

Stopping VEOs from meeting “milestones” will decrease their lifespan.

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General Description of the Literature:

Understanding the lifespan of VEOs has been investigated both qualitatively (Gurr and Ross 1989, Crenshaw 1991, Cronin 2009) and quantitatively (Cronin 2009, Blomberg et al. 2010) by several scholars. However, the way preventing VEOs from meeting “milestones” or reducing their ability to reach what Cronin (2009) calls tactical or process goals influence their lifespan is less understood. As Cronin (2009) suggests, reaching these process goals tends to perpetuate a VEO campaign rather than shorten it. These “milestones”, or goals, could serve organizational goals such as promoting a certain VEO over a rival. Hamas’ suicide bombing campaign during the early 1990s is an oft-cited example of such a goal (Bloom 2004). Pape (2003, 2005) suggests that terrorist campaigns are not very good at reaching their ultimate goals (usually some form of territorial concession), but are better at meeting more “modest” goals. No large cross-national time-series investigation of this question has occurred. Political scientists and economists have been the main scholars pursuing related hypotheses.

Detailed Analyses

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Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Case evidence is divided on the question of whether stopping groups from reaching milestones will decrease their lifespan. As discussed above, Crenshaw (1991) and Cronin (2009) suggest that meeting these milestones will empower groups vis-à-vis rivals, provide credibility to the group, and solve internal organizational challenges. In contrast, Ross and Gurr (1989) suggest that meeting certain goals may transition moderates into nonviolent participation, citing Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s as an example. Jones and Libicki (2008) also cite the PLO as a similar case. These authors suggest that “partial success”, when coupled with other preconditions, can diminish the lifespan of VEOs. Blomberg et al. (2010) investigate structural factors that influence the lifespan of a group, but do not test this hypothesis. Cronin (2009) uses the data from Jones and Libicki (2008) in the only large-N test of a similar hypothesis, but does not test this directly. There are significant flaws in these data, such as only providing information on the largest terrorist organizations (selection bias). Cronin (2009) also does not use time-varying covariates. Thus, her data are essentially cross-national and prone to endogeneity and selection bias.

Empirical Support Score: 2

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: This hypothesis is directly applicable to government efforts to counter VEOs. In fact, understanding the lifespan of organizations is one of the most important questions to ask. Unfortunately, there has not been a time-series, cross-sectional test of the duration of groups based upon reaching “milestones” or partial successes.

Applicability Score: Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs



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