Breaking VEO networks and connections can reduce VEO activity.

46; 47; 49; 48

General Description of the Literature:

A number of scholars have theorized, using social network theory, that breaking the nodes and networks in VEO networks can reduce VEO activity, including Enders and Su (2007), Farley (2003), and Jackson (2005). However, there have only been two published studies that use systematic empirical analysis to test this hypothesized dynamic. Rethemeyer and Asal (2008) find that connections to other terrorist groups greatly increase the lethality of a VEO's operations, whereas Kenny (2006) concludes that VEOs can repair themselves quickly, concluding that breaking connections, therefore, has little effect.

Detailed Analyses

46: *Breaking VEO networks and connections can reduce VEO activity.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Conducting a statistical analysis on the lethality of VEOs from 1998 to 2005, Rethemeyer and Asal (2008) find that terrorist groups that have greater numbers of connections to other terrorist groups are more lethal than less well-connected groups. They hypothesize that this result is due to the fact that they are better able to draw on their allies' resources. This finding would suggest that breaking these terror connections would reduce VEO activity. In a comparative case study of Colombian drug traffickers and Al Qaeda, however, Kenny (2006) reaches the opposite conclusion. He finds that government efforts to eliminate nodes and connections in VEO networks are often unsuccessful because VEOs can adapt and repair themselves quickly.

Empirical Support Score: 3

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: These studies were performed on VEOs and are, therefore, directly relevant to government efforts to influence VEOs.

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

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47: *Breaking VEO networks and connections will reduce VEO activity in the short term only, if at all.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Theoretical work by Carley (1991) suggests that perturbations to a network have minimal short-term effects as the network can recover quickly, but that over time such effects could make networks less stable. There is no evidence for this hypothesis, however, as it relates to VEOs.

Empirical Support Score: 0

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: These studies concern influencing state sponsors of terrorism.

Applicability Score: N/A

49: *State targeting of actors in the VEO support system will have little effect because networks can repair or replace themselves very quickly.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: In a comparative case study of Colombian drug traffickers and Al Qaeda, Kenny (2006) finds that government efforts to eliminate nodes and connections in VEO networks are often unsuccessful because VEOs can adapt and repair themselves quickly. Conducting a statistical analysis on the lethality of VEOs from 1998 to 2005, Rethemeyer and Asal (2008) find that terrorist groups that have greater numbers of connections to other terrorist groups are more lethal than less well-connected groups. They hypothesize that this result is due to the fact that they are better able to draw on their allies' resources. This finding would suggest that breaking these terror connections would reduce VEO activity.

Empirical Support Score: 2

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: These studies were performed on VEOs and are, therefore, directly relevant to government efforts to influence VEOs.

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

48: *Breaking VEO networks and connections will reduce VEO activity in both the short and long term.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Theoretical work by Carley (1991) suggests that perturbations to a network have minimal short-term effects as the network can recover quickly, but that over time such effects could make networks less stable. There is no evidence for this hypothesis, however, as it relates to VEOs.

Empirical Support Score: 0

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: N/A

Applicability Score: N/A

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