

Terrorist Recognition Handbook



**A Practitioner's
Manual for
Predicting and
Identifying Terrorist
Activities**

Third Edition



Malcolm W. Nance

 **CRC Press**
Taylor & Francis Group

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For
Lt. Col. Patricia Horoho
US Army Nurse Corps

Recognizing her conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as a combat nurse assigned to the Pentagon during the suicide attack by al-Qaeda terrorists on September 11, 2001. *Hour after hour, she proved an inspiration to all who saw her.*

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The Author



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terrorism, abduction, and hostage survival school from 1997 to 2001. On the morning of 9/11, he witnessed firsthand the attack on the Pentagon and became a rescuer at the crash site. In the response to the September 11 attacks, he trained US Special Operations personnel, operated in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. An internationally recognized expert, author, consultant, and educator on terror insurgency, jihadist tactics, and al-Qaeda global organization, he provides regular commentary for the BBC, CNN, MSNBC, FOX News, and the International Spy Museum. He lives and works between the Middle East and his home in New York.

Part I

Know the Terrorist

Your Mission

Critical Awareness

Criminal investigators spend years studying criminal behavior to better understand and counter crime. The field of terrorism is no different. It is a specialized subject that requires serious study, and requires that those in the front line of defense be as knowledgeable as possible. Today's police officers, security managers, and customs officers have received most of their terrorism education in short briefings, or simply via magazines or television. In the coming years, security professionals may receive more specialized training and education on terrorism—or they may not. This book is intended as a resource for those who realize that they need to begin their own terrorism education today.

The most difficult and critical component of terrorism education is learning how to recognize and predict an attack. Those responsible for homeland security need to be well versed in terrorist attack preincident indicators (TAPIs). TAPIs are behaviors; they are actions terrorists must take before they can carry out an attack. In the law enforcement and intelligence communities, some TAPIs may be referred to as behavioral science or “profiling.” For example, Secret Service teams are trained to watch individuals' behaviors—as well as their race, age, sex, or appearance, which are secondary indicators. The Israeli airline El Al has used this behavior-recognition approach for decades and is generally successful at stopping potential terrorists from skyjacking its airliners.

Until recently the United States has had a much less diligent attitude toward security—and terrorism in particular—than many other countries in the world, but we have since learned. Why even more diligence? First, America is a huge nation with a higher level of domestic freedom than domestic security; and second, the United States is a declared target of future terrorist attacks. The devastation caused on 9/11 may, tragically, only inspire others to continue the trend.

All members of the anti- and counterterrorism community need to seek answers to these questions:

- Who represents a threat?
- What options do those people have for carrying out harm?
- How might they carry out an attack?
- Most importantly, what behaviors can be observed when they are preparing or ready to act?

These questions will eventually lead to observable behaviors and actions of terrorists and their supporters.

For example, if terrorists want to disperse a chemical weapon, they must first acquire and move the chemicals, locate and stock a safe location, select a target and observe it, deploy a delivery team and support it, and create a dispersal system and move it to the target. All of these actions are detectable to the trained observer. Before we can detect terrorist activity, however, we must first change our perceptions about who terrorists might be.

ADOPT AN INTELLIGENCE-BASED APPROACH TO ANTITERRORISM

Understanding and countering terrorism requires adjustment in perspective. Security professionals need to respect and understand terrorists, recognize the preincident indicators of terrorist activities, and competently analyze intelligence information. Even in this day of increasing “lone wolf” operators, terrorist attacks require planning, and planning can lead to red flags and indicators—opportunities to thwart such attacks.

1. One must learn to respect the terrorist’s capabilities:

You don’t have to agree with terrorists in order to recognize their abilities and understand them. Terrorism as a political tool may be abhorrent; however, you need to identify and recognize the grievances of a particular terrorist group and—for lack of a better word—respect the intelligence and tenacity they use to perform terrible deeds. Why were they motivated to take up their cause? How effective are their tactics? If you disregard a demonstrated capability—or dismiss their ability to analyze weak spots and work around them because you think terrorists are inferior, you may create a blind spot in your security. To get an edge on terrorists, you must learn to see the world from behind their mask.

2. Observe street-level behaviors:

Learn the terrorist attack preincident indicators of a terrorist operation in the works. No matter how clever terrorists may be, they're not ghosts. Terrorists and their support personnel must perform certain behaviors in order to carry out their plans. They have specific roles and duties, many of which are observable to the trained eye.

3. Analyze source information:

Basic analysis must be applied to any data or evidence collected by integrating intelligence assets, using computerized analytical programs, or just asking the right questions. Clearly, as we learned in the September 11 attacks, without cross checking the data and applying common sense the analytical process breaks down.

Field officers must make every effort to match the observed or suspected criminal behaviors with terrorist intelligence. Analysis does not have to be a long, drawn-out process. Even the simplest key word associations comparing known intelligence to known capability can find potential TAPIs. Prior to September 11, the words *Osama bin Laden*, *al-Qaeda*, and *pilot training* in the same sentence should have spelled out suicide skyjacking to most people who worked the al-Qaeda mission. All of these words were found in one FBI agent's report prior to the attack. Al-Qaeda's global capabilities, matched with bin Laden's personal animosity toward America and a previous skyjacking for this purpose by a group associated with al-Qaeda (the skyjacking of an Air France airliner by the Algerian GIA [Groupe Islamique Armee] in 1994) should have made even the coolest intelligence analyst spill his coffee and issue a dire warning. Several did just that.

These key steps—respect, observe, and analyze—represent an intelligence-based approach to predicting terrorist actions. With a few exceptions, the intelligence-based approach is surprisingly new to many law enforcement agencies; stereotypes and heavy reliance on technology still dominate our security perspective to a great degree.

AVOID A STEREOTYPE-BASED APPROACH TO ANTITERRORISM

Why do we stereotype terrorists? Let's look at a basic fact: America is new to terrorism. We have a hard time understanding who would

Stereotype-based views of terrorism don't help us fight the threat but blind us to it.

carry out such acts, so, to answer our own questions, we create stereotypes of “the terrorist” in the absence of facts. Some people see terrorists as incompetent cowards who can’t stand up to us; others consider them brilliant but suicidal bogeymen who can’t be stopped. Until September 11, the predominant image of a terrorist in many people’s minds was a cartoon character carrying a big bomb with a lit fuse.

In educating members of the armed forces and law enforcement, I often hear terrorists referred to as “crazy rag-heads” or “camel jockeys.” One senior member of the US House of Representatives, in an oblique reference to al-Qaeda, recommended arresting people with “diapers on their heads.” These attitudes may have contributed to our intelligence community’s focus on finding the stereotypical terrorist while the atypical ones operated with complete impunity within our borders.

Terrorism against America can only be defeated through careful intelligence collection, surveillance, and cooperative efforts among law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

But there is another damaging stereotype at work: that of the current counterterrorism effort. Some inflamed political rhetoric has created an inaccurate stereotype of how fast and effective the “war on terrorism” has been. Americans now believe that we can stop terrorism by sending out our military forces to get terrorists, “dead or alive.” That may be true to some extent, but not entirely. Terrorism cannot be defeated in a grand war. Trying preemptively to hunt down every person in the world who might carry out or participate in an act of terrorism is akin to trying to hunt and catch a few specific ants in Texas: a nearly impossible task.

Terrorism against America can only be defeated through careful intelligence collection, surveillance, cooperative efforts among law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and resolving the root complaints of the terrorist-supporting population. One thing is certain: We may not get every operative, but we can stop key people at critical junctures before an attack occurs. This book will assist you in this effort.

DEFENSIVE ACTION: THE DETECT, DETER, DEFEND (3D) DOCTRINE

Your role in stopping terrorism is to learn how to use the information presented in this manual to see terrorists, make terrorists stop their planning, and/or stop terrorists as they attack. The US government’s force-protection doctrine is based on the “3D” concept of “detect, deter, and defend.” It is a highly effective concept that can be applied to the homeland security community as well.

You, as a professional, will detect the terrorist act in its planning stages through intelligence collection and use the intelligence-based

approach of analysis by taking aggressive action to deter an attack before the terrorists leave their safe house. These are the fundamentals necessary to defend our nation from attack.

But before we can truly use this process, it helps to know a few things about the terrorists themselves.

Who They Are

Identifying Terrorist Operatives

IF YOU KNOW THE TERRORISTS, YOU KNOW THEIR PLANS

Who are terrorists? What is the single most important thing you should know? There are many terrorists, and they come from diverse social and economic backgrounds. However, the most important thing you should consider is this: The intention of the terrorist operative is to use simple but bold, innovative actions to defeat your security and to render high technology useless.

This mode of operations, called “asymmetric warfare” or “technology judo,” is the terrorist’s profession. Terrorist operatives always consider the use of the most appropriate and lowest-end technology, best innovation, and exploiting any limits their target may have. However, these actions can be predicted and observed. Terrorists operate between the cracks of technology and laws, yet they must operate somewhere. They cannot hide in a safe house with the curtains drawn all day. Even that is an observable action that should draw suspicion.

Terrorists do not apply any rules or values to their operations other than what will enable them to gain publicity for their cause and hurt the enemy. If you attempt to get a fix on them with stereotypes of cultural traits, they will adopt the ones you don’t suspect in order to carry out a mission. For example, more than one of the 9/11 skyjackers were seen in US nightclubs. No American would think they were devout religious extremists, given this behavior. In fact, they were using a simple technique to throw off government surveillance. The oldest rule of terrorism is, in effect: “Do whatever it takes.”



FIGURE 2.1 Basque ETA terrorists (left to right): Pikabea Uglade, Turrillas-Aranceta, Santesteban-Goikoetxea, Zabula-Muguirra. (Source: Police Nationale, Ministry of the Interior, Republique de France.)

RULE 1: ANYONE CAN BE A TERRORIST

- To fight them, get inside terrorists' heads and learn their tactics.
- Terrorists do not have the capability to counter conventional military force except on their own terms.
- You must recognize the unusual activities that indicate an attack is planned or is under way.
- Looking for one specific group may blind you to seeing the hundreds of other groups that may gain the expertise and skills equal to a group such as al-Qaeda (Figure 2.1).

WHO ARE TERRORISTS?

It is a generally scandalous notion that terrorists must be treated with anything but contempt. In fact, that is one of the views that blind us. Terrorists must be respected for what they are: determined, ruthless human beings who use death and destruction to meet their goals. If you underestimate them, they will inevitably surprise you. You do not have to like terrorists, but you must respect their capability and their ability to realize their deadly objectives. Here are some key things to know.

Terrorists are:

- Human beings: Terrorists are not automatons as depicted by Hollywood. They are human beings with emotions, feelings, and concerns. These emotions are channeled into lethal action and often bring innocent people within their definition of "enemy." If you ignore them as people, you may witness the horrifying determination of human intelligence.
- Revered within their culture/ideology: What may be an evil, horrific deed to you or me may be a respectful and honorable act to someone else. Don't judge terrorist

actions by Western values, no matter how horrible the acts; ignoring their perspective will blind you to the terrorists' potential for future action. Have professional respect for a foreign culture, a strange philosophy, or a disagreeable ideology and use it to identify ways to predict and stop its acts.

- **Rational in their actions:** Terrorists are rarely insane. They are generally intelligent, clear thinking, and rational. In the heat of an attack, they harness the human ability to overcome obstacles and attack with clarity and with ruthlessness. Westerners who observe this ruthlessness may view it as "insane."
- **Well motivated:** Terrorists use personal motivation to carry out the deadly acts necessary to demonstrate their determination.
- **Mentally justified in their actions:** Terrorists view the necessity of the mission as justifying any act necessary to meet their goals. Murdering women and children, attacking nurseries, or blowing up hundreds or thousands of people can always be justified in the mind of the terrorist. For the terrorist, the end justifies the means.

CLASSIFYING TERRORIST OPERATIVES BY SKILLS LEVEL

The traditional method of categorizing terrorist groups and operatives has been to classify them by their philosophy or region of operations. This is an excellent method for academics, but for anyone involved in detecting, responding to, or analyzing terrorism, there is a more exact method: classifying terrorist groups by their relative level of experience and skillfulness in terrorist activities. The reason that terrorist skills levels matter, now more than ever, is their ability to project these skills past the combined resources of the world's intelligence and homeland defense agencies. The officer on the street, the soldier on patrol, and the intelligence analyst need to know not just who they are dealing with, but also how skillful these people are. Some groups are going to be naturally more adept than others in certain fields, but there is a very clear hierarchy of skills.

Government-trained terrorist organizations are better funded, staffed, and trained than guerrilla or radical revolutionary groups that spontaneously start terrorist attacks. In the same vein, the amateur who is unsupported by anyone may be able to perform a major attack, but still lacks professional skills when compared to guerrillas or revolutionaries. We have classified terrorist groups

The Terrorist Recognition Handbook defines terrorists in the following manner: Any person or group of people who fail in, reject, or are disenfranchised from political, economic, or personal objectives and deliberately choose to use acts of terrorism as a tool of political violence, a method of protest, or effecting change.

SOME FACTS ABOUT TERRORISTS

- Rarely are terrorists insane, though their acts may appear insane.
- Terrorists are human beings who care about their families, ideology, and cultural values.
- Terrorists are usually very well organized when ready to attack.
- They rely on seemingly random acts of violence to inculcate fear.
- They may fail in the attempt but have won when they gain your attention.
- If you know terrorists' options, you can beat them.

Terrorists fear one thing only...not making it out of the safe house to carry out the attack.

from class I—the best supported and most skillful—to class V, the least skillful.

The need to know terrorists' skills is paramount in stopping them. On the street level, the value of this knowledge exceeds almost every other kind of intelligence except their location and strength. Critical questions must be considered before implementing any antiterrorism measures or counterterrorist operations. Critical information may be found in the answers to these questions: Is the terrorist a combat-experienced guerrilla who learned to fire the AK-47 rifle and RPG-7 rocket launcher from 9 years of age? Is he a former American infantry soldier turned antigovernment militiaman who studied *The Anarchist Cookbook* and builds homemade bombs? Is she a member of a foreign intelligence agency with years of special operations skills and weapons training? Is she a logistician with a religious extremist group or a walking bomb? Each answer is going to affect how you deal with these terrorists. You will adjust your tactics according to their skill—not yours.

When the Special Operations Forces face a terrorist threat, the first thing they want to know is the relative combat experience and weapons that a group has in its possession. For the intelligence analyst, the general skills level is the key to the structure, including funding lines, potential weapons procurement, and intelligence collection. Law enforcement officers want to know what terrorists will do when stopped for a speeding ticket. SWAT teams want to know if they have the skills level and fire support to conduct an extremely high-risk warrant arrest.

The higher the skills class is, the less likely will be an occurrence of a dangerous individual encounter before an attack. Higher

skills terrorists want to complete their mission and use intelligence tradecraft to blend and slip in and out of foreign societies. Amateurs are usually hotheads who may “hit the steel” at the first sign of law enforcement.

You can see why we need to change the ways we classify terrorist operatives. The following information is general in scope but will allow you to group threats quickly by relative risk to you and your operations.

CLASS I TERRORIST: THE GOVERNMENT-TRAINED PROFESSIONAL (INCLUDING FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE THREATS)

Intelligence profile: Though government-trained professional terrorists are generally very well trained because of the enormous resources that many nations can put into professionalizing a few agents to carry out terrorist acts, they are becoming a rarer class of operative. As terror-sponsoring regimes such as Iraq, Libya, and Syria were destabilized or fell in the early part of the twenty-first century, other nations, such as North Korea and Iran, became further isolated and their agents’ scope of offensive activity became limited.

Class I terrorists are selected from key party personnel, loyal military members, secret police, and intelligence communities; they are trained to carry out missions with maximum secrecy. Class I terrorists may operate with official cover—as diplomats, support staff, or official representatives in embassies or consulate offices. They may also use nonofficial roles (nonofficial cover), including posing as businesspeople, students, merchants, immigrants, or opposition group volunteers. In the past, terrorists were trained by national intelligence agencies. History shows that the intelligence officers of Chile, East Germany, the Soviet Union, North Vietnam, Cuba, Libya, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea (Figures 2.2 and 2.3) were instrumental in terror operations globally or regionally. These government agents carried out political assassinations, mass murders, and terror abductions; however, more often than not they left the terror business to surrogates by supplying other less skillful terrorist groups with weapons, training, and equipment (Table 2.1).

Typical Profile of a Class I Terrorist

Age: 22–50

Sex: male or female

Education: university; professional intelligence agency educated

Upbringing: middle to upper class; party or political loyalist



FIGURE 2.2 North Korean Intelligence Officer Kim Chun-Hyee killed 115 people when she placed a bomb on a Korean Air airliner. (Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Republic of Korea.)



FIGURES 2.3 Libyan intelligence agents Abdul Basset al-Meghrani (left) and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah (right) were convicted of blowing up Pan Am Flight 103 over Scotland. (Source: FBI.)

TABLE 2.1
Some Organizations That Currently Use Class I Terrorists

| Sponsor Organization | Tactical Organization | Area of Operations |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| North Korean Intelligence | Cabinet General Intelligence Bureau | South Asia |
| Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard | Pasdaran-e Inqilab | International |

Criminal history: no history prior to recruitment
Military history: military special operations soldiers, political party civilians, national intelligence community members
Most common operations: assassination, sophisticated explosive bombings, abduction

CLASS II TERRORIST: THE RELIGIOUS
EXTREMIST PROFESSIONAL

Intelligence profile: Class II terrorists are religious extremists who swear dedication to an extremist cause in their religion and have been channeled into the active cadre of a professional terrorist group. They are civilians who live their lives as professional terrorists. They have no other duty in life but terror. These operatives receive advanced combat skills training, more pay, benefits for their families, and advanced ideological training (Table 2.2 and Figure 2.4).

Typical Class II Terrorist Profile

- Age: 18–45
- Sex: male or female (females may act occasionally as suicide bombers but mainly work in logistics cells)
- Education: diverse, but generally university educated
- Upbringing: all classes; generally a devout religious follower
- Criminal history: often, no criminal background
- Military history: Some have military training and are often trained at local or overseas professional terrorism schools

TABLE 2.2
Organizations That Currently Use Class II Terrorists

| Sponsor Organization | Tactical Organization | Area of Operations |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Iran | Islamic Change Organization | Middle East |
| Al-Qaeda | Haqqani Network | Afghanistan |
| Al-Qaeda | Boko Haram | Nigeria/Central Africa |
| Hezbollah | Islamic Jihad Organization | Middle East, North/ South America |
| Hezbollah | Hamas | Middle East (Israel/Palestine) |
| Hezbollah | Palestinian Islamic Jihad | Middle East |
| Chechen nationalists | Special Purpose Islamic Regiment | Russia, Central Asia |



FIGURE 2.4 Hamas suicide bomber Izz al-Din al Masri. (Source: Israeli Defense Forces.)

Most common operations and experience: sophisticated and advanced improvised explosive bombings; suicide/martyrdom attacks; explosives and firearms assassination; advanced armed raids/light infantry weapons attacks; kidnappings; skyjackings; maritime attacks; infrastructure attacks; rudimentary weapons of mass destruction; cyberattacks

Special Characteristics of the Class II Terrorist

Professionally trained: Many are graduates from professional terrorism schools and are often allowed to design and implement low-level operations. Groups associated with al-Qaeda were trained in Afghanistan, Sudan, Lebanon, Iran, Algeria, Yemen, and even the United States. Secret locations may still exist for advanced courses.

Experienced: Senior operatives have gained operational experience through years of avoiding numerous international police and covert intelligence agencies. For example, groups within Israel have managed to avoid an outstanding counterterrorist force that has arrested or killed dozens of terrorist operatives and detained or deported hundreds of supporters. They still manage to carry out waves of suicide bombings in the heart of Israel. Before being allowed to move up the chain, most operatives must participate in supporting other terrorist operations as junior cell members. Professional-level operators are often tested on battlefields around the world.

Martyrdom/suicide candidates: The most devoted ideological candidates are selected by the terrorist leadership for suicide attack missions in groups such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah. These “martyrdom” operatives and their families are given great stature and respect as the best of the organization and the religion.

Secretive: These are highly secretive and family-like operatives, emphasizing internal security by personally knowing whom they are dealing with and why.

Learn from mistakes: These operatives learn counterterrorist survival lessons from the experiences of teams that have failed or been arrested. When compatriots are arrested, the organization quickly communicates the threat and adapts (Figure 2.5a–e).

“Extra-special” operations: For missions within the United States or near extremely sensitive locations, terrorist organizations generally use clean operatives who have been specially selected. Often, they will have real or cover

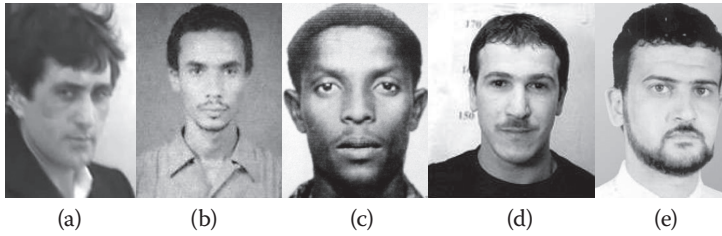


FIGURE 2.5 (a) Umar Mohammed Ali Rezaq, (b) Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, (c) Mustafa Mohammed Fadhil, (d) Abdulmajid Dahoumane, and (e) Anas al Liby. (Source: FBI.)

families, use legal documentation, and may live as “sleepers” for extended periods.

The al-Qaeda Class II Terrorist Operative

The September 11 attack on America has created in our minds an image of terrorists synonymous with al-Qaeda. However, it must be understood that al-Qaeda (AQ) is not one group, but rather a collective of organizations that cooperated and received funds and orders from Osama bin Laden.

Al-Qaeda is the hub of a network of many groups and individuals who are of a like mind. It is an inspirational global organization that motivates individuals to join the proclaimed jihad and become comrades in arms.

Operatives come from almost every country in the world that has a Muslim population. It is believed that members hail from more than 50 countries and operate in over 90. Captured members have been natives or residents of countries including Algeria, Argentina, Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burma, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Paraguay, the Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, United Arab Emirates, the United States, and Uzbekistan—to name a few. Although al-Qaeda originally comprised mostly Arabs, its members come from almost every race.

Al-Qaeda may have approximately two hundred to three hundred active leadership and terrorist operatives worldwide. It should always be presumed that there are at least a few dozen AQ operatives and supporters in the United States at any given time. The numbers of active supporters worldwide are conservatively estimated in the thousands.

Their attacks include the 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New York City; the 1998 bombings of American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; the 2000 bombing of the *USS Cole* in Aden, Yemen; and the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

After the attack by US forces on its base in Afghanistan, AQ immediately began to reconstitute into a broader, less centralized follow-on organization. Its operatives and inspired activists will continue their jihad, possibly in greater numbers than before. They are a formidable enemy but not unbeatable; compared with other terrorist groups, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Hezbollah, AQ thinks big. Spectacular simultaneous attacks are its *modus operandi*. However, al-Qaeda has always relied on simple tactics in executing its attacks.

For the investigative team, it may be a little reassuring to know that al-Qaeda has always left a massive trail of tips and hints despite its emphasis on operations security. Many of the terrorist attack preincident indicators prior to the 9/11 attack were clear and unambiguous to a trained intelligence analyst. It is up to intelligence and law enforcement to find, analyze, and act aggressively on intelligence discovered through investigation.

CLASS III TERRORIST: THE RADICAL REVOLUTIONARY OR QUASI-RELIGIOUS EXTREMIST

Intelligence profile: Radical revolutionaries fit the traditional model of the European and Latin radical revolutionary terrorist of the 1960s and 1970s and popularized by Hollywood. This class of terrorists should be considered a dying breed and is generally harder to find. However, the class III model lays the groundwork for nationalist and religious terror in long-term conflicts. The Kurdish separatists of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq maintain the model. Iranian resistance organizations such as the Mujahideen E’Khalq (MEK), which was once a terrorist group in Iraq and now carries out political opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran, also held to this model. Class III operatives are usually trained inside the group, with some advanced professional training in foreign countries—although such training is becoming increasingly harder to obtain. Such operatives have gained operational experience through years of avoiding police and planning smaller, conducting limited scope but generally successful operations. They learn survival lessons when compatriots are arrested. They also learn to compartmentalize when operational and personal security is critical. Many active groups are radical nationalists, though militarized religious-nationalist groups occasionally make brief comebacks through media-attention grabbing attacks (Table 2.3 and Figures 2.6–2.8).