Question 5 – How are terrorist groups organized?

Processes linked to globalisation and the information revolution have affected the organisational structure of terrorist groups. In the past, most terrorist groups were organized along hierarchical lines, while contemporary terrorist groups and movements often operate through looser, cell-based and network-type organisations. This lecture analyses the main organisational structure of terrorist organisation, how they relate to each other and what are the policy implications.

Discussion questions

1. Is there a predominant organisational structure for contemporary terrorist groups?
2. Which organisational structure presents the highest level of threat?
3. How would you describe Al-Qaeda's organisational structure?

Essential readings

Gunaratna, Rohan, and Aviv Oreg. 2010. "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33 (12): 1043–78.
Sageman, Marc, and Bruce Hoffman. 2008. "The Reality of Grass-Roots Terrorism [with Reply]." *Foreign Affairs* 87 (4): 163–66.

Further readings

Helfstein, Scott, and Dominick Wright. 2011. "Success, Lethality, and Cell Structure across the Dimensions of Al Qaeda." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34 (5): 367–82.
Jackson, Brian A. 2006. "Groups, Networks, or Movements: A Command-and-Control-Driven Approach to Classifying Terrorist Organizations and Its Application to Al Qaeda." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (3): 241–62.
Kaplan, Jeffrey. 1997. "'Leaderless Resistance.'" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9 (3): 80–95.
Kelly, Mitchel, and Anthea McCarthy-Jones. 2019. "Mapping Connections: A Dark Network Analysis of Neojihadism in Australia." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, March, 1–23.
Ken, Miichi. 2016. "Looking at Links and Nodes: How Jihadists in Indonesia Survived." *Southeast Asian Studies* 5 (1): 135–154.
Kilberg, Joshua. 2012. "A Basic Model Explaining Terrorist Group Organizational Structure." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35 (11): 810–30.
Michael, George. 2012. "Leaderless Resistance: The New Face of Terrorism." *Defence Studies* 12 (2): 257–82.
Perliger, Arie, and Ami Pedahzur. 2011. "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44 (1): 45–50.

Non-peer reviewed resources

Arquilla, John. 2001. Networks and Netwars the Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy. Santa Monica, (CA).: RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1382.html.

"The Islamic State: How Its Leadership Is Organized?" *Wall Street Journal Video,* 8 September 2014. https://www.wsj.com/video/the-islamic-state-how-its-leadership-is-organized/4F4FA0B8-9C07-4D09-BF1D-5761162A0D87.html.

"Panel 3: The Evolution of Terrorism from al Qaeda to ISIS," *Centre for National Security Foundation*, May 2, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlQNHRJj3lU.

"Piecing Together the Complex Structure of ISIS," *NPR*, 7 August 2016. https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=489061729.

"The Military Structure of ISIS Explained," *NowThisWorld,* 15 July 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIzGG1B7afo.