

Effectiveness of terrorism campaigns



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Much of the theory surrounding terrorism states that it works as a communication strategy signalling the costs of not giving in to the coercers' demands (Abrahms 2001). Bonnie Cordes goes against this way of thinking by saying that “ although terrorism is often described as a form of communication, terrorists are rather poor communicators because the violence of terrorism is rarely understood by the public” (p. 1).

During the 70's and 80's the emergence of terrorism was used as a tool of coercion being the preferred choice in warfare in the hopes of furthering an Islamic group to being the main ruling power of a country. Many analysts have exposed terrorism as sometimes reaching the outlined goals while many others argue that terrorism depending on whether it uses guerrilla warfare or strikes on civilians, reaches no positive outcomes for the coercer. Much of the literature has focused on pre-Iraq and pre-Afghan conflicts both of which contained a lot of terrorism. We have now entered the twenty first century and at present the Middle Eastern countries are engulfed in numerous ideological and religious based wars. Different Islamic groups are fighting within their own countries to reach and end that sees their preferred religious group becoming the ruling governing party. As of this year terrorism against both civilians and military still remains the preferred tool of warfare. As terrorism has failed to wane in the present it is relevant to see whether its use has become any more positively coercive against the targeted country or state.

Max Abrahms (2001) is a researcher who has delved in to terrorism data to uncover whether it is a useful tool in coercing governments to giving into groups' demands. He first outlines two types of targeted conflicts – those

that are guerrilla who take aim at military targets which are found to be the more successful at coercing governments into meeting demands. The second type is ones targeting civilians and these are less successful due to the perception that by targeting civilians the groups through their aggressive nature will be impossible to bargain and reason with. The goals the groups attempt to achieve are also indicative of future success. Maximalist goals are often not achieved whilst minimalist goals are. The aims of the group also need to be clear. Often outcomes goals are not easily understood as they are tied up in ideological or religious reasons. In this case outcomes are often not reached.

Although terrorism was used frequently during the 80's and 90's terrorism specialists stated that the use of terrorism rarely achieved the outcome goals demanded of governments (Cordes et al., 1984 in Abrahms 2012). Abrahms (2012) finds that terrorist campaigns are an inherently unprofitable coercive tactic because governments resist complying when their civilians are the focus of substate attack.

When Abrahms assessed the goals of terrorists he found two types; process goals and outcome goals. Process goals are a ploy to gain extra individuals to the group, to gain media attention, and financial support from likeminded people with attempts at hampering peace-processes and boosting morale. As we will see in examples from Iraq, their civil war is based on both types of goals. Their outcome goals are stated political goals which aim to overthrow the current Shia government and instil a caliphate leader of Sunni background. The difference between the two is the latter requires the

compliance of the target government which at present is not happening under current Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki.

In order to statistically test the effectiveness of terrorist campaigns Abrahms used a sample of 42 cases of terror attacks. He found that attacks carried out on civilians as done by Hamas versus ones carried out against a military such as the Tamil Tigers lead to differences in favour of the Tamil Tigers. The difference being governments tended to comply more often when attacks were not aimed at innocent people. Unlike guerrilla campaigns terrorist campaigns are seen as a losing political tactic (Abrahms 2012).

He further expanded his study to include 125 campaigns carried out by 54 groups. Roughly half of the campaigns were guerrilla using their attacks on military personnel. He first looked at the Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTO) capabilities and found certain criteria were relevant for future success. These included the peak membership size, the FTO life span; older groups had more highly developed organisational skills, whether or not the group received external support and lastly whether the group employed suicide missions as these enhanced the lethality of attacks, required additional manpower which enhances coercive effectiveness (Pare 2003, 2005). The target country's capability was also a future predictor of a campaigns success, as a country with great capability was less susceptible to coercion (Drezner 1998, Hart 2000 in Abrahms 2012).

Much of the terrorist activity used at present is within the Middle East and is being used in a civil war. In these cases the size of the objective is the key

variable affecting the political outcomes of these substate campaigns (Abrahms 2006b, Pape 2003, 2005).

In order for a government to make concessions to terror groups it is important they know what the objectives are. In the current literature there appears to be a general consensus on how governments rank political objectives. Campaigns found to have maximalist objectives seek to induce target governments into relinquishing their power or changing their ideology. Campaigns with limited objectives tend to not directly affect the government or its citizens fundamental way of life (Abrahms 2006b, George 1971).

There is some research that finds FTO's to be successful on certain occasions. Of the 125 campaigns Abrahms looked at, 38 successfully coerced the target country into at least partially complying with the policy demands. There is a clear difference however based on whether guerrilla tactics were used over terrorist attacks. The number is practically half of those that used guerrilla versus terrorism. The guerrilla campaigns which targeted the military accounted for 36 successful cases of coercion. The only case where terrorism partially succeeded on its policy demand was the highly publicised Spanish decision to withdraw from Iraq in response to the March 11 2004 Madrid train station bombings. Here the Moroccan Islamist group attacked Spanish commuters days before the prime ministerial election, helping to elect anti-war candidate who then fulfilled his pledge to bring Spanish troops home. However researchers tend to agree on the conclusion that the 11-M campaign was an outlier. Regardless of terrorist capability, guerrilla groups appear to be the only group that achieve their political demands. Terrorist campaigns would therefore seem to be an ineffective coercive tool.

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Comparativists are finding that rebel campaigns against civilians in protracted civil wars reduce the likelihood of gaining compliance of either the government (Fortna 2008) or the local population (Kalyvas 2006) again which can be observed from an Iraq perspective. The PM Maliki has consistently resisted the demands of the terrorist groups while also condemning all attacks.

Equally, studies assessing the media coverage of terrorism, consistently finds that it seldom amplifies the political demands of its perpetrators.

Equally the coverage is portrayed as acts of senseless bestiality (Hewitt 1993 p. 52). Less than 10% of coverage sided with the grievances of the terrorists (Kelly & Mitchell 1984p. 287). Lastly, the number of people killed is always higher for civilians than against assaults on a military in guerrilla campaigns.

Putting terrorism into context and taking the year 2012 as an example, there were a total of 6771 attacks worldwide resulting in over 11, 000 deaths and more than 21, 000 injuries (state. gov). Of these attacks civilians were the biggest victims accounting for 2073 lives. Police fatalities accounted for 1700 while government staff accounted for 971. Military personnel only accounted for 379 (state. gov) despite the research carried out by Abrahms suggesting that for terrorist groups to achieve any success being determined by attacks carried out on military staff.

In January alone Iraqi terrorist groups were responsible for the brutal deaths of over 1300 people (state. gov). Globally, Iraq ranks second in the total number of attacks combined in the year 2012 however they are number one for the amount of people killed (2436), the greatest number seen since

2006-2008 civil war. As previously mentioned, the Middle East is geographically the mostly heavily concentrated area of terrorist attacks even though the attacks occur in 85 countries. The highest proportion of attacks occurred in Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan with over half the occurrences happening in these countries. Of the targets aimed at 2073 out of 7467 are civilians whilst police account for 1699, government 971 and military comes at 379 after business at 480. In Iraq just over 27 percent of attacks were targeted at civilians whilst 24 percent against police. Journalists were targeted most frequently in Somalia (26%), Pakistan (18%) and Syria (13%).

Taking Iraq as an example and using Max Abrahms criteria for successful campaigns the following will outline whether after all these years terrorism really is the only viable way of coercing governments to a groups demands. State. gov reports that like Pakistan over 81% of attacks in Iraq are attributed to unknown perpetrators. The remaining attacks were identifies as those belonging to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) or The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Terrorism in Iraq was identified as some of the most lethal with three out of 10 being the most lethal of 2012. Although a single attack on any given day would be severe in Iraq there was often a concentrated and coordinated attacks that happened across the same day at multiple different locations. One particular day there were 30 attacks across the country. The tactics and targets were highly concentrated with more than 6 percent of all attacks targeted at either innocent civilians and property or police. An additional 10 percent were targeted at government officials. Over 80 percent of the attacks were bombings.

Worldwide the perpetrators that accounted for the most fatalities were the Taliban (1842) with Al Qaeda in Iraq and the ISIL coming in third (892). Of the tactics used bombing was the most preferred choice accounting for 65 percent used worldwide.

At present the U. S. Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security (OSAC) reports that the main target of terror in Iraq are government personnel and assets. Due to the groups protracted attempts at overthrowing the democratically elected Iraqi government and replacing it with a Sunni led Islamic caliphate such as in Iran. In 2013 9571 Iraqi civilians were killed and 2006 since the beginning of this year according to Iraq Body Count (Counterpunch). At present ISIS is taking over Sunni populated areas such as Fallujah and Mosul, this however is not getting the media attention that is required due to the threats and attacks on journalists, of which five have been killed since October last whilst over 40 have fled to Kurdistan and Turkey (Counterpunch). There has been a major increase in the occupation of Sunni led groups such as ISIS taking control over Sunni Iraq however the government seems to be struggling to regain control. Shia civilians continue to be killed en masses however the biggest problem is finding the whereabouts of the groups.

Civilian deaths appear to have outnumbered military fatalities despite the fact that research has shown this type of warfare to be ineffective in achieving any coercive outcomes. Despite thousands of Shia's being mortally wounded Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has numerous times stated that he " will not enter negotiations with terrorists" saying " that crushing terrorists is one of the priorities of the current Iraqi government". He further

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explained why negotiating with these groups (ISIL/Al Qaeda) would be futile saying these groups are not and will not be a negotiating side”. He went on to stress that “ whichever side that is not opposed to terrorist groups, is not worthy of partnership in running the country’s affairs”. (REF)

At present the Iraqi army has been working closely with both ethnic and local police in the al-Anbar province in an attempt to defeat the terrorists and al-Qaeda. The fighting is due to divisions between the Sunni and Shia population remaining after the civil war. Prior to which the Sunni minority were leading the country through Saddam Hussein. Add to this also the Kurdish minority who also want a say in how the country is governed. Sunnis accuse the current government of exclusion despite their presence in parliament. The government ignored a protest in December 2013 stating that it was a ploy for the sectarian and territorial division of the country (REF).

In November 2010 a power sharing agreement was made between all three parties however the Sunnis felt the government was marginalising them by having more Shia representatives. The cultural divisions appear too difficult for the government to handle which has led to the current uprising in the country and their inability to handle the security crisis.

Although the massacring of civilians has proven ineffective in the past, 8,000 people died in 2013 of which most of them were civilians. Abrahms outlined the possible coercive abilities of groups being dependent on the outcome or process goals. For ISIL and al-Qaeda, process goals have managed to garner some support from the mainly Sunni peoples and they

have been receiving funding from external sources such as Iran who are happy to help out the opposition in order to create instability within the Sunnis. Recruits were increased during the past number of years and the group is claimed to have 2500 members. Although the groups hope for media attention, as Abrahms has pointed out this is seldom in favour of the group's plight and this has been the case in Iraq. Journalists are afraid to print negative stories in fear of their lives with many as shown fleeing to neighbouring countries.

Equally, when looking at the outcome goals which is looking at what the group wishes to achieve politically they are aiming for maximalist goals that are not so much based on territory alone but rather a forceful attempt at overthrowing a government in the hopes of dividing the country into sectarian divisions based on ideological and religious goals of transforming the country into a Shia state following Sharia Law. These goals have proved to be impossible to achieve whether peaceful or violent means are attempted due in part to the lack of compliance of the current government.

Iraq's capabilities also are strong with the US having trained them and provided them with numerous arms and ammunition and vehicles (REF). The higher the capability the less susceptible the target country is. The size of the objective is a key variable in the future success of the group. As can be seen in the Iraq example the objectives are vast which makes the likelihood of any concessions highly unlikely.