

Chapter 4 Terrorism and U.S. Forces

"Everything was absolutely ideal on the day I bombed the Pentagon. The sky was blue. The birds were singing. And the bastards were finally going to get what was coming to them."

- Bill Ayers, Former Weather Underground leader in his memoir "Fugitive Days"

The Threat to U.S. Military

The United States enters the 21st century as the single most influential nation in the world. The world perceives the United States as the sole remaining superpower, the victor of the Cold War. Some quarters view the United States as a hegemonic enforcer of its own brand of order and stability.⁷² Because of this influence, anyone seeking to change the existing world order through aggression, coercion or violence sees the United States as an eventual adversary. As a result, they seek means to effectively challenge the United States. Various forms of low intensity conflict, and competition and conflicts short of war are seen by most of America's potential adversaries as the most promising methods of presenting this challenge.⁷³ Terrorism is a component of these strategies.

With the end of the bi-polar world order and the demise of the Soviet Union, U.S. diplomatic, military and economic interventions have become more frequent, and more significant. Because of this dominance, some antagonists see terrorism as the only effective means of competing with the United States. In terms of effectiveness, al Qaeda alone has killed more Americans with terrorist attacks than all of the casualties suffered in all the campaigns and interventions since 1980, including the Gulf War. The resulting effects on the United States have been immense, and the unprecedented response by the U.S. to the threat of terrorism encourages the belief that the asymmetric approach of terrorism is the only way of defeating the United States.

As part of the overall primacy of American power, United States military forces have demonstrated dominant conventional capabilities through successful campaigns and participation in multiple international interventions. Despite this level of preeminence, U.S. military forces remain vulnerable to terrorist operations.

There are concrete reasons to consider terrorism as a specific and pervasive risk for U.S. forces. Factors contributing to a greater danger of attack to military forces are:

- The improved protection or "hardening" of non-military targets. Formerly, non-military targets were "softer" due to a lower degree of security consciousness and a lack of belief in a credible threat. Frequent attacks on non-military personnel and organizations, both government and corporate, have resulted in the imposition of improved security measures, greater threat awareness, and acceptance of increased expenditures for protection. This

⁷² Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, trans. Department of State, American Embassy Beijing Staff Translators (Washington, D.C., 1999).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Part III.

increase in the level of difficulty to the terrorist has reduced the bias toward non-military targets.

- The increasing exposure of forward deployed and internationally based military forces in “permissive areas” for terrorist activities. Clearly, increases in the operations tempo and the number of overseas deployments raise the odds that U.S. forces will operate in areas that are more accessible to terrorist groups than CONUS or established overseas bases. This is especially true when the potential military target may in fact come directly to the terrorist, operating in his stronghold due to mission requirements. Likewise, some countries where U.S. forces are permanently based have groups of domestic terrorists that would not be a threat outside that country, yet pose significant risk to units or individuals stationed there.
- The symbolic value of successful attacks against military targets has often been a consideration in terrorist planning. This is now particularly true of the U.S. military, widely perceived as the premiere military in the world. The primacy of the U.S. Department of Defense in the response to the September 11th attacks further raises the profile of the U.S. military. Improved public perceptions about military personnel increase their value as terror targets. Striking at a respected institution whose members have public sympathy, and which also constitutes a direct threat to terrorist groups will become highly attractive. The potential status and psychological impact of such a coup is a strong inducement to all types of terrorist groups.
- The aims and methods of terrorists – particularly religious extremists - have grown more radical and destructive. A generational change in leadership is in many cases, ushering in a more destructive and relentless type of leadership. Added to this is the effect of extended periods of turmoil and conflict in many regions of the world for the past two decades. This provides recruits and followers that have been desensitized to violence, and who have known nothing but conflict and insecurity for all of their lives.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the nature of the terrorist threat to U.S. forces, specifically ground forces. To do this we will:

- Examine in a general sense who will want to engage U.S. military forces utilizing terror tactics, and why attacking military targets would be desirable.
- Explore why particular U.S. forces would be targeted, and how that targeting is accomplished.
- Provide context by categorizing U.S. forces based upon their status as Deployed, Deployable, and Non-deployable elements.
- Clarify the categorization of various threats by categorizing terrorist groups by their functional capabilities.

For the purposes of this chapter, when discussing terrorist attacks on “military targets” we are speaking of individuals or facilities targeted because of their military identity. This includes off

duty personnel in civilian settings specifically attacked because of their status as military personnel. It does not address military personnel or activities that are victims of attacks intended to strike non-military targets.

Also, in discussing questions of why terrorists will conduct particular activities, it is helpful to clarify the terminology used to define terrorist goals and objectives.

Objective: The standard definition of *objective* is – “The clearly defined, decisive, and attainable aims which every military operation should be directed towards.”⁷⁴ For the purposes of this work, terrorist objectives will refer to the intended outcome or result of one or a series of terrorist operations or actions. It is analogous to the tactical or operational levels of war as described in FM 101-5-1.

Goals: The term *goals* will refer to the strategic end or end state that the terrorist objectives are intended to obtain. Terrorist organization goals equate to the strategic level of war as described in FM 101-5-1.

Section I: Potential Adversaries and Their Motivations

Potential Adversaries

There are a large number of terrorist organizations active in the world today, and a wide variety of them are potential antagonists willing to attack U.S. military forces throughout the world. Appendix A contains a listing of specific groups and their operational range. The threat environment for terrorism is too dynamic to discuss specific groups or individuals in this context, but identifying situations that may exacerbate or trigger the motivations of potential adversaries can assist in developing some idea of whose interests are served by such attacks.

- **Presence** – Many antagonists are opposed to the presence of U.S. military forces in a particular area, or the presence of organizations U.S. forces are safeguarding. Frequently, this opposition is because the U.S. presence is preventing particular political, military, or criminal activities, but it can also be culturally inspired. Another possibility is that the presence of U.S. forces is viewed as an opportunity to eliminate or dominate rival factions, and attacks on U.S. forces would be staged in the hopes that the U.S. would encourage the suppression or disarmament of rivals.
- **Culture** – Antagonists who are directly opposed to one or more major characteristics of American culture, such as capitalism, secular democracy, polytheism, pop culture, women’s rights, sexual freedom, or racial tolerance; will attack Americans wherever found. Groups primarily motivated by cultural differences will not differentiate between civilian and military targets, other than in their respective degree of risk and difficulty to attack.
- **State of Conflict** – Groups that feel that they are “at war”, or in a social or political conflict with the United States will target military personnel and facilities to gain legitimacy and

⁷⁴ Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 12 April 2001, as amended through 9 January 2003.

make statements. Likewise, states that are engaged in or anticipate hostilities with the U.S. will use sponsored terrorist organizations or clandestine military or intelligence assets to attack military targets.⁷⁵

In considering who may be our potential antagonists, several things must be kept in mind. While a “threat” is normally considered to be an actor with both the capability *and* intention to actively oppose the U.S.⁷⁶, both these factors can shift rapidly when dealing with terrorist organizations.

Unit planners must evaluate all known and suspected terrorist groups in the area regardless of their previous attitude toward the U.S. and U.S. military. Terrorism is dynamic, and behavior patterns volatile. Groups that are neutral or that avoided targeting U.S. interests in the past can change their attitudes rapidly. Announced or perceived U.S. policy may antagonize previously neutral groups, if that policy conflicts with the goals or objectives of the group. Changes in leadership or internal fractionalization of a group may cause changes in targeting policies or priorities. Also, any organization amoral enough to utilize terrorism as a tactic will not hesitate in exploiting an “ally” or partner if the benefits seem to warrant it. For all these reasons, assumptions regarding previous attitudes of terrorists toward targeting U.S. military assets should be reexamined frequently and with a highly critical mindset.

Also, in assessing potential antagonists, caution should be taken to avoid considering only those threats that are viewed as particularly large or well known. There is a popular tendency to allow the amount of media attention a group can command to determine how we perceive its effectiveness or lethality. Because of the nature of the modern news media, as well as the acknowledged skill of terrorist groups in manipulating it, this is an invalid approach. Small, little known groups can pose threats that are as probable as larger groups, and every bit as dangerous. This is particularly true when operating in a region or country not previously accustomed to a U.S. military presence, and where domestic or indigenous groups may suddenly be presented with the opportunity of gaining international attention through an attack on U.S. forces.

Motivations to Attack U.S. Forces

During the post-colonial and nationalist insurgencies of the Cold War, terrorists often contended that one civilian casualty was worth many enemy military dead. This was due to the fact that many insurgencies had simultaneous military and terror campaigns, so the novelty and impact of military casualties was lessened.⁷⁷

Even when not involved in hostilities, military casualties delivered less psychological impact because of expectations that military personnel are “at-risk” due to their profession. Terrorists also pursue soft targets, preferring unarmed, less secure victims. A saying attributed to any number of terrorists is “Why hunt wolves when there are so many sheep

**“One corpse in a [suit] jacket is always worth more than twenty in uniform”
- Ramdane Abane, senior FLN terrorist leader**

⁷⁵ Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 52.

⁷⁶ FM 7-100, *Opposing Force Doctrinal Framework and Strategy*, February 2002

⁷⁷ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 61.

about?” While there are exceptions to this, such as the consistent targeting of British soldiers and police by the IRA, targeting civilians was the clearly preferred tactic.

As terrorism became less and less associated with classical insurgencies and more international in scope, the preference for civilian targets became less pronounced. American military installations and personnel were frequently targeted in the 1980s and 1990s by anti-NATO European terrorists, and by state sponsored terrorists acting on behalf of a variety of regimes.⁷⁸ These attacks generally struck at military targets that were not engaged in hostilities, but that were accessible to the terrorists due to their being based or deployed overseas. This trend has accelerated, although the focus has shifted from Europe to the Persian Gulf region.

There are two strategic factors in terrorists accepting the greater risks associated with attacking military targets: accessibility and symbolic value. (Tactical reasons for selecting specific military targets are discussed in Section II.)

- **Accessibility** – Military forces are often based or deployed into areas that are “permissive” to terrorist operations. These environments need not be destabilized regions or failed and dysfunctional states such as Bosnia, Lebanon or Somalia, but can also be functioning states with liberal laws, permissive border controls, and existing terrorist infrastructures.
- **Symbolic Value** – For the United States, commitment of military forces is a significant indicator of national interest, and carries major political consequences. Targeting military forces so committed can achieve a greater visibility and significance than targeting existing civilian targets such as diplomats or commercial personnel and facilities. Additionally, the very presence of U.S. forces in some regions, allegedly offending political or religious sensibilities, can be presented as a justification for the attack.

Section II: Considerations in Targeting U.S. Forces

The foremost consideration in terrorist targeting is always the psychological impact on the selected audience. U.S. forces whose destruction or damage would provide a psychological impact that serves the goals of the terrorist are therefore at risk. However, a key point must be understood; assessment of the risk to potential targets must focus less on their military value, and more on their value to the terrorist in terms of psychological impact.

Risk Assessment

U.S. military risk assessment normally looks at what is most militarily valuable (mission essential) to us. Operationally vital systems and equipment, or key personnel are assumed to be at greater risk based upon an estimation of their military worth in particular conditions. However, the benefits for a terrorist organization do not lie in defeating our military aims. A terrorist will view value as a function of the overall psychological impact the destruction of a target has. The loss of a single piece of equipment (such as an artillery targeting radar) has important military impact, but little psychological impact outside the unit or organization that relies on it. For a

⁷⁸ *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. “Chronology of Terrorist Events.”

terrorist, expending assets to destroy such a piece of equipment would not make sense unless it were tied to some other event or objective.

As an example, let's consider a hypothetical comparison of the relative worth of two task forces as terrorist targets. One is a task force built upon a divisional cavalry squadron, soon to play a critical tactical role in a conventional campaign during a major regional conflict. The other is a Civil Affairs (CA) task force TACON to the same division during this conflict. With an upcoming conventional combat mission, the immediate military value of the cavalry task force is relatively greater, and conventionally considered subject to greater risk.

However, from the terrorist perspective, the CA task force is the better target. The composition, mission, and nature of the combat unit render it more difficult to strike, less susceptible to casualties, and capable of controlling the release of information regarding casualties and effects that comprise the terrorist ability to exploit any attack (see Appendix B as regards to the exploitation phase of terrorist operations). The CA unit will be more exposed because of its mission requirements to operate closer to likely terrorist operational environments (population centers). It is less capable of self-defense and the CA unit is likely to contain more suitable victims from the terrorist point of view; reservists, female soldiers, soldiers with a family. All of these categories have a greater likelihood of psychological impact than the average member of a combat unit, and therefore a higher target value for terrorist purposes. Finally, because of its requirement to interact with the local population, the CA task force is less likely to prevent external knowledge of an attack and its effects, which makes exploitation of the attack easier.

From a terrorist's perspective, targeting individual soldiers, especially those that are not perceived to be in imminent danger or engaged in hostilities, is very effective. Several soldiers kidnapped and gruesomely murdered would have a small overall military impact, but a potentially huge psychological payoff for the terrorist. With the atrocity recorded as digital video and streamed via multiple sources on the Internet to bypass any self-censorship news networks might exercise, it would be accessible throughout the world. Palestinian groups have conducted this tactic with varying degrees of success against Israeli soldiers. Consider the amount of media attention given the abduction and eventual murder of reporter Daniel Pearl in 2001, and how the video of his murder was nearly presented on cable television networks.

Undoubtedly, the technique used with Daniel Pearl would be effective even if soldiers were the victims. A case in point occurred during the air campaign against Serbia in the spring of 1999. Three U.S. Army soldiers patrolling the Yugoslav-Macedonian border during this period became separated from a larger patrol and were captured by the Serbians. Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic orchestrated an international media campaign during the capture and month long captivity of the three. Maintaining an ambiguous stance on the status of the prisoners, and their possible fate, Milosevic eventually scored a coup by releasing the three to an unofficial mission of prominent American political figures, resulting in even more media coverage. In this case, the political and psychological impact far outweighed any operational impact caused by the capture of three soldiers and one vehicle. While Milosevic enjoyed some advantages as a head of state that few terrorist organizations will possess, proper media manipulation can make up this deficiency.

Reasons for Targeting

With the variety of terrorist motivations and goals, the reasons for a tactical decision to target U.S. military units or individual personnel are equally varied. The most common motivations in recent history are discussed below.

Demonstration of Capability

This is a method to demonstrate a group's ability to deliver on its threats, and to establish a level of effectiveness as a future threat. Targets may be selected for either military or symbolic value, but the true intent is to show that the terrorist has the capability to negate the U.S. military advantage. The failed attempts of the RAF to assassinate General Kroesen and General Haig by bomb and rocket-propelled grenades in Germany are examples of this type of operation.⁷⁹

A more recent and more successful example is the Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia. To Islamic fundamentalists, the presence of U.S. military forces in Saudi Arabia is considered particularly offensive due to the religious importance of the Saudi city of Mecca. In June of 1996, a housing facility for U.S. Air Force personnel near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia was attacked with a large truck bomb. On the heels of this attack, Usama bin Laden declared war on American forces in the Persian Gulf region in August 1996, and announced that all U.S. forces must be withdrawn, or suffer further attacks. The Khobar Towers attack, which killed nineteen U.S. Air Force personnel and wounded over 400 others⁸⁰, demonstrated bin Laden's ability to back up threats with effective action.

Influence U.S. Policy

Terrorists can attack military forces with the intent to force a change in U.S. policy. Hizballah and their Syrian sponsors were concerned that the deployment of international peacekeeping forces into Lebanon in the spring of 1983 would reduce their freedom of action in the ongoing Lebanese Civil War. Near-simultaneous suicide truck bomb attacks on the U.S. Marine and French paratroop barracks in October of 1983 killed 241 U.S. servicemen, and 60 French paratroopers. Combined with an earlier bombing campaign against the embassies of the U.S. and other countries, these attacks resulted in the withdrawal of

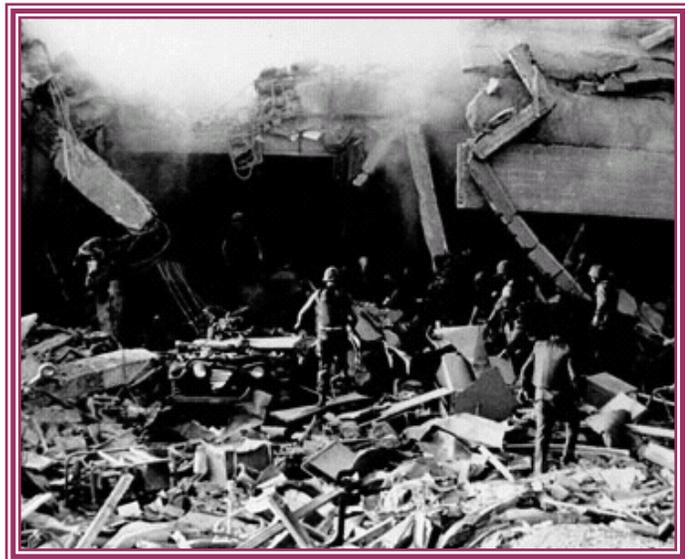


Figure 4-1: U.S. Marine Barracks, Beirut (Source: USMC Photo)

⁷⁹ Ibid., s.v. "The Public View: Political Murder."

⁸⁰ Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 71.

the international military force.

Domestic Politics

The desire to discredit U.S. Federal, state, and local governments can result in military units and personnel being targeted by domestic groups. Anti-war extremist groups targeted ROTC detachments, draft board offices, and university facilities involved in military research during the Vietnam War.⁸¹ The Weather Underground likewise targeted recruiting offices in the late 70's. Both of these campaigns were undertaken to influence U.S. domestic politics. In more recent times, various anti-government groups have targeted CONUS military bases believing them to be staging areas for United Nations directed foreign military forces. During the twenty-year period from 1980 to 1999 (inclusive), thirteen specifically domestic military targets were struck by terrorist activity. This does not count military facilities or personnel who were collocated in the other 101 U.S. Government targets that were attacked.⁸²

Reduce Military Capability

Military forces can be targeted to reduce or remove a specific capability or impair effectiveness. Killing one key or very effective individual can also reduce the motivation for others to accept responsible positions or perform above the norm, and thereby risk becoming targets. This tactic will usually be combined with some symbolic justification, such as "justice" applied by the terrorists because of alleged "war crimes" perpetrated by the victim.

The assassination of Colonel Nick Rowe in Manila provides a good example of this. Colonel Rowe was in charge of the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group for the Philippines. His two years there had been spent contributing to the improvement of the Philippine Army's counterinsurgency capability, and the insurgent New People's Army (NPA) felt he was doing his job too well. He was assassinated April of 1989 in a moving ambush where small arms fire defeated the protection of his armored official vehicle. The NPA announced that the reason for the assassination was Colonel Rowe's notable Vietnam service record. The NPA hoped this would draw the parallel that the Philippines were becoming "another Vietnam". This justification was not stressed at the time, and seems to have been of much less importance to the NPA than the elimination of the threat posed by Colonel Rowe's activities.⁸³

Prevent or Delay Deployment

During Operation Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein called for terrorist activity to be directed against the countries of the coalition preparing to invade Iraq. Consequently, more terrorist activities took place during the period of the air campaign and subsequent invasion of Iraq than

⁸¹ *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. "Student Terror: The Weathermen "

⁸² Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Counterterrorism Threat Assessment and Warning Unit, Counterterrorism Division, *Terrorism in the United States 1999*, Report 0308, (Washington, D.C., n.d.), 53.

⁸³ *Colonel James "Nick" Rowe* (Psychological Operations Web Site, n.d.); available at <http://www.psywarrior.com/rowe.html>; Internet; accessed 7 January 2003.

the entire year of 1996 (275⁸⁴ incidents versus 272⁸⁵). Attacks conducted by indigenous terrorist groups Dev Sol and 17 November took place against U.S. staging areas in Turkey and Greece. Iraq directly supported these overseas attacks with weapons components delivered via diplomatic pouch and other assistance.⁸⁶ Due to extensive counter-terrorism efforts and international coordination, the effort to disrupt coalition deployments was ineffective. However, it is a vivid example of the threat that both deployed and deploying units will face in the future.

In addition to terrorist activities outside Iraq, the Iraqi government conducted what amounted to the largest hostage taking in modern time. They seized 10,000 Kuwaiti citizens, and hundreds of foreigners resident in Iraq, as “human shields” immediately after the start of Operation Desert Shield and during preparations for the liberation of Kuwait. Fortunately, most of the hostages were released before the initiation of Desert Storm.⁸⁷

Section III: Categorizing Terrorist Groups by Capability

“Asymmetric challenges can arise across the spectrum of conflict that will confront US forces in a theater of operations or on US soil.”
- [“Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future With Nongovernment Experts”](#) report (December 2000). [Emphasis in original]

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are many different terms and labels used to describe terrorist organizations. Most of these terms provide little or no information of value to the military professional in assessing the true threat of a terrorist group as an adversary. For the unit at risk of terrorist attack, although it helps to know if the particular terrorist group is on the Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (DFTO) list or not, or if it is an Islamic fundamentalist organization or a secular nationalistic group; it is more important to understand the capabilities the groups has that can be employed against the military unit.

In this section we will discuss a method to assist soldiers in the rapid and clear assessment and comparison of terrorist threats based upon militarily relevant criteria. It is designed to describe terror groups by their capabilities to target and attack U.S. military forces, rather than by legal status, political or religious characteristics, or other value-based criteria. Capability-driven group descriptions are desirable for a variety of reasons.

Capabilities Descriptions are Neutral: Terms describing capabilities are less likely to be emotionally charged. Attaching politically or socially relevant descriptions to a group allows value judgments to be made relative to those terms. Also, like legal categories and other methods of classifying terrorists, they do not contain much useful information for leaders and planners.

⁸⁴ Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 52.

⁸⁵ Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001* (Washington, D.C., May 2002), 172.

⁸⁶ Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 52.

⁸⁷ *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. “Chronology of Terrorist Events “

Capability Descriptions do not Constrain: Accepting descriptions that focus on ideological or religious motivations for terrorist groups can be misleading, and encourage false assumptions. Ideological considerations do play a part in determining if a group will target U.S. forces, but they have no effect on that group's capability to do so. Any group can become a threat because its announced objectives or ideology can change or are misleading, perhaps even unimportant.⁸⁸ Also, changes to the political situation, U.S. policy, or the role or mission of U.S. forces may cause formerly neutral or ideologically allied groups to become hostile. While the Afghanistan mujahideen were willing to accept U.S. aid in fighting the Soviet occupation, many of these Afghan fighters were confronting the Soviets as the embodiment of corrupting Western influences. When the Soviets withdrew, the mujahideen expanded their anti-Western struggle to include Europe and the United States.⁸⁹

Measures of Capability are Militarily Pertinent: Most systems used to classify terrorists are militarily irrelevant. For the most part, knowing the legal status, social orientation, or political theory of a potential truck bomber is of less value than knowing what sort of explosive devices he can afford, where in the operational area he can strike, and what level of local support and sympathizers he can expect. Motivations and behaviors are important to long term terror and counter-terror strategies, but play a minor role in the tactical activities of terrorists and the true threat opposing our forces.

Specific Measures of Capability

In describing the capabilities of a terrorist group, simple, measurable, concrete terms have been selected for use. These are the **objective, levels of support, training, and operational presence** of a particular group. These factors drive the capabilities of a terrorist organization, not the ideology, religion, or status as determined by U.S. legislation or UN resolution. This method is not intended to add another layer of nomenclature to an already thick coat that covers terrorism analysis. It is designed to be a method by which unit leaders and planners can organize pertinent, objective data about potential threats. This data must be researched or obtained from available intelligence information on specific threats within the AOR (Area Of Responsibility) as the unit prepares to conduct operations.

Objective

As defined in the introduction of this chapter this measure identifies the tactical intent and the operational priorities of an organization. It is the actual directing principle(s) behind group activities. By determining what the group wishes to accomplish, the likelihood and circumstances under which that group would target U.S. forces or facilities can be determined.

The objective may be derived from both communications of the organization and the actions it undertakes. Group communications must be examined with a critical eye toward the use of rhetoric and dogma. As mentioned in Chapter 2, ideological material may be unimportant to the actual objectives of a group. Actual indicators in terrorist communiqués are likely to be: what

⁸⁸ Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 31-35.

⁸⁹ *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. "Roots of Fundamentalist Terrorism".

potential targets are concretely threatened; what organizations or individuals are identified with negative concepts or de-humanizing language. A group may declare itself to be “anti-colonialist”, but in fact ignore targets associated with a nation that has colonies, and associate “colonialism” with another organization such as NATO, which they intend to target.

Support

There are several types of support that provides information about a terrorist group’s capabilities. These are measures of the strength of financial, political, and popular support for a group, as well as the number of personnel and sympathizers it has. These factors indicate an organization’s abilities to conduct and sustain operations, gather intelligence, seek sanctuary and exploit the results of operations.

- **Financial:** Is the organization well funded? Money is probably the greatest “force multiplier” of terrorist capabilities, and a well financed group can trade money for virtually any imaginable object or ability that their objectives require, especially weapons and equipment (discussed below). Financial support is a question of both income and expenditures. Many of the nationalist terror groups of significant durability (IRA, Hizballah) have incredibly large budgets, but they also have the infrastructure costs and political or social support obligations that come with building an alternative government or social structure.
- **Political:** Does the organization have political sponsors or representation, either within international, state, or sub-state political bodies? This measures the degree to which a group is state sponsored or supported. It also considers whether the organization has its own political representatives or party that supports its aims (if not its methods). Political support blurs the lines between terrorism and other forms of conflict, and can generate sympathy and reduce negative consequences.
- **Popular:** Popular support is the level of sympathy and passive or active support for the organization among populations it affects to represent, or operates within. Support from a constituency increases the effectiveness of other types of support. It makes funds go farther, and increases the legitimacy and visibility of a group. Popular support from populations the terrorists operate within reduces the security risks, and complicates the tasks of detection and defeat for the security forces.
- **The number of personnel and sympathizers:** These are the actual workers and operators for the group, both active and “sleeper”. This bears more upon the number of operations a group may undertake than the type of operations. The size of a group in terms of the number of personnel is important, but less so than other aspects of support. For instance, a small, well-funded, highly trained group such as the Japanese Red Army (JRA) can effectively attack targets in CONUS. A larger, poorly funded, untrained group may be no direct threat to U.S. targets other than those in immediate proximity to its base area of operations.

Training

Training is the level of proficiency with tactics, techniques, technology and weapons useful to terrorist operations (see Appendix C for descriptions of general terrorist operations). It measures the abilities of a group in terms of specific operations and activities that threaten friendly forces. Keep in mind that innovative application of tactics can render moderately innocuous activities threatening. For example, the ability to stage a peaceful demonstration may be used to set the conditions for a riot that will provide cover for sniper assassinations of responding security forces.

The proliferation of expertise and technology has enabled groups that do not possess particular skills to obtain them relatively rapidly. In addition to the number of terrorists and terror groups that are willing and available to exchange training with one another, there are also experts in the technical, scientific, operational, and intelligence fields willing to provide training or augment operational capabilities for the right price.

Operational Presence

This indicates where a group can operate, and what limits there are to expansion of its operational area. It considers the physical locations of a group's assets, and the capability to move and conduct activities beyond those locations. Although the physical presence of group members is an important factor for determining operational presence, it must be noted that a terrorist cell can have a variety of functions, and not all cells have direct action capability. Many terrorist organizations have extensive support networks within the continental United States, but have not developed an operational capability to match. Their infrastructure within the U.S. is designed primarily to acquire funding and equipment. Yet they could contribute to a rapid expansion of operational capability into the U.S. if required.

For most groups today, their operational presence is determined by their strategic goals, operational objectives, and funding levels, rather than by physical constraints such as geographical distance. Terrorists have exploited the increasing economic, information, and transportation linkages around the globe to expand their presence. The tools available to terrorists to defeat travel controls include support or sponsorship from rogue states, alliances with criminal trafficking and smuggling networks, technologically enhanced forging operations, and simple bribery.

Weapons and Equipment

The weaponry and equipment available is an important part of any capabilities assessment of organizations that use violence. A separate measure of these categories has not been included in our measures above due to the rapidity of change in this area, and the relation of weapons and equipment capabilities to financial strength. Whereas conventional military organizations rely upon standardization, and often have the problem of "legacy" systems that must be used in lieu of the most modern technologies, terrorists rely upon weapons and equipment tailored to each new operational requirement. If a 30-year old RPG-7 will do the job, it will be used. If not, an appropriate system will be purchased. Since terrorists do not have to go through long acquisition processes like conventional militaries, their only limitation in obtaining state-of-the-art systems is financing and availability of the equipment. If a sophisticated precision guided missile is

needed, and it cannot be bought, it will be “built”, utilizing a suicide asset and the appropriate explosives.

Appendices D-G are provided as an introduction to various types of terrorist weaponry and their attack capabilities.

Proxies

Terrorist capabilities are solely a function of the individual group or organization. As previously mentioned, many groups maintain links to rogue states, criminal gangs, activist groups, and other organizations that can expand their capabilities. This expansion may exceed the traditional areas of training and logistic assistance. It can include the actual conduct of operations, with one group acting as a proxy for the other. This is extremely dangerous, as it grafts the motivation and objectives of the group requesting an operation onto the capabilities and characteristics of the organization executing the operation.

Revolutionary groups such as the Baader-Meinhof Gang and the JRA provided operational personnel or undertook specific missions for Palestinian groups in the 1970s in exchange for training and support. Iraqi efforts to instigate terrorist activities as part of their strategy during the Gulf War⁹⁰ have been mentioned previously. Many of these attacks were instigated out of shared anti-U.S. objectives, whereas others were in exchange for the support Iraq provided the terrorist groups. In many cases there were previous linkages, and due to the expectation that Iraq would attempt to use the terrorism weapon, security and counter-terrorism forces were alert to these proxy activities.

Other proxy actions have been less obvious. The Chicago based criminal gang El Rukns negotiated with Libya in the early 1980s to shoot down an American passenger jet with a surface to air missile. The fee discussed was one million U.S. dollars. Although the plot was foiled, members of the gang had managed extensive contact with Libyan agents in preparation for the mission.⁹¹

While proxies generally share some goals or ideological basis with their sponsors or clients, this need not be the case. Purely mercenary proxy operations are possible, and sometimes even ideological opposites can find points where they can cooperate. The American Neo-nazi and Christian Identity movements would seem to have nothing in common with Islamic fundamentalist groups, but in fact they have been cautiously exploring their shared anti-Semitism. Under the right conditions, this may prove to be enough agreement to lead to a proxy relationship.

For U.S. military forces, the most significant threat from a proxy attack is similar to the Gulf War scenario discussed above. A local or regional terrorist group accepts incentives to strike U.S. staging areas inaccessible to a hostile power against which the U.S. is deploying. Unlike

⁹⁰ Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 52.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

Desert Storm, it is likely that some of these operations in the future will take place against units and facilities within the U.S. itself.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have placed the threat to U.S. forces in a conceptual framework that allows unit planners and leaders to organize and interpret the threat information available to them. We have shown some of the motivations and objectives that exist for attacking military targets, and introduced a method of categorizing terrorist organizations in a militarily useful manner. In Chapter 5 we will look at the various categories of U.S. military forces in relation to terrorist threats.