The “war on terror” was a term employed by the U. S. administration under President George W. Bush to describe the armed conflict it launched against Al-Qaeda and associated groups following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks 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 elsewhere in the world.

The Bush administration determined that its “war on terror” was neither an international nor a non-international armed conflict because Al-Qaeda was not a State party to the Geneva Conventions and the conflict went beyond the territory of one State. Furthermore, it held that its enemies in the conflict were neither combatants nor civilians but unlawful combatants who could be attacked at any time and detained indefinitely 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; Direct participation in hostilities; International armed conflict; Non-international armed conflict.
Geneva Conventions | Attacks | Terrorism and terrorists | Internationalized internal armed conflict | Combatants | Civilians | Unlawful combatants | Unprivileged belligerent | Internment

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