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# Older and Wiser: How Terrorist Leaders' Tenure Influences Tactical Decisions

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## ABSTRACT

Terrorist leaders play a central role in overseeing and executing strategic and operational decisions to advance their group's political goals. One key decision includes what targets should be attacked and how often. While previous research has identified various factors influencing target selection, little attention has been given to how individual-level characteristics shape terrorist leaders' tactical choices. This study examines how a leader's tenure and role in founding a group affect the nature and balance of targets attacked in group operations. Using a global sample of 120 terrorist leaders across 77 groups, longitudinal multi-level models reveal that as a leader's tenure increases, so does their group's attack frequency on both soft and hard targets. Contrary to expectations, groups led by more experienced leaders devote a greater proportion of their attacks to soft targets. Additionally, groups led by founding leaders attack hard targets at significantly lower rates than those led by non-founders. These findings, consistent with organizational science theories, suggest that terrorist organizations may exhibit strategic leadership dynamics similar to those in traditional firms.

## KEYWORDS

Terrorist leaders; target selection; hard targets; soft targets

## Introduction

... we calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy, who would be killed based on the position of the tower. We calculated that the floors that would be hit would be three or four floors ... due to my experience in this field, I was thinking that the fire from the gas in the plane would melt the iron structure of the building and collapse the area where the plane hit and all the floors above it ... We had notification since the previous Thursday that the event would take place on that day. We had finished our work that day and had the radio on. It was 5:30pm our time ... Immediately we heard the news that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. We turned the radio station to the news from Washington.

—Usama bin Laden, December 13, 2001.

In addition to directly linking himself in the strategic planning associated with 9/11, in the same videoed conversation, Usama bin Laden described the operational security associated with the attack, stating that the pilots (e.g., Mohammed Atta) did not know the other terrorists who boarded the plane. Given this level of detail, it makes sense that Usama bin Laden was ultimately held responsible for this and other terrorist attacks on civilian targets in the United States. Notably, this example highlights the growing consensus in terrorism studies: leadership matters.<sup>1</sup> Terrorist leaders have a central role in overseeing and implementing strategic decisions in pursuit of their group's political goals. Furthermore, terrorist leaders contribute to important decisions such as "what specific targets should be attacked, when, and how?".<sup>2</sup> What remains unknown, however, is the degree to which individual-level factors influence terrorist leaders' tactical decisions.

In this study, we examine how terrorist leaders' tenure and role in founding their group influence the nature and balance of targets attacked in group operations. Target selection is a tactical decision that often carries strategic implications. Terrorist organizations do not attack at random but pursue a profile of targets based on an underlying strategic logic.<sup>3</sup> A robust literature demonstrates that several factors, at various levels of analysis, inform this impactful decision. Drawing on agency theory<sup>4</sup> and upper echelons theory<sup>5</sup>—two dominant conceptual frameworks in the study of leadership, management, and applied psychology research—we argue that as terrorist leaders' tenure increases, so too does the frequency in which they orchestrate attacks on hard targets (e.g., police, military). Over time, the vision of terrorist leaders becomes routinized, institutional norms are established, and their principal control solidifies in the group. In turn, when strategically beneficial, senior leaders are able to steer their corps of experienced foot-soldiers to attack hard targets, despite the immediate risks, and away from indiscriminate attacks on soft targets (e.g., civilians). At the same time, we expect that terrorist leaders who found the group they lead attack hard targets at a lower rate relative to subsequent non-founding leaders. This is, in part, because founding an organization is no small task and founders do not want to put themselves or their organization at risk.

We test these arguments using a series of longitudinal hierarchical Poisson models and an international sample of 120 terrorist leaders across 77 terrorist groups active between 1998 and 2012. Our findings suggest that as a terrorist leader's tenure grows so too does their organization's frequency of attacks in general and their propensity for attacks on soft *and* hard targets. That said, experienced terrorist leaders dedicated a higher share of their overall attacks to soft targets over time. Consistent with our expectations, terrorist organizations headed by a founding leader attacked hard targets at a significantly lower rate than groups with non-founder leaders. In keeping with theory drawn from organizational science, these results suggest that terrorist organizations may be subject to many of the same strategic leadership dynamics found in traditional firms.

In the following section, we highlight prior research on terrorist leadership. Next, we present agency theory and upper echelons theory—the conceptual frameworks that guide our analyses. In particular, we assess how these frameworks have been applied to leaders in conventional settings and their utility for explaining target selection among terrorist leaders. Third, we discuss our methodology and findings. We finish by discussing the theoretical and policy implications of our study as well as how our study advances research on terrorist leadership.

## Existing research on terrorist leaders and target selection

Our understanding of terrorist leaders and their effect on group behavior have largely emerged from two primary research streams: (1) studies on terrorist group structure, behavior, and performance; and (2) research on the effects of leadership decapitation on terrorist groups. Our study contributes to the first stream, but insights from both lines of inquiry inform the foundational assumptions of our theoretical argument.

First, research on the organizational structure of terrorist groups have highlighted the roles that terrorist leaders play in their organizations.<sup>6</sup> In general, leaders oversee an inherent command-and-control structure characterized by differentiation between senior members (i.e., leaders) and lower-level members.<sup>7</sup> In these structures, terrorist leaders exert unidirectional influence over group members and serve a central role in making, enforcing, and overseeing operational and strategic decisions much like leaders of conventional organizations.<sup>8</sup> Levels of centralization and command structure vary; while some terrorist leaders' decisions are facilitated through direct operational proximity and interactions with followers, other leaders' influence is dispersed via a top management team (e.g., lieutenants) in an attempt to maintain the operational security requisite of a clandestine groups.<sup>9</sup> Terrorist leaders influence extends beyond immediate contacts to their followers in the rank-and-file.<sup>10</sup> These roles are emphasized across practitioner and academic literature. The U.S. Department of Defense 2006 *National Military Strategy for the War on Terrorism* emphasizes, "Leadership provides the following focus for targeting: strategic vision/motivation; operational

guidance/direction; and tactical direction.”<sup>11</sup> Speaking from an academic perspective, Paul Williams (2016) underscores that, “Like wars, recipes don’t make themselves—there must be cooks, and it is important to know whether one is dealing with a novice or a master chef.”<sup>12</sup> Even terrorists acknowledge the outsized role that leaders play. One Al Qaeda operations manual reads: “Leadership is what unifies, shapes, and executes. Leaders unify in the sense they integrate under one umbrella all the cadres, efforts, capabilities, and experience that the movement possesses.”<sup>13</sup>

Building on this foundation, important theoretical works by Freeman (2014) and Hofmann and Dawson (2014) posit that terrorist leaders have differing degrees of influence or inspiration over followers, which impact the group’s success.<sup>14</sup> Some studies build valuable theories around the leader as a key actor, but do not systematically evaluate the effects of leader level differences.<sup>15</sup> More recently, other terrorism scholars have begun to examine how individual differences between terrorist leaders shape group behavior,<sup>16</sup> structure and networks,<sup>17</sup> and cohesion.<sup>18</sup> For example, Tierney (2015) finds that rebel groups led by its founder are less likely to end conflicts compared to groups with non-founding leaders.<sup>19</sup> More recently, Doctor and colleagues (2023) illustrate that terrorist groups attack more frequently and are more lethal when their leader has combat experience compared to leaders who do not.<sup>20</sup> While much of the previously discussed literature focuses on terrorist leaders from a positional view, it is encouraging to see a growing number of studies adopt a person-centered view emphasizing how differences across individual leader’s shape group outcomes.

Second, a robust body of research has also examined the effects of leadership decapitation on the behaviors and longevity of terrorist groups.<sup>21</sup> This literature demonstrates that leadership decapitation strategies (e.g., arrest or killing of a leader) generally have negative, long-term implications on terrorist groups. While scholars have shown that there are important conditions to consider—such as organizational sophistication and group strategic objectives—the lethality and longevity of terrorist groups diminishes following a leadership decapitation event. In some cases, this is because the group fails to adapt or replicate the departed leaders strategic or tactical decision-making abilities.<sup>22</sup> Again, this body of work underscores a key assumption of the leader-related research stream in terrorism: Leaders can wield independent effects on terrorism-related outcomes that are often observed and measured at the group level. We argue that this also includes target selection in group operations. In the following section, we review the relevant literature.

### ***Terrorist target selection***

The decision of who to attack is an important choice for terrorist leaders. While there are numerous targets for terrorists to choose from, they do not all present the same opportunity, incentives, or risks. Specifically, across the academic, military, and grey literatures, target types tend to be categorized as “soft” or “hard.”<sup>23</sup> Soft targets generally refer to unarmed civilians, members of the general public, and, in some cases, critical infrastructure; hard targets include fortified positions, law enforcement personnel and stations, and military personnel.<sup>24</sup> In general, terrorist groups utilize attacks on both hard and soft targets—although they generally display a relatively preference for one target type.<sup>25</sup> Research indicates that target selection preferences are influenced by multiple factors, including the ideological orientation of the terrorist group, its strategic objectives, operational capabilities, availability of external support, and the nature of its organizational and leadership structure.<sup>26</sup> For example, terrorist groups prioritize striking hard targets in order to weaken the government and demoralize government supporters while avoiding the potential backlash from targeting civilians.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, terrorist groups prioritize attacking soft targets in an effort to garner media attention, spread fear, and undermine the government and their capacity to protect its citizens.<sup>28</sup>

Soft targets are often unguarded and thus offer less operational risk to the attacker during the commission of the act.<sup>29</sup> Pinar Alakoc (2017) finds, for instance, that civilians are appealing targets for terrorist groups because they are easily accessible and vulnerable, lacking the protections that harder targets have, which often come with a higher risk of intervention from security forces.<sup>30</sup> As Polo (2020), Kalyvas (2006), and others point out, the political

calculus of attacking soft targets is not uniform across all groups and these attacks—especially selective operations against social outgroups—can reinforce group goals and cohesion.<sup>31</sup> This includes both lethal and non-lethal forms of violence, such as conflict related sexual violence.<sup>32</sup> There is a strategic tension in targeting soft targets; while operationally more feasible, they can decrease public support for the terrorist groups since they target the vulnerable.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, many terrorist groups are wary of blowback from attacks that harm the image that they have built for public audiences and their supporters.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, hard targets are well protected and/or have the capacity to “fight back.” In turn, attacks on hard targets are not only operationally risky for the attacker but also costly for the terrorist group in terms of planning, coordination, and equipment.<sup>35</sup> When successful, attacks on hard targets are advantageous since it maximizes the direct damage to the enemy, “occupying forces,” other elements of the State.<sup>36</sup> Militants balance a natural tension between forceful coercion and engendering local support. By showcasing employable kinetic capabilities through demonstrable damage on a hard target, terrorists may intend to either compel the enemy to allocate its personnel and resources differently or—if particularly destructive—may deter them from holding the attacked target space altogether.<sup>37</sup> This also may be used by terrorist leaders to bolster the legitimacy that local communities confer upon their forces as they signal a potential ability to contest, hold, or even defend physical space—typically the sole responsibility and competency of a state regime. This logic is supported by the fact that terrorists are generally more likely to claim attacks against hard targets.<sup>38</sup> Relatedly, successful attacks on hard targets are found to enhance a terrorist group’s reputation. For example, Al-Shabaab successfully attacked joint US– Kenya military base Camp Simba at Manda Bay in January 2020. Commander of U.S. Africa Command General Stephen Townsend reported that the attack “inflicted casualties and destroyed seven contracted light aircraft and other property.” Three Americans were killed in the operation, a fact that Al-Shabaab exploited in subsequent propaganda efforts.<sup>39</sup>

To date, most research examining terrorist group decision-making in the context of target selection have focused on factors, such as the group’s ideology, constituency, size, external supports, or age. For example, Alakoc and Johnson (2024) argue that groups which invest in building a positive reputation in the eyes of their intended constituents are inclined toward concentrating a larger number of their attacks on hard targets.<sup>40</sup> Research by Polo (2020) and Fortna (2015) indicates that group operational capabilities matter but are not associated with consistent or unidirectional effects on target selection decisions, underscoring the complexity of this process.<sup>41</sup>

What remains unknown is the degree to which individual-level factors influence terrorist leaders’ targeting decisions. More specifically, to what degree does leadership tenure and the role of founding the group influence terrorist leaders’ decision of who to attack? To address this question, we utilize an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from both agency theory and upper echelons theory. By incorporating leadership theory from the organizational science literature and considering the parallels that can be drawn between terrorist groups and traditional organizations, of which there are several,<sup>42</sup> we may expand our capacity to predict and explain the impetus for terrorist group activity.

## Integrating insights from agency theory and upper echelons theory

The question of target selection among terrorist leaders can be viewed in parallel to those regarding how CEOs and other top managers make and implement decisions over operational strategies, particularly those which carry the potential for significant risk. Agency theory suggests that organizational risk taking is heavily influenced by the governance structure of the firm, which includes managers or leaders (principles) and organizational stakeholders (agents).<sup>43</sup> Principles and agents have different incentives with respect to organizational pursuits. Managers have an incentive to mitigate risks as much as possible so to avoid negative repercussions but often suffer from the pressures of firm agents who expect to see return on investments and organizational performance that may require risk taking.<sup>44</sup> As a result, top managers often engage in greater risk taking when they are subject to and unable to divert increased agent-related pressures.

In traditional organizations such pressure can be applied from a variety of sources, such as zealous boards of directors, activist investors, or high-value risk incentives and performance-related executive bonuses.<sup>45</sup> Non-traditional organizations, such as terrorist groups, have different but functionally similar avenues for pressure including internal challengers, the morale of the fighting force, the espoused political or social aspirations of the group, community constituencies, and reputational expectations. Further, in terrorist groups the “return on investment” that is expected by agents (e.g., group members, funders, political affiliates) could be categorized as operational success; supporters of these groups expect to see their mission being executed in a way that appears effective in furthering their political and military aims. Much like traditional managers, under an agency theory paradigm we would expect that group-level pressures would constrain the decision-making agency of terrorist leaders toward strategies that are most amenable to group acceptance, irrespective of whether the leader believes them to be strategically valid. This creates a tension between leaders and their organization in which the route to longer-term leader influence, and eventual executive agency, requires abdicating decision-making power to the desires of the collective in the short term.

These agency conflicts can be mitigated, however, by increased operational discretion for leaders. Upper echelons theory clarifies that contextual, organizational, and individual differences which increase the unilateral authority of leaders subvert the influence of principle-agent dynamics.<sup>46</sup> One example of this is the issue of executive “duality,” wherein the CEO is also the chairperson of the board of directors.<sup>47</sup> Duality grants significantly greater managerial discretion to CEOs, allowing them to ignore the pressures applied by external agents and behave in a manner that is more aligned to their personal tolerance for risk.<sup>48</sup> Executive tenure also increases such discretion, as more seasoned organizational leaders develop both self-efficacy and institutional capital which allow them to resist external pressures.<sup>49</sup> Long-tenured executives may use this increased discretion to mitigate the potential for criticism of their operational strategy, increasing the likelihood that their methods become “stale” and obsolete due to a tendency toward risk aversion and complacency.<sup>50</sup> However, leader tenure can also reflect firm and environmental stability, with research demonstrating that firms led by long-tenured executives continually improve their performance provided that the competitive environment does not require rapid, paradigm-shifting innovation.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, organizations helmed by long-tenured leaders may be more calculated in their approach to strategy revision, leveraging their expertise and resources toward initiatives that are maximally impactful rather than easily executed.

Translation of these theories to the context of terrorism requires two assumptions. First, that terror groups operate under institutional, social, and psychological dynamics that are like traditional firms, a view which has been suggested by both terrorism scholars and organizational scientists.<sup>52</sup> Second and relatedly, that there are parallels between how the leaders of terror groups and traditional CEOs or senior managers think about strategy and the long-term pursuit of organizational objectives. The application of agency theory and upper echelons theory to terrorist organizations suggests that leader discretion, shaped by tenure and governance dynamics, plays a crucial role in determining strategic decision-making. As tenure increases, terrorist leaders accumulate operational experience, build credibility within the organization, and strengthen their autonomy from internal challengers or external pressures. This increased authority enables them to steer their group’s tactics in accordance with their strategic vision rather than being swayed by immediate pressures for demonstrable success or radical action.

In the context of target selection, risk-taking behavior is a particularly relevant dimension of strategic decision-making. Hard targets—such as military installations, government buildings, or fortified infrastructure—pose significant operational challenges, including heightened security measures and the likelihood of strong defensive responses. However, they also offer potentially higher payoffs in terms of organizational legitimacy, propaganda value, and long-term strategic positioning. Targeting hard assets is one way by which militants can signal resolve and cost acceptance given the material and reputational risks involved. In order to create a viable alternative to the state and acquire the requisite legitimacy by local audiences, terrorist forces must be able to threaten and provide security with a level of credibility.<sup>53</sup> Polo and González (2020) argue that groups with low coercive



power and at risk of popular backlash need to ensure that terrorism imposes costs on the government without hurting popular support for their cause—hard targets provide a desirable solution to this dilemma.<sup>54</sup> We argue that longer-tenured leaders—having crossed the “minimally viable” threshold of survival—place a relatively large premium on the value of those legitimacy gains.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, soft targets—such as civilian areas, markets, or public transportation—are more accessible and often result in immediate casualties but may carry less strategic significance in terms of organizational prestige and military impact.

Given the theoretical foundation discussed, long-tenured leaders are expected to move away from immediate, opportunistic risk-taking behavior driven by external pressures and instead adopt a more calculated approach to attack selection. Rather than focusing on the frequency of attacks or short-term visible success, they are likely to emphasize strategic gains that enhance the organization’s legitimacy, durability, and influence. This suggests a shift in tactical preferences: while early-tenured leaders may resort to high-frequency, lower-risk attacks on soft targets to demonstrate activity and maintain internal support, longer-tenured leaders may instead prioritize harder, higher-value targets that align with a more deliberate long-term strategy.

Therefore, we present the following testable hypotheses.

H<sub>1</sub>: As terrorist leaders’ tenure increases, they orchestrate their group to perpetrate a higher number of terrorist attacks on hard targets.

H<sub>2</sub>: As terrorist leaders’ tenure increases, they orchestrate their group to perpetrate a lower number of terrorist attacks on soft targets.

Research in organizational theory and applied psychology has firmly established the importance of leadership as an organizational process.<sup>56</sup> Far from being a mere positional or hierarchical dynamic, wherein the “rank” of leader is ceremonial and interchangeable, the personal characteristics of individual leaders and their alignment to situational needs are known to meaningfully contribute to organizational performance.<sup>57</sup> Due to the leader’s role in setting organizational strategy and direction, monitoring performance, and managing institutional risk, the within-person and within-role variables which influence those processes are important factors to consider in any organizational analysis.

An additional consideration in this discussion is how agency and managerial discretion issues are affected by whether the leader is also an organizational founder. Founders are not always top organizational executives, despite their obvious role in organizational formation, and vice versa. However, when founders do hold executive roles their behavior and motivations are often quite different than agent-appointed executives, including their propensity for risk. Whereas agent-appointed CEOs are typically risk averse, founder CEOs have a higher baseline propensity for risk due to the risk-reward incentives that come with having an ownership stake in the firm.<sup>58</sup> This differs, however, in organizations where management is orchestrated by a heterogenous, oligarchic, and socially connected group. In many cases these organizations are operated by members of the same family, hence the term “family firm,” or some other social group which aligns individuals to each other for reasons other than the organization itself (e.g., religious groups; political parties). Family firms are significantly more risk averse in their strategy than non-family firms,<sup>59</sup> and firm leadership is naturally imbued with substantial managerial discretion.<sup>60</sup> Thus, it would be expected that founding leaders in family firms will exercise discretion to mitigate unnecessary risk substantially, to stabilize and ensure the longevity of their organization.

Founders of an organization are especially capable leaders, given that they are able to create a group out of a diffuse set of shared values or ideas. In an assessment of the effects of founder leadership on terrorist organization durability, Tierney (2015) demonstrated that removing a founder leader was particularly detrimental to a rebel group, as such individuals marshaled both political will and organizational resources to attract members to commit acts of organized ideological violence.<sup>61</sup> Tierney’s findings demonstrated that removing “capable” leaders decreased the effectiveness of a group and members’ commitment to the organization. Accordingly, we anticipate that terrorist

group founders are more likely to prioritize attacks on soft targets as a means conserving resources and reinforcing organizational objectives while minimizing the operational risks associated with attacking hard targets. Therefore, we present the following testable hypotheses.

H<sub>3</sub>: Terrorist groups lead by founders perpetrate fewer terrorist attacks on hard targets than groups led by non-founders.

H<sub>4</sub>: Terrorist groups lead by founders perpetrate more terrorist attacks on soft targets than groups led by non-founders.

## Methods

To examine the role of terrorist leaders' tenure and founder effort on target selection, we merged three datasets: (1) the Big, Allied and Dangerous 2 (BAAD2) dataset,<sup>62</sup> (2) the Leadership for the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results (LEADIR) dataset,<sup>63</sup> and (3) the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).<sup>64</sup> In doing so, we developed a longitudinal group-period dataset with years nested within terrorist groups. Altogether, the group-period dataset included 77 terrorist groups that were active for a collective 792 years between 1998 and 2012. Across the 77 groups, we identified a total of 120 terrorist leaders. In the following sections, we describe how our group-period dataset was constructed.

### BAAD2—LEADIR

Construction of our group-period dataset began with the BAAD2 dataset, which contains yearly data for 140 terrorist and insurgent organizations active between 1998 and 2012.<sup>65</sup> The organizations included in the BAAD2 dataset met the following inclusion criteria: (1) had a record of violent activity between 1998 and 2012, (2) had characteristics indicative of an organization (e.g., group boundaries, hierarchy, collective resources), and (3) had enough coverage in secondary sources to be assessed at the yearly level (for more details on the BAAD2 dataset.<sup>66</sup> Not every organization included in BAAD2 were active for the full 15-year period; some groups were active before 1998 while others became active at some point between 1998 and 2012. Nevertheless, coding for each group ended the year they became peaceful, stopped existing, or when no information could be found for that group.

Next, we connected the BAAD2 dataset to the LEADIR dataset. LEADIR is a cross-sectional dataset contains information on 295 terrorist leaders active across 280 terrorist groups active between 2008 and 2017.<sup>67</sup> Each of the 280 terrorist groups in LEADIR had (1) five or more attacks in the 10-year period between 2008 and 2017 and (2) an identifiable group name as a marker of group boundaries. In total, 60 terrorist groups were housed in both the LEADIR and BAAD2 datasets.<sup>68</sup> Subsequently, we also coded leadership information for an additional 17 terrorist groups unique to the BAAD2 dataset.

After merging the BAAD2 and LEADIR datasets, our longitudinal group-period dataset included 77 terrorist groups (see Appendix) and 120 terrorist leaders active between 1998 and 2012 for a collective 792 years.

### GTD

We then connected the each of the 77 terrorist groups with their corresponding attack data collected within the GTD. The GTD is an unclassified open-source database on domestic and international terrorist events from 1970 through 2023 maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. Terror events are included in the GTD if they have a political, social, religious, or economic motive, are intended to coerce, intimidate, or publicize the cause, and/or if they violate international humanitarian law. Legitimate exercises of authority by state actors are excluded from the GTD. While recognizing the complexities in defining terrorism, the GTD's inclusion criteria are generally agreed upon by most scholars and experts. The GTD is the most comprehensive database on terrorist attacks.



## Dependent variables

All of the measures included in the analyses are described at the group-year level and highlighted on Table 1.<sup>69</sup> The five primary dependent variables examined in this study came from the GTD and reflect the average *number of attacks*, *number of attacks on hard targets*, *number of attacks on soft targets*, *proportion of attacks on hard targets*, and *proportion of attacks on soft targets* per year for each terrorist group. Hard targets include government buildings and personnel, police, and military targets. Soft targets include private citizens/property, tourists, journalists/the media, religious groups/organizations, educational institutions, and/or nongovernmental organizations. Prior to the analysis we capped the distribution for the number of attacks, number of attacks on hard targets, and number of attacks on soft targets to remove the influence of outliers and create more meaningful variation in the distribution of the outcomes.<sup>70</sup> More specifically, the number of attacks per year was capped at 100, the number of attacks on hard targets per year was capped at 50, and the number of attacks on soft targets per year were capped at 29.

## Main independent variables

The two primary independent variables in this study were *leadership tenure* and *founder*. Both predictor variables were time varying at the group-year level and came from the LEADIR dataset.

**Table 1.** Description of sample for organization-year analysis

Measures	Mean	SD	Range
<i>Outcomes<sup>a</sup></i>			
Number of attacks	6.06	15.26	0–100
Number of attacks on hard targets	2.39	7.40	0–50
Number of attacks on soft targets	1.99	4.77	0–29
Proportion of attacks on hard targets	.18	.30	0–1
Proportion of attacks on soft targets	.21	.33	0–1
<i>Within organization predictors</i>			
Leadership Tenure	10.90	10.04	1–46
Founder	.55	.50	0–1
Age of Organization	19.35	13.53	1–54
Size	2.69	.71	1–4
Territorial Control	.29	.45	0–1
Drug Trafficking	.20	.40	0–1
Extortion	.26	.44	0–1
Kidnapping	.13	.34	0–1
Robbery	.08	.28	0–1
Smuggling	.10	.31	0–1
State Sponsor	.10	.31	0–1
Social Services	.14	.35	0–1
Criminal Networks	.60	1.13	0–10
<i>N<sub>t</sub></i> = 792 years			
<i>Between organization predictors</i>			
Region			
Middle East and North Africa	.23	.43	0–1
South Asia	.32	.47	0–1
Sub-Sahara Africa	.26	.44	0–1
Other <sup>b</sup>	.18	.39	0–1
Ideology			
Left-Wing	.17	.38	0–1
Religious	.48	.50	0–1
Ethno-Nationalist	.51	.50	0–1
Other <sup>b</sup>	.09	.29	0–1
<i>N<sub>2</sub></i> = 77 organizations			

Note: <sup>a</sup>The distribution for each of the three outcome variables were top coded (or capped) at the upper 99<sup>th</sup> percentile.

<sup>b</sup>reference category for the analyses.

First, *leadership tenure* is measured in the number of years a leader has been in power for the year coded. Table 1 shows that the average leaders' tenure was just under 11 years. Second, *founder* is a binary measure reflecting whether the leader was the original founder of their group (1 = founder). Of the 120 terrorist leaders in our sample, a total of sixty-two leaders (52 percent) were founders of their respective group.

### Control variables

Although this study is focused on the effects of terrorist leaders, prior research has demonstrated that organizational- and contextual-level characteristics influence terrorist groups' willingness and capacity for violence.<sup>71</sup> To account for this, we leveraged the BAAD2 dataset to control for the following time-varying, group-level characteristics. First, *age of organization* is measured in the number of years a terrorist group has been in existence for the year coded. Next, *organization size* is an ordinal measure indicating the approximate number of members in each group (1 = 0–100 members, 2 = 100–999, 3 = 1,000–9,999, 4 = 10,000 or more). *Territorial control* is a binary measure of whether the terrorist group-controlled movement into, out of, or within a given territory (1 = control territory). Groups coded as having territorial control must have controlled a substantial area (e.g., city, region) for more than a few days.

Next, *drug trafficking* is a binary measure of whether the group trafficked drugs and/or was the original grower and supplier (1 = engaged in drug trafficking). *Extortion* is a binary measure of whether the group collected resources by threatening local businesses or communities with violence (1 = engaged in extortion). *Kidnapping* is a binary measure of whether the group engaged in kidnapping for ransom (1 = engaged in kidnapping). *Robbery* is a binary measure of whether the group engaged in robbery for money (1 = engaged in robbery). Next, *smuggling* is a binary measure of whether the group smuggles product or people to raise money (1 = engaged in smuggling). Next, *state sponsor* is a binary measure of whether the group is known to be directly supported by a sovereign state for that year (1 = supported by sovereign state). *Social services* is a binary measure of whether the group provided any medical, welfare, education, infrastructure, or protection services (1 = provided social services). *Criminal networks* is a count measure of the number of alliances between the terrorist group and other violence nonstate actors that engaged in crime in the previous year.

Finally, we also accounted for time stable characteristics including measures of each terrorist group's primary region of operation and ideology. Region of operation included four variables including, *Middle East/North Africa*, *South Asia*, *Sub-Saharan Africa*, and *other*. Ideology also included four variables, including, *religious*, *ethno-nationalist*, *left-wing*, and *other*. Data on each group's primary country of operation and ideology came from the BAAD2 dataset.

### Statistical analysis

The analysis of limited count outcomes over time involved the use of a series of longitudinal hierarchical Poisson models with the correction for overdispersion available in the HLM 7.03 software (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations).<sup>72</sup> In addition, the analysis of the proportions as outcomes involved the use of longitudinal hierarchical linear models in the HLM 7.03 software. Use of these techniques and the corresponding group-year dataset allowed us to examine observed changes in time varying characteristics (e.g., leadership tenure), adjust for the dependence among multiple observations within the same group, and permit the hypothesis tests to be based on the appropriate sample size (years versus organizations). Assuming a sufficient number of distinct measures of time (an assumption met here), the bi-level analysis of the group-year data set also adjusted for problems (e.g., biased standard errors) associated with data that are unbalanced, such as those used here (i.e., organizations were active for different lengths of time).

The analysis proceeded in several stages.<sup>73</sup> First, an unconditional model revealed significant variance ( $p \leq .05$ ) in each outcome at level-1 (within groups) and level-2 (between groups). Next,

the level-1 predictors were then group mean centered and added to the models as fixed effects. In longitudinal multi-level analyses, level-1 predictor variables are group mean centered to permit the examination of the effects of within unit changes on the dependent variable. We considered examining random effects, but preliminary analyses revealed that most of the level-1 effects did not vary across groups, and allowing those that did to vary generated multicollinearity, a common problem when using longitudinal data. Finally, the level-2 predictors were grand-mean centered and included in the model.

## Results

Table 2 contains the results of the multi-level longitudinal analysis of the effects of leadership tenure and founder effects on the number of attacks, number of attacks on hard targets, and number of attacks on soft targets per year. Regarding the within group predictors, leadership tenure was significantly associated with each of the three terrorist attack outcomes. More specifically, as a terrorist leader's tenure grows over time, they are more likely to perpetrate violence in general and strike hard targets and soft targets more frequently. That said, the leadership tenure squared term was also significantly related to each attack outcome implying a diminishing marginal effect of leadership tenure, such that increases in tenure progressively reduce its impact on the frequency of attacks, including those against both hard and soft targets. One interpretation is that groups led by long-tenured leaders approach a saturation point in violent activity, after which external pressures induce

**Table 2.** Longitudinal hierarchical overdispersed Poisson model of within and between organization effects on attack outcomes

	Number of attacks		Number of attacks of hard targets		Number of attacks of soft targets	
	$\beta$	s.e. $_{\beta}$	$\beta$	s.e. $_{\beta}$	$\beta$	s.e. $_{\beta}$
Intercept	1.71***	.12	.72***	.15	.65***	.15
<i>Within organization predictors</i>						
Leadership Tenure	.14***	.03	.19***	.03	.11***	.04
Leadership Tenure <sup>2</sup>	-.01***	.01	-.01***	.01	-.01***	.01
Founder	-.59*	.27	-1.20***	.23	-.21	.30
Age of Organization	.01	.01	.01	.02	.01	.01
Size	.19	.17	.01	.16	.33	.19
Territorial Control	.27	.23	.42	.31	.19	.23
Drug Trafficking	-.24	.20	.15	.18	-.52*	.27
Extortion	-.05	.23	-.11	.20	-.16	.23
Kidnapping	.56***	.09	.51***	.14	.44*	.22
Robbery	.05	.35	.02	.40	.48*	.21
Smuggling	-.01	.17	-.38	.26	.42***	.13
State Sponsor	.10	.29	.40*	.19	.19	.28
Social Services	.64***	.20	.63***	.21	.54***	.19
Criminal Networks	.18***	.06	.17**	.07	.14	.08
Proportion variation w/in organizations explained	.17		.15		.15	
Proportion variation w/in organizations	.80		.64		.60	
<i>Between organization predictors</i>						
<i>Region</i>						
Middle East and North Africa	.17	.27	.03	.29	.29	.35
South Asia	.22	.32	.15	.38	.11	.38
Sub-Sahara Africa	-.40	.37	-.59	.49	-.08	.34
<i>Ideology</i>						
Left-Wing	.40	.33	.37	.37	-.29	.35
Religious	.34	.27	.16	.32	.58	.31
Ethno-Nationalist	-.97***	.24	-1.41***	.26	-.55	.29
Proportion variation b/w organizations explained	.11		.16		.07	
Proportion variation b/w organizations	.20		.36		.40	
<i>N<sub>1</sub> = 792 years</i>						
<i>N<sub>2</sub> = 77 organizations</i>						

Note: \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ .

a decline in their level of violence. For instance, under Joseph Kony's leadership, the Lord's Resistance Army experienced a steady rise in attack frequency between 1998 and 2003, followed by a gradual decline in subsequent years as a result of sustained military pressure. It is plausible that Kony's accumulated experience informed his strategic calculus, enabling him to recognize and mitigate tactical risks in order to preserve the organization's survival against overwhelming military force.

Next, [Table 2](#) illustrates that leaders who found a terrorist group committed fewer terrorist attacks in general and were significantly less likely to strike hard targets relative to non-founding leaders. One plausible explanation for this pattern is that group founders tend to exhibit greater risk aversion, favoring more conservative tactical choices compared to their successors. For instance, under the leadership of its founder Hassan Hattab, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting (GSPC) conducted an average of six attacks per year, including two against hard targets, between 1998 and 2003. Following his removal, however, the organization's activity escalated markedly, averaging approximately 19 total attacks and 12 against hard targets annually under subsequent leaders Nabil Sahraoui and Abdelmalek Droukdel. The status of terrorist leaders as a founder or not had significant effect on the number on soft targets per year.

The findings on [Table 2](#) also shows that two within-group predictors, kidnapping and social services, were related to all three terrorist attack outcomes. Specifically, terrorist attacks, attacks on hard targets, and attacks on soft targets occurred a greater frequency among groups who engaged in kidnapping or provided social services relative to groups who did not engage in those activities. We also found that, as a terrorist group's criminal network expands, they committed a greater number of terrorist attacks and attacks on hard targets. In relation to hard target selection, terrorist groups who received state sponsorship were found to strike hard targets at a higher rate than groups without such support. Finally, three types of criminal fundraising were related to the number of attacks on soft targets per year. Terrorist groups who engaged in robbery or smuggling attacked soft targets at a higher rate, whereas groups that engaged in drug trafficking attacked soft targets at a lower rate relative to the comparison group. Taken together, the collection of level-1 predictors accounted for 17 percent of the variation within group in the number of attacks, 15 percent of the within group variation in the number of attacks on hard targets, and 15 percent of the within group variation in the number of attacks on soft targets.

Turning to the time stable predictors, [Table 2](#) shows that none of the geographic region variables were significantly linked to any of the attack outcomes. Turn to ideology, terrorist groups motivated by ethno-nationalism engaged in violence in general and attacked hard targets at a lower rate than those motivated by other ideologies. None of the other group ideology measures were significantly associated with any of the three attack outcomes. The collection of level-2 predictors accounted for 11 percent of the variation between groups in the number of attacks, 16 percent of the between groups variation in the number of attacks on hard targets, and 7 percent of the between organizations variation in the number of attacks on soft targets.

[Table 3](#) reports the results of the multi-level longitudinal analysis examining the effects of leadership tenure and founder status on the proportion of attacks directed at hard and soft targets. Among the within-group predictors, leadership tenure was significantly associated with the proportion of attacks on soft targets over time. Specifically, as a leader's tenure increased, their group carried out a higher share of attacks against soft targets. For instance, under Ramadan Shalah's leadership of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), more than half of the organization's attacks targeted soft targets in eight of the 15 years represented in our dataset. Between 2006 and 2012, approximately 85 percent of PIJ's attacks fell into this category, during a period when Shalah had been in power for over two decades. However, the squared term for leadership tenure was also significant, indicating that the positive effect of tenure on the proportion of soft target attacks diminishes during the later stages of a leader's time in office. By contrast, founder status did not exert a significant effect on either outcome measure.

Next, we also found that terrorist groups who engage in drug trafficking or receive state sponsorship dedicated a greater proportion of attacks to hard targets. None of the other within group control

**Table 3.** Longitudinal hierarchical linear model of within and between organization effects on attack outcomes

	Proportion of attacks on hard targets		Proportion of attacks on soft targets	
	$\beta$	s.e. $_{\beta}$	$\beta$	s.e. $_{\beta}$
Intercept	−1.70***	.09	1.62***	.10
<i>Within organization predictors</i>				
Leadership Tenure	.01	.03	.08*	.03
Leadership Tenure <sup>^2</sup>	−.01	.01	−.01*	.01
Founder	−.22	.31	−.43	.27
Age of Organization	−.02	.02	−.03	.02
Size	.09	.14	−.04	.19
Territorial Control	.31	.20	.32	.21
Drug Trafficking	.45*	.22	−.40	.25
Extortion	−.19	.19	.02	.22
Kidnapping	.01	.22	.25	.24
Robbery	−.01	.23	.28	.37
Smuggling	.18	.18	.15	.22
State Sponsor	.37*	.20	−.04	.26
Social Services	−.26	.18	.13	.13
Criminal Networks	.03	.10	.02	.05
Proportion variation w/in organizations explained	.02		.05	
Proportion variation w/in organizations	.39		.32	
<i>Between organization predictors</i>				
<i>Region</i>				
Middle East and North Africa	.08	.23	.33	.28
South Asia	−.18	.22	−.28	.27
Sub-Saharan Africa	−.70**	.29	.09	.28
<i>Ideology</i>				
Left-Wing	.32	.24	.01	.25
Religious	−.16	.20	.32	.20
Ethno-Nationalist	−.36*	.17	.01	.18
Proportion variation b/w organizations explained	.25		.14	
Proportion variation b/w organizations	.61		.68	

Note: \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ .

variables were significantly associated to the proportion of attacks on soft targets. Altogether, the collection of level-1 predictors accounted for 2 percent of the variation within group in the proportion of attacks on hard targets and 5 percent of the within group variation in the proportion of attacks on soft targets.

Turning to the time stable predictors, Table 3 shows that the proportion of attacks dedicated to hard targets was lower among terrorist groups operating in sub-Saharan Africa or those motivated by ethno-nationalism. None of the time stable predictors were related to the proportion of attacks on soft targets. Overall, the level-2 predictors accounted for 25 percent of the variation between groups in the proportion of attacks on hard targets and 14 percent of the between group variation in the number of attacks on soft targets.

## Discussion and conclusions

The goal of the current study was to examine how terrorist leaders' tenure and role in founding their group influence nature and balance of targets attacked in group operations. After examining a longitudinal group-period dataset, there are three important findings regarding terrorist leadership to discuss. First, we find that terrorist leader tenure was significantly associated with both the number of attacks and type of attacks committed. Specifically, as leaders become more experienced and head their organizations for a longer period, they are more likely to perpetrate violence in general and attack hard and soft targets in greater numbers. These findings are aligned with what would be expected from

leadership theory and current models of upper echelon organizational dynamics. Tenure and longevity provide leaders with both the experience and institutional capital to defray the perceived costs of strategic actions.<sup>74</sup> As such, operations which would have been considered untenable or overly risky become easier to justify for those with more experience. These dynamics are partly due to increased personal confidence and a downgrading of risks in the strategic calculus, as well as expected increase in skill among leaders in appropriately identifying risk and likelihood of success when selecting operations.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, since engaging in a higher rate of attacks—regardless of the target—has the potential to generate prestige for the group that can claim them,<sup>76</sup> experienced leaders may see such actions as a meaningful way to shore up support for their leadership in the future and negate the view that they lack strategic viability.<sup>77</sup>

Contrary to our expectations, we found that terrorist groups managed by more seasoned leaders directed a greater proportion of attacks to soft targets. We suspect that experienced terrorist leaders dedicated a higher share of their attacks to soft targets for two reasons. First, tenured terrorist leaders attack soft targets relative to other target types to send a political message regarding the strategies and tactics an organization is willing to use to achieve their goals. By attacking soft targets, experienced leaders signal that their violence is not limited, which ultimately increases the pressure felt by the government.<sup>78</sup> Focusing on soft targets also maintains a level of fear in the target population that may otherwise diminish over time. Second, and relatedly, our hypothesis that the discretion afforded to terrorist leaders would increase over time and insulate them from agent pressures appears to be incorrect. Given the inherent volatility of terrorist groups, both in their internal dynamics and relationship to the outside world, longer-tenured leaders appear to value a risk calculus built on small, consistent successes over one that emphasizes larger-scale actions, despite their potential operational and propaganda value.

It is notable that this focus on soft targets coincides with a general tenure-related increase in attacks, suggesting that experienced leaders do not select soft targets in an effort to slow down after establishing their foothold, but as the appropriate strategy for building and maintaining their influence over time. From an agency theory perspective, this suggests that these leaders view themselves as needing to be more responsive to the desire for “return on investment” from their broader network. As the organization matures, and a leader’s tenure matures along with it, the expectation for success increases, the internal margin for error decreases, and leaders take a strategic approach which they believe favors them in both areas. This has meaningful implications for the study of terror group dynamics, as the tenure of a particular leader may be a useful variable to account for when considering what a group’s operational focus may be in the near future.

Relatedly, a third critical finding of this study is that leaders who helped found their group orchestrated fewer attacks overall and fewer attacks on hard targets than leaders who were not founders, irrespective of tenure. The prototype of the entrepreneurial leader is one who takes considerable risk to establish their emergent firm and brand, a model to which a reasonable comparison might be drawn when considering the leadership approach of an individual who founds an extremist group. However, we propose that terrorist organizations, at least at their outset, are structurally and operationally like family firms. Organizational scholars acknowledge that the dynamics of family firms, and how they are led, are vastly different than those of non-family firms operating in the same domains.<sup>79</sup> One critical differentiating factor is in their propensity for risk, as family firms are motivated to protect the collective’s interest via the firm and therefore typically adopt conservative strategies. As terrorist groups are founded, they are ideologically and operationally fragile, significantly increasing the possibility of destructive outcomes from failed operations.<sup>80</sup> Attacks on hard targets are therefore especially risky under these conditions and, given the outsized operational discretion of founders, unlikely to be planned or undertaken.

Our analysis also found that certain group characteristics and behaviors are related to attack frequency and target selection. For example, terrorist groups who engaged in kidnapping for ransom or provide social services engaged in a higher rate of attacks and targeted hard targets and soft targets more frequently. Terrorist groups engaged in violent campaigns likely utilize kidnapping both as



a revenue stream and a means for political gains through government negotiation and concessions.<sup>81</sup> Among terrorist groups, supplying community services challenge the state's authority and legitimacy as well as increase the target populations' dependency on the terrorist group. Terrorist groups who engage in such services have the capacity to sustain violence via a readily available pool of recruits who perceive the group favorably and likely depend on the group for public service.

Next, terrorist groups a high number of linkages to other criminal groups as well as those receiving state sponsorship attack hard targets with greater frequency over time. For terrorist groups, relationships with either state or non-state actors creates value and is often mutually beneficial.<sup>82</sup> When terrorist groups forge a relationship with other actors, they are able to exchange the knowledge, expertise, and resources necessary to attack hard targets. Similarly, we found that terrorist groups receiving state sponsorship dedicate a greater proportion of their attacks to hard targets. This is, in part, because terrorist groups are incentivized to successfully attack the target state after acquiring resources from a sponsor.<sup>83</sup> In other words, state sponsors provide the capabilities and motivation to attack hard targets.

We also found that terrorist groups involved in robbery or smuggling attacked soft targets at a higher rate. Prior research has shown that territorial control is a significant predictor of involvement in robbery and smuggling among terrorist groups.<sup>84</sup> It is plausible that attacks on soft targets are a coercive tool to maintain control over a given territory for terrorist groups involved in smuggling or robbery. Finally, terrorist groups involved in drug trafficking targeted soft targets at a lower rate overtime and were more likely to dedicate a higher proportion of their overall attacks to striking hard targets. In other words, terrorist groups involved in drug trafficking almost exclusively attacked hard targets when violence was necessary. One explanation for this finding terrorist groups involved in drug trafficking do not want the negative publicity of attacking soft targets. At the same time, drug trafficking is a lucrative enterprise and, when facing law enforcement operations seeking to dismantle this revenue, terrorist groups are willing to use violence.<sup>85</sup>

Despite these three areas of contributions in areas of leadership, organizational resources, and socio-cultural events, several limitations related to this study are important to bear in mind. First, the current sample does not reflect the entire population of extremist organizations active between 1998 and 2012. Because of the rigor of these data required to make inferences about leadership type, the present effort was constrained to the 77 unique terrorist groups that had credible and reliable information about leader type. While this may raise concerns regarding the generalizability of inferences made from this data, our findings for grounded constructs such as organizational size, age, and ideology are consistent with other datasets used in previous research. Second, although studies relying upon open-source data have come to play important roles in terrorism research, secondary data have the potential of reporting inaccurate, biased, or false information, or are tainted by government disinformation. Open-source information on extremist organizations and terrorist events are often limited by media inaccuracies, conflicting or false information, no claims of responsibility, and government censorship. That said, open-source information is valuable for studying terrorism given the growing media interest in non-state actors, and studies examining the representativeness of open-source information to other types of data about terrorists indicate suitable reliability for this method. Finally, our study did not account for important macro-level correlates of terrorism such as state repression and social disorganization. While our focus was on unpacking within-organizational correlates of terrorism, future research should integrate this perspective within a larger macro-level framework.

Despite these limitations, the findings from this study provide evidence that terrorist leaders influence the tactics of their group—particularly how often and who to attack. Although prior research has generated some insights about terrorist leadership, almost no attention has been paid to one of the most robust findings about what predicts organizational outcomes: the leader. Journalists, analysts, and citizen observers often comment on the quality or level of a terrorist leader, but to date the nature of leadership has not been explored in the field of criminology nor terrorism research using a multivariate analytic approach grounded in

organizational theory. Because of the hierarchical structure of our dataset, combining information about terrorist groups from the BADD2 dataset, leaders from the LEADIR project, and attacks from the GTD, we were able to provide quantitative evidence about how leadership influences terrorist attacks overtime. While the present effort suggests that leadership is an important organizational resource to consider when examining ideologically inspired violence, it also should serve as a springboard to extend what we have learned.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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  69. Attack observations were excluded if they did not satisfy all three GTD inclusion criteria: (1) the presence of a political, social, religious, or economic motive, (2) the intention to coerce, intimidate, or publicize the cause, and (3) were outside of the precepts of international humanitarian law. We also excluded doubtful cases of terrorism, and cases in which the group associated with the attack was based on speculation or dubious claims.
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## Appendix A. Full sample of terrorist groups

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Abu Sayyaf Group	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)
Al Qaeda in Iraq	Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM)
Al-Fatah	Jemaah Islamiya (JI)
Al-Nusrah Front	Jundallah (Iran)
Al-Qaida	Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State
Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula	Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)
Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent	Lashkar-e-Islam (Pakistan)
Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
Al-Shabaab	Lashkar-e-Taiba
All Tripura Tiger Force	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
Allied Democratic Forces	Lord's Resistance Army
Ansar al-Dine (Mali)	M23
Ansar al-Islam	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
Ansar al-Sharia (Libya)	Moro National Liberation Front
Armed Islamic Group	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
Azawad National Liberation Movement	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
Baloch Liberation Army	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
Baloch Republican Army	National Liberation Army of Colombia
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement	New People's Army
Boko Haram	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
Caucasus Emirate	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
Communist Party of India - Maoist	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Gen Cmd
Communist Party of Nepal- Maoist	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda	Revolutionary United Front
Donetsk People's Republic	Right Sector
Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement	Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage
Garo National Liberation Army	Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting
Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement)	Shining Path
Haqqani Network	Sinai Province of the Islamic State
Harakat ul-Mujahidin	Students Islamic Movement of India
Hezbollah	Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition
Houthi extremists (Ansar Allah)	Taliban
Indian Mujahideen	Tawhid and Jihad
Irish Republican Army	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	United Self Defense Units of Colombia

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