
THE NATURE OF THE TERRORIST THREAT TODAY

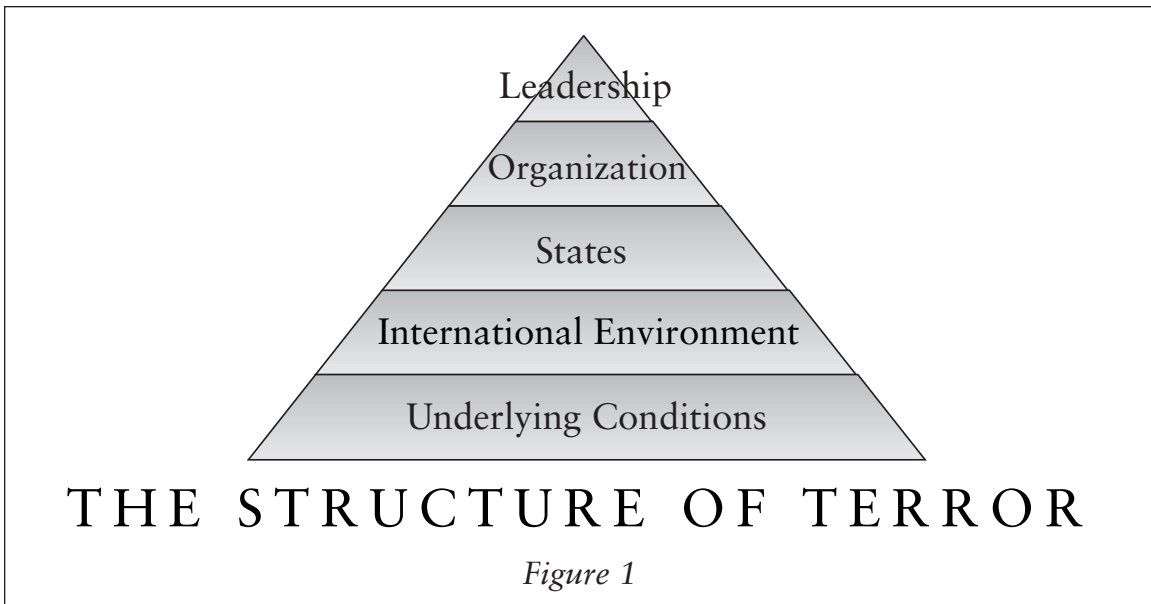
“We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions—by abandoning every value except the will to power—they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies.”

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH
ADDRESS TO A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS
AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
SEPTEMBER 20, 2001

Americans know that terrorism did not begin on September 11, 2001. Regrettably, its history is long and all too familiar. The first major terrorist attack on New York City’s financial district, for instance, did not occur on September 11, or even with the 1993 truck bombing of the World Trade Center. It occurred September 16, 1920, when anarchists exploded a horse cart filled with dynamite near the intersections of Wall and Broad Streets, taking 40 lives and wounding about 300 others. Starting with the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901 and continuing with the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998 and the USS Cole in Yemen in 2000, American history in the 20th century was punctuated by terrorism.

Americans also understand that we are not alone in the struggle against terror. Terrorists have left their mark in some way upon every country in the world. Citizens from some 90 countries died in the attacks of September 11. For decades, the United States and our friends abroad have waged the long struggle against the terrorist menace. We have learned much from these efforts.

Even as we experience success in the war on terrorism, new enemies may emerge. Thus, the United States will confront the threat of terrorism for the foreseeable future. Consequently, we must continue to take aggressive action to uncover individuals and groups engaged in terrorist activity, by analyzing the common characteristics of terrorists in order to understand where our enemies are weak and where they are strong.



The Structure of Terror

Despite their diversity in motive, sophistication, and strength, terrorist organizations share a basic structure as depicted in *figure 1*.

At the base, underlying conditions such as poverty, corruption, religious conflict and ethnic strife create opportunities for terrorists to exploit. Some of these conditions are real and some manufactured. Terrorists use these conditions to justify their actions and expand their support. The belief that terror is a legitimate means to address such conditions and effect political change is a fundamental problem enabling terrorism to develop and grow.

The international environment defines the boundaries within which terrorists' strategies take shape. As a result of freer, more open borders this environment unwittingly provides access to havens, capabilities, and other support to terrorists. But access alone is not enough.

Terrorists must have a physical base from which to operate. Whether through ignorance, inability, or intent, states around the world still offer havens—both physical (e.g., safe houses, training grounds) and virtual (e.g., reliable communication and financial networks)—that terrorists need to plan, organize, train, and conduct their operations. Once entrenched in a safe operating environment, the organization can begin to solidify and expand. The terrorist organization's structure, membership, resources, and security determine its capabilities and reach.

At the top of the structure, the terrorist leadership provides the overall direction and strategy that links all these factors and thereby breathes life into a terror campaign. The leadership becomes the catalyst for terrorist action. The loss of the leadership can cause many organizations to collapse. Some groups, however, are more resilient and can promote new leadership should the original fall or fail.

Still others have adopted a more decentralized organization with largely autonomous cells, making our challenge even greater.

The Changing Nature of Terrorism

While retaining this basic structure, the terrorist challenge has changed considerably over the past decade and likely will continue to evolve. Ironically, the particular nature of the terrorist threat we face today springs in large part from some of our past successes.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the United States and its allies combated generally secular and nationalist terrorist groups, many of which depended upon active state sponsors. While problems of state sponsorship of terrorism continue, years of sustained counterterrorism efforts, including diplomatic and economic isolation, have convinced some governments to curtail or even abandon support for terrorism as a tool of statecraft. The collapse of the Soviet Union—which provided critical backing to terrorist groups and certain state sponsors—accelerated the decline in state sponsorship. Many terrorist organizations were effectively destroyed or neutralized, including the Red Army Faction, Direct Action, and Communist Combatant Cells in Europe, and the Japanese Red Army in Asia. Such past successes provide valuable lessons for the future.

With the end of the Cold War, we also saw dramatic improvements in the ease of transnational communication, commerce, and travel. Unfortunately, the terrorists adapted to this new international environment and turned the advances of the 20th century into the destructive enablers of the 21st century.

A New Global Environment

Al-Qaida exemplifies how terrorist networks have twisted the benefits and conveniences of our increasingly open, integrated, and modernized world to serve their destructive agenda. The al-Qaida network is a multinational enterprise with operations in more than 60 countries. Its camps in Afghanistan provided sanctuary and its bank accounts served as a trust fund for terrorism. Its global activities are coordinated through the use of personal couriers and communication technologies emblematic of our era—cellular and satellite phones, encrypted e-mail, internet chat rooms, videotape, and CD-ROMs. Like a skilled publicist, Usama bin Laden and al-Qaida have exploited the international media to project his image and message worldwide.

Members of al-Qaida have traveled from continent to continent with the ease of a vacationer or business traveler. Despite our coalition's successes in Afghanistan and around the world, some al-Qaida operatives have escaped to plan additional terrorist attacks. In an age marked by unprecedented mobility and migration, they readily blend into communities wherever they move.

They pay their way with funds raised through front businesses, drug trafficking, credit card fraud, extortion, and money from covert supporters. They use ostensibly charitable organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for funding and recruitment. Money for their operations is transferred surreptitiously through numerous banks, money exchanges, and alternate remittance systems (often known as “hawalas”)—some legitimate and unwitting, others not.

These terrorists are also transnational in another, more fundamental way—their victims. The September 11 attacks murdered citizens from Australia, Brazil, China, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Germany, India, Israel, Jordan, Japan, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and scores of other countries.

As the al-Qaida network demonstrates, the terrorist threat today is mutating into something quite different from its predecessors. Terrorists can now use the advantage of technology to disperse leadership, training, and logistics not just regionally but globally. Establishing and moving cells in virtually any country is relatively easy in a world where more than 140 million people live outside of their country of origin and millions of people cross international borders every day.

Furthermore, terrorist groups have become increasingly self-sufficient by exploiting the global environment to support their operations. Whether it is the FARC's involvement in the cocaine trade in Colombia, al-Qaida's profiting from the poppy fields in Afghanistan, or Abu Sayyaf's kidnapping for profit in the Philippines, terrorists are increasingly using criminal activities to support and fund their terror. In addition to finding sanctuary within the boundaries of a state sponsor, terrorists often seek out states where they can operate with impunity because the central government is unable to stop them. Such areas are found in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. More audaciously, foreign terrorists also establish cells in the very open, liberal, and tolerant societies that they plan to attack.

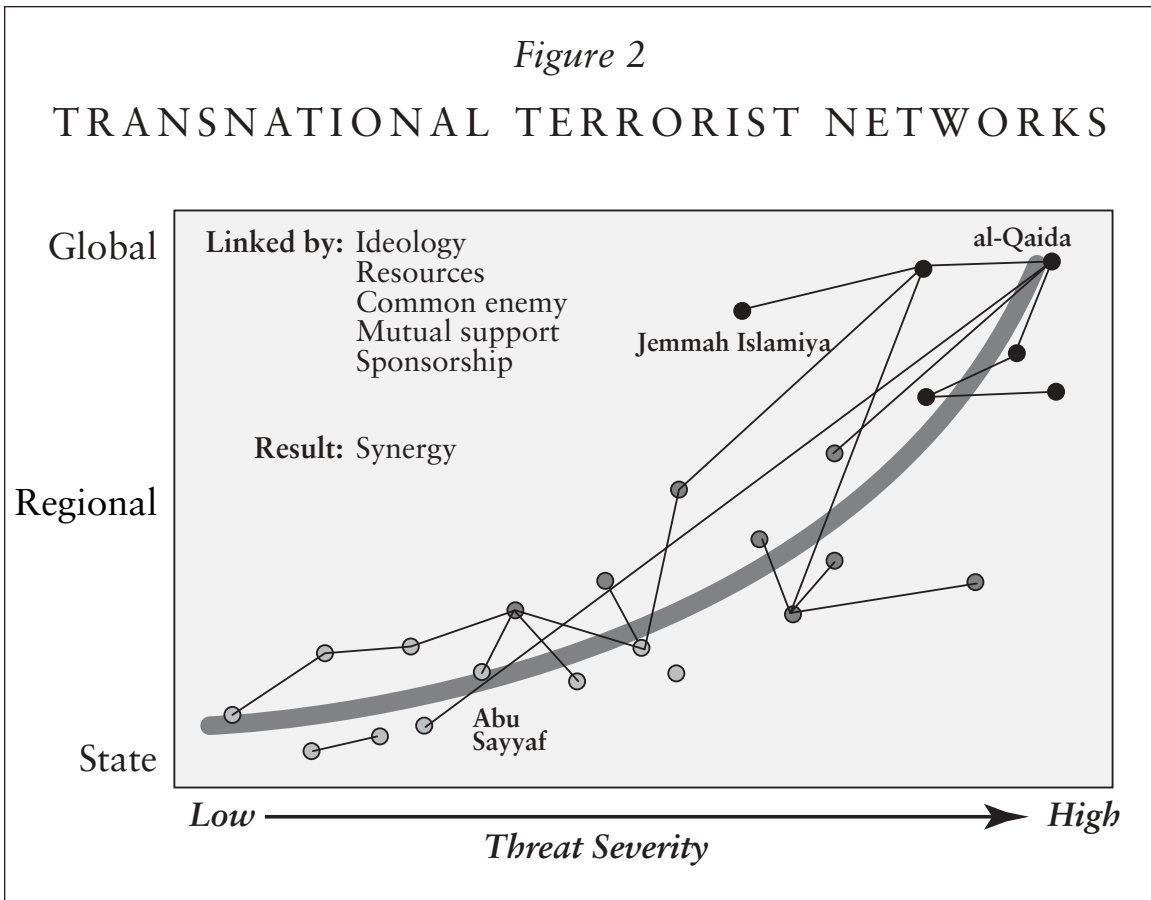
Interconnected Terrorist Organizations

The terrorist threat is a flexible, transnational network structure, enabled by modern technology and characterized by loose interconnectivity both within and between groups. In this environment, terrorists work together in funding, sharing intelligence, training, logistics, planning, and executing attacks. Terrorist groups with objectives in one country or region can draw strength and support from groups in other countries or regions. For example, in 2001, three members of the Irish Republican Army were arrested in Colombia, suspected of training the FARC in how to conduct an urban bombing campaign. The connections between al-Qaida and terrorist groups throughout Southeast Asia further highlight this reality. The terrorist threat today is both resilient and diffuse because of this mutually reinforcing, dynamic network structure.

Figure 2 is representative of how terrorists and terrorist organizations operate on three levels. At the first level are those terrorist organizations that operate primarily within a single country. Their reach is limited, but in this global environment their actions can have international consequences. Such state-level groups may expand geographically if their ambitions and capabilities are allowed to grow unchecked.

At the next level are terrorist organizations that operate regionally. These regional operations transcend at least one international boundary.

Terrorist organizations with global reach comprise the third category. Their operations span several regions and their ambitions can be transnational and even global.



These three types of organizations are linked together in two ways. First, they can cooperate directly by sharing intelligence, personnel, expertise, resources, and safe havens. Second, they can support each other in less direct ways, such as by promoting the same ideological agenda and reinforcing each other's efforts to cultivate a favorable international image for their "cause." By capitalizing on the very technological advances that we use within our country, terrorist organizations learn and share information garnered from our web sites, exploit vulnerabilities within our critical infrastructure, and communicate across the same internet paths we use each day. The interconnected nature of terrorist organizations necessitates that we pursue them across the

geographic spectrum to ensure that all linkages between the strong and the weak organizations are broken, leaving each of them isolated, exposed, and vulnerable to defeat.

Availability of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Weapons of mass destruction pose a direct and serious threat to the United States and the entire international community. The probability of a terrorist organization using a chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapon, or high-yield explosives, has increased significantly during the past decade. The availability of critical technologies, the willingness of some scientists and

others to cooperate with terrorists, and the ease of intercontinental transportation enable terrorist organizations to more easily acquire, manufacture, deploy, and initiate a WMD attack either on U.S. soil or abroad.

While new instruments of terror such as cyber attacks are on the rise, and other conventional instruments of terror have not diminished, the availability and potential use of a WMD is in a category by itself.

We know that some terrorist organizations have sought to develop the capability to use WMD to attack the United States and our friends and allies. Motivated by extreme, even apocalyptic ideologies, some terrorists' ambitions to inflict mayhem seem unlimited. The Aum Shinrikyo's unsuccessful efforts to deploy biological weapons and its lethal 1995 sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway provided an early warning of such willingness to acquire and use WMD. In 1998, Usama bin Laden proclaimed the acquisition of WMD a "religious duty," and evidence collected in Afghanistan proves al-Qaida sought to fulfill this "duty." The threat of

terrorists acquiring and using WMD is a clear and present danger. A central goal must be to prevent terrorists from acquiring or manufacturing the WMD that would enable them to act on their worst ambitions.

Summary

While terrorism is not new, today's terrorist threat is different from that of the past. Modern technology has enabled terrorists to plan and operate worldwide as never before. With advanced telecommunications they can coordinate their actions among dispersed cells while remaining in the shadows. Today's terrorists increasingly enjoy a force-multiplier effect by establishing links with other like-minded organizations around the globe. Now, with a WMD capability, they have the potential to magnify the effects of their actions many fold. The new global environment, with its resultant terrorist interconnectivity, and WMD are changing the nature of terrorism. Our strategy's effectiveness ultimately depends upon how well we address these key facets of the terrorist threat.