Preface

Throughout the last four decades, a growing body of research has emerged to analyze (and find ways to thwart) terrorist organizations. A common framework within the study of terrorism suggests that terrorist attacks are the product of two primary elements: motivation and capabilities. A large portion of the scholarly literature in this area has focused on terrorist motivations—particularly the religious ideological motivations of the Islamic Jihadist movement; the ethnonationalist motivations of groups like the Chechens in Russia, the ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna—"Basque Homeland and Liberty") in Spain, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, and the Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan (Kurdish Workers Party, or PKK) in Turkey; and the political motivations of early anarchists in Western Europe, the United States, and Latin America. A number of authors have also studied various aspects of terrorist capabilities, addressing such topics as training, financial networks, state sponsorship, and weapons acquisition. This volume furthers our understanding in both dimensions by exploring how terrorist groups apply the principals of organizational learning to improve their ability to motivate new members, equip them with new skills, and become smarter and more lethal terrorists.

Exploring the transfer of knowledge between individuals and organizations adds an important dimension to our study of the terrorist world. International terrorists have developed a global knowledge network through which tactics and strategies are increasingly shared. Within a particular group, new recruits learn from veteran fighters, while on the global level, organizations learn from each other. For example, there is increasing evidence that al Qaeda has learned new strategies and tactics

from Hizballah, and vice versa. Recent studies suggest various forms of collaboration between terrorist organizations and criminal organizations, including—for example—in the Tri-Border region of South America. Experts from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have discovered that Islamic and non-Islamic terrorists have used the same designs for car bombs in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. And the increasingly widespread availability of information technology has enabled terrorist organizations to share knowledge in new and more effective ways (including websites, user groups, chat rooms, and e-mail). The chapters of this volume thus explore the centrality of learning in the terrorist world, with an overall goal of informing our understanding of—and responses to—the global threat of terrorism.

The volume begins with an introduction to the topic of knowledge transfer, addressing both individual and organizational learning dimensions. Following this introductory chapter, the volume is organized into two sections. Six chapters in the first section provide conceptual overviews and analyses that help us understand the complex nature of knowledge transfer in the terrorist world. Michael Kenney begins this discussion by illustrating how terrorists acquire their skills through training and experience and adapt their practices in response to counter-terrorism, in the process becoming more difficult for governments to destroy. He notes that terrorism is a specialized pursuit, requiring knowledge of light weapons, demolitions, clandestine operations, and a host of related activities. Terrorists learn their violent tradecraft through informal apprenticeships and formal training programs that convey the abstract ideals of extremist ideologies and the concrete techniques of asymmetric warfare, while strengthening their identities as devoted militants and enhancing their capacity to attack enemy soldiers and civilians. Chapter 3, by Horacio Trujillo and Brian Jackson, furthers this discussion by providing an overall definition of organizational learning for the study of terrorism, as well as a model describing stages of learning within terrorist organizations. This approach enables them to develop a typology of terrorist group learning and explore factors that can influence such groups' ability to learn effectively. Their chapter concludes with a discussion of how organizational learning can shed light on terrorist groups' strategic and tactical activities.

The next chapter explores the past, present, and future centers of learning in the terrorist world—places in the physical and digital world where professional training materials and activities enable an individual to become a *bona fide* terrorist. Our understanding of the terrorist world must incorporate the means by which individuals learn the terrorist trade, from professional training manuals and other documented sources of knowl-

Preface   xiii

edge (both in print and on the Internet) to physical locations such as training camps. Gabriel Weimann's chapter examines the terrorists' use of the Internet to provide virtual training camps that provide an online forum for indoctrination as well as the distribution of terrorist manuals, instructions and data. Drawing from an extensive research project (funded by the U.S. Institute of Peace), Weimann discusses how terrorist organizations and their supporters maintain hundreds of websites, exploiting the unregulated, anonymous, and easily accessible nature of the Internet for various purposes. Clearly, it is important for us to become better informed about how terrorists use the Internet, and from this knowledge find better ways to monitor and counter their activities.

The next chapter, by Cindy Combs, explores the important role of the media as a forum for knowledge transfer in the terrorist world. The media have, to varying extents in different cultures, become a tool of modern terrorists, offering a "showcase" through which those carrying out terrorist acts can impress and threaten an audience, recruit and train new members, and support and coordinate an emerging network of followers. In order to better understand the use of the media as a "teaching tool" for terrorism today, Combs examines the symbiotic relationship the exists between terrorists (who seek attention from an audience) and news organizations (which seek dramatic stories to increase their readership and ratings). She concludes that because violent behavior can be "learned," and since "copycat" behavior among individuals and groups is common, the media do play a significant role in modern terrorism, suggesting implications for better media self-regulation.

The first section of the volume concludes with a chapter by Annette Schaper, addressing one of the critical challenges presented by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—the role of knowledge transfer in weaponizing nuclear and radiological technology. The possession, threatened use, or outright use of a nuclear or radiological weapon is desired by some terrorist organizations for two primary purposes: inflicting mass casualties and drawing attention to itself and its goals. This chapter addresses the unique attributes of these weapons and their potential impact, including physical destruction and psychological, social, and economic impact. As the worldwide proliferation of knowledge about these weapons continues to be dynamic and poses increasingly greater risks, this analysis calls for continued and heightened vigilance, particularly regarding the trade in radiological materials on regional and global black markets, and the increasing availability of scientific literature on the Internet.

The second section of the volume offers four case studies on how learning takes place within the context of a terrorist organization. Rohan Gunaratna begins with an analysis of al Qaeda's lose and learn doctrine. In this case, we see a terrorist network that clearly demonstrates the attributes of a

learning organization: a willingness to experiment with new approaches, analyze the results, and develop new strategy and tactics based on those lessons learned. The implications for countering the threat from al Qaeda, as well as for our understanding of other terrorist organizations, are striking. In the next chapter, Kim Cragin explores how the Islamic Resistance Movement (commonly known as Hamas) has learned to adapt to a changing operational environment and Israeli tactics in the Middle East, while maintaining its support networks among Palestinian communities. Her analysis illustrates an often overlooked dimension of knowledge transfer: while terrorism experts often look at organizational learning in the context of technology or tactics, few have explored the role of strategic learning and community involvement in building and sustaining a terrorist group's long-term operational capabilities.

Román Ortiz provides another important study of terrorist learning by exploring the strategic innovations and evolution of FARC (a Colombian guerrilla movement) over the last several decades. His research highlights how clandestine networks for exchanging technology and military information between terrorist groups and criminal organizations have offered FARC critical channels through which they could expand their fighting capability. And Kumar Ramakrishna's case study of Jemaah Islamiyah reviews the historical role of Islam in Indonesia; the influence of training and ideas gathered by JI members participating in the jihad in Afghanistan; the ideological influences from Egypt and elsewhere; and the importance of social developments in Indonesia and the region. His analysis reveals an array of sociocultural and individual psychological dimensions that form the identity of the JI terrorist, and that frame our understanding of how JI rejuvenates its membership. What JI members and leaders "know" (and how this knowledge is produced and transferred among members of the organization) plays a vital role in how JI members see themselves, their groups, the world, and their role in changing the world.

The final chapter of the volume reviews the key themes and conceptual patterns identified throughout the volume and draws connections to the central theme of knowledge transfer in the terrorist world, before offering a handful of suggestions for policymaking and further research. In prosecuting its Global War on Terrorism, the U.S. and its allies face a thinking, adapting enemy. Thus, the more we can learn about terrorist knowledge transfer in the terrorist world, the better we can devise effective counterterrorism initiatives.

In sum, this volume approaches the problem of global terrorism from a central lens of knowledge—specifically, what do we know about knowledge in the terrorist world, and how is it used to maintain a terrorist organization's capacity to carry out its deadly operations? The chapters of

this volume support the notion that terrorist groups are learning organizations: they capture, store, and analyze knowledge—both from their own history as well as from the experiences of other groups—and by doing so are able to develop the means of achieving their goals with increasing sophistication. Our ability to combat the terrorist threat requires a better understanding of how and where these knowledge-based activities take place, before devising ways to disrupt or degrade the terrorists' organizational capabilities.

James JF Forest
September 1, 2005