

## Section 3



# TERRORISM AWARENESS

## Key Points

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- 1 Definition of Terrorism
- 2 History of Terrorism
- 3 Methods of Terrorism
- 4 Impact of Terrorism
- 5 The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)

The enemy is terrorism—premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents. . . . [The US] priority will be first to disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations of global reach and attack their leadership; command, control, and communications; material support; and finances.

*From United States Government, National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*

## Introduction

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**Terrorism** has become one of the most pervasive and critical threats to the security of the United States in recent history. This lesson will acquaint you with the definition, background, methods, and information sources on terrorism. As an Army leader, you need to understand this concept so that you will be able to respond to the threat locally while posted at your training base and globally while deployed in the Contemporary Operating Environment.

You will become familiar with the history of terrorism as well as resources on the Internet where you can find up-to-the-minute terrorism information from the Army, Department of Homeland Security, and FBI.

The importance of terrorism awareness to Army leaders at all levels was never more apparent than in the 1996 catastrophe at Khobar Towers, in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, when terrorists attacked a secure military housing complex.

### terrorism

*the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological*

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### The Khobar Towers Bombing

On June 25, 1996, at approximately 10:00 p.m. Dhahran local time, a fuel truck laden with an improvised explosive device approached the northwest end of the Khobar Towers compound from the north and turned east onto 31st Street just outside the perimeter fence separating the compound from a public parking lot. The truck bomb had an estimated explosive power of 20,000 pounds of TNT. The truck, and a car that it was following, continued to travel along the perimeter fence toward the northeast corner of the compound.

A US military security guard, present at an observation site on the roof of Building 131, spotted the suspicious car and fuel truck as they continued to travel along the perimeter fence toward the eventual attack site. When the vehicles reached Building 131, they turned left, pointed away from the building, and stopped. The fuel truck backed up into the hedges along the perimeter fence, about 80 feet from and directly in front of Building 131. When two men emerged from the truck, quickly entered the car, and sped away, the US military security guard radioed the situation to the security desk and began, along with the other two guards on the roof, to evacuate the building.

Emergency evacuation procedures began for Building 131 as the three security personnel ran door to door, starting from the top floor and working their way down, knocking loudly on each door and yelling for the residents to evacuate. Three to four minutes after the truck had backed up against the perimeter fence, the bomb exploded, demolishing the entire front façade of the eight-story building.

Timely action on the part of the guards, who had only been able to work their way down several floors of the building, saved the lives of many residents of Building 131. Many residents evacuating the building were located in the building stairwells at the moment of the explosion. Given the injury and death caused by



Photo courtesy [www.visac.ornl.gov](http://www.visac.ornl.gov)

*Khobar Towers bombing*

glass and other flying objects caused by the blast, the stairwells were probably the safest place to be at the time of bomb detonation. However, the force of the blast destroyed Building 131 and severely damaged five adjacent buildings. Most of the buildings in the US-occupied sector of the Khobar Towers complex suffered some degree of damage. Nineteen US military personnel were killed with several hundred other people injured. Hundreds of Saudi and third-country nationals living in the complex and immediate vicinity were also wounded. The bomb blast shattered windows throughout the compound and created a crater 85 feet wide and 35 feet deep. The blast was felt as far away as Bahrain, 20 miles to the southeast.

US intelligence experts concluded that Americans were the targets of the terrorists. Although injury and death were extensive, an even greater number of casualties might have occurred had the driver positioned the truck differently against the fence and if at least one row of concrete barriers [“Jersey” barriers of the kind used in construction and on US highways] had not been present to absorb or deflect part of the blast away from the lower level of Building 131.

Senior leaders of the US military unit, after consultation with engineers and investigators at the scene, concluded that this force protection measure helped to prevent the collapse of the lower floors of the building. Had the lower floors collapsed, the attack would have likely caused collapse of the entire building with a significantly larger number of casualties and fatalities.

According to the terrorist plan, attack leaders immediately departed the Khobar Towers area and Saudi Arabia using false passports. Two terrorists remained in Saudi Arabia in their hometown. No Khobar Towers terrorists were captured immediately following the [improvised bomb] attack.

Much of the force protection concentrated on precluding penetration of the complex perimeter by a car, truck, or suicide bomb. The commander responsible for the Khobar Towers complex was very proactive and aggressive in implementing improved security measures. Many complementing security measures were enacted, such as increased threat condition awareness, physical barriers and serpentine driving control patterns at checkpoints, restricted off-base travel, inspection procedures for parcels and commercial deliveries, and procedures for unannounced or suspicious visitors. In the months preceding the Khobar Towers bomb attack, over 130 new security measures were implemented. The DOD task force report on the Khobar Towers bombing states a strong belief that “. . . to assure an acceptable level of security for US forces worldwide, commanders must aggressively pursue an integrated systems approach to force protection that combines awareness and training, physical security measures, advanced technology systems, and specific protection measures tailored to each location. A comprehensive approach of common guidance, standards, and procedures will correct inconsistent force protection practices observed in the theater.”

Following the Khobar Towers terrorist attack, the US Secretary of Defense directed a critical re-evaluation of US force posture in the region, and empowered military commanders to examine mission tasks with force protection as an even more important consideration in its worldwide mission planning and operations.

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## Critical Thinking

What exactly does suspicious activity look like? Does a car blinking its headlights in a parking lot next to a US Army facility in a foreign country give reason to be suspicious?

## Definition of Terrorism

To fully understand terrorism, you should have a clear idea of exactly what it is. But since terrorism is, by nature, decentralized and highly adaptable, pinning down a single definition is difficult. For example, one researcher found 109 different definitions for terrorism in the current literature.

The Department of Defense (DOD) definition of terrorism is “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”

According to the FBI, terrorism is “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”

The US Department of State uses the definition contained in federal law, Title 22 USC Section 2656f(d). It defines terrorism as “premeditated politically-motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.”

US military fatalities from terrorist actions between 1972 and 2002 exceed the total battle deaths from Operations Urgent Fury (Grenada), Just Cause (Panama), and Desert Shield and Desert Storm (Persian Gulf). Statistics from the Department of Defense show there were 672 military deaths between 1980 and 2002 attributed to either hostile action or terrorism. Of these deaths, 63 percent were due to terrorist actions. The obvious threat terrorist elements pose to US military forces requires you to understand clearly the nature of this threat and your responsibilities for **force protection**.

### force protection

*actions taken to prevent or mitigate hostile actions against Department of Defense personnel (including family members), resources, facilities, and critical information*

## Common Elements

While definitions of terrorism vary, they share common elements.

### Political

A terrorist act is a political act or is committed for political effect.

### Psychological

The intended result of terrorist acts is a psychological effect, i.e. “terror.” Terrorist acts usually target an audience other than the actual victims of the act. The intended target audience of the terrorist act may be the population as a whole, some specific portion of a society (an ethnic minority, for example), or the society’s decision making elite—political, social, or military.

### Coercive

Terrorists use violence and destruction to produce a desired effect. Even if a terrorist operation does not result in casualties or destruction, the mere threat of violence produces the intended effect.

### Dynamic

Terrorist groups demand change, revolution, or political reform. The terrorist’s radical worldview that justifies terrorism demands action to destroy or alter the status quo.

### Deliberate

Terrorism is carefully planned and intended to achieve particular goals. It is a rationally employed, specifically selected tactic, not a random act.

## Common Observations

In addition to the common elements that help to define terrorism, experts have identified specific observations common to terrorist practices.

### Media Exploitation

Again, the actual victims of terrorist violence are not its real target; they are simply objects to be exploited. To work, information about the attack must reach the target audience.

### Permissive Societies

Terrorists typically conduct more operations in societies that support individual rights and civil legal protections than in more restrictive or socially less permissive societies. Even so, terrorist acts can occur in very restrictive societies, as the Khobar Towers bombing and others illustrate.

### Illegal Methods

Terrorism is a criminal act. Terrorists are criminals in both civil and military spheres. Even if terrorists claim that their use of such violence is justifiable, they are *de facto* war criminals under international law and most nations' military justice systems.

### Preparation and Support

Terrorist operations are not conducted by a group of hotheads on a whim, but are the result of extensive preparation and support operations. Significant effort and coordination go into financing group operations, procuring or manufacturing weapons, conducting target surveillance and analysis, and delivering trained terrorists to the operational area. This idea is crucial, because if terrorism has a weakness, it is here: Terrorist planning and coordination are vulnerable to disruption at all levels.

## Terrorism or Insurgency?

To clearly understand the nature of terrorism, you must understand the differences between concepts often confused with terrorism. Some people equate *guerrilla warfare* and *insurgencies* with terrorism. One reason for the confusion is that insurgencies and terrorism often have similar political goals. But when you consider what insurgency and guerrilla warfare are, you will understand the specific differences.

One definition states that an insurgency is “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.” This definition clearly distinguishes insurgency from both guerrilla warfare and terrorism, which are both *methods used to pursue the goals* of a political movement.

Guerrilla warfare is defined as “military and paramilitary operations conducted in enemy-held or hostile territory by irregular, predominantly indigenous forces.”

Nothing inherent in either insurgency or guerrilla warfare dictates the use of terrorism. While some successful insurgencies and guerrilla campaigns have employed terror tactics, others have not and have still succeeded.

Terrorism is, therefore, a *method to accomplish a particular goal*, whereas an insurgency is the actual organized movement that aims to overthrow a government.

Since the ultimate goal of an insurgency is to challenge the existing government for control of all or a portion of its territory, or to force political concessions in sharing political power, insurgencies require the active or tacit support of some portion of the population

involved. Additionally, external support, such as recognition or approval from other countries or political entities can be useful to insurgencies. By contrast, a terror group does not require, and in fact rarely has, the active support or sympathy of a large segment of the population. This lack of public support renders terrorists illegitimate.

Insurgencies don't require the targeting of noncombatants, although many insurgencies expand the accepted legal definition of combatants to include police and security personnel, in addition to the military. On the other hand, terrorists do not discriminate between combatants and noncombatants; if they do, they often so broaden the category of "combatants" as to render the terms meaningless.

The main difference between insurgency and terrorism, then, is in the intent of the actors. Insurgency movements and guerrilla forces may adhere to international norms regarding the law of war in achieving their goals, but terrorists are, by definition, committing crimes under both civil and military law.

## Terrorism and Nation-States

Much of the time, terrorism is the method of "non-state actors," or groups that are not connected to a sovereign government. Sometimes, however, individual national governments become involved in terrorism, or utilize terror to accomplish their governments' or rulers' objectives. Occasionally, internal security forces may use terror to aid in repressing dissent, and intelligence or military organizations perform acts of terrorism to further a state's political or diplomatic efforts abroad.

Adversary governments may use terrorism to add depth to their engagement of US forces. They may also repress local populations through terror to prevent internal dissent and insurrection that the US might exploit. Finally, state-sponsored terrorist organizations or paid domestic agents could launch attacks against the US homeland.

States can use terror in three different ways:

### Governmental or "State" Terror

Sometimes referred to as "terror from above," the government terrorizes its own population to control or repress it. These actions usually align with government policy and use official institutions such as the judiciary, police, military, and other government agencies. Laws may permit or encourage torture, killing, or property destruction in pursuit of government policy.

A recent example of this state terror is the prisons, torture chambers, and mass graves discovered in Iraq, where the government terrorized its own population to ensure the continuance of Saddam Hussein's regime. Historical examples include Nazi Germany's concentration camps and gas chambers, and Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's gulag of prison and death camps across Siberia.

### State Involvement in Terror

Sometimes government personnel carry out operations using terrorist tactics. They may direct these activities against other nations' interests, their own population, or private groups or individuals they view as dangerous to the state. In many cases, these activities are officially sanctioned, although such authorization is rarely acknowledged openly.

Historical examples include the Soviet and Iranian assassination campaigns against dissidents who had fled abroad and cases in which Libyan and North Korean intelligence operatives have sabotaged international airline flights, such as Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988.

## Critical Thinking

What is the difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter? How do you think their methods differ? How are their motives and aims different?

### State Sponsorship of Terrorism

Governments may provide supplies, training, and other forms of support to non-state terrorist organizations. This is known as “state-supported” terrorism. One valuable type of this support for terrorists is providing safe haven or physical bases for the terrorists, such as the Taliban allowing Al Qaeda to base training operations in Afghanistan, or Syria and Iran sheltering known terrorists wanted elsewhere by police.

Another crucial service a state sponsor can provide is false documentation—not only for personal identification (passports and internal identification documents), but also for financial transactions and weapons purchases. States also support terrorists by giving them access to training facilities and/or offering expertise to groups without extensive resources. Finally, states have significantly aided some groups by extending diplomatic protections and services—such as immunity from extradition, diplomatic passports, and use of embassies and other protected grounds and diplomatic pouches to transport weapons or explosives.

#### *State Department List of State Sponsors of Terror (2007)*

*Cuba  
Iran  
North Korea  
Sudan  
Syria.*

## History of Terrorism

Terrorism is not a recent development. Direct targeting of military personnel and facilities by terrorists has occurred since the earliest times.

The earliest known reference to people who behaved like modern terrorists was to the Zealots of Judea in the first century A.D. Known to the Romans as *sicarii*, or dagger-men, they carried on an underground campaign of assassinating members of the Roman occupation forces, as well as killing Jews they felt had collaborated with the Romans. Their motive was an uncompromising belief that they could not remain faithful to Judaism while living as Roman subjects.

The “Assassins” were the next group to show recognizable characteristics of terrorism as we know it today. A breakaway faction of Shia Islam called the Nizari Ismalis adopted the tactic of assassinating enemy leaders because the group’s limited manpower prevented open combat. An early form of asymmetric warfare, this group demonstrated how a less capable force could take on an enemy of vastly superior military strength.

The French Revolution provided the actual first uses of the words “terrorist” and “terrorism.” “Terrorism” in 1795 referred to the Reign of Terror initiated by the French Revolutionary government against real and imagined opponents. The agents of the Committee of Public Safety and the National Convention who enforced the policies of “The Terror” became known as “Terrorists.”

During the late 19th century, radical political theories and improvements in weapons technology spurred the formation of small groups of revolutionaries who effectively attacked nation states. Anarchists espousing belief in the “propaganda of the deed” produced some striking successes, assassinating heads of state and politicians in Russia, France, Spain, Italy, and the United States (President William McKinley in 1901).

During the early 20th century, as nations became closely tied to concepts of race and ethnicity, international political developments grew up in support of such concepts. Members of ethnic groups whose states had been absorbed by others—or that had ceased to exist as separate nations—saw opportunities to realize nationalist ambitions. Several of these groups chose terror as a method in their struggle to make their situation known to world powers they hoped would be sympathetic. In Europe, both the Irish and the Macedonians used terrorist campaigns as part of their ongoing struggle for independence, but had to initiate bloody uprisings to further their cause. The Irish were partially successful; the Macedonians failed.

Currently, terrorism continues to evolve. Shifts in terrorists’ motives, changes in organizational structures, and changes in response to world developments such as the globalized economy and information technology have considerably altered the nature of terrorism. The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of Palestinian terrorism, including the infamous attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany, organized by the infamous Carlos “the Jackal.” The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the terrorist activities of the Japanese Red Army, the Red Brigades in Italy—who in 1981 kidnapped BG James Dozier, then the highest-ranking US officer attached to NATO in Italy (he was freed by Italian commandos). The Baader-Meinhof (Red Army Faction) terrorists operated in West Germany with secret help from Communist East Germany’s intelligence agency.

The United States experienced periodic acts of terrorism during the 20th century. In 1910 labor extremists bombed the *Los Angeles Times* printing plant, killing 20 people. In September 1920, up to 40 people were killed and 300 wounded by a bomb set off by suspected anarchists on Wall Street in New York City. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Weather Underground carried out a series of bombings, including at the Pentagon and the US Capitol. Jewish extremists bombed Soviet offices, Puerto Rican extremists carried out several bombings, and Croatian extremists attacked Yugoslav offices around the country. In 1993 Islamist extremists bombed the World Trade Center. In 1995 Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168.

Meanwhile, Islamist terrorists belonging to an organization known as Al Qaeda (the Base) were stepping up their attacks on American and other targets. Al Qaeda bombed the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998 and the USS *Cole* in Yemen in 2000.

On 11 September 2001, nearly 3,000 people were killed when Al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four airliners, crashing two into the World Trade Center in New York and one into the Pentagon. Passengers on the fourth plane tried to seize control from the hijackers, and the plane crashed in rural Pennsylvania. A few days later, President George W. Bush declared a Global War on Terrorism. At about the same time, a series of letters containing anthrax bacteria were mailed to several media outlets and two US senators, killing five people. (In August 2008, authorities identified a government scientist—who committed suicide a week earlier—as the sender.)



*Car bombings are a common terrorist technique.*

## Methods of Terrorism

Historically, terrorist operations include, but are not limited to, assassination, hostage taking and barricade situations, kidnapping, raids, extortion, ambush, hijacking, sabotage, aircraft attacks, and maritime sabotage.

Terrorists have proven extremely agile in adapting their methods to the mission. Because of its flexible use of situational tactics, terrorism is difficult to predict and to prevent. Nonetheless, studying and analyzing terrorist tactics and methods sheds some light on how to deal effectively with this global threat.

Terrorist tactics include—but are not limited to—bombing, arson, hoaxes, misdirection and compound attacks, and suicide attacks. Terrorists use both traditional military firearms—pistols, submachine guns, assault rifles, sniper rifles, shotguns—and unconventional munitions, such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Of the greatest concern to governments combating global terrorism are the relatively recent efforts of terrorists to acquire biological, chemical, and nuclear materials to make what are known as “weapons of mass destruction,” or WMD. These weapons present the greatest threat to large populations in areas targeted by terrorists. Terrorists are actively seeking WMDs, which they can easily conceal, transport, and covertly deliver with no warning. Traditional nuclear deterrence provides no defense against terrorism.

## Impact of Terrorism

Terrorism as we know it today began in the late 20th century as political groups sought to grab world attention to further their causes. In this they were assisted by the rise of global mass media and the widespread use of the video camera. In 1968, for example, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked an El Al airliner en route from Tel Aviv to Rome. While hijackings of airliners had occurred before, this was the first time that the nationality of the carrier (Israeli) and its symbolic value were a specific operational aim. This was also the first deliberate use of passengers as hostages for demands made publicly against the Israeli government.

These events had their intended effects and gained significant media attention. The founder of PFLP, George Habash, observed that the level of coverage and attention was far greater than that obtained through any battles with Israeli soldiers. In a 1970 interview, Habash stated that although his cause did not receive much media coverage prior to the hijacking, “At least the world is talking about us now.” This success led to increased use of terrorism throughout the world.

The period of the 1990s and since has seen an increase in total incidents of nearly 500 percent over the 1970s, including an increase of 644 percent in incidents involving the United States. Clearly, terrorism has become a significant threat to the United States and the rest of the world.

Terrorists have now followed up their successes in exploiting television coverage with clever and sophisticated use of the Internet. Their latest efforts include attempts to change nations’ foreign policies through attacks on innocent civilians. The Madrid, Spain, railway bombing of 11 March 2004 occurred just before parliamentary elections and led to the defeat of the incumbent government and the withdrawal of Spanish forces from Iraq. The London Underground bombings in July 2005 may have been in retaliation for British military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)

The United States declared a Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) with the aim of ending material support to terrorists and disrupting, capturing, and killing their leadership. The financial support and resources of worldwide terrorism are key targets. An additional primary goal is to prevent terrorist organizations or their state sponsors from gaining or using WMDs.

But victory in the GWOT is not ensured simply by attacking the leadership, material support, and finances of terrorist organizations. The United States is also waging a war of ideas designed to discredit terrorism, just as communism and fascism were discredited in the late 20th century. A key element of this campaign is support of moderate, modern governments, especially in the Muslim world, to neutralize the conditions that spawn terrorism. Building more-open and tolerant societies in the developing world will create socioeconomic conditions that will provide alternatives to terrorism. Reforming educational systems and creating free markets, for example, are key goals of this initiative. According to the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, “The United States will work . . . to reverse the spread of extremist ideology and those who seek to impose totalitarian ideologies on our Muslim allies and friends.”

To achieve its military objectives in the GWOT, the US military will conduct rapid and precise operations when intelligence identifies potential to harm the United States. Maintaining strong armed forces will ensure that the balance of power remains aligned against the terrorists and will ultimately support the long-term goals of the nation's **homeland security**.

The post-9/11 world is an ever-changing environment that requires you as a future Army leader to keep abreast of the best and latest information, state-of-the-art technology, and counterterrorist planning available. Knowing the enemy, having resources at hand, and fostering and applying **situational awareness** can help you avoid catastrophic events.

### homeland security

*the capability to anticipate, preempt, and deter threats to the homeland whenever possible, and the ability to respond quickly when such threats do materialize*

### situational awareness

*the degree of accuracy to which one's perception of one's current environment mirrors reality; the temperament of leadership that protects the unit in day-to-day activities by staying constantly alert and informed*

### For updates on terrorism, check these US government websites

#### Army

<http://www.army.mil/terrorism/>

#### Department of Defense

<http://www.defendamerica.mil/>

#### Department of Homeland Security

<http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?theme=29>

#### Department of State

<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/>

#### Federal Bureau of Investigation

<http://www.fbi.gov/terrorinfo/counterterrorism/waronterrorhome.htm>

**America is no longer protected by vast oceans. We are protected from attack only by vigorous action abroad, and increased vigilance at home.**

President George W. Bush

From United States Government, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*



# CONCLUSION

Terrorism is a significant challenge for US military forces in the 21st century. Wherever you deploy as an Army unit leader, and whatever your mission, your understanding of terrorism and its threat to you and your Soldiers will be critical.

The enemy in the war on terrorism is not one person, not a particular ethnic group, not the followers of a specific religion. It is those who try to subvert the rule of law and effect change through violence and fear. In this war, the US will not prevail primarily through military might. But it will not hesitate to use military force when required to defend itself and its friends around the world.

## Key Words

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**terrorism**

**force protection**

**homeland security**

**situational awareness**

## Learning Assessment

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1. What is the current DOD definition of terrorism?
2. What are terrorists' key goals? How do they run counter to the goals of societies that recognize the rule of law and rights of the individual?
3. Explain why force protection is crucial to the small-unit leader.
4. What is situational awareness? How can you become more situationally aware?

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