POLS 429: International Terrorism
Lecture 7 (01.29.2020):
Explaining Terrorism - The Strategic Approach, Vol. 2

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Overview

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Theoretical approaches to explain terrorism.
- The strategic approach - logic, and why do we use it?
- Classification of terror objectives.
- Assumptions of the strategic approach, why do we need it?

Questions??

The Strategic Approach - Implications

- Implications $=$ equilibrium in formal model analysis.
- Test implications with real-world data.

(1) Terrorists evaluate their adversaries' expected responses

- Terrorists calculate the expected actions of other relevant actors.

Evidence/Examples

- Communication between groups - AQ Ramadi cell (Iraq 2013). ▸ RamadiCell
- Bin Laden and provoking US response (2004). ▸ BinLaden

The Strategic Approach - Implications

(2) Coercive Effectiveness

- Force adversaries into making concessions.
- Forcing concessions - maximizing return on group's preferences.
- **Costly signaling** and resolve to harm opponents by attacking civilians.

Evidence/Examples

- Terrorism more effective in African civil wars (Thomas 2014).
- Terrorized public support compromise (Maoz and McCauley 2009).

The Strategic Approach - Implications

(3) Terrorism as Last Resort

- Rational actors will utilize this method after exhausting all other options.
- Alternative (less costly) methods - legal action, protest, supporting certain political candidates.

Evidence/Examples

- Qualitative data on discussions within groups that using terrorism is "our last resort".

The Strategic Approach - Implications

(4) Terrorists are willing to compromise

- Based on preference ordering assumption.
- Interactions are not "zero-sum" games (win-loss) but a bargaining over a range of outcomes.

Evidence/Examples

- Terrorists accept a political settlement solution (Thomas 2014; Wood and Kathman 2014).
- Data comparing terrorists' initial objectives and eventual concessions accomplished.

The Strategic Approach - Implications

(5) Terrorists claim credit after successful attacks

- Terrorism is most effective $\rightarrow$ claim credit after successful attacks.
- Bolsters reputation and credibility.

Evidence/Examples

- Pakistani Taliban attack on Karachi airport (2014).
- Claim credit when attacking government installation, not when targeting citizens (Abrahms and Conrad 2017).

The Strategic Approach - Implications

(6) Terrorists learn from success and failures

- Rational actors self-evaluate their operations.
- Successful attacks should be replicated, unsuccessful methods should be discarded.

Evidence/Examples

- The expansion of suicide terrorism since 1980's.
- Demise of political assassination since 19th century anarchists.
- P-IRA abandon terrorism (2005) and integrated into political system in Ireland.

The Strategic Approach - Implications

(7) Terrorists tactics substitution

- "Substitution" of ineffective actions.
- Types of substitution: perpetrators, locations and targets.

Evidence/Examples

- Metal detectors, skyjacking, and new modes of hostage taking.
- Algerian war (1954-1960): women as perpetrators.
- Attacks shift to MENA region (less protected).
- Hamas: Rockets over bombs. ▸ TacticsSub

The Strategic Approach

COUNTERING TERRORISM

Policy options to counter terrorism threats:

- Attrition strategy - protection and demonstrate resolve (US Homeland security policy).

- Provocation strategy - restricted countermeasures (drone strikes under President Obama; avoid from full-scale military intervention).

- Deter suicide attacks - enforce a collective punishment (Israel house demolitions during Second Intifada).

The strategic approach - Criticism

Critique 1: Terror organizations are not unitary actors

- Terror groups are not monolithic.
- Face management issues like internal conflicts, leadership struggle, etc.
- Effect terror operations - internal struggle and group "splintering".

Critique 2: Preferences are rarely stable over time

- Terror groups' preferences shift over time: Al Qaeda (1980-2020).

The Strategic Approach - Criticism

Critique 3: Terrorism is relatively ineffective

- Groups achieve goals only 7% of times (Abrahms 2006).
- Other forms of political action: Insurgency (25%) or civil resistance (52%).
- Effect on public - terrorized citizen support aggressive responses.

Critique 4: Terrorism as last resort

- No empirical support - Al Qaeda never lobbied the US to alter its foreign policy in Middle East.

The Strategic Approach - Criticism

Critique 5: Terrorists do not compromise

- Groups are unwilling to compromise: ISIS affiliates and removal of all "non-believers".
- Real IRA attack (August 1998) - rejected the Good Friday Accords.

Critique 6: Terror groups do not claim attacks

- Drop in credit claiming since 1997 (less than 50%).
- Groups use certain tactics as "calling cards": Al Qaeda/ISIS and simultaneous attacks.

The Strategic Approach - Criticism

Critique 7: Terrorists target each other

- Groups target each other, or their own base of support.
- Examples: Red Brigades (Italy), Hamas and Fatah (Gaza), Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the "Sunni Awakening".

Critique 8: Terror groups do not learn from success/failure

- Persist in using same methods despite relative ineffectiveness (Abrahams 2008).
- For example: Palestinian suicide attacks during 2nd Intifada.

The Strategic Approach - Criticism

Critique 9: Military solution is possible

- Terrorism is a result of deep social and political grievances, so military solution is not possible.
- Cases when military option is necessary for the removal of threat (Sri Lanka).

Critique 10: Approach is too abstract

- Assumptions are too abstract.
- Methods: large datasets may miss contextual factors, case studies ("Selection bias").

The Strategic Approach

MULTIPLE APPROACHES TO EXPLAIN TERRORISM

"Alternately, it may be that terrorists are not motivated just by cost-benefit calculations; rather, they may be motivated by their political, economic, or social environment, socio-organizational dynamics, extremist ideologies, or even psychological conditions that make purely rational choice perspectives unlikely to yield much value."
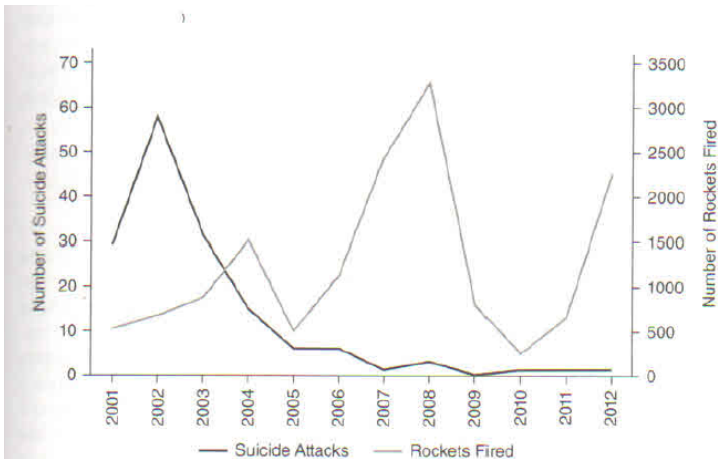(Chenoweth and Moore 2018)

Recommended readings

More studies on the topic of terrorism research:

1. Abrahms, Max. "What terrorists really want: Terrorist motives and counterterrorism strategy." *International Security*, 32, no. 4 (2008): 78-105.

2. Abrahms, Max. "Why terrorism does not work." *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): 42-78.

3. Peffley, Mark, Marc L. Hutchison, and Michal Shamir. "The impact of persistent terrorism on political tolerance: Israel, 1980 to 2011." *American Political Science Review*, 109, no. 4 (2015): 817-832.

4. Peter Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, "Strategic Terrorism: The Framework and its Fallacies," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (2005), pp. 571-595.

"Stop the killing of people unless they are spying, military, or police officers. We have to find a secure method because if we continue using the same method, people will start fighting us in the streets"

"All that we have to do is to send two mujahedeen to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written Al Qaeda, in order to make generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses without their achieving anything of note other than some benefits for their private corporations"

Figure 2.1 Suicide Attacks and Rockets Fired, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, 2001–2012

Figure: Terrorism Methods Substitution