

The Effects of Leadership on the Claim of Responsibility

Authors : Katalin Kovacs

Abstract : In most forms of violence the perpetrators intend to hide their identities. Terrorism is different. Terrorist groups often take responsibility for their attacks, and consequently they reveal their identities. This unique characteristic of terrorism has been largely overlooked, and scholars are still puzzled as to why terrorist groups claim responsibility for their attacks. Certainly, the claim of responsibility is worth analysing. It would help to have a clearer picture of what terrorist groups try to achieve and how, but also to develop an understanding of the strategic planning of terrorist attacks and the message the terrorists intend to deliver. The research aims to answer the question why terrorist groups choose to claim responsibility for some of their attacks and not for others. In order to do so the claim of responsibility is considered to be a tactical choice, based on the assumption that terrorists weigh the costs and benefits of claiming responsibility. The main argument is that terrorist groups do not claim responsibility in cases when there is no tactical advantage gained from claiming responsibility. The idea that the claim of responsibility has tactical value offers the opportunity to test these assertions using a large scale empirical analysis. The claim of responsibility as a tactical choice depends on other tactical choices, such as the choice of target, the internationality of the attack, the number of victims and whether the group occupies territory or operates as an underground group. The structure of the terrorist groups and the level of decision making also affects the claim of responsibility. Terrorists on the lower level are less disciplined than the leaders. This means that the terrorists on lower levels pay less attention to the strategic objectives and engage easier in indiscriminate violence, and consequently they would less like to claim responsibility. Therefore, the research argues that terrorists, who are on a highest level of decision making would claim responsibility for the attacks as those are who takes into account the strategic objectives. As most studies on terrorism fail to provide definitions; therefore the researches are fragmented and incomparable. Separate, isolated researches do not support comprehensive thinking. It is also very important to note that there are only a few researches using quantitative methods. The aim of the research is to develop a new and comprehensive overview of the claim of responsibility based on strong quantitative evidence. By using well-established definitions and operationalisation the current research focuses on a broad range of attributes that can have tactical values in order to determine circumstances when terrorists are more likely to claim responsibility.

Keywords : claim of responsibility, leadership, tactical choice, terrorist group

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