Counterterrorism & Counterinsurgency

CDSn4002 Political Violence

Spring 2023 – 24 April 2023

Deretha Bester

PAPER PRESENTATIONS

Terrorism and Insurgency

What is terrorism? (NO UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED DEF)

- *'Terrorism can be interpreted as violence or threats aimed at a society where the action contains political goals or motives carried out by nonstate actors.'* (Albaroza et al, 2022).

- Three main points: 1) the use of violence, 2) political objectives, and 3) the intention of sowing fear in a target population (Merari, 2007).

- Terrorism is conceptualized as a 'tactic'.

What is insurgency? (NO UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED DEF)

- *'Insurgency is a protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government'* & *'Use of violence by a group that seeks to overthrow, or force, change of a governing authority.'* (Paul et al, 2010).

Mirror image of terrorism and insurgency: counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT)

QUESTION:

What is your understanding of CT and COIN?

Mirror Image of Terrorism and Insurgency = CT & COIN

Field of COIN and CT

- In contrast to terrorism and insurgency, CT remains under-theorized.

COIN conceptualized:

- Conceptualized COIN as *'a combination of offensive, defensive, and stability operations' aimed at combatting insurgency and creating stability.* (Paul et al, 2010).

- Use of multiple tools and institutions.

Counterterrorism:

- Concept refers to a variety of strategies used by the state to counter and fight threats related to terrorism.

- Tactics, operations, policies, strategies.

- Use of multiple tools.

Readings and focus

- Price: *Leadership decapitation*
- Johnston: *Leadership decapitation*
- Ursula: *Repressive measures & coercive responses*
- Kurtulus: *Trends in US and Israel*

What is leadership decapitation?

- Tactics designed and aimed to kill/ capture the key leader/ leaders of a terrorist/ insurgency group who play a prominent role in the organization.

- Leadership decapitation: capture of kill of terrorist group's leader.

What is the logic behind such a tactic?

- Intent: disrupt the organizational routine and structure of terrorist group & deter others from assuming power/ leadership.

Leadership Decapitation

- Tactic used by many states in CT/ COIN strategy.

PROPONENTS OF DECAPITATION:

- Cite cases where the tactic has contributed to the organizational collapse of terror groups.
- PKK, Shining Path (Peru)

CRITICS OF DECAPITATION:

- Cite cases where terror activity increased and intensified
- Morally questionable
- Possible backlash effect (decapitation result = increase terror recruits)

Price (2012): **What are the effects of leadership decapitation?**

Analyses: the effects of leadership decapitation on the mortality rate of 207 terrorist groups from 1970-2008.

How to assess effects of decapitation?

- Number, frequency, lethality of attacks.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH:

- Finds no effect of leadership decapitation.

AUTHOR'S FINDING:

- Decapitation increases the mortality rate of terror groups.

Evaluates: effects of decapitation on the *DURATION* of terror groups.

TWO CONDITIONS must be met if leadership decapitation is to be effective in CT policy:

1. Terrorist group leaders need to be IMPORTANT to the overall success of the group.

2. Leadership SUCCESSION must be difficult.

IMPORTANT ASPECT:

Terrorist groups have unique **organizational characteristics** that increase the influence of leaders and make leadership succession complicated, due to the fact that they are *'violent, clandestine, and values-based organizations.'*

Terrorist groups: violent, clandestine, value-based

- In the case of violent, clandestine, value-based groups: members depend on their leaders, more so than in the case if group lacks all three characteristics.

- More **cohesive** groups – often led by **charismatic** leaders.

- **Lack** of formalization and institutionalization – **Increases** level of uncertainty in group – **complicates** leadership succession and causes **organizational instability.**

- **End** of terrorist group – 'died' – inactive for 2 years since last attack.

- Inactive = committed no violent attack.

Empirical results

1. Decapitated terrorist groups have higher mortality rate, however, no guarantee that organizational death will be immediate

- Only 30% of decapitated groups ended in two years after loss of leader.

2. Earlier decapitation occurs in terrorist group's life cycle = greater effect.

- kill/ capture in first year of existence of group – 8 times more likely to end.

3. Capture and killing increases the mortality rate.

4. Group size does not effect duration of group: small and large groups both durable.

5. ANY TYPE of leadership turnover increases the mortality rate of groups

- therefore, states may not have to kill/capture a leader to hasten the group's demise.

6. Religious terrorist groups: less resilient and easier to destroy than nationalist groups after leadership decapitation.

QUESTION:

What is your opinion on leadership decapitation?

Are you a proponent or a critic, AND why?

Looked at terrorist groups and decapitation.

So, does the same logic of leadership decapitation apply to different types of militant organizations?

Johnston (2012): Decapitation & Insurgency

ANALYTICAL FOCUS

- **Primary RQ**: concerns the **EFFECT** of leadership decapitation on COIN campaign **OUTCOMES** and **DYNAMICS.**

- **Data** collected on attempts to kill/capture insurgent leaders.

- **LEADER:** defined as the most powerful figure/ figures of an insurgent organization.

- 90 COIN campaigns from 1975 to 2003, 928 campaign-year observations.

- Data show: 46 out of 118 attempts resulted in the removal of a top-level insurgent leader (39%).

Argument

- Argues that decapitation is likely to help the overall efforts of the states' against militant organizations.

- Other factors matter in most cases.

- Decapitation is more likely to help states achieve their objectives as an OPERATIONAL COMPONENT within an INTEGRATED campaign strategy than as a STAND-ALONE strategy against both insurgent + terrorist organizations.

Results

- States more likely to win – when successfully targeting militant leaders, regardless of type of adversary (terrorist group, guerrilla insurgency).

- Substantial **CAUSAL EFFECTS**: leadership decapitation has causal effects on campaign outcomes – removing militant leaders INCREASES counterinsurgents' chances of achieving quick and successful campaign terminations.

- **Decapitation**: reduces conflict, violence, and associated with fewer insurgent attacks.

Universal strategy or group-characteristic related?

- **QUESTION: Is leadership decapitation more or less effective against some types of insurgencies than others?**

- **IDEOLOGICAL conflicts**: fought over how polities should be governed.

- **IDENTITY conflicts:** usually involve at least one party that views itself as fundamentally different from others and is fighting to pursue some form of self-determination.

- NO EVIDENCE – that would suggest a differentiated impact of leadership decapitation on the two types of insurgencies.

- KILLING insurgent leaders is likely MORE effective than capturing.

QUESTION:

Do you agree with these findings?

Would leadership decapitation effects differ for ideological conflicts and ethnic conflicts?

Relationship between REGIME TYPE and **coercive**, **repressive** RESPONSES to terrorism

Daxecker & Hess (2012): **CT and Regime Type**

- Empirical analysis: examine 539 groups from 1976 to 2006

- Regimes that rely LESS ON POPULAR SUPPORT (authoritarian regimes), COERCION is expected to produce DETERRENCE effects.

- Deterrence effects: reduce duration of terrorist groups.

- COERCIVE RESPONSES to terrorism – tend to be counterproductive in democracies.

Harsh & Repressive responses to terrorism

Include:

- Holding suspects without charging them.

- Assassinating suspected terrorists.

- Curbing civil freedoms.

- Impose retribution on alleged sponsors.

Use of Harsh responses:

- Contradict fundamental values of democratic regimes.

- Backlash likely if counter-terrorist measures do NOT discriminate between supporters of terrorist groups and civilians (innocent citizens)

Why are democracies different?

1. Harsh policies reduce local communities' cooperation with governing authorities.

2. Harsh counterterrorism policies increase sympathy for terrorist groups' cause & increase recruitment.

3. Democratic governments use of repression will jeopardize their ability to combat terrorism in a more general sense:

- Use of coercive measures may result in changes to counterterrorism policies that can reduce the government's effectiveness in combatting terrorist groups.

Results: Harsh measures, regime type, long run

- Democracies = limited and selective counterterrorism strategies have the HIGHEST potential for success.

- IRON FIRST strategies = have negative consequences in democratic and non-democratic states (especially in the long run).

- **Long run:**

- May end terrorist campaign in affected country, but might result in exodus towards other states.

- Indiscriminate repression, while effective in short run, may lead to widespread opposition or rebellion against authoritarian regimes in the long run. (example: Egypt).

QUESTION:

What is your opinion on harsh and repressive measures/ policies?

What are the effects?

Q&A

References

- Price, B. (2012). *"Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism"*
- Johnston, P.B. (2012). *"Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns"*
- Daxecker, U.E. & Hess, M. (2012). *"Repression Hurts: Coercive Government Responses and the Demise of Terrorist Campaigns"*
- Kurtulus, E. N. (2012). *"The New Counterterrorism: Contemporary Counterterrorism Trends in the United States and Israel"*
- Paul, C. & Clarke, C.P. & Grill, B. (2010). *"Victory has a thousand fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency"*

- Merari, A. (2007). *"Terrorism as a strategy of insurgency"*

- Albaroza, A.I. & Bagastian, R. & Sihidi, I.T. (2022). *"Impact of Terrorism and the role of media in Islamophobia"*