Preface: A Different Approach

Almost ten years after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, a decade in which terrorism has become the focal point of national-security studies all over the world, it is difficult to find fresh approaches that can yield new insights on the subject. The faculty of the Center for Civil–Military Relations (CCMR), who have been conducting seminars for colleagues and military professionals from more than 130 countries that are dealing with terrorist threats, have developed a new analytical approach that we believe is important to share with a wider audience. We titled this series of seminars “Civil–Military Responses to Terrorism,” a rubric that emphasizes the common ground necessary to stimulate meaningful, collaborative thought. Each nation faces the difficulty of mixing civilian and military instruments in a series of effective strategies aimed at preventing terrorism or managing the consequences of terrorist attacks that cannot be prevented. Working from this premise, we have, since 2002, helped our international colleagues develop insights into what will constitute the most effective approaches to the complex problem of terrorism in their home countries.

The teaching portion of a seminar is only the beginning of the learning process; discussion is the key to developing notions into useful ideas. In order to stimulate fruitful discussion among our diverse participants, we needed to develop content devoid of U.S.-centric explanations and prescriptions. While the U.S. point of view is important to an understanding of global strategy, what our colleagues really needed was a spectrum of concepts and principles
that appear to work in the general case and might be applied successfully in their specific cases. Each government confronts the same basic challenges, but every government manages those challenges according to its own historical, cultural, and political circumstances. Even within the growing family of democratic nations, governments diverge quite a bit in their approaches to similar problems. Indeed, the ability to reform and adapt to ever-changing conditions is the major strength of democracy as a system. Democratic governments do this by tapping into a steady stream of new ideas from both domestic and international sources.

CCMR has positioned itself to be one of the international sources of new ideas that democratic governments can turn to as they confront issues of national security. Fresh, creative, primary-source content; Socratic methods of lively interaction to elicit personal views; case studies of selected government responses and lessons learned; scenario-driven tabletop exercises; and working groups to analyze specific problems are all thrown into the mix. We conduct our seminars and workshops in Monterey, California, but we mostly travel to where they live. We have been pleased to see our participants leave CCMR programs ready to share a wealth of new intellectual capital with colleagues in their own governments and regions.

Manichean-minded Americans tend to search for “school solutions” to ambiguous problems, apply those solutions, and move on to another problem. The complex and enduring problem of terrorism does not lend itself to such linear thinking. The development of effective strategy against terrorism is a continuous exercise in thinking out of the box, measuring effectiveness, and adjusting our approaches. This need for iterative strategizing has inspired policy makers within the U.S. government with the notion that we should help educate members of the global coalition against terrorism, in addition to training them. Whereas training focuses the mind on a specific task, education opens the mind to a more complete understanding of when, where, and how to apply that training. As faculty members of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, we have embraced this role.

There are two broad areas on which to target such education: national strategy and collective regional planning. Governments cannot contain or defeat the near-universal threat of terrorism alone. They must first learn to make the decisions needed to mobilize the tools available to them; then they must learn how to work together against a threat that places whole regions at risk. One without the other will not work. Because the core competency
of CCMR since its inception has been to assist partner governments to make better security decisions, combating terrorism fell naturally within our set of responsibilities. Our mandate has been to help friendly nations build their own capacities and to enable them to assist one another within regional coalitions against terrorism. To achieve these goals, we began working with three distinct types of audience: global, regional, and national.

It soon became clear that we were learning even more than our international colleagues about how governments can respond to terrorism. We kept searching for a textbook to guide the seminars but quickly discovered that there was no book available that presented this kind of dynamic, acquired knowledge. As they say, if you don’t find the book you need, write it. We wrote the book for two purposes. The first is to serve as a textbook in our seminars; the second is to help U.S. government officials develop the best means to help other governments develop the capacity to fight terrorism successfully. It is easy for governments to make terrorism worse through poorly considered or repressive policies; we wanted to give them the strategic tools they need to remove the threat from the minds of their frightened citizens.

It may not be possible to rid the world of terrorism as a tactic for extremists, but democratic governments are obliged to do whatever they can to protect their citizens. The chapters that follow are intended to illuminate the ways in which national governments, sometimes working together and sometimes not, have tackled the challenges of terrorism in all its variations. We have attempted to draw lessons learned and best practices from these efforts, analyze and distill all the information thus gathered, and present it to the reader in a manner that is both engaging and enlightening. We are all students in this ever-changing field of study; wrestling terrorism off the world stage will require us to share our best ideas.