



Future Terrorism in the United States: Implications for the Armed Forces

Air Command and Staff College

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The 1995 Khobar Towers bombing and recent embassy bombings in Africa once again illustrated the threat faced by Americans, and in particular US military personnel, as a result of terrorist activity. These incidents stimulated renewed attention, literature, and efforts concerning the protection of U.S. persons overseas. Unfortunately, until recently, much less attention has been paid to terrorist threats faced inside the U.S. With a few notable exceptions (World Trade Center, Oklahoma City, etc.), the U.S. has been largely immune from terrorism on its soil. A premise of this research project is that the immunity will end in the future, sooner rather than later. Will USAF personnel be prepared for future terrorism in the U.S. or, as suspected, has the small number of domestic terrorist attacks contributed to less than optimal levels of security awareness? Alertness and security awareness have proven helpful to interdicting terrorist attacks and decreasing the number of casualties when attacks do occur (for example, the actions of an alert Security Policeman are credited with helping decrease fatalities in the Khobar Towers bombing). This project will discuss the issue of security awareness on the part of USAF personnel. Whether it be homegrown extremist “militia” type groups who fear government “repression” or international radical Islamic groups who oppose perceived Western/American decadence and U.S. encroachment in the Islamic world, the threat of terrorism on U.S. soil has increased in recent years. A key to solving a problem is understanding the problem. Thus, this project will attempt to identify and describe the likely sources of terrorism that could impact USAF resources in the U.S. Additionally, ideas will be offered to help raise awareness of USAF personnel and facilitate increased preparedness for future terrorism in the U.S. The key to stimulating and sustaining high levels of security awareness is acceptance by the populace that a problem exists. Programs such as recurring force protection “town meetings,” an enhanced terrorist threat briefing program for CONUS-based US personnel, use of force protection newsletters, and innovative use of the internet, are areas to be explored for helping USAF personnel accept that the threat of terrorism exists and there is a real need for increased awareness.

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