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Emergency measures? Terrorism and climate change on the security agenda

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Abstract

The significantly divergent trajectories of terrorism and climate change as security issues for Western states in the early years of the 21st century represent a puzzle. While sharing some attributes – uncertainty and the primacy of risk-management responses – climate change clearly represents a more fundamental threat to life than terrorism. Despite this, terrorism has occupied a prominent place on states' security agendas, while climate change has been decidedly marginal. This paper explores this divergence. Employing the securitisation framework, the paper maps the approach to terrorism and climate change as 'security' issues among key proponents of the 'war on terror', before exploring why these two issues were treated in such different ways. This analysis suggests a clear inclination to define and approach terrorism as an urgent security threat necessitating emergency measures: a willingness not evident in the case of climate change. While noting elements of the latter that militated against its securitisation, the paper points to the role of ideology – the beliefs and commitments of political leaders in particular – in driving choices around the construction of the security agenda. It concludes by suggesting that unlike the response to terrorism, impediments to enacting emergency measures to address the climate crisis remain.

Keywords: climate change; coalition of the willing; securitisation; terrorism; war on terror

Introduction

This special issue's focus on the trajectory of terrorism as a security concern in the mooted wake of the 'war on terror' encourages us to reflect on how states' security agendas are constituted and the process through which these choices are made. For many, including some of us writing on the 'war on terror', it was always difficult to justify the primacy attached to this concern relative to the climate emergency, for example, even in the early 2000s.[1] This was a comparison especially invited by the parallel elements of these challenges, including the uncertain nature of the threat posed and their proposed management through logics of risk, precaution, and prevention. With the unambiguous arrival of the climate crisis and increasing attention to climate change as a security issue at the national and international level, the choice to significantly mobilise available resources to address the threat of terrorism, while governments continue to drag their feet on climate change action, looks both puzzling and deeply problematic.

This paper examines the parallel trajectories of terrorism and climate change as security issues in the heady days of the 'war on terror', reflecting on the choices to prioritise one possible

[1]See Cass Sunstein, 'On the divergent American reactions to terrorism and climate change', *Columbia Law Review*, 107:2 (2007), pp. 503–58; David A. Welch, *Security: A Philosophical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

threat – terrorism – over another – climate change. The paper aims to explore why securitisation played out as it did with respect to the two issues of terrorism and climate change in key proponents of the 'war on terror', examining why we see significant divergence in approaches to these issues. While somewhat evident in representations of the threat in the countries examined, this was particularly apparent in the extent of exceptional measures justified and enacted in the context of terrorism, and the absence of a case for – or deployment of – exceptional measures in the context of climate change.

Ultimately, I argue that the nature and immediacy of these respective challenges, the capacity for unilateral response, and cost–benefit considerations of the response all played a role, but in particular the ideological commitments of governments served to drive the prioritisation of terrorism as a first-order and existential threat while undermining recognition of the security implications of climate change. Indeed, these commitments found their way into how the nature of the challenge and the cost–benefit of action were both perceived and framed.

In making this case, I focus in this analysis on key proponents of the 'war on terror': the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia. These states embraced the 'war on terror' framing, were active participants in military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, and enacted controversial domestic responses to the terror threat. These states also released official and publicly available reports in the aftermath of 9/11 – most notably the US's 2002 National Security Strategy, the UK's 2003 Defence White Paper, and Australia's 2003 Defence Update – that enable examination of the extent to which terrorism or climate change were represented as key security considerations at this time.

As the framing of this paper suggests, I approach security as a social construction. Simply put, security means different things to different political communities, with their varied histories and values encouraging different ways of conceiving and approaching security and threats to it.[2] Further, what constitutes 'security' or 'security threats' is the subject of processes of negotiation and contestation within those political communities, with that agenda likely to change over time. This conception of security underpins the analysis to follow, which attempts to chart how and why key participants in the 'war on terror' understood and addressed the security implications of terrorism and climate change in radically different ways.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first introduces the conceptual framework of securitisation, which is particularly useful for the purposes of examining the construction of (terrorism and climate change as) security threats. The second and third sections examine the mooted linkages between these issues and security before examining the varied trajectories of the securitisation of terrorism and climate change respectively, exploring designations of threat, audience acceptance, and emergency measures justified or enabled in both cases. The fourth section attempts to make sense of the varied trajectory of threat depiction and prioritisation. The radically different prioritisation of these challenges looks increasingly puzzling in the context of the increasing (and existential) harms linked to the climate emergency and the comparatively minimal harms (at least in terms of lives lost and life prospects) of Islamist terrorism, which was overwhelmingly depicted as an immediate, pressing, and urgent threat in the context of the 'war on terror'. Here, as noted, I particularly point to the role of ideologies of governments – their beliefs and commitments – in driving these choices and the construction of security. The conclusion reflects on trends since the mooted end of the 'war on terror' and the undeniable onset of the climate crisis. I echo points made in earlier papers in this Special Issue by noting that while the states concerned might be keen to claim that the 'war on terror' is over, key policy settings in response to the terrorist threat have been sustained. Further, some of the dynamics that enabled these states to elide responsibility for addressing the imminent and existential threat of climate change ultimately remain.

[2]See, for example, Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Securitisation and the construction of threat

Securitisation, as a framework for making sense of how particular issues come to be viewed and approached as security threats, has been applied to a wide range of issues in different political contexts. This includes both terrorism[3] and climate change,[4] and indeed the framework is also deployed in the contribution of Jenne and Chang to this Special Issue. In many ways, its application to issues such as terrorism and climate change is understandable. It certainly speaks to the contribution this framework makes to the way we think about security and the processes through which it is given meaning, especially as neither terrorism nor climate change fit comfortably within traditional definitions of security and threats to it. Traditional approaches tend towards a focus on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, and its protection from external military threat. Threats, in this schema, are usually military in nature, emanating from other states in the international system determined to use or threaten force to maximise their material power relative to others.[5] In this sense, there is work to do in understanding how it is that issues that do not seem to immediately fit this definition can come to be viewed and addressed as 'security' issues. The securitisation framework is well placed to contribute to this understanding.

One of the key strengths of the securitisation framework is the simplicity of the core insights that provide the foundation of and rationale for the framework itself. It is common sense that different political communities understand and approach the scope and meaning of security in different ways, and this perception can change over time. It borders on self-evident that it is more important to pay attention to how these communities – and those representing them charged with the responsibility for providing security – actually understand and approach security rather than how analysts view the scope of security from afar. And of course how security is understood and threats to it conceived actually matters politically in terms of the responses encouraged or indeed compelled. These insights, even before 'securitisation' itself is given detail as a conceptual framework, represent an important corrective to abstract analytical accounts of the meaning or scope of security that appear distant, even antithetical, to the worlds that political communities and security practitioners occupy.

In the sense of viewing security as constructed – as being understood in different ways by different political communities at different times – the Copenhagen School's architects are not alone. Constructivist theorists generally point to these distinctions, driven significantly by ideational factors, pointing too to dynamics of negotiation and contestation that characterise the processes through which political communities come to understand security, and threats to it, in particular ways.[6] But the securitisation framework is more specific, even parsimonious,[7] in developing a detailed account of *how* threats to security are designated. Three key components or elements of the framework are important to outline here: the role of speech acts, the role of audience acceptance, and the role of emergency measures. These provide the foundation and structure for the analysis

[3]For example, Mark Salter, 'When securitization fails: The hard case of counter-terrorism programs', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 116–31; Paul Roe, 'Actor, audience(s) and emergency measures: Securitization and the UK's decision to invade Iraq', *Security Dialogue*, 39:6 (2008), pp. 615–35; Sarah Leonard and Christian Kaunert, 'Refugee flows and terrorism in the European Union: Securitization through association', *International Politics*, 59 (2021), pp. 562–76.

[4]Anselm Vogler, 'Tracking climate securitization: Framings of climate security by civil and defence ministries', *International Studies Review*, 25:2 (2023), p. viad010; Jeroen Warner and Ingrid Boas, 'Securitization of climate change: How invoking global dangers for instrumental ends can backfire', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 37:8 (2019), pp. 1471–88; Matt McDonald, 'The failed securitization of climate change in Australia', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 47:4 (2012), pp. 579–92.

[5]See Stephen Walt, 'The renaissance of security studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 35 (1991), pp. 211–39.

[6]See Roxanne Doty, 'Immigration and the politics of security', *Security Studies*, 8:2–3 (1988–9), pp. 71–93; Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall (eds), *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security*.

[7]Ole Wæver, 'Politics, security, theory', *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), pp. 465–80.

of securitisation dynamics regarding terrorism and climate change in the US, UK, and Australia to follow.

For the Copenhagen School, and Ole Wæver in particular,[8] security is a speech act. Drawing on the linguistic theory of Austin,[9] the argument advanced is that the designation of threat can have performative effects, potentially changing the way an issue is conceived and approached. This necessitates a focus on whether and how political actors represent issues as existential threats through speech or text. If this happens, such representations can be viewed as 'securitising moves', which become successful (i.e. constitute securitisation) if accepted by a relevant audience.[10] There are questions here about the specific form these representations need to take,[11] about who is in a position to meaningfully securitise an issue[12] and about whether alternative forms of representation (such as images) could feasibly also be viewed as securitising moves.[13] But ultimately the approach draws our attention to the *process* through which threats are designated to a particular referent object through speech.

A second component of the framework is the importance of audience acceptance. Essentially, for securitisation to be successful, the political community on behalf of whom the securitising actor is attempting to speak must recognise the legitimacy of that pronouncement and support the designation of that issue as a threat to security.[14] Speaking security is important, but acceptance of that pronouncement is also crucial, especially in enabling exceptional measures (to be discussed).

There are at least three complications in attempting to make sense of the role of the audience in the process of securitisation, however. The first is the question of who the audience itself is. We tend to work with the assumption that we are talking about the broader public's acceptance of threat designation, but of course the need for that endorsement can look different in different settings, especially in non-liberal states.[15] And as Paul Roe has noted in his account of the British government's attempts to justify war in Iraq, even in liberal states it is not immediately clear whether the relevant audience is the broader public or parliament, for example.[16]

A second challenge is about what the threshold for audience acceptance is – at what point can we say the audience has accepted the idea that a particular issue constitutes an existential security threat? It is hard to say in definitive terms whether majority support is required, or even (in the case of significant existential measures) whether a narrow majority is enough.[17] And it is similarly unclear whether active endorsement is required or simply acquiescence.[18]

Finally, for some there is a tension at the heart of the framework in terms of the focus on the performative effects of speech acts on the one hand and the apparent need for negotiation and consent on the other. Balzacq memorably identifies this as a possible tension in the framework between illocutionary and perlocutionary (speech) acts, with one enacting or constituting security and the other simply providing a foundation which – only if endorsed – then enables emergency

[8]Ole Wæver, 'Securitisation and de-securitisation', in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 46–87.

[9]J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[10]See Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

[11]See Thierry Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11:2 (2005), pp. 171–201.

[12]See Matt McDonald, 'Securitization and the construction of security', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:4 (2008), pp. 563–87.

[13]See, for example, Michael C. Williams, 'Words, images, enemies: Securitization and international politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47:4 (2008), pp. 511–31; Lene Hansen, 'Theorizing the image for security studies: Visual securitization and the Muhammad cartoon crisis', *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:1 (2011), pp. 51–74.

[14]Buzan et al., *Security*.

[15]See Claire Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School on tour in Kyrgyzstan', *Security Dialogue*, 38:1 (2007), pp. 5–25.

[16]Roe, 'Actor, audience(s) and emergency measures'.

[17]Balzacq, 'The three faces'.

[18]See, for example, Matt McDonald and Matt Merefield, 'How was Howard's war possible? Winning the war of position over Iraq', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 64:2 (2010), pp. 186–204.

measures.[19] By this account, the inclusion of any role for the audience may ultimately undermine the idea of the performative effect of the speech act.

Clearly, there is a role for audiences in the securitisation framework in making sense of whether – and how – particular issues come to be constituted as existential security threats, even given some uncertainty about how to define 'audience acceptance' in abstract terms. But rather than approaching challenges of interpretation about the audience as elements of the theory to be resolved through theorisation, it suggests an interpretive role for those applying the framework: to develop context-specific accounts of what audience acceptance means in particular empirical contexts.[20]

The final element of the securitisation framework is the product of (successful) securitisation: emergency measures. For Copenhagen School theorists, the construction of an issue as an existential threat enables emergency or exceptional measures to deal with that threat that might not otherwise have been countenanced without the enabling threat depiction. Indeed, in some of their work, emergency measures are viewed as evidence of successful securitisation having occurred.[21] The idea of exceptionalism draws on Carl Schmitt's conception of the political and the capacity of the sovereign to break free of existing rules.[22] This encourages architects of the framework to make a distinction between security and 'normal politics', while also encouraging a normative preference for desecuritisation.[23] The latter, or simply just keeping issues off the security agenda in the first instance, is for proponents more likely to be consistent with normal processes of debate and deliberation, and less likely to be subjected to secrecy, emergency measures, and illiberal practices.[24]

This conception of emergency measures as a feature of securitisation is also contested, in at least two ways. First, for some it simply is not the case that emergency measures necessarily follow securitising moves and audience acceptance. As we will see, this is precisely an argument made about climate change, with some analysts suggesting that threat depiction and audience acceptance has often been followed by reluctance even to pursue relatively minimal – much less exceptional – responses to the climate emergency.[25]

A second point of contention is whether the hard-line distinction made between normal and security politics makes sense and plays out in a range of different contexts. Paris School theorists have here made the case for the role of logics of 'risk' and risk management operating somewhere in between exceptional and normal politics.[26] This is particularly relevant to the case of both terrorism and climate change, as will be noted. Rita Floyd, meanwhile, has made the case for the normative desirability of securitisation in some instances, particularly in addressing urgent threats.[27] And a range of accounts have suggested the model relies upon a particular conception of the political that may look inapplicable to non-liberal, non-democratic contexts.[28] Like the

[19]Balzacq, 'The three faces'. See also Juha Vuori, 'Illocutionary logic and strands of securitization: Applying the theory of securitization to the study of non-democratic political orders', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:1 (2008), 65–99; Welch, *Security*, pp. 21–5.

[20]On this point, see Wæver, 'Politics, security, theory'.

[21]Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a counterpoint, see Jessica Kirk and Matt McDonald, 'The politics of exceptionalism: Securitization and COVID-19', *Global Studies Quarterly*, 1:3 (2021), ksab024, available at: {https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksab024}.

[22]See Williams, 'Words, images, enemies'.

[23]Wæver, 'Securitization and desecuritization'.

[24]See Christopher S. Browning and Matt McDonald, 'The future of critical security studies: Ethics and the politics of security', *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:2 (2013), pp. 235–55.

[25]See Ole Wæver, 'Climate change: The security issue of the future?', paper presented in Departmental Seminar Series, Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, October (2007); Warner and Boas, 'Securitization of climate change'.

[26]Dider Bigo, 'Security and immigration: Toward a critique of the governmentality of unease', *Alternatives*, 27 (2002), pp. 63–92; Jef Huysmans, 'What's in an act? On security speech acts and little security nothings', *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2009), pp. 371–83.

[27]Rita Floyd, *The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[28]Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School on tour'; Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, 'Revolutionary securitization: An anthropological extension of securitization theory', *International Theory*, 4:2 (2012), pp. 165–97.

question of approaching the audience and its acceptance, however, there is a case here for analysts who are applying the framework to adjust elements of it to the inquiry at hand. Certainly, it is likely that the alignment of securitising move, audience acceptance, and emergency measures (like border closures or war) tells us something about the construction of security and threat.

If the above outline gives us a sense of what the dynamics of securitisation look like in practice, it does not necessarily provide a clear account of *why* securitisation plays out in different ways in different contexts. Here, architects of the framework have noted the importance of so-called facilitating conditions: dynamics and contexts that allow securitising moves to achieve success, particularly in convincing a target audience.[29] In this context, Ole Wæver noted the importance of the speech act's form; the position or role of the securitising actor; and the 'conditions historically associated with that threat'.[30] Like other elements of the framework, however, the onus is by and large on the analyst applying the framework to give meaning to these conditions in context, and to reflect more broadly on the driving forces behind securitising moves themselves. Indeed, a crucial point to note here is that the failure to follow the steps of securitisation aside, the framework gives us relatively few resources for understanding why some issues are subjects of securitising moves in the first place while others are not. As such, while the following section charts the trajectory of securitisation of terrorism and climate change respectively (in terms of the three components of speech act, audience acceptance, and emergency measures), in the subsequent section I move beyond the framework in reflecting on the question of why these two issues were treated in such distinct ways in the states examined here.

Terrorism as a security threat?

Why might terrorism, particularly the dominant image of terrorist action undertaken by non-state actors,[31] qualify as a threat to security, especially *national* security? For many, not least in the US after 9/11, this was self-evident. But of course violent action for political purposes undertaken by a small group of non-state actors does not align with the image of an external military preparing for invasion or attack central to modern strategy, often conflated with the field of security studies.[32] Largely, however, it has come to be seen as a first-order security threat on several grounds. Clearly, it is a purposive and violent action undertaken intentionally by a hostile actor. In this sense, there are parallels to the more traditional security agenda, and the role of intentional and hostile action makes this more amenable to traditional security considerations than climate change, for example. Specific terrorist action (not least of all the September 11 attacks, of course) has involved large-scale violence and loss of life, while the possibility of the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by terrorists raises the spectre of an even more significant and catastrophic event.[33]

[29]McDonald, 'Securitization and the construction of security', pp. 570–1. Of course, there is now a significant literature examining unsuccessful, failed, or partial securitisation in different contexts. See, for example, Salter, 'When securitization fails'; Rita Floyd, 'Extraordinary or ordinary emergency measures: What, and who, defines the "success" of securitization?', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29:6 (2016), pp. 677–94; Jan Ruzicka, 'Failed securitization: Why it matters', *Polity*, 51:2 (2019), pp. 365–77; and McDonald, 'The failed securitization of climate change'.

[30]Ole Wæver, 'The EU as a security actor', in Morten Kelstrup and Michael C. Williams (eds), *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 250–94 (pp. 252–3).

[31]On the idea of state terrorism, see, for example, Ruth Blakeley, *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[32]See Walt, 'The renaissance of security studies'.

[33]Obviously this concern was central to a narrative advanced by the US administration in justifying military intervention in Iraq in 2003 and evident in the 2002 National Security Strategy. But the 1995 Sarin gas attack undertaken by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Tokyo also suggested some precedence for the use of WMD (in the form of chemical weapons) in a terrorist attack. See Angus Muir, 'Terrorism and weapons of mass destruction: The case of Aum Shinrikyo', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 22:1 (1999), pp. 79–91. This issue is also discussed in the following paper in this Special Issue, by Futter and Zala.

Beyond these concerns, the shock and disruption associated with a terrorist act – focused as it is on the creation of 'extreme anxiety'[34] – has the potential for broader impacts on the resilience of a society and its *ontological* security.[35] This relates to a broader expectation within society that the state will respond, potentially robustly, to instances in which a community's sense or feeling of security and protection is shattered.[36] In more direct terms, the use of force within a state poses a challenge to the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force, again potentially encouraging a robust response. And in some cases – as was the case with US in the 9/11 context – a terrorist attack within the state could be presented as the only politically motivated violent attack on the state's territory in living memory.[37]

Of course, this discussion is not to suggest either that terrorism *is* a security threat (a claim inconsistent with the broadly constructivist account of security outlined here) nor that the framing of terrorism as a security threat is inevitable. Indeed, in a range of different national or historical contexts, states have responded very differently to the perceived threat posed by terrorism or the experience of a terrorist attack. Western responses to non-state actor Islamist terrorism in the wake of 9/11, however, clearly suggested it was viewed and approached as a security threat of the highest order. This was especially the case in the US.

Securitising moves?

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that consequential political actors in Western states represented terrorism as an urgent and existential security threat in response to the 9/11 attacks, one necessitating exceptional measures in response. This was unambiguously the case in the US in response to the threat posed by Islamist terrorism to the US, its citizens, and even the broader international order.[38] In the preamble to the 2002 National Security Strategy document, for example, President Bush argued that:

> To defeat (the threat of terrorism) we must make use of every tool in our arsenal – military power, better homeland defenses, law enforcement, intelligence, and vigorous efforts to cut off terrorist financing. The war against terrorists of global reach is a global enterprise of uncertain duration.[39]

In his detailed analysis of the response to the terrorist threat by the Bush administration, Richard Jackson, points to the range of ways and contexts in which the administration emphasised the unprecedented security threat posed by Al-Qaeda and like-minded organisations and states.[40] In the process, Jackson suggests the possibility of both alternative framings of the 9/11 attack and with it the nature of the response.[41] He argues that positioning the attacks not as an act of 'war' but as a *criminal* act – as was common with domestic acts of (white) terrorism in the US, for

[34]Grant Wardlaw, *Political Terrorism: Theory, Tactics and Counter-Measures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 16.

[35]Alexandria Innes and Brent Steele, 'Memory, trauma and ontological security', in Erica Resende and Dovile Budryte (eds), *Memory and Trauma in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15–29; Christian Kaunert, Joana de Deus Pereira, and Mike Edwards, 'Thick Europe, ontological security and parochial Europe: The re-emergence of far-right extremism and terrorism after the refugee crisis of 2015', *European Politics and Society*, 23:1 (2022), pp. 42–61; Carolina Kinvall, Ian Manners, and Jennifer Mitzen (eds), *Ontological Security in the European Union*, Special issue of *European Security*, 27:3 (2018).

[36]Sunstein, 'On the divergent American reactions'.

[37]Jack Holland, 'From September 11th, 2001 to 9-11: From void to crisis', *International Political Sociology*, 3:3 (2009), pp. 275–92.

[38]See Richard Jackson, *Writing the 'War on Terrorism': Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

[39]White House, *National Security Strategy, 2002* (Washington, DC: White House, 2002), p. i.

[40]Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*. See also Sandra Silberstein, *War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[41]Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*.

example[42] – would have rendered subsequent military intervention in Afghanistan, and certainly Iraq, less likely.

But the US was far from alone in its willingness to designate terrorism – and Islamist terrorism – as a fundamental and existential threat in the wake of 9/11, one necessitating exceptional responses. This response was prevalent internationally and particularly among the leadership of states that composed the 'coalition of the willing' in Iraq.[43] The UK's Defence White Paper of 2003 argued that 'international terrorism and the proliferation of WMD represent the most direct threats to our peace and security'.[44] In Australia, meanwhile, the 2003 Defence Update noted that:

> Since the horrific attacks of September 2001 and October 2002,[45] the Government has taken steps to improve security, both domestically and internationally. These actions, which include increased funding to intelligence agencies, improved immigration controls, new Defence capabilities to combat terrorism and improvements in airline security, have quickly and effectively responded to some of the major threats which have emerged.[46]

Clearly, then, we saw attempts to represent terrorism as a significant, overarching, and existential threat to these states,[47] with the US leading in positioning Islamist terrorism as an unprecedented threat necessitating an exceptional response.

Audience acceptance?

Public shock and outcry after the 9/11 attacks served to create a context in which Western publics were particularly receptive to arguments that terrorism posed an immediate security threat. This was, predictably, especially the case in the United States, where even potentially divisive claims about the 'evil' nature of actors perpetrating these attacks and all those supporting them was met with broad endorsement.[48] Opinion polling throughout the early years of the 'war on terror' in the US indicated consistent public anxiety about the threat of terrorism alongside support for (even significant) responses to it.[49] Indeed while some might suggest that the 'war on terror' may be behind us, it is telling that the percentage of Americans indicating that they are very or somewhat worried about being a victim of terrorism – at 24 per cent in 2000 – has remained consistently above 40 per cent for the last decade.[50] This suggests a sustained role for terrorist concerns in the American public, a point that speaks to the core themes of this special issue.

Of course, isolating the specific effects of 'securitising moves' on public attitudes towards terrorism and the extent of the threat posed is a challenge. Indeed, recent work analysing the utility of the securitisation framework in this context has suggested that it is not clear either that securitising moves have the effect of building public concern or support for exceptional measures, nor that exceptional measures *require* securitising moves to be enabled.[51] In this context, however, it is

[43] See Jack Holland, *Selling the War on Terror: Foreign Policy Discourses after 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[44] UK Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper: Delivering Security in a Changing World* (London: MoD, 2003), p. 4.

[45] The October 2002 attack refers to a terrorist attack on the Indonesian island of Bali carried out by militant Islamist group Jemaah Islamiyah. The attack targeted Western tourists on the island, and 88 of the 202 people killed in the attack were Australian citizens. See Matt McDonald, 'Constructing insecurity: Australian security discourse and policy post-2001', *International Relations*, 19:3 (2005), pp. 297–320.

[46] Australia Department of Defence (DoD) Australia, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update, 2003* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003).

[47] Of course, this representation extended beyond these states, with Barry Buzan suggesting that the internationally diverse embrace of the 'war on terror' frame suggests that it constitutes a possible example of 'macro-securitisation' with parallels in scope and effect to the Cold War. Buzan, 'Will the "global war on terrorism" be the new Cold War?', *International Affairs*, 82:6 (2006), pp. 1101–18.

[48] Holland, *Selling the War on Terror*.

[49] See Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, 'The polls – trends: Public perceptions and the threat of international terrorism after 9/11', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75:2 (2011), pp. 366–92.

[50] Gallup, *Gallup Poll: Terrorism*, 2023, available at: {https://news.gallup.com/poll/4909/terrorism-united-states.aspx}.

[51] See Kirk and McDonald, 'The politics of exceptionalism'.

enough to note that the Bush administration and allies throughout the world were making the case that terrorism constituted a threat warranting an exceptional response, and this position was broadly supported by Western publics, at least up to the point of external military intervention.

Within the US, support certainly extended beyond increased levels of vigilance or policing to support for a military response. In the US, public support for military intervention in Afghanistan neared 90 per cent in October 2001.[52] This was largely mirrored in the later case of Iraq in 2003, which of course had a more tenuous connection to the 'war on terror'.[53] US publics supported intervention here too, and if our audience is viewed as the legislature rather than the public as a whole, it is telling there that in the US, Congress voted overwhelmingly in favour of military intervention in the case of both Afghanistan (in 2001) and Iraq (in 2002).[54] In the key 'coalition of the willing' countries of UK and Australia – where publics supported military intervention in Afghanistan – support for intervention in Iraq was more ambiguous.[55] In all three countries, incumbent governments were re-elected in the first post-9/11 elections, and while isolating the role of concerns about terrorism (and support for government responses to it) is obviously challenging, it is worth noting that the Howard government in Australia was re-elected on a national security platform only months after the 9/11 attacks while promising a suite of new measures in response to the threat of terrorism.[56]

Emergency measures?

A range of emergency measures were ultimately enacted in response to the perceived threat of terrorism, and representations of this threat were often tied – by policymakers – to the proposed response. This is a critical point of distinction to climate change, to be noted. This was particularly the case in the US, but participation in military interventions in response to the threat of terrorism and enactment of parallel legislative reforms were evident in other countries too.

As the above suggests, of course, military intervention, war, counter-insurgency, and prolonged occupation (in Afghanistan and Iraq) were all linked to the threat of terrorism. In the case of Iraq, terrorism did not provide the legal foundation for the case made but was linked through the suggestion that terrorists might acquire WMD from 'axis of evil' states like Iraq, necessitating an escalation in action to *prevent* a nuclear programme in Iraq from progressing.[57] While the role of the terrorist threat drifted in and out of focus over time in these contexts (as nation-building and counter-insurgency imperatives loomed large in each case), it was clearly the case that the depiction of threat had provided a (powerful) rationale for military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, especially (again) for the US.[58]

Emergency or exceptional practices extended well beyond intervention, however, as the Introduction and several contributions to this special issue attest. These also included expanded powers of surveillance and monitoring; new border control measures; significantly expanded powers for police, security, and intelligence agencies; new institutional arrangements (with the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security in the US, for example); and a range of restrictions on civil liberties in the US, UK, Australia, and beyond that disproportionately targeted (minority) Muslim communities.[59] These measures were identified in the key defence documents

[52]Karlyn Bowman, 'America and the war on terror', *AEI Public Opinion Study* (July 2008), p. 57.

[53]See Holland, *Selling the War on Terror*.

[54]James Scott and Ralph Carter, 'The not-so-silent partner: Patterns of legislative–executive interaction in the 'War on Terror', 2001–2009', *International Studies Perspectives*, 15:2 (2014), pp. 168–208.

[55]See Holland, *Selling the War on Terror*; McDonald and Merefield, 'How was Howard's war possible?'.

[56]David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003).

[57]White House, *National Security Strategy, 2002*; Lawrence Freedman, 'Prevention, not preemption', *The Washington Quarterly*, 26:2 (2003), pp. 105–14.

[58]See Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*.

[59]Of a significant body of literature, see, for example, Adrian Cherney and Kristina Murphy, 'Being a "suspect community" in a post 9/11 world: The impact of the war on terror on Muslim communities in Australia', *Journal of Criminology*, 49:4

noted earlier, where their deployment was justified in response to the existential threat posed by terrorism. It was viewed as necessary, to reiterate the words of the US president in 2002, to 'make use of every tool in our arsenal'.[60]

In the case of the US and other proponents of the 'war on terror' noted here, terrorism was clearly securitised after 9/11. It was presented consistently as an existential threat, audience acceptance was forthcoming regardless of how the audience itself is defined, and emergency measures were demonstrably evident. Of course, it is difficult to isolate the effects securitising moves had on public attitudes towards the terror threat and emergency measures associated with it (would these have been forthcoming regardless?). But the scale of the investment of political capital, time, and resources by those states in making and pursuing this case in the 'war on terror' is genuinely difficult to exaggerate.

Climate change as a security threat?

Climate change at once suggests itself as a more obvious candidate for securitisation given the capacity for harm, and as less obvious given how foreign elements of it seem to the traditional security agenda (especially of states). In terms of the challenge posed to human and ecological security,[61] the threat of climate change is both direct and immediate, extending from warmer temperatures, ocean acidification, and changing rainfall patterns in the case of ecosystem resilience to natural disasters, rising sea levels, and secondary implications for health and livelihoods in the case of human security. At the national level, some states have chosen to frame climate change as a threat to human or ecological security, for example.[62] And for others, climate change represents an immediate and direct threat, even on traditional grounds. Low-lying island states such as Tuvalu and Kiribati in the Pacific, for example, face direct challenges to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state associated with the effects of climate change, particularly rising sea levels.

By and large, however, the case for climate change as a security issue is more likely to focus on *secondary* implications of climate change: the capacity for direct effects of climate change noted above to contribute to fragility, instability, population displacement, and even armed conflict. Here, a range of analysts have suggested the possibility that effects such as warmer temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, droughts, loss of arable land, and displacement will serve as contributors to fragility, grievance, and (potentially) armed conflict.[63] In this context, some have drawn links between climate change and war in Darfur[64] and Syria,[65] though such linkages have been contested.[66] A common representation of the role of climate change in contributing to armed conflict

(2016), pp. 480–96; Tahir Abbas, 'Implementing "Prevent" in countering violent extremism in the UK', *Critical Social Policy*, 39:3 (2019), pp. 396–412; Stephen Vertigans, 'British Muslims and the UK government's "war on terror" within', *British Journal of Sociology*, 61:1 (2010), pp. 26–44.

[60] White House, *National Security Strategy, 2002*, p. i.

[61] Matt McDonald, *Ecological Security: Climate Change and the Construction of Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[62] Judith Nora Hardt, Adrien Estève, Cameron Harrington, Nicholas P. Simpson and Franziskus von Lucke (eds), *Climate Security in the Anthropocene* (Berlin: Springer, 2023); Matt McDonald, 'Discourses of climate security', *Political Geography*, 33 (2013), pp. 42–51.

[63] Joshua Busby, *States and Nature: The Effects of Climate Change on Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Richard Black, Joshua Busby, Geoffrey Dabelko et al., *Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2022).

[64] Ban Ki Moon, 'A climate culprit in Darfur', *Washington Post* (16 June 2007), p. 15; UNEP, *Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2007).

[65] Peter Gleick, 'Water, drought, climate change, and conflict in Syria', *Weather Climate and Society*, 6 (2014), pp. 331–40.

[66] See, for example, Jan Selby, Omar Dahi, Christiane Frolich, and Mike Hulme, 'Climate change and the Syrian civil war revisited', *Political Geography*, 60 (2017), pp. 232–44.

is the idea of climate change as a 'threat multiplier': creating or reinforcing conditions in which conflict becomes more likely, rather than directly *causing* conflict as such.[67]

Another prominent focus in this context has been the potential implications of climate change for the defence sector itself. Defence establishments around the world are increasingly aware of – and attempting to address in varying ways – the implications of climate change for the types of missions that may be required in future (more Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief [HADR] missions in particular); the capacity for military equipment and personnel to function effectively in changing environments; the need to consider availability of fuel types and contributions to climate change when approaching decisions of procurement; the vulnerability of (often-significant) defence estates to changing weather conditions; and likely pressure on Defence to reduce its own 'bootprint' in terms of its contribution to emissions.[68] In these senses, climate change is increasingly recognised as having implications for security and strategic considerations even traditionally defined. But this recognition has not necessarily translated to securitisation, and certainly not to anything approaching 'emergency measures' in response to the climate crisis.

Securitising moves?

While we have seen increasing recognition of the national security implications of climate change among states,[69] including in the countries examined here, in the early years of the 2000s this recognition was less evident. Certainly this was the case in the US, where the Bush administration was announcing the withdrawal of the US from the Kyoto Protocol and at times even questioning the science of climate change.[70] Within the Defence establishment, work continued on analysing some of the potential implications of climate change for Defence itself, but this was very much below the parapet, with Defence figures generally eschewing high-profile public statements on the immediate security challenges of climate change.[71] Recognition of climate change as an issue of national or international security had begun to emerge among European states,[72] but here it was telling that announcement of climate mitigation targets or new mechanisms to reach these (whether carbon pricing, regulation, emissions trading, or renewable energy investment, for example) were rarely if ever justified in the context of the need to address the *security* implications of climate change.[73]

In the key strategic documents that were produced in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, climate change was clearly not prioritised as a security concern. The issue warranted a fleeting mention in the Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy and received no mention in the president's preamble that focused overwhelmingly on the threat of terrorism.[74] Climate change was not noted in the UK's Defence White Paper of 2003, while 'threats posed by international terrorism' constituted the rationale for revisiting defence policy settings.[75] And climate change was similarly absent from Australia's 2003 Defence Update, while a full chapter in that report discussed the threat of – and Australia's response to – terrorism.[76]

[67]CNA, *National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change* (May 2014), available at: {https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/MAB_5-8-14.pdf}.

[68]See Hardt et al., *Climate Security in the Anthropocene*; Duncan Depledge, 'Low-carbon warfare: Climate change, net zero and military operations', *International Affairs*, 99:2 (2023), pp. 667–85.

[69]Vogler, 'Tracking climate securitization'.

[70]See Paul Harris, 'Beyond Bush: Environmental politics and prospects for US climate policy', *Energy Policy*, 37:3 (2009), pp. 966–71.

[71]Daniel Abrahams, 'From discourse to policy: US policy communities' perceptions of and approaches to climate change and security', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 19 (2019), pp. 323–45.

[72]Hardt et al., *Climate Security in the Anthropocene*.

[73]Jarrod Hayes and Janelle Knox-Hayes, 'Security in climate change discourse', *Global Environmental Politics*, 14:2 (2014), pp. 82–10.

[74]White House, *National Security Strategy, 2002*.

[75]UK MoD, *Defence White Paper*.

[76]Australia DoD, *Defence Update*.

In short, the early years of the 'war on terror' saw none of its key proponents making a case for the securitisation of the issue or its prioritisation as an emerging concern. And crucially, we do not see any attempt to make the case that the challenge of climate change necessitated – or even justified – exceptional responses.

Audience acceptance?

Given the absence of key securitising moves regarding climate change in the early years of the 'war on terror' among the states noted here, it appears redundant to examine the extent to which public acceptance was forthcoming. But reflecting on broader societal attitudes, and responses to this framing since, tells us something about the potential for such representations to find support. At an abstract level, political communities within most Western states have supported the idea that climate change constitutes a first-order security challenge, even if the dynamics of securitisation have played out differently in different contexts.[77] Hayes and Knox-Hayes, for example, have pointed out that the language of security (and securitisation) when applied to climate change is received differently by US audiences compared to European audiences, for example.[78] In the former, they argue, this framing is more likely to mobilise some sceptical elements of the US population, whereas in the latter (where climate change is less politicised) the security framing is less persuasive in terms of building concern or support for action than a framing focused on justice or economics.

Contemporary views of climate change in these contexts suggest strong levels of public support for the idea that climate change constitutes a threat. The issue here is about whether this concern is sufficient to encourage or warrant substantive responses that may come at a cost. In Australia, for example, a 2019 survey (admittedly prior to the onset of the coronavirus or Russia's invasion of Ukraine) indicated that Australians viewed climate change as the most pressing threat to Australian interests. Indeed, a report on the poll noted that it 'ranked as a more serious concern than international terrorism'.[79] Yet concern about climate change in Australia paradoxically wanes when governments indicate a commitment to act to address the issue.[80] And in the US, contemporary Pew Center polling suggests that a majority of Americans view climate change as a 'major threat', even while the issue was at the lower end of policy issues that Americans felt should be prioritised.[81] In UK, meanwhile, support for climate action has coincided with increasing recognition of the security implications of climate change, but it is difficult to sustain the argument that the latter framing has driven that support.[82]

In short, there is evidence to suggest that key constituencies in Western states have accepted the idea that climate change constitutes a threat, and this has grown steadily since the earliest years of the 21st century. It is less clear that this support translates into these populations either pressuring governments into policy action or even appearing willing to accept emergency measures to address the threat posed. And of course, as noted, such a case was not made by the political leaders of the states examined here.

[77] See, for example, Thomas Diez, Franziskus von Lucke, and Zehra Wellmann, *The Securitization of Climate Change* (London: Routledge, 2016); Judith Hardt et al. (eds), *Climate Security in the Anthropocene*.

[78] Hayes and Knox-Hayes, 'Security in climate change discourse'.

[79] Michael Slezak, 'Climate change a bigger threat to Australia's interests than terrorism, Lowy Institute poll suggests', *ABC News* (8 May 2019), available at: {https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-08/australians-think-climate-change-bigger-threat-than-terrorism/11091276}.

[80] Matt McDonald, 'Are Australians more worried about climate change or climate policy?', *Lowy Interpreter* (26 June 2019), available at: {https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/are-australians-more-worried-about-climate-change-or-climate-policy}.

[81] Alex Tyson, Cary Funk, and Brian Kennedy, 'What the data says about Americans' views of climate change', *Pew Research Center* (18 April 2013), available at: {https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/18/for-earth-day-key-facts-about-americans-views-of-climate-change-and-renewable-energy/}.

[82] Hayes and Knox-Hayes, 'Security in climate change discourse'.

Emergency measures

The 'war on terror' appears to have furnished us with a myriad of examples of emergency measures linked to the imperative of addressing an unprecedented threat, including some (like CIA black sites, 'enhanced interrogation', and the incarceration of asylum seekers) we may not have readily anticipated. In the case of climate change, by contrast, emergency measures are notable by their absence.

So what would emergency measures look like in the context of climate change? A few examples suggest themselves here, including an international ban on the mining, trade or use of fossil fuels;[83] the deployment of significant solar geoengineering projects to minimise warming;[84] sanctions on, coercion of, or military intervention in other countries responsible for significant fossil fuel use or deforestation; or the establishment of a new institution with enforcement capability to police climate commitments. These steps can clearly be contrasted with where we are currently at in 2024: at this point, we have not been able to agree even on economic penalties for those states failing to meet their emissions targets; a commitment to phase out fossil fuel use was omitted from the final text of the UN Climate talks (COP28) in Dubai in 2023; and the Security Council was not able to agree on moderate plans around research and reporting about climate security or consideration for climate change in UN peace operations. And, perhaps most importantly, global emissions continue to rise even after stated commitments to the 1.5 degree target endorsed in Paris in 2015, a target that may be passed within the next 5 years.

Unlike terrorism, the possibility of catastrophic climate change – though in this case backed up by the science[85] – was not enough to prompt even mainstream responses to this issue in the cases of some of the countries noted here (e.g. carbon pricing, significant emissions reduction targets), much less sweeping new regulations or intervention. In fact, Ole Wæver himself noted that climate change presented a challenge to the securitisation framework in the sense that we had seen both the designation of threat and audience acceptance but no emergency measures in response.[86] Other accounts of the 'failed' securitisation of climate change broadly echo this point.[87]

A tale of two securitisations: Why?

Ultimately, the picture here of the immediate post-2001 period in the US, UK, and Australia suggests a significant and institutionalised focus on terrorism as a key threat to national security, with such representations both supported publicly and manifested in substantive and exceptional responses that were advocated by the leaders in question. By contrast, climate change is given little political priority or attention in these early years, and the types of potential exceptional responses identified in the preceding section are notable for their absence on the policy agenda.

So how do we make sense of this distinct trajectory evident in approaching the issues of terrorism and climate change as security concerns? This is partly a puzzle because these issues have important similarities, including the uncertain nature of that threat and the apparent centrality of risk management-oriented actions, precaution, and even prevention in response.

On uncertainty, 9/11 took authorities by surprise, and the capacity for action understood as 'terrorist' action to be undertaken by small groups of individuals, or even a lone wolf, makes threat anticipation a lot more difficult than monitoring another state's build-up of troops or deployment of military resources, for example. This is even the case for states with significant surveillance and intelligence capacity, as Donald Rumsfeld's memorable characterisation of 'unknown unknowns'

[83]Harro van Assalt and Peter Newell, 'Pathways to an international agreement to leave fossil fuels in the ground', *Global Environmental Politics*, 22:4 (2022), pp. 28–47.

[84]Matt McDonald, 'Geoengineering, climate change and ecological security', *Environmental Politics*, 32:4 (2023), pp. 565–85.

[85]IPCC, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[86]Wæver, 'Climate change'.

[87]Warner and Boas, 'Securitization of climate change'; McDonald, 'The failed securitization of climate change'.

attests.[88] And while we can now say with certainty that climate change is happening, is human-induced, and will create significant (and life-threatening) harms for a range of living beings,[89] the complexity of ecosystem functions means it is harder to say exactly when, where, or how specific climate-induced harms will play out.[90] Nor can we be certain when or where climate-induced ecological stress will spill over into armed conflict, for example, even if we know that such stress makes conflict generally more likely.[91] This uncertainty arguably increases the space and potentially the effect of different framings of these challenges. This importantly creates opportunities for those with particular (ideological) commitments, allowing them to frame these challenges as either urgent or minimal and to represent and pursue particular responses to them in the process.[92] This is a crucial point to note here in underscoring the role of political and ideological *choices*.

On the question of response, the register (and framing) of risk, precaution, and prevention also apply to both terrorism and climate change. In the case of the former – risk management and precaution – Vice President Dick Cheney famously noted that if 'there's a one percent chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response'.[93] Aradau and van Munster suggest the embrace of this logic in the case of the 'war on terror' is historically significant, representing 'a permanent adjustment of traditional forms of risk management in light of the double infinity of catastrophic consequences and the incalculability of the risk of terrorism'.[94] By contrast, responses to the climate crisis have tended to endorse the importance of precaution at a rhetorical level – hardly surprising given the origins of the 'precautionary principle' in international environmental negotiations – while greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise.[95] And prevention was strongly endorsed in early calls for action on climate change, including by Vice President Al Gore in his dismissal of the legitimacy of any discussion of adaptation in the 1980s.[96] Now, the failure of a strategy of prevention is arguably evident in COP discussions of funds for adaptation and loss and damage. A logic of prevention was also central to the case for military intervention in Iraq in 2003, with arguments that this intervention would prevent the possible (even likely?) scenario of terrorists acquiring WMD through rogue regimes and using them against Western targets.[97]

Some similarities are therefore evident in the uncertainty associated with the challenges of climate change and terrorism, and the potential logic of responses to these threats. Yet these issues have been subject to very different levels of prioritisation and different forms of action. How do we make sense of the divergent approaches to terrorism and climate change in the years following 9/11? The nature of the problem and perceived capacity to respond (and efficacy of response) are clearly relevant here. But choices made to prioritise particular threats and responses to them also point to the important – perhaps driving – role of ideology.

The (perceived) nature of the problems – immediate, direct, and localised in the case of terrorism versus longer-term, indirect, and more diffuse in impact in the case of climate change – is clearly a factor. For their similarities in the sense of uncertainty and logics of response, the issues are certainly approached in different ways, with suggestions of the long-term and diffuse

[88]Christopher Daase and Oliver Kessler, 'Knowns and unknowns in the "war on terror": Uncertainty and the political construction of danger', *Security Dialogue*, 38:4 (2007), pp. 411–34.

[89]IPCC, *Climate Change 2022*.

[90]McDonald, *Ecological Security*.

[91]See, for example, Busby, *States and Nature*.

[92]Dominik Stecula and Eric Merkley, 'Framing climate change: Economics, ideology, and uncertainty in American news media content from 1988 to 2014', *Frontiers in Communicatio*n, 4:6 (2019), pp. 1–6.

[93]See Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

[94]Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster, 'Governing terrorism through risk: Taking precautions, (un)knowing the future', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13:1 (2007), pp. 89–115 (p. 89).

[95]McDonald, *Ecological Security*, pp. 176–8.

[96]In McDonald, 'Geoengineering', p. 579.

[97]Freedman, 'Prevention, not preemption'.

nature of climate harms arguably allowing policymakers to elide responsibility for prioritising or addressing this challenge, at least in terms of enabling urgent responses to an imminent threat. Even in the case of natural disasters, increasing in intensity and frequency as a result of climate change, the inability to definitively attribute singular floods or fires to climate change has militated against even catastrophic events serving as turning points for climate policy.[98] The capacity to elide responsibility appears more difficult in the case of terrorism, particularly given the direct challenge posed to the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force within its boundaries and the population's shock (even trauma) and desire for swift response to terrorist attacks like those on 9/11.[99] While this was immediate in the case of the US, this shock was also felt by proxy in the UK and Australia.[100] Subsequent Islamist terrorist attacks in Indonesia in 2002 – targeting Western and in particular Australian tourists – and in London in 2005 only served to reinforce the conception of an immediate threat to Australian and British citizens respectively.

By contrast, the intervening factors between the direct impacts of climate change and the secondary (traditional) security implications like fragility, instability, population displacement, and conflict also appeared to create a 'get-out' space for policymakers in directly addressing climate change and its causes.[101] This notion of 'distance' between the effects of climate change and national impacts has been surprisingly resilient even in the US and Australia, states that have experienced a range of significant natural disasters certain to increase in frequency and intensity with the onset of climate change. Here, however, it is important to reiterate that the way this issue is framed or represented is crucial, suggesting (again) a significant role for the beliefs and commitments of political leaders to impact on how urgent and immediate, or secondary and distant, particular threats are deemed to be.

Related to the issue of the (perceived or represented) nature of the problem as a factor potentially explaining divergence in securitisation is also the capacity to respond. Policymakers within states like the US believe they have the instruments, through traditional security and defence mechanisms, for addressing the threat posed by terrorism.[102] Whether this is indeed the case or whether prominent responses to the threat of terrorism do indeed suggest a capacity to prevent or manage this threat is of course a different question. But one of the challenges of climate change, one of the things that makes it such a 'wicked problem' to deal with, is that directly addressing the problem is demonstrably beyond the capacity of any individual state. Indeed, compelling states to accept responsibility for addressing the security implications of climate change that they increasingly recognise has been a challenge.[103]

In his analysis of the very different approaches to the threats of terrorism and climate change by the US government, Cass Sunstein concludes that 'the United States has responded aggressively to the risk of terrorism while doing very little about the risk of climate change'.[104] His central explanation for this divergence is bounded rationality:

> Americans believe that aggressive steps to reduce the risk of terrorism promise to deliver significant benefits in the near future at acceptable cost. By contrast, they believe that aggressive steps to reduce the risk of climate change will not greatly benefit American citizens in the near future – and they are not willing to pay a great deal to reduce that risk.[105]

[98] Sam Rowan, 'Extreme weather and climate policy', *Environmental Politics*, 32:4 (2023), pp. 684–707.
[99] See Holland, 'From September 11th, 2001 to 9-11'.
[100] See Holland, *Selling the 'War on Terror'*.
[101] Matt McDonald, 'Accepting responsibility? Institutions and the security implications of climate change', *Security Dialogue*, 55:3 (2024), pp. 293–310.
[102] See Phillip Gordon, 'Can the war on terror be won? How to fight the right war', *Foreign Affairs*, 86:6 (2007), pp. 53–66.
[103] McDonald, 'Accepting responsibility?'.
[104] Sunstein, 'On the divergent American reactions to terrorism and climate change', p. 503.
[105] Ibid.

Such an account is compelling and finds support in a range of literature exploring attitudes towards action on climate change in the US context, for example.[106] However, for our purposes this cost–benefit explanation risks limiting our understanding of mobilisation in the case of terrorism and inactivity in the case of climate change to the role of societal attitudes. In the process, this risks downplaying the choices made to frame these issues in particular ways, and the interests of key political actors in doing so. In this sense, ideology clearly matters.

In the case of the 'war on terror', geostrategic interests were clearly important in guiding the response to terrorism and the willingness to undertake military intervention. As a range of accounts have suggested, 9/11 arguably provided an opportunity for neoconservatives within the US administration to (successfully) make a case for military intervention and regime change in Afghanistan and (more controversially still) in Iraq.[107] Increased degrees of control over energy supplies and the expanded/extended US presence in the Middle East this enabled were an important consideration for at least some in the US administration. By contrast, the absence of key strategic considerations in the case of climate change enabled relative inaction on this issue in the early years of the 'war on terror', and particularly under the Bush administration. During his administration, President Obama attempted to frame the need to shift away from fossil fuels (thereby acting on climate change) as a geostrategic attempt to limit US reliance on the problematic regimes that were the main fossil fuel suppliers to the US. It was telling here, though, that while this framing could link up effectively with the need to act on climate change, it could also play a role in helping to justify the expansion of oil drilling in Alaska.[108]

Related to the above were perceptions and representations of economic opportunity and cost. Clearly, military interventions in and sustained occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq in the 'war on terror' represent a significant economic cost, while inaction on climate change has had long-term cost implications. The latter range from the cost of necessary adaptation projects and the need to facilitate a rapid transition away from fossil fuels and develop new energy infrastructure to the imperative of responding to increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters and the need to compensate those states unable to do so effectively (and least responsible for the problem itself). But perceptions or considerations of the Bush administration at the time were clearly different. For some critical accounts, these interventions served the interests of the military industrial complex within the US, and contracting arrangements within Iraq represented an economic windfall for at least some US decision-makers.[109] Historical materialists would here point to the key and close relationship between the state and capital in the US context that enabled – even encouraged – this calculation of cost and benefit in the case of the Iraq War.[110]

By contrast, action on climate change was viewed as a substantial economic burden for the US, with the president suggesting that significant action on climate change (including higher fuel prices) constituted a threat to the American way of life.[111] While the former economic incentives may have been less evident for other members of the 'coalition of the willing', the latter perception of climate change action as a considerable and damaging economic burden was particularly apparent in Australia, where the Howard government joined the Bush administration in withdrawing from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Clearly, the latter aligns at least to some degree with societal views of

[106] See for example Robert Brulle, Jason Carmichael and Craig Jenkins, 'Shifting public opinion on climate change: An empirical assessment of factors influencing concern over climate change in the U.S., 2002–2010', *Climatic Change*, 114:2 (2012), pp. 169–88.

[107] See Brian Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, 'The Bush doctrine and the Iraq war: Neoconservatives versus realists', *Security Studies*, 17:2 (2008), pp. 191–220.

[108] Jonna Nyman, 'Rethinking energy, climate and security: A critical analysis of energy security in the US', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 21:1 (2018), pp. 118–45.

[109] Ronald Cox, 'The military industrial complex and US military spending after 9/11', *Class, Race and Corporate Power*, 2:2 (2014), available at: {https://doi.org/10.25148/CRCP.2.2.6092117}.

[110] Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, 'Axis of evil or access to diesel', *Historical Materialism*, 23:2 (2015), pp. 94–130.

[111] Harris, 'Beyond Bush'.

economic costs associated with addressing climate change identified by Sunstein[112] but points as well to the significant role of ideology in *choosing* to interpret and emphasise particular dimensions of the challenge rather than others. The willingness of states to accept a significant economic cost associated with the (exceptional) responses to terrorism (especially military invasion), alongside a willingness to reject the costs associated with addressing climate change through even mainstream measures and to ignore long-term costs of its effects points clearly to the role of choice here. In this context, the readily apparent politics of political leaders' choices to prioritise or downplay particular challenges suggests that ideology – the beliefs and commitments of the political leaders examined here – looms as the key driver for the respective securitisation of terrorism and non-securitisation of climate change.

Conclusion

Terrorism and climate change share important features, as noted, in terms of the uncertain nature of the threat, and the apparent role for risk management, precaution, and prevention in dealing with them. But in the early years of the 21st century, the two issues elicited very different responses from the states examined here, with one viewed as an urgent existential threat necessitating (and resulting in) emergency responses, and the other as a diffuse, long-term, and indirect threat, the responses to which will necessarily be partial and may create harms in the process. Ultimately, terrorism was securitised, climate change was not.

How much has changed since these early years? While the question of whether the 'war on terror' has ended is clearly one that animates this special issue, the fact that this question is asked – along with the onset of climate-change effects – would surely suggest reorientation of security priorities, possibly even the securitisation of climate change and desecuritisation of terrorism.

Certainly, climate change features prominently in the US's 2022 National Security Strategy, with the Biden administration arguing that 'climate change is the greatest and potentially existential for all nations'.[113] It is recognised as a 'national security issue' by the Australian government in its 2023 Defence Strategic Review[114] and features prominently in the UK's Integrated Review Refresh as a national priority, and as a national and international security concern.[115] This is mirrored in broader international trends, from an increase in discussion of the international security implications of climate change in the UN Security Council, particularly since 2018,[116] to an increasing number of states explicitly recognising climate change as a threat to national security and attempting to institutionalise responses to it in their defence sectors.[117]

Yet for all this increasing recognition we have not seen significant interventions by political leaders in the three countries noted here that have been linked to the imperative for exceptional responses, nor have we seen such responses in practice. Meanwhile, as a range of contributions to this Special Issue have noted, the key policy settings and institutional arrangements to address the threat of terrorism that emerged in the heady days of the 'war on terror' remain largely in place. In this sense, it might be argued that the changing realities of potential or experienced harm for these states has not genuinely shifted security priorities in these countries.

What does this tell us about the future of these issues? To the extent that leaders are able to convince themselves and their constituents they have the means to immediately address the threat posed by terrorist groups – whose existence and activities they are able to portray as evil – they will arguably be inclined to continue to prioritise that threat and exceptional responses to it. Doing

[112]Sunstein, 'On the divergent American reactions to terrorism and climate change'.

[113]White House, *National Security Strategy, 2022*, p. 9, available at: {https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf}.

[114]Australia Department of Defence, *Defence Strategic Review 2023* (Canberra: Australia, 2023).

[115]UK Ministry of Defence, *Integrated Review Refresh 2023* (London: MoD, 2023).

[116]Susanne Droge, 'Addressing the risks of climate change: What role for the UN Security Council', SWP Research Paper (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2020).

[117]Vogler, 'Tracking climate securitization'; Hardt et al. (eds), *Climate Security in the Anthropocene*.

so has the potential to strengthen their legitimacy claims in terms of protecting their population. The prospects for prioritising significant (even exceptional) responses to climate change look bleaker given inherent limits to state capacity in addressing the threat and states' contribution to the problem itself. However, the significance of the way these issues were framed and the *choices* underpinning that framing as noted in this paper suggest the possibility of changes in the way these issues are viewed and approached. Genuine political leadership, alongside the onset of increasingly severe effects of climate change, might ultimately enable such change, including in the states examined here.

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