

Under most conditions, there are limits to the use of military force against terrorist groups. Most groups are small. Our data showed that nearly two-thirds of all terrorist groups active since 1968 have fewer than 100 members, making it difficult to engage them with large, conventional forces. Military forces may be able to penetrate and garrison an area that terrorist groups frequent and, if well sustained, may temporarily reduce terrorist activity. But once the situation in an area becomes untenable for terrorists, they will simply transfer their activity to another area, and the problem remains unresolved.⁶⁸ Terrorists groups generally fight wars of the weak. Most do not put large, organized forces into the field unless they have become involved in an insurgency.⁶⁹

In addition, military force is usually too blunt an instrument for countering terrorism. Military tools have increased in precision and lethality, especially with the growing use of precision standoff weapons and imagery to monitor terrorist movement. These capabilities may limit the footprint of U.S. or other forces and minimize the costs and risks of sending in military forces to potentially hostile countries.⁷⁰ But even precision weapons have been of marginal use against terrorist groups. For example, the United States launched cruise-missile strikes against facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan in response to the 1998 bombing of U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. But they had no discernible impact on al Qa'ida. The use of massive military power against terrorist groups also runs a significant risk of turning the population against the government.

Military force has been most effective against large insurgent groups. Even in these cases, however, police and intelligence services were critical. An insurgency is an armed conflict that pits the government and national army of an internationally recognized state against one or more armed opposition groups able to mount effective resis-

⁶⁸ Galula (2005, p. 72).

⁶⁹ See, for example, Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.

⁷⁰ Pillar (2001, pp. 97–110); Hoyt (2004).