Research

The research of the START center is divided among three thematic working groups:

**Working Group No. 1**

Terrorist Group Formation and Recruitment  
*headed by Arie Kruglanski, University of Maryland*

The guiding assumption of Working Group 1 (WG1) is that terrorism is a tool available to many actors (whether at the state, sub-state, or individual level) who believe using it will advance their objectives. Thus WG1 examines differences between historical and contemporary terrorist organizations, as well as the bases of their potential collision. WG1 focuses research efforts on those terrorist organizations that pose a clear and present danger to the U.S. including al Qaeda and its network of global affiliates.

Projects...

**Working Group No. 2**

Terrorist Group Persistence and Dynamics  
*headed by Clark McCauley, University of Pennsylvania*

Working Group 2's (WG2) interdisciplinary research focuses its efforts on understanding terrorist group dynamics. This requires understanding terrorism as politics. The guiding perspective of WG2 emerges from four observations.

- A terrorist group is only the apex of a much larger pyramid if sympathizers and supporters.

- The base of the pyramid includes all who sympathize with terrorist goals, even though they may disagree with terrorists' attacks on civilians. Higher levels of the pyramid are associated with increasing levels of mobilization, including increased support for unrestricted violence and increased behavioral commitment and risk-taking for terrorist causes.

- Persistence of a terrorist group depends critically on its connection to the larger pyramid for cover, information, money, expertise, supplies and, especially, new recruits to replace losses.

- A terrorist group must compete for the support of the pyramid, not only against more moderate representatives of the cause they claim to forward, but often against one or more competing terrorist groups claiming the same sympathizers.

Projects...

**Working Group No. 3**
Societal Responses to Terrorist Threats and Attacks
headed by Kathleen Tierney, University of Colorado

Working Group 3 (WG3) provides scientifically derived insights on preceptions of, preparations for, responses to, and recovery from terrorist attacks, focusing on the domestic US setting. Investigators mine existing databases and literature to develop timely guidance on what is already known. Concurrently, WG3 conducts original research on issues that are poorly understood: risk perception and communication; household and community preparedness for terrorist attacks; likely behavioral responses by the public to a future terrorist attack; social and psychological vulnerability to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction; and strategies for mitigating negative psychological effects and enhancing resilience in the face of the terror threat. Paralleling activities in the other areas rather than working on stand-alone projects, investigators collaborate on multi-disciplinary team activities.

WG3 activities assume that because a considerable amount is already known about risk communication, public preparedness for crises, and psychological impacts of extreme events, the most pressing need is to synthesize existing research findings in order to provide timely guidance for decision-makers and the public. While new governmental initiatives have set in motion many changes in domestic preparedness activities, there is a lack of a clear understanding of the consequences of these changes in domestic preparedness and vulnerability reduction. WG3 pays special attention on how diverse audiences react to and are affected by threats and preparedness efforts.

Projects...

Within each of these groups, an array of integrated research projects are underway. As projects are completed, START will post to this website reports and findings resulting from the research.