominant approach to counterterrorism is largely based on heavy-handed military action, which has been a failure (especially in the Middle East) and for many societies the “cure” of militarized counterterrorism has been worse than the “disease” of terrorism. In his introduction, Schmid argues that much of the counterterrorism since 9/11 has been counter-productive and efforts have taken a heavy toll with no victory in sight. The *Handbook* was crafted to stimulate a rethinking of the way terrorism should be countered by focusing on prevention. The *Handbook* is divided into five parts: Part I: Lessons for Terrorism Prevention from the Literature in Related Fields, Part II: Prevention of Radicalization, Part III: Prevention of Preparatory Acts, Part IV: Prevention of, and Preparedness for, Terrorist Attacks, and Part V: Preparedness and Consequence Management. The *Handbook* combines prevention with preparedness as the former contributes to the latter, and should prevention fail, preparedness reduces harm and facilitates better crisis- and consequence-management. Each chapter is self-contained and can be read on its own. An extensive General Bibliography on the prevention of radicalization, extremism, and terrorism as well as preparedness, compiled by Ishaansh Singh, can be found at the end of the volume.

**Author Biography:** [Alex P. Schmid](#) (ed.) is a Professor Emeritus and Research Fellow of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). He is currently the Director of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI).

**Ali Soufan, In Conversation: [“There has never been accountability”](#): Ali Soufan on how the 9/11 Disinformation Campaign Paved the Way for Political Armageddon, Chris Smith for *Vanity Fair*, September 8, 2020.**

In this interview, Ali Soufan states that there has never been accountability for many of the things that took place around 9/11, which has shaped the world we live in today. This lack of accountability created a credibility gap between the American people and their government that increased a distrust of the media. COVID-19 has taken this to another level. He does not mince words when he says that twenty years ago there was a disinformation campaign by the American government backed by things obtained under torture that were not true. Soufan concludes that the CIA’s torture program helped al Qaeda recruit more, destroyed our image in the world, and did not produce information that saved lives. In the September 2000 interview, Soufan said the number one threat to the U.S. today is that it is losing its position as a global leader and leaving a vacuum for China, Russia, and other powers to control their own region. Furthermore, al Qaeda is more powerful than it was on 9/11 and they are spread from the western shores of Africa to Southeast Asia. They feel accomplished in phase one of their war – to conduct terrorism attacks to weaken the global system or the regional system. Phase two is creating a lot of violence to prevent America or its agents from filling that

vacuum and phase three is controlling large swaths of land. According to Soufan, domestic terrorism threats remind him of the early days of al Qaeda and the rise of white supremacy in the West is very alarming.

**Author Biography:** Ali Soufan is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of The Soufan Group. He is a former FBI Supervisory Special Agent who investigated and supervised complex international terrorism cases, including the events surrounding 9/11.<sup>2</sup>

**Darrel M. West and Nicol Turner Lee, [How Technology and the World Have Changed Since 9/11](#), *Brookings Institution*, 27 August 2021.**

Darrel M. West and Nicol Turner Lee begin this article by reflecting on their personal experiences on 9/11 and connecting this to the digital landscape in 2001. Substantial alterations in news transmission, technology innovation, telecommunications networks, disaster preparedness, personal privacy, digital inequity, and security levels rose after 9/11. The upside of the rapidity of news transmission is that people are aware of new developments far more quickly, enabling us to quickly share what is happening from our corners of the world with others. The current realities of misinformation and disinformation reveal the downside of instant news, especially the pressure to react immediately to unfolding events that can lead to overreactions, false interpretations, or premature conclusions. West and Turner Lee explain that events and people become easy to manipulate when information is quickly forming and incomplete. The same echo chambers created by the current information ecosystem have also left many intensely concerned regarding how technology has fueled extremism, polarization, and radicalization. The authors suggest that in 2001, it is probable that contemporary technology would have made it far more difficult to define, address, and even heal from the tragic events of 9/11. A positive contemporary feature is that our communications networks are more broad-based and robust than they were 20 years ago, but even with improved communications capabilities, we now face different kinds of threats in the form of cyber threats, ransomware attacks, and unwanted digital intrusions. West and Turner Lee discuss privacy versus national security as well as digital inequity. They conclude that it is crucial to retain hope and humanity using technological advances.

**Author Biography:** [Darrel M. West](#) is the vice president and direct of Governance Studies and holds the Douglas Dillion Chair in Governmental Studies at the Brookings Institution.

[Nicole Turner Lee](#) is a senior fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution and the director of the Center for Technology Innovation.

**Amy Zegart, [None of My Students Remember 9/11](#), *The Atlantic*, August 30, 2021.**

Amy Zegart reflects on how for the coming generation of students, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 is history rather than memory and she questions how this effects how they learn about it. 9/11 used to be a trauma shared by everyone and now it is a day

that those in a classroom have no memory of. She explains how at first, she struggled to find ways to take the emotion out of teaching by bringing in logical reasoning and historical perspective, but now she struggles to put the emotion back in to help students understand the visceral context and swirling uncertainties. On 9/11, together with colleagues, Zegart tried to make sense of the world, to begin searching for explanations for something that seemed inexplicable. That day she learned the valuable lesson that learning is an act of community. She traces her experiences teaching in the years after 9/11 and how students came with powerful feelings and personal experiences seeking certainties while she pressed them to see complexities. She wanted students to see how hindsight prevents us from realizing how little intelligence officers and politicians understood in the moment. Zegart explains that her students now see 9/11 as long-gone history and one of the drawbacks to the distance of time is that the human element of policy making gets lost. Policy makers are humans, not robots, and we need to better understand how real people under stress make difficult and consequential decisions as best they can, and what can help them do better when the next crisis arrives. Zegart concludes that she hopes her students remember that foreign policy is far more complex and challenging than pundits often claim, that analysis and emotion both play important roles, and that there is much more insight to gain from rigorous debate than comfortable agreement.

**Author Biography:** [Amy Zegart](#) is a Professor of Political Science, Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, and the Freeman Spogli Institute at Stanford University.

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<sup>1</sup> I engage with the question of the terrorism label in my work on [How the 'Terrorism' Label is Informed and Applied to a Violent Attack in Canada](#) supported by the *Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security, and Society*, January 2021.

<sup>2</sup> A stunning piece of journalism by Lawrence Wright in *The New Yorker* tells the story of Ali Soufan as the lead investigator on the U.S.S. Cole bombing and how he suspected a larger al Qaeda plot, see: [The Agent: Did the C.I.A. stop an F.B.I. detective from preventing 9/11?](#), 3 July 2006.