POLS 429: International Terrorism
Lecture 30 (04.13.2020):
The Politics of Counter-Terrorism

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Overview

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Soft power instruments: persuasion and the benefits of abstaining from terrorism instead of costs.
- Economic influence: prevent financing, diplomatic pressure.
- Cultural and social programs: CVE inclusion strategies to prevent marginalizing groups and radicalization.
- Effectiveness: difficult to assess, focused programs.
- Political influence: conciliatory measures to reduce popular support for terrorism .
- Drones debate: effectiveness, public opinion and psychological mechanisms of support.

Questions??

Counter-Terrorism: Puzzles

Variations in CT

- Single vs. combined approach.
- Expanded action: US post-9.11 (the PATRIOT ACT - 2001).
- Restraint: Norway after the 2011 attacks by Brevik.
- Variation in approaches facing similar types of threats: Bush and Obama facing the AQ and ISIS threats.

- The main puzzles: What explains the variation in the ways states fight terrorism? Why some favor repressive actions while others opt for conciliatory policies?

The Effectiveness Challenge

- The CT puzzles facing evidence regarding effectiveness.

- Indiscriminate repression or combining discriminate repression and conciliatory actions.

- Within military repression, effectiveness is higher when employed for various actions (Drones in Pakistan).

- Many historical examples of ineffective methods – invasion to Afghanistan (and Iraq) using indiscriminate military action.

- States tend to persist in using ineffective policies (mostly indiscriminate repression) - deviation from a rational process.

The Strategic Approach

- State as a unitary rational actor when choosing CT policy.
- *Bounded rationality*: selected policy may not be the most effective.
- Still, a rational information updating process.
- A strategy based on the threat: when the threat increases, the degree of repression also increases.
- Israeli repressive CT policies correlate with increases in number and lethality of terror attacks.

The Strategic Approach

Counter-arguments

- Policy process is not organized, based on minimal understanding of the threat.

- Based on uncertainty of current events, or sloppy and improvisational process.

- Focus on degree of threat cannot explain different policy approaches.

- France and UK facing terrorism $\rightarrow$ different approaches. .

The Strategic Approach

- Relaxing the unitary actor assumption, account for domestic politics.

- Why do governments emphasize their counter-terrorism policy?

- Salient to the public, and politicians aspire to survive in office.

- Governments adopt policies that demonstrate to the public that they respond to the threat (fortification using barriers in public places).

- These actions are not necessarily the most effective, compared to covert actions (infiltration and arresting terrorists).

The Strategic Approach

- A related problem: the lack of quality self-assessments of the selected CT policies.

- Selective updating - few officials engage in serious evaluation of the success or effectiveness of their actions.

- Ignoring terror strategy such as provocation is puzzling: if governments recognize this risk, how come indiscriminate repression policies are still the most favored?

The Organizational Approach

- How security is structured within a state? The military, police and the relative strength of agencies dictating CT policies.

- Incentives for influence and survival: an agency will promote its view, at the expense of others, even if that means less optimal policy.

- Why? Because it must ensure its survival and try to exert as much influence as possible.

- Variations in approaches: the dominance of military and intelligence (France), versus reliance on the national police force (UK).

The Organizational Approach

- **Interagency rivalry**: US national security agencies and the military in the 1990's.

- **SOPs**: standards and routines that large organizations subscribe to and tend to follow.

- Intended to prevent chaos in times of crisis and ensure simple procedures to address the issue.

- The problem $\rightarrow$ an automatic response with no careful consideration of fit to the issue.

- Example: British army and the conflict in Ireland.

The Psychological Approach

- **Risk perceptions**: variations in risk aversion and leaders' preferred CT tools.
- Obama (risk averse) → drones;
  Bush → manned airstrikes (risk acceptant).
- Risk aversion is a function of personality traits and is rooted in genetic characteristics.

- **Groupthink**: explains why certain CT policies are not abolished despite information suggesting they are counter-productive.
- Why groups will not spend time on self-assessment of their decisions.

The Ideological Approach

- Different views of 9.11 and global terrorism: US (an act of war); Germany (criminal actions); Japan (a political crisis).

- A function of different historical experiences and practices facing security threats.

- Terrorism $\rightarrow$ a symbolic form of power between actors.

- The events of 9.11 are more symbolic than the WTC attacks of 1993.

- Significant (existential?) threat $\rightarrow$ counter with overwhelming response.

The Ideological Approach

- **Ethnocentrism**: a belief about the division of the world to in- and out-groups.

- Higher degree of ethnocentrism → support for forceful response against perpetrators (and their supporters).

- Counter external, substantial threats from external out-groups (Most US public opinion data since 2001).

- **Authoritarianism**: a belief in the nature of authority as central to socio-political relationships.

- Those with higher authoritarianism scores are more likely to support offensive and repressive CT measures.

The Structural Approach

- **State capacity**: weak governments are more likely to employ harsh, repressive CT.
- Why? States' inability to control, monitor and collect intelligence (mostly on their population) which harm selective response.
- Strong, capable states have robust intelligence agencies, strong judiciary, and effective law enforcement forces.
- Example:
  - Peru (1980-1990): Mass repressions in the fight against the "Shining Path" terror movement.
  - Spain: Judicial process and securing prisoners' rights in the fight against ETA.

The Structural Approach

- **Regime type**: using repression and torture as CT tool.
- Democracies are more likely to employ torture $\rightarrow$ relative autonomy that the military has to address external security threats.
- Public 'accept' torture of foreign terrorists, compared to domestic.
- Yet $\rightarrow$ checks and balances as well as public accountability.
- **Threat perceptions and geography**: closer geo-political views and similar geographic characteristics.
- Classes of "shared" CT tools:
  1. Low threat (Austria, Denmark, Greece, New Zealand).
  2. Intermediate - mid-level restrictions (France, Spain, Germany).
  3. High - US & UK.

The Critical Approach

- View CT as a tool to manipulate the public and further consolidate power and maintain the SQ.
- It is a **performative act**, and not intended to secure the state using "legitimate" tools.
- Despite CTS arguments, many approaches emphasize the normative and moral implications of CT tools.
- Multiple empirical studies point to the tradeoffs that CT requires.

Recommended readings

More studies on the politics of Counter-Terrorism:

1. Lyall, Jason. "Do Democracies Make Inferior Counterinsurgents? Reassessing Democracy's Impact on War Outcomes and Duration." *International Organization*, Vol. 64, no. 1 (2010): 167-192.

2. Kam, Cindy D., and Donald R. Kinder. "Terror and ethnocentrism: Foundations of American support for the war on terrorism." *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, no. 2 (2007): 320-338.

3. Davies, William Adair. "Counterterrorism effectiveness to jihadists in Western Europe and the United States: we are losing the war on terror." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 41, no. 4 (2018): 281-296.