Increased American dominance in the international system has led to more terrorism.

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General Description of the Literature:

A number of scholars in the political science and policy literatures have hypothesized that increased American dominance of the international system has led to more terrorism, including Betts (2002) and Weber et al (2007). Ratner (2011) has suggested that as China becomes more powerful it will become a more attractive target for terrorist networks. These scholars do not, however, provide empirical support for their claims. There have, however, been a number of statistical studies evaluating the effect of the end of the Cold War, U.S. military occupation, and economic development on terrorist activity by Enders and Sandler (1999, 2000), Chenoweth (2008), Pape (2010) and Li (2005). Taken together the findings suggest that the end of the Cold War and the rise of U.S. primacy led to a reduction in the frequency, but an increase in the deadliness, of terrorist attacks during the 1990s and that U.S. military occupations in the naughts have increased the frequency of suicide bombings. They also suggest that wealthier countries are more likely to become the target of terror attacks.

Detailed Analyses

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Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Enders and Sandler (1999) conducted statistical analysis on data from 1970 to 1996 and concluded that the end of the Cold War led to a reduction in bombings and hostage takings due to a decrease of USSR funding for left wing groups. In a second study (2000), the authors found that terrorist attacks became more deadly beginning in 1991 due to the rise of religiously-motivated terrorism. Chenoweth (2008) found support for the idea that terrorist attacks decreased in the 1990s, but found that the end of the Cold War had no effect on the formation of new terrorist groups. Li (2005) and Chenoweth both found that wealthier countries are more likely to experience terrorist attacks because, while they are better resourced to perform counterterrorism missions, they are also more attractive targets and terrorists themselves can draw on resources in wealthy countries in staging attacks. In an evaluation of suicide terrorism, Robert Pape (2010) found that military occupations by a democratic state are near-necessary conditions for suicide terrorism and that U.S. military occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to a global increase in the incidence of suicide terrorism.

Empirical Support Score: 3

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: These studies were conducted on VEO activity and are, therefore, highly relevant to government efforts to influence VEOs. There is good reason to believe that these results would hold in the future and that a continuation of U.S. occupation will result in more suicide attacks against U.S. assets in the occupied countries and that the winding down of U.S. occupations could decrease them. It is uncertain, however, whether withdrawals of U.S. forces would decrease attacks against U.S. interests elsewhere or whether the relatively low levels of terrorist attacks detected in the 1990s could be restored given the fundamental changes in the international security environment since 9/11.

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

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