Guerilla Warfare & Law Enforcement: Combating the 21st Century Terrorist Cell within the U.S.

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Abstract

Both domestic and international terrorist organizations employ guerrilla warfare tactics, techniques, and procedures. Thus, the ability to identify and defeat the members of these organizations, cripple their infrastructures, and disrupt their financial resources lies in the understanding of modern guerrilla warfare as it develops in the twenty-first century within the United States.3 The forms of asymmetric warfare4 adopted by domestic and international terrorist groups alike is no longer intended to gain simple media exposure or governmental manipulation; they want to make an overpowering impact by causing massive loss of life and severe damage to infrastructure and are often motivated by religious imperatives and political goals. As terrorism analyst Stephen Flynn has observed, "Throughout the 20th century [Americans] were able to treat national security as essentially an out-of-body experience. When confronted by threats, [America] dealt with them on the turf of our allies or our adversaries. Aside from the occasional disaster and heinous crime, civilian life [in the United States] has been virtually terror-free." With the turn of the twenty-first century, terrorist operations have become more prevalent in the United States and are taking shape in the form of modern guerrilla warfare, thus creating new challenges for federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. After reviewing the origin and nature of these challenges, this article will offer some suggestions for countering guerilla warfare in the United States.

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"The mind of the enemy and the will of his leaders is a target of far more importance than the bodies of his troops."

Samuel B. Griffith II, On Guerrilla Warfare, *1961*[1]

Introduction

Both domestic and international terrorist organizations employ guerrilla warfare tactics, techniques, and procedures.[2] Thus, the ability to identify and defeat the members of these organizations, cripple their infrastructures, and disrupt their financial resources lies in the understanding of modern guerrilla warfare as it develops in the twenty-first century within the United States.[3] The forms of asymmetric warfare[4] adopted by domestic and international terrorist groups alike is no longer intended to gain simple media exposure or governmental manipulation; they want to make an overpowering impact by causing massive loss of life and severe damage to infrastructure and are often motivated by religious imperatives and political goals.[5] As terrorism analyst Stephen Flynn has observed, "Throughout the 20th century [Americans] were able to treat national security as essentially an out-of-body experience. When confronted by threats, [America] dealt with them on the turf of our allies or our adversaries. Aside from the occasional disaster and heinous crime, civilian life [in the United States] has been virtually terror-free."[6] With the turn of the twenty-first century, terrorist operations have become more prevalent in the United States and are taking shape in the form of modern guerrilla warfare, thus creating new challenges for federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. After reviewing the origin and nature of these challenges, this article will offer some suggestions for countering guerilla warfare in the United States.

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Terrorist Operations within the United States

According to a book by Harvey Kushner and Bart Davis, Islamic extremist groups have been plotting within the borders of the United States for decades, originating with an exclusive network of educated leaders eventually known as "Mullahs."[7] They note that this "secret Islamic network" was formed during the mid-1980s "when a tightly knit group of Islamic radicals attended the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro."[8] After years of planning, recruiting, and training in decentralized terrorist cells located throughout the country, "[t]he founding members of the secret Islamic terror network executed a long-range plan: raise money to fund terrorist activities; support Arab and Muslim demonstrations against our government's foreign policy and its support for Israel; infiltrate our political, economic, and military system to conduct espionage and to buy influence; and use our universities to set up fronts for terrorist organizations, because our academia's commitment to Free Speech and tolerance of diversity will protect them."[9]

In an effort to gain a more thorough understanding of terrorism, recognize who the terrorists are, and contend with why Americans have been attacked in their own sanctuaries, a growing cadre of academics and security professionals have recently begun developing the field of terrorism and counterterrorism studies. However, one of the challenges yet to be overcome in this field is the need for a common definition. As one scholar has observed, "[W]e seek to define terrorism so as to be better able to cope with it, [but we] cannot begin to counter effectively that which we are unable to fully comprehend or agree on as to its nature."[10] This lack of a universal definition poses issues in identifying, defending against, and ultimately defeating terrorist acts in the War on Terrorism.

Not only is it imperative that commonly accepted definitions of domestic and international terrorism exist, it is equally important to understand the methods of terrorist warfare and how they are actually conducted as well as what type of individuals—even among U.S. citizens—would join a cause that uses terrorism to achieve seemingly unobtainable objectives. As Benjamin Netanyahu—a former soldier in an elite antiterrorist unit in the Israeli Army and former prime minister of Israel—has noted, "The current breed of interlocking domestic and international terrorists is certainly not to be taken lightly. They know the West well and have developed strategies designed to take advantage of all its weaknesses."[11] Identifying the enemies' tactics and their motivational means for executing such heinous acts of political- and religious-based violence against an innocent civilian population will prove invaluable in the fight against domestic and international terrorism within the United States.

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Guerrilla Warfare Tactics

Tactics that have been successfully employed by small guerrilla-fighting forces for centuries are quickly becoming a serious problem, as domestic and international terrorist groups are utilizing stand-off, overt (high profile), and covert (low profile) tactics to accomplish their end state with little regard for those outside their organizations. This type of terrorist-oriented asymmetric warfare is currently used all over the world, even though such a strategy rarely leads to the type of complete victory envisioned by its adherents. Understanding guerrilla warfare requires the recognition of how terrorist cells operate within their political and religious ideologies and within their varying environmental battlefields.

According to historians Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, guerrilla warfare has historically been viewed as

> . . . a war of the masses, a war of the people. The guerrilla band [has been] an armed nucleus, the fighting vanguard of the people. It draws great force from the mass of the people themselves. Guerrilla warfare [has been] used by the side which is supported by a majority but which possesses a much smaller number of arms for use in defense against oppression.[12]

Guerilla leaders such as Mao Tse-tung in China, Ernesto "Che" Guevera in Latin America, and Carlos Marighella in Brazil, have revolutionized the art of small-unit warfare against larger and more adequately resourced opponents. Their decentralized campaign tactics have led to many victories over mighty armies and have eventually been adopted by many terrorist groups such as the Baader-Meinhoff Gang (later known as the Red Faction Army) operating in West Germany.[13]

Guerrilla warfare has become the principal design from which terrorist cells are shaping their operations from preparation to recruitment to execution. It has historically been a proven blueprint for various levels of tactical success and always provides the terrorist an opportunity to launch "himself against the conditions of the reigning institutions at a particular moment and dedicate himself with all the vigor that circumstances permit to breaking the mold of these institutions."[14] As Mao Tse-tung wrote many years ago, "A trained and disciplined guerrilla is much more than a patriotic peasant, workman, or student armed with an antiquated . . . homemade bomb. His indoctrination begins even before he is taught to shoot accurately, and it is unceasing. The end product is an intensely loyal and politically alert fighting man."[15]

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Twenty-First Century Terrorism as Guerilla Warfare

Domestic and international terrorist groups located within the United States are demonstrating the various guerrilla warfare techniques of old as they are setting out to achieve their political and religious objectives. From the development of the organization through the execution of the attack, these groups are organized in a manner—and utilize tactics, techniques, and procedures—consistent with the operational phases of a traditional insurgency. These offensive measures are initiated whenever the opportunity for power, control, and socioeconomic influence favor the aggressor. Other operational fundamentals include influencing the need to defend multiple potential targets, the massive consumption of critical resources, sacrificing counter (offensive) measures, and the loss of political and law enforcement initiatives. In essence, insurgents seek to reduce resources and diminish any willingness to protect civilian communities through attrition and exhaustion.[16] One last and extremely critical impact could include the alienation of (local) communities toward law enforcement officials and local and federal governments.

Guerilla warfare groups generally organize their activities around seven areas: preparation, initial contact, infiltration, organization, build-up, combat employment, and demobilization. Each is described in more detail below.

Preparation

Terrorist groups first look for a location from which to base their operations and begin recruiting. Location is critical, as they require an environment conducive to recruiting as well as privacy for planning their attacks. Community selection and socioeconomic structure are two critical factors in the choice of location. Like the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland, terrorist groups form decentralized cells that consist of a select few individuals who can blend into an urbanized community and begin the recruiting process. The members of these sleeper cells[17] will blend into their chosen society by obtaining jobs, paying bills, and acting and speaking like the indigenous population within the neighborhood for months and years while preparing and recruiting for the next attack. The socioeconomic structure of a community is crucial to a cell's intelligence preparation in a given area of operation.

As Daniel Pipes notes, although most would expect the militant Islamic to entice those individuals from the lower end of the social strata, "research finds precisely the opposite [to be] true. To the extent that economic factors explain who becomes Islamic, they point to the fairly well off, not the

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poor . . . . Those who back militant Islamic organizations also tend to be well off. They come more often from the richer city than the poorer countryside."[18]

Initial Contact

Over time, the organizational structure begins to take shape, and positions within the cell are filled with recruits from the local community. In order to recruit locals to meet their specific needs, cell members set clandestine operations in motion to begin identifying those who meet the special needs within a particular cell. As Tse-tung observed, guerrilla warfare's "basic element is man, and man is more complex than any of his machines."[19] While looking for those individuals who might meet their strategic and tactical needs for future terrorist operations, cell members integrate themselves into the daily lives of their target population with absolute discretion, giving the appearance of the average U.S. citizen residing in "Anytown, U.S.A." Marighella believed that urban guerillas would have neither the means nor the capability to maintain a job for very long, forcing them to begin expropriation tactics over long periods of time. He also spoke of the importance for guerilla insurgents to learn how to live among the indigenous people in their operational area, employing extreme discretion as they gradually integrate into their new environment. Once they have comfortably maneuvered themselves into the everyday events of their chosen community, then, and only then, will they begin their initial contact.

Infiltration

Infiltration is defined as complete submersion into a society. In places such as Dearborn, Michigan; Brooklyn, New York; Hancock, New York; and Buena Vista, Colorado (the last two cities refer directly to cells of the *Jaamat ul-Faruqa* movement), Islamic jihad extremists have infiltrated and begun recruiting, training, and plotting their next terrorist attack against the United States—all in the name of Islamic purification through violence and destruction. A critical factor for the development of the cell's structure in this stage is the process of isolating promising recruits in U.S. society who may harbor ill feelings toward either the current government or Christians and Jews. They begin to quietly spread their religious and political beliefs as a more acceptable alternative to the democratic governments in the evil empire of the Western world. Christianity is dismissed in their eyes as a lesser religion, or no religion at all, and the Islamic faith is praised as the only righteous path to Allah (Arabic for God), as revealed through the last prophet Muhammad and his universal and timeless message.

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Additionally, these groups engage in criminal acts such as fraud, burglary, racketeering, and illegal use and distribution of drugs (narco-terrorism) in an effort to financially provide for future training and tactical operations. Other methods of gathering funds to further facilitate their jihad are through the production and sale of militant Islamic propaganda during their teachings, training, and prayer meetings.

Organization

Once the infiltration phase in an area of operations has been established and deemed satisfactory to the needs of the newly formed insurgent group, the terrorist cell's organization begins to take shape. The traditional guerrilla forces of Afghanistan, Brazil, China, and Vietnam grew in size equaling two hundred to one thousand-person units, but terrorist cells forming in the United States are significantly smaller and "stovepiped" in design, mostly due to the urban terrain and environments in which they have chosen to conduct their operations. This organizational technique is better known as decentralization, or networked decentralization. With decentralized cells working toward a common objective, those caught during the commission of an illegal act are unable to give any operational intelligence on other sections of their cell or on the existence of other cells. A terrorist cell evolves in both size and sophistication as new recruits enter their training and progress to any of the cell's three organizational forces: auxiliary, intelligence, or operational.

Build-up

Although the name of this phase implies there is a massing or increase in size of the cell, the size will vary with each location (and sociological environment), organization, and intended mission. As stated earlier, unlike the traditionally sizable guerrilla forces dating back to Guevara, Marighella, and Tse-tung, twenty-first-century terrorist cells located within the United States are organized in much smaller and more elusive elements in order to suit their needs for covert operations at every phase of their insurgency. Furthermore, recruits with special skills are also examined more heavily when considered for recruitment, unlike the average guerrilla fighter in previous wars. As Loveman and Davies observe, drawing on the doctrine originally espoused by Guevara, "Guerilla warfare, the basis of the struggle of a people to redeem itself, has diverse characteristics, different facets, even though the essential liberation remains the same."[20] Understanding this philosophy is critical for law enforcement agencies throughout the country that must identify and disrupt terrorist cells within their jurisdictions. Guevara's teachings still hold true in the forming and training of both domestic and

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international terrorist organizations located in the United States. Another important parallel between guerrilla warfare of old and today's terrorist cells is that this form of war "is a war of the masses, a war of the people."[21] While terrorist cells will utilize this phase to further develop their organizations, they will only have a select few who are deceived by their *fatwa*[22] to attack and kill other Americans in their own country.

Combat Employment

Once a cell has determined that the time has come to conduct "combat" operations, plans will become actions set into motion with finite precision, leaving little room for identification or interception by first responders. The asymmetric actions of typical guerilla warfare are a product of months of detailed planning, resourcing, organizing, and rehearsing. Although there are varying social-strata levels joining and participating in terrorist acts, make no mistake that the delivery platform of this horrific weapon of terrorism will result from highly trained and dedicated Islamic jihadists who truly believe their actions are righteous and for the betterment of the Islamic nation.

Demobilization

Although the term demobilization infers that terrorist forces are maneuvering from wartime to a peacetime position through the disbanding of their organization, this is not the posture referenced here. Demobilization during guerrilla warfare is more likely to occur in the form of a dismembering of the operational cell responsible for the actual terrorist attack—that is, if the members do not die for their cause (e.g., homicide bombings) or get caught during the commission of their criminal act. It could also be concluded that the parent cell itself could stand down and relocate to another area or region if the situation proved dangerous to its existence and execution of ibn Ladin's *fatwa*. The organization's decentralized operational control allows the separate cells to function independently, providing uninterrupted and continuous operations. In order to successfully terminate a local cell's operational status, a way must found to demobilize the actual base facilities where they recruit, train, plan, and project terror against their intended targets.

This key cell adjustment will not be undertaken lightly by terrorist organizations, as it involves several critical moving pieces not only in terms of the destruction of its current base of operations, but also in the process of executing the first five operational phases over what could prove a lengthy and costly amount of time. Therefore, if a cell cannot be identified and totally eradicated by a country's intelligence and law enforcement agen-

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cies, the next best option may be to cause its members to believe that they must demobilize and move to another location.

Strategic Challenges for Countering Guerilla Warfare

Over two hundred years after the first Spanish guerrillas, terrorist groups are still thriving on the principles that have made guerrilla warfare such a tremendous and potentially successful tactic of fighting more with less. However, there are several critical differences in how modern guerrilla warfare is executed in the United States today, as compared with other countries in the past:

1. The foundation of modern terrorist cells could be either domestic or international in nature (that is, not always "homegrown"). This might appear irrelevant at first, but while most domestic terrorist groups are discontented from the government, they are not necessarily looking to cause massive loss of life (Timothy McVeigh's terrorist attack of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City is clearly an exception). International cells consisting of militant Islamic groups conducting guerrilla operations in another country are not only looking to have an impact on the government, they are also plotting to attack soft targets with the intent of destroying critical economic infrastructure and cause enormous loss of life in order to carry out the following *fatwa* issued by ibn Ladin on February 23, 1998: "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."[23]

2. While the cause is against a perceived oppressive government, it is not, nor will it ever be, supported by a trained, professional army constituted of U.S. citizens. Guerrilla armies in other countries have always depended on a "regular" army to sustain their governmental opposition, and the lack of popular local support will ultimately minimize the opportunities for guerrilla-style warfare to win the wars of either attrition or annihilation, especially in a foreign country.

3. Terrorists are fighting for "religious ideologies" rather than for "civilizations." In a fight for religious ideological pursuits, the identified battlefield must contain multiple supporters in these perceived ideologies in order to successfully sustain the cause and have any hope for long-term success. While there are over one thousand two hundred mosques

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with some two million American Muslim participants located through-out the United States,[24] clearly very few members have the desire to express their religious and political beliefs through ibn Ladin's *fatwa*.

4. As Therese Delpeche notes, terrorist acts will "contribute to reshaping international relations,"[25] and not just in the immediate area in which they are conducting operations. If terrorism was to successfully manip-ulate U.S. citizens and subdue or defeat the government of the United States, every other country in the world would feel the ripple effect of the most powerful nation in the world collapsing to a weaker enemy, and other economies would ultimately face unrecoverable losses as well as an onslaught of follow-on terrorist attacks. The world will not stand by and watch terrorism erode the United States to the point of defeat.

5. According to Delpeche, "The boundaries between military and civil defense are being blurred. The increasing need to protect civilians from terrorists attacks . . . will lead the most-developed countries to give a new priority to civil defense, making it harder for the terrorist[s] to strike in the middle of cities and easier for [the] government to deal with limited unconventional attacks."[26] Governments today are better equipped with intelligence-gathering techniques and technological defense mechanisms to fight modern guerilla fighters. The freedom of movement within a city or state has been limited by these modern counterinsurgency techniques, causing terrorist cells to move at a slower pace and spend more time planning and training for their next attack. The greater the degree of precision placed on terrorists increases the opportunity for local law enforcement agencies and other first responders to act or react to their attacks and potentially prevent an attack from occurring.

Closing the Training Camps, Mosques, Compounds, and Schools

While militant Islamism has been a force to contend with throughout the world for many years, it is also becoming more prevalent in the United States. According to Kushner and Davis:

> It isn't an accident that many U.S. mosques have become append-ages of worldwide jihad against the West. The number of Muslims coming here rose rapidly after the United States revised immigra-tion laws in the mid-1960s. The number of mosques and Islamic community centers grew over that time, by some estimates from

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about fifty at the end of World War II to more than twelve hundred today. The role of the mosque has also changed—from Americanized "cultural clubs" of earlier immigrants to conservative, religion-oriented institutions that manipulate the national and cultural identities of new immigrants in an effort to avoid their inclusion in mainstream America.[27]

These terrorism analysts also point to a common thread that emerges from recent cases brought against confirmed or alleged Islamic terror cells in the United States—the connection between the terror cells' members and a local mosque.[28] State and federal law enforcement agencies must initiate and maintain aggressive intelligence-gathering operations with varying profiles, specifically targeting those individuals and organizations where militant Muslims teach others to execute ibn Ladin's *fatwa*. "Islamberg," a training camp utilized by the *Jamaat ul-Faruqa* movement in Hancock, New York, is a prime example of how militant Islamic teachings have penetrated the fabric of the United States' society and begun the recruiting and transformation of Islamic Americans against their democratic government. As Cooper notes, "The youngest members of Islamic society are being exposed to intolerance and hate in the Islamic religious schools from the earliest grades on."[29]

Delpeche recently observed that having the ability to contain violence has always been the key to security.[30] Stephen Flynn agrees, arguing that

> . . . the threat is ongoing, and [the United States] must be doing more right now to limit the consequences of future acts of terror. It will take time to implement well-conceived, layered security measures that protect the critical foundations of [the American] society. [Americans] have to make judgments about [their] most immediate vulnerabilities, identify what stop-gap protective measures [they] can implement in a hurry, and develop and exercise plans to guide [their] response when the next attack materialize.[31]

Conclusion

Terrorism, by its nature, seeks out and exploits its opponents' weaknesses. Terrorist cells will only execute when they believe the tactical advantage is clearly theirs and that, as Tse-tung dictates, "chances for victory are weighted heavily in their favor."[32] The asymmetric warfare tactics practiced by domestic and international terrorist organizations have achieved some success over the years in various countries throughout the

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world. Arguably the most powerful and influential nation in the free world, the United States must refuse to concede to such heinous acts of violence, as its second- and third-order impacts could prove detrimental to the political and economic status of nations throughout the world. As Stephen Flynn observes:

> The reason that catastrophic terrorism holds such potential as a means to wage war on the United States is not simply because these attacks can inflict damage to systems we depend on; it is because our enemies have good reason to believe that a successful act of terror on American soil will trigger a reaction which the U.S. Government exacerbates localized destruction with substantial self-inflicted national and even global costs.[33]

In order to pursue a successful counteroffensive against terrorism, the United States must analyze previous defense strategies in overseas areas of operation and begin to concentrate on the varying phases of a terrorist organization's movement within its own borders, as well as on its understanding of what Kushner and Davis describe as "the terrorist's language, culture, history, methods, and psychology."[34] Furthermore, the leaders of this democratic nation should consider how they might prevent others from joining these militant Muslim organizations as willing participants by improving the socioeconomic welfare of those subject to easy recruitment.

We are at a point in our history where "timidity" will prove an undesirable and fatal flaw in the defense of this nation. The days of Americans feeling safe within their geographical borders has come to an end, as militant Islamic jihadists penetrate the United States' societal footprint and live among their prey. Outdated security against the average criminal element will neither prevent nor protect against modern-day criminal attacks by a well-funded and highly trained terrorist cell. According to Flynn's analysis, "[Americans] must create the kind of structure that widens the breadth and quality of civic participation in making America safe. The nation, not just the federal government, must be organized for the long, deadly struggle against terrorism."[35]

The War on Terror has forced the United States to face its enemies on its own soil for the first time since the Civil War, thus forcing its strategies of defense to alter as it considers the long-term effects of both massive wartime damage to infrastructure and loss of civilian life. The world is anxiously standing by to see just how effective the United States is in handling terrorism inside its own borders as well as in other foreign countries, as its actions (or lack thereof) will forever shape the diplomatic and

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economic policies sustained between itself and other governments around the world. The United States cannot afford to lose this war.

A version of this article previously appeared as a chapter in a book published by: Forest, et. al. (June 2007). Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century [Three Volumes]: International Perspectives. Chapter titled "Guerilla Warfare and Law Enforcement: Combating the 21st Century Terrorist Cell within the United States." Praeger Security International, Chapter 12, pp. 235–252.

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3 Portions of this chapter have appeared previously in Richard J. Hughbank, "Policing America's Streets: How to Fight and Win the War on Terrorism in Anytown, USA," *On Point: A Counter Terrorism Journal for Military and Law Enforcement Professionals*, a multi-installment column that was published in the February 24 through June 2, 2006 issues, available at: *http://www.uscav.com/uscavonpoint/FeatureArticles.aspx?CatID=6510*.

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10 H.H.A. Cooper, "Terrorism: The Problem of Definition Revisited," *The New Era of Terrorism: Selected Readings*, ed. C. Gus Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004): 59.

11 Benjamin Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism: How Democracies can Defeat the International Terrorist Network*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 5.

12 Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, Jr., *Che Guevara: Guerrilla Warfare*, (New York: SR Books, 2004), 52.

13 Nico Armstrong, "Carlos Marighella: Walking a Line between Terrorism and Revolution," *International Studies Review*, 42. This publication noted the impact Marighella's book *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* had on the Baader-Meinhoff Gang.

14 Loveman and Davies, *Che Guevara*, 52.

15 Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 8.

16 For more on the goals and objectives of insurgents, please see the many case studies presented in volume 3 of this publication, particularly those by Thomas A. Marks and Adam Dolnik.

17 Sleeper cells are small groups of individuals that belong to a larger terrorist organization. The cell "sleeps" (lies dormant) inside a population until it decides to act.

18 Daniel Pipes, "God and Mammon: Does Poverty Cause Militant Islam?" *The New Era of Terrorism: Selected Readings* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004): 113–114.

19 Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 7.

20 Loveman and Davies, *Che Guevara*, 51.

21 Ibid., 52.

22 A "fatwa" is a legal pronouncement in Islam, issued by a religious law specialist on a specific issue. Usually a fatwa is issued at the request of an individual or a judge to settle a question where "'fiqh," Islamic jurisprudence, is unclear. Because Islam has no centralized priestly hierarchy, there is no uniform method to determine who can issue a valid fatwa and who cannot and upon whom such fatwas are binding.

23 The text of *Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans* was published in *Al-Quds al-'Arabi* on February 23, 1998. Statement signed by Sheikh Usamah Bin-Muhammad Bin-Ladin; Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of the Jihad Group in Egypt; Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, a leader of the Islamic Group; Sheikh Mir Hamzah, secretary of

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27 Kushner and Davis, *Holy War*, 68–69.

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31 Flynn, *America the Vulnerable*, 111.

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