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Whose Counter-terrorism?

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In the aftermath of the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan, the rejection of French counter-terrorism operations in several Sahelian countries, and the rise of new geopolitical actors, the question of "whose counterterrorism?"has become especially prescient. In this panel, we aim to disentangle the relations, contestations, and negotiations inherent to contemporary counter-terrorism operations.

Recent research on counter-insurgency (COIN) interventions warns against viewing knowledge production in matters of military and security intervention as unidirectional, emanating from actors based in the Global North to those sites of intervention in the Global South. Instead, this strand of research argues, counterterrorism and COIN interventions are co-produced, and increasingly take on features and practices that coincide with a 'local turn' in counter-insurgency interventions and policing more broadly (see Moe and Muller 2017; Hönke and Muller 2016). Other relational-holistic takes have employed theoretical concepts such as 'assemblages', 'counter-insurgency governance', 'patchwork of counter-terrorism' and 'entanglements' to better understand cooperation dynamics in settings of security and military intervention (see Frowd & Sandor 2018; Charbonneau 2021; D'Amato 2021; Stambøl and Berger 2023).

To what extent do these recent theoretical approaches adequately capture the dynamics we observe? How useful are they at articulating the forms of competition and contestation over how counter-terrorism and COIN interventions unfold on the ground? How has the global critique of post-colonial hierachies influenced the practices and reception of such interventions? In what ways does the decolonial turn illuminate contradictions inherent in current counterterrorism doctrines, such as the assumption that counterterrorism violence in the GWoT can be legitimated to affected populations to produce political order and the (ephemeral) creation of "stabilised states"? To what extent have south-south collaborations carved out an alternative vision of counterterrorism? How have trends in counterterrorism such as 'population centric counterinsurgency', 'tailor-made', or 'context sensitive'interventions influenced practice? Who are these new approaches to counterterrorism designed to benefit, whose interests are met or challenged, and what are the stakes involved? The panel examines these questions from multiple perspectives with papers drawn from research conducted in Iraq, Niger, Ghana and elsewhere.

Track Classification: Critical Studies on Terrorism Working Group