According to the old common wisdom, terrorists want an audience, but not a large number of dead (see Waugh, 1990). The reasoning is that, while attacks can demonstrate the power and commitment of the terrorists, the vulnerabilities of their targets, and the ineffectiveness of government authorities, large numbers of deaths can alienate political support. Grisly pictures of car and suicide bombngs cause television viewers to weigh the objectives of the organizations against those human lives. Now, the old common wisdom itself has been a casualty of evolving terrorist motivations and technologies of war. Since the 1980s, terrorists have shown increasing willingness to kill many people, often innocent bystanders, without regard for the impact on public opinion and potential political support. Bombings of aircraft, public markets, schools, and other gathering places have increased the casualty lists. The general populace, rather than representatives of the state or socioeconomic elitists, has become the target of choice. As a result, the new common wisdom since the 1990s is that terrorists may wish to kill hundreds or thousands or even millions of people and may well have the wherewithal to do it. The shift to mass casualty and mass destruction attacks by some terrorist organizations has increased the potential for disaster and fundamentally changed the nature of the hazard. Moreover, as the scale of the attacks has increased, the psychological and social impacts of terrorism have certainly changed. Individuals and communities often surprisingly adjusted to the relatively localized violence that characterized terrorism during the early decades after World War II. The potential lethality and destructiveness of terrorism today makes it a hazard that cannot be ignored.

There are a number of reasons why terrorists have been willing to kill and/or injure large numbers of people. First, they frequently have their own financial and material sources and are not as dependent on outside support. Financial support from so-called “rogue” states, criminal activities (e.g., robberies, kidnappings, extortion, and drug smuggling), and wealthy benefactors reduces the need for outside fund raising, and thus reduces the need to appeal for broad popular support. Second, groups motivated by religious or political extremism or very broad international goals are less likely to draw support domestically or internationally than those seeking autonomy from central authorities or colonial powers. Many groups have little expectation of or need for broad popular support. Third, access to military weapons from assault rifles to sophisticated explosives, as well as capabilities to build such low-tech weapons as homemade fertilizer and fuel oil bombs, have increased the potential lethality of such groups. Little sophistication is needed to improvise a large explosive device. As a
result, terrorists have created disasters on a scale that has required the same kinds of hazard management, disaster response, and long-term recovery that nations have had to provide for major earthquakes, typhoons, floods, industrial accidents, and other acts of nature and man.

The escalation of the potential lethality of terrorist attacks was evident in the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway in 1994. In both cases, the scale of the disasters could have been much greater had the terrorists’ devices functioned as intended. The attacks were relatively unsophisticated in terms of the technologies involved, but either could have caused hundreds or even thousands of casualties. The escalation of terrorist capabilities was clear in the bombings of the Khobar barracks in 1996, the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the USS Cole in 2000. Those attacks were directed against targets that were assumed to be secure. Since then, the 9/11 attacks in New York and Arlington and bombings in Bali (Indonesia), Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), Istanbul (Turkey), Beslan (Russia), Madrid (Spain), Taba (Egypt), London, Netanya (Israel), and Sharm el Sheik (Egypt) have provided evidence that the risk of terrorist attack is increasing and from several quarters. While none of the attacks involved chemical, biological, or radiological devices or materials (so-called weapons of mass destruction [WMD]), they did involve large numbers of casualties and significant destruction. They also had and continue to have tremendous impact on the nations involved and have raised questions concerning the efficacy of government officials responsible for providing security. Perhaps more importantly, the increasing consequences and frequency of terrorist attacks, the two common measures of risk, have encouraged policymakers to respond. The potential costs of such attacks are so great that preventing them, rather than apprehending terrorists after their violence, has become the focus of government efforts (Heymann, 1998). No leader wants to have a major attack on his or her “watch” because public safety and security is a fundamental responsibility of government. The political costs of failure can be very high. Unfortunately, too little attention has been paid to the need to mitigate the effects of potential attacks, to lessen their physical, economic, and psychological impacts.

For the United States, the deaths of almost 3000 people in the airliners, collapsing towers, and damaged Pentagon on September 11, 2001, have had a profound effect on the nation’s sense of security. The attacks led to the largest reorganization in the U.S. federal government since the creation of the Department of Defense in 1946 when the Department of Homeland Security was created in 2003. Massive investments in security programs have also meant major shifts in federal spending away from social and economic programs. Similarly, the attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 have shaken public confidence in their governments’ capacities to protect residents and visitors and encouraged increased investments in security technologies and programs. The political costs of failure were evident in the aftermath of the rail station bombings in Spain. Spanish officials responded poorly to the bombing, blaming a domestic group, and were voted out of office as a result. Around the world, terrorist violence has precipitated increased security measures to monitor public gathering places, to control national borders, and to protect sensitive facilities (such as airports, ports, and rail stations). The economic and sociopolitical costs of security are growing exponentially with little evident reduction in the risk of attack, although some potential targets are much better protected.

**DISASTER AND TERRORISM**

The association of disaster with terrorism is not new and the scale of recent attacks and the potential for future attacks have certainly focused official and public attention on the