

# Did the world really change? Marking the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks

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A specially commissioned set of essays, published in the September 2011 issue of the *Geographical Journal*, argues that in the years following the 9/11 terrorist attacks the world did change, but not always in ways anticipated by policy-makers and pundits.

Edited by Simon Dalby of Carleton University the commentaries and essays, written by distinguished [geographers](#) and [social scientists](#) including Derek Gregory and Neil Smith, puncture the more hyperbolic claims regarding the longer-term significance of the attacks.

"For some conservative commentators 9/11, as it rapidly became described, was going to be the trigger for a World War IV, after the First, Second and Cold Wars," said Dalby "The United States, as a consequence, needed to prepare for a 'long war' with potentially dire implications for western civilization."

Fundamentally, the essays argue, phrases such as 9/11 served to establish a novelty and a privileging of time rather than space. However, the real significance of this tragedy, involving the deaths of nearly 3000 people in three different places, lies in the connections between people and places, past and present.

"9/11 did not come out of nowhere. It owes its origins to a complex series of events and places stretching from Afghanistan and the [Arabian Peninsula](#) to East Africa and the Lebanon," said Dalby. "The geographies of US foreign and security policies remain a critical factor,

while allies such as Britain find themselves fighting again in Afghanistan and Iraq, just as they did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."

These essays suggest that there are three key factors to understanding 9/11 and its evolving legacy; acceleration, intensification and opportunism.

Acceleration refers to the role that this event provided a catalyst to invoke and implement new legislation involving counter-terrorism, surveillance and public order management.

Intensification refers to the manner in which existing structures implicated in homeland security and projects involving walls and barricades were extended across domestic territories. Investment in security-related expenditure increased markedly, and changed everyday life for citizens and immigrants alike, as the 'state of exception' became the new norm.

[Opportunism](#) was important in facilitating the 2003 invasion of Iraq on the basis of bogus intelligence involving WMD, and the establishment of the detention centre at the US Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay Cuba allowed the US administration to deny terror suspects access to domestic and international legal protection.

The essays also challenge the concept of post-Imperialism, arguing that the foreign policy of the United States and Great Britain in the years following 9/11 suggests the 'colonial present' is alive and well.

"This themed section of essays offers a sober and sobering overview of how much and how little has changed, as we witness ongoing western intervention in Libya," concluded Dalby. "After all the attack and occupation of Basra in 2003 was the fourth time the British Army has done this in less than a century, as the military graveyards in Iraq attest".

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