

cliques. They would be less capable of mounting complex, large-scale operations, because they would lack expertise, logistical support, and financial support. Small-scale terrorist operations are difficult to end. But without spectacular successes to sustain their motivation, isolated operators would lose their enthusiasm. And this isolation would reduce terrorism to simple criminality. Winning the media war to label terrorists as criminals is especially important and virtually impossible to do in the face of a strategy based on military force.¹⁶

Working with local police and intelligence agencies is critical. They generally have better training and information to penetrate and disrupt terrorist organizations. They are the primary arm of the government focused on internal security matters.¹⁷ Their mission should be to penetrate and seize terrorists and other criminals—their command structure, members, logistical support, and financial and political support—from the midst of the population. Local police and intelligence know the language, people, culture, and terrain better than U.S. agencies do. To paraphrase a U.S. special forces mantra, this strategy requires working “by, with, and through” local security forces.

Human intelligence is preferable to signal intelligence, since there are limitations to using technological means to monitor al Qaeda movements. One good example is al Qaeda’s courier system. The organization adopted a four-tiered courier system to communicate among key members of the group and minimize detectability. Many al Qaeda leaders have become more cautious in using cell phones, satellite phones, email, and other forms of communication that foreign intelligence services could easily track. The administrative courier network dealt with communication pertaining to the movement of al Qaeda members’ families and other administrative activities. The operational courier network dealt with operational instructions. Where possible, unwitting couriers were substituted for knowledgeable people to minimize detection. The media courier network was used for propaganda. Messages were sent in the form of CDs, videos, and leaflets to television networks, such as al Jazeera. Only al Qaeda’s top leadership, who usually did not pass writ-

¹⁶ Sageman (2004, pp. 175–184).

¹⁷ Trinquier (1964, p. 43); Galula (2005, p. 31).