Preface

Terrorism—the calculated employment of violence, or the threat of violence by individuals, subnational groups, and state actors to attain political, social, and economic objectives in violation of law, intended to create an overwhelming fear in a target group larger than the victims attacked or threatened—is as old as civilization itself. Yet unlike their historical counterparts, present-day terrorists have introduced into contemporary life a new scale of violence in terms of conventional and unconventional threats and impact. The internationalization and brutalization of modern terrorism make it clear that we have entered into an Age of Super and Cyber Terrorism with its serious implications concerning national, regional, and global security concerns. Perhaps the most significant dangers are those relating to the safety, welfare, and rights of ordinary people; the stability of the state system; the health of economic development; the expansion of democracy; and perhaps even the survival of civilization itself.

The academic community—in recognition of its intellectual obligation as well as its moral and practical responsibility to participate in the international effort to arrest the virus of terrorism—has developed in the past four decades multidisciplinary research initiatives focusing on a broad range of issues related to this challenge. For instance, in the aftermath of the February 26, 1993, bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, the most spectacular foreign terrorist attack in the United States, killing six people and injuring over 1,000 others, the Terrorism Studies Program at The George Washington University organized a research project on the selected Middle East perpetrators. This study grew out of the realization that “if contemporary society is to make terrorism, initiated in the name of supposedly ‘higher’ ideological and political purposes, a less inviting tactical and strategic tool and a more costly weapon to its precipitators and their nation-state supporters, then it is critical to expand our knowledge of the motivations and capabilities of these groups.”

Americans, and the international community in general, have renewed their interest in the terrorism phenomenon with the emergence of Usama bin Laden's *al-Qaida*. This group has been blamed for: the November 13, 1995, car bomb explosion outside the American-operated Saudi National Guard training center in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, killing five Americans and two Indians; the June 25, 1996, car bombing attack at Khobar Towers, a U.S. Air Force housing complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, killing 19 soldiers and wounding hundreds more; and the two August 7, 1998 truck bombings outside the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killing 234 people, 12 of them American, and wounding over 5,000 others. *Al-Qaida* is also suspected of mounting the October 12, 2000, suicide bombing of the USS *Cole*, killing 17 and wounding 39 American sailors in Aden harbor, Yemen. Currently, attention has been focused on the unfolding trial at the Southern District Court of New York of four alleged *al-Qaida* members.

It is against this backdrop that the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies (a consortia of academic institutions in over 30 countries), in collaboration with the International Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, initiated a research project to increase our understanding of *al-Qaida*, one of the most notorious contemporary informal and loose international terrorist networks active in some 55 nations. The purpose of this publication is not to glorify bin Laden nor his group. Rather, it is designed to provide an easily accessible reference for academics, policy makers, the press, and other interested individuals. The study exposes much of *al-Qaida*'s mystique and thereby places it in perspective as one of the many challenges facing the international community in the twenty-first century.

Important contributions were made by a research team, coordinated by James T. Kirkhope of the International Center for Terrorism Studies, and comprised of: Adam Barrer (Tufts University), Allyson Kozal (Georgetown University), Alon Lanir (Johns Hopkins University), Peter H. Leddy (Tulane University), Brian J. Miller (Georgetown University), Vivek C. Narayanan (American University), Yoav Rogovin (University of Minnesota), and Mark E. Williams (American University).

In addition to these researchers, other individuals in the United States and abroad have contributed to this project. We are particularly indebted to
Professor Herbert M. Levine and Dr. Milton Hoenig of the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies and Professor Edgar H. Brenner of the Inter-University Center for Legal Studies (International Law Institute in Washington, D.C) for their review of the manuscript.

Finally, this volume, which represents the first research effort in the Terrorism Library Series of Transnational Publishers, draws on unclassified information generated over the past several years from dozens of international seminars and conferences, numerous interviews, media reports, court cases and field work in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.

Prof. Yonah Alexander  
*Senior Fellow and Director*  
*International Center for Terrorism Studies*  
*Potomac Institute for Policy Studies*

Mr. Michael S. Swetnam  
*President and Chairman of the Board*  
*Potomac Institute for Policy Studies*

February 28, 2001