

## WHO THEY ARE: IDENTIFYING TERRORIST OPERATIVES

### If You Know the Terrorists, You Know Their Plans

**W**ho 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 U.S. 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.”

### Rule 1: Anyone Can Be a Terrorist

- To fight them, get inside terrorists’ heads and learn their tactics.
- Terrorists do not have 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.



POLICE NATIONALE, MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR, REPUBLIQUE DE FRANCE

Basque ETA terrorists (left to right): Pikabea Uglade, Turrillas-Aranceta, Santesteban-Goikoetxea, Zabula-Muguirra.

## 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 blinds 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

their 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, 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.

### **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.

### **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 whom they are dealing with but 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 organ-

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

**The Terrorist Recognition Guide 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.**

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 nine 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, the less likely an occurrence of a dangerous individual encounter before they 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 charts are general in scope but will allow you to quickly group threats by relative risk to you and your operations.

### **Class I Terrorist: The Government-Trained Professional (Including Foreign Intelligence Threats)**

Intelligence profile: Government-trained professional terrorists are generally very well trained because of the enormous resources many nations can put into professionalizing a few agents to carry out terrorist acts. 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. Terrorists trained by the foreign intelligence agencies of Chile, Cuba, Libya, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea have conducted assassinations, mass murders, and abductions, and have supplied other less skillful terrorist groups with weapons, training, and equipment.

#### **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.

**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.



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY,  
REPUBLIC OF KOREA

**North Korean Intelligence Officer Kim Chun-Hyee killed 115 people when she placed a bomb on a Korean Air airliner.**

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FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Above, North Korean agents tried to use this mini-sub in 1998 to infiltrate South Korea. Upper left and left, Libyan intelligence agents Abdul Basset al-Meghrani and Lamem Khalifa Fhimah were convicted of blowing up Pan Am Flight 103 over Scotland.

**Some Organizations That Currently Use Class I Terrorists**

Sponsor Organization	Tactical Organization	Area of Operations
North Korean intelligence	Cabinet General Intelligence Bureau	International
Libyan Intelligence Service	External Security Office	Middle East, Africa, Europe
Islamic Revolutionary Guard	Pasdaran-e Inqilab	International



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**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.

## 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.



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Criminal history: Often, no criminal background.

Military history: Some have military training and are often trained at local or overseas professional terrorism schools.

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



ITALIAN MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR, CARABINIERI

Al-Qaeda terrorists may have planned to release hydrogen cyanide under the American Embassy in Rome using this underground tunnel.

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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 familylike 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.

### Organizations That Currently Use Class II Terrorists

Sponsor Organization	Tactical Organization	Area of Operations
Usama bin Laden Org. (UBL)	Al-Qaeda	International
Hezbollah	Islamic Jihad Organization	Middle East, North and South America
Hezbollah	Hamas	Middle East (Israel/Palestine)
Hezbollah	Palestinian Islamic Jihad Organization	Middle East (Israel/Palestine)
FATAH	al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade	Middle East (Israel/Palestine)
UBL	Armed Islamic Group	International
UBL	Egyptian Islamic Jihad	International
None	Special Purpose Islamic Regiment	Russia, Central Asia
Iran	Islamic Change Organization	Middle East

“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 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 a collective of organizations that cooperate and receive 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 with a Muslim population. It is believed that members hail from more than fifty countries and operate in over ninety. 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 was originally comprised of 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



ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES

Above, Hamas suicide bomber Izz al-Din al Masri.

U.S. MARSHALL'S SERVICE

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Saif al Adil



Umar Mohammed Ali  
Rezaq



Fazul Abdullah  
Mohammen



Mustafa Mohammed  
Fadhil



Abdulmajid Dahoumane



Anas al Liby

Trade Center and the Pentagon.

After the attack by U.S. 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 TAPIs 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 is generally harder to find. These 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 operations. They generally learn survival lessons when compatriots are arrested,



Propaganda for radical revolutionary terrorist groups 17th November (left) and the Tamil Tigers.



HELLENIC NATIONAL POLICE, GREECE

### Organizations That Currently Use Class III Terrorists

Sponsor Organization	Tactical Organization	Area of Operations
Sinn Fein	Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)	UK/N. Ireland
None	Real IRA (RIRA)	UK/N. Ireland
None	Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA)	Spain/Europe
None	Red Army Faction (RAF)*	Germany
None	Red Brigade (BR)*	Italy
Libya, Iraq	Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)**	Middle East
PLO	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	Middle East
PLO	Tanzim	Middle East
None	Japanese Red Army (JRA)**	Asia, Middle East
None	Aum Shinrikyo (AUM)*	Asia, Russia
LTTE	Black Tigers	Sri Lanka
PKK	Various	Middle East, Europe
None	November-17**	Greece
Cuba	Andres Castro United Front (FUAC)*	Nicaragua

\*Believed to be defunct, but recently seen active (circa 2003).

\*\*Believed to be defunct.



BUNDESKRIMINALAMT, REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Red Army Faction terrorist Andrea Klump (above) was arrested in Austria in 1999. Her partner, Horst-Ludwig Meyer (below), was killed during an arrest by an Austrian SWAT team.

and operational and personal security is a critical concern. Many active groups are radical nationalists.

- Quasi-religious extremists: Unlike the religious extremist professional (Class II) model, these terrorists have far less skill and capability. They may live a secular life but secretly fight for a religious-based political cause. Irish Republican Army members, for example, are Catholics seeking political reunion with the Catholic south of Ireland against the Protestant loyalists.

### Typical Class III Terrorist Profile

**Age:** 20-50.

**Sex:** Male or female.

**Education:** From no education to university educated.

**Upbringing:** Average to upper-middle-class family background.

**Criminal history:** None or minor criminal involvement prior to recruitment.

**Military history:** Some possible former military.

**Most common operations and experience:** Improvised bombs;



BUNDESKRIMINALAMT, REPUBLIC OF GERMANY



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, GUARDIA CIVIL, GOVERNMENT OF SPAIN

Class III terrorist Leirre Echevarria Simarro of the Basque Separatist and Homeland Movement (ETA).



NATIONAL POLICE AGENCY OF JAPAN

Japanese Red Army terrorist wanted poster.

arson; pistol/sniper assassination; small raids and robberies; kidnappings; tactical operations; rudimentary chemical attacks.

### Class IV Terrorist: Guerrilla/ Mercenary Soldier

**Intelligence profile:** Class IV terrorists are generally the most predictable of terrorists, because they fall back on basic military training and equipment used in military or paramilitary experience. Basic infantry weapons such as the AK-47 and M-16 are preferred weapons in their armed forces and provide the most reliable firepower for their terrorist operations.

- **Guerrilla terrorists** are proficient at general military operations for their country of origin. They occasionally have some urban terrorism experience, but this is limited to bombings, simple assassinations, ambushes, and light infantry weapons assaults. Some countries use very young children as soldiers to conduct surveillance or act as gunmen.



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- **Mercenaries:** Since the 1960s and even more recently in Yugoslavia and Africa, Western mercenaries have conducted terrorist acts. French mercenary Colonel Robert Denard conducted several coups d'état in the Reunion Islands after 1975, for instance, as well as numerous acts of terrorism including summary execution of the former leaders, until the French military intervened and arrested him. South African, British, and American mercenaries have been arrested worldwide while attempting to carry out military operations. In 1981, the well-known mercenary "Mad Mike" Hoare tried to topple the government of the Seychelles. Foreign mercenary groups, like guerrilla soldiers, usually have excellent combat proficiency in general military operations.



POLICE NATIONALE, MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR, REPUBLIQUE DE FRANCE

Mercenary Bob Denard

### Organizations That Currently Use Class IV Terrorists

Sponsor Organization	Tactical Organization	Area of Operations
Hutu Guerrillas	Interahamwe	Africa (DR Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi)
RUF	Various	Africa (Sierra Leone)
FARC	Various	South America (Colombia, Ecuador, Panama)
Cuba	National Liberation Army (ELN)	South America (Colombia)
MILF	Abu Sayyaf Group	Asia (Philippines)
Various	Unita	Africa (Angola)
None	Movement for Social Justice	Africa (Chad)

### Typical Class IV Terrorist Profile

**Age:** 10-50.

**Sex:** Male or female.

**Education:** Little to none.

**Upbringing:** Urban or rural poverty, raised in combat culture; some middle class; upper-class leadership.

**Criminal history:** Minor criminal or none.

**Military history:** Guerrilla army training, some urban terrorist internal training.

**Most common operations:** Improvised explosives and military explosives bombings; weapons and explosives ambushes; weapons and explosives assassinations; armed raids; kidnappings; occasional suicide bombings; hostage barricade.

## Class V Terrorist: Amateur (Civilian, Untrained Criminal, or Militia-Vigilante)

**Intelligence profile:** These groups may have large numbers of people, but they have rudimentary terrorist experience. Many paramilitaries may subcontract themselves to terrorist groups with higher capability and carry out easy tasks such as abductions and assassinations for money. Often these financial arrangements may use ethnic or territorial rhetoric as a “political” mask for moneymaking goals.



RUSSIAN FEDERATION FEDERAL SECURITY SERVICE (FSB)

American militia groups are a low-level variant on paramilitaries. Rarely do they carry out large-scale attacks, such as the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City; for the most part, their acts have been small in scale and limited by law enforcement. This does not mean they could not become a significant threat. Often they will carry out sympathetic, follow-up harassment attacks after major external attacks on America. In the counterterrorism community, there is a saying: “The second attack is almost always an American.”



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### Typical Class V Terrorist Profile

**Age:** 10-65.

**Sex:** Male or female.

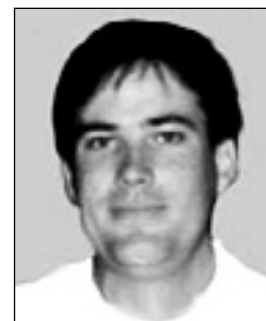
**Education:** Little to none.

**Upbringing:** Urban or rural poverty, raised in criminal and/or combat culture; some middle-class or upper-class leadership.

**Criminal history:** Minor criminal or none.

**Military history:** Guerrilla army training, some urban terrorist internal training.

Timothy McVeigh (above) and Eric Robert Rudolph (below).



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Most common operations: Simple, improvised explosives bombings; kidnappings; suicide bombings; improvised bombs; arson; pistol or sniper assassinations; physical intimidation and maiming; drive-by shootings; small raids and cash robberies; easy kidnappings.

The instigator of the 2001 anthrax attack on the U.S. Senate may have been a Class V terrorist with access to Class I terrorist weapons. This incident remains under investigation.

### Organizations That Currently Use Class V Terrorists

Sponsor Organization	Tactical Organization	Area of Operations
None	AUC	South America (Colombia)
None	Covenant, Sword, Arm of the Lord (CSA)	North America (USA)
None	Earth Liberation Front (ELF)	North America, Europe
None	Army of God	North America (USA)
None	Aryan Nation	North America (USA)
CPM—Nepal	People's War	Indian subcontinent (Nepal)
None	Free Aceh Movement	Asia (Indonesia)
None	Corsican Army (AC)	Europe (France)