STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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COMBATTING DOMESTIC TERRORISM: A STRATEGIC APPROACH FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

BY

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ABSTRACT

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This paper will examine the United States' current strategic approach to combatting domestic terrorism and explore potential recommendations for deterring and defeating it in the twenty-first century. In order to reach sound, strategic recommendations for combatting terrorism, the author will begin with some background on terrorism, review the various definitions as defined by the Department of Defense and other agencies, describe the United States' current policies toward combatting terrorism, offer an evaluation of prospective measures in the form of pros and cons, and make seven recommendations for implementation.

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Combatting Domestic Terrorism: A Strategic Approach for the Twenty-First Century

Terrorism in the United States is on the rise. The threat to the American society and way of life is real. The challenges a free and democratic nation must overcome to defeat terrorism are formidable. As the United States and its policies to combat terrorism progress toward the twenty-first century, the level of intensity of the terrorist threat is not only different from place to place, but changes across time. That is, from all indications, the face of terrorism has become less predictable and more dangerous. In this country, terrorist incidents have included bombings of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. in 1983, Mobile Oil corporate headquarters in New York City in 1985, the World Trade Center in New York City in 1993, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, and at Centennial Park, during the 1996 Olympics. Between 1 January 1977 and 1 January 1998 there have been 3,150 recorded incidents of political violence in the United States perpetrated by at least 128 domestic and international terrorist groups. These incidents included murder, bombings, kidnappings, hijackings, sabotage, prison escapes, arson, attacks on police, building takeovers, hostage-taking situations, and robberies of banks, armored cars, gun stores, and explosive storage sites.[1] As a result of its unrivalled military strength, the United States can expect that its potential adversaries will continue to refrain from direct confrontation and will be tempted to use unconventional tools, such as weapons of mass destruction, to target U.S. cities and disrupt the operations of the government.[2] It is clear that attacks on U.S. interests have jumped over the past two years and that terrorism is no longer something that happens in other countries and to other people; terrorism has come to America from overseas and from within its own borders.

Since the United States is a free and democratic government, it is vulnerable to terrorist attacks and the cost will be measured in individual lives. America's vulnerability stems from the many advantages that modern terrorism offers its adherents, i.e., terrorists have an unlimited number of targets from which to choose and may select their targets to determine when, where, and how to attack. As a result, the range of choices gives terrorists a high probability of success with minimum risk. If the attack goes awry, or fails to produce the desired results, the terrorists can deny responsibility.[3] Fortunately, up to now, most terrorist violence has been symbolic, not murderous. This is because terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead.[4] More significantly, terrorists have come to realize that senseless killing is counterproductive in that it doesn't advance any of their political goals; quite the contrary, it diminishes support for their aims. While the threat of terrorism is serious, America can take solace in the fact that the number of actual terrorist incidents perpetrated in the United States are relatively small (from 1988 to 1993 there were 165 terrorist incidents committed in the U.S. compared to a total of 3,371 terrorist attacks committed in the rest of the world during the same time period).[5] However, in light of the United States' recent confrontation with Iraq, there has been widespread concern among political and social scientists that the United States could become the target of increased violence. For this reason, the United States must remain vigilant and understand that the battle against terrorism can be likened to a "fourth world war" and that the threat is truly awesome in its reach and scope. It requires a whole new strategic system to address and cope with this problem. All of our institutions must keep pace with these changes or we are lost.[6] For example, some changes might include gearing up federal agencies to be prepared to handle large scale terrorist attacks, expanding federal laws to give law enforcement officials wider authority to investigate known or suspected terrorists groups, or hardening security around our critical infrastructures to prevent disruption of essential operations of

our economy and government. Indeed, there has been heightened interest in the press and other media to the extent that much has been written and debated over what the United States' approach to domestic terrorism should be. In this paper, I will attempt to explore what America's strategic approach to combatting terrorism should be, if we are to be successful in defeating terrorism. I will first begin with the definitions and components of terrorism, then turn to the United States' current policy toward terrorism, offer a brief examination of some strategic measures for combatting terrorism, and lastly, I will present seven specific recommendations for implementation. But first, in order to grasp what terrorism is, and to build a common framework for its origins, let's turn to some key definitions and components.

DEFINITIONS AND COMPONENTS OF TERRORISM

Defining terrorism has caused political, legal, and military leaders to throw up their hands, metaphorically, in discouragement and dismay.[7] Since terrorism is a political, as well as legal and military issue, its definition in the minds of people has been slow to evolve. As a result, there are literally hundreds of definitions. Although it will never be possible to arrive at a definition of terrorism that suits everyone, it is important to at least start with some basic definitions in order to lay a foundation for examination. Noted political scientist and author Cindy C. Combs defines terrorism as a synthesis of war and theater, a dramatization of the most proscribed kind of violence—that which is perpetrated on innocent victims—played before an audience in the hope of creating a mood of fear for political purposes.[8] As can be seen by this definition, terrorism has a number of crucial components: it is a violent act designed to catch the attention of millions or hundreds of millions of people, and which normally will produce outrage, horror, and fear.

However, the trouble with this definition is that what is described as terrorism by one group may be regarded as heroism by another. Also, the use of terror may not be politically motivated. For example, criminals resort to terrorist-type tactics for personal gain and are not politically motivated. Therefore, the use of terror in itself does not constitute terrorism. Another more precise definition of terrorism might be the use, or threat of use, of violence by an individual or a group, whether acting for or in opposition to established authority, when such action is designed to create extreme anxiety and/or fear-inducing effects in a target group larger than the immediate victims with the purpose of coercing that group into acceding to the political demands of the perpetrators.[9] Other definitions of terrorism exist, but for the purpose of this paper, terrorism will be defined as the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.[10] From this definition, then, an act of terrorism must contain four critical elements: it must display an act of violence, have a political, religious, ideological motive or goal, be perpetrated against innocent people, and be staged before an audience whose reaction of fear and terror is the desired result. It is important to have a working definition of terrorism in mind because all acts of violence are not terrorist acts, however heinous the acts may be (i.e., lunatics on a killing spree, and the lone assassin who tries to kill a despised ruler are not acts of terrorism). Now that I have defined the components of terrorism, I will outline the current administration's policy on terrorism.

POLICIES

Until the 1980s the U.S. government, like most western governments, considered terrorism to be primarily an internal security issue, generally the responsibility of the police. The seizure of the

U.S. Embassy in Tehran and subsequent car and truck bomb attacks on our facilities in Lebanon forced us to reevaluate that position. Current U.S. policy regarding terrorism encompasses acts against Americans at home and abroad. The United States considers all terrorist acts criminal and intolerable and condemns them without regard for their motivation.[11] The current administration's policy on terrorism is summed up in Presidential Decision Directives 62 and 63 (PDD 62 and 63) which state that combatting terrorism is a top national security objective "as it has sought aggressively to track down and punish terrorists worldwide and to fight international crime to the fullest extent of the law."[12] In 1998, President Clinton told the United Nations General Assembly that terrorism knows no boundaries—ethnic nor economic—and that the world body should put the fight against terrorism "at the top" of its agenda. Terrorism is not fading away with the end of the 20th century; it is a grave misconception to see terrorism as only, or even mostly, an American problem. The threat of terrorism is a clear and present danger to tolerant and open societies and innocent people everywhere. No one is immune.[13]

President Clinton is determined that in the coming century, the United States will be capable of deterring and preventing all terrorist acts. The President is also convinced that America must have the ability to limit the damage and manage the consequences should such an attack occur. PDDs 62 and 63 create new and more systematic approaches to fighting the terrorist threat, reinforce the mission of many U.S. agencies charged with roles in defeating terrorism, and codify and clarify their activities in the wide range of U.S. counter-terrorism programs. Further, the PDDs call for a national effort to assure the security of increasingly vulnerable and interconnected infrastructures of the United States (i.e., telecommunications, banking, energy, and other essential government services). The fact that these infrastructures are automated and interlinked make them increasingly vulnerable to equipment failures, human error, weather and other natural causes, and physical and

cyber attacks. In all, PDDs 62 and 63 will help achieve the President's goal of ensuring that the United States meets the threat of terrorism in the 21st century with the same rigor that it has met military threats in this century.

President Clinton has also asked Congress for legislation to strengthen America's ability to combat terrorism. On 24 April 1998, the President signed into law the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. In this bill, Congress included many of the Administration's proposals that give law enforcement officials tough new tools to stop terrorists before they strike, and to bring them to justice if they do. The legislation bans fundraising in the United States that supports terrorist organizations. It also allows U.S. officials to deport terrorists from American soil without being compelled by the terrorists to divulge the source of classified information, and to bar terrorists from entering the United States in the first place. President Clinton is also seeking permission to give law enforcement personnel increased wiretap authority and more liberal use of search warrants in terrorism cases. Some other notable achievements by the Clinton Administration in combatting terrorism include:

* Dogged and effective Justice Department, international, national, and local law enforcement attention culminating in swift arrests following major terrorist incidents in Oklahoma City and at the World Trade Center in New York City;

* Broke up major terrorist attacks in New York City before they could be carried out at the United Nations and in the Holland Tunnel; and against U.S. commercial aircraft in the Pacific;

* Developed an emergency rapid-response plan to deal with chemical and biological terrorism;

* Ordered bombing of an Iraqi military intelligence facility in the wake of a report that an Iraqi terrorist attack was attempted against former President Bush;

* Arrested and brought back to stand trial in the United States terrorists hiding in Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Jordan, and Egypt; and

* Ordered attacks on paramilitary training camps in Afghanistan and a chemical weapons plant in Sudan in reaction to a terrorist attacks by Osama bin Laden.

It is clear from the above that the Clinton Administration has taken aggressive steps to deter and defeat domestic terrorism. But the question remains, is it enough and what more can be done? In the next part of this paper, I will examine other strategic measures that the U.S. might undertake to combat domestic terrorism and provide pros and cons as to their efficacy. Some of the measures described may be contrary to America's democratic way of life, and in some ways threaten the very core of its democratic values. However, difficult decisions must be made if the U.S. is to defeat terrorism, and a reassessment of its legal instruments may be in order. For fighting terrorism is not a policy option; it is a necessity for the survival of our democratic society and our freedoms.[14]

STRATEGIC MEASURES

Based on the Clinton administration's initiatives to combat terrorism, the United States has taken unprecedented steps to develop comprehensive strategies to accomplish its goal of deterring and preventing terrorism. However, as noted above, more must be done if the United States is to be successful in preventing and discouraging domestic terrorism. But first it is necessary to make clear that in order for any measures to be successful, America's leaders must first solicit the understanding, support, and cooperation of the public. No policy can be effective without firm, resolute, and consistent action. In this regard, I am inclined to agree with Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, who said, "the battle against terrorism should be waged relentlessly,

resisting the attempt to glorify or mystify its perpetrators or their cause in any way."[15] However, caution is required, as there is a price to pay for defeating terrorism, one that may be too high for democracies to afford. As Mr. Netanyahu states, "the governments of free societies charged with fighting a rising tide of terrorism are thus faced with a democratic dilemma: if they do not fight terrorism with the means available to them (i.e., more liberal search and seizure laws, unlimited surveillance), they endanger their citizenry; if they do, they appear to endanger the very freedoms which they are charged to protect."[16] What Mr. Netanyahu is alluding to is that the United States government may have to attenuate the constitutional rights of its citizens in order to defeat terrorism. If so, this may be too high a price to pay for its defeat. Intrusive surveillance, increased powers for the police, a greater involvement of the armed forces in internal security, and restrictions on the news media are some of the dangers that may be inherent in defeating terrorism. If Americans are unwilling to sacrifice some of their basic freedoms to defeat terrorism, then what other measures are there from which to choose? At this point, let's look at some of the more accepted options for defeating and deterring terrorism and consider their pros and cons.

1) **Impose sanctions on suppliers of nuclear technology and small arms and munitions to terrorist states.**

PROS: Prevents the proliferation of nuclear technology, fissionable materials, and nuclear scientists to countries with a history of sponsoring and practicing terrorism, in particular, the seven recognized state sponsors of terrorism: Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Syria, Libya, and Sudan. Prevents deployment of nuclear materials against us and reduces the flow of arms to terrorists.

CONS: Further incurs the wrath of those who wish to procure such weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Nuclear technology transactions are difficult to monitor since there is a fine line between

materials needed for peaceful use and those needed for weapons. This action could cause loss of trade and revenues with those countries the U.S. targets by denying trade status. Further, what terrorists can not purchase on the open market, they can procure illegally through the black market. This measure is difficult to impose since the sales of arms are a multi-billion dollar business and everyone wants a piece of the pie.

2) **Impose diplomatic, economic, and military sanctions on the terrorist states themselves.**

PROS: Economic sanctions have proven successful with Libya, Iraq, and South Africa (Libya and Iraq have distanced themselves from outward support of state-sponsored terrorism). Economic pressures are usually successful over the longhaul and can deplete revenues of terrorist states. Sanctions can be effective if they are multi-lateral and have international commitment. Sanctions also send a signal to the target state of the seriousness of their behavior. Lastly, the threat of military action may deter consideration of the use of terrorism.

CONS: Economic sanctions do not work in the short term, if action is needed quickly. Economic sanctions tend only to hurt the population and not the dictators. Sanctions are ineffective if only imposed unilaterally by the United States. Most terrorist states do not receive massive financial assistance from the United States; therefore, this measure may be ineffective. Moreover, it is difficult to coordinate sanctions between countries and virtually impossible to ensure enforcement. Finally, rabid, fanatical terrorists are immune to military threats.

3) **Neutralize terrorist enclaves.**

PROS: Removes breeding grounds for training and housing of terrorists. Removes protection and sanctuary of terrorists and sends a signal to terrorists that reciprocity can be painful.

CONS: Use of military force to neutralize sanctuaries in sovereign states could cause international condemnation, if proof is not unimpeachable; public outrage is a likely result. Requires accurate intelligence sources. Insufficient training, experience, and poor equipment can lead to disaster, such as Operation Eagle's Claw in Iran in 1980. Use of force can lead to loss of innocent lives without precise targeting. Requires considerable resources to develop high quality military capabilities.

4) **Freeze financial assets in the West of terrorist regimes and organizations.**

PROS: Reduces assets used to sponsor terrorism. Sends a strong signal of seriousness to offending countries.

CONS: Did not work against Iran during the hostage crisis. Economic ties are stronger than political ties when large sums of money are involved. Loose laws and lax law enforcement can still allow American and multi-national corporations to conduct business with countries that sponsor terrorism.

5) **Share intelligence.**

PROS: Can be vital in pre-empting terrorist actions. Coordination between intelligence services enables the tracking of terrorists and provides full picture of terrorists and terrorist activities and is the first line of defense against terrorism; alerts countries to known terrorists; early detection can prevent terrorism and save lives if timely and consistent.

CONS: If not carried out within the limits of the law, can be intrusive. There is widespread public concern about government agencies abusing authority and compiling extensive files on

organizations and people who may not be terrorists. Also, there is concern that the information gathered might be used for purposes other than terrorist tracking.

6) **Revise legislation to enable greater surveillance and action against organizations inciting violence.**

PROS: Increases chances of tracking and apprehending terrorists. Permits law enforcement agencies to move against known or suspected terrorist groups. Can prevent terrorist activities and save lives.

CONS: Restricts basic civil liberties guaranteed under the constitution. Can be intrusive and curtail privacy; compromises the free, democratic nature of American society.

7) **Train Special Forces to fight terrorism.**

PROS: Can be effective if used as "preemptive operations" to evacuate or invade a hostile environment; or used as "search and recovery operations" to recover from a hostile country a stolen nuclear weapon or nuclear material which might fall into terrorist hands; or employed as "rescue operations" to extract hostages taken by terrorists where the local government cannot or will not carry out the assault; or finally used as "retaliatory or punitive raids" to attack either terrorist bases or targets in the territory of sponsor states as punishment for a terrorist incident, and to demonstrate such behavior will not be tolerated. Shows that the U.S. is not just a helpless target.

CONS: Success for the above types of operations is low, risky, and likely to incur international condemnation. Such operations raise legal, moral, and political issues. Arguments can be made that retaliation only provokes counter attacks. A policy of retaliation cuts off future options since there is nothing left to try.

8) **Educate the public.**

PROS: Strengthens resistance to terrorism and enlists support and cooperation of public. Fortifies public from giving in to terrorist demands and awakens public to need for security and awareness.

CONS: If the public relations campaign is not done carefully, or is overdone, it may exaggerate the threat or instill an unnecessary sense of fear in public and create the mood of terror the terrorists are seeking to convey.

It is clear from the above that much can be done, and remains to be done, if the United States is to wage a successful war on terrorism. Tough decisions may be required to adopt all or some of the above measures. One thing is certain--terrorism will not disappear of its own accord. Although the measures cited above are sound approaches to combatting terrorism, some measures are more applicable than others and should be implemented as the cornerstone of United States policy to defeat and deter terrorism. In the next section of this paper, I will look at the recommendations that are the most practical to implement in a democratic society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the measures cited above are considered unacceptable options for countering terrorism and may not be compatible in a democratic society. Therefore, it may be prudent to pursue a balance of options that keep in proportion those values that Americans covet. The use of overly aggressive policies that restrict the civil liberties guaranteed to Americans under the constitution might in fact encourage the type of response the U.S. is seeking to avoid. America's leaders must clearly think through their actions to ensure the United States is on the right path legally, morally,

and politically with its fellow community of nations. It can be argued that America's present course of action against terrorism is making significant progress, as the United States is not routinely victimized by terrorist incidents.

The following seven recommendations represent my vision for combatting terrorism in the twenty-first century. In this regard, the first line of defense, and most important recommendation, should be the better use and **sharing of intelligence,** in particular, human intelligence. The United States needs agents in place to identify members of terrorist groups, to learn how terrorists get their money, to discover who provides them with training and support, to track their capabilities, and to pre-empt their plans. Prevention and preparation will be the keys to success, so long as our methods are not overly intrusive and infringe on the civil liberties guaranteed by our constitution. The United States should also establish a domestic counter-terrorism center under the aegis of the FBI to coordinate the U.S. government's counter-terrorism efforts. Such a center is needed to collect, analyze, and disseminate timely information concerning domestic terrorist groups and the activities and immigration status of foreigners who have engaged in or supported terrorism. This would help improve coordination among intelligence agencies, law enforcement authorities, and immigration officials. Instead of being in competition with other nations for intelligence, the United States should seek to establish bilateral agreements with other police, intelligence, and military agencies for the free exchange of information.

America must also **improve its domestic military doctrine and capability** to be able to respond to terrorist situations, if appropriate and legitimate. Also, **keeping the public educated and informed** is critical to any success. The best defense of a democracy is an informed citizenry. For without public support for, and interest in, its policies, both national and international, U.S. policies are doomed to failure. Greater public awareness will make the public accept the various

policies and measures the U.S. decides to follow. In addition, the U.S. government must encourage the public to take a role in identifying and informing on terrorists and terrorist activities. Further, the United States needs to **reform its immigration laws** to improve internal security. Congress should pass legislation that enables U.S. immigration officials to deny visas to foreigners with memberships in terrorist groups. Would be terrorists now are denied entry only if the government can prove they have committed, or intend to commit, terrorist acts. The United States Congress must also ensure there is **sufficient funding** to support the administration's policies. In an environment of constrained resources, any budget cuts aimed at reducing America's strategies to combat terrorism would undermine these initiatives and set back any goals we wish to achieve. Congressional appropriations committees must take care to avoid weakening America's defenses against terrorism—particularly counter-terrorism programs in the intelligence community, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Department's Office of Counter-terrorism, the Defense Department's Special Operations Command, and the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control. Another recommendation not mentioned above which might be worth pursuing is for the U.S. to establish better international **negotiation and consensus building** procedures to bring terrorists to justice. This measure would involve initiating extradition treaties with countries that currently may not recognize U.S. customs and laws. In addition, the U.S. needs to increase **legal cooperation** with other countries to encourage the arrest and extradition of known terrorists to the United States.

Unfortunately there are no simple measures to combat terrorism, nor are there measures without risks. America cannot defeat terrorism alone. The world community must take on the threat of terrorism. As terrorism is not confined to the United States, or to any one country, its extirpation

will require the world's help. But United States' leaders must walk a careful and reasonable path, exercising both restraint and caution, in the just pursuit of their goal to defeat terrorism.

CONCLUSION

While many nations have been the target of terrorism, up until now, the United States has remained relatively unaffected by terrorism in our homeland. But now more than ever, the United States could increasingly become a target and must be prepared for its consequences, as groups from Western Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and religious fundamentalists turn to this method of unconventional warfare. The battlefield will not be jungles or deserts, but cities, airports, and office buildings. The United States will not be fighting an enemy face to face, but rather an invisible antagonist with the deadliest of intentions. The threat will be unlike any the United States has ever encountered.

In order to devise a successful strategy against terrorism, the government needs first to understand the threat. The United States has a good handle on that threat. All that is left then is to develop and implement the means necessary to destroy that threat. Ultimately, the question may not be how nations can eliminate terrorism since it is a centuries old practice, but rather to decide at what point does terrorism become intolerable, and we as a nation, must take steps to defeat it, however unfavorable those steps might be to our own public and the world. As noted columnist and author Harry Summers stated, "the Clinton administration's war on terrorism has one basic problem. As far as the United States is concerned, it's not a war at all. Once war is forced upon us, there is no alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end."[17] Although I do not subscribe to Mr. Summers' premise that we are at war with terrorism, I do, however, believe that we

would be naïve to think we are completely immune from it. The United States will be the target of terrorism for the foreseeable future, as the number of terrorist incidents has increased dramatically in the last two decades. Acts of terrorism have not only grown in sheer numbers of incidents, but also in terms of potential lethality.[18] With the continued proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the number of fatalities can only climb. In view of Iraq's recent loss of face during Operation Desert Fox, the U.S. can expect that Iraq will retaliate through terrorism at some point. United States military personnel will continue to be the targets of terrorists. Although no one can challenge the United States on the conventional battlefield, terrorist acts are certainly going to be the preferred method of expression for the near future.[19] The questions that have to be asked in forming any coherent policy to thwart terrorism are: will terrorism in the future resemble terrorism in the past? Will terrorists escalate their violence? Will terrorists employ weapons of mass destruction? Will terrorists go nuclear? Once the United States has the answers to these questions, it can begin to articulate an effective policy.

Terrorism is no longer an occurrence that only happens "over there." The bombings of the World Trade Center and the Federal Building in Oklahoma signaled the end of American innocence. The threat of terrorism is present, even in our own backyard. Strange as it may seem, it may be the very values we treasure that make us most susceptible to the threat of terrorism. Our beliefs in the freedom of speech, religion, and expression are aimed at protecting our civil liberties. But they have also tied the hands of our law enforcement agencies, making it near impossible to combat this growing threat. To defeat terrorism, the United States must exercise all its instruments of national power—that is, it must employ the right balance of diplomacy, economics, information, and military force.

In the beginning of this discussion, I referred to the formidable challenges the United States must overcome to defeat terrorism. The challenge for the United States will be to devise responses appropriate to the given crisis that will be neither an overreaction nor a violation of our democratic values, for there is a strong temptation to be careless in choosing the right weapons to fight this growing danger. If the United States' campaign against terrorism is to succeed, it must exercise judgement and not rush blindly into measures that may only have short-term popularity. Since America's evident prosperity and open society expose it to potential violence, only a vigilant and constant watch can ensure that the United States and Americans will be protected. To be sure, countering terrorism remains a high priority for the United States, and we are making a determined and impressive effort to combat it. As a result, Americans have every reason to look forward to the next century with great expectations and high hopes.

WORD COUNT = 5402

ENDNOTES

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[2]White House Fact Sheet on Presidential Decision Directives 62 and 63, May 1998

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[4]Cindy C. Combs, Terrorism in the 21st Century (Prentice Hall, 1997), 133.

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