Broad-front strategies are more effective at lowering VEO activities than center-of-gravity strategies.

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General Description of the Literature:

When a military confronts a clandestine VEO, they can choose from a range of strategies. Two ideal types of military responses, referred to as broad-front (BF) and center of gravity (CoG) by Davis and Jenkins (2002), suggest different approaches to combating the organization. CoG approaches suggest concentrating resources in a particular/specific area. As Davis and Jenkins (2002) note, this strategy can be a bit vague. In the context of countering VEOs, this suggests a strategy that would concentrate on a single part of the organization rather than what Davis and Jenkins (2002) call "the system", or what others term "the network" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, among others). Military theorists and public policy scholars have pursued this question; a related literature comes from political science/international relations/psychology (Deibert and Stein 2002, Pedahzur and Perliger 2006, Sageman 2004). The network arguments (Deibert and Stein 2002, Sageman 2004) argue for what might be considered more BF strategies. Instead of targeting killings, decapitation, or focusing on particular actors in the network, these arguments suggest disrupting communications, denying the network a host, etc. Most of this literature comes from the policy/military communities, and no strong tests of these claims could be found using either detailed cases or cross-national empirical work.

Detailed Analyses

36: *Broad-front strategies are more effective at lowering VEO activities than center-of-gravity strategies.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Davis and Jenkins (2002) address this hypothesis, but do not provide a direct empirical test. Sageman (2004) and Pedahzur and Perliger (2006) examine specific networks, how people join, and how they evolve and decline, but neither study specifically tests this hypothesis. Pedahzur and Perliger (2006) do conclude through Social Network Analysis (SNA) that in the context of Palestinian suicide networks, it is more useful to think of the group as a network (implying a BF strategy) than as an organization (implying a CoG strategy).

Empirical Support Score: 0 = No empirical support (for or against the hypothesis)

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: This hypothesis has some relevance to VEOs, but care should be taken in applying conventional military strategies to clandestine violent networks/systems. How one conceptualizes the threat leads to models for action. BF strategies apply more to conventional militaries facing other conventional militaries. Misplaced models, such as the bombing/punishment strategies in the Vietnam conflict, can be counterproductive. One type of CoG action—decapitation—may or may not be effective. This issue is handled in a separate hypothesis/literature review.

Applicability Score: N/A

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