The “war on terror” was a term employed by the U. S. administration under President George W. Bush to describe the armed conflict [1] it launched against Al-Qaeda and associated groups following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks [2] against the U. S. It comprised of a military campaign against Afghanistan (which, at the time, was under the government of the Taliban, who were accused of harbouring Al-Qaeda leaders) and of attacks against or arrests of suspected Al-Qaeda members or other terrorists [3] elsewhere in the world.

The Bush administration determined that its “war on terror” was neither an international [4] nor a non-international armed conflict [5] because Al-Qaeda was not a State party to the Geneva Conventions [6] and the conflict went beyond the territory of one State. Furthermore, it held that its enemies in the conflict were neither combatants [7] nor civilians [8] but unlawful combatants [9] who could be attacked at any time and detained indefinitely [10] without trial.

However, this approach was rejected by the US Supreme Court which ruled in the case Hamdan v. Rumsfeld that every armed conflict which “does not involve a clash between nations” is “not of an international character”. The U.S., under the Obama administration, has abandoned the term “war on terror”.

See Armed conflict [1]; Direct participation in hostilities [11]; International armed conflict [4]; Non-international armed conflict
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