

# Government Response to Terrorism

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## ABSTRACT

Although terrorism is relatively new to the U. S., it has been practiced for centuries around the world. In recent years the subject of terrorism has come under the limelight, but our society has had difficulty comprehending what terrorism is and what terrorism does. In order to better understand the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, I research the history of terrorism, specifically focusing on terrorism in the U.S. In addition, I study the changing response by the U.S. government to terrorism through an examination of U.S. Defense Department's budgets. Although the government has created an entire Federal agency devoted to terrorism, the Department of Homeland Security, identifying other changes is a challenge primarily due to classified information. It is important to understand how the United States Government has responded to terrorism in the past and how it currently responds to terrorism in order to better understand what can be expected in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

The world is constantly evolving and the topic of terrorism is becoming more prevalent. However, terrorism itself is becoming more difficult to define. This is a result of the ever changing and expanding range of acts that can be considered terrorism. Unfortunately, this range is cursed to continue to expand as the methods of terrorism are limited only by one's imagination. A study released in 1988 by the U.S. Army identified 109 different definitions of terrorism.<sup>1</sup> Within the United States Government itself there is discord about the definition of terrorism. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Defense, and Department of Homeland Security have separate definitions of terrorism.<sup>2</sup> Although there is debate over the definition, there tends to be general consensus over a few elements. In essence, an act of terrorism is any act of force or violence committed with the intention of coercing or intimidating a government or society with the aggressor's political or social objectives as motivation.

Terrorism is an evolution of war and is often used in situations where asymmetric capabilities are present. In essence, this means that a small terrorist cell is confronted with a situation in which their opponent is superior, not only in numbers but also in available resources. In such a situation, a frontal assault, or direct confrontation, by a small cell would prove cataclysmic for the cell. If the cell were to engage a military leviathan, such as the United States, in conventional warfare it would be a fatal strategic folly. Thus, it would be advantageous for the terrorist cell to avoid conventional combat and pursue unconventional strategies and tactics. The decision to utilize terrorism is strategic; much in the same way a government decides to deploy ground forces as opposed to pursuing diplomatic efforts. The rationalization behind this strategic decision can be partly explained through Sun Tzu's principles of war:

*If one knows where and when a battle will be fought, his troops can march a thousand li and meet on the field. But if one knows neither the battleground nor the day of the battle, the left will be unable to aid the right and the right will be unable to aid the left, and the van will be unable to support the rear and the rear, the van.<sup>3</sup>*

The tactics used by terrorists have changed through history to utilize the newest technology and sciences. For instance, wireless technology allows a terrorist to be a great distance from the intended target and still be able to strike at the optimal moment. This improved technology is one reason attacks are becoming more efficient, causing increasing amounts of casualties per attack.<sup>4</sup> The toll taken by such attacks is becoming greater on not just the immediate victims but on the society and government.

The continuing advancements in mass media have also played a vital role in advancing terrorism. A goal of terrorists is to gain attention to their cause.<sup>5</sup> With the advances in mass media, terrorists are able to achieve global attention. The minute-by-minute live coverage of a terrorist attack can aid in the terrorists' intentions of causing fear, instability, and change. Watching a plane crash into a building repeatedly serves no practical purpose other than gaining attention, thus ratings. By gaining the attention of the news networks, the networks are indirectly giving terrorists the attention they desire.

In addition to the deaths caused by terrorist attacks, the calculated uncertainty of when the next attack will occur can paralyze the targeted society and its government. An advantage of terrorism is the apparent spontaneity of the attack. This makes it exceptionally difficult for a government or society to prevent such attacks. The resulting fear from an attack is destabilizing and has the potential of toppling even the strongest of governments if not dealt with properly. The funds spent by a government in the efforts to prevent and prepare for future attacks that may or may not manifest will cause the government's ability to respond to actual attacks to steadily deteriorate. It is akin to herding cattle. Through the use of fear, terrorism is able to guide domestic and foreign policies. Fear is an effective tool used to achieve terrorism's ultimate goal of causing change in the current system.

In *Calculating Tragedy: Assessing the Costs of Terrorism*, Luechniger and Stutzer (2004) argue that traditional studies on the costs of terrorism have "neglected" to scrutinize terrorism's impact on utility, which they argue, surpasses economic losses.<sup>6</sup> While past studies have covered the effects of terrorism on tourism, foreign direct investment, savings and consumption, investment, stock markets, foreign trade, urbanization and overall economic development,<sup>7</sup> the authors recommend a new approach for future studies based on utility or "subjective well-being data."<sup>8</sup> An attack would have direct impacts on the economy as well as indirect impacts. Consumer psyche would change as a result of a terrorist attack and this would be reflected through the loss of utility.

### *Responses to Terrorism in the U.S.*

Terrorism has an extensive history, dating back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> Arguably, acts of terrorism have existed in some form since mankind developed a sense of society and discrimination. The word "terrorism" was first documented during the French Revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> America's exposure to terrorism is only recent, relative to the rest of the world. Because of the difficulty in defining terrorism, the first act of terrorism targeting America is debatable. However, a noteworthy surge in terrorism occurred between 1878 and 1914, a time in which Presidents Garfield and McKinley were assassinated, along with numerous civilian targets, by anarchist individuals and groups.<sup>11</sup> The Klu Klux Klan, formed in 1865, as well as other white supremacy groups have been, and continue to be, actively involved in domestic terrorism.<sup>12</sup> Domestic terrorism, committed by one citizen against another, presents just as much a threat as international terrorism. From 1975 through 1997, there were 455 cases of domestic terrorism.<sup>13</sup> Examples of such domestic terrorism include the Oklahoma City Bombing and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

On May 1, 1961, the first U.S. aircraft was hijacked and this incident would be the first sting of contemporary terrorism America would feel.<sup>14</sup> Since that time the U.S. has been plagued by attacks orchestrated by such international terrorist groups as MR-8, Black September, Islamic Jihad, Abu Nidal, FARC, and al Qaeda.<sup>15</sup> In response to foreign and domestic terrorist attacks the United States Government implemented new policies, created new departments, and developed highly specialized counterterrorism military forces to combat terrorism. The 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, affectionately known as Delta Force, was formed in 1977 in response to the rash of terrorist activity against the U.S. in the early 1970's.<sup>16</sup> This group was formed to conduct counterterrorism operations and specialize in hostage recovery and urban warfare. The Department of Homeland Security was a response to the tragic events that unfolded on September 11, 2001. This department was formed to assess America's vulnerabilities and form resolutions to those vulnerabilities.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the Executive Order signed in 1976 by President Ford abolishing Legal Findings, another word for assassinations, was rescinded by President Bush in 2001.<sup>18</sup> This gives our military and other departments and agencies permission to neutralize threats to U.S. interests.

## **RESEARCH PURPOSE**

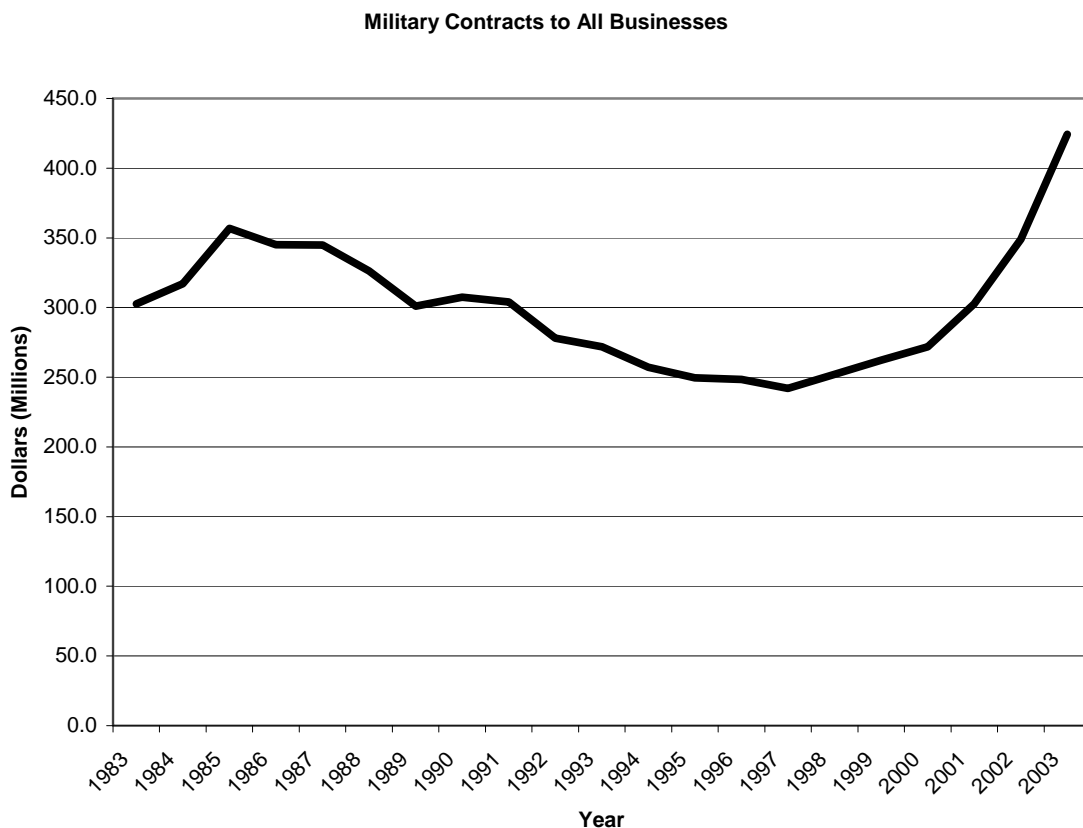
The purpose of this study is to understand how the United States Government has responded to terrorism in the past and how it currently responds to terrorism in order to better understand what can be expected in the future. As seen from the attacks of September 11, 2001 terrorism shakes a country to its core. The rippling caused by such an attack has widespread effects throughout the country. The subsequent events have reached every sector, every level of our local, state, and federal government. No one has been spared from the effects of the legislative, economic, and cultural reaction to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Some countries have dealt with terrorism for centuries; the United States government has only started taking action against terrorism in the 1970's.

As the United States pushes further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is vital to have a better understanding how the federal government reacts to terrorism. It is only through the efficient allocation of America's resources and the implementation of effective policy that America will be able to withstand the trial of terrorism. To analyze the U.S. Government's response to terrorism a database was constructed of 113 significant terrorist incidences that have occurred from 1968 to 2003<sup>19</sup> against the U.S. The sources of the data were the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Census Bureau. The data was organized into the following categories: the type

of target, the type of attack, the number of victims, and the year the incident took place. These categories were further reduced to provide a better account of each incident. A victim was defined as any American civilian or government worker who was injured or killed as a result of the incident. The type of target was determined to consist of either government or civilian targets. The type of attack was broken down into three separate areas. The first, a fatal attack, included any attack, kidnapping, or hijacking that resulted in the death of a victim. The second, a non-fatal attack, included any incident in which there were no fatalities. The third, a kidnapping, included any incident in which a victim was abducted and later released or escaped.

In order to assess the government response to these terrorist attacks, military contracts by type of business, total contracts awarded to all businesses, and the total annual budget of the Department of Defense were included in the data.<sup>20</sup> The contracts by type of business included contracts for major hard goods, aircraft, electronics and communication equipment, ships, tanks, ammunition, weapons, missiles and space systems, contracts to business firms for work inside and outside of the U.S., education and non-profit institutions, and services.<sup>21</sup> The years for this specific data ranged from 1983 to 2003. Total contracts awarded to all businesses are a sum of the previously mentioned. This information is provided for the years 1996 to 2004.<sup>22</sup>

The data is summarized in six figures that follow in this section. Figure 1 shows the aggregate of contracts to all businesses from 1983 to 2003. Figure 2 shows a break down of contracts by business type from 1983 to 2003. Figure 3 shows the Department of Defense annual budget from 1996 to 2004. Figure 4 shows the types of attacks committed yearly from 1968 to 2003. Figure 5 shows the target of terrorism attacks committed annually from 1968 to 2003. Figure 6 shows the aggregate victims per annum from 1968 to 2003 as a result of terrorism.



**Figure 1.** Graph shows military contracts to all businesses from 1983 to 2003. Data collected from U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>23</sup>

Military Contracts by Type

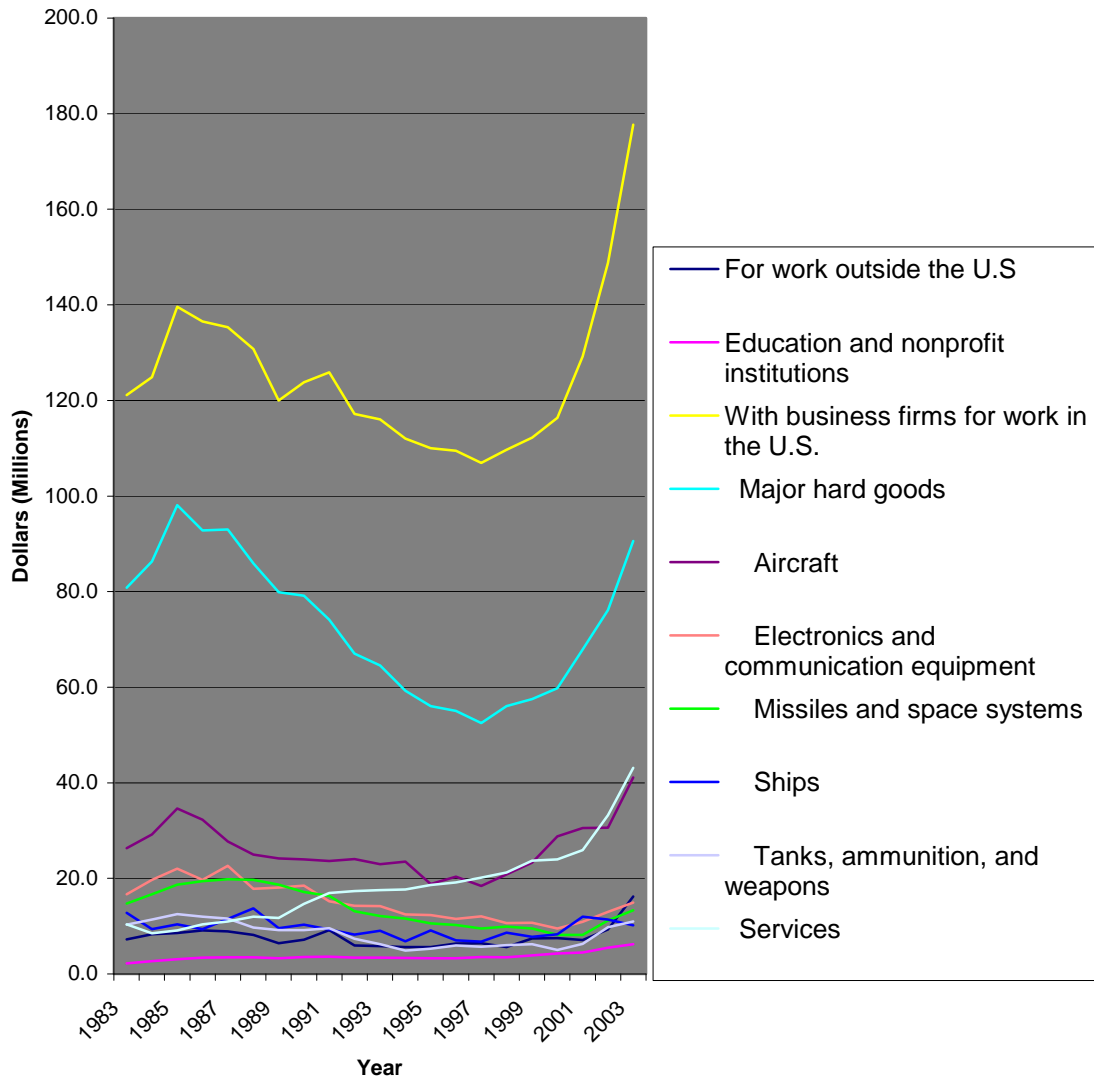
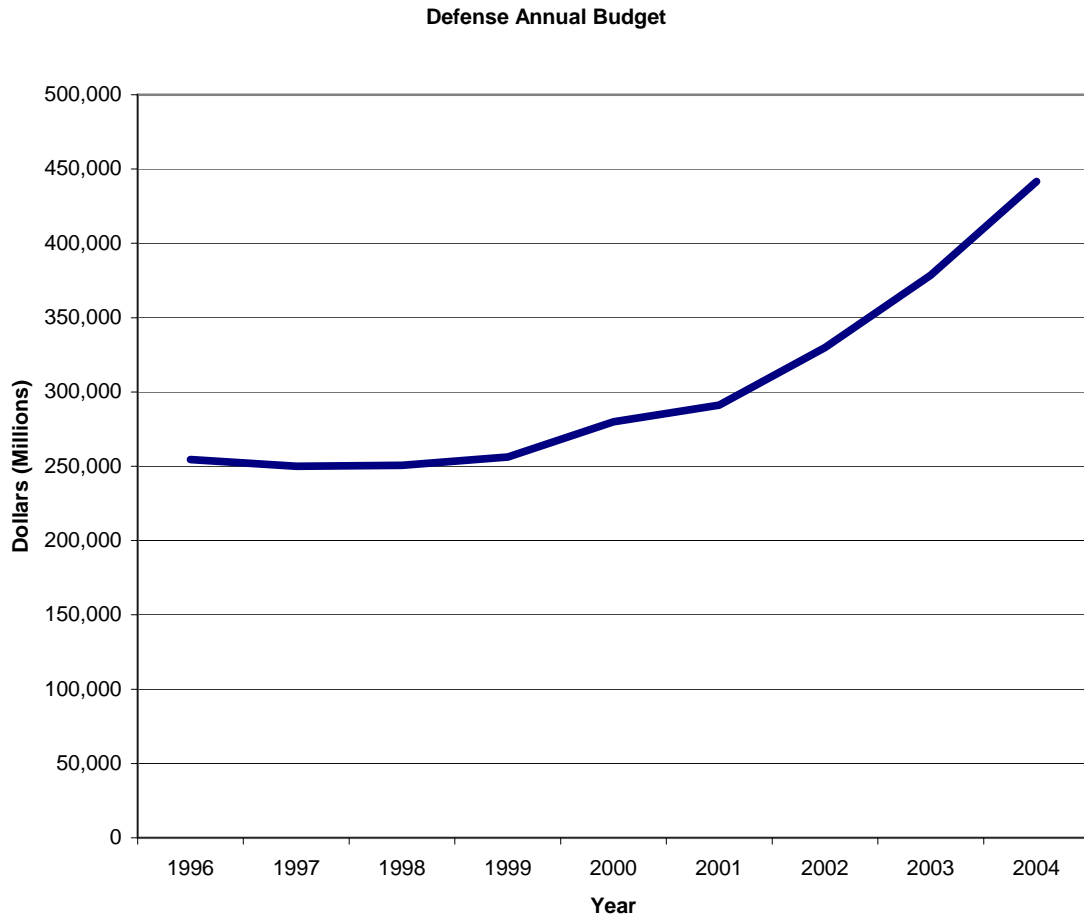


Figure 2. Graph shows military contracts by business type from 1983 to 2003. Data collected from U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 3.** Graph shows the annual defense budget from 1996 to 2004. Data collected from U.S. Department of Defense.<sup>25</sup>

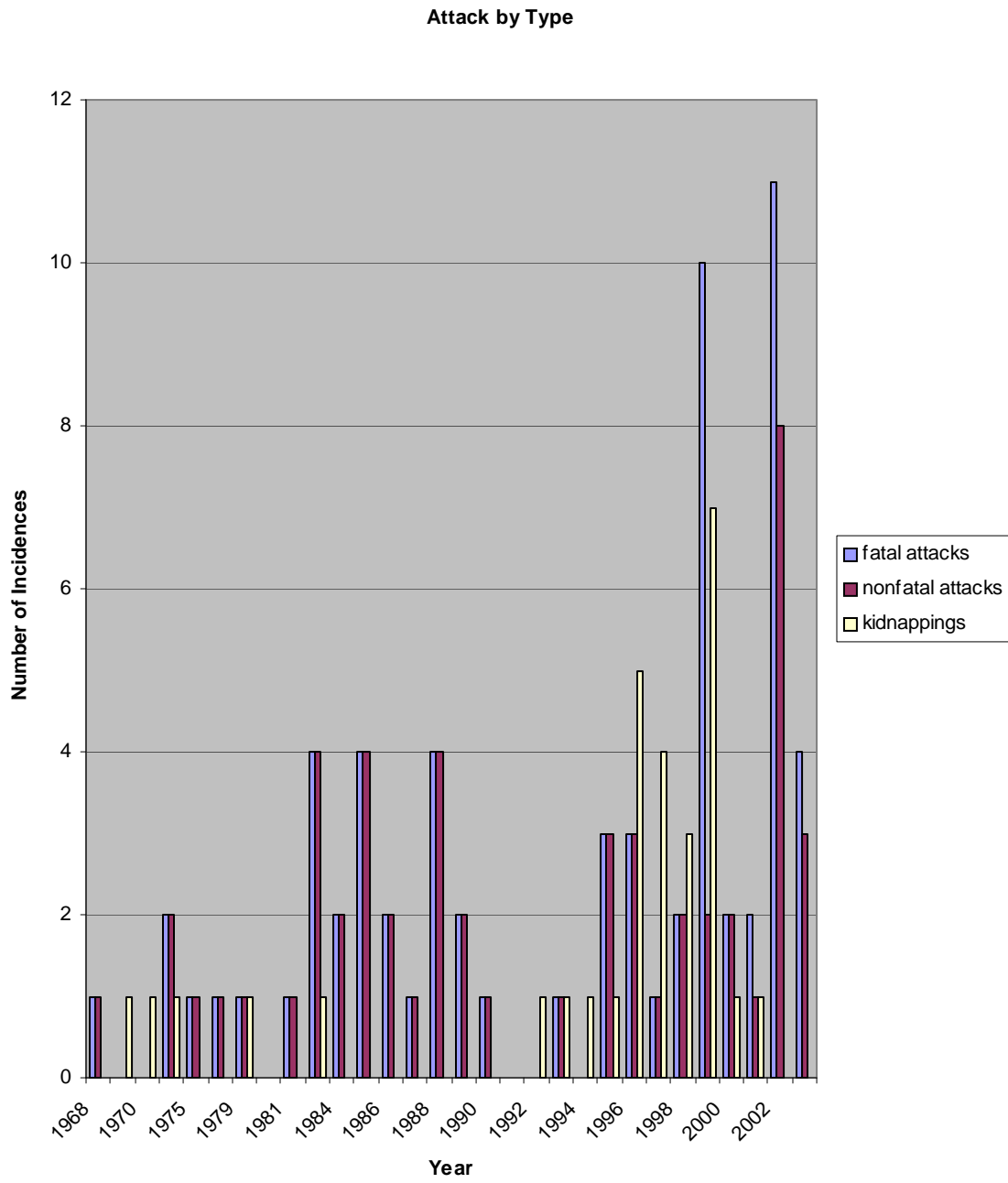


Figure 4. Graph shows terrorist attacks by type from 1968 to 2003. Data collected from U.S. Department of State.<sup>26</sup>

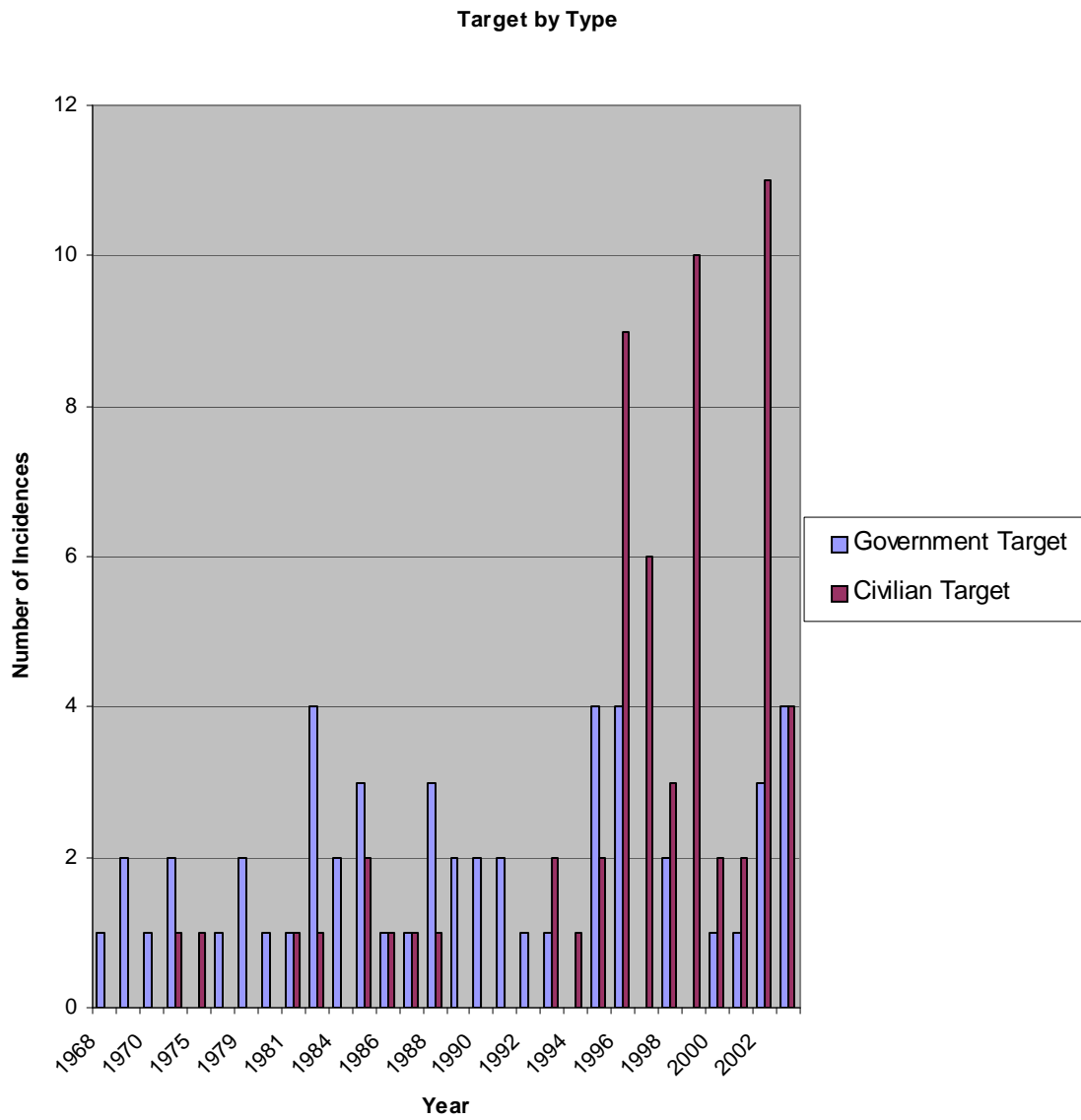
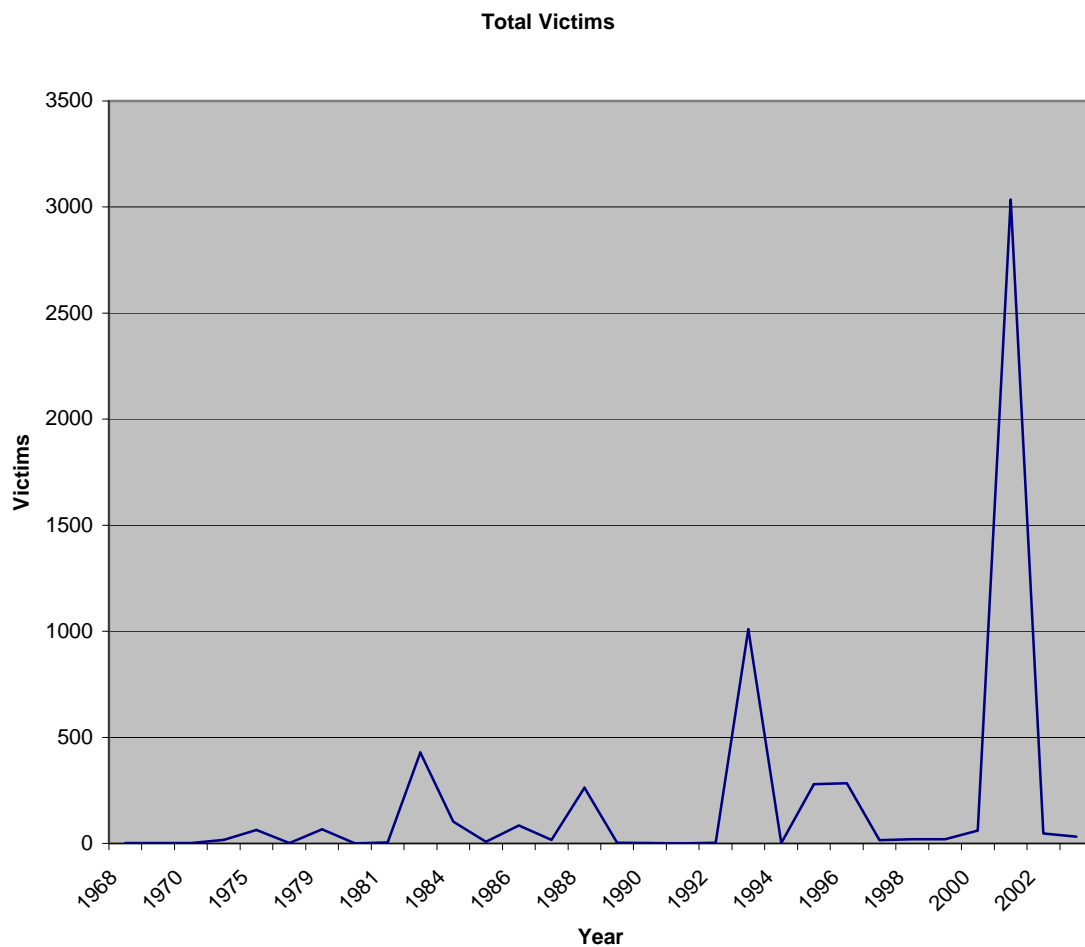


Figure 5. Graph shows targets of terrorist attacks by type from 1968 to 2003. Data collected from U.S. Department of State.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 6.** Graph shows total victims per year caused by terrorist attacks from 1968 to 2003. Data Collected from U.S. Department of State.<sup>28</sup>

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of the information presented above reveals a disturbing trend. Over the last decade there has been an increase of fatal attacks. Equally disturbing is the noticeable shift that has occurred from attacks on government targets towards attacks on civilian targets. Over the last decade the number of attacks on civilians has risen significantly. This indicates a shift in strategy by terrorists. One of the most effective ways of getting a message across to a government is to attack the citizens. In a nation that reveres its democracy, an attack on the citizens is more effective than an attack on the government. The citizens are more likely to act quickly and demand policy changes right away, without thinking about the long-term. Defense contracts have also increased over the last decade after a decrease that lasted about the same length of time. The increase in defense contracts is part of an overall increase in defense spending.

After an analysis of the information it was discovered that no accurate correlation could be realized between acts of terrorism and the U.S. Department of Defense budget. The true government response to terrorism is undeterminable. What we see and hear through the various media outlets and what is released in government documents is only the tip of the iceberg. The United States Government has numerous entities combating terrorism. These entities include, but are certainly not limited to, Delta Force, Navy SEALs, Special Forces, CIA Paramilitary, FBI counter terrorism units, as well as government contractors. The specifics of these entities' operations and budgets are largely classified. For example, while reviewing a funding proposal for the Special Operations community it was realized that the page numbers on the report were not in immediate order: large gaps existed between the pages released in the report.<sup>29</sup> What these groups do is justifiably secretive. Relatively little is released to the public and it is next to impossible to determine where and when these groups have operated.



The same secretive philosophy carries over to the spending on terrorism. Portions are released, such as the funding for assets to be used by the Special Operations Community, but a problem arises in the fact that not all activity by our Special Operations Community is terrorism related.<sup>30</sup> They perform a wide range of responsibilities making it next to impossible to determine what was spent on operations and maintenance and what was spent on terrorism. This is a common problem seen throughout government spending on terrorism. Much of the spending on terrorism is rolled into the budget of an organization that performs a wide range of responsibilities. Until recently the United States policy on terrorism has been informal. For example, the Bush (senior) administration never had a formal policy towards terrorism.<sup>31</sup> Changes in defense spending have largely been a result of individual administration's policy. Though the number of terrorist attacks has increased along with increases in defense contracts, the increase in defense contracts has been part of a general increase in overall defense spending. The lack of formal policy, the classified nature of terrorism, and the subjective nature of terrorism make it impossible to empirically measure the true government response to terrorism through defense spending accurately.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the subjective nature of terrorism, the lack of formal policy, the classified nature of spending on terrorism, and the inability to distinguish spending on terrorism from general operation and maintenance spending, the true government response to terrorism is indeterminable. In fact, what is written and shown in the media is a very small portion of what actually goes on. Though defense spending has increased over the last decade along with the number of terrorist attacks against the United States, this increase has been a part of an overall increase in defense spending.

How to efficiently and effectively combat terrorism is the million-dollar question for the current administration and will continue to be a major concern for generations to come. Combating terrorism is costly, even when done efficiently and effectively. In order to efficiently and effectively combat terrorism the following is recommended:

1. *Set forth basic, permanent, formal terrorism policies:*

Defense spending changes with each new administration and is often politically driven. The protection of American citizens and interests should not suffer as a result of politically motivated changes. By implementing a basic, permanent, formal policy it will decrease the ad hoc responses to terrorism from administration to administration. It will also provide unity through all levels of government concerning terrorism.

2. *Increase funding to the intelligence community:*

Terrorist cells and groups are typically highly mobile, making the acquisition, tracking, and targeting of these groups extremely difficult. In order to combat terrorism we need to know as much about our adversaries as possible. Without accurate intelligence our enemies are able to stay one step ahead. This is both costly and demoralizing to the country.

3. *Implement a combination of antiterrorism and counterterrorism strategies:*<sup>32</sup>

Antiterrorism doesn't necessarily mean the use of force.<sup>33</sup> Propaganda and social programs should be created in those countries that spawn and harbor terrorism. Such programs should target the civilians of those countries and would be run covertly by the Special Operations Community. If a country's stability was to deteriorate, even the most tyrannical government will end at the hands of its citizens and more importantly they will rebuild it. Programs can also be designed to aid those governments who are willing to actively pursue terrorists within their own borders. This will be done through intergovernmental military training. Though these programs will prove beneficial we must tread carefully. It has happened a number of times in last 50 years that the U.S. has performed mentor programs or provided aid to organizations only to have those organizations become problematic later.

Since terrorism continues to adapt to new technology and sciences, we must parallel these adaptations with our own. Counterterrorism groups will need to be constantly updated and created in order to provide the security that is demanded by the American people. These groups will also need to protect American interests worldwide. For instance, as China continues to become more industrialized and its middle class expands, the demand on fuel sources will increase. As a result of the decrease in supply to America, attacks on American oil interests will have amplified effects.

4. *Establish an international counterterrorism agency:*<sup>34</sup>

Terrorism is a global issue and the struggle should not rest solely on the shoulders of a few. The resource burden should be shared amongst countries. The agency will offer a globally diverse outlook on terrorism, which will prove to be more effective.<sup>35</sup> Instead of having a single perspective held globally, it is more

effective to have region specific perspectives that allow for region specific policies to be implemented as opposed to a single policy intended to fit all situations worldwide.<sup>36</sup>

5. *Increase funding to the armed forces Special Operations Community and related areas:*

Over the last century the art of war has changed dramatically. From the merciless pounding of trench warfare as seen in WWI to the frustrating hit and run strategy seen during Vietnam, again America has encountered a milestone in military strategy. Seldom are the conflicts we fight conventional in the traditional sense. We are relying more heavily on our Special Operations Community during conflicts. Like an insurgency, the war against terrorism cannot be won by conventional means. To combat terrorism the right tools are needed. Combating terrorism through conventional means is like trying to fit a square peg through a round hole. The square peg can be wedged into the hole with enough force, but ultimately it will fail to solve the problem. The correct tools are needed, and in the case of a war on terrorism the proper tools are those groups well versed in and capable of unconventional strategies.

## LIMITATIONS

The greatest limitation to this study is the inability to access government data on anti-terrorism. Another limitation that has been indicated before is the subjective nature of terrorism. I reviewed information pertaining to 113 significant acts of terrorism between 1968 and 2003, but who is to say what is significant? There certainly have been many more terrorist attacks that have been carried out against the U.S. than were reviewed. Also the Department of Defense budget has many areas, I looked at a relatively small portion of the budget. For future studies I would suggest looking at other areas such as employment figures. I reviewed but one case of domestic terrorism though there have been 455 incidences from 1975 to 1997, I would suggest future studies focus on the effects of domestic terrorism upon our country.<sup>37</sup>

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