

terrorist groups. They focus on one case, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), or perhaps a handful of cases in which a terrorist group abandons the use of terror. As with many case studies, a small number of observations can lead to indeterminate results. They do not control for random error, which can make it extremely difficult to determine which of several alternative explanations is the most viable. The value of this study is that it looks at all terrorist groups since 1968. It is more systematic than previous analyses. In our view, the United States cannot conduct an effective long-term counterterrorism campaign against al Qa'ida or other terrorist groups without understanding how terrorist groups end.

This research seeks to fill this gap. It asks, How have terrorist groups ended in the past? What are the implications for dealing with al Qa'ida? As explained in more detail in Chapter Two, terrorist groups can end in several ways. Military or police forces defeat some; some splinter by joining existing terrorist groups or forming new ones; some calculate that they can better achieve their goals through nonviolence; and a few achieve victory. But sorting out how frequently—and how—groups end remains a puzzle.

This research has significant implications for U.S. foreign policy. In a memo to senior U.S. Department of Defense officials, for instance, former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld asked, “Are we winning or losing the Global War on Terror?” It continued,

Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us? Does the US need to fashion a broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists? The US is putting relatively little effort into a long-range plan, but we are putting a great deal of effort into trying to stop terrorists.⁴

⁴ Donald H. Rumsfeld, secretary of defense, “Global War on Terrorism,” memorandum to General Richard B. Myers, Paul Wolfowitz, General Peter Pace, and Douglas J. Feith, October 16, 2003.