



# Threat and Vulnerability

The U.S. government has no higher purpose than to ensure the security of our people and preserve our democratic way of life. Terrorism directly threatens the foundations of our Nation—our people, our democratic way of life, and our economic prosperity. In the war on terrorism, as in all wars, the more we know about our enemy, the better able we are to defeat that enemy. The more we know about our vulnerability, the better able we are to protect ourselves.

One fact dominates all homeland security threat assessments: terrorists are strategic actors. They choose their targets deliberately based on the weaknesses they observe in our defenses and our preparations. They can balance the difficulty in successfully executing a particular attack against the magnitude of loss it might cause. They can monitor our media and listen to our policymakers as our Nation discusses how to protect itself—and adjust their plans accordingly. Where we

insulate ourselves from one form of attack, they can shift and focus on another exposed vulnerability.

We remain a Nation at war. Even as we experience success in the war on terrorism, the antipathy of our enemies may well be increasing, and new enemies may emerge. The United States will confront the threat of terrorism for the foreseeable future.

## **Our Free Society Is Inherently Vulnerable**

The American people and way of life are the primary targets of our enemy, and our highest protective priority. Our population and way of life are the source of our Nation's great strength, but also a source of inherent vulnerability.

Our population is large, diverse, and highly mobile, allowing terrorists to hide within our midst. Americans congregate at schools, sporting arenas, malls, concert halls, office buildings, high-rise residences, and places

of worship, presenting targets with the potential for many casualties. Much of America lives in densely populated urban areas, making our major cities conspicuous targets. Americans subsist on the produce of farms in rural areas nationwide, making our heartland a potential target for agroterrorism.

## The American Population

- An estimated 284.8 million people lived in the United States on July 1, 2001

*Source: U.S. Department of Commerce*

- 54.2% of the Nation's population lives in ten states – three in the Northeast, three in the Midwest, three in the South, and one in the West
- The average population density within the United States is 79.2 people per square mile of land
- The average population density in metropolitan areas is 320.2 people per square mile of land
- Over 225 million Americans live in metropolitan areas
- Nearly 85 million Americans live in metropolitan areas of 5 million people or more
- Each year, the United States admits 500 million people, including 330 million non-citizens, through our borders

*Source: 2000 Census*

- Over 4 million people were processed through security at the last Olympics, over 85,000 at the last Super Bowl, and approximately 20,000 each at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

*Source: U.S. Secret Service*

The responsibility of our government extends beyond the physical well-being of the American people. We must also safeguard our way of life, which involves five key elements: democracy, liberties, security, economics, and culture.

**Democracy.** Our way of life is both defined and protected by our democratic political system. It is a system anchored by the Constitution, which established a republic characterized by significant limits on governmental power through a system of checks and balances, a distribution of state and federal rights, and an affirmation of the rights and freedoms of individuals. Our democratic political system is transparent and accessible to the populace. It requires that all actions adhere to the rule of law. And it relies on the stability and continuity of our government, which is ensured by constitutionally prescribed procedures and powers.

**Liberties.** Liberty and freedom are fundamental to our way of life. Freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, property rights, freedom from unlawful discrimination—these are all rights we are guaranteed as Americans, and rights we will fight to protect. Many have fought and died in order to establish and protect these rights; we will not relinquish them.

**Security.** Our federal system was born, in part, out of a need to “provide for the common defense.” Americans have enjoyed great security from external threats, with no hostile powers adjacent to our borders and insulated from attack by two vast oceans. Our approach to security has had both external and internal dimensions. Externally, the United States has over the course of the past six decades sought to shape the international environment through strong global political, economic, military, and cultural engagement. Internally, we have relied primarily on law enforcement and the justice system to provide for domestic peace and order.

**Economy.** Our country's economy is based on a free market system predicated on private ownership of property and freedom of contract, with limited government intervention. We ask our able population to work for their individual prosperity, as our government ensures that all have equal access to the marketplace. Our formula for prosperity is one that has succeeded: we are the most prosperous Nation in the world.

**Culture.** The United States of America is an open, welcoming, pluralistic, diverse society that engages in dialogue rather than the dogmatic enforcement of any one set of values or ideas. Our culture is also characterized by compassion and strong civic engagement.

---

## The Means of Attack

Terrorism is not so much a system of belief, like fascism or communism, as it is a strategy and a tactic—a means of attack. In this war on terrorism, we must defend ourselves against a wide range of means and methods of attack. Our enemies are working to obtain chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons for the stated purpose of killing vast numbers of Americans. Terrorists continue to employ conventional means of attack, such as bombs and guns. At the same time, they are gaining expertise in less traditional means, such as cyber attacks. Lastly, as we saw on September 11, our terrorist enemies are constantly seeking new tactics or unexpected ways to carry out their attacks and magnify their effects.

*Weapons of mass destruction.* The knowledge, technology, and materials needed to build weapons of mass destruction are spreading. These capabilities have never been more accessible and the trends are not in our favor. If our terrorist enemies acquire these weapons and the means to deliver them, they are likely to try to use them, with potential consequences far more devastating than those we suffered on September 11. Terrorists may conceivably steal or obtain weapons of mass destruction, weapons-usable fissile material, or related technology from states with such capabilities. Several state sponsors of terrorism already possess or are working to develop weapons of mass destruction, and could provide material or technical support to terrorist groups.

Chemical weapons are extremely lethal and capable of producing tens of thousands of casualties. They are also relatively easy to manufacture, using basic equipment, trained personnel, and precursor materials that often have legitimate dual uses. As the 1995 Tokyo subway attack revealed, even sophisticated nerve agents are within the reach of terrorist groups.

Biological weapons, which release large quantities of living, disease-causing microorganisms, have extraordinary lethal potential. Like chemical weapons, biological weapons are relatively easy to manufacture, requiring straightforward technical skills, basic equipment, and a seed stock of pathogenic microorganisms. Biological weapons are especially dangerous because we may not know immediately that we have been attacked, allowing an infectious agent time to spread. Moreover, biological agents can serve as a means of attack against humans as well as livestock and crops, inflicting casualties as well as economic damage.

Radiological weapons, or “dirty bombs,” combine radioactive material with conventional explosives. They

can cause widespread disruption and fear, particularly in heavily populated areas.

Nuclear weapons have enormous destructive potential. Terrorists who seek to develop a nuclear weapon must overcome two formidable challenges. First, acquiring or refining a sufficient quantity of fissile material is very difficult—though not impossible. Second, manufacturing a workable weapon requires a very high degree of technical capability—though terrorists could feasibly assemble the simplest type of nuclear device. To get around these significant though not insurmountable challenges, terrorists could seek to steal or purchase a nuclear weapon.

*Conventional means.* While we must prepare for attacks that employ the most destructive weapons, we must also defend against the tactics that terrorists employ most frequently. Terrorists, both domestic and international, continue to use traditional methods of violence and destruction to inflict harm and spread fear. They have used knives, guns, and bombs to kill the innocent. They have taken hostages and spread propaganda. Given the low expense, ready availability of materials, and relatively high chance for successful execution, terrorists will continue to make use of conventional attacks.

*Cyber attacks.* Terrorists may seek to cause widespread disruption and damage, including casualties, by attacking our electronic and computer networks, which are linked to other critical infrastructures such as our energy, financial, and securities networks. Terrorist groups are already exploiting new information technology and the Internet to plan attacks, raise funds, spread propaganda, collect information, and communicate securely. As terrorists further develop their technical capabilities and become more familiar with potential targets, cyber attacks will become an increasingly significant threat.

*New or unexpected tactics.* Our terrorist enemies are constantly seeking new tactics or unexpected ways to carry out attacks. They are continuously trying to find new areas of vulnerability and apply lessons learned from past operations in order to achieve surprise and maximize the destructive effect of their next attack. Our society presents an almost infinite array of potential targets, allowing for an enormously wide range of potential attack methods.

## The Terrorists

Our enemies seek to remain invisible, lurking in the shadows. We are taking aggressive action to uncover individuals and groups engaged in terrorist activity, but often we will not know who our enemy is by name until after they have attempted to attack us. Therefore,

---

we must uncover more than just the identities of our enemy. We need to analyze the characteristics shared by terrorists to help us understand where our enemies are weak and where they are strong.

*Terrorists and their tactical advantages.* Terrorists enjoy certain tactical advantages. They are able to choose the time, place, and method of their attacks. As we reduce our vulnerabilities in one area, they can alter their plans and pursue more exposed targets. They are able to patiently plan their attacks for months and years. Plans are undoubtedly underway today by terrorist cells that we have not yet eliminated.

Terrorists also exploit the advantage of relative anonymity. They hide throughout the world, using the cover of innocent civilians as a shield. Weak states will remain susceptible to terrorist groups seeking safe haven, and may even cooperate with or actively support terrorists.

*Known terrorist groups.* Al-Qaeda remains America's most immediate and serious threat despite our success in disrupting its network in Afghanistan and elsewhere. While we have captured or killed hundreds of Al-Qaeda operatives, many remain at large, including leaders working to reconstitute the organization and resume its operations. Al-Qaeda operatives and cells will continue to plan attacks against high-profile landmarks and critical infrastructure at home and against targets in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Those attacks may use both conventional and unconventional means in an effort to create as much destruction and kill as many people as possible.

Al-Qaeda is part of a dangerous trend toward sophisticated terrorist networks spread across many countries, linked together by information technology, enabled by far-flung networks of financial and ideological supporters, and operating in a highly decentralized manner. Unlike traditional adversaries, these terrorist networks have no single "center of gravity" whose destruction would entail the defeat of the entire organization. While we have denied Afghanistan as a safe

haven for Al-Qaeda, unrest in politically unstable regions will continue to create an environment conducive to terrorism and capable of providing sanctuary to terrorist groups. Moreover, an unknown number of terrorist cells operate from within Western democracies, where the safeguarding of civil liberties protects them as well as their potential victims.

Al-Qaeda is only part of a broader threat that includes other international terrorist organizations with the will and capability to attack the United States. The most dangerous of these groups are associated with religious extremist movements in the Middle East and South Asia. Until September 11, Hizballah was responsible for more American deaths than all other terrorist groups combined, including those killed in the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Lebanon. Hizballah has never carried out an attack within the United States, but could do so if the situation in the Middle East worsens or the group feels threatened by U.S. actions. Other terrorist groups, from Hamas to the Real Irish Republican Army, have supporters in the United States. To date, most of these groups have largely limited their activities in the United States to fundraising, recruiting, and low-level intelligence, but many are capable of carrying out terrorist acts within the United States.

Terrorist groups also include domestic organizations. The 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City highlights the threat of domestic terrorist acts designed to achieve mass casualties. The U.S. government averted seven planned terrorist acts in 1999—two were potentially large-scale, high-casualty attacks being organized by domestic extremist groups. Both domestic terrorist groups (such as the National Alliance, the Aryan Nation, and the extremist Puerto Rican separatist group Los Macheteros) and special interest extremist groups continue to pose a threat to the peace and stability of our country.