# RREGULARADVERSARIES AND HYBRIDTHREATS

AN ASSESSMENT-2011



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## **PREFACE**

The black-and-white distinction between conventional war and irregular war is becoming less relevant in the real world. Possessing the ability to annihilate other militaries is no guarantee we can achieve our strategic goals—a point driven home especially in Iraq. The future will be even more complex, where conflict most likely will range across a broad spectrum of operations and lethality, where even near-peer competitors will use irregular or asymmetric tactics and non-state actors may have weapons of mass destruction or sophisticated missiles.

—Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Ft. Leavenworth, Kans., 2010

Without a true understanding of the national security threats facing our nation, we have little hope of effectively countering them. This assessment of our irregular adversaries and the hybrid threats they pose seeks to provide this common understanding, as the rise of certain nonstate actors and their benefactors as a malevolent force on the global stage is undeniable. It is not an all-inclusive, comprehensive document or an intelligence community assessment; it was developed to increase civilian and military students' awareness of irregular adversaries and the hybrid threat problem set.

Put simply, America's most-likely and most-lethal enemies for the foreseeable future are adaptive, ruthless, networked, and committed. These adversaries seek to foster conditions of fear, uncertainty, and instability. Ranging from violent extremist organizations to insurgencies to criminal networks and potent, adaptive mixes of each, these enemies are unrestrained by international laws or norms of behavior and will flow to areas of vulnerability or weakness. Lastly, some of these enemies will also be supported by nation-states that wish us ill.

Our nation's continuing security demands a comprehensive approach to curb the hostile ambitions of our irregular adversaries and the hybrid approaches they use to threaten a strong and free America. Our military is adapting to these threats even while engaged in major combat operations, and leading security professionals are focused on the implications of these increasingly dangerous adversaries while ensuring a balanced force capable of responding to conventional threats. The Department of Defense is working to provide our nation with capabilities that are even more flexible and adaptable, and it also is improving its ability to work with other nations and other departments of the U.S. Government. Nevertheless, these highly resourceful and adaptable threats will require global vigilance and a unified effort on our part to maintain the security of our nation and its vital interests.

The world has changed drastically in the 20 years since the Berlin Wall fell, marking the demise of the Soviet Union. Now, in the early 21st century, the specters of global nuclear war and of mechanized armies clashing on the plains of Europe have been replaced with the threat of catastrophic terrorist or disruptive cyber attacks from any number of state and nonstate actors. Interestingly, many of yesterday's enemies are now our partners in defending against these irregular adversaries, denying sanctuary to violent extremist organizations and insurgents that threaten our national security, and securing free access to the global commons. We must continue to leverage this common ground to impede the growth and reach of these adversaries who would threaten free people everywhere, recognizing that enemies and potential enemies will make mistakes we must be prepared to exploit to build the coalition against them.

As during the Cold War, we are engaged in a global competition of ideas and values. Since truth often is the first casualty in these battles of competing narratives, we cannot craft our case on what we consider to be the obvious and outrageous falsehoods and inconsistencies in our adversaries' words and actions. Information technology and increasingly web-savvy generations now provide obscure actors a voice equal to that of the most-seasoned and most-respected diplomats. We must compete for the trust and attention of relevant populations by highlighting the harsh and intolerant actions of these adversaries. We must accomplish this by offering better alternatives in the local languages and through the social-cultural dynamics of the local population, and we must do so with persistence.

The key to victory in current and future struggles against these adversaries is understanding them—their origins, motives, sources of power, goals, strategies, and tactics—and the complex operating environments that spawn and support them. We require a comprehensive understanding of their capabilities, vulnerabilities, and limitations. In many cases, our Western world views have not prepared us to bridge the language, cultural, and educational divides that separate us from many of these threats. We must learn to comprehend and accept these differences while rejecting oppressive regimes and individuals.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, challenged our view of the threats confronting our nation and the belief in our ability to counter them. They alerted us to the emerging danger, and we transformed our military to more effectively fight "war amongst the people." But we can and must do more, and we must do so in a climate of fiscal austerity and without relinquishing the superiority we built in conventional and nuclear warfare that is so critical to our nation's safety and security, and from which the international community draws great benefit.

Around the world, innocent people have been victimized by the enemies of stability and freedom. This document recognizes that the threat to our nation also is a threat to many other nations and that we must gain a common understanding of these adversaries if we are to defeat them. This

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assessment attempts to provide that understanding through historical examples of the worldwide irregular adversary and hybrid threat problem to help fill the void in current doctrine, training, and education.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 2008, p. 265.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 What Is Irregular Warfare?	1
vv nat is irregular vvariarer	1
CHAPTER 2	
The Methods and Capabilities of Irregular Adversaries	
Insurgent Groups: The Iraqi Insurgency, 2003–2006	
Violent Extremist Organizations: Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates	
Criminal Groups	16
Threat Transformation and Adaptation.	21
CHAPTER 3	
The Future of Irregular Warfare	23
Hybrid Approaches	24
Super-Empowered Groups and Individuals	
Irregular Warfare's Future Target Set	
CHAPTER 4	
Why Irregular Warfare Matters	
Attacks on the U.S. Homeland	
The Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction	
The Survival of U.S. Allies	31
The Impact of Drug-Related Violence	31
The Viability of Major Global Systems	32
CHAPTER 5	
Summary	

#### CHAPTER 1

# WHAT IS IRREGULAR WARFARE?

The U.S. military faces an era of enormous complexity . . . extended by globalization, the proliferation of advanced technology, violent transnational extremists, and resurgent powers. America's vaunted military might stand atop all others but is tested in many ways. Trying to understand the possible perturbations the future poses to our interests is a daunting challenge.

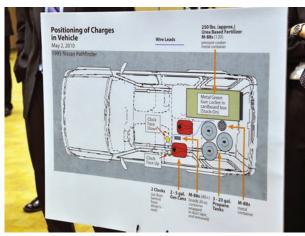
—Frank G. Hoffman, Joint Force Quarterly, 2009

Saturday, May 1, 2010, seemed like a typical spring evening to New York City street vendors Lance Orton and Duane Jackson. The sound of traffic passing through the intersection of West 45th Street and Broadway echoed through Times Square as tourists crowded the sidewalks of Astor Plaza. The two men prepared to sell their t-shirts and handbags to the crowds, anticipating the rush of theater goers emerging from The Lion King playing at the Minskoff Theatre. They barely noticed the dark blue 1993 Nissan Pathfinder sport utility vehicle as it pulled up to the sidewalk at 6:28 p.m. Although the engine was left running and the hazard lights were blinking, it wasn't until smoke began to fill the vehicle's back seat and firecrackers began to pop inside that something seemed amiss. The men notified a mounted policeman, who observed canisters inside the car and smelled gunpowder. He immediately called for backup, a bomb-disposal team, and the New York City Fire Department.

Seven city blocks were shut down, and buildings surrounding the mysterious vehicle were evacuated. The bomb disposal team, using a remote-controlled robotic device to remove one of the vehicle's windows, discovered three full 20-gallon propane tanks and 250 pounds of urea-based fertilizer in eight plastic bags attached to an assort-

ment of wiring and triggering devices intended to ignite the explosives. Luckily, the crude improvised explosive device malfunctioned, and the explosives were not set off as intended. Had the car bomb operated properly, it would have created a massive fireball and sprayed shrapnel across Times Square, killing or wounding an unknowable number of unsuspecting pedestrians. In subsequent weeks, it was discovered the bombing attempt was the work of a Pakistani-born American citizen who had attended a terrorist training camp in Pakistan and was "inspired by" an Al Qaeda—allied cleric with whom he was in touch via the Internet.

Two months later, on July 1, hundreds of Muslim pilgrims were taking advantage of the cool evening weather to visit the remains of the Sufi saint Abul Hassan Ali Hajvery in Lahore, Pakistan. They were not so lucky. A suicide bomber detonated a jacket carrying 10–15 kilograms of explosives in



(CRAIG CRAWFORD)

A diagram of the Times Square car bomb shows the position of the explosive charges placed in the would-be attacker's vehicle. According to the Department of Justice, the effects of the bomb, had it detonated, would have been "devastating to the surrounding area." The would-be attacker was sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty to ten bombing-related counts.



This graph, adapted from the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database, START, accessed on October 1, 2010, shows the annual incidence of the more than 40,000 bombings and other attacks involving explosives that occurred around the world between 1970 and 2008. Like attacks in general, the number of such attacks against military targets in particular rose sharply in recent years (from approximately 200 in 2004 to approximately 900 in both 2007 and 2008).



(AP PHOTO/K. M. CHAUDARY)

Family members mourn those killed in the July 1, 2010, suicide bombings of a popular Sufi shrine in Lahore.

the shrine's underground area, where pilgrims sleep and prepare themselves for prayer. As visitors fled in terror, a second bomber detonated his explosives in the upstairs area, having packed his device with ball bearings to maximize the destructive power of the blast. Suddenly, the shrine considered holy ground by Sunni and Shia alike was littered with mutilated bodies and spreading pools of blood. More than 50 people were killed in the attack, and more than 200 were wounded. Although no Americans were among the victims, U.S. "interference" in the region was perceived as indirectly to blame for the attack—a conclusion that contributed

to anti-American sentiment in Pakistan so significantly that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued a statement condemning the attack.<sup>1</sup>

In August, half a world away, a young Ecuadorian man with bullet holes through his shoulder and cheek staggered up to a Mexican Navy checkpoint in northeastern Mexico. He reported that he and his travelling companions had been kidnapped on their way to seek work in the United States. Acting on his tip, Mexican troops launched an air assault on August 24 on a ranch near San Fernando in Tamaulipas state, 80 miles from the U.S.

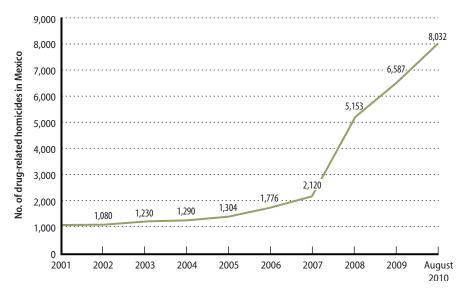
border. After a brief shootout in which three gunmen and one marine were killed, the troops discovered a mass grave containing 72 corpses. All were victims of the Mexican drug cartels. These remains were, in fact, a mere drop in the bucket of the more than 28,000 people killed in drug-related violence in Mexico since 2006. The violent reach of the Mexican drug cartels has also manifested itself in home invasions in Tucson, kidnappings in Phoenix, and assaults in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, more than 100,000 U.S. and NATO forces have been deployed in Afghanistan in a counterinsurgency campaign against the Afghan Taliban insurgency—a battle that has been going on for almost a decade, ever since the toppling of the Taliban regime in December 2001. Fighting from sanctuaries in southern Afghanistan and the Pakistani tribal areas, the Taliban have rejected the outcomes of the June 2002 Loya Jirga, the January 2004 ratification of the Afghan constitution, the first national elections in October 2004, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> "High Alert After Pakistan Shrine Suicide Blasts," BBC.co.uk, July 2, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Randal C. Archibold, "Mexican Drug Cartel Violence Spills Over, Alarming U.S.," NYTimes.com, March 22, 2009.

the September 2005 and November 2009 elections that have established the legitimacy of the Afghan government headed Hamid Karzai. To date, than 1,000 more members of the International Security Assistance Force have been killed by insurgents in the effort to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming an operational and training base for violent extremorganizations mitted to attacking the U.S. homeland. July 2010 was the deadliest month for U.S. forces during the conflict's entire period.



According to information collected by the University of San Diego's Trans-Border Institute, there were more than six times as many drug-related killings in Mexico in 2009 as there were in 2001. Institute data on such killings through August 2010 show that 2010 has already been even more deadly.

Thirty years ago, the overwhelming threats to U.S. national security were the massive armies of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal. Today, the United States no longer confronts a world in which the sole or even predominant threat is the conventional forces of rival great powers. As Secretary Gates recently observed, America's potential adversaries, "from terrorist cells to rogue nations to rising powers[,]... have learned that it is unwise to confront the United States directly on conventional military terms." Indeed, nonstate actors specializing in irregular warfare arguably pose as great or even a greater threat to our nation and its vital interests. Although unconventional adversaries are not a new phenomenon—the United States' first foreign military expedition was against the pirates operating off the Barbary Coast—globalization has diminished the United States' strategic depth and provided nonstate actors with access to our shared cyberspace and to increasingly lethal technology. As the examples above demonstrate, irregular warfare is pervasive in the modern age and poses threats largely inconceivable just a generation ago.

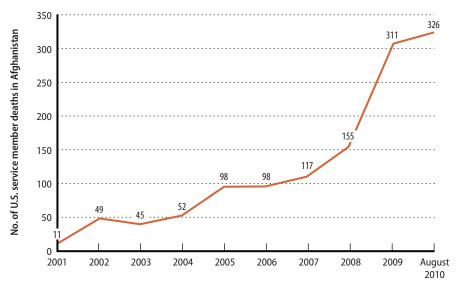


(AP PHOTO/ALEXANDRE MENEGHINI)

Alleged members of the Beltran Leyva drug cartel, arrested by federal police in the border town of Nogales, stand behind a table covered with weapons seized during the police raid. According to the Department of the Treasury, the cartel is responsible for numerous murders of counternarcotics personnel within Mexico's law enforcement and military community.

This document examines the threat to U.S. interests posed by irregular warfare and the entities who conduct it. For the purposes of this study, we follow Department of Defense Directive 3000.07 in defining *irregular warfare* as a "violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s) . . . [that] favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Robert M. Gates, "A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age," *Foreign Affairs*, January/ February 2009, p. 32.



Defense Manpower Data Center statistics on the number of U.S. service members killed in Operation Enduring Freedom show an escalating number of deaths over the past three years. Data on such deaths through August 2010 show that 2010 has already been the operation's most deadly to date.



(AP PHOTO/ALLAUDDIN KHAN)

An International Security Assistance Force soldier takes note of the wreckage of a suicide bomber's vehicle in Khandahar City. The November 2006 attack on a military convoy killed two Canadian soldiers and an Afghan civilian.

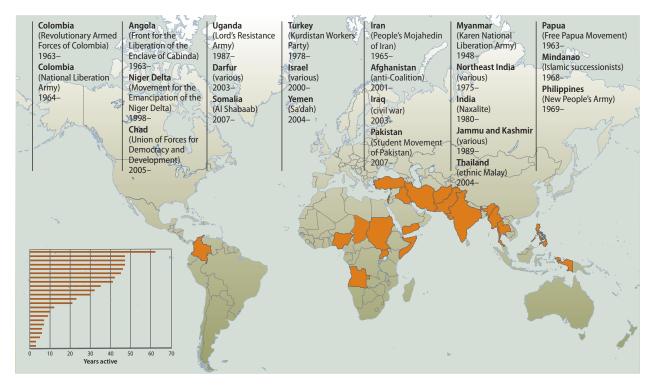
influence, and will."<sup>4</sup> The nature of war and warfare does not change, but the character of war and warfare changes constantly based on the evolving context of the environment in which war and warfare operate and the new technologies that enable new approaches to war and warfare. Contemporary ideas founded in the use of the term *hybrid* are best focused by understanding hybrid approaches and hybrid threats and their potential implications for joint operations. Hybrid threats can be found across

the entire range of military operations, and the portions of the spectrum of most concern to building irregular warfare competency are those involved in insurgencriminal networks, cies, and terrorist networks. In the remainder of this chapter, we describe three types of irregular adversaries active today—insurgent groups, violent extremist organizations, and criminal networks-in order to establish terms of reference for the discussion to follow. In the second chapter, case studies illustrate the capabilities and methods of these

irregular forces. In the third chapter, we describe the future of irregular warfare, including hybrid approaches, "super-empowered" individuals, and the expanding set of targets that adversaries will attack or threaten in order to attempt to influence the United States. In the fourth chapter, we discuss why these adversaries matter, specifically examining how they threaten U.S. vital interests and national security.

To understand irregular warfare's importance to the United States, it is first necessary to understand who is capable of threatening our national security using irregular means. This assessment discusses three types of groups that conduct their conflict with the United States using such means: insurgent groups, violent extremist organizations, and criminal networks. The descriptions we provide here are not intended to be comprehensive definitions, since such definitions would incorrectly imply a consensus among policymakers, officers, and analysts that simply does not exist. Moreover, the finality such definitions suggest risks fostering intellectual rigidity in conceptualizing and identifying irregular threats and in developing courses of action to mitigate, deter, or defeat such adversaries. Thus, these descriptions are presented only to provide clear terms of reference for the discussion that follows.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*, December 1, 2008, p. 11.



It is often difficult to determine precisely when insurgencies begin and end, and calculating the exact death toll attributable to each conflict can be even more challenging. However, subject-matter experts consulted in October 2010 identified the 23 insurgencies presented here as both ongoing and major—that is, the conflicts are currently causing violent deaths and have claimed more than 1,000 lives. As the inset shows, many of these insurgencies are longstanding conflicts, and others developed during the past ten years.

Insurgent groups (or insurgencies) are organized movements aimed at the overthrow of or separation from a constituted government or at the attainment of specific rights through the use of subversion and armed conflict. Insurgencies stem from root causes that create popular discontent sufficient to convince citizens to risk their lives in order to achieve the group's goals. Although it may be possible to identify categories of root causes, such as religious or ethnic discrimination, economic failure, or rampant corruption, insurgencies frequently stem from a combination of causes, and different individuals may join a common insurgent group for different reasons.5 To ensure strategic and operational unity of effort, insurgent groups tend to be hierarchically structured, and they may evolve into large, armed, and uniformed cadre. As the organizations grow, they begin to require safe havens. Such sanctuaries must be supported by a significant element of the

beliefs. These individuals are thus "accidental guerrillas."

domestic population or at least tolerated by a geographically contiguous state.

Violent extremist organizations are often referred to as terrorist groups. However, because terrorism is a tactic also frequently employed by insurgent groups, this document uses the term violent extremist organizations to distinguish between these organizations and insurgents. Violent extremist organizations seek to strike fear into societies and governments through seemingly random acts of unlawful violence, primarily attacking civilian targets. Unlike insurgent groups, which may include attacks on civilian targets as part of a campaign intended to create instability that undermines the constitutional government's legitimacy, violent extremist organizations rely on such attacks as their principal means of action. Violent extremist organizations are motivated by political, ethnic, religious, or ideological factors that, unlike those that motivate insurgencies, typically transcend state boundaries and are strong enough to justify repeated mass murder. Additionally, because violent extremist organizations tend to be more focused on operational matters (i.e., on planning

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> For example, counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen argues that individuals may, for local, personal reasons, fight for a group that does not necessarily reflect their specific



This map shows the location, date, and casualty count of the 15 major attacks claimed by or attributed to Al Qaeda since 1998. Only those attacks that resulted in 40 or more deaths or injuries are displayed, and attacks that occurred in Afghanistan and Iraq beginning in 2001 and 2003, respectively, are omitted. This map is based on information from the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database, START, accessed on October 1, 2010.

and conducting future attacks) than on strategic issues, their structures are frequently more flat and more networked than the hierarchical structures common to insurgencies.

Unlike insurgent groups and violent extremist organizations, *criminal networks* are not motivated by ideology and do not overtly seek to overthrow existing governments or gain control of state institutions. Instead, these syndicates and gangs are motivated by the relatively simple factor of profit. Consequently, criminal networks use violence in order to commit illegal acts (e.g., illegally seize ships), protect or expand their share of an illicit market, or intimidate civilian populations or police forces to create the space necessary to commit illegal activities.

It is important to recognize that the lines between these three irregular adversaries are not always clearly drawn. As previously noted, insurgent groups sometimes employ terrorism as a tactic to achieve their strategic ends. Some engage in criminal activities in order to fund their guerrilla forces, occasionally coming to find, as did the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the Irish Republican Army, that the illegal activities initially pursued to fund the struggle become more important, because they are so profitable, than the original ideological cause. Similarly, violent extremist organizations often finance their operations with the proceeds of criminal activity even if that activity contradicts the group's ideological goals. For example, violent extremist organizations seeking to impose extremist versions of Islamic ideology have shown little compunction in actively participating in opium production and trafficking despite religious proscriptions against involvement with narcotics. Finally, as demonstrated by the Colombian drug cartels, criminal syndicates will engage in terrorism to intimidate government authorities or will seek an accommodation with an insurgent group to obtain sanctuary. Thus, given the often interchangeable and interdependent nature of these irregular forces, black-and-white definitions may obscure more than they illuminate.

#### CHAPTER 2

# THE METHODS AND CAPABILITIES OF IRREGULAR ADVERSARIES

In many insurgency environments, rapid, large-scale social change may also be occurring: mass population movement, ethnic or sectarian "cleansing," flight of refugees and displaced persons, social revolution, or even genocide may be occurring alongside the guerrilla conflict itself. Thus, the imperative is to understand each environment, in real time, in detail, in its own terms, in ways that would be understood by the locals—and not by analogy with some other conflict, some earlier war, or some universal template or standardized rule-set.

—David Kilcullen, Counterinsurgency, 2010

Continuing conflicts between violent groups and states generate an ever-present demand for higher-quality and more timely information to support operations to combat terrorism. Better ways are needed to understand how terrorist and insurgent groups adapt over time into more-effective organizations and increasingly dangerous threats.

—Brian A. Jackson et al., *Aptitude for Destruction*, Vol. 1, 2005

To determine the resources and strategies necessary to mitigate or defeat future irregular adversaries, it is first necessary to have some fundamental understanding of their methods and capabilities. To this end, this chapter offers four brief case studies of insurgent groups, violent extremist organizations, and criminal networks in action. Specifically, it examines the Iraqi insurgency from 2003 to 2006, Al Qaeda and its affiliated violent extremist

organizations, and two types of criminal networks (the Mara Salvatrucha gangs of Latin America and modern pirates in Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa). These cases are intended to be illustrative, neither presenting definitive histories of the irregular adversaries discussed nor comprehensively explaining the nature of the particular category of irregular threat. Rather, they are intended to provide specific examples of how irregular adversaries operate counter to American interests.

#### Insurgent Groups: The Iraqi Insurgency, 2003–2006

In the wake of the U.S.-led Coalition's liberation of Iraq in April 2003 and the subsequent declaration of the end of major combat operations, some military analysts began debating where the three-week campaign to conquer a regional military power ranked in the pantheon of history's greatest triumphs.<sup>1</sup> Although such assessments seem Pollyannaish in retrospect, at the time, few experts and organizations, including the National Intelligence Council and U.S. Central Command, anticipated the possibility of an insurgency.<sup>2</sup> Yet, during the spring and early summer of that year, the level of violence in Iraq steadily increased. There were roughly six attacks against Coalition forces each

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For example, see Victor Davis Hanson, "The Three-Week War," NationalReview.com, April 17, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For example, see excerpts from the National Intelligence Council's January 2003 report, "Principal Challenges in Post-Saddam Iraq," published in Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, New York, N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 2006, pp. 570–571.

Sunni strongholds are located north of Baghdad, particularly in Anbar and Diyala. At its peak in 2006/2007, Al Qaeda in Iraq was the largest Sunni extremist group in Iraq, numbering 5,000–10,000 members. In 2007, Sunni insurgent groups began to lose cohesion. Nationalist Islamist insurgents split with Al Qaeda in Iraq over the latter's use of indiscriminate terror and intent to wage jihad across the region. New tribal-affiliated groups formed the basis of the Awakening (aka Sons of Iraq) and began working with Coalition forces. In 2010, the Sons of Iraq claimed more than 80,000 members. The group has become the target of radical Sunnis, who consider the Sons of Iraq to be traitors to Iraq and to Al Qaeda's mission of global jihad.

Shia strongholds are located in southern Iraq between Baghdad and Basra and along the Iranian border. Jaish Al Mahdi (headquartered in Baghdad) and the Badr Organization (headquartered in Karbala) are the two principal Shia insurgent organizations, and each staged multiple offensives against Coalition forces. Members of both organizations are motived by a desire for revenge against previous Sunni and Baathist ruling elites and by a desire to gain political and economic power for previously unrepresented populations. Indeed, by 2007, both groups had begun to position themselves within the political systems. Smaller Shia militias remain active in the south and in Baghdad.



Based on information from U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State reports on Iraq and terrorism, this map shows Sunni (green) and Shia (orange) strongholds in Iraq and supplies information about the major insurgent groups operating in the country.

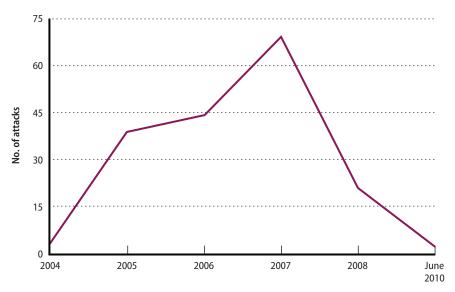
day, and U.S. fatalities due to hostile action rose from nine in May to 35 in July. Homicides in Baghdad during the same period also rose (from 462 in May to 751 in July), making Iraq's capital more than three times as dangerous as Washington, D.C. In June, a key Coalition adviser warned,

The new threat is well-targeted sabotage of the infrastructure. An attack on the power grid last weekend had a series of knock-on effects, which halved the power generation in Baghdad and many other parts of the country. That, in turn, cut off the water supply. . . . The oil and gas network is another target, with five successful attacks this week on pipelines. . . . We are also seeing the first signs of intimidation of Iraqis working for the Coalition.<sup>3</sup>

Initially, the two primary sources of this resistance were remnants of Iraq's Baathist regime—especially former Iraqi Army officers and members of President Saddam Hussein's security apparatus—and foreign extremists recruited into the Fedayeen Saddam prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom. As the level of violence in Iraq rose dramatically in the late summer and fall of 2003, two other groups emerged. The first, which came to be known as Al Qaeda in Iraq, was controlled by Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, who established a base of operations in Iraq's Sunni areas from which he masterminded an eight-month wave of suicide attacks across Iraq. Like the former Baathists, Al Zarqawi drew support from Iraq's Sunni tribes and, by the end of 2004, had sworn formal allegiance to Al Qaeda. The second, Jaish Al Mahdi, was controlled by the radical Shia cleric Muqtada

Subsequently, on July 16, U.S. Central Command commander General John Abizaid identified the attacks on Coalition troops as a "guerrilla-type campaign."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> John Sawers, quoted in Gordon and Trainor, 2006.



This graph, adapted from a report generated by the National Counterterrorism Center's Worldwide Incidents Tracking System in October 2010, shows that a total of 178 suicide bombings by foreign attackers were either attempted or successfully carried out between 2004 and June 2010, peaking in 2007.



(AP PHOTO)

Attacks on Iraqi oil pipelines typically shut down Iraqi oil production for weeks at a time, and they cost the struggling Iraqi economy more than \$7 billion in oil revenues. Likely perpetrated using conventional demolition explosives that cost only a couple of thousand dollars, the attacks yielded a rate of return of 250,000 times the initial investment. The attacks also created an image of Coalition weakness, and the resulting shortages of electricity and fuel (and the loss of jobs) stoked dissatisfaction with the Coalition occupation, and later, with Iraqi governance.

Al Sadr, who formed the group as a militia operating apart from the Iraqi Security Forces. In October 2003, Jaish Al Mahdi ambushed elements of the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment in Baghdad, and, by April 2004, it was engaged in open combat operations against U.S. forces.

Because the various insurgent groups were not organized into regular formations, it was never pos-

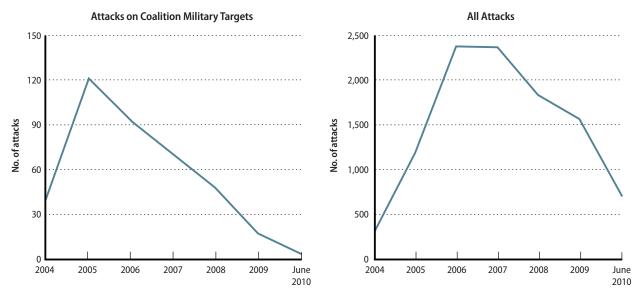
sible to accurately assess their numerical strength. In 2003, the Coalition estimated that there were roughly 5,000 active insurgents in Iraq. This number was later revised upward to 20,000, and estimates from Iraqi government officials were much larger still.4 At its peak strength in mid-2006, Jaish Al Mahdi may have had as many as 60,000 fighters in Iraq.5 These numbers were also supplemented by a logistical tail anchored in neighboring states. Al Qaeda in Iraq relied on a steady stream of foreignborn extremists transiting through Syria, which also

provided a safe haven for the Baathist insurgents' senior leadership. Similarly, Jaish Al Mahdi's "special units" were sent to Iran for advanced training by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which was also one of the militia's key weapons suppliers.

Because of its diverse composition, the Iraqi insurgency's tactics and operational methods varied significantly over time and by group. Initially, Sunni insurgents relied on small-unit ambushes against U.S. forces, but, because the insurgents lacked tactical sophistication relative to U.S. troops, these attacks proved to be little more than a nuisance for the intended targets (while often proving fatal for the attackers). However, by late 2003, the insurgents had begun to direct precise improvised explosive device attacks against coalition troops. During the summer of 2004, Sunni insurgents began to lay "daisy chains" of roadside bombs in more-precise strikes involving squad-level, enemyharassing attacks when Coalition first responders arrived on the scene. Additionally, many of these attacks were filmed and quickly posted on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> In June 2005, General Abizaid stated that the number of Iraqis participating in the insurgency amounted to less than 0.1 percent of Iraq's population and likely did not exceed 20,000. See moderator Bob Schieffer's interview of General Abizaid on CBS News, "Face the Nation," June 26, 2005.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report*, New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 2006, p. 5.



As shown on the left, improvised explosive device attacks aimed at coalition military targets between 2004 and June 2010 reached their peak in 2005. As shown on the right, there were thousands of additional attacks during this same period, most of which targeted civilians and Iraqi police. These graphs were adapted from reports generated by the National Counterterrorism Center's Worldwide Incidents Tracking System in October 2010.

Internet for recruitment and propaganda purposes. Jaish Al Mahdi, on the other hand, used Iraniansupplied explosively formed projectiles, by some accounts capable of penetrating up to 4 inches of armor at 100 yards. Between 2003 and September 2007, improvised explosive device attacks caused nearly two-thirds of U.S. combat deaths (and an even higher proportion of battle wounds) and were responsible for killing or wounding more than 21,000 Americans. Moreover, the improvised explosive device proved an incredibly costeffective weapon for Iraqi insurgents. The various groups used widely available consumer electronics technology to build and detonate explosive devices, and they used Google maps to plot their emplacement. During the same period, the United States spent more than \$3 billion on electronic jammers to counter the devices.6

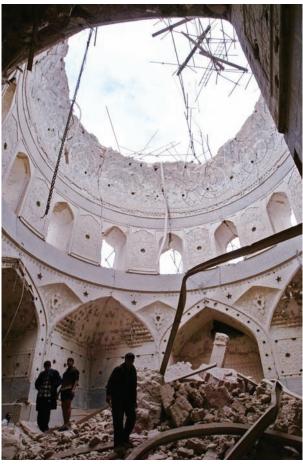
These roadside-bomb attacks were supplemented with a steady stream of foreign suicide bombers who did not even have to attack Coalition forces in order to damage U.S. strategic interests. Al Zarqawi's initial targets, for example, were the Jordanian embassy and the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, the bombings of which under-

mined the international coalition attempting to rebuild Iraq. Other insurgent groups targeted contractors working on reconstruction projects, forcing corporations to withdraw from the country even as U.S. troops remained. Some Sunni groups directly targeted Iraq's infrastructure, blowing up oil pipelines and high-voltage transmission lines. These attacks crippled Iraq's economy, fueling popular discontent with the Iraqi Government and undermining its legitimacy by demonstrating its inability to provide security and services to the Iraqi people.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to conducting its initial series of attacks designed to degrade international support for the United Nations–sanctioned occupation, Al Zarqawi's network terrorized Shia civilians by carrying out attacks in market places, cafés, and other crowded civilian locations. This spree of suicide bombings began with the August 2003 attack that killed more than 95 Shia worshippers at the sacred Imam Ali mosque in Najaf and culminated with the murder of an estimated 185 Shia worshippers celebrating the religious festival of Ashura in twin bombings in Karbala and Baghdad in March 2004. On February 22, 2006, foreign extremists

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For example, see Rick Atkinson, "The Single Most Effective Weapon Against Our Deployed Forces," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2007, p. A1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> On the targeting of Iraqi infrastructure as an insurgent strategy, see John Robb, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization*, Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007, pp. 51–57.



(AP PHOTO/KHALID MOHAMMED)

Iraqis review the damage caused by a February 2006 bomb attack on the Askiriya Mosque in Samarra, Iraq. The Department of State notes that single terrorist events can, like this bombing, become "triggers" for broader conflict.

destroyed the golden dome of the Askariya Mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest shrines in Shia Islam. This attack triggered such intense ethnic cleansing against Sunnis by Shia militias that, by early 2006, U.S. officials estimated that Shia militias were killing more people than Sunni insurgents were and that Shia militias were becoming the greatest threat to the stability of the Iraqi Government.<sup>8</sup>

By December 2006, the insurgency had nearly inflicted a strategic defeat on the United States. Almost 3,000 U.S. troops had been killed in



U.S. ARMY)

This photo shows a Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle on fire after being hit by an improvised explosive device in Iraq. Such devices are simple but effective tools that allow enemies to challenge more-sophisticated forces covertly, from a distance, and in areas heavily populated by civilians.

	Shia	Sunni
2007	2,575	549
2008	566	413
2009	833	206
October 2010	522	120

Data from the Brookings Iraq Index show, by year and sect, the estimated number of Shia and Sunni civilian deaths associated with multiple-fatality bombings. The significant drop between the 2007 and 2008 totals may have been due to the U.S. troop surge begun in 2007. Despite increased Shia participation in the Iraqi Government, as a group, the Shia are still suffering the greatest number of casualties in large attacks.

Iraq, and another 22,000 had been wounded. The Democratic Party won control of Congress in the November 2006 midterm elections, in part due to the unpopularity of the war, and its leaders declared the war lost and pledged to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq. In December, the bipartisan Iraq Study Group issued a report that concluded that the situation in Iraq was deteriorating and recommended that the United States reduce its support if the Iraqi Government did not make substantial progress. Thus, despite America's unprecedented conventional military capability, the Iraqi insurgency had pushed the United States to the brink of a strategic defeat in Iraq in less than four years.

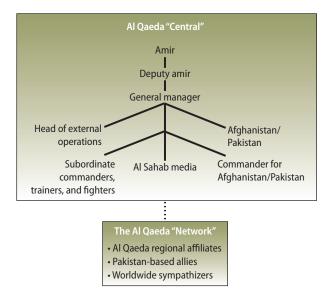
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> In the first six months of 2006, the number of Iraqi civilians violently killed rose by nearly 80 percent (from 1,778 in January to 3,149 in June). Sunnis were forced to turn to Al Qaeda in Iraq for protection, and, between January and June, multiple-fatality bombings increased nearly 300 percent (from 21 to 57 per month).

## Violent Extremist Organizations: Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates

On August 11, 1988, after nearly a decade of fighting a guerrilla war against the Soviet forces occupying Afghanistan, the leaders of the "Afghan Arabs" voted to form a new organization dedicated to keeping jihad alive after the Soviets left. Subsequently, in 1989, the charismatic Saudi millionaire Usama bin Ladin founded Al Qaeda, Arabic for "The Base," with the goal of forcing regime change in the Middle East, sweeping away the "apostate" governments in Cairo and Riyadh, and driving Western troops and influence out of the region. In their place, bin Ladin and his followers seek to create an Islamic state that ranges east from Northern Africa through Afghanistan, extends southward into Africa and northward into southern Russia and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, and ends at the far edge of Southeast Asia.

To support these panregional ambitions, Al Qaeda has attempted to recruit operatives, establish cells, and support associated groups in many places around the world. In 1991, after running afoul of the Saudi royal family, bin Ladin moved to the Sudan and established a broad and intertwined set of business and terrorist enterprises. His commercial operations proved a useful cover for training camps that tutored hundreds of his followers in paramilitary tactics. By early 1994, he had secretly dispatched groups of jihad fighters, arms smugglers, and organizers to Somalia, Kenya, Yemen, Bosnia, Egypt, Libya, Tajikistan, and other locales.<sup>9</sup>

In May 1996, bin Ladin left the Sudan for Afghanistan, where, under the protection of the Taliban, he launched his holy war against the United States. Al Qaeda, unlike many other regional Islamic violent extremist organizations, saw the United States as the primary supporter of the apostate regimes in the Middle East and therefore focused its strategy on what it called "the far enemy." In a July 1996 interview with a British journalist, bin



One interpretation of Al Qaeda's leadership organization shows a central command structure with multiple wings and a network of affiliates, allies, and sympathizers.

Ladin said the world had reached "the beginning of war between Muslims and the United States." <sup>10</sup> He codified this statement on August 23 in a proclamation, stating, "Terrorizing you, while you are carrying arms in our land, is a legitimate right and a moral obligation." This declaration of war was followed by a series of increasingly bellicose interviews with CNN, ABC News, and Al Jazeera.

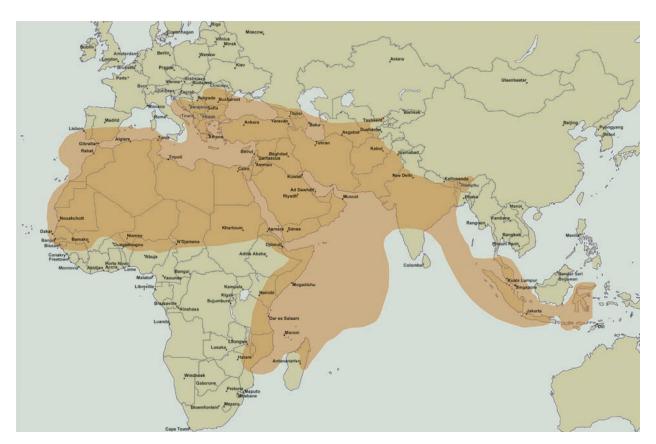
On February 22, 1998, bin Ladin announced the formation of the International Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders. The new coalition's fatwa declared that "to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is the individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible." Six months later, on August 7—the eighth anniversary of the arrival of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia—the almost simultaneous bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killed 234 people and wounded thousands. This attack bore what would become the hallmarks of Al Qaeda's major operations: precisely synchro-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, New York: Knopf, 2006, pp. 131–132; Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden*, New York: Free Press, 2001, pp. 62, 82, 84; Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*, New York, N.Y.: The Penguin Press, 2008, p. 409.

Robert Fisk, "Why We Reject the West," The Independent, July 10, 1996, p. 14.

<sup>11 &</sup>quot;Text of World Islamic Front's Statement Urging Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," Al Quds Al Arabi, February 23, 1998 (trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Osama bin Laden and the Future of Terrorism*, Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1999, p. 200.



Adapted from a National Counterterrorism Center map, this figure shows an interpretation of Al Qaeda's goal of creating a "pan-Islamic caliphate" that spans territory from Northern Africa to Southeast Asia.

nized "swarming" attacks on multiple targets. Unlike the previous generation of terrorists, who used attacks and hijackings to create a media event to publicize their chosen cause, these attackers designed the operation to kill as many civilians as possible.

Al Qaeda's responsibility for the attacks was determined quickly. The United States retaliated on August 20, when U.S. Navy destroyers fired 75 missiles, each costing about \$750,000, at Al Qaeda's training camps in Zawhar Kili, Afghanistan. The attack, code-named Operation Infinite Reach, killed at least 21 Pakistani jihadist volunteers and wounded dozens more. The operation did not deter or inhibit Al Qaeda, however. On October 12, 2000, two Arabs piloted a skiff toward a U.S. Navy destroyer, the USS *Cole*, which was refueling in the Yemeni port of Aden. The bow of the skiff was laden with a shaped charge that, when it collided with the *Cole*, tore a 40-foot gash

in the destroyer's steel siding. Seventeen American sailors were killed, and the *Cole* would have been sunk if not for the heroic efforts of its crew.

The attack against the *Cole* paled in comparison to Al Qaeda's next operation. On September 11, 2001, four teams of Al Qaeda operatives hijacked domestic flights in the United States and essentially turned the airplanes into guided fuel-air bombs aimed at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks, and the United States suffered the single largest loss of life from an enemy attack on its soil. Subsequently, the United States embarked on overseas contingency operations that effectively continue today.

Given Al Qaeda's need to operate from sanctuaries and in the shadows of the societies it targets, the organization's capabilities have always been difficult to assess accurately. It is believed that 10,000–20,000 extremists were trained in Al Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan between 1996 and September 11, 2001. Yet, as few as 200 core fighters may have comprised the heart of the network. Several hundred "free-agent" foreigners, mostly Arabs

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Steve Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, New York, N.Y.: Penguin, p. 411.





(AP PHOTO/DAVE CAULKIN

(AP PHOTO/KHALIL SENOSI)

Photos show the aftermath of the U.S. Embassy suicide bombing in Nairobi. A coordinated attack on the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam took place nearly simultaneously. Twelve Americans and hundreds of locals were killed in the two attacks; thousands were injured.



(U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE)

The USS *Cole* was attacked on October 12, 2000, during a refueling operation in the Yemeni port of Aden. Seventeen U.S. Navy crewmembers were killed in the suicide bombing, and another 39 were injured. Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack.

and Uzbeks, Al Qaeda personnel all but in name, are supporting the network's senior leadership in its current sanctuary in Pakistan. Several thousand militant Pashtun tribal members form an additional layer of protection for these leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Since September 11, 2001, however, the mostserious terrorist attacks have been committed by regional violent extremist organizations affiliated with Al Qaeda. In October 2002, two suicide bombers from Al Qaeda's affiliate in Southeast Asia, Jemaah Islamiya, attacked a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia, killing more than 200 and wounding an additional 300. In March 2004, a Spainbased radical Islamic group ideologically aligned with Al Qaeda killed 191 and injured 1,800 in an attack on commuter trains in Madrid. The failed attempt to bring down Northwest Airlines Flight 253 over Detroit in December 2009 was linked to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In July 2010, Al Shabaab, Al Qaeda's affiliate in Somalia, claimed responsibility for several attacks on crowds gathered in Kampala, Uganda, to watch a World Cup game—attacks that killed 74 people. These attacks have generally followed one of Al Qaeda's operational templates: synchronized attacks involving multiple bombers and massed civilian targets or attacks involving airplanes.

Al Qaeda lost its sanctuary in Afghanistan in 2001 during Operation Enduring Freedom, and U.S. drones have successfully targeted roughly half of its top 20 leaders. Some believe that Al Qaeda's senior leadership may therefore be relegated to providing inspiration to affiliates. Through its media wing, Al Sahab, Al Qaeda senior leadership has issued 280 press releases, often distributed via the Internet, consisting of statements from specific individuals, documentary films, or videos praising militant attacks. Indeed, according to some experts, the Al Qaeda organization has evolved into an ideology of "bin Ladenism." <sup>15</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "The Almanac of Al Qaeda," *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2010, p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama I Knew: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader*, New York, N.Y.: Free Press, 2006, p. 360.





(AP PHOTO/A ARON MARRON

(U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE)

Photos show the ruins of the 110-floor Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City (left) and the damage to the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia (right). A fourth hijacked plane, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after passengers and crew attempted to rush the cockpit and retake control of the plane.



(AP PHOTO/MARC HOFER)

Uganda was the target of a series of terrorist attacks in its capital city, Kampala, on July 11, 2010. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the first bomb exploded at approximately 10:30 p.m. at a restaurant, and the second and third exploded nearly an hour later at a rugby club. Two of the bombs may have been triggered by suicide bombers. At both venues, crowds were gathered to watch the final World Cup soccer match.

Although it is still dangerous, Al Qaeda may be losing the "war of ideas" within the Islamic world. Al Qaeda and other violent extremist organizations have used their idiosyncratic interpretation of Islam to advance their cause and justify indiscriminate killing. In broad terms, the message of the radical Islamists is that the entire Muslim community is under attack and that this threat justifies the arbitrary use of violence for self-defense. However, it is difficult for Al Qaeda to claim to be the defender of the *umma*<sup>16</sup> when its affiliates have killed more Muslims than non-Muslims.



(AP PHOTO)

Shortly after the attack on a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia, the United States designated Jemaah Islamiya as a foreign terrorist organization. The United Nations Security Council added the network to its own list of terrorist groups, thereby requiring all United Nations members to "freeze the organization's assets, deny it access to funding, and prevent its members from entering or traveling through their territories" (Bruce Vaughn, Emma Chanlett-Avery, Richard Cronin, Mark Manyin, and Larry Niksch, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, Congressional Research Service, 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The Arabic word *umma* signifies the global Islamic community.





(AP PHOTO/DENIS DOYLE)

(AP PHOTO/ANJA NIEDRINGHAUS)

The March 11, 2004, bombings of four commuter trains in Madrid represent to many a successful attempt by a terrorist group to convince a foreign population to withdraw its support from U.S. efforts in Iraq. Although the Spanish government first blamed Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, the Basque terrorist organization responsible for multiple attacks in Spain since 1968, subsequent developments pointed toward operatives affiliated with Al Qaeda.

A second tragedy was narrowly avoided just one day later, when Spanish police disarmed a bomb hidden on a train. A video of men claiming responsibility for the attempt and reporting that they represented Al Qaeda in Europe cited the Spanish government's support of U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan as the reason for the attempted attack. On March 14, the conservative People's Party government was defeated by the Socialist Worker's Party, which had opposed Spanish involvement in Iraq. The Spanish government removed its troops from Iraq within months. There is still disagreement about the exact nature, if any, of Al Qaeda's involvement in the attacks. Some experts believe that the Madrid bombings were conducted by a group formed under the banner of Al Qaeda but with no solid connection to or support from bin Ladin's organization. Others believe that the link was more concrete, citing the Al Qaeda connections of some of the accused as evidence.

#### **Criminal Groups**

#### **The Maras**

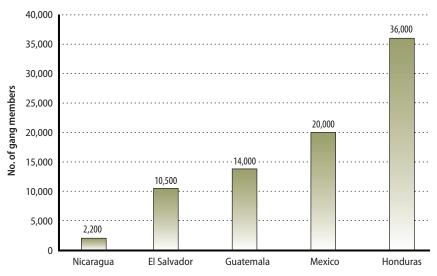
Gangs pose a staggering security problem throughout Central America. They are responsible for a high proportion of the crime in the countries most affected by their presence—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—and are engaged in a broad range of criminal activity, including kidnapping, human trafficking, smuggling, and extortion.

The most prominent organized gangs in Central America are Mara Salvatrucha and Mara 18, together known as the Maras. Both have roots in the streets of Los Angeles. (Mara 18 takes its name from the 18th Street Gang in Los Angeles.) The gangs originated during the civil conflicts in Central America in the 1980s, which displaced some 2 million people, including many who settled in the United States. Some of these young people, many of whom had military training, were not accepted into existing gangs and responded by establishing their own.

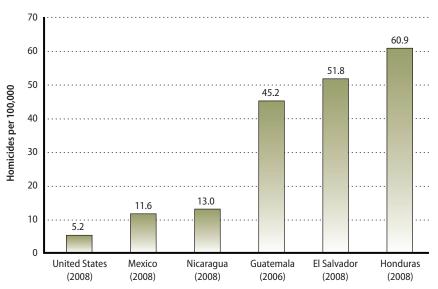
After the civil conflicts in El Salvador and Guatemala ended, gang members began to be deported from the United States back to their home countries (some after having served prison sentences in the United States). Between 2000 and 2004, an estimated 20,000 criminals were deported to their countries of origin. <sup>17</sup> Generally having no family or support structure to return to, these men re-created in their own countries the organizations with which they had associated in the United States.

Mara Salvatrucha found a fertile recruiting ground in Central America, establishing a presence throughout the region but chiefly in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Mara 18, created in similar fashion and still part of the 18th Street Gang, is Mara Salvatrucha's chief rival. Antigang laws instituted in Honduras and El Salvador have had the unintended consequence of pushing the Maras to the north, into Guatemala and Mexico. According to Mexican officials, Mara Salvatrucha and Mara 18 operate in at least 25 states and Mexico City; the majority of the gangs' members are in Chiapas, where there is a significant gang presence along the border with Guatemala. These gangs control a considerable portion of that border and are heavily involved in the smuggling of people, drugs, and weapons between the two countries.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ana Arana, "How the Street Gangs Took Central America," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 3, May/June 2005, p. 100.



In 2006, the U.S. Agency for International Development estimated that approximately 82,700 gang members combined resided in Mexico and Central America.



Information from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is used here to show the number of homicides per year per 100,000 residents in Mexico and select Central American countries. These rates, reported to the United Nations by criminal-justice sources in each country, are from the last year for which data were available (indicated in parentheses). The U.S. rate is provided as a point of comparison.

The Maras are exceptionally violent. Indeed, Mara Salvatrucha seems to pride itself on its brutality. In San Salvador in June 2010, for instance, suspected Mara Salvatrucha gang members set a bus on fire, killing at least 14 passengers. In 2008, the murder rate per 100,000 people was 58 in Honduras, 52 in El Salvador, and 48 in Guatemala, compared with fewer than six in the United States. The purpose of the violence is to instill fear and compliance.

Mara Salvatrucha has advanced well beyond the status of a typical street gang fighting for turf. According to the director of the National Council for Public Security in El Salvador, for example, in that country, the gang is "highly organized and disciplined . . . with semiclandestine structures and vertical commands."19 The gang has affiliates in Canada, Mexico, South America, and Western Europe. These affiliates run cartheft rings and traffic drugs, people, and weapons. They are also modern in their use of technology for communications; some have their own web pages.

The Maras themselves have been carrying out more terrorist-style operations, especially where antigang laws have been instituted. In 2003, the Honduran authorities arrested Mara Salvatrucha members on charges of conspiring to assassinate then–President Ricardo Maduro and Porfirio Lobo, then head of congress. In December 2004, the gang killed 28 people, mostly women and children,

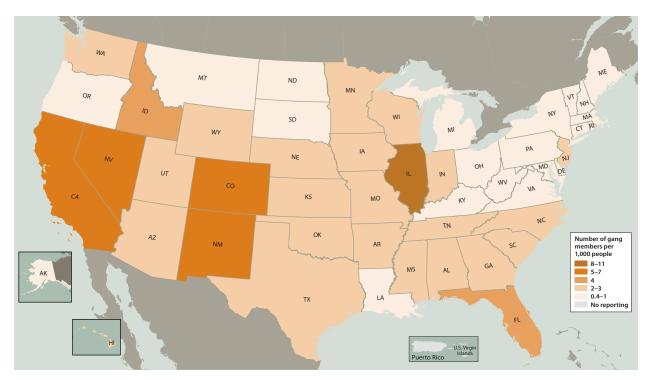
apparently in retaliation for antigang actions by the government.

What makes the gangs different from ordinary criminals or even most narcotics traffickers is that that they are willing to openly confront the authorities. This means that they pose a threat to the political stability of states that are fragile to begin with. According to one Mexican official, the prob-

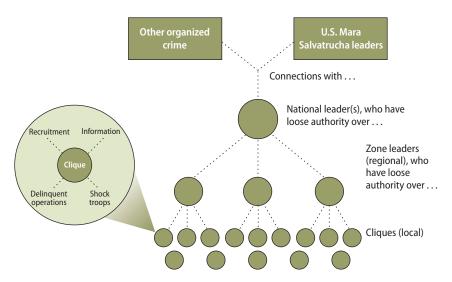
Within the gangs themselves, members who are suspected of disloyalty are usually killed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Clare Ribando Seelke, *Gangs in Central America*, Congressional Research Service, January 11, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Oscar Bonilla, quoted in Andrew Romano, "The Most Dangerous Gang in America," Newsweek.com, March 28, 2005.



Adapted from a map presented in the National Gang Intelligence Center's National Gang Threat Assessment 2009, this figure displays, by state, the estimated number of gang members per 1,000 people in the United States in 2008. The center found that approximately 1 million gang members belonging to more than 20,000 gangs were "criminally active" in the United States as of September 2008. According to the assessment, criminal gangs commit "as much as 80 percent of the crime in many communities . . . [including] alien smuggling, armed robbery, assault, auto theft, drug trafficking, extortion, fraud, home invasions, identity theft, murder, and weapons trafficking."



Mara Salvatrucha's command structure is largely clandestine, and there is no consensus among experts regarding either its exact nature or overall rigidity. However, according to El Salvador's Anti-Drugs Commission, Mara Salvatrucha is organized into a network of cliques, each of which is responsible for a particular geographic area, such as a specific park or neighborhood. A zone leader commands two or three cliques, and a national leader is in charge of the zone leaders. Cliques—some of which may not be networked with zone leaders—likely comprise separate functional groups, such as recruitment and delinquent operations.

lem is too large to be dealt with by law enforcement alone.<sup>20</sup> The gangs' extensive presence in the United States, smuggling infrastructure, and willingness to engage in extreme violence makes them a danger to U.S. national security. Although there is no credible evidence of cooperation between gangs and terrorist groups, the gangs have assets (e.g., smuggling routes and methods, safe houses, covert networks) that could be leveraged by terrorists to mount an attack against the U.S. homeland.

#### **Maritime Pirates**

In contrast to maritime terrorism, which has political objectives, piracy is an economically driven illegal activity. The United States' first overseas military operations in the early 1800s were directed against pirates who preyed on American ships from bases in Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. Contemporary piracy is defined by the 1958 Convention on the High Seas as an illegal act of depredation committed for private ends by the crew or the passenger of a private ship or a private aircraft and directed on the high seas against another ship or aircraft. The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea defines piracy as an unlawful act committed by a private ship against another ship for private ends.

In February 2009 testimony to the House of Representatives, piracy expert Peter Chalk stated that piracy costs the maritime industry between \$1 billion and \$16 billion each year. This contemporary piracy is driven by a combination of factors. First is the enormous increase in the volume of commercial freight moving by sea. Much of this traffic has to move through a small number of maritime chokepoints (notably, Bab el Mandeb and the Strait of Malacca) that make it vulnerable to pirate attacks.

Second, weak state control and sociocultural conditions foster lawlessness and the development of pirate safe havens. Some of the areas with the highest incidence of piracy are the waters off Somalia, West Africa, and Indonesia, all places characterized by porous borders, the unregulated movement

of persons, and the presence of terrorist and insurgent movements.

Third is the spread of technologies—from such weapons as automatic rifles, machine guns, and antiship mines to Global Positioning Satellite devices and radar—that enable pirates to organize and carry out attacks.

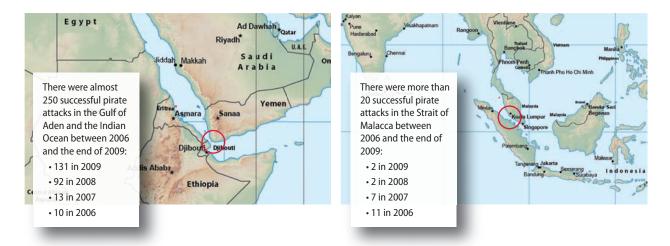
Fourth, the costs of pirate operations are very low, and the rewards can be very high when ransom payments are made. The Somali pirates who hijacked the Saudi supertanker Sirius Star reportedly received a \$3million ransom payment for the release of the ship and crew. Moreover, the lack of an international legal regime to effectively prosecute and convict detained suspects adds to the incentives to participate in this type of illegal activity.

According to the International Maritime Organization, in 2009, there were 406 reported incidents of committed or attempted acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships. More than half of these incidents occurred in East Africa, but there were also a significant number of incidents in the South China Sea, in the waters off West Africa, and in the Indian Ocean. In the waters off East Africa, pirates held more than 600 crew members hostage during these incidents, in contrast to 52 in the South China Sea and smaller numbers in other maritime areas.

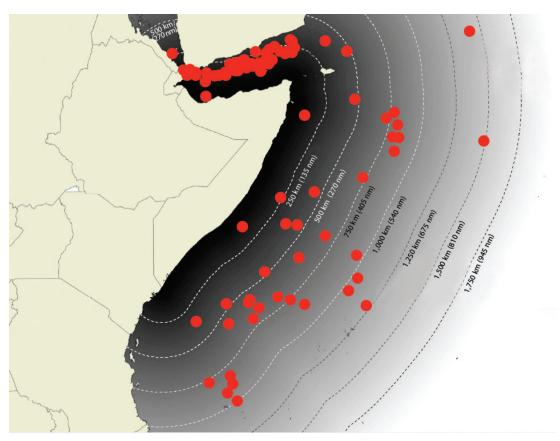
The Gulf of Aden and the waters around the Horn of Africa are among the most piracy-prone regions in the world. Pirates and criminal syndicates are well armed, they usually operate within mutually agreed spheres of influence, and they engage in everything from looting and ransacking to more-sophisticated hostage-takings and hijackings.

Pirate attacks off the coast of Somalia have surged because, since the overthrow of the Islamic Courts Union government in Mogadishu in December 2006, there has been no central government that provides services or security, including maritime security. Somali pirates have pushed further out to sea in search of oil tankers and large merchant vessels, going as far out as 1,000 nautical miles from shore.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Alejándro Sánchez, "Admiten Amenaza de 'Maras' en México," Noticieros Televisa, February 17, 2005.



Bab el Mandeb (left) and the Strait of Malacca (right) are two of the world's most-significant chokepoints for global shipping. If either were shut down, tens of thousands of ships would have to be rerouted. Numbers of successful pirate attacks in the chokepoints (and, in the case of Bab el Mandeb, surrounding waters) were compiled based on annual reports issued by the International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre.



Adapted from an April 23, 2009, report by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research Operational Satellite Applications Programme, this map shows the locations of 100 successful vessel hijackings and other reported pirate attacks in the waters around the Horn of Africa in just the first four months of 2009. According to the report, *Analysis of Somali Pirate Activity in 2009*, these 100 attacks represented an increase of 650 percent over the number of attacks during the same period in 2008.

#### **Threat Transformation and Adaptation**

One of the most dangerous aspects of a hybrid threat is the ability of its components to transform and adapt. Military forces, for example, can remove uniforms and insignia and other indicators of status and blend in with the local population. Insurgent forces can abandon weapons and protest innocence of wrongdoing. Criminals can don the accourrements of a local police force in order to gain access to a key facility.

The potential combination of regular and irregular forces and the ability of an entity to combine and transition between regular and irregular forces and operations to capitalize on perceived vulnerabilities make hybrid threats particularly effective. The interconnectedness between the various types of irregular adversaries must be noted. In Iraq, all insurgent groups used some form of terrorism as a tactic, and Al Zarqawi's Unity and Jihad Group, which had previously been a violent extremist organization, became committed to specific territorial ambitions. Moreover, criminal groups that looted power lines for copper and conducted organized kidnappings were often a source of funding for the various insurgent groups in Iraq. Al Qaeda specifically linked itself to the Iraqi insurgency by affiliating with Al Zarqawi in December 2004. Al Qaeda in Iraq currently funds most of its operations through bank robberies and other criminal activity.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, although there is no evidence of a nexus between piracy and maritime terrorism, pirates and Islamist terrorists often operate in the same areas, and some terrorist groups have sought to develop a maritime capability. Therefore, there is a possibility that terrorists may seek to leverage pirate tactics and capabilities to stage maritime terrorist attacks.

There is a demonstrated fluidity between the methods and capabilities of various types of irregular adversaries that defies generalization. Hybrid threats are highly adaptive and show a great ability

to learn and adjust their behaviors based on lessons learned and changes in the operational environment. Hybrid threats will offer a mix of capabilities along the spectrum of conflict to counter U.S. military actions. Adversaries will learn from U.S. operations what works and what needs to change. Irregular adversaries will continue to be adaptive in terms of using all available sources of power at their disposal.

<sup>21</sup> See Jim Michaels, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Relying More on Heists," *USA Today*, September 7, 2010, p. 7.

#### CHAPTER 3

# THE FUTURE OF IRREGULAR WARFARE

Thinking about the future requires an understanding of both what is timeless and what will likely change. As Thucydides suggested in the fifth century BC, "the events which happened in the past . . . (human nature being what it is) will at some time or other and in much the same way be repeated in the future." Many features will not change. The challenges of the future will resemble, in many ways, the challenges that American forces have faced over the past two centuries. In spite of the current intellectual climate in much of the developed world, conflict will not disappear. War has been a principal driver of change over the course of history, and there is no reason to believe that the future will differ in this respect. Neither will the fundamental nature of war change. War will remain primarily a human endeavor.

In contrast, changes in the strategic landscape, the introduction and employment of new technologies, and the adaptation and creativity of our adversaries will alter the character of joint operations a great deal. Here too, the past can suggest much about the future—the nature of change, its impact on human societies, and the interplay among human societies in peaceful and warlike competition.

—U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment 2010* 

The previous chapters have described America's irregular adversaries as a sometimes amorphous combination of insurgent groups, violent extrem-

ist organizations, and criminal networks. They also offered a broad outline of these adversaries' methods and capabilities. Each of the three has demonstrated the ability to undermine or directly threaten U.S. national interests. Yet, history shows the danger of "fighting the last war"—a danger that, in part, stems from making assumptions that adversaries will remain fixed in terms of their nature and tactics. Consequently, it is critical to consider what shapes irregular warfare and unconventional adversaries could assume in the near-to-medium term.

Although it may be impossible to predict the specific attributes that such threats will exhibit, there are several identifiable trends that can usefully inform such an assessment. This chapter examines three such trends in irregular warfare that will threaten America's national security:

- the use of hybrid approaches to warfare by both state and nonstate adversaries
- the diffusion of technology that permits the rise of super-empowered groups and individuals
- the creation of new target sets for irregular adversaries, a result of the increasing dependence of developed states on advanced technology.

Together, these trends suggest that irregular adversaries—whether they are rival states using unconventional tactics, insurgent groups, violent extremist organizations, criminal networks, or even highly motivated individuals acting independently—will gain increasing destructive power. These adversaries will be able to conduct irregular warfare with greater alacrity and lethality, and they will pose a significant threat to U.S. interests and security in the years to come.

#### **Hybrid Approaches**

The term "hybrid" has recently been used to capture the seemingly increased complexity of war, the multiplicity of actors involved, and the blurring between traditional categories of conflict. While the existence of innovative adversaries is not new, today's hybrid approaches demand that U.S. forces prepare for a range of conflicts. These may involve state adversaries that employ protracted forms of warfare, possibly using proxy forces to coerce and intimidate, or non-state actors using operational concepts and high-end capabilities traditionally associated with states.

—Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 2010

Faced with the overwhelming conventional dominance of the technologically advanced militaries of the United States and its Western allies, irregular adversaries are learning to adapt their means and methods of warfare to avoid or neutralize American strengths and to exploit our vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

In 1999, two Chinese People's Liberation Army officers asserted that the ability to blend technologies, such as combining financial and cyber attacks with military actions and political-influence activities (a technique they dubbed "unrestricted warfare"), signifies that weapons alone will no longer be sufficient to dominate on the battlefield. The new principle of war, they asserted, is "no longer using armed force to compel the enemy to one's will, but rather, using all means, military and non-military, lethal and non-lethal, to compel the enemy to accept one's interests."

Increasingly, the term *hybrid* has been used to describe these threats. In an August 2009 article, Secretary Gates suggested that future conflicts will include "more tools and tactics of destruction . . . being employed simultaneously in hybrid and more

complex forms of warfare." Leading military analysts have described the same trend toward a blurring of warfare means and methods. Author Colin Gray asserted that "[t]he first feature we can predict with confidence is that there is going to be a blurring, a further blurring, of warfare categories." In War Made New, Max Boot observed, "The boundaries between 'regular' and 'irregular' warfare are blurring. Even non-state groups are increasingly gaining access to the kinds of weapons that were once the exclusive preserve of states. And even states will increasingly turn to unconventional strategies to blunt . . . American power."

Although not formally defined in doctrine, hybrid approaches are briefly described in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report and in U.S. Joint Forces Command's Joint Operating Environment 2010. Hybrid approaches are generally characterized by the adaptive and simultaneous mixing of multiple forms of warfare and by the blending of military and nonmilitary means. More specifically, the irregular adversaries discussed in this assessment are using hybrid approaches that mix the use of guerrilla tactics, conventional training and discipline, high-technology weapons and disruptive capabilities, terrorism, and criminal activities to achieve their objectives. These same multidimensional adversaries employ a complex blend of means that includes the orchestration of diplomacy, political interaction, humanitarian aid, social pressures, economic development, savvy use of the media, and military force. Although there is no universally accepted definition of hybrid approaches, the term has provided a useful mental model for examining and understanding the evolving trends in the character of conflict and for informing future force development to reduce the operational risk posed by potential state and nonstate adversaries.

A frequently cited example of a modern adversary posing a hybrid threat is Hizballah in Lebanon, which analysts characterize as having struck an "artful balance between the conventional and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare:* China's Master Plan to Destroy America, Beijing, China: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Gates, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Max Boot, War Made New: Technology, Warfare and the Course of History, 1500 to Today, New York, N.Y.: Penguin Group (USA), Inc., 2006, p. 472.



(AP PHOTO/SEBASTIAN SCHEINER)

Already well known for its prominent bombings, hijackings, and kidnappings, in 2006, Hizballah successfully sustained a largely conventional fight against Israel, a nation-state with what the Defense Intelligence Agency describes as a "first-tier" regional military capability. This photo shows Israeli rescue workers at the site where a rocket fired by Hizballah from southern Lebanon hit the northern Israeli city of Haifa on August 13, 2006. Hizballah fired more than 250 rockets that day.

unconventional in its military strategy, tactics, weapons, and organization" in its 2006 war with Israel.<sup>5</sup> Hizballah studied its Israeli foe carefully and adapted a hybrid approach to effectively counter the Israel Defense Forces.<sup>6</sup> By combining low-visibility, guerilla-style methods with well-trained, conventional, state-like military forces, Hizballah was able to achieve surprising success against the Israeli forces.<sup>7</sup> Hizballah is perhaps the best example of a nonstate actor employing a hybrid approach, but other nonstate actors and nation-states have also recently employed an adaptive mix of conventional, irregular, terrorist, and criminal or other disruptive means and methods.<sup>8</sup>

Two factors have increased irregular adversaries' ability to challenge the United States and its allies. The first is the range and quality of advanced-technology weapons, kinetic and nonkinetic, now available to these irregular adversaries. The second is the ability of these groups to innovatively adapt and synchronize the employment of capabilities to achieve their objectives. Ease of movement across borders, increased and varied communications methods, and access to weapons heretofore only available to nationstates have provided insurgencies, violent extremist organizations, and criminal networks with the wherewithal to inflict significant

damage and, in some circumstances, to challenge the security forces of nation-states.

Relatedly, irregular adversaries' use of the underground environment is on the rise. Between December 2008 and January 2009, Israel targeted Hamascontrolled tunnels along the Gaza-Egyptian border during Operation Cast Lead. Immediately following the January 18, 2009, cease-fire, the smuggling tunnels were repaired, and smuggling resumed. Despite efforts by the Egyptian government to detect the tunnels and end their use for smuggling, the tunnels continue to supply both weapons (including rockets) and goods to Gaza. In the 2006 conflict with Lebanon, Hizballah complicated Israeli targeting by using underground facilities to store weapons, conduct operations, and launch rockets. Construction of underground havens by irregular adversaries is continuing.

Critical to an irregular adversary's procurement of advanced-technology weapons and to training an effective force capable of employing a hybrid approach that can challenge the United States and its allies is external support, gained either from nation-state sponsors or through criminal activity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, "The Hizbollah Project: Last War, Next War," OpenDemocracy.net, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> For example, Russia used a mix of conventional, unconventional, disruptive, and cyber warfare in its war with Georgia; the Taliban engages in a mix of unconventional, terrorist, and criminal activities; and Al Qaeda in Iraq and the Sunni insurgents blended terrorism, unconventional means and methods, and criminal activities in their operations.



(AP PHOTO/MARTY LEDERHANDLER)

On February 26, 1993, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center, killing six people and injuring 1,042. The explosive device was made of commercially available materials that cost less than \$400 but resulted in millions of dollars of damage. This attack was an ominous foreshadowing of the asymmetric cost-benefit advantage that future practitioners of irregular warfare would come to enjoy.

For example, Iran supported Hizballah with funding, weapons, training, and sanctuary.<sup>9</sup>

Whether they are state or nonstate entities, adversaries employing hybrid approaches display different stages and levels of sophistication. They are capable of employing a broad range of political, economic, social, and information activities in conjunction with military actions at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. They may have strong political, economic, and social links to the popu-

lace, as Hizballah does with the Lebanese Shia community. They may also use a variety of lethal means, using modern military capabilities, such as sophisticated surface-to-air missiles, or promoting protracted insurgencies that involve ambushes and improvised explosive devices. Applied in combination, these capabilities can produce conflicts that result simultaneously in the lethality of a state conflict and the fanatical, protracted fervor of irregular warfare. <sup>10</sup>

### Super-Empowered Groups and Individuals

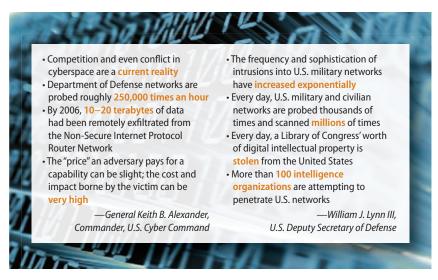
Concern about hybrid approaches stems from the risk that rival states will use irregular adversaries as "cat's-paws" for actions against U.S. interests or that existing irregular adversaries will gain conventional capabilities. The diffusion of lethal technology, however, and particularly the increased lethality of dual-use technology, will allow increasingly smaller organizations, and possibly superempowered individuals, to threaten U.S. interests. Insurgents and violent extremist organizations do not need to obtain weapons of mass destruction to conduct successful attacks because a wide array of dual-use and commercial technologies is available. For example, Irish Republican Army bombmakers in the 1980s use the following technologies to remotely detonate bombs:

- radio controls for model aircraft, easily purchased at hobby shops
- radar detectors and the same type of handheld radar guns used by police around the world
- photo-flash units used by commercial photographers during photo shoots, which cost less than \$200.

Similarly, the explosive device used in the 1993 World Trade Center attack, made out of ordinary, commercially available materials (including lawn fertilizer and diesel fuel), cost less than \$400 to construct. And of course, the September 11, 2001, attacks were carried out by terrorists who turned commercial airplanes into guided missiles. Troublingly, in 2009, the U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded that "sensitive dual-use and military technology can be easily and legally purchased from manufacturers and distributors within

Ouncil on Foreign Relations, "State Sponsors: Iran," CFR.org, August 2007.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, quoted in Gates, 2009.



On September 23, 2010, General Alexander delivered the first posture statement of the newly formed U.S. Cyber Command, noting that cyberspace is a potential area for both criminal and hostile purposes. In the September/October 2010 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Secretary Lynn described the most significant breach of U.S. military computers to date and presented the Pentagon's five-pillar cyberstrategy.

the United States" and illegally exported, without detection, to rogue states and terrorist suppliers.<sup>11</sup>

The dual-use implications of modern technology are not limited to lethal capabilities: They are also applicable to these groups' communications and intelligence efforts. Thanks to the Internet and widely available encryption technology, any group with a few thousand dollars can create a secure, worldwide communications system accessible from any Internet café or public library around the world. Similarly, commercially available technologies already allow nonstate actors to collect and disseminate intelligence on targets and on their enemies, including U.S. forces. Iraqi insurgents use Google maps to plot ambushes and attacks with improvised explosive devices. In November 2008 in Mumbai, India, ten terrorists from Lashkar e-Tayyiba, carrying only easily obtainable small arms, used cell phones, BlackBerries, and Global Positioning Satellite locators to coordinate their three-day rampage, which killed 173 and wounded 308. Thus, as Chinese military theorists Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui predicted more than a decade ago, "[S]ome morning people will awake to discover with surprise that quite a few gentle and kind things have begun to have offensive lethal characteristics."<sup>12</sup> More than ever before, a broad spectrum of technologies that make our lives more convenient allows small groups to wage irregular war on a more equal footing with states, a trend that will likely accelerate in the future.

This diffusion of destructive power is being further accelerated by the rapid spread of the information revolution. Information about dangerous technologies, once typically harnessed and closely monitored by governments, is quickly pro-

liferating beyond government control. This knowledge is now global and spreading exponentially due to ever-increasing interconnectivity. Furthermore, systems that used to be highly classified are now commercially available to anyone with a computer, a modem, and a credit card. Exponential advances in computing power and the rapid spread of information through global interconnectivity have empowered bloggers and other individuals, but they will also enable individuals seeking to do harm for ideological or criminal purposes. As terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman has noted, "Today, it is clear that the means and methods of terrorism are readily available and accessible to anyone with a grievance, agenda, or purpose or any idiosyncratic combination of the above."13

#### **Irregular Warfare's Future Target Set**

Current trends in the information revolution suggest that technology may eventually provide individuals with the ability to wage war on a nearly equal footing with states. This eventuality is espe-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Gregory D. Kutz, "Military and Dual-Use Technology: Covert Testing Shows Continuing Vulnerability of Domestic Sales for Illegal Export," testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives, June 4, 2009, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Liang and Xiangsui, 1999.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum," in John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, eds., *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1997, p. 350.

#### **Significant Cyber Attacks**

- 2007: An unknown foreign power broke into multiple agencies (including the U.S. Departments of Defense, State, and Energy) and downloaded terabytes of data, roughly equivalent to a Library of Congress' worth of government information.
- 2007: A concerted denial-of-service attack was launched against Estonian government, media, and bank web servers.
   The attack was precipitated by Estonia's decision to move a Soviet-era war memorial.
- 2008: Politically motivated Russian hackers shut down Georgian governmental websites during the South Ossetia conflict.
- 2009: Chinese operators created a virtual "trapdoor" to gain control of a Google employee's computer and access information on dissidents and sensitive intellectual property.
- 2009: In November, an unknown attacker broke through the firewalls and encryption devices and remained inside U.S. Central Command's network for several days.

cially likely given the increasing vulnerability of the U.S. military and civilian infrastructures to systems disruption.

Although technological innovations will enhance U.S. military operational capabilities in the future, they will also create new vulnerabilities. For example, Global Positioning Satellites enhance joint forces' targeting capabilities, but they are also susceptible to jamming and, even worse, spoofing that can cause U.S. forces to fire at noncombatants and therefore undermine U.S. strategic goals. Additionally, future irregular forces will likely launch operations—both kinetic and informational targeting public opinion in countries on which the U.S. military will depend for basing and predeployment positioning. These operations may succeed in denying our forces entry into the theater of conflict or to generally limit their freedom of action in the theater.

Likewise, insurgents, terrorist groups, and criminal networks will be able to target critical U.S. military systems. Hizballah was able to hack into the Israeli Defense Force's computer systems prior to the latter's invasion of Lebanon in 2006, and the attacks originally appeared to come from a small southern Texas cable company, a suburban Virginia cable provider, and web-hosting servers in Delhi, Montreal, Brooklyn, and New Jersey. In Novem-

ber 2009, an unknown party was able to get past the firewalls and encryption devices of U.S. Central Command's computer network and stay inside for several days. By attacking the computer systems upon which the U.S. military has become dependent, future irregular adversaries could hobble U.S. forces without ever exposing themselves to U.S. firepower.

Moreover, groups or individuals may be able to attack U.S. or allied infrastructure targets offensively and strategically. Just as Iraqi insurgents were able to undermine U.S. reconstruction and counterinsurgency efforts by physically attacking elements of the Iraqi electric grid, future hackers may be able to disable critical infrastructure in a major U.S. city and disrupt essential services. If such an attack were conducted in either the cold of winter or the heat of summer, it could create a cascading effect and kill hundreds. Given the potentially untraceable nature of the source of such an event, the mere threat of a catastrophic cyber attack might be enough to deter U.S. intervention against a foreign insurgency. Whereas a state such as China may be deterred from conducting such an attack by the likely economic repercussions, a nonstate actor (a violent extremist organization, an insurgent group, a criminal group, or even an individual sharing these groups' aspirations) would likely not be similarly dissuaded.

#### CHAPTER 4

# WHY IRREGULAR WARFARE MATTERS

To put it bluntly, we're trying to face 21st century threats with national security processes and tools that were designed for the Cold War—and with a bureaucracy that sometimes seems to have been designed for the Byzantine Empire, which, you will recall, didn't end well. We're still too often rigid when we need to be flexible, clumsy when we need to be agile, slow when we need to be fast, focused on individual agency equities when we need to be focused on the broader whole of government mission. . . . But if we as a government can't get better at linking ends, ways, and means, we will not adequately position the United States to protect and advance our national interests in the face of a very challenging 21st century security and economic environment. And just to translate for any lay persons in the audience: that's defense wonk speak for "adapt or fail."

> —Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy, Washington, D.C., 2010

Although the previous chapters have established the general nature of irregular warfare, identified the methods and capabilities of potential irregular adversaries, and sketched the possible evolution of irregular warfare, it is still unclear why these groups necessarily threaten U.S. security or national interests. For example, not all insurgencies are inherently damaging to U.S. interests, and it is at least theoretically conceivable that the United States might actually support an insurgency that weakens or overturns an existing regime that does threaten American security. Similarly, not every violent extremist organization threatens American lives or those of our closest allies, and criminal activity is nearly as old as civilization itself. Nearly 200 years

after John Quincy Adams famously warned that America "does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy," to define the mere existence of such irregular adversaries as a threat to U.S. national security could lead to damaging strategic overreach in an era of finite resources.

However, since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, it has become clear that irregular adversaries are capable of threatening U.S. interests: They have done so and will continue to do so. This chapter examines how insurgent groups, violent extremist organizations, criminal networks, actors using hybrid approaches, and super-empowered groups/individuals may threaten five vital U.S. national interests:

- preventing attacks against the U.S. homeland
- preventing, deterring, and reducing the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapon attacks on the United States and its military forces abroad
- ensuring the survival of U.S. allies
- containing the impact of drug-related violence
- ensuring the viability of major global systems, such as trade, financial markets, and energy supplies.

Although different presidential administrations will likely emphasize some of these interests above others or add to the list, these five interests are permanent and are likely to continue to attract bipartisan support beyond the next decade.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This list is adapted from The Commission on America's National Interests, *America's National Interests*, July 2000. The commission drew upon expertise from Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, the Nixon Center, and the RAND Corporation and thus represents a broader spectrum of consensus regarding U.S. national interests than would any specific National Security Strategy or Quadrennial Defense Review.

In the end, it is clear both that specific irregular adversaries pose direct threats to these vital interests and that the United States will have to devote resources, planning, and training to countering them in the next two decades.

#### Attacks on the U.S. Homeland

Although terrorists had previously attacked the World Trade Center in February 1993 and been foiled in attacks planned to occur on the eve of the millennium, the scale of the threat that violent extremist organizations pose to the U.S. homeland was not made clear until the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001. After considerable detailed planning and preparation, a small number of Al Qaeda operatives launched coordinated attacks on New York City and the Pentagon, and they were certainly attempting to strike a third target. The operation killed nearly 3,000 people, making it both the first significant attack against U.S. soil since Japan bombed Pearl Harbor 60 years earlier and the deadliest single attack ever against the homeland. Since September 2001, there have been "46 publicly reported cases of domestic radicalization and recruitment to jihadist terrorism in the United States."2 For the foreseeable future, the United States will be confronted with the reality that it faces the certainty of additional attacks from radical groups.

Another challenge confronting the United States and many of its allies is the rise of extremist groups within their own borders. There are, for example, several thousand jihadi websites on the Internet that can be accessed by American citizens. Homegrown radicals have the huge advantage of speaking the local language and understanding the culture in which they live. Therefore, selecting targets and preparing attacks is easier for them than for a foreign terrorist who slips into the country. Some recent examples of domestic extremists include Daniel Patrick Boyd, accused of conspiring to provide material support to terrorists and to commit murder, maiming, and kidnapping overseas, and

Major Nidal Hassan, the accused shooter of 13 soldiers and civilians at Fort Hood, Texas, in November 2009. However, domestic terrorist threats are not strictly limited to Al Qaeda—inspired groups or individuals. Extremists on both fringes of the U.S. political spectrum—i.e., "Unabomber" Theodore (Ted) Kaczynski and other environmental terrorists on the left, Timothy McVeigh and his coconspirators on the right—have conducted terrorist attacks in America. So, although Al Qaeda represents the gravest threat to the U.S. homeland, it is far from the only one.

## The Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Al Qaeda has sought to acquire weapons of mass destruction since its inception. During the early 1990s, its operatives worked with the Sudanese military to manufacture chemical weapons (and, possibly, mount them on artillery shells) and obtain uranium. Since the middle of that decade, Al Qaeda's efforts to procure weapons of mass destruction "have been managed at the most senior levels . . . and with central control over possible targets and the timing of prospective attacks."3 Indeed, bin Ladin himself has declared, "We don't consider it a crime if we tried to have nuclear, chemical, biological weapons. . . . We have the right to defend ourselves."4 After the fall of the Taliban in December 2001, U.S. forces discovered evidence that Al Qaeda had conducted grisly experiments on dogs that were injected or gassed with cyanide possibly a prelude to the use of the deadly agent against American targets.5

The possession of weapons of mass destruction by a violent extremist organization, such as Al Qaeda, is particularly threatening to U.S. national security. Unlike the terrorists characterized in Brian Jenkins' famous 1975 dictum—"terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listen-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Brian Michael Jenkins, Would-Be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Terrorist Radicalization in the United States Since September 11, 2001, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-292-RC, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, "Al Qaeda's Pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Authoritative Timeline," ForeignPolicy.com, January 25, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "'I Am Not Afraid of Death," transcript of a December 18, 1999, conversation between Jamal Ismail and Usama Bin Ladin, Newsweek.com, January 11, 1999.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Bergen, 2001, pp. 87–88.

ing and not a lot of people dead"6—modern violent extremist organizations seek to kill as many people as possible, especially if their members are motivated by theological or even apocalyptic aims. Because of their highly radicalized nature, extremist groups are often immune to the type of deterrence or negotiation that is possible with nations and some insurgent groups. These realities make the possession of weapons of mass destruction by such groups or super-empowered individuals especially dangerous.

#### The Survival of U.S. Allies

As previously noted, the mere existence of an insurgency is not in and of itself a threat to U.S. national security. However, if an insurgency threatens either the survival of U.S. allies or their pursuit of policies that support U.S. national interests, then it becomes a potential threat to the United States. A prominent example of this is afforded by the history of insurgent groups in Afghanistan over the past 30 years. During the 1980s, the United States provided weaponry and financial support to the Afghan guerrillas who were resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. This insurgency was far from posing a threat to U.S. national security; indeed, it supported U.S. strategic objectives. During the 1990s, Afghanistan was not perceived to have any intrinsic strategic value, and U.S. policymakers were therefore indifferent to the various groups involved in the country's civil war. However, after the Coalition removed the Taliban from power in December 2001 and enabled formation of the government now led by President Karzai (which allied itself with the U.S. effort to defeat Al Qaeda), the presence of insurgent groups dedicated to toppling President Karzai became of matter of vital national interest. Similar strategic considerations required U.S. support of successive post–Saddam Hussein Iraqi governments that had broadly allied Iraq to U.S. strategic interests in the region.

#### The Impact of Drug-Related Violence

In the past decade, Mexico has experienced a huge increase in violence and instability due to the growing power of a number of powerful criminal drug cartels. These groups seek to undermine the Mexican government and legal system not for reasons of political or religious ideology but rather to create favorable conditions for their drug business.

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, Mexican drug gangs were essentially middlemen for Colombian drug trafficking, helping smuggle heroin, marijuana, and other substances into the United States. By the late 1980s, however, many of the Mexican drug gangs were established as cartels in their own right, often taking over market share from Colombian cartels. Today, the Mexican cartels are at war with the Mexican and U.S. governments, and they are often at war with each other for control of the hugely profitable drug trade. Although no one knows the exact figure, the narcotics smuggled into the United States from Mexico may be worth up to \$50 billion every year. The profits are so large that the drug gangs have found it worthwhile to take the risk of openly opposing the authority of the Mexican government. Indeed, the drug cartels have virtually taken over several Mexican states, especially those along the U.S.-Mexican border.

Thousands of people—Mexican police and army personnel, gang members, and civilians—have been killed in the Mexican drug war, and, in 2009 alone, some 6,500 people were murdered in drug-related incidents. The Mexican government has deployed more than 45,000 army troops into the states suffering most from the violence, which includes acts of terrorism so severe that thousands of citizens have fled the most heavily affected areas. Indeed, police in El Paso estimate that "at least 30,000 Mexicans have moved across the border . . . [since 2008] because of the [drug] violence in Juárez and the river towns to the southeast."

As the war between the Mexican government and the cartels has worsened, there has been associated violent activity in the United States along the border, including kidnappings, assaults against

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Brian Michael Jenkins, "International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict," in David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf, eds., *International Terrorism and World Security*, London, UK: Croom Helm, 1975, p. 15. For a modern critique of this formulation, see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2006, especially Ch. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> James McKinley, "Fleeing Drug Violence, Mexicans Pour into U.S.," *New York Times*, April 17, 2010, p. A1.

U.S. law enforcement personnel, home invasions, and even homicides.8 The governors of several states that share a border with Mexico have asked the U.S. Government for additional resources for their National Guard units so that they can be used to help U.S. Customs and Border Patrol secure the border. And it is not just illegal drugs that are flowing across the border: Most of the guns used by the cartels were transported south from the United States into Mexico. The cartels are well armed with automatic weapons, grenade launchers, and possibly even rocket-propelled grenades. The rise of the Mexican drug cartels is not only a major threat to stability in that country: Some consider it the most serious criminal threat the United States has ever faced.

#### The Viability of Major Global Systems

Because of the illicit nature of their activities, criminal networks seek to undermine the rule of law in areas in which they operate. This undermines the global systems necessary for the legitimate economic activity upon which American security and prosperity depend. Moreover, criminal activity raises transaction costs for legitimate economic activity and therefore distorts global financial markets. For example, in 2008, due to the increasing volume of pirate attacks on tankers in the Gulf of Aden, insurers declared the gulf "a 'war-risk' zone subject to a premium of tens of thousands of dollars per day"; one company decided to divert "all its [100 chemical tanker] vessels around Africa, at an extra cost of \$30,000 a day"; and other companies contemplated "hiring licensed security guards, who would cost approximately \$60,000 per trip."9 Finally, as energy resources become scarcer or in greater demand, they will become inviting targets for criminal networks. For example, Somali pirates

Violent extremist organizations or super-empowered groups/individuals could specifically target infrastructure in attacks that would severely undermine the international economic system. For example, Al Qaeda has targeted the oil production sector in Saudi Arabia, a key U.S. ally, in hopes of economically crippling the United States. A cyber attack against the New York Stock Exchange or its supporting infrastructure could have as devastating an effect on the U.S. economy as did the physical attack against the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Finally, given the interdependence of the global economy, violent extremist organizations need not directly attack the United States. Instead, they can target infrastructure or physical plants in allied nations as a means of creating havoc in international financial markets.

Again, it is important to note the potential overlap between irregular adversaries and the threats they pose. Weapon-trafficking networks operating throughout West and East Africa and the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America are motivated by a desire for profits. Yet the availability of weapons fuels insurgencies and civil conflicts, therefore threatening the survival of U.S. allies. Pirates, often operating in the same areas as Islamist terrorists, might offer the terrorist groups a way to develop their own maritime threat by leveraging pirate tactics and capabilities to stage maritime terrorist attacks.

have pushed further out to sea in search of oil tankers and large merchant vessels. As energy resources are diverted by criminal activity, and as transportation and security costs rise in response to piracy, there will be distortion in the global energy markets upon which the U.S. economy and our way of life depend.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See National Drug Intelligence Center, *National Drug Threat Assessment 2010*, Johnstown, Pa.: National Drug Intelligence Center, 2010; Archibold, 2009; "Authorities: Murders Related to Mexican Cartels," TheBrownsvilleHerald. com, October 1, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> John W. Miller, "Piracy Spurs Threats to Shipping Costs," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 19, 2008, p. A12.

#### CHAPTER 5

### **SUMMARY**

We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense. And for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken—you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you.

—President Barack Obama, inaugural address, Washington, D.C., 2009

This assessment is intended to be a primer on challenges posed by irregular warfare and hybrid threats that the United States and its allies and partners face today and will face in the near future. The subject of irregular threats is huge and complex. A relatively short document, such as this assessment, can provide only an overview of the issues involved and, hopefully, spur readers to further their understanding of this challenging form of conflict.

We have focused on examining irregular adversaries and hybrid threats in order provide a common understanding of them so that we can in turn recognize and counter them. Hybrid threats can be found across the entire range of military operations, and the portions of the spectrum of most concern to building irregular warfare competency are those involved in insurgencies, violent extremist organiations, and criminal networks. The future operating environment will be complex and ambiguous, and future potential adversaries will likely be amorphous and highly adaptable, avoiding our overwhelming conventional strengths and targeting our perceived weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Hybrid threats combine state-based, conventional military forces—which leverage sophisticated weapons, command and control, and combinedarms tactics—with attributes usually associated with insurgent and terrorist organizations. Hybrid threats tend to seek sanctuary by blending into the local population, hiding in complex terrain, or operating through proxy forces, thus presenting little or no observable signature. Friendly offensive

operations may not find an enemy to fight, or, if conducted with lethal weapons that fail to discriminate the enemy from the population, may result in civilian casualties that do more harm to joint force objectives than good.

A hybrid threat would employ a mix of all these means and methods. This high degree of sophistication should drive the need to develop a balanced, adaptable set of capabilities that enables the United States to counter such a threat.

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of irregular threats is not new. Rome's armies spent more time suppressing rebellion and insurgency than they did conquering new territories. Our own nation gained its independence in a late-18th century version of hybrid warfare in which the colonials opposed the British Empire with a mix of conventional and irregular techniques. These irregular adversaries, while not new by nature, are new in character, reflecting the changing conditions of our global environment. Further, they represent a malignant and dangerous cancer that is rapidly spreading from the distant and disregarded regions of the world to threaten our security and way of life. With growing frequency, we hear about the violent and destructive results of these irregular threats, but the relatively few events that make the news merely represent the visible tip of an insidious iceberg.