Chapter 3

TERRORIST SAFE HAVENS

A terrorist safe haven is an area of relative security exploited by terrorists to indoctrinate, recruit, coalesce, train, and regroup, as well as prepare and support their operations. Physical safe havens are often found in under-governed territory or crossing international boundaries. Global communications and financial infrastructure, especially those created by electronic infrastructure such as the Internet, global media, and unregulated economic activity, can allow terrorists to fulfill many of the same functions without the need for a physical sanctuary. These "virtual" havens, are highly mobile, difficult to track, and difficult to control.

Physical safe havens provide security for many senior terrorist leaders, allowing them to plan and to inspire acts of terrorism around the world. The presence of terrorist safe havens in a nation or region is not necessarily related to state sponsorship of terrorism. In most instances cited in this chapter, areas or communities serve as terrorist safe havens despite the government's best efforts to prevent this.

Denying terrorists safe haven plays a major role in undermining terrorists' capacity to operate effectively, and thus forms a key element of U.S. counterterrorism strategy as well as the cornerstone of UN Security Council Resolution 1373 that was adopted in September 2001. UNSCR 1373 specifically targets terrorists' ability to move across international borders and find safe haven, to solicit and move funds, and to acquire weapons; it also calls on states that do not have laws criminalizing terrorist activity and support to enact such laws.

Key Judgments:

- The most intractable safe havens worldwide tend to exist astride international borders or in regions where ineffective governance allows their presence. Examples are: the Afghanistan border, the Triborder region of South America, the Celebes Sea in Southeast Asia, and Somalia.

- Denying safe haven to terrorists requires a regional approach based on coordinated action by partner governments working with the United States as well as with each other, and by regional and multilateral institutions.

- Corruption, poverty, a lack of civic institutions and social services, and the perception that law enforcement and legal systems are biased or brutal are conditions that terrorists exploit to create allies or to generate a permissive operating environment.

- Efforts to build partner capacity and encourage partner states to cooperate more effectively with each other at the regional level are key to denying terrorists safe haven.

"Virtual" Safe Haven

Terrorists exploit electronic infrastructure such as the Internet, global media, and satellite communications for recruitment, training, planning, resource transfer, and intelligence collection between and among terrorists and terrorist groups. Like many others, terrorists view the Internet as the most powerful and inexpensive form of communication yet developed. Harnessing the Internet's potential for speed, security, and global linkage gives terrorists the ability to conduct many of the activities that once required physical haven, yet without the associated security risks. With the ability to communicate, recruit, train, and prepare for attacks, any computer may function essentially as a "virtual" safe haven. Closing these havens demands concerted action at the global and regional levels.

The Internet also has empowered the enemy with the ability to produce and sustain its own public media outlets and to present its own distorted view of the world to further its agenda. Terrorists are placing encrypted messages in electronic files to hide photos, maps, and messages on innocent third-party websites, chat rooms, and bulletin boards.

There are several thousand radical or extremist websites worldwide, many of which disseminate a mixture of fact and propaganda designed to challenge information gleaned from other sources. Traditions of tolerance, political asylum, and multiculturalism are key elements of open societies. The enemy has been savvy in exploiting this and in having a consistent message easily heard in the cacophony of the global media and the Internet. Countering the messages that terrorists propagate cannot be done quickly or easily; it must become part of a long-term strategy.

Physical Safe Haven

The remainder of this chapter provides a survey of the status of selected potential and physical safe havens worldwide.

AFRICA

The Trans-Sahara

The sparsely inhabited Trans-Sahara region provides safe haven for terrorist groups operating in North and Northwest Africa.

- **Mali.** The Algeria-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) maintains a regular but small-scale presence in Mali's northern desert, where it is engaged in recruiting, training, and smuggling activities. GSPC members have been able to move without hindrance in northern Mali; the government has maintained a limited military presence in the north since the negotiated end of a rebellion by elements of the Tuareg population in 1996. The size of the country and the limited resources of the Malian Government hamper the effectiveness of military patrols and border control measures. There have been no confrontations between the military and the GSPC in 2005, and the government has not taken any steps to modify its military force posture in the

region or directly confront GSPC elements in the north because of the perceived potential to create unrest. The Malian Government did cooperate fully with neighboring countries in June and July to try to isolate and capture GSPC cells in its territory, including those responsible for an attack in el-Mreiti, Mauritania.

- **Mauritania.** The GSPC and the Mauritanian Group for Preaching and Jihad (GMPJ) have conducted supply, smuggling, fundraising, and recruiting operations in Mauritania and the region.

Somalia

Parts of Somalia, which has no functioning central government, have become havens for terrorist and other illicit activities, threatening the security of the whole region.

- A small number of al-Qaida (AQ) terrorists, responsible for the 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, continue to operate in Somalia and are assisted by elements within the complicated Somali clan structure.

- Members of the Somalia-based al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) have committed terrorist acts in the past, primarily in Ethiopia. AIAI rose to prominence in the early 1990s with the goal of creating a pan-Somali Islamic state in the Horn of Africa. Presently, AIAI is highly factionalized and diffuse, and its membership is difficult to define.

- Other groups have appeared in Somalia that are suspected to have committed terrorist acts against Western interests in the region, or to be capable of doing so. Little is known about movements such as al-Takfir wal-Hijra ("al-Takfir"), but the extremist ideology and the violent character of takfiri groups elsewhere suggests that the movement merits close monitoring. (Takfiri ideology is an inflexible interpretation of Islam that labels those who do not share the same interpretation as "infidels.") Some individuals and groups with past AIAI association and/or current takfiri leanings are sympathetic to and maintain ties with al-Qaida.

EAST ASIA

The Sulawesi/Celebes Sea

East Asia includes a maritime safe haven area composed of the Sulawesi/Celebes Sea and Sulu Archipelago, which sit astride the maritime boundary between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The physical geography of the thousands of islands in the region makes them very difficult for authorities to monitor. Thus, they are well suited to terrorist operations and activities, such as movement of personnel, equipment, and funds. This area represents a safe haven for the AQ-linked Jemaah Islamiya (JI) group.

- **The southern Philippines and Sabah, Malaysia**. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), responsible for multiple bombings and kidnappings throughout the southern Philippines in recent years, remains active despite the loss of key leaders and

Philippine military operations against the group. In addition, some JI members have obtained safe haven in Mindanao in areas under the control of elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf Group. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) is addressing the JI presence through military operations and ongoing peace talks with the MILF. The Government of Malaysia is mediating the GRP-MILF peace talks. The U.S. Institute for Peace is supporting the process by facilitating dialogue on contentious issues such as control of territory. The GRP-MILF talks have made progress, and could lead to a formal peace agreement that would be crucial in addressing the issue of safe haven in the long term. Two specific mechanisms have grown out of the peace process to increase cooperation between the Philippine Government and the MILF. The Coordinating Committee for the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) allows Philippine Government and MILF representatives to broker cease-fire violations. The Ad Hoc Joint Action Group provides a framework for Philippine Government and MILF representatives to cooperate against terrorists and criminals in MILF areas, and has operated with some success over the last year.

- **Indonesia.** JI has had links to al-Qaida and was responsible for the August 2003 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta and the bombing outside the Australian Embassy in September 2004. While Indonesia has significantly improved its efforts to control the maritime boundary area with the Philippines, the area remains difficult to control, surveillance is partial at best, and traditional smuggling and piracy groups provide an effective cover for terrorist activities in the area.

EUROPE

Although most of Europe is not a physical safe haven in a literal sense, domestic terrorist groups, as well as AQ and its associated terrorist cells, remain the principal groups of concern in Europe. North African Salafist groups are especially active, such as the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, the Armed Islamic Group, and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. Moreover, extremist groups recruit and proselytize heavily in some major European cities. The presence and activity of such terrorist cells was dramatically highlighted by the London bombings in July. In addition, terrorist groups opposed to the Middle East peace process such as HAMAS and Hizballah have active propaganda, fundraising, and other support activities in Europe.

Mediterranean

Smuggling, illegal immigration, and narcotics trafficking networks traverse the Mediterranean Sea between Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, providing opportunities for potential terrorist movement and support.

Cyprus forms a transit and support hub for various organizations operating in the Eastern Mediterranean and Levant. The Kongra-Gel/PKK has an active presence in Cyprus on both sides of the buffer zone, which it reportedly uses as both a fundraising and transit point. The Kurdish community in the south of Cyprus is estimated at approximately 1,500.

The Caucasus

Over the past decade, insurgent activities in Chechnya, Daghestan, North Ossetia, and surrounding areas have created opportunities for establishing a terrorist safe haven in the north Caucasus. The Pankisi Gorge area of Georgia was previously noted as a safe haven; however, Georgian authorities were largely successful in eliminating it. Georgian internal troops continued to carry out operations to rid the Pankisi Gorge of terrorists. The identification and safe removal of hidden weapons caches in the Pankisi area enabled Georgian security forces to secure and protect it from terrorist acts or transit. Although border guard and customs reform continued, Georgia was still used to a limited degree as a transit state for weapons and money. Georgia made efforts to close its borders to those who wished to smuggle money, weapons, and supplies, but was hindered in particular by corruption at border checkpoints, as well as by lack of territorial integrity in the separatist areas of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

SOUTH & CENTRAL ASIA

Afghan-Pakistan Border

For decades, the mountainous and sparsely populated Afghan-Pakistani border has been an autonomous area, with little control by Islamabad or Kabul. The Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan have been a safe haven for AQ fighters since the fall of the Taliban in December 2001.   The FATA also includes Islamist groups and local tribesmen who continue to resist the government's efforts to improve governance and administrative control at the expense of longstanding local autonomy. Bringing government services to this region, and turning an AQ safe haven into a regularly administered province of Pakistan, remains an important objective in the global war on terror.

Through substantial efforts since 2004, the Government of Pakistan has deployed more than 80,000 security forces into the FATA and made some improvements in health care, education, and social services. These operations have disrupted the terrorists but also affected tribal institutions in the area, requiring efforts to build new political and economic institutions. Meanwhile, the Afghan Government, in concert with U.S. forces and the international community, continues efforts to build security on the Afghan side of the border. The border areas remain a contested region, however, with ongoing insurgent and terrorist attacks and AQ-linked propaganda activity.

MIDDLE EAST

Secretary Rice with Nineveh Province Governor Duraid Kashmoula (center) and other Iraqi officials, as well as U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad (left) and U.S. Army Major General David Rodriguez (background center), at the inauguration of the Nineveh Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) headquarters in Mosul in November.
(AFP Photo/Ho/US Army)

Iraq

Iraq is not currently a terrorist safe haven, but terrorists, including Sunni groups like al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), Ansar al-Islam (AI), and Ansar al-Sunna (AS), as well as Shia extremists and other groups, view Iraq as a potential safe haven and are attempting to make it a reality.

Terrorist groups coordinated and conducted attacks on Iraq's utility infrastructure and claimed responsibility for kidnappings and attacks on Iraqi personnel working at refineries and electrical stations. Terrorists' efforts to disrupt and destroy Iraq's energy infrastructure not only made the Iraqi Government appear incapable of providing essential services, but hindered economic development. These attacks also sought to undercut public and international support for Iraq.

Efforts by the Iraqi Government, the United States, Coalition partners, and the international community are helping to thwart AQI's ambitions, but the battle is far from over. Not all of Iraq's neighbors have supported the international community in this effort. In particular:

- **Syria.** Designated by the United States as a state sponsor of terror, Syria was used as a facilitation hub for terrorist groups operating in Iraq, as well as for traditional tribal groups, smugglers, and border-crossers exploiting a porous border with Iraq and lax immigration controls. Foreign terrorists constituted a small percentage of insurgent forces, but their impact was dramatic. Although Coalition and Iraqi commanders consistently reported that most of the enemy killed or captured were Iraqi citizens, the foreign terrorist cells continued to move and kept a low profile while training, equipping, and supporting other terrorist groups. In addition, HAMAS, Hizballah, and several other Palestinian terrorist organizations operate offices in Damascus, and the Syrian Government has taken little effective action to curb this activity.

- **Iran.** Also designated by the United States as a state sponsor of terror, Iran has provided political and ideological support for several terrorist and militant groups active in Iraq. Attractive to terrorists in part because of the limited presence of the United States and other Western governments there, Iran is also a safe haven in that known terrorists, extremists, and sympathizers are able to transit its territory and cross the long and porous border into Iraq. Iran also equips terrorists with technology and provides training in extremist ideology and militant techniques.

- **Northern Iraq/Southeastern Turkey.** The Kongra-Gel/PKK maintains an active presence in the predominantly ethnic Kurdish areas of southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq. The Kongra-Gel/PKK operates several base camps along the border in northern Iraq from which it provides logistical support to forces that launch attacks into Turkey, primarily against Turkish security forces, local Turkish officials, and villagers who oppose the organization.

Lebanon

The Lebanese Government recognizes several terrorist organizations, including Hizballah, which holds several seats in Parliament, as "legitimate resistance groups" and permits them to maintain offices in Beirut and elsewhere around the country. The Lebanese Government recently agreed to work to control the weapons of Palestinian militias outside the refugee camps within six months and, for the first time, is discussing possible limits to Hizballah's arms. Although Syria withdrew its military forces in April 2005, it maintains an intelligence presence in Lebanon and continues to offer support and facilitate arms smuggling to Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist groups. Because the Government of Lebanon does not exercise effective control over areas in the south and inside the Palestinian refugee camps, terrorists can operate relatively freely in those areas.

Yemen

Several terrorist organizations continued to maintain a presence in Yemen throughout 2005. The Government of Yemen recognizes HAMAS and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) as legal organizations. HAMAS conducted extensive fundraising through mosques and other charitable organizations and maintains offices. In December, HAMAS leader Khaled Mishal visited Sanaa and met publicly with President Saleh. Al-Qaida's operational structure in Yemen has been weakened and dispersed, but concerns remain about the organization's attempts to reconstitute operational cells there. Yemen continues to increase its maritime security capabilities, but land border security along the extensive frontier with Saudi Arabia remains a problem, despite increased Yemeni-Saudi cooperation on bilateral security issues.

THE AMERICAS

Colombia Border Region

This region includes the borders between Colombia on one side, and Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Brazil on the other. Rough terrain, dense forest cover, and lack of government authority and presence in this area create a safe haven for insurgent and terrorist groups, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Panama have adopted an unstated policy mix of containment and non-confrontation with Colombian narcoterrorist groups, while Peru pursues the domestic terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (SL). FARC used remote areas to house prisoners and hostages and to stage and train for terrorist attacks in cities.

The Triborder Area

Suspected supporters of Islamic terrorist groups, including Hizballah and HAMAS, take advantage of loosely regulated territory and proximity to Muslim communities in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, and Foz do Iguacu, Brazil, to engage in illegal activity and illicit fundraising.

Venezuela

Venezuelan President Chavez has an ideological affinity with two Colombian terrorist organizations, the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), which in turn limits Venezuelan cooperation with Colombia in combating terrorism. The FARC and ELN regard Venezuelan territory near the border as a safe haven and often use the area for cross-border incursions. In addition, splinter groups of the FARC and another designated terrorist organization, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), operate in various parts of Venezuela and are involved in drug trafficking.