POLS 429: International Terrorism
Lecture 26 (04.01.2020):
State Sponsorship of Terrorism

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Overview

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- AQ: origins, US - focused campaign and current challenges.
- Franchising: goal, risks, countering moves.
- AQ Revival: ISIS demise, structural conditions.
- ISIS: origins (AQI), violent approach and mobilizing the Muslim civil society.
- Expansion in 2015 and loss of territory until today.
- Main strength: innovation and ability to evolve and adapt.
- Media use: "virtual caliphate", "virtual planner model" (Paris 2015).
- Syria and Iraq: multiple enabling structural conditions.

Questions??

State Sponsorship

INTRODUCTION

- State support $\rightarrow$ access to diplomatic, economic, military and intelligence resources.
- State support $\rightarrow$ advanced weaponry, training, access to classified information, safe havens, logistical material and protection from infiltration.

WHY DO IT?

1. **Direct and indirect reprisals**
   - US invasion to Afghanistan and collapse of Taliban regime.
   - US strikes on Libya (attacks in Europe in 1980's).
   - Iran: economic sanctions (Hamas and Hezballah).
   - Sudan: US reprisal attacks for harboring Bin Laden and Al Qaeda.

State Sponsorship

WHY DO IT?

1. **Inefficient results**.
   - Unreliable allies who do not fulfill their promises.
   - Different agendas and clashes with sponsored group.
   - Unclear long term benefits.
   - Example: India and LTTE (Sri Lanka).

2. **Reputation and Image costs**.
   - Suffer damages from the actions of terror groups.
   - Supported groups are less sensitive to indiscriminate civilian targeting.
   - Can harm the long term reputation of sponsor with local population.

State Sponsorship

WHY DO IT, THE GROUP PERSPECTIVE:

- Limits on freedom of action to accomplish strategic goals.
- The sponsoring state may expel the group if it becomes a threat on some interests.
- Example: PLO and Jordan after the 1967 war.
- Black September (1970).

State Sponsorship

DEFINITION AND SCOPE CONDITIONS

- Like terrorism, no consensus definition.
- The role played by a state in supporting (on some level) a nonstate entity conducting acts of transnational terrorism.
- Another version $\rightarrow$ a state that establishes a group to serve as its agent and spread its goals in another location.
- Iran $\rightarrow$ Hezballah in Lebanon.
- Not just an Arab issue $\rightarrow$ French silent support of ETA's attacks in Spain, or US support for the Contras in Nicaragua.

State Sponsorship

Types of state sponsors (Byman 2005)

1. Aggressive supporters.
   - High capacity actors who actively support groups that serve as their agents.
   - Solves asymmetric conditions versus another state rival.
   - Iran: support Hezballah and Hamas.

2. Strong actors who oppose terrorism.
   - High capacity actors who reject the use of terrorism, or at the very least remain neutral.
   - Until the mid-2000's, The US ignored smuggling weapons and financial support by Irish-American sympathizers of PIRA.

State Sponsorship

Types of state sponsors (Byman 2005)

1. Weak supporters.
   - Actors who support terrorists but lack the capacity to expel them if needed.
   - Example: Taliban in Afghanistan.

2. Weak actors who oppose terrorism.
   - Actors who oppose terror groups but lack the capacity to confront the militant groups.
   - Iraq and AQI, until US support.

- Inadvertent support (weak capacity - structural).

- States misrepresent their intentions or stay silent about their actions: Pakistan after 9.11.

State Sponsorship

Modes of state sponsorship

- Sanctuary
    - Provide safe haven for training, plotting and recruitment.
    - Group protected from foreign intervention and can focus on preparing future attacks.
    - Incentives to seek such support (FLN - Algeria and bases in Tunisia).

- Money, arms and logistical support.
    - Run routine operations, pay recruits, purchase weapons, encryption technologies and transportation equipment.
    - Iran and Hezballah.
    - Specific logistical support: Idi Amin (Uganda) and Palestinian terror groups (1976).

State Sponsorship

Modes of state sponsorship

- Training and Operations.
    - Access to advance training facilities.
    - Provide intelligence about adversaries.
- Organizational assistance.
    - Early stages: closing 'information gaps'.

- Diplomatic backing.
    - Provide legitimacy to terrorists' claims (Arab countries and PLO).
- Ideological direction.
    - Inspiration and ideological guidance (Soviets in cold war, Iran after the Islamic revolution).

Strategic Approach

- Sponsorship $\rightarrow$ cost effective tactic for power maximization.
- Covert method to advance the sponsor's objectives while keeping plausible deniability involvement with the terror group.
- Reducing the risk of retaliation (military, economic or other).
- Example: Iraq and MeK (in Iran).
- Global power projection (Iran and Hezballah versus Israel and US).

- Countering evidence: the costs that states suffer for sponsoring terrorism, yet they persist.

Ideological Approach

- Belief systems regarding regional/global dominance and sponsorship of terrorism.

- Example: the 'silent support' of Saudis to ISIS and global Jihad.

- Ideology based sponsorship of terrorism is hard to counter:
    1. Contain sponsors by isolating them:travel bans, financial freezes of assets and more.
    2. Motivation is prestige? → remove the status benefits: expel from global events (G7 meetings) or membership in international organizations.

- Problems with with this explanation: in many cases, states support is not based on a particular ideology (Iran - Hamas).

Psychological Approach

- Individual leader: Qaddafi's support for terrorism is to his psychological and personality traits (narcissism, intense paranoia).

- A group context → *groupthink*. Radical Clerics in Iran that established and support Hezballah.

- Evidence to support this explanation is extremely hard to obtain since it requires private records of leaders about their views of sponsorship and assessment of psychological state.

Structural Approach

- Macro-level conditions that explain the states' decision to sponsor terror groups despite the risks.

- **State capacity**: weak states that sponsor groups and receive aid from those interested in containing terrorists.

- Example: Pakistan and American support.

- Weak states trying to (indirectly) project power via the terror group.

- Example: Pakistan prefers to support groups that target India from its borders and not risk a direct war.

Structural Approach

- **Regime type**: democracies are less likely to use proxy violent actors to resolve their differences.

- Without this channels $\rightarrow$ support for violence (mostly using terrorism).

- Problems with structural explanations:
  1. Cannot explain variation across similar conditions (Colombia versus Pakistan).
  2. Powerful states and terror sponsorship (US and Contras or Mujahideen in Afghanistan).
  3. Timing: static structural factors cannot explain why states decide to stop sponsorship (weak Jordanian monarchy and Palestinian groups, 1970).

Policy Implications

Strategies to counter state sponsorship of terrorism:

- **(1) Military action**: offensive retaliation targeting the host and the terror group.

- Example: Israel raid in Jordan (1968) for harboring Palestinian terrorists and allowing them to attack from its territory.

- Blowback: destroyed all militant bases, but attracted global criticism for being disproportionate and actually increased the sympathy for the Palestinians.

- Example: US invasion to Afghanistan (October 2001) to deny AQ safe haven and punish the Taliban for harboring Bin Laden.

- Military success in the short-term, but led to longest conflict in US military history.

Policy Implications

- **(2) Sanctions**: economic and diplomatic measures to punish sponsors of terrorism and dissuade them from this action.

- Example: Libya was included on the US state sponsor list (1979-2003).

- 1986: Reagan imposed exports and imports sanctions on Libyan products and barred providing financial services.

- 1988: UN increased actions with arms and petroleum embargo and closed off travel to and from the country.

- Substantial effects and drop in the extent of support for terrorism by Libya.

- Other countries had been more resistant to such measures (Sudan).

Recommended readings

More studies on State sponsorship of terrorism:

1. Sarah Kreps and Daniel Byman, "Agents of Destruction? Applying Principal-Agent Analysis to State Sponsorship of Terrorism," *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (February 2010), pp. 1-18.

2. Todd Sandler and Kevin Siqueira, "Terrorists versus the Government: Strategic Interaction, Support, and Sponsorship," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 6 (2006), pp. 878-898.