Honors Theses   Capstone Projects

5-2018

Targeting Terrorist Leaders

Stephen Charles Rowe
Bates College, srowe@bates.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scarab.bates.edu/honorstheses

Targeting Terrorist Leaders

An Honors Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Politics
Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By Stephen Rowe

Lewiston, Maine
March 28, 2018

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Will d'Ambruoso for the countless hours he has assisted and supported me throughout the thesis process. Without him this project would not exist. I would also like to thank Emily Bacon for the time she spent helping me with formatting issues, Olin Carty for his help with evaluating the Global Terrorism Database's data, Jack McWilliams and Rob Flynn for all of their help and support, Owen Schmitt for being my emotional rock, and Vanessa Paolella for always being there for me. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their belief in me and their support for my Bates experience.

Abstract

Nearly every country engaged in counterterrorism campaigns includes leadership targeting as a key pillar of its counterterrorism strategy. However, the effectiveness of leadership removal in reducing the lethality of terrorist organizations is fiercely debated in the academic community. This thesis contributes to this field by examining how varying levels of charismatic authority and institutionalization within a terrorist group interact to impact the outcome of leadership removal on a terrorist organization's operational capacity. I find that leadership removal is rarely an effective military strategy for degrading the operational capacity of a terrorist organization, working successfully only on terrorist groups that are highly dependent on charismatic authority and have a weak institutional structure. However, leadership removal, particularly within terrorist groups that have both high levels of charismatic authority and institutionalization, causes political change within terrorist groups that, depending on the internal dynamics of that group, can have either positive or negative implications for counterterrorism policy.

Introduction

In the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, President George W. Bush called on the Taliban government in Afghanistan to hand over the leadership of Al Qaeda and promised the American people that the United States would hunt down the leaders of Al Qaeda wherever they might be.[1] In 2008, Barrack Obama made the finding and killing or capturing of Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, a key campaign pledge that he fulfilled in 2010.[2] In 2016, presidential candidate Hillary Clinton promised that, if elected, she would find and kill the leaders of ISIS.[3] This emphasis on targeting terrorist leaders as a way of combating terrorism has been at the forefront of the United States' counterterrorism policy for the last twenty years.

Targeting terrorist leaders is not only a US counterterrorism response but also a global reaction by states to terrorism. After the Moscow apartment building bombings, Russian President Vladimir Putin promised to have the leaders of the Chechen terrorist organization responsible "rubbed out, even if they're on the outhouse."[4] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu explicitly warned terrorist organizations that if Israel was attacked, they would respond by hunting down and removing the leaders of those

---

[1] George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on 9-11-01" *American Rhetoric.*
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911addresstothenation.htm
[2] Barrack Obama, *Second Presidential Debate,* Oct. 7th, 2008.
[3] Spencer Ackerman, "Hillary Clinton's plan to stop Isis: hunt down leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi," *The Guardian*. September 23rd, 2016.
[4] Owen Matthews, "Why Russia's Reaction to Terrorism is All About Strengthening Putin's Power." *Newsweek*, April 10th, 2017.

organizations responsible.[5] Across the globe, despite differences in regimes and governing philosophies, states that are the victims of terrorist attacks make leadership removal a key counterterrorism policy. The default global response to terrorism is leadership removal.

The logic underlying leadership removal is: If the head of a terrorist organization is eliminated then that organization will be significantly less capable of planning and executing lethal terrorist attacks. However, the empirical evidence on the effectiveness of targeting terrorist organizations' leaders is mixed, providing unclear guidance for policymakers.

The school of thought that supports leadership removal as a counterterrorism strategy argues that a terrorist organization's unique reliance on charismatic authority makes it particularly vulnerable to leadership removal.[6] This argument claims that terrorist organizations must rely on charismatic authority to hold their organization together and, since charismatic authority is not easily replaced, leadership removal presents an existential crisis for terrorist organizations because it challenges their legitimacy in the eyes of their followers. This argument is heavily criticized by scholars who oppose the use of leadership removal as a counterterrorism strategy for overstating the importance of charismatic authority within terrorist organizations.

---

[5] Toi Staff, "Netanyahu warns terror groups: Don't even think about it," *The Times of Israel*. November 12th, 2017.
[6] See Bryan Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2012, 9-46, and David Hofmann, "The Influence of Charismatic Authority on Operational Strategies and Attack Outcomes of Terrorist Groups," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2016, 14-44.

Scholars who oppose the use of leadership removal as a counterterrorism strategy tend to substantiate their arguments through the ideas of organizational resilience.[7] These arguments claim that terrorist organizations are not all that different from other organizations that employ political violence. Terrorist groups, and in particular large and established terrorist groups, will have complicated institutional structures that allow them to easily replace lost leaders and have their overall operational capacity unaffected by leadership removal.

The theories that focus on the importance of charismatic authority and those that focus on institutionalization in a terrorist group are often viewed as mutually exclusive. Terrorist groups are either secretive organizations that are entirely dependent on charismatic authority to bind them together or they are well-structured and heavily institutionalized organizations ,where leaders are little more than transactional pieces of a greater machine. This thesis, however, argues that notions of charismatic authority and institutionalization are not mutually exclusive within terrorist groups. Instead, terrorist groups contain varying levels of charismatic authority and institutionalization and this influences how they respond to leadership removal.

The goal of this thesis is to provide a greater understanding into how the variables of charismatic authority and institutionalization interact within a terrorist group to influence the effects of leadership removal. To do this, this thesis examines terrorist organizations with varying levels of dependency on charismatic authority and

---

[7] See Jenna Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark," *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 2014, 7-38, and Lisa Langdon, Alexander J. Sarapu, and Matthew Wells, "Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policy Makers," *Journal of Public and International Affairs*. Vol. 15 2004, 59-78.

institutionalization and shows how these two variables determine if the operational capacity of a terrorist organization is harmed by leadership removal.

In this thesis, I argue that leadership removal is rarely an effective way to degrade the operational capacity of terrorist groups. Leadership removal is remarkably ineffective at reducing a terrorist group's underlining operational capacity, working only in terrorist organizations that are heavily reliant on charismatic authority with a weak institutional structure. Instead, the greatest impacts of leadership removal are political. The loss of a leader forces political change within a terrorist group and the results of this political change can have either positive or negative counterterrorism policy implications based on the internal dynamics of the terrorist group.

Chapter I of this thesis focuses on the theoretical background and reviews the literature on leadership removal. In this chapter, I explain the competing theories on terrorist group organization, and I explore the arguments made by major authors in the fields and their critiques of each other's work.

Chapter 2 outlines the methods and research design of this thesis. In this section, I explain and justify the cases selected in this thesis, define relevant terms, layout the key variables used in this thesis, and show how those variables are measured.

Chapter 3 examines the effects of leadership removal on the operational capacity of Aum Shinrikyo. Aum Shinrikyo was a large Japanese terrorist organization that was highly dependent on the charismatic authority of its leader, Shoko Asahara, and lacked a strong institutional structure. It was also notable for being the only terrorist organization to use weapons of mass destruction. I find that, in line with the theoretical understanding,

leadership removal decimated the operational capacity of Aum Shinrikyo and quickly led to organizational collapse.

Chapter 4 examines the effects of leadership removal on the operational capacity of Hamas. Hamas is a large terrorist organization that is not highly dependent on charismatic authority, but is incredibly institutionalized and well-structured. It operates in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Here, again, I find that the impact of leadership removal follows the theoretical arguments. The loss of its leaders did not negatively impact the operational capacity of Hamas and ultimately ended up strengthening its position.

Chapter 5 examines the impact of leadership removal on the PKK. The PKK is a Kurdish insurgent organization that engages in terrorist attacks to further its political goal of creating a Kurdish state. The organization at the time of leadership removal was both highly dependent on the charismatic authority of its leader and incredibly institutionalized and well-structured. In this case, I find that while leadership removal did not reduce the underlying operational capacity of the PKK, it did force political changes within the group that led to positive counterterrorism policy developments.

Chapter 6 examines the case of leadership removal in Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda is a large transnational terrorist organization that, like the PKK, was heavily reliant on the charismatic authority of its leader, Osama Bin Laden, while also having a sophisticated institutional structure to support the organization. Again, I find that leadership removal did not reduce the operational capacity of Al Qaeda, but did force political change within the organization. However, unlike the PKK, this political change did not lead to a decrease in the lethality of Al Qaeda, but instead made the organization more violent and more regionally focused.

The last section of this thesis is the conclusion. Here I claim that leadership removal needs to be reevaluated and used not as a military tool to degrade the operational capacity of terrorist organizations, but rather as a political strategy to modify terrorist organizations. I also lay out other areas for further research.

Chapter I

The Theory of Leadership Removal

The efficacy of leadership removal on a terrorist organization's operational capacity is a contentious subject. Governments and military officials tend to be ardent supporters of leadership targeting. Meanwhile, academics have tended to be more critical of the efficacy of leadership removal as a means of degrading terrorist organizations. Each side has developed its own theoretical framework to support its case. These theories are heavily focused on organizational structure, borrowing from the fields of economics and sociology. Supporters of leadership removal tend to draw heavily from theories on charismatic authority, while detractors draw from theories of organizational resilience.

The foundational puzzle for both the supporters and detractors of leadership targeting is, why do leaders matter? Practically every government in conflict with terrorist groups pursues leadership targeting as a counterterrorism strategy. However, governments typically don't apply leadership targeting as a strategy when in conflict with another state. What makes the leaders of terrorist organizations different?

Charismatic Leadership Theory

Supporters of leadership targeting argue that terrorist organizations' structures leave them uniquely vulnerable to the death or capture of their leaders. Terrorist organizations are in asymmetric power arrangements, in which the states that they are

fighting have significantly more capacity than they do. To compensate for their lack of

power, terrorist organizations are secretive and opaque.[8] They blend in with the general

population, making it harder for the state security apparatus to determine who is a

member of a terrorist organization and who is a citizen.[9] While this structure helps

terrorist organizations adapt to the asymmetry of power, it also restricts how terrorist

organizations can be structured.

In his groundbreaking work on leadership structures, Max Weber argued that there

are three types of authority around which to structure an organization: tradition,

rational/legal, and charismatic.[10] In order for an organization to be successful in mobilizing

individuals to complete its goals, one of these types of authority needs to be present.

An organization possesses traditional authority when it is based on long standing

traditions, norms, and cultural customs. The classic example of an organization structured

around traditional authority is the English monarchy. The English monarchy is incredibly

old, steeped in tradition, and has been an essential part of the English culture. All of these

factors allow the English monarchy to be a source of traditional authority to this day.

Terrorist organizations, on the other hand, typically lack the factors necessary to

create strong traditional authority within their organization. While terrorist organizations

are not a new phenomenon, individual terrorist organizations typically don't last longer

than a century, making it hard for them to have the background to establish strong

traditional authority.[11] Additionally, while norms and cultural customs certainly exist

---

[8] Bryan Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2012, 18-19.
[9] Ibid, 18-19
[10] Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, S.N. Eisenstadt, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, 48.
[11] Bryan Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 14-17.

within terrorist organizations, they are weaker than the norms and cultural customs found within organizations with the capacity to engage in state building.[12] The nature of terrorist organizations makes them weak sources of traditional authority.

The most common type of authority in organizations is rational/legal. Rational/legal authority is derived through an agreed process through which laws are created and enforced.[13] Thinking back to the Great Britain example, an organization in that country with rational/legal authority would be parliament and the police force. Parliament is how the sovereign people of Great Britain agreed that they would be governed, which in turns makes legitimate coercive use of force by the police to uphold the law.

Terrorist organizations also typically lack strong rational/legal authority. The two key pillars that uphold rational/legal authority are legitimate rules and enforceability.[14] Terrorist organizations are weak in both pillars. For rules to be legitimate, they have to be created in a standardized and agreed upon way. This is difficult for terrorist organizations because, in order to conduct their organizations activities in secret from the states that are trying to dismantle them, they lack high levels of institutionalization.[15] This makes them different from organizations with strong rational/legal authority, all of which have high level of institutionalization that provides them with authority.[16] Terrorist organizations also lack strong enforcement powers. Terrorist organizations lack the capacity of states, which means their ability to assert their authority over individuals is much less than that of

---

[12] David Hofmann, "The Influence of Charismatic Authority on Operational Strategies and Attack Outcomes of Terrorist Groups," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2016, 14-21.
[13] Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*. 1968.
[14] Ibid, 1968.
[15] Bryan Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists" 16.
[16] Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, 1968.

state organizations.[17] Overall, terrorist organizations lack the foundation for obtaining strong rational/legal authority.

The weakness of terrorist organizations to build traditional or rational/legal authority leaves them with only charismatic authority around which to build their organization. The key factor for an organization that is built around charismatic authority is its leader. A leader who has charismatic authority is considered to be superior to an ordinary man by the followers of the leader.[18] Followers are willing to commit themselves to that leader and all followers feel a deep personal connection to their leader, even if they have never met before.[19] While this type of authority has the least structure to it, it is considered the most powerful in its ability to mobilize people.

Terrorist organizations rely heavily on charismatic authority. The ability to mobilize individuals without a concrete organizational structure is appealing to terrorist groups because it allows them to recruit members without the risk of exposing the organization. Devotion to a charismatic leader also helps overcome collective action problems. The risks involved with joining a terrorist organization are much higher than the potential rewards. This poses a major problem for terrorist recruitment, but charismatic authority overcomes this problem by changing the framework through which an individual evaluates his/her self-interest.[20] Followers of charismatic leaders define their self-interest as the interests of the leader or the leader's vision.[21] This makes many actions that appear irrational to

---

[17] Bryan Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists" 16-17.
[18] David Hofmann, "The Influence of Charismatic Authority on Operational Strategies and Attack Outcomes of Terrorist Groups." *Journal of Strategic Security*. Vol. 9, No. 2. 2016, 20.
[19] Ibid, 20.
[20] Ibid, 20.
[21] David Hofmann, "The Influence of Charismatic Authority on Operational Strategies and Attack Outcomes of Terrorist Groups." 20.

outside observers, such as suicide bombings, rational to individuals under charismatic authority. This is why so many of the most lethal and effective terrorist organizations in history have been headed by charismatic leaders such as Osama Bin Laden, Shoko Asahara, Abimael Guzman, and Abdullah Öcalan.

Scholars who support leadership targeting argue that terrorist organizations' heavy reliance on charismatic authority makes them ideal for leadership targeting programs. There are two types of leaders, transactional and charismatic.[22] Transactional leaders are focused on managing an organization. They set goals for individuals and set benchmarks for the organization to hit.[23] This makes them easily replaceable since the skills of setting goals and benchmarks are not exactly unique. Charismatic leaders, on the other hand, have to have all the previously mentioned skills necessary to create charismatic authority. This type of leader cannot simply be replaced. The ability to get others to commit themselves fully to a leader and their cause is not common, and members of organizations built behind a charismatic leader often consider themselves committed to the leader, not the organization.[24] Thus, the removal of a charismatic leader from an organization built around charismatic authority should quickly cause that organization to collapse.

Charismatic leader theorists have tried to support their work empirically. Bryan Price, one of the strongest advocates for the use of leadership removal as a counterterrorism strategy, conducted a quantitative study looking at hundreds of cases of leadership removal through a database he designed himself. He found that while violence would typically spike after a terrorist organization suffered leadership removal, the

---

[22] Bryan Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 20-21.
[23] Ibid, 20
[24] Ibid, 21

duration of the organization's life span would be significantly shortened by leadership removal.[25] Terrorist organizations, Price concludes, are simply unable to replace their leaders, which causes their organizations to fall apart.

These results were closely corroborated by the results of Patrick Johnston. He found that successful counterterrorism campaigns almost always had instances of leadership removal, leadership removal would lead to an overall decrease in violence committed by a terrorist organization, and leadership removal would shorten the length of counterterrorism operations.[26] This is similar to the results of a study by Jason Brown, who found that the removal of Al Qaeda leaders significantly reduced that organization's operational capacity.[27]

For supporters of using leadership removal as a counterterrorism strategy, it is clear that terrorist organizations are overly reliant on their leaders. The best way to counter terrorist organizations is to remove its leaders, as the organization will be unable to find a replacement and find its organizational lifespan and operational capacity reduced.

Critiques of Charismatic Leadership Theory

There are several critiques leveled at the charismatic leader theory on both an empirical and theoretical level. First, there are some problems with the empirical work supporting the theory. There is a real difficulty in establishing causality between leadership removal and reductions in a terrorist organization's operational capacity. Max Abrahms notes that leadership removal almost never takes place in a vacuum. It is almost always

---

[25] Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists" 43-44.

[26] Patrick Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns," *International Security*, Vol 36, No 4., 2012, 47-79

[27] Jason Brown, "To Bomb or Not to Bomb? Counterinsurgency, Airpower, and Dynamic Targeting," *Air and Space Power Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2007 75-86.

accompanied by a sustained counterterrorism campaign that engages the terrorist

organization at all levels and by intelligence operations conducted by states that make it

harder for terrorist organizations to plan and execute lethal terrorist attacks.[28] Given the

multi-faceted nature of counterterrorism campaigns, it is difficult to assess the success of

just one strategy. This is why Patrick Johnston does not claim causality in his study, but

rather just makes note of the strong correlation between leadership removal and the

reduction of terrorist violence.[29]

Bryan Price does try to establish causality between leadership removal and

organizational death, but in doing so, he creates some problematic issues. In order to

obtain statistically significant results, Price created a huge sample across which he could

measure the effectiveness of leadership removal. However, to make his sample large

enough to be statistically significant, he included many terrorist organizations that had

fewer than 100 members in them when they experienced leadership removal.[30] An

organization with fewer than 100 members would receive a greater than 1% reduction in

overall capacity from leadership removal, so it is difficult to establish whether the

organizational death that occurred afterwards was a result of the loss of a charismatic

leader or the overall reduction in capacity of the terrorist organization.

Finally, critics argue that charismatic leadership theorists are wrong in their

assumptions about how common and important charismatic leaders are in terrorist

organizations. While supporters of charismatic leadership theory argue that terrorist

organizations rely on charismatic instead of transactional leaders to preserve their secrecy,

---

[28] Max Abrahms and Jochen Mierau, "Leadership Matters: The Effects of Targeted Killing on Militant Group Tactics," *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Vol. 29 No. 5 2017, 47-79
[29] Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work?" 47.
[30] Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists" 34.

critics respond with empirical cases that show transactional leadership is actually quite common within terrorist organizations.

For example, when the United States assassinated Osama Bin Laden, they uncovered thousands of internal Al Qaeda documents that detailed an intricate financial system that illustrated that Al Qaeda had a very hierarchical and structured center.[31] There were clearly identifiable, mid-level transactional leaders and there were clear lines of succession. All this suggested that Al Qaeda was not overly dependent on the charismatic authority of Osama Bin Laden to maintain its operational capacity. Additionally, some terrorist organizations, such as the IRA and Hamas, function as violent wings of political parties. Not only do these organizations boast many lower and mid-level transactional leaders that help run the organizations, but the authority within these organizations is derived not from the charisma of its leaders, but from strength of the political party's ideology. This suggests that even if a leader of one of these organizations is removed, the ideological authority of the organization will survive. With these points, critics contend that the charismatic leadership theory's assumptions are fatally flawed and an alternative outlook on leadership removal is needed.

Organizational Resilience Theory

Scholars critical of the charismatic leadership theory and the effectiveness of leadership removal at reducing the operational capacity of terrorist organizations use organizational resilience theory to argue that terrorist organizations can easily absorb the loss of leader without suffering a blow to that organization's operational capacity. The organizational resilience theory takes the key assumption behind the charismatic

---

[31] Jacob Shapiro *The Terrorist Dilemma: managing violent covert organizations.* (Princeton University Press 2013) 83-99.

leadership theory - that leaders are critically important to a terrorist organization's authority - and directly contradicts it, arguing that individual leaders are not important to the functioning of a terrorist organization.

Organizational resilience theory argues that the level of institutionalization present within an organization, as opposed to its leaders, is what determines the ability of an organization to function effectively. Institutionalization strengthens organizations through several channels. First, the more institutionalized an organization, the more diverse its resources will be.[32] As an organization becomes more bureaucratic, specialized branches carry out specific tasks. In a terrorist organization, this might look like having a branch of the organization that is dedicated to bomb making, which is separate from the group's finance branch. A more bureaucratic organization is also more likely to have redundancies built into the organization, such as having multiple sources financing, which make the organization more durable.

More institutionalized and bureaucratized organizations will also be more resistant to outside shocks because of their clearly defined rules, procedures, and lines of succession. With an established process to follow, institutionalized organizations can prevent the damaging confusion that follows a disruption to the organization and quickly continue to carry out its objectives.[33] A leader that is removed from an institutionalized organization will quickly be replaced without a leadership struggle that is damaging to the organization.

The effectiveness of the organizational resilience theory is easily seen in the most institutionalized and bureaucratic institutions that are dedicated to the use of violence,

---

[32] Jenna Jordan "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark," *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 2014, 11-12.
[33] Ibid, 13-15.

namely military units. Military units routinely suffer leadership removal, yet they have a tendency to handle leadership removal very well. For example, the average battle casualty rate for 1st Lieutenants in the U.S. Army during the Second World War was 105%.[34] This meant the average company, a military unit of around 200 soldiers, would experience one instance of leadership removal over the course of the war. The battle casualty rate for 2nd Lieutenants was nearly twice as high at 204%.[35] Yet despite the frequency of leadership removal within military units in WWII, the United States Army did not lose operational capacity and continued on to win the war.

Even total devastation of the leadership in military units does not have to lead to organizational collapse. When the 116th Infantry regiment landed on Omaha Beach, all of its officers, including its commanding officer, were killed or wounded within the first hour of combat.[36] Yet despite this tremendous loss of leadership, the 116th Infantry regiment went on to secure the Omaha beachhead within 24-hours and continued to serve as an effective frontline force throughout the French campaign.[37] Clearly ,the loss of leadership does not prevent military organizations from accomplishing strategic objectives.

Empirical research also suggests that terrorist organizations also have enough of an institutional structure to resist the effects of leadership removal. Jenna Jordan has, one of the most detailed studies on leadership removal. She examined hundreds of cases of terrorist removal and she found that, on average, leadership removal tends to be

---

[34] Anne Leland and Mari-Jana, "American War and Military Operations Casualties: List and Statistics." *Congressional Research Service.* February 26th, 2010.
[35] Leland and Jana, "American War and Military Operations Casualties: List and Statistics," 2010.
[36] Austin Long, "Whack-a-mole or Coup de Grace? Institutionalization and Leadership Targeting in Iraq and Afghanistan," *Security Studies.* Vol. 23, 2014, 477.
[37]Ibid, 477.

counterproductive, as it will actually increase levels of violence.[38] This trend was

particularly pronounced among the older, larger, and most institutionalized terrorist

organizations. This led Jenna Jordan to conclude that leadership removal is a costly and

counterproductive counterterrorism strategy.[39]

    Multiple scholars have replicated these results. Aaron Mannes and Lisa Landon both

conducted large quantitative studies that also found leadership removal to have a

negligible impact on terrorist organizations.[40] These results also held up in case studies.

Steven David found, when he examined the unnamed but widely acknowledged program by

Israel of target killing, that it did not deter terrorist organizations.[41] In fact, he found many

instances in which targeted killing actually led to an increase in the lethality of the terrorist

organization.[42] The organizations that he was examining were all firmly established with a

great degree of institutionalization. This gave the organizations the capacity to step up

attacks, even while Israel targeted their leaders.

    In the face of an institutionalized terrorist organization, supporters of the

organizational resilience theory find that leadership removal is simply ineffective at

impairing the operational capacity of the terrorist organization. Through this perspective,

---

[38] Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2009, 719-755
[39] ibid, 719-720.
[40] Aaron Mannes, "Testing the Snake Head Strategy: Does Killing or Capturing its Leaders Reduce a Terrorist Group's Activity?" *Journal of International Policy Solutions*, Vol. 9. 2008, 40-49 and Lisa Langdon, Alexander J. Sarapu and Matthew Wells, "Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policy Makers," *Journal of Public and International Affairs*. Vol. 15 2004, 59-78.
[41] Steven David, "Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing," *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No 3. 2003, 138-158.
[42] Ibid, 138.

leadership targeting is at best ineffective, and at worst counterproductive to counterterrorism goals.

Critiques of Organizational Resilience Theory

There are several critiques of the organizational resilience theory. A large problem with the theory for its detractors is that it treats leaders as actors with no real agency or influence in their organization. The organizational resilience theory treats leaders as little more than replaceable parts. Empirically, this is not always the case. When Israel implemented its leadership-targeting program, it quickly brought Hamas to the negotiating table, and the first demand of Hamas was to stop the leadership-targeting program.[43] Clearly, the leaders of Hamas changed the operational strategy of their organization to adapt to the threat to their leadership. This is an outcome that the organizational resilience theory fails to explain.

Organizational resilience theory, just like the charismatic leadership theory, also has measurement issues. While levels of institutionalization are certainly easier to measure, through the presence of captured financial and bureaucratic documents and information received through interrogations, than charisma, measurements of institutionalization are often based on faulty assumptions. For example, it is generally assumed that old and large terrorist organizations have to be highly bureaucratic, otherwise they would not have survived so long.[44] Again, this is not always the case. The Shining Path in Peru had thousands of members and was active in Peru for over 30 years, yet had low levels of

---

[43] Steven David, "Fatal Choices" 143-144.
[44] Jenna Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark." 14.

institutionalization around its central leadership.[45] Classifying the level of institutionalization of a terrorist organization based on age and size alone can lead to faulty results.

The portrayal of terrorist organizations as either organizations dependent on charismatic authority or organizational resilience in their structure is detrimental to evaluating the effectiveness of leadership removal. Terrorist organizations are not uniformly organized. Almost all terrorist organizations contain both charismatic leaders and institutional structures designed to increase the ability of that organization to withstand counterterrorism operations, but the importance and structure of these two variables will vary across terrorist organizations. This means from a theoretical perspective that evaluating the effectiveness of leadership removal should not be explained as a binary choice, in which organizations that are based on charismatic authority will be greatly affected by leadership removal and organizations with high levels of institutionalization will not be significantly affected. Rather, the effectiveness of leadership removal on a terrorist organization is determined by how these two variables interact with each other.

The interaction of these two variables can be seen in the case of Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda had an incredibly charismatic leader in Osama Bin Laden. He could expertly articulate the vision of the organization and he had a large impact on the members of Al Qaeda, even if he had never personally interacted with them.[46] At the same time though, Al Qaeda is a very institutionalized group at its core. Captured documents reveal that Al Qaeda kept detailed

---

[45] Steven Stern, *Shining and Other Paths War and Society in Peru 1980-1995*. (Duke University Press 1998), 267-301.
[46] Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists" 45.

financial records that included a payroll system, and also collected demographic

information on its recruits, and would even provide social services and benefits to the

families of it recruits.[47] The existence of both charismatic authority and high levels of

institutionalization in one terrorist organization challenges the classical theoretical

understanding of leadership removal.

---

[47] Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations*, 36-37.

Chapter II

Methods and Research Design

In order to determine how charismatic authority and institutionalization interact within a terrorist organization to impact the effectiveness of leadership removal, this thesis is constructed as a typology. I examine leadership removal in four terrorist organizations, Aum Shinrikyo, Hamas, the PKK, and Al Qaeda.

	High Charismatic Authority	Low Charismatic Authority
High Institutionalization	**PKK** **Al Qaeda** LTTE	**Hamas** IRA ISIS
Low Institutionalization	**Aum Shinrikyo** Shining Path Red Army Faction	Extremely Rare

These four terrorist groups provide valuable case studies through which I examine how charismatic authority and institutionalization interact within a terrorist organization. The cases of Aum Shinrikyo and Hamas were chosen to test the traditional theoretical thought on leadership removal. As an organization with high charismatic authority and low levels of institutionalization, Aum Shinrikyo should be severely degraded by leadership removal. Hamas, on the other hand, as an organization with low levels of charismatic authority but high levels of institutionalization, should prove resilient to leadership removal. The cases of Al Qaeda and the PKK are the most important to this thesis, as they shed the most light on how charismatic authority and institutionalization influence the effects of leadership removal. In these organizations, the two classical theoretical frameworks reach opposite conclusions about what the effects of leadership removal would be. Since there is a high amount of charismatic authority within Al Qaeda and the PKK, charismatic leadership theory would suggest leadership removal would be effective at reducing the operational capacity of terrorist organizations, whereas since both organizations also have high levels of institutionalization, organizational resilience theory would suggest that their operational capacity would not be hindered by leadership removal.

I have not included any organizations with both low levels of charismatic authority and institutionalization because they are extremely rare. While terrorist organizations can have both high levels of charismatic authority and institutionalization, they generally need at least one of them to function. An organization without a consolidated charismatic authority or a strong institutional structure would have no way to bind its members together and exert authority over them. Even if a terrorist organization managed to

function in a low institutionalization and charismatic authority setting, choosing to examine it to learn about the effects of leadership removal on a terrorist organization's operational capacity would be pointless since leaders in that group would not be important to the organization's functions.

One final important note about the terrorist organizations examined in this thesis is they are all large organizations. Each one of these organizations had, at the peak of its power, over 10,000 members. I chose to examine large organizations for three reasons. First, size is an important factor in determining the risk posed by a terrorist organization. While smaller groups can certainly cause havoc and conduct devastating attacks, larger group will pose more of a threat to a state due to the increase capacity that comes with a larger number of individuals. This makes the conclusions regarding the effectiveness of leadership removal on the operational capacity of terrorist organizations more valuable in since governments and citizens have more to fear from large terrorist organizations.

Secondly, the inclusion of large terrorist groups allows this thesis to measure how organizational resilience theory and charismatic leadership theory interact within an organization. As previously mentioned, terrorist organizations typically have both significant levels of institutionalization and a charismatic leader and one of the goals of this thesis is to determine how these two factors interact within an organization. However, smaller terrorist organizations can lack the high levels of institutionalization on which organizational resilience theory is based. For example, Louis Beam, the somewhat charismatic head of a small far-right white supremacy group within the United States, has no institutional structure to his organization. Instead, he tries to use charismatic appeals to

get others to conduct violence in the name of his goals.[48] While his case is somewhat

unique, his location, unlike that of most self-anointed leaders of terrorist groups, is known

to the authorities of the state that he is trying to undermine through terrorism. This

illustrates the point that smaller terrorist organizations don't need, and won't always have

,an institutional structure. While large terrorist organizations can also have lower levels of

institutionalization - the Shining Path, for example, has low levels of institutionalization,

albeit in the center, with the outer fringes of the organization being much more structured

– large organizations with to over 10,000 members require some sort of functioning

bureaucracy so the two variables will always interact.[49] Studying the effects of leadership

removal on small terrorist organizations does not yield as many interesting insights, as

both charismatic leadership and organization resilience theorist would agree that

leadership removal in the case of these organizations would lead to organizational death.[50]

Finally, this thesis looks only at large terrorist organizations to help isolate the

effectiveness of leadership removal. There are many quantitative studies that find that

leadership removal is a particularly effective strategy against smaller terrorist

organizations. Even Jenna Jordan, an avowed critic of the strategy, notes in her quantitative

work that leadership removal is remarkably effective against small and newly established

terrorist organizations.[51] However, many of the organizations that these quantitative

studies find leadership removal to be effective against are so small that it is hard to

attribute the aftermath of leadership removal simply to the loss of leadership. As

---

[48] Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations,* 2013 11-32
[49] Steven Stern, *Shining and Other Paths War and Society in Peru 1980-1995*, 1998
[50] Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists" 43-44. And Jenna Jordan. "When Heads Roll". 743-745
[51] Jenna Jordan. "When Heads Roll" 743-745.

mentioned earlier, many of these organizations have less than 100 members.[52] In these cases, the loss of a leader not only means the loss of a charismatic and guiding figure for the organization but also the loss of over 1% of the organization's manpower. In these cases, it is exceptionally hard to use mathematical tools to isolate the effects of the loss of leadership.

Determining Leaders

The prerequisite to studying the effects of leadership removal is determining who the leaders of terrorist organizations are. Many studies in the field of leadership removal use an expansive definition of leader that includes everything from operational commanders to chief bomb makers. This thesis takes the opposite approach. In this thesis, the leader of a terrorist organization is the head political authority within the organization. Determining who the leader of the terrorist organizations in this thesis was quite easy. They were all founders or co-founders of their respective organizations, held complete authority within their organization, and were solely responsible for their organizations overall agenda and strategy.

Defining Terms

Terrorist Organization: With acknowledgement to the fact that one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter, I have included these groups as terrorist organizations based on the following definition of a terrorist organization: non-state organizations that employ violence against civilians in pursuit of goals that are religious, political, or ideological in nature. All of the previously mentioned groups, however laudable one may consider their ultimate objectives to be, have undertaken actions that make them

---

[52] See datasets in Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll" 143-145, and Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 34.

fall into this category. All find themselves on the U.S. Department of State's list of terrorist organizations but their inclusion in this thesis is not an attempt to pass a moral judgment on them, but an acknowledgement of their actions.[53]

Terrorist Attack: I define a terrorist attack as the use of violence by a terrorist organization to further its political agenda. The parameters of this definition mean that attacks undertaken by terrorist groups that target what under normal wartime circumstances would be considered legitimate targets such as military units, are classified as terrorist attacks. I am using this looser definition of a terrorist attack, as opposed to one that only classifies attacks that directly target civilians as a terrorist attack because I feel that this definition provides a better understanding of the operational capacity of a terrorist organization.

Measuring Charismatic Authority Within an Organization

In order to determine how important charismatic authority was within a terrorist group, I used David Hoffman fourteen-point measurement of charismatic authority.[54] This scale and the justifications for the leaders examined in this thesis can be viewed in the Appendix, where I apply Hoffman's scale to the leaders examined in this thesis.

Measuring Institutionalization

To determine levels of institutionalizations within terrorist organizations, I rely heavily on the information from captured internal documents. These records do a good job in explaining to what extent there was an organized bureaucratic structure in place and what that structure looked like. Paper trails are also a good indication of

---

[53] U.S. Department of State. "Foreign Terrorist Organizations"
https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm
[54] Hoffman, "Quantifying and Qualifying Charisma," 716.

institutionalization. Generally speaking, the more documents and records an organization keeps the more institutionalized that organization is. Some other factors that are important to determining levels of institutionalization are the amount of linkages within an organization. Extensive linkages within an organization are key to building institutionalized structures as it ensures communication between members and provides clarity about the structure of the organization. Finally, to be highly institutionalized, a terrorist organization needs to be able to use its structure in secret. Terrorist organizations need to be secretive because a public institutional framework would not serve their goals. A highly institutionalized terrorist organization not only has an organized institutional structure but is also able to operate that structure in secret. A more comprehensive list of ten major criteria I use in evaluating the level of institutionalization within a terrorist organization can be found in the Appendix.

Measuring the Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this thesis is operational capacity. The operational capacity of a terrorist organization is its ability to use political violence. In order to measure operational capacity I have broken it down into a series of indicator variables: number of attacks, lethality, wounded, type of attack, and location and target of attack.

1. **Number of attacks:** This is an important indicator in determining the operational capacity of a terrorist organization because the number of attacks is informative of how active a terrorist organization is. Terrorist organizations accomplish their political goals through the use of violent attacks so the ability for a terrorist organization to launch violent attacks is key to its operational capacity.

2. **Lethality:** Not only is the number of attacks important but also how lethal those attacks are. This indicator can pick up smaller changes in operational capacity than simply the number of attacks. For example, if the number of attacks after leadership removal stays the same but the lethality of those attacks falls, it could indicate that leadership removal disrupted the ability of the terrorist organization to orchestrate successful terrorist attacks, which would be a decrease in the organization's operational capacity.

3. **Wounded:** The main tool of a terrorist organization is fear and attacks don't need to be lethal to instill fear in a target population. The amount of people wounded by terrorist attacks helps a terrorist organization accomplish its political goals so should be considered part of a terrorist organization's operational capacity.

4. **Type of Attack:** The type of attack is informative of the operational capacity of terrorist organizations. Bombing attacks take considerable more planning and leadership than stabbings so a change in a terrorist organization's repertoire of violence could signal a change in its operational capacity.

5. **Location and Target of Attack:** Attacks that take place further away from a terrorist organization's central leadership also take considerably more planning and leadership then local attacks. The targets of these attacks are also important. Rre terrorist organizations attacking soft targets like markets or public or hard targets such as military units or diplomatic missions? A change in these indicators represents a change to the organization's operational capacity.

All of the data on the indicator variables was taken from the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Which was created and maintained through the National

Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START). All of the data within the GTD is complied and coded from public unclassified documents.

Chapter III

Aum Shinrikyo

The case of Aum Shinrikyo clearly illustrates how terrorist groups structured around charismatic authority, but without a strong institutional structure to support them, will have their operational capacity damaged by leadership removal. Without a clear institutional structure in place, Aum Shinrikyo was unable to adapt to the shock of leadership removal, and the organization quickly crumbled.

Background

On March 20th, 1995, five men boarded five separate subway trains on the Tokyo underground.[55] Each of the men carried two seemingly normal items, an umbrella with a pointed top and a bundle of newspapers.[56] Half an hour later, the trains converged at the Kasumigaseki station in the heart of Japan's government district. As the five men left their respective trains, they put their newspapers on the floor and drove their umbrellas through them.[57] Hidden underneath the newspapers were plastic vials of Sarin gas, a chemical

---

[55] A.T. Tu, "Aum Shinrikyo's Chemical and Biological Weapons: More Than Sarin," *Forensic Science Review,* Vol. 26, No. 2, 2014, 115-120.

[56] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*. (University of California Press: 2003) 103-120.

[57] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*. (University of California Press: 2003) 103-104.

compound so dangerous that droplet the size of a pinhead can kill an adult.[58] At first no one realized anything was wrong, but after a few minutes people on the trains started feeling nauseous and then started having seizures and began foaming at the mouth.[59] By the time the conductors of the trains finally realized that something was very wrong, stopped at the nearest stations, and called emergency personnel to treat the victims, a massive amount of damage had already been inflicted. Twelve people were killed in that attack and another 5,500 suffered some kind of injury from the gas. Many of the wounded would never fully recover.[60] It was the worst terrorist attack in Japanese history, and it is still the most devastating instance of a weapon of mass destruction being used by a non-state actor.[61]

The perpetrators of the terrorist attack all belonged to a cult-like religion called Aum Shinrikyo. Aum Shinrikyo was founded by Chizuo Matsumoto, who ,after its founding changed his name to Shoko Asahara to better fit his title of guru, because, during a trip to India, he claimed he received a message from the deity Shiva and a special mission from the Dalai Lama himself.[62] Shoko Asahara was very skilled in understanding the spiritual needs of individuals and he created Aum Shinrikyo to be particularly attractive to young people. The religion incorporated manga and anime, which were not only attractive to a young audience but also were extremely ingrained in Japanese secular culture.[63] The main message of Aum Shinrikyo was quite simple - modern life is an endless grind, but through

---

[58] Tu, "Aum Shinrikyo's Chemical and Biological Weapons," 115-120.
[59] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 104.
[60] Ibid, 104.
[61]Ibid, 104.
[62] Ibid, 106.
[63] Alexander Raevskiy, "Psychological aspects of the Aum Shinrikyo affair." *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2014 34-39.

the teaching of Aum Shinrikyo one could both have fun and obtain enlightenment.[64] This

message was so attractive that by 1995, Aum Shinrikyo had over 40,000 members and its

own commune in Japan.[65]

While the cult of Aum Shinrikyo started out as a nonviolent organization, Shoko

Asahara slowly adjusted its goals, making them more extreme until the attack in March of

1995. In 1989, Shoko Asahara introduced the Tibetan Buddhist idea of poa, the sacred

killing in the name of the spiritual leader, into Aum Shinrikyo.[66] The organization also

adopted more apocalyptic beliefs. Aum Shinrikyo, like some sects of Christianity, taught

that Armageddon was fast approaching and when it occurred, only members of Aum

Shinrikyo who had reached enlightenment would be saved from its destruction.[67] Shoko

Asahara tried to use this message to gain political power when Aum Shinrikyo formed its

own political party, but after it failed to gain enough votes to join the Japanese parliament,

Shoko Asahara was no longer content on waiting for the apocalypse to end society. The

new goal of Aum Shinrikyo was the absolute destruction of Japanese society.[68]

Aum Shinrikyo posed a unique challenge to Japanese security. The perpetrators of

the Sarin gas attack were all very highly educated, having attended some of Japan's finest

universities.[69] Furthermore, the possession of Sarin gas showed that Aum Shinrikyo had

the capacity to inflict damage that most terrorist organization could only dream of and the

large numbers of Aum Shinrikyo members dispersed in the Japanese population at large

---

[64] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 110-111.
[65] Audrey Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*, (Princeton University Press: 2009) 1-34.
[66] Raevskiy "Psychological aspects of the Aum Shinrikyo affair." 36-37.
[67] Ibid, 36-37
[68] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 115-116.
[69] Raevskiy "Psychological aspects of the Aum Shinrikyo affair," 35.

made it almost impossible to stop future attacks.[70] Given the security challenges posed by Aum Shinrikyo, it would have been understandable for the Japanese government to have adopted authoritarian and undemocratic counterterrorism policies towards the entire organization. However, the Japanese government instead focused exclusively on holding the leaders of Aum Shinrikyo responsible for the attack, not the organization as a whole.[71] While the government did repeal its status as a religious organization, they did not ban the organization.[72] Instead, the Japanese government put its efforts into capturing Shoko Asahara, which it did about a year after the attack.

Charismatic Authority Within Aum Shinrikyo

The role of Shoko Asahara in Aum Shinrikyo upholds the ideas of the charismatic leadership theory. Shoko Asahara was completely blind in one eye and partially blind in the other.[73] As a child, he had been sent to a school for the blind, where his partial vision gave him an advantage over his peers and made him a natural leader. He built his leadership skill as a child using his gift of limited vision to manipulate his classmates.[74] Later, as head of Aum Shinrikyo, Shoko Asahara incorporated his blindness into his cult of personality.

Shoko Asahara had an unbelievable level of authority over the members of Aum Shinrikyo. Many ex-members cited him as the main draw of the organization and he had a profound impact on the people he met. One ex-member was shocked when he met Shoko Asahara by how knowledgeable and profound he was. [75]He spoke with such firm authority. It felt like from just one short interaction, Shoko Asahara could judge a man's worth and

---

[70] Tu, "Aum Shinrikyo's Chemical and Biological Weapons," 115-120.
[71] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 105.
[72] Ibid, 105.
[73]Ibid, 108
[74] Ibid, 108
[75] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 108.

value.[76] Shoko Asahara built up these feeling by claiming that he was not an ordinary man. Building on Hindu theories of existence, Shoko Asahara claimed that he occupied a higher plane of existence than that of an ordinary man, which allowed him to see, in spite of his blindness, the course of future events.[77] Given that many of the members of Aum Shinrikyo are on record saying that they thought that the capture of Shoko Asahara by the Japanese authorities was planned by Shoko Asahara himself as a strategic response to events that would occur in the future, it appears that the rank and file truly bought into the cult of personality surrounding Shoko Asahara.[78] It is abundantly clear that charismatic authority was very important in Aum Shinrikyo.

Shoko Asahara also worked to structure the practices of Aum Shinrikyo in a way to help enhance his charismatic authority. This can be seen in the recruitment and initiation process of the organization. All of Aum Shinrikyo's advertising publications heavily featured Shoko Asahara and his spiritual wisdom.[79] The goal of the recruitment process was to attract people who already felt close to Shoko Asahara, as opposed to the organization at large. This was even more dramatically reinforced during the initiation process.

The initiation process was a tool used to cement Shoko Asahara's authority within the organization. After an individual would apply to be admitted into Aum Shinrikyo and had passed vetting and submitted their 10,000 yen fee, they were invited to Aum Shinrikyo's initiation process.[80] This process usually involved being forced to sit in a dark

---

[76] Ibid, 108.
[77] Ibid, 115.
[78] Ibid , 115-116.
[79] Ibid, 108.
[80] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 107.

room wearing nothing but a diaper and not being allowed to eat or move without being told to do so. [81] After this was over, each recruit would get to meet with Shoko Asahara. He would interact with the recruits and ask them questions about their lives and what they sought. After this brief interaction, the recruits would be placed on lightly vibrating mats and be given a tea that caused them to hallucinate (It is suspected that the tea was laced with LSD).[82] During this hallucination the recruits were told to think of Shoko Asahara because only through him could they avoid bad visions and find the truth.[83] While this ritual is admittedly bizarre, it was incredibly effective in creating a personal devotion among each recruit to Shoko Asahara. This was an organization entirely built around the premise that Shoko Asahara was the absolute authority. No other leader within the organization was elevated anywhere close to his level, so even though there was an organization behind Shoko Asahara, it was designed so that only he could lead the organization.

Institutionalization in Aum Shinrikyo

While Aum Shinrikyo lacked a strong organizational structure, because it was a very large organization, it did have some institutional structures in place that could have mitigated the effects of leadership removal. The public face of Aum Shinrikyo appeared to be very structured. Aum Shinrikyo had a downtown Tokyo office with positions that included head of public relations, general secretary, and official spokesperson.[84] The organization had a media wing that created its own publications, films, and owned bookstores to raise revenue for the wider organization. The organization also had a list of

---

[81] Ibid,108-109.
[82] Ibid, 108-109.
[83] Ibid, 108-109.
[84] Ibid, 105.

every member and every member of Aum Shinrikyo was required to pay the organization

10,000 yen (around $100) a month.[85] Underneath this public organization structure was

another secret one that included a highly advanced chemical weapons manufacturing plant

at the Aum Shinrikyo compound.[86] This organizational structure was supported by the

codified belief system of Aum Shinrikyo.

The belief system of Aum Shinrikyo also supported the organization because it

established norms within the group and provided an alternative source of authority within

the organization. The beliefs and practices of Aum Shinrikyo provided a common structure

to the organization that would remain unchanged during leadership removal. Additionally,

this belief system also opened up an alternative source of authority within Aum Shinrikyo.

Charismatic leaders are so important to terrorist organizations because their connection

with their members changes an individual's rational framework, allowing them to engage

in actions that do not appear to be rational from an individual standpoint, such as suicide

bombing, but are incredibly useful to terrorist organizations.[87] However, this authority

does not always have to come from an individual. Religion can also change an individual's

pre-rational framework. Indeed, Jenna Jordan argues that Islamic terrorist organizations

will not suffer from leadership removal because religion can provide the authority

necessary to run the organization entirely independently of its leaders.[88] While Aum

Shinrikyo certainly is not a traditional religion, its belief system could have provided an

alternative source of authority.

---

[85] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 107.
[86] Tu, "Aum Shinrikyo's Chemical and Biological Weapons," 115-120.
[87] Hofmann, "The Influence of Charismatic Authority on Operational Strategies and Attack Outcomes of Terrorist Groups," 32.
[88] Jenna Jordan "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark," 19.

Yet, despite having the trappings of a well-structured organization, Aum Shinrikyo lacked the organizational infrastructure to allow it to successfully withstand a concerted counterterrorism effort. All of the previously mentioned institutional structures of Aum Shinrikyo were part of its public organization. For a terrorist group to be highly institutionalized, it is essential for them to build what is referred to as a dark organization. These are organizational structures that can be run in secret. On this account, Aum Shinrikyo utterly failed. Its terrorist activities were secret from a large part of the organization, with only the central leadership conceiving and planning operations.[89] There were also poor linkages between different parts of Aum Shinrikyo. The group had several campuses with local leaders, but these leaders did not interact with each other and received all their instructions from the central leadership.[90] This structure left Aum Shinrikyo in a poor position to rely exclusively on its organizational structure to support its terrorist activities.

Impact of Leadership Removal

The removal of Shoko Asahara from the head of Aum Shinrikyo ended the organization's ability to function as an effective terrorist organization. This can easily be seen by examining the group's terrorist attacks. While Aum Shinrikyo was not a terrorist organization that had attacked the Japanese state very often before 1995 (see table 1), their attack had been surprising lethal. The year before their infamous subway attack, the group launched a terrorist attack that left over 500 casualties.[91] They also continued to attack the

---

[89] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 109-111.
[90] Ibid, 109-111.
[91] Global Terrorism Database, "Aum"
https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Aum&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search

Japanese state after the Sarin gas attacks with smaller terrorist attacks that targeted

government and law enforcement officials.[92] The ramping up of Aum Shinrikyo's attacks

came to an abrupt end around the same time that Shoko Asahara was captured by Japanese

authorities. After his capture, the group did not launch a single attack.[93]

Terrorist Activity of Aum Shinrikyo[94]

Year	# of attacks	# of deaths	# of wounded
1993	0	0	0
1994	1	7	500
1995	6	14	5,503
1996	0	0	0
1997	0	0	0
1998	0	0	0

Table 1

The loss of Shoko Asahara also had a devastating impact on Aum Shinrikyo's

capacity and leadership as well. Aum Shinrikyo quickly lost thousands of its members after

Shoko Asahara was arrested.[95] Without the guidance and leadership provided by Shoko

Asahara, the organization quickly folded in on itself.

The existence of both a Aum Shinrikyo's public organizational structure and its

religious ideology did not prevent the group from being fatally damaged by leadership

removal. This has to do with the structure of the organization and the conditions in which it

operated. The lack of a dark organizational structure prevented the local leaders of Aum

Shinrikyo from understanding what was happening in the different parts of the

---

[92] Ibid
[93] Ibid
[94] All data shown was compiled from GTD's database
[95] Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends,* 1-34.

organization or coordinating any of their actions. The reliance on the central leadership for

information, and the secrecy of the central leadership, also severely handicapped Aum

Shinrikyo's efforts to respond to leadership removal. Some members of Aum Shinrikyo

refused to believe that the organization was responsible for the sarin gas attack. Other

leaders believed that Shoko Asaraha actually wanted to be arrested because he knew of

some coming event that they did not, so they continued to wait for orders from the central

leadership that never came.[96]

Conditions within Japanese society also ensured that the Aum Shinrikyo "religion"

was not enough of a source of authority to allow other leaders to replace Shoko Asahara.

Despite popular perceptions, religion is not naturally politically salient to individuals.[97] It is

made politically salient through political institutions. For example, one of the reasons

religion is prominent in conflicts in the Middle East is that postcolonial societies

redistributed goods along religious lines. This makes religion incredibly important to an

individual's life chances. This creates an opportunity for political entrepreneurs to use

religion as a basis to mobilize people.[98] Since religion is already politically salient in these

societies, the political entrepreneurs don't need to be particularly skilled or charismatic to

organize along religious lines. This was not the case for Aum Shinrikyo.

Aum Shinrikyo was not made politically salient by the conditions of Japanese

society. Political distribution and equal access were not affected by an individual's religion.

---

[96] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 109-111.
[97] Matthew Isaac, "Faith in Contention: Explaining the Salience of Religion in Ethnic Conflict," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2017, 200-231.
[98] Beverly Crawford, "The Causes of Cultural Conflict: An Institutional Approach," In: Beverly Crawford and Ronnie Lipschutz, ed., *The Myth of "Ethnic Conflict*": *Politics, Economics and "Cultural" Violence.* (University of California International and Area Studies Digital Collection, Research Series#98,1998).

Aum Shinrikyo had equal status under Japanese law as any other religion and its classification as a religion gave it advantages.[99]The lack of natural grievances against the Japanese state made it difficult to mobilize members of Aum Shinrikyo against the Japanese state. It took the uniquely extraordinary skill and charisma of Shoko Asahara to mobilize its members. The loss of that talent was simply irreplaceable.

There are a couple of lessons on when leadership removal will be effective that can be drawn from the Aum Shinrikyo case. First, the existence of institutionalization by itself is not enough on its own to reduce the vulnerability of a terrorist organization to leadership removal. What matters is how the institutions within a terrorist organization support the goals of that organization. Terrorist organizations can be built either to increase the survivability of the organization or to increase the control of its leader over the organization as a whole. As the Aum Shinrikyo case shows, organizations that try to prioritize control will be much more susceptible to leadership removal.

Unfortunately, terrorist organizations are not transparent about whether they build their organization to resist leadership removal or increase the control of the leader over the organization. There are clues that can help in determining this, though. Nearly every former member of Aum Shinrikyo, when asked about their experience in the organization and their motivations for joining, mentioned Shoko Asahara.[100] The ubiquity of Shoko Asahara in the common recruit's experience shows that the structure of Aum Shinrikyo was designed to promote the leader. Finding out the motivations of individuals in joining an organization can provide a useful measuring stick in determining how important an individual leader is to the overall organization.

---

[99] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 105-106.
[100]Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 109-111.

Another important conclusion from the Aum Shinrikyo case is that ideology is not always enough to provide the authority necessary to run a terrorist organization. Without factors that promote the political salience of religion, terrorist organizations will rely more heavily on authority from charismatic figures than authority derived from an ideology. There are two important implications from this. The first is that leadership removal should not be discounted as a tactic against terrorist organizations that are religious or ideologically driven. Instead, each terrorist organization's ideology needs to be evaluated within the conditions it operates.

The second, and more important, implication from the Aum Shinrikyo case is that liberal democracies should try to avoid making ideology or religion politically salient in their counterterrorism operations. One of the best tactics of the Japanese government after the Sarin gas attacks was to treat the counterterrorism operation as a criminal affair instead of a military one. The main way they did this was by choosing to punish the leaders and perpetrators of the attack, as opposed to the entire Aum Shinrikyo religion. This gave many of the members of Aum Shinrikyo an opportunity to opt out of the organization and it prevented members uninvolved in the attack from feeling persecuted by the government. This strategy ensured that after the removal of Shoko Asahara, the ideology of Aum Shinrikyo was not strong enough to allow for the continued use of terrorism by the organization. This lesson is particularly relevant to the United States' counterterrorism operations against Islamic terrorist organizations and supports the policy of the United States to make clear that it is not at war with Islam, but rather a group of violent criminals.

While the case of Aum Shinrikyo provides useful variables for evaluating the effectiveness of leadership removal on terrorist organizations, there are potential problems

with trying to apply the case too broadly. The case can be criticized because, unlike most terrorist organizations, many of the members who joined Aum Shinrikyo had no inkling of the terrorist wing of the organization.[101] Therefore, some of the collapse in the Aum Shinrikyo organization might have been due to the horrified members finding out about the nature of the organization they joined. This would make it hard to pinpoint the blame for Aum Shinrikyo's collapse on the removal of Shoko Asahara.

This criticism of the Aum Shinrikyo case tends to discount the capacity of the organization. Even though some members of Aum Shinrikyo were unaware of all of the group's terrorist involvement, a large number of them were dedicated to terrorist activities. The creation of biological weapons required lots of inputs, not only of equipment and workers, but also experts and scientific know-how.[102] This was an operation that required the knowledge of many individuals within Aum Shinrikyo. Additionally, even before the Tokyo subway attack, Aum Shinrikyo had been involved in a series of terrorist activities. Between 1992-1995, the group had been involved in a string of murders and had also launched another Sarin gas attack in Japan, although this one was much less lethal than the 1995 attack.[103] The definitive stop to Aum Shinrikyo's ability to function as a terrorist organization occurred when Shoko Asahara was captured.

---

[101] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*. 108-109.
[102] Tu, "Aum Shinrikyo's Chemical and Biological Weapons," 115-120.
[103] Global Terrorism Database, "Aum"

Chapter IV

Hamas

The case of Hamas illustrates how terrorist organizations that are not dependent on charismatic authority and have strong institutional structures will be resilient to leadership removal. While Hamas had a very charismatic leader, charismatic authority was not important in keeping the organization together. Instead, Hamas relied heavily on its sophisticated organizational structure and local networks to support the organization's terrorist activities. This structure allowed Hamas to easily absorb the shock of leadership removal and ultimately leadership removal ended up strengthening Hamas' position in the West Bank.

Background

In the 1970s, the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were the two main actors in the Israeli Palestinian crisis. They clashed violently in Israel, Palestine, and the Gaza Strip. To adapt to Israel's overwhelming military superiority, the PLO embraced terrorism to not only to combat Israel but also to raise the profile of the Palestinian liberation struggle.[104] In the midst of this violent turmoil, a small offshoot of the regional Muslim Brotherhood organization broke away from the main organization and formed its own Islamic group. In 1978, this organization was officially recognized by the

---

[104] Khaled Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisi," *Journal of Palestinian Studies,* Vol. 33 No. 4, Summer 2004, 21.

Israeli Military Administrative and given the right to set up administrative units and control religious and educational institutions in the West Bank.[105] The Israel government hoped this organization would compete with the PLO for supporters thereby weakening Palestine resistance to Israel.[106] The Israel government could not have known at the time that they had just given the green light to an organization that would evolve into one of the most sophisticated and capable terrorist organizations in the region and one of Israel's greatest enemies.

The co-founder of the new organization, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, had no interest in creating an organization that would only focus on development in the West Bank. From the beginning he imagined his organization as a group that would reclaim all of Palestine for Palestinians.[107] To make the goal of his organization clear, he named it Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Hamas), which translates to the Islamic Resistance Movement.[108] Hamas quickly occupied a unique position in a region that was filled with resistance groups and terrorist organizations.

Hamas had a couple of advantages that helped it grow strong in its early years. First, it was an Islamic organization and it fought not only to reclaim Palestine in general, but also to make liberated Palestine an Islamic state.[109] This helped distinguish Hamas from its much larger and more established rival, the PLO, which was a secular organization. Secondly, Hamas benefited from fortunate timing. The organization's early years coincided

---

[105] Shaul Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas: A Network Perspective," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Summer 2003, 575.
[106] Ibid, 575
[107] Nir Gazir and Robert J Brym, "State-directed political assassinations in Israel: A political hypothesis," *International Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 6, 2011, 864.
[108] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 569.
[109] Gazir and Brym, "State-directed political assassinations in Israel," 864.

with the end of the first intifada. The bloody struggle between the PLO and Israel had not

only degraded the operational capacity of the PLO, but also left the organization bankrupt

in the minds of many Palestinians.[110] This provided the groundwork for Hamas to quickly

expand. Finally, while the PLO at the end of the first intifada was willing to negotiate with

Israel, Hamas remained committed to refusing to acknowledge Israel's right to exist.[111]

After several years of quickly growing, Hamas became a dominant regional actor.

Hamas was able to use its growing clout to stand out as a major player in the second

intifada. As the Palestinian region once again erupted into conflict, Hamas stood out for the

brutality of its attacks. Under the direction of Yassin, Hamas adopted suicide bombing as its

primary strategy.[112] In Yassin's mind, the suicide bomber was the only response

Palestinians had to Israel tanks. Hamas was the only organization in the conflict to fully

engage in a campaign of suicide bombing, causing the organization to stand out in the

Israeli defense establishment's mind as a major threat.

Understandably, the campaign of Hamas suicide bombers caused a lot of fear in

Israel. By their very nature, suicide bombers cannot be deterred. The only way to stop

suicide bombers is to deny them access to their target or to prevent individuals from

deciding to become suicide bombers in the first place. Major Israeli defense officials started

to look at leadership removal as a way fulfill the latter option.[113] Yassin was the leader of

Hamas who made it the strategy of the organization to undertake suicide bombings and

who was insistent on refusing to recognize the right of Israel to exist.[114] Over the course of

---

[110] Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisis," 22.
[111] Ibid, 22.
[112] Ibid, 22.
[113] Gazir and Brym, "State-directed political assassinations in Israel," 869-873.
[114]Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisis," 22.

the previous decade, he had spent much of his life in and out of Israeli prisons, and had

even been given a life sentence at one point in time only to be released in a prisoner

exchange.[115] When the Israel state struck this time, they would remove him permanently.

Since 2000, Israel had acknowledged that they engaged in a policy of targeted

assassination against certain militants.[116] The decision to target Yassin was different than

most of Israel's previous operations though, because Yassin was not just some mid-level

commander or bomber maker, but the main political leader of Hamas.[117] This was

important because Hamas was not just a terrorist organization but also a legitimate

political entity that provided social services, set up schools, and ran charities across the

Gaza Strip and West Bank.[118] Targeting such a leader would send a signal that the rules of

engagement had changed and risked international condemnation.

Despite the risks, Israel determined that the potential damage to the organization of

Hamas that leadership removal could accomplish was greater than the risks, and despite

being in a cease-fire with Hamas at the time gave the green light for the assassination. On

the 22nd of March 2004, an Israel F-16 flew over the home of Yassin. The roar of the jet's

engines drowned out the noise of two Apache attack helicopters as they made their

approached. As Yassin was wheeled out of his home on his daily trip the mosque, the

helicopters fired hellfire missiles at Yassin instantly killing him, his two bodyguards, and

inflicting significant collateral damage including wounding two of Yassin's sons.[119] Despite

the collateral damage though, the operation was considered a success and the Israel

---

[115] Matthew, Levitt, *Hamas: politics, charity, and terrorism in the service of Jihad*, Yale University Press, NJ, 2006, 34-37.
[116] Gazir and Brym, "State-directed political assassinations in Israel," 862-863.
[117] Gazir and Brym, "State-directed political assassinations in Israel," 864.
[118] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 575.
[119] Gazir and Brym, "State-directed political assassinations in Israel," 867-869.

defense establishment expected Hamas to suffer significantly from the loss of their political and spiritual leader.

The Charismatic Authority of Yassin within Hamas

While I have listed Hamas as an organization with low levels of charismatic authority, there is no denying that Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was a charismatic individual. When Yassin was 16 years old, he suffered an accident while playing on a beach that damaged his spinal cord and left him confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.[120] Much like Shoko Asahara of Aum Shinrikyo, Yassin took his personal disability and used it to enhance his personal authority. His calm demeanor, wizard like appearance, and being confined to a wheelchair gave Yassin the air of an individual who was close to God, which increased the legitimacy of Yassin spiritual directives. This was in spite of the fact that Yassin had never actually received any type of official religious training. There is no doubt that Yassin used his charismatic appeal to his advantage as the spiritual and political leader of Hamas.

Yassin also showed great charisma through his piety. While Yassin had the means to live comfortably, he chose to live a very modest lifestyle. He was very committed to the teaching of Islam and attended prayer daily.[121] He gave extensively to charities, in particular to religious and educational charities.[122] He did this in spite of having eleven children of his own with his wife.[123] Yassin's lifestyle made him seem to truly be a man of the people. The people of Gaza saw themselves in him and saw him as a father figure to all of them. This made Yassin an unbelievably popular political leader.

---

[120] Matthew, Levitt, "*Hamas*," 34.
[121] Matthew, Levitt, "*Hamas*," 34.
[122] ibid, 34
[123] Ibid, 34.

Given that Yassin is clearly a charismatic leader, why have I chosen to classify

Hamas as an organization with low levels of charismatic authority? The reason is that while

Yassin was a leader with clear charismatic traits he failed to consolidate charismatic

authority within Hamas behind him. Charismatic authority is not simply the existence of

charisma within an individual, it is the use of the authority granted by charisma to exert an

individual's will over an organization and weld it together. This did not happen in the case

of Hamas.

One of the clearest illustrations of how charismatic authority was not consolidated

across Hamas is in local level dynamics. While at the top, Hamas was an hierarchical

organization, at the local level, Hamas was a networked organization focused around many

different local leaders who held authority in their communities based on family ties,

religious affiliations, or personal charisma.[124] This led to many situations where the

authority of local or mid-level leaders ended up trumping Yassin's authority. For example,

during Hamas' conflict with Israel in 2000, Yassin made it clear that he would not negotiate

with Israel. The military wing, *'Izz al-Din al-Qassam* blatantly ignored Yassin and issued an

order to Hamas military units to stop engaging Israel and declare a truce.[125] This led to a

very public fight between Yassin and the military groups, in which Yassin had to make a

public announcement that: "Hamas did not declare a truce. . . . The political wing, not the

military wing drafts the politics of Hamas."[126] Despite the charismatic appeal of Yassin, he

failed to consolidate his authority over Hamas. Indeed, by the time of his assassination,

---

[124] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 581.
[125] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 583.
[126] Ibid, 583.

Yassin, despite being its official political leader, was not heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of Hamas.

Another reason that Yassin failed to consolidate his charismatic authority was that many of the traits that were essential to his charisma were not considered unique to him but rather a product of the organization of Hamas. In order to establish authority, it is very important that the charismatic traits of the leader are considered to be unique. Shoko Asahara was considered the only person in the organization of Aum Shinrikyo who had obtained enlightenment, which provided him and no one else the ultimate authority within the organization. In Hamas though, the traits that made Yassin popular and charismatic were common among the general leadership. For example, much of Yassin's appeal came from his modest lifestyle and how in touch with the struggles of ordinary people he remained despite being in the political leadership.[127] However, this was true across all levels of leadership within Hamas. At every level, members of Hamas were considered to be clean and honest individuals, in contrast to its rival in the PLO, who cared deeply about the prosperity of its people.[128] The ubiquitous nature of these traits within the organization of Hamas makes it difficult for one leader to use the traits to claim absolute authority. Instead within the eyes of the members of Hamas it is the organization itself, rather than any individual leader within the organization, that holds authority. The success of Hamas in consolidating authority behind the organization instead of behind its leaders has much to thank from the institutionalization of the organization.

---

[127] Matthew, Levitt, "*Hamas*," 34.
[128] Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisis," 22.

Institutionalization in Hamas

Hamas has a complicated but remarkably effective institutional layout that allows the organization to balance multiple goals while operating under significant pressure. The organization of Hamas is split into four separate units, security, military, political activities, and Islamic teaching.[129] Every single one of these units is well organized in a bureaucratic fashion with each having their own office in the Gaza Strip.[130] Overseeing these four administrative units is a political bureau and consultative council that are the main authority wielding organs in Hamas.

While Yassin was the most visible and powerful leader within the political bureau and consultative council, he was far from the only high-powered political figure in these institutions. In Hamas' upper echelons, there were two types of leaders, insiders and outsiders.[131] The insiders were leaders who were in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank dealing with the daily administrative functions of Hamas.[132] The outside leaders operated a sophisticated support network for Hamas abroad that tried to increase support for the cause of Palestinian liberation in the international community, particularly among European Muslims. The outside leadership sat atop their own sophisticated institutional infrastructure that organized large events, issued its own publications, and actively raised money for Hamas.[133] The outside leadership even had its own office in Dallas, Texas, until Hamas was branded by the United States as a terrorist organization.[134] Both the outside and inside leadership of Hamas had an equal number of representatives in the political

---

[129] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 582.
[130] Ibid, 582.
[131] Ibid, 581.
[132] Ibid, 581.
[133] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 581.
[134] Ibid, 581.

bureau and consultative council that ensured that even though there was a hierarchy of leaders within those bodies, there was enough power sharing that no one leader was too essential to the organization as a whole.[135]

The smaller administrative branches within Hamas also helped insulate it from the impacts of leadership removal. Hamas was not just a terrorist organization but also a governing organization that provided for the social services and education of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.[136] This aspect of Hamas provided two important benefits to the organization that increased it resilience to leadership removal. First, the presence of administrative units within the Gaza Strip and West Bank increased the legitimacy of the organization of Hamas in the eyes of its people. Hamas' work in the Gaza Strip and West Bank elevated the importance of the organization over the importance of the organization's top leader. Secondly, the different administrative units of Hamas provided a training ground for future leaders of the organization and increased the authority of local leaders within Hamas. Hamas' political administrative unit in particular was full of professional bureaucrats operating within a well-established institutional arrangement.[137] Not only did this give Hamas a deep well of political talent to draw on, it also meant that the administrative units were the organization's most visible face to its supporters. This diluted the importance of Hamas' top leadership.

Furthermore, the networked organization of Hamas on the local level also diluted the authority of the top leadership, making the organization more resilient to leadership removal. As mentioned in the previous section, at the local level, Hamas was a networked

---

[135] Ibid, 581.
[136] Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisis," 22.
[137] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 582.

association of interpersonal relationships.[138] This organization style meant that local

leaders were the most important figures within their jurisdiction, and that made the overall

organization less reliant on a hierarchal structure to operate effectively. This meant that on

a local level, the policies and choices of Hamas were determined more through an

interaction of important local political figures than the decisions of the organization's top

leaders. In Hamas, decision-making was focused on discussions and consensus building.

The orders of local leaders were carried out on the basis of local information and with the

use of local resources, and local activists were independent political agents concerned

about local issues and being competent in their positions as opposed to simply general

administrators whose sole function was to blindly follow directives from the top.[139]

In addition to providing a counter veiling force to the authority of the central

leadership, the different administrative units of Hamas also pooled resources and

supported each other.[140] The parts of Hamas that were involved in the struggle for

Palestinian liberation and the terrorism that accompanied it, and the parts of Hamas

involved in the administration of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, while having separate

official administrative bodies, were tightly bound together. The charities run by the

organization, in addition to the good they did for the Palestinian people, also funneled cash

into the provision of armaments.[141] Local leaders used the authority they had within their

communities to recruit members to Hamas' military wing, and used local networks to

increase the efficiency of intelligence gathering. These types of activities ensured that there

were strong linkages and a long record of communication and collaboration between the

---

[138] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 581.
[139] Ibid, 581-582.
[140] Matthew Levitt, "*Hamas*," 37-43.
[141] Matthew Levitt, "*Hamas*," 37-43.

different administrative units of Hamas. These linkages served to undercut the importance of hierarchy in Hamas, making the overall organizational structure look more like a web than a pyramid.

The Effects of Leadership Removal on Hamas

Hamas is seemingly a perfect example of the institutionalization theory in practice. Hamas is an enormous organization with a wide range of responsibilities to carry out. In order most efficiently execute its responsibilities, a massive institutional structure supports Hamas. This structure undercuts the importance of any one leader to the overall organization and ensures that the organization will be resilient in the face of leadership removal. Even though Hamas had a charismatic head in Yassin, the structure of the organization prevented him from consolidating his charismatic authority, reducing his overall importance to Hamas.

Just looking at the raw empirical data on the lethality of Hamas though, it is easy to reach the opposite conclusion. The year Yassin was assassinated, Hamas was 62% less lethal than it had been the year before and wounded 64% fewer people (See Table 2).[142] Furthermore, in the proceeding two years, Hamas' lethality continued to fall and remained far below its peak in 2002. The lethality of Hamas only rebounded in 2007 three years after leadership removal.[143] From the raw numbers it appears that leadership removal had a significant impact on Hamas.

---

[142] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Hamas&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search
[143] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Hamas&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search

Hamas' Terrorist Activity 2001-2007

Year	Attacks	Killed	Wounded
2001	39	136	791
2002	34	207	729
2003	39	131	344
2004 (removal)	19	49	125
2005	22	16	21
2006	27	13	31
2007	65	109	344

Table 2

There are two problems with using the aggregate data to discount the theory of organizational resilience and claim victory for leadership removal. Firstly, the data is also displaying efforts by the Israeli government to reduce the lethality of Hamas that were not leadership targeting, and, secondly, breaking the data down reveals a significant revenge effect in response to leadership removal.

There were two developments outside of leadership removal that caused the number of terrorist attacks by Hamas to drop so significantly from 2003 to 2004. The first development was an agreed ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Both parties were exhausted from the brutality of the first intifada, so had agreed to an uneasy ceasefire during 2004.[144] While the data shows that the ceasefire was not completely successful, a significant drop in the level of terrorist attacks attributed to Hamas can be attributed to the ceasefire.

---

[144] Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas," 579-580.

The second, and more important, development in the Israeli Palestinian crisis that contributed to the decrease of lethality of Hamas was the construction of the West Bank Barrier, which was completed at the end of 2003. As stated earlier, Hamas was notable as a terrorist organization because of its prolific use of suicide bombers and they only way to stop suicide bombers is to prevent their recruitment or prevent them from accessing their targets.[145] The West Bank Barrier was a series of walls and security checkpoints that isolated the West Bank from Israel denying suicide bombers access to Israeli targets.[146] The effectiveness of this strategy can be seen in how Hamas shifted its targeting. When the lethality of Hamas increased back to the level comparable to the 2000-2003 period, the locations of its targets had changed to be almost entirely in the West Bank since its bombers had a much harder time accessing Israel. [147] The effect that the data on lethality is showing in the case of Hamas is not that leadership removal reduced the operational capacity of Hamas but rather that the West Bank Barrier made the primary strategy of Hamas less lethal.

This conclusion is reinforced when the data on the number of attacks is more closely examined. While the year of Yassin assassination also had the fewest number of attack perpetrated by Hamas, as well as the fewest deaths, this is mostly because of the

---

[145] Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisis," 22.

[146] Simon Perry, Robert Apel, Graeme Newman, and Ronald V Clarke, "The Situtational Prevention of Terrorism: An Evaluation of Israeli West Bank Barrier," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, Vol. 33 No. 4, 2017, 727.

[147] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database," http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Hamas&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search

ceasefire.[148] In 2004, before the assassination of Yassin, there were only five terrorist

attacks by Hamas. The assassination of an old, ailing, half-blind, wheel chair bound man by

Israeli gunships though, made the members of Hamas angry enough to retract the ceasefire

and increase attacks on Israel in retaliation.[149] In the part of 2004 after the death of Yassin,

the number of terrorist attacks rose to fourteen, but because of the effectiveness of the

West Bank Barrier, the fatalities of these attacks deceased.[150] In 2007, Hamas actually

launched more attacks than it did during its most lethal year in 2002, but the death to

attack ratio fell from 6:1 to 1.6:1.[151] The drop in the effectiveness in suicide bombing can

again be credited to the West Bank Barrier. By 2007, Hamas was barely able to launch a

single attack in the state of Israel and instead focused all of its attacks in the West Bank,

which had fewer of the soft targets that made suicide bombing so successful in the early

2000s.[152]

Since there were complicating variables during Hamas leadership removal, the best

way to determine the effects of leadership removal is to examine how the internal

dynamics of Hamas changed after Yassin's death. Within Hamas, Yassin was quickly

replaced by Abdel Aziz Al-Rantissi. Rantissi was a leader who was a decade younger than

Yassin and very energetic with his own charismatic appeal.[153] Rantissi had no issues

effectively assuming command within Hamas. He did not alter the organization's stance on

---

[148] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Hamas&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search
[149] Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisis," 22.
[150] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Hamas&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search
[151] ibid
[152] ibid
[153] Matthew Levitt, "*Hamas*," 37-38.

Israel or its commitment to the use of suicide bombers.[154] He was so successful in replacing Yassin that Israel decided he had to go. He was assassinated after a little more than a month in Hamas' top position.[155] Even the assassination of Rantissi though, did not disrupt the functioning of Hamas.[156] What the assassination did do was increase the power of the outside leadership in the political bureau of Hamas. Ironically, this was a bad development for Israel because the outside leadership tended to be more radical than the inside leadership since they were less concerned about on the ground developments.[157] Leadership removal did not disrupt the leadership of Hamas, it just empowered the more radical leaders within Hamas.

In addition to failing to disrupt the leadership of the organization, leadership removal also increased the political strength of Hamas. Hamas for most of its existence had operated as an inferior organization to the PLO. The PLO had a longer history of struggle against Israel, held significantly more resources than Hamas, and most importantly, had more support among the general population.[158] After the assassination of Yassin though, for the first time in the history of its organizational lifetime, the population of the West Bank had a more favorable view of Hamas than the PLO.[159] The assassinations of its leaders led to a groundswell of support for an organization that was more radical than the PLO. Eventually, Hamas was able to use its newfound political strength to increase its attacks on Israel. It was only the effectiveness of Israel's other counterterrorism policies that prevented Hamas from becoming a more lethal organization after leadership removal.

---

[154] Ibid, 37-38.
[155] Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisis," 33.
[156] Ibid, 33
[157] Ibid, 33-35.
[158] Ibid, 21
[159] Hroub, "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisis," 21.

The case of Hamas illustrates how institutionalized terrorist organizations without consolidated charismatic authority can successfully withstand leadership removal. The case supports the logic laid out by organizational resilience theorists and also provides evidence that leadership removal can be counterproductive to counterterrorism goals. Leadership removal cannot be viewed as a silver bullet that will work in every situation.

Chapter V

The PKK

Leadership removal in the case of the PKK provides valuable insights into the competing influences of charismatic authority and institutionalization within terrorist groups. On one hand, the loss of Abdullah Öcalan's charismatic authority within the PKK after his removal left the organization rudderless and led it to change its tactics for achieving political change from terrorism to political negotiation. On the other hand, the highly bureaucratic and institutional nature of the PKK was not disrupted by leadership removal, and when political negotiations with the Turkish state failed, the PKK returned to terrorism and proved that leadership removal had not diminished its operational capacity.

Background

In 1984, a small group of Kurdish militants attacked Turkish military units in the predominantly Kurdish regions of the country. These attacks continued sporadically throughout the year.[160] At first, the Turkish government paid little attention to the attacks. Government spokesmen wrote off the attacks as the work of common bandits.[161] However, as the attacks continued, they became such an annoyance to the Turkish government that a military response was launched. Martial law was declared in the region, which allowed for

---

[160] Özlem Pusane "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 5, 2015, 727-741.
[161] Pusane "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency, 728.

the government to conduct military operations. At first, these seemed successful. The militant group was reduced to little more than 200 members.[162] Eventually, though, the group adapted to the government's response by increasing its recruitment efforts and creating a sophisticated training-regiment for its members. By 1987, the threat couldn't be contained and the Turkish government declared a state of emergency across ten provinces in southeastern and eastern Turkey, the region that contained most of the state's Kurdish population.[163] This action escalated a conflict that would dominate Turkish affairs throughout the 1990s and posed a real threat to the Turkish state: A conflict between the Turkish government and a Kurdish-based insurgent group, known as the People's Kurdish Party (PKK).

By the 1990s, the PKK was inflicting serious damage on the Turkish government. While the PKK was responsible for only 1,619 deaths between 1984 and 1990, from 1991 to 1993, it killed 4,132 individuals.[164] The greater death toll in a shortened period of time showed how the PKK was able to increase its operational capacity, despite the increased military campaign against them. The PKK also employed brutal terrorist attacks as one of its main weapons against the Turkish state. These attacks not only targeted military units, but government and social workers as well. In its increased campaign against the Turkish states, the PKK abducted and murdered over 200 Turkish teachers in Kurdish regions over a three-year period.[165] The PKK operational capacity was so great that for much of the southeastern and southern parts of Turkey, residents were members of the Turkish state

---

[162] Ibid, 728
[163] ibid, 728
[164] Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency," 2015.
[165] David Phillips, "Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan's Workers Party," *National Committee on American Foreign Policy*, (15th October, 2007).

by day ,but would be under the authority of the PKK at night. In some areas of Turkey, the central government lost all functional control.[166]

The PKK had been founded as a Marxist-Leninist Party by Abdullah Öcalan. After a few years of failing to gain significant momentum within Turkish institutions, Öcalan reorganized the PKK for the purpose of becoming the sole representative for the Kurdish people in an armed struggle against the Turkish state.[167] Through brilliant and often brutal political maneuvering, Öcalan managed to position the PKK as the only legitimate organization that could respond to the needs of the Kurdish population.

Öcalan's prominent role in the PKK made him an ideal target for the Turkish government. As the lethality of the PKK continued to increase over the course of the 1990s, the Turkish government made the capturing or killing of the elusive Öcalan one of their top priorities.[168] Eventually, in 1999, Turkish intelligence officials discovered that Öcalan was staying in Damascus. The Turkish government sent the Syrian government an ultimatum: give up Öcalan or face immediate invasion.[169] The Syrian government capitulated to Turkish demands and, after a series of long and highly publicized flights, Öcalan ended up in the hands of Turkish officials.[170]

---

[166] Özlem Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency," 729.
[167] Aliza, Marcus, "Turkey's PKK: Rise, Fall, and Rise Again?" *World Policy Journal,* NYU Press, 2007.
[168] Özlem Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency," 729.
[169] Ibid, 729
[170] Özlem Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency," 729.

Charismatic Authority in the PKK

Öcalan displayed a significant level of charismatic authority over the PKK. The followers of the organization affectionately nicknamed him Apo, short for Abdullah, and viewed him as a father figure, not only for the organization, but for the Kurdish people as well.[171] Öcalan certainly did his best to cultivate this image. In response to his followers nicknaming him Apo, he declared that all members of the PKK would be called Apocular or "Apo's people." He also made it clear that he was one with the organization. Everything that the PKK did, every attack that it launched, and every position it took, was claimed as the responsibility of Öcalan.[172] He built himself as not only the leader of the PKK, but as the sole leader and sworn protector of the Kurdish people. The greatest success of his charismatic authority was his ability to tie himself into ideas of Kurdish identity.

Öcalan, much like Shoko Asahara, used the organizational structure of the PKK to enhance his own control over the organization. In order to consolidate his charismatic authority within the PKK, Öcalan centralized the organization around himself and removed rivals within the PKK. Öcalan ran the PKK in an incredibly brutal and authoritarian fashion. The first victims of the PKK's violence were not members of the Turkish government, but fellow Kurds.[173] Öcalan destroyed any other group that tried to support or advocate for Kurdish rights. After he had consolidated the PKK as the only group that could represent the Kurdish people, he quickly went about eliminating rival leaders within the PKK. Under his leadership, purges were swift, frequent, and brutal. Öcalan killed every founding

---

[171] Michael Gunter, "The Kurdish Problem in Turkey," *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 42, No. 3, 1988, 394.
[172] Ibid, 394.
[173] Özlem Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency," 730.

member of the PKK, other than himself.[174] The same individuals who had masterminded

the 1984 attacks against the Turkish state with Öcalan were killed because of the risk they

posed to Öcalan's authority within the PKK.

No official was too close to Öcalan to be safe from his purges. When his own wife

started to display more ambition within the PKK and rumors started to circulate that she

could become a successor in case he was killed, Öcalan tried to assassinate his wife, who

only escaped by fleeing to Europe.[175] No offense was too small to incite a purge either.

Once, one high-ranking official within the PKK suggested to Öcalan that they should focus

more heavily on engaging with European Kurds and build and international coalition that

would employ nonviolent means of resistance against the Turkish state instead of simply

being an organization for Kurdish armed resistance. Öcalan did not take this well and had

the official promptly assassinated.[176]

Institutionalization in the PKK

As prevalent as charismatic authority was within the PKK, there were also a

multitude of factors that suggested that the PKK would be resilient in the face of leadership

removal. One of these factors was the level of bureaucratization within the PKK. The PKK

was such a large organization, and included so many different branches with vastly

different goals and operations, that it had to build a complex bureaucracy to operate

efficiently. The PKK was a multi-branched organization with a main operational leadership

group in located in Turkey that planned and executed terrorist attacks for the organization.

---

[174] Marcus, "Turkey's PKK: Rise, Fall, and Rise Again?" 110.
[175] Susan McDonald, "Kurdish Women and Self-Determination: A Feminist Approach to International Law," *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*, Ed. Shahrzad Mojab (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publisher, 2001) 148.
[176] Marcus, "Turkey's PKK: Rise, Fall, and Rise Again?" 110.

Additionally, the PKK had two sister branches in Syria and Iraq, which were responsible for

publications, propaganda, and recruitment, and a separate organization for women

fighters.[177]

In addition to how large the PKK was as an organization, it also took on complex

state-building and political roles that forced it to adopt a sophisticated, institutional

framework. The PKK, at various points in its violent campaign against the Turkish state

controlled vast amounts of land. In these areas, it set up an administrative apparatus that

levied taxes on the local population, conducted forced enlistment into the PKK, and

provided social services to Kurdish residents.[178] Not only did the PKK have its own

administrative territory to run, it was also involved in Turkish and international politics.

While the PKK was banned as a political party in Turkey at this time, there were Kurdish

members of the Turkish Parliament within existing political parties that harbored

sympathies with the PKK and would work with the organization to influence the Turkish

government within Turkish institutions.[179] The PKK also engaged in a concentrated effort

to build support among the Kurdish diaspora for the Kurdish cause. This was used not only

to increase recruitment for the PKK using the diaspora, but also to use the diaspora to put

pressure on foreign governments to come out and support the PKK's cause in the

international arena.[180] These political positions all required skill and capable political

operatives. Given the wide extent and far reaching activities of the PKK the organization

[177] Özlem Pusane "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency," 728.

[178] Süleyman Özeren, Murat Sever, Kamil Yilmaz, and Alper Sözer, "Whom Do They Recruit?: Profiling and Recruitment in the PKK/KCK," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* Vol. 37, 2014, 322-347.

[179] Özlem Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency,"731.

[180] Ibid, and Özeren, Sever, Yilmaz, and Sözer, "Whom Do They Recruit?," 325.

should have had the ability to find a suitable replacement to Öcalan to take over the mantel of the PKK after his capture.

Another reason it was unlikely that leadership removal would significantly reduce the lethality of the PKK is that the underlining motivation and justification for the PKK did not go away with the capture of Öcalan. The PKK became the official body of Kurdish grievances in Turkey.[181] The Turkish state was very oppressive toward its Kurdish citizen and treated them as second class within its own society. The Kurdish regions of Turkey are also some of that county's poorest and opportunities for advancement among the Kurdish population are incredibly low.[182] The military campaign by the Turkish government only exacerbated Kurdish grievances. The Turkish response to PKK attacks was often brutal and indiscriminate. The Turkish army frequently embarked on reprisal attacks and village-burning operations as part of their counterterrorism effort.[183] Torture of suspects without due process was a commonplace occurrence and many Kurds would be abducted by the state and never heard from again. [184]

Being Kurdish in Turkey has real implication for an individual's life chances. Given the politically salience of Kurdish ethnicity in Turkey and the strong institutional structure of the PKK to support its terrorist activities, the PKK should have the ability to recover from leadership removal.

---

[181] Michael Gunter, "The Kurdish Problem in Turkey," 1988.
[182] Özeren, Sever, Yilmaz, and Sözer, "Whom Do They Recruit?," 325.
[183] Özlem Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency,"729.
[184] Ibid, 729.

Results of Leadership Removal

The removal of Öcalan from the head of the PKK had a profound effect on the organization. Directly after his capture, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire with the Turkish government.[185] Despite sporadic breakdowns in the ceasefire, the amount of attacks launched by the PKK fell dramatically (See table 3) and the PKK continued to engage diplomatically with the Turkish government throughout the mid 2000s. For the Turkish government, removing Öcalan had an immediate and positive impact on their security. Unfortunately, the chance of ending the conflict through political negotiations was squandered and the PKK returned to its insurgency against the Turkish government. When the PKK returned to arms, they proved that leadership removal had not altered their organization's ability to conduct violent attacks.

One of the main reasons that the removal of Öcalan led the PKK to switch its tactics to political negotiations was Öcalan's leadership purges had removed many of the radical lower level leaders within the PKK allowing for more moderate voices to step in. Öcalan used frequent purges of the PKK's leadership as a means to enhance his own charismatic authority within the organization. A large component of his charismatic authority was melding of the struggle for a Kurdish state and his personal brand. Öcalan built this myth that he was the only person within the PKK who could lead the Kurdish people to liberation. Leaders within the PKK who were more radical in their resistance to the Turkish state threatened this image and were purged. Subsequently the leaders who remained in the PKK were moderates who were good at keeping their heads down and carrying out the

---

[185] Özlem Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency."728.

will of Öcalan. The loss of Öcalan allowed these leaders to step in and change the direction
of the organization.

PKK Terrorist Activity 1997-2003[186]

Year	Attacks	Deaths	Wounded
1997	16	127	14
1998	11	27	37
1999	46	105	233
2000	3	4	2
2001	2	7	4
2002	0	0	0
2003	3	7	6

Table 3

The capture of Öcalan as opposed to his death was also a useful force in reducing the

lethality of the PKK. Having Öcalan in the custody of the Turkish state while still being the

head of the PKK put the organization in a tricky place. Even as the organization was roiling

from the loss of its founder and trying to find replacements, Öcalan was still sending orders

to the organization through his lawyers and family visitors.[187] It was Öcalan who proposed

the ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish government while he was in custody. The

fact that his health and well-being depended on the Turkish state probably helped convince

him to switch his position from violent confrontations to negotiation. This switch in

---

[186] All figures are compiled from the Global Terrorism Database's PKK dataset. Leadership
removal occurred in 1999.
[187] Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK
Insurgency." 727-728.

position sent the PKK into an identity crisis. The members who wanted to resist could not be sure if there were members of the organization who still supported Öcalan enough that they would try to oppose them. In addition, now that Öcalan was out of the picture there was also a much larger moderate voice in the PKK advocating for a ceasefire.[188] This moderate voice used the legitimacy that Öcalan still had within the organization to pursue control of the organization. It was remarkably effective, as almost immediately after the capture of Öcalan the moderates were able to seize control of the PKK, and with Öcalan's blessing, started political negotiations with Turkey.

After using his authority to help justify their take over of the organization though, the new leaders of the PKK started to reduce Öcalan's authority within the PKK. Over the next couple years, the PKK repeatedly rebranded itself as a way to diminish Öcalan's hold over the organization. This was only partially successful, as the PKK has never managed to fully disentangle itself from Öcalan's image. Even today under the banner of the new PKK Öcalan's imprisonment is still used as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the Turkish government.[189] However, Öcalan's imprisonment is no longer enough to keep the PKK away from using terrorist tactics. After years of failing to achieve their political goals through negotiations, the PKK returned to its insurgency as an incredibly capable and effective organization (See table 4).

There are several important points to take away from the PKK case. First, the reaction of the PKK to the removal of Öcalan shows that charismatic leaders are important to the direction of their organization even when their organization has a strong

---

[188] Özlem Pusane "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency." 727-728.
[189] Ibid, 730.

institutional structure to support it. Öcalan's capture by Turkey fundamentally altered the

actions of the PKK. He had so successfully consolidated his authority within the PKK that he

was still able to influence the decision making process in the PKK from a Turkish prison.

This shows that despite whatever institutional processes are in place, leaders are

incredibly important in determining how their organizations are run.

PKK Terrorist Activity 2012-2016

Year	Attacks	Killed	Wounded
2012	43	232	390
2013	21	14	14
2014	66	23	41
2015	337	424	840
2016	379	732	2,088

Table 4

The PKK case also illustrates the problems with viewing leadership removal as a

military strategy against terrorist groups with high levels of both charismatic authority and

institutionalization. Leadership removal in the PKK resulted in a less violent organization

not because the organization was harmed to the point where they could not carry violent

attacks against Turkey, but because leadership removal created the conditions within the

PKK for political change to occur in a way that was beneficial to Turkey. When the PKK

returned to it insurgency against the Turkish state, it proved that it had maintained a high

level of operational capacity, launching a greater number, and more violent, attacks than it

had in its heyday in the 1990s.

The more effective strategy in reducing the operational capacity of the PKK was the Turkish military campaign against them. By the time Öcalan was captured by the Turkish state in 1999, the PKK had been decimated by a brutal Turkish military campaign that put the organization under a lot of pressure. The amount and lethality of the PKK's attacks had fallen from their peak in the mid-1990s. The PKK had lost control of much of the territory that it had once controlled and its membership had been severely depleted by the extended military campaign. Yet while the military campaign was able to degrade the operational capacity of the PKK, it was also extremely costly to the Turkish government. Given that leadership removal achieved a positive political outcome, could it provide a cheap political counterterrorism policy solution for terrorist groups with high levels of charismatic authority and institutionalization?

Unfortunately, the PKK case cannot be generalized too broadly for there were many factors specific to the PKK that led to the PKK choosing to enter political negotiations after leadership removal. First, Öcalan's consolidation of his political authority within the PKK had removed more radical leaders from the PKK allowing for political moderation after his removal. This is not always the case. As shown in the Hamas case, leadership removal can strengthened the hand of radicals within the organization. Additionally, the capture of Öcalan also helped ensure that the political change within the PKK after his removal would move in the direction of moderation but it is not always possible to capture terrorist leaders. Leadership removal simply creates the conditions for political change within a terrorist group; it does not ensure that the political change will have positive counterterrorism outcomes. This is seen in the next chapter, where leadership removal led to the creation of more violent terrorist groups.

Chapter VI

Al Qaeda

Similar to the case of the PKK, leadership removal in Al Qaeda did not decrease the operational capacity of the organization. However, unlike the PKK, leadership removal in Al Qaeda caused the organization to become more violent and regionally-focused.

Background

In 1988, a multimillionaire and war hero from the Soviet-Afghan war set about creating a new organization to bring the ideas of a jihadist struggle to the rest of the Arab world. This man was Osama Bin Laden, and the organization that he founded, Al Qaeda, would become arguably the most influential terrorist organization in history. Its actions defining international politics for the beginning of the 21st century.

At its inception, Al Qaeda had trouble distinguishing itself from the multitude of militant Islamist organizations in the Middle East at the time. Like many other groups, it was based on a Salafiya-Jihadia ideology that advocated for returning the Middle East to Muslim rule.[190] The important distinguishing factor for Al Qaeda in this period was its leader, Osama Bin Laden, who not only had extensive financial resources to back up his infant organization but was already inspiring fanatical devotion in Al Qaeda's members.

---

[190] Rohan Gunaratna and Aviv Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* Vol. 33, 2010, 1047.

After several years of engaging in terrorist activities against the regimes of Arab countries, Bin Laden, frustrated with the slow progress toward the organization's goals, changed the focus of Al Qaeda. In his mind, the authoritative and secular regimes of the Arab world would not fall to terrorism until they lost the support of their powerful western backers.[191] Therefore, Bin Laden switched the focus of Al Qaeda to committing acts of terror against the "far enemy", the United States and its Western allies.[192] His hope was that the public of the United States would be unwilling to remain involved in the Middle East in the face of the terrorism.

This strategy was remarkably successful in making Al Qaeda stand out from other militant Islamic groups, and, by the late 1990s, Al Qaeda had become the foremost terrorist organization in the Middle East. It had launched dozen of attacks against international targets, raising the organization's prominence within the Jihadist community and also putting it on the radar of Western security organizations.[193] The success of Al Qaeda's early years convinced Bin Laden that the United States was still suffering from a Vietnam complex and that Al Qaeda had the ability to bleed the political will out of the United States.[194] This conclusion led to Bin Laden's approval of the world's most infamous terrorist attacks.

On September 11, 2001, members of Al Qaeda hijacked passenger airlines and used them to attack symbols of the United States' economic and political dominance. Over 3,000 civilians died in the deadliest attack on American soil. In response, the United States government declared war on Al Qaeda and its affiliates, wherever they resided in the

---

[191] Gunaratna and Aviv, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1049.
[192] Ibid,1049.
[193] Ibid, 1150.
[194] Ibid, 1150.

Authorization of Military Force Act.[195] This led to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and was

one of many justifications used for the invasion of Iraq. For a decade, one of the main

foreign policy goals of the United States was to kill or capture Osama Bin Laden. On May

2nd 2011, that goal was finally accomplished when U.S. Navy Seals raided a compound in

Pakistan and killed Osama Bin Laden.

Al Qaeda, after the death of Osama Bin Laden, provides a particularly interesting

case study into the effects of decapitation on a terrorist organization because of Al Qaeda's

unique organizational structure. Osama Bin Laden was an extremely charismatic individual

and his personal appeal was a huge part of the success of Al Qaeda. At the same time, he sat

atop a sophisticated institutional structure that oversaw an organization spanning

countries and continents and containing features that made the organization resistant to

leadership removal.

Charismatic Authority in Al Qaeda

Without Osama Bin Laden, there would have been no Al Qaeda. It was his

charismatic authority that first pulled the organization together. Through brilliant

propaganda and careful presentation, Bin Laden built up a cult of personality and extended

his charismatic authority over far-flung branches of his organization, allowing for Al Qaeda

to become a transnational terrorist organization.

Much of Bin Laden's charismatic appeal came from his inspiring backstory. He was

the son of an incredibly wealthy Saudi businessman.[196] His father owned the largest

company in Saudi Arabia and when he died, Osama Bin Laden inherited over $20 million.

---

[195] Gunaratna and Aviv, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1050.
[196] Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, "Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 35, 2012, 27.

Despite his massive personal fortune, Bin Laden felt he had a higher calling.[197] When the

mujahedeen declared a holy war against the occupying Soviet forces, Bin Laden not only

gave them extensive financial resources, he also left the comfort of Saudi Arabia to become

a field commander in Afghanistan.[198] It was there that he made a name for himself in the

jihad movement.

In the war against the Soviet Union, Bin Laden stood out as an excellent and brave

commander adding to the myth surrounding him. In the spring of 1987, Bin Laden engaged

Soviet forces in the battle of Jaji, a brutal, weeks-long battle.[199] Personal accounts of Bin

Laden's bravery made it into the militant Islamist magazine, *Jihad,* increasing his

recognition across the region.[200] Even at this early date, before the organization of Al Qaeda

existed, Bin Laden recognized the value of charismatic authority. When he met some

veteran Islamists, they told him "You are the leader which we can trust. . . we will follow

you."[201] This meeting planted the idea in Bin Laden's mind that he could create his own

Islamic Army, so he started to work on enhancing his charismatic appeal. Bin Laden invited

Saudi journalists to interview him and even created a documentary about his struggles in

Afghanistan.[202] This care for his image would become a hallmark of Al Qaeda.

From its inception, Bin Laden recognized the importance of using his charisma to

establish loyalty within the rank and file of Al Qaeda. While Al Qaeda was still a struggling

organization in Sudan, Osama cultivated personal loyalty by targeting individuals who had

---

[197] Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, "Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 35, 2012, 27.
[198] Bergen and Cruickshank, "Revisiting Early Al Qaeda," 6.
[199] Ibid, 6.
[200] Ibid, 6.
[201] Ibid, 6.
[202] Bergen and Cruickshank, "Revisiting Early Al Qaeda," 24.

been abandoned by the state and provided them not only with financial resources, but also

with the feeling that his organization cared about them.[203] Bin Laden's son testified that

this strategy was incredibly effective in inspiring deep personal loyalty. "Many veterans

told my brothers and me that our father was the only one who never forgot them . . . they

worshipped him with their whole hearts."[204] For Bin Laden, this type of loyalty was not a

perk of his organization but necessary to its goals. He believed that jihad would only

succeed through an Arab army that fought under the principle of martyrdom.[205] To create

this force, he needed to have something that people would be willing to sacrifice their lives

for ,and he found that in his charismatic appeal.

     Bin Laden's belief in the importance of his charismatic appeal can also be seen

through Al Qaeda's use of media. Most militant Islamic organizations, such as the Taliban,

viewed modern media as contrary to Islamic teachings and banned it from their

organizations.[206] Bin Laden, on the other hand believed that media was instrumental to

accomplishing Al Qaeda's goals. He remarked in a letter to Mullah Omar, "It is obvious that

the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach

90% of the total preparation for the battles."[207] Al Qaeda's use of media let it extend Bin

Laden's charismatic authority and helped the organization receive a steady stream of

foreign fighters. When local Islamist groups pledged their allegiance to Al Qaeda and

adopted their media, they found that the number of foreign fighters they could recruit

---

[203] Ibid, 18.
[204] Ibid, 18.
[205] Ibid, 6.
[206] Ibid, 24
[207] Bergen and Cruickshank, "Revisiting Early Al Qaeda," 24.

increased dramatically.[208] Even the Taliban dropped its opposition to the use of modern media after pledging allegiance to Al Qaeda.[209]

Bin Laden was also very conscious to ground his lifestyle in traditional Islamic teachings. Bin Laden was a fervently religious man and modeled his life after the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed.[210] Despite his extraordinary wealth, Bin Laden lived a very modest life. He slept on the floor and ate very little throughout the day.[211] This helped ground Bin Laden's charismatic appeal in the traditional authority of Islam. To his followers, Bin Laden was not just a savior figure who would usher in Islam to the world, he was also a physical embodiment of what an individual should be.

In person, he had an amazing ability to make people like him. Despite the horrific acts of violence that Al Qaeda was engaged in, Bin Laden was reportedly an incredibly pleasant man. He hated disagreement to the point that he would remain aloof from many of the major disagreements within the Al Qaeda leadership.[212] However, his charismatic appeal over the organization was so great that every decision was made on the basis of what Osama would want, even if he did not personally speak on that issue. [213]

For the different branches of Al Qaeda, Bin Laden's authority was key to tying the organization together. As will be explained more in the next section, Al Qaeda is an umbrella organization that is comprised of many different regional branches that owe

---

[208] Peter Bergen, Bruce Hoffman, and Katherine Tiedemann, "Assessing the Jihadist Terrorist Threat to America and American Interests, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 34, 2011, 73-76.
[209] Bergen and Cruickshank, Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda," 24.
[210] Ibid, 30.
[211] Ibid, 30.
[212] Ibid, 29-30.
[213] Bergen and Cruickshank, "Revisiting Early Al Qaeda," 30.

allegiance to a central leadership.[214] Al Qaeda was an appealing organization for regional

Islamic groups to join because the authority of Bin Laden was so strong that regional

groups associated with Al Qaeda quickly became the dominant group in their region.[215] In

exchange for the renown and increased authority that came with an association with Bin

Laden, these regional groups ceded some of their sovereignty to the central leadership

organization. Most frequently, after joining Al Qaeda, these regional Islamic terror groups

would change focus to engage in international terrorism to better align their group with the

goals of the central organization.[216] In this way, the authority of Bin Laden served as the

glue that bound the different branches of Al Qaeda together in one common purpose.

Given how important charismatic authority was to the structure of Al Qaeda, it

would be logical to assume that leadership removal would deeply harm the organization's

ability to function. However, in addition to Bin Laden's exceptional charisma, he also had an

incredible talent for organization. In Al Qaeda, he built an institutional and hierarchical

structure. This type of structure has the features necessary to be resistant to leadership

removal.

Institutionalization in Al Qaeda

It should not be surprising that son of one of Saudi Arabia's most successful

businessmen and a former economics major would create a very bureaucratic organization.

Bin Laden had spent his whole life around, or running, complex organizations and that

experience showed in the construction of Al Qaeda.

---

[214] Gunaratna and Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1051.
[215] Bergen, Hoffman, and Tiedemann, "Assessing the Jihadist Terrorist Threat to America and American Interest," 73-76.
[216] Ibid, 73-76

Al Qaeda is comprised of two main components, the center and the branches. The center of Al Qaeda includes a small core leadership contingent that is organized into a very hierarchical structure (See Fig. 1).[217] At the top of this structure is the Amir, the overall leader of the organization, who was Bin Laden. The Amir is the ultimate authority in the group with the final say on all religious, operational, and logistic matters. The Amir sets the goals and provides direction for the entire organization.[218] Directly below the Amir is the Secretary. The Secretary is responsible for turning the decrees of the Amir into action.[219] This is a managerial position, and the Secretary is not supposed to replace the Amir. Around the time of the death of Bin Laden, it was not clear if the secretary position was occupied or not.[220]

The second highest position of authority in the organization is the Deputy. The Deputy is supposed to be the organizations secondary leader. If the Amir is removed during counter terrorism operations, the Deputy would become the new Amir.[221] The Deputy should hold some of his own authority within Al Qaeda that is independent of the authority of the Amir.[222]

Below the deputy is the Command Council. This is the main operational unit of the Al Qaeda organization. This body is composed of 7-10 high level Al Qaeda officials who together set about the planning and execution of terrorist attacks.[223] The Command Council is chaired by the Amir who has the final say in all of its decision. In the past, the other

---

[217] Gunaratna and Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1055.
[218] Ibid, 1054.
[219] Ibid ,1056.
[220] Ibid, 1056.
[221] Ibid, 1055
[222] Gunaratna and Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1055.
[223] Ibid, 1056

members of the Command Council have included the head of finance, head of security, head of general section military, head of the special operations unit, head theologian, head of media, and official spokesman.[224]

Amir
Secretary
Deputy
Command Council

Political Committee | Religious Committee | Military Committee | Administrative and Financial Committee | Security Committee | Media Committee

General Section (Internal)
Main Unit
Training
Special Operations Unit
Document and Forgery
Worldwide operational cells and extensions
WMD
Library and Research

Accommodation
Accounting
Inter-Organizational Services

Phonetics
Film Editing
Printing Press
Archive
Photography
Secretariat
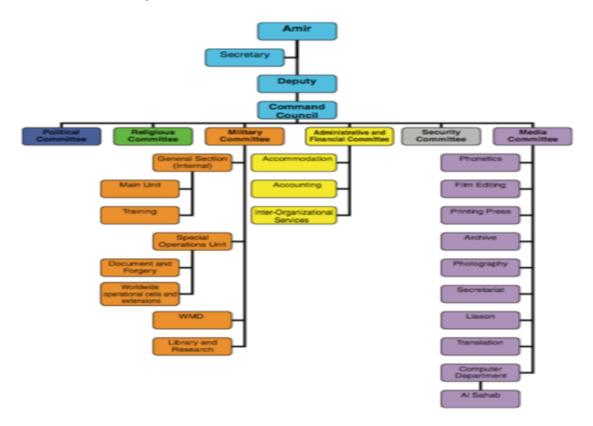Liason
Translation
Computer Department
Al Sahab

Figure 1

Underneath the Command Council, the organization of Al Qaeda breaks down into multiple, specialized units. For this thesis, the most important of these units is the Military Committee, which provides the resources and recruits to carry out the Command Council's planned attacks.[225] One wing of the Military Committee, the Military Command Special

---

[224] Gunaratna and Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1056-1057.
[225] Gunaratna and Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1058.

Operations Unit, was responsible for the execution of all of Al Qaeda's international terrorist attacks.[226]

This central leadership structure is located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region and is actually a fairly small part of the organization's overall size.[227] The bulk of Al Qaeda membership and resources comes from the different branches of Al Qaeda that pledge loyalty to the central leadership.[228]

The branches of Al Qaeda are a diverse set of regional Islamic terrorist organizations. Some of the most notable branches of Al Qaeda are the Abu Sayaf Group (ASG) of the Philippines, the Islamic Jihad Union of Uzbekistan, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), which operates across North Africa, Al Shabab in Somalia, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).[229] These branches give the Al Qaeda organization a vast international reach and deep reservoirs of capacity.

The relationship between the center of Al Qaeda and the branches is symbiotic. The center provides the goals and guidance, while the branches provide the resources to carry out the goals of the central leadership. This can be seen by comparing the different branches before and after they joined Al Qaeda. Al Shabab was a regional Islamist group focused on attacking the decrepit Somali state before it pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda. Soon after it joined up with Al Qaeda it launched a series of devastating bombings in Uganda.[230] These attacks showed that after joining Al Qaeda, Al Shabab had not only gained

---

[226] Ibid, 1058.
[227] Bergen, Hoffman, and Tiedemann, "Assessingthe Jihadist Terrorist Threat to America and American Interests." 69.
[228] Ibid, 71-76
[229] Gunaratna and Oreg "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1051.
[230] Bergen, Hoffman, and Tiedemann, "Assessing the Jihadist Terrorist Threat to America and American Interests," 73.

extended reach with the ability to attack outside of the borders of Somalia, but that the organizational capacity of Al Shabab had also improved and they could now execute complicated terrorist attacks that required extensive training. Through their alliance Al Shabab improved its capacity, while Al Qaeda central leadership gained another ally through which it could fight the far enemy.

This same process is seen in the AQAP. After joining Al Qaeda, AQAP gained extended reach and operational abilities that quickly made it the most deadly branch of Al Qaeda. AQAP was responsible for the attempted Detroit airplane bomber, who successfully snuck an explosive device through airport security by hiding it in his underwear.[231] They were also accredited in the Fort Hood and Little Rock shootings that targeted American servicemen on their home soil.[232] The multitude of branches of Al Qaeda poses a challenge for the effectiveness of leadership removal, since it makes the organization a multi-headed beast.

The incredible sophistication of Al Qaeda's institutional structure can be seen in the massive paper trail of the organization. Al Qaeda kept detailed records; it required and had extensive recruitment profiles drawn up on potential members of the organization with key areas such as youth, zealousness, and ability to obey orders highlighted as desirable traits.[233] It also engaged in complicated contracts with its members with sections on salary, holiday, travel expenses, rewards, and punishments.[234] The organization had its own daily and weekly new publications and its media wing was particularly active in the creation and

---

[231] Bergen, Hoffman, and Tiedemann, "Assessing the Jihadist Terrorist Threat to America and American Interests," 72-73.
[232] Ibid, 72.
[233] Bergen and Cruickshank, "Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda," 11.
[234] Ibid, 11.

distribution of videos.[235] Even written correspondence between the leaders and branches

of Al Qaeda was formatted in a way that made it read less like communications between

higher-ups in a secretive and violent organization and more like internal memos at a large

multinational firm.[236]

The institutional nature of Al Qaeda's organization stands in sharp contrast to its

dependency on charismatic authority and provides a challenge to predicting the outcome of

leadership removal. The extent and importance of Bin Laden's charismatic authority in the

organization suggests that Al Qaeda would be susceptible to leadership removal while the

complex institutional framework holding up Al Qaeda's leadership gives one reason to

think leadership removal would be ineffective against Al Qaeda.

Analysis of Leadership Removal

Contrary to the case of the PKK, the killing of Bin Laden did not drastically reduce

the lethality of Al Qaeda. In fact, 2012 was Al Qaeda's most deadly year in a long time, with

more deaths than the previous three years combined (See table 5).[237] Based on this data, it

appears that the removal of Bin Laden created a more violent and more dangerous

organization. However, the raw data hides very interesting regional trends and masks the

damage that leadership removal did to the organization.

Firstly, the rise in lethality in Al Qaeda can be attributed to the increased activity of

Al Qaeda in Iraq and to a much greater extent the AQAP.[238] So why did these two branches

---

[235] Ibid, 23.
[236] Bergen and Cruickshank, "Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda," 31.
[237] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Al+Qaida&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search
[238] See University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=AQAP&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Se

of Al Qaeda suddenly become much more lethal after the death of Bin Laden? The answer seems to lie with a change of group priorities. As mentioned earlier, one of the key distinguishing factors between Al Qaeda and other Islamic terrorist groups was Al Qaeda's commitment to launching sophisticated terrorist attacks against the West.[239] The emphasis on the far enemy meant that Al Qaeda prioritized complex terrorist attacks against highly visible Western targets as opposed to a multitude of attacks against softer and more local targets. However, after the removal of Bin Laden, the AQAP seems to have shifted its focus back to a more regional terrorism, with the goal of undermining the Yemeni state. Nearly all of the AQAP's attacks were located within Yemen, and the targets typically included police stations and military units, signs of the Yemeni state, as opposed to Western targets.[240]

The data on the AQAP's terrorist activities after the death of Bin Laden shows that the AQAP faced increasing pressures from other Islamist groups. In addition to government troops, multiple AQAP attacks were targeted at rival terrorist groups.[241] The death of Bin Laden threatened the AQAP's status as the premier Islamic terrorist organization on the Arabian peninsula, so the organization quickly moved to eliminate or deter regional rival and to re-establish its supremacy by conducting large, visible and violent terrorist acts. As the most powerful group of Al Qaeda, the AQAP's use of terror to reestablish legitimacy

arch and
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Al+Qaida+in+Iraq&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search
[239] Gunaratna and Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1049.
[240] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=AQAP&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search
[241] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=AQAP&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search

after the fall of Bin Laden proved to be particularly lethal. The AQAP's actions provide evidence for Abrahms' theory that leadership removal increases violence by creating a power struggle within the organization.[242]

Al Qaeda Terrorist Activity 2009-2014

Year	# of Attacks	Killed	Wounded
2009	65	352	492
2010	103	445	812
2011 (before)	28	395	359
2011 (after)	60	350	730
2012	522	1,919	3,447
2013	247	795	1,454
2014	315	935	885

Table 5

The change in the behavior of the AQAP is important because it shows the importance of Bin Laden's charismatic authority in holding the branches of Al Qaeda together. Al Qaeda was Bin Laden's organization and he provided the organization with a sense of direction. The different branches used his legitimacy to enhance their own status and power and, in exchange, they helped carry out Bin Laden's plans. The problem with this system was it put the authority of the core of Al Qaeda into one man, as opposed to the office of the Amir. After Bin Laden was killed a new Amir was named and assumed the

---

[242] Abrahms, Max and Mierau, Jochen. "Leadership Matters: The Effects of Targeted Killing on Militant Group Tactics," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 29, No. 5, 2017, 47-78.

head of the organization. However, despite the best efforts of the organization, the new Amir simply did not have the type of charismatic authority that Bin Laden had. This made the center of Al Qaeda fairly useless to its different branches, so local leaders took the materials and experience that the core leadership of Al Qaeda had provided them over the years and used them to pursue their own goals.

The amount of authority that the core of Al Qaeda lost over the branches can be seen in the center's response to the AQAP change in direction after the death of Bin Laden. In 2012, the infighting within AQAP, as different local leaders scrambled for the most valuable piece of Al Qaeda, was so bad that the core of Al Qaeda took the extraordinary measure of pleading with the AQAP in open publications to stop fighting.[243] A terrorist organization's existence is based on its ability to communicate covertly, and the fact that the core of Al Qaeda was reduced to publicly begging one of its branches to listen to it shows how much authority the center lost with the death of Bin Laden.

Just like the AQAP, Al Qaeda in Iraq also became more violent and regional after the death of Bin Laden in order to re-establish it primacy. However, unlike the AQAP, Al Qaeda in Iraq failed to compete with its regional rivals and has faded into obscurity. The group has not launched a terrorist attack since 2013 despite the fact that 2012 was the group's most violent year (see table 6).[244] The members and leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq did not simply give up and go home, though. Instead, they gave up their association with Al Qaeda to join a new terrorist group called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The members

---

[243] Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations,* 2013 11-32
[244] University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Al+Qaida+in+Iraq&sa.x=0&sa.y=0&sa=Search

who tired to remain loyal to Al Qaeda found that, without the appeal of Bin Laden, they simply could not compete with their newer regional rival.

Al Qaeda in Iraq

Year	# of Attacks	Killed	Wounded
2009	19	161	382
2010	33	163	623
2011 (before removal)	3	158	245
2011 (after removal)	27	153	401
2012	120	430	947
2013	77	347	814
2014	0	0	0

Table 6

While the most sophisticated and well equipped branches of Al Qaeda became more lethal after the death of Bin Laden, some of the smaller branches that lacked much of the critical infrastructure of AQAP and Al Qaeda in Iraq suffered a decrease in operational capacity immediately following leadership removal. AQIM terrorist activity dropped significantly after the removal of Bin Laden, with 2012 being its least active year. However, by 2013, the organization's rate of terrorist activity and lethality returned to around its average (see Table 7).

The IJU also appears to have suffered from the loss of Bin Laden. While the Uzbek group had always been a smaller branch of Al Qaeda, there was significant evidence that

suggested that by 2010, the group was becoming more involved in the perpetration of terrorist attacks planned by Al Qaeda's core leadership. The organization started to receive a large contingent of foreign fighters particularly from Germany, and even launched a failed terrorist attack against the Ramstein Airforce Base in Germany.[245] Since the removal of Bin Laden, however, the organization has not been heavily involved with international terrorism.

AQIM Terrorist Activity

Year	Attacks	Deaths	Wounded
2009	32	154	75
2010	17	41	74
2011 (before)	10	41	44
2011 (after)	9	6	13
2012	12	9	22
2013	18	48	50
2014	17	45	48

Table 7

The experiences of the more peripheral branches of Al Qaeda confirm the trends seen in AQAP and Al Qaeda in Iraq. The removal of Bin Laden decayed the authority of Al Qaeda's core leadership and forced a return to regionalism in the branches of Al Qaeda. However, unlike the stronger branch of Al Qaeda, the periphery branches experienced a loss of capacity after the death of Bin Laden, since they had weak institutional structures

---

[245] Bergen, Hoffman, and Tiedemann, "Assessing the Jihadist Threat to America and American Interests," 76.

and they were more negatively impacted by leadership removal than AQAP or Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Given the mixed effects of the death of Bin Laden on the operational capacity of Al Qaeda it is difficult to assess how effective leadership removal was as a counterterrorism strategy. On the one hand, leadership removal did not lead to organizational collapse or the halting of terrorist activities by Al Qaeda, as in the case of the PKK, and for citizens of Yemen, the death of Bin Laden certainly left them worse off. On the other hand, it cannot be said that the death of Bin Laden did not have an effect on Al Qaeda. The death of Bin Laden fundamentally altered Al Qaeda. The core of the organization lost much of its authority over its branches and has become significantly less relevant to the organization. The branches of Al Qaeda that are left seem much less fixated on Bin Laden's strategy of targeting the far enemy. From the perspective of the American defense establishment, this could be a counterterrorism win since the death of Bin Laden shifted the focus of the organization away from targeting American citizens. However, the increased violence of the branches of Al Qaeda poses a risk to the stability of the region and there is no guarantee that these branches will not choose to adopt international terrorism as their main strategy later. Additionally, some of the renegade branches of Al Qaeda spun off into regional terrorist organizations that still gave the security establishment a headache.

While it is hard to weigh the cost and benefits of leadership removal, the case of Al Qaeda does do a good job in illustrating how high levels of charismatic authority and institutionalization interact within a terrorist organization. Once again, institutionalization in an organization with a highly charismatic leader, served to expand the authority of the charismatic leader instead of the office of the leader, over the organization. The highly

institutionalized nature of Al Qaeda was simply a support mechanism to turn the will of Osama Bin Laden into action. When Bin Laden was killed, the hierarchical Al Qaeda core lost legitimacy. The organization that perpetrated the September 11th attacks died with Al Qaeda. The organization that emerged after the death of Bin Laden took advantage of the infrastructure that was in place to create new groups. High levels of institutionalization in Al Qaeda did not allow the organization to survive leadership removal unchanged, but it did allow the organization to keep its operational capacity and evolve into something new.

Conclusion

In terrorist organizations with high levels of charismatic authority and institutionalization, leadership removal does not degrade their operational capacity. The institutional structures within the terrorist group ensure that leadership removal does not result in organizational collapse, and the organization can continue to function. However, the loss of charismatic authority within highly institutionalized terrorist organizations has a significant impact on the goals and direction of a terrorist group. The loss of charismatic authority from leadership removal threatens a terrorist group's legitimacy forcing political change within the organization and these changes can have positive counterterrorism implications.

The positive impact of these changes is most clearly seen through the case of the PKK. After the removal of Öcalan, the strategy that the PKK used to accomplish their political goals changed overnight from one of insurgent violence with a heavy emphasis on terrorist attacks to political negotiations with the Turkish state. The change in the PKK's tactics was immensely beneficial to the Turkish state as violent attacks by the PKK against the Turkish state fell to essentially zero, relieving pressure on the Turkish government. As noted in the chapter, though, even though the tactics of the PKK changed in a way that was beneficial to the Turkish state, the potential of the organization to launch terrorist attacks against the Turkish state was unhindered by leadership removal. After the breakdown of political negotiations with the Turkish state, the PKK returned to the use of terrorism. To this day, the PKK remains one of the Turkish state's greatest threats. While leadership

removal provided a chance at a political solution to the conflict between Turkey and the PKK, it was not effective as a military strategy that could defeat the PKK.

Additionally, while leadership removal in highly charismatic and institutionalized organizations can provide positive counterterrorism outcomes, it can also yield outcomes that make the organization more dangerous. This was seen in the case of Al Qaeda, in which the loss of Osama Bin Laden's charismatic authority made some of the different regional branches of Al Qaeda significantly more lethal as they attempted to reassert their legitimacy in their respective regions. For the countries that had active Al Qaeda branches operating within them, leadership removal was certainly a negative development. While the removal of Osama Bin Laden could be argued as a positive development for the United States, since it reduced the organization's focus on fighting the far enemy, it also created new headaches for the defense establishment since the more active Al Qaeda regional branches threaten state stability across the Middle East. The United States' counterterrorism policy had to adapt accordingly to this change in the nature of Al Qaeda. After 2011, the number of U.S. drone attacks in Yemen rose drastically, as the U.S. attempted to counter a more active AQAP.[246] At best, the removal of Osama Bin Laden had a mixed impact on the security of the United States.

Given that the effects of leadership removal in terrorist organizations with high levels of charismatic authority and institutionalizations can be mixed, when should governments pursue leadership removal against these organizations? Governments should use and view leadership removal as a tool to modify the tactics and goals of terrorist

---

[246] "Drone Strikes: Yemen." New America. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/americas-counterterrorism-wars/us-targeted-killing-program-yemen/

organizations. Unfortunately for governments, how exactly leadership removal will modify

the goals and tactics of a terrorist organization depends heavily on intergroup dynamics

that are not usually transparent to governments. For example, one of the hopes of Israeli

military planners when they gave the order to assassinate Yassin was that Hamas might not

pursue suicide bombing as a strategy under a different leader.[247] However, the dynamic

within Hamas empowered more radical leaders after the death of Yassin and suicide

bombings continued.

To understand how leadership removal impacts the goals of a terrorist organization,

it is important to understand the sources of legitimacy within that terrorist group. The

greatest strength of leadership removal is not it ability to degrade the operational capacity

of a terrorist organization but rather its ability to challenge the legitimacy of that

organization. To evaluate the impact of leadership removal it is essential to think about

how the organization will work to restore its legitimacy. The death of Osama Bin Laden

made the branches of Al Qaeda more violent within their regions to re-establish their

legitimacy. Öcalan was so successful at consolidating charismatic authority behind himself

through his hierarchical structure that even while captured by the Turkish state he

commanded enough authority within the PKK to demand that it declare a ceasefire and

start political negotiations. By looking to sources of legitimacy, the potential impacts of

leadership removal on an organization can be evaluated.

Evaluating Potential Effects of Leadership Removal on Contemporary Groups

How effective then would leadership removal be against a contemporary terrorist

organization such as ISIS? It would not be that effective. ISIS is not an organization that

---

[247] Gazir and Brym, "State-directed political assassinations in Israel," 867-869.

draws it legitimacy from its leader. Bagdadhi is a charismatic leader without a doubt, but the true source of ISIS' authority comes from its possession of territory, which justifies its claim to be the new caliphate.[248] Since ISIS is also a well-organized and institutionalized organization, during its heyday it basically functioned as a state in the territory it controlled, leadership removal could be resisted without an altering of the organization's goals or tactics.[249] However, the U.S. policy of helping local forces reclaim territory from ISIS poses a great challenge to the organization's legitimacy, not to mention its operation capacity as well, since unlike leadership removal, the reclaiming of territory was accompanied by combat that resulted in substantial losses across all levels of ISIS' organization. By the time of this writing, US coalition forces had reclaimed nearly all the territory that ISIS once controlled. This development will force ISIS to turn to other sources of legitimacy.

I predict that similar to the Al Qaeda case, the loss of the main source of legitimacy will cause ISIS members to turn to regional terrorism. ISIS brought thousands of foreign fighters to its caliphate to carry out attacks in Syria and Iraq.[250] Now that the caliphate is dead, these foreign fighters will most likely try to return to their home countries. Some of these fighters will give up terrorist violence, but a few will use the skills they learned in Syria and Iraq to conduct acts of terrorism in their home countries using ISIS' name in a bid to make the organization stay relevant. This is similar to how the branches of Al Qaeda became more dangerous after the death of Osama Bin Laden. However, the main difference between Al Qaeda and ISIS is that Al Qaeda already had a regional infrastructure in place

---

[248] Gerges, Fawaz, *ISIS: A History*, (University of Princeton Press: 2016) 222-228.
[249]Ibid, 1-6.
[250] Ibid, 1-6.

that allowed the branches of Al Qaeda to operate effectively. ISIS has no regional

infrastructure in place so the new ISIS will be a decentralized, leaderless organization that

will carry out lone wolf style attacks in ISIS' name. These attacks will probably be

significantly less lethal than the attacks that the organization undertook in Syria and Iraq

but could be more politically important in the counties where they occur.

The ISIS case illustrates how the logic used to evaluate the impacts of leadership

removal can be applied to other counterterrorism developments. Even though leadership

removal would not be effective against ISIS since the authority of the organization does not

come from its leader, thinking through the effects of challenging the legitimacy of ISIS

provides insights into how the organization will evolve from the U.S. effort to take its

territory.

With the massive caveat that a terrorist organization is not a state, the results of

leadership removal, particularly on highly charismatic and institutionalized terrorist

organizations, since they most closely resemble states, could be used to evaluate the

impacts using leadership removal on a head of state. This is particularly relevant since the

taboo on the use of leadership removal as a strategy in state conflict has recently

weakened. The South Korea government recently created a special decapitation unit,

whose sole function is to eliminate the North Korean leadership in event of a conflict

between the two states.[251]

The North Korean State is both highly institutionalized and utterly dependent on

charismatic authority so leadership removal would challenge the authority of the state and

---

[251] Choe Sang-Hun "South Korea Plans 'Decapitation Unit' to Try to Scare North's Leaders." *The New York Times,* September 12th, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/world/asia/north-south-korea-decapitation-.html

force changes in state behavior. However, I would never recommend leadership removal as a solution to the Korean crisis because the chance that what happens as a result being far worse than the status quo are unconscionably high. It is possible that after leadership removal the new leader of North Korea adopts a more conciliatory tone toward South Korea and is less committed to the North's nuclear program, but it is far more likely that local leaders decide the best way to increase their own legitimacy and power after leadership removal is through massive and lethal retaliation against the South. Leadership removal is simply too risky of a strategy to use against states, let alone nuclear-armed ones.

Areas for Further Research

One area not addressed within this thesis is the effect of capturing leaders instead of killing them. With the caveat that I have not extensively researched the issue, I would predict that it is always preferable to capture charismatic terrorist leaders as opposed to killing them. This is because a captured terrorist leader poses a much bigger debacle to an organization dependent on charismatic authority than a dead one. While a dead leader forces the organization to re-establish its legitimacy through other means, a captured leader will typically still hold authority within their organization and can use that authority to modify the goals of the organization in a more controlled fashion. This is certainly what Öcalan did after he was captured by the Turkish state. If Turkey had killed him instead of capturing him it is unlikely that the PKK would have agreed to the cease-fire. The authority that Öcalan has over his organization may be the reason that the Turkish state continues to delay his execution. In addition to the two examples in this thesis, in which captured leaders led to positive counterterrorism policy outcomes, the capture of Guzman of the Shining Path and Auginaldo of the Philippines also led to their respective organizations'

collapse. The effects of leadership removal are often messy and rarely controlled, but a captured leader provides the opportunity to exert a little control over the process.

Final Thoughts

Leadership removal has been treated as a default strategy in counterterrorism for far too long. It certainly has its place in the counterterrorism policy world as it is remarkably effective against organizations with high levels of charismatic authority and low levels of institutionalization, but its effects are far to varied to be applied as a blunt instrument. Instead, leadership removal needs to looked at for what it is: a relatively uncontrolled method through which states can alter the goals and tactics of terrorist organizations. The employment of leadership removal should be limited and done on a case-by-case basis, in which the internal dynamics of a terrorist organization are first evaluated to determine that leadership removal can yield a positive outcome.

Bibliography

Abrahms, Max and Mierau, Jochen. "Leadership Matters: The Effects of Targeted
   Killing on Militant Group Tactics." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 29,
   No. 5, 2017 47-78.

Ackerman, Spencer. "Hillary Clinton's plan to stop Isis: hunt down leader Abu Bakr
   al-Baghdadi" *The Guardian*. Sep. 23rd, 2016.

Bakker, Rene, Raab, Jörg, and Milward, Brinton "A preliminary theory of dark networks
   resilience." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Winter 2012,
   33-62.

Bergen, Peter and Cruickshank, Paul. "Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of
   its Formative Years," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 35, 2012, 1-36.

Bergen, Peter, Hoffman, Bruce and Tiedemann, Katherine. "Assessing the Jihadist Terrorist
   Threat to America and American Interests, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 34,
   2011, 65-101.

Brown, Jason. "To Bomb or Not to Bomb? Counterinsurgency, Airpower, and
   Dynamic Targeting" *Air and Space Power Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2007, 75-86.

Bush, George W. "Address to the Nation on 9-11-01" *American Rhetoric.*
   http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911addresstothenation.h tm

Crawford, Beverly. The Causes of Cultural Conflict: An Institutional Approach In:
   Beverly Crawford and Ronnie Lipschutz, ed., The Myth of "Ethnic Conflict":
   Politics, Economics and "Cultural" Violence. University of California International and
   Area Studies Digital Collection, Research Series#98,1998.

Cronin, Audrey. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of
   Terrorist Campaigns*. (Princeton University Press: 2009) 1-34.

Fawaz, Gerges. *ISIS: A History*, (University of Princeton Press: 2016) 1-352.

Gazir, Nir and Brym, Robert. "State-directed political assassinations in Israel: A political
   hypothesis," *International Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 6, 2011, 862-877.

Gunaratna, Rohan Oreg, Aviv. "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* Vol. 33, 2010, 1043-1078.

Gunter, Michael. "The Kurdish Problem in Turkey." *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 42, No. 3, 1988, 389-406.

David, Steven, "Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing." *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No 3. 2003, 138-158.

Hofmann, David. "The Influence of Charismatic Authority on Operational Strategies and Attack Outcomes of Terrorist Groups." *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2016, 14-44.

Hroub, Khaled. "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisi," *Journal of Palestinian Studies,* Vol. 33 No. 4, Summer 2004, 21-38.

Isaac, Matthew. "Faith in Contention: Explaining the Salience of Religion in Ethnic Conflict." *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2017, 200-231.

Johnston, Patrick. "Does Decapitation Work: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns." *International Security*, Vol 36, No 4, 2012 47-79.

Jordan, Jenna. "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark." *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 2014, 7-38.

Jordan, Jenna. "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation." *Security Studies,* Vol. 18, No. 4, 2009, 719-755.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God*. University of California Press. 2003. 103-120.

Langdon, Lisa Sarapu, Alexander and Wells, Matthew. "Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policy Makers." *Journal of Public and International Affairs*. Vol. 15 2004, 59-78.

Leland, Anne and Jana, Mari. "American War and Military Operations Casualties: List and Statistics." *Congressional Research Service.* February 26th, 2010.

Levitt, Matthew. *Hamas: politics, charity, and terrorism in the service of Jihad*. Yale
      University Press, 2006. 34-37.

Long, Austin. "Whack-a-mole or Coup de Grace? Institutionalization and Leadership
      Targeting in Iraq and Afghanistan." *Security Studies*. Vol. 23, 2014, 471-512.

Mannes, Aaron. "Testing the Snake Head Strategy: Does Killing or Capturing its
      Leaders Reduce a Terrorist Group's Activity?" *Journal of International Policy
      Solutions*, Vol. 9. 2008, 40-49.

Marcus, Aliza. "Turkey's PKK: Rise, Fall, and Rise Again?" *World Policy Journal* NYU
      Press, 2007.

Matthews, Owen. "Why Russia's Reaction to Terrorism is All About Strengthening
      Putin's Power." *Newsweek*. April 10th, 2017.

McDonald, Susan. "Kurdish Women and Self-Determination: A Feminist Approach to
      International Law," *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*, Ed. Shahrzad
      Mojab. (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publisher, 2001).

Mishal, Shaul."The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas: A Network Perspective."
      Armed Forces and Society, Vol. 29, No. 4, Summer 2003, 569-589.

Obama, Barack. *Second Presidential Debate* Oct. 7th, 2008.

Özeren, Süleyman Sever, Murat Yilmaz, Kamil and Sözer, Alper. "Whom Do They
      Recruit?: Profiling and Recruitment in the PKK/KCK." *Studies in Conflict and
      Terrorism* Vol. 37, 2014, 322-347.

Perry, Simon, Apel, Robert, Newman, Graeme, and Clarke, Ronald, "The Situtational
      Prevention of Terrorism: An Evaluation of Israeli West Bank Barrier." *Journal of
      Quantitative Criminology*, Vol. 33 No. 4, 2017, 727-751.

Phillips, David. "Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan's
      Workers Party." *National Committee on American Foreign Policy*, (15th
      October, 2007).

Price, Bryan. "Targeting Top Terrorists," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2012,
      9-46.

Pusane, Özlem. "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the
        PKK Insurgency." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 5, 2015, 727-741.

Raevskiy, Alexander. "Psychological aspects of the Aum Shinrikyo affair." *Psychology
        in Russia: State of the Art*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2014 34-39.

Shapiro, Jacob. *The Terrorist Dilemma: managing violent covert organizations.*
        Princeton University Press, 2013. 83-99.

Staff, Toi. "Netanyahu warns terror groups: Don't even think about it" *The Times of
        Israel*. November 12th, 2017.

Stern, Steven. *Shining and Other Paths War and Society in Peru 1980-1995*. Duke
        University Press, 1998, 267-301.

Tu, A.T. "Aum Shinrikyo's Chemical and Biological Weapons: More Than Sarin,"
        Forensic Science Review, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2014, 115-120.

University of Maryland, "Global Terrorism Database,"
        https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

U.S. Department of State. "Foreign Terrorist Organizations,"
        https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm

Weber, Max. *On Charisma and Institution Building*, Tans. S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago:
        University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Appendix

David Hoffman's scale of Charismatic Authority[252]

1. Is the authority of the leader interpreted in terms of ingrained and traditional conceptions of charismatic authority in the broader society and culture?

2. Is authority attributed to the leaders on the basis of the perception that there is an impending or current crisis, one associated with the bankruptcy of existing forms of traditional and/or rational-legal forms of authority?

3. Are attributions of power to the leader based on the follower's perception of the leader's superhuman and/or exceptional powers and qualities?

4. Is the authority attributed to the leader associated with any physical impairment or suffering viewed positively by the followers?

5. Does the leader legitimate their authority through reference to a higher source of authority, either divine or some other transcendent source (i.e. a supreme ideology)?

6. Are grandiose and exaggerated claims made about the nature and scope of the leader's authority and importance?

7. Are new members socialized into recognizing the special powers and authority of the leader?

8. Does the leader figure prominently in the folklore of the group and the representation of its "story"?

9. Are the organization's decisions highly centralized and reliant on the will of the leader?

---

[252] Hoffman, "Quantifying and Qualifying Charisma," 716-717.

10. Is the leader intolerant of alternative sources of power and authority, both internal and external to the group?

11. Does the leader introduce sudden and/or seemingly arbitrary changes in the practices and policies of the group?

12. Do followers readily accept these sudden and/or seemingly arbitrary changes in the practices and policies of the group?

13. Is the delegation of authority highly centralized and reliant on the will of the leader?

14. Does the legitimacy of subordinate leaders in the group depend on the nature of their personal relationship with the leader?

Charismatic Authority of Shoko Asahara[253]

1. Yes. This criteria is easily fulfilled by Shoko Asahara. Shoko Asahara was completely blind in one eye and partially blind in the other. He used disability to substantiate his claim that his vision was not like that of ordinary men but divine in its nature. This allowed him to see into the future and determine what the divine plan for the world was and how his followers could achieve enlightenment. Members of Aum Shinrikyo believed that Shoko Asahara occupied a higher dimensional existence, making him the solo individual who could provide spiritual fulfillment.

2. Sort of. This might be the weakest aspect of Shoko Asahara's charismatic authority, but there are clear efforts on his part to ground his own charismatic authority in more traditional conceptions of charismatic authority. For example, Shoko Asahara barrowed heavily from Buddhist practices and even claimed he was the first enlightened

---

[253] Information to complete the scale was compiled from Mark Juergensmeyer *Terror in the Mind of God*, (University of California Press: 2003) 103-120.

one to be born on earth since Buddha himself. This practice allowed Shoko Asahara to coopt the authority of Buddhism, which was very popular in Japanese culture to grant his organization more legitimacy.

3. Yes. Shoko Asahara was brilliant at exploited disillusionment among individuals to increase his own authority over his members. The time when Aum Shinrikyo membership was most actively growing was also during an economic boom in Japan. While this rapid economic growth brought many benefits to Japan, it also prompted vast cultural change that left many young Japanese people disillusioned. The pressure of the economic rat race and the rapid Westernization of Japan sent many young looking for spiritual fulfillment. Shoko Asahara told them exactly what they wanted to hear; that they were right to be disillusioned because Japanese society was morally bankrupt and this corrupt society would soon collapse.

4. Yes. This criteria fits perfectly to Shoko Asahara. Again, Shoko Asahara was half-blind but he turned his disability into a key aspect of his cult-of-personality. This skill came from an early start using his half-blindness to his advantage. As a child, he had been sent to an all blind school, where his partial vision gave him an advantage over his peers and made him a natural leader. He built his leadership skills as a child using his gift of limited vision to manipulate his classmates.

5. Yes. As stated earlier, Shoko Asahara barrowed heavily from traditional Buddhist practices creating an easy association between himself and the authority of Buddha.

6. Yes. The whole basis of Aum Shinrikyo was that Shoko Asahara was unique among men and only he could successfully guide people to enlightenment. Many of the claims made about Shoko Asahara such as the claim that he occupied a higher dimensional

existence that allowed him to see into the future or the claim that on a trip to Nepal he was personally entrusted with a secret mission from the Dalai Lama himself are clearly exaggerated to stress his importance and authority.

7. Yes. Aum Shinrikyo had very bizarre socialization processes to get new members to believe in the special powers and authority of Shoko Asahara. In one such ritual, recruits would be placed on lightly vibrating mats and be given a tea that caused them to hallucinate (it is suspected that the tea was laced with LSD). During these hallucinations the recruits were told to think of Shoko Asahara because only through him could they avoid bad visions and find the truth.

8. Yes. For Aum Shinrikyo, their story is completely dependent on Shoko Asahara. Shoko Asahara was the only member of the organization to receive divine messages, so only he could fulfill the organization's goals. Shoko Asahara purposely designed the Aum Shinrikyo founding myth with himself at the center.

9. Yes. Aum Shinrikyo was incredibly centralized. Shoko Asahara was the sole individual responsible for the direction and decisions of the organization. Everything produced by the organization was designed to increase Shoko Asahara 'sauthority within it. For example, all of Aum Shinrikyo's advertising publications heavily featured Shoko Asahara and his spiritual wisdom. The goal of the recruitment process was to attract people who already felt close to Shoko Asahara as opposed to the organization at large.

10. Yes. Shoko Asahara always tried to eliminate opposing sources of authority both within and outside of Aum Shinrikyo. The first targets of Aum Shinrikyo's terrorist activities were not ordinary citizens of Japan but fellow members of Aum Shinrikyo who posed a challenge to Shoko Asahara's authority. Once he had consolidated his authority

within Aum Shinrikyo, Shoko Asahara moved to eliminate his main rival in external authority, the Japanese government. He first attempted to do this through elections, but after the Aum Shinrikyo political party failed to win in parliamentary elections, Shoko Asahara sought to undermine the authority of the Japanese government through terrorism.

11. Yes. Shoko Asahara quite frequently changed the religious practices of Aum Shinrikyo. One of the largest and most dramatic changes he made to the organization was the introduction of "poa", which marked a transition of the religion towards violent fanaticism.

12. Yes,.Despite Shoko Asahara's frequent changes to the vision of Aum Shinrikyo, the religion continued to grow and pick up new members. By the time of the Tokyo subway attack, the group held over 40,000 members. The lack of an exodus from the organization during major changes to its religious philosophy highlights just how strong Shoko Asahara's charismatic appeal in Aum Shinrikyo was.

13. Yes. All of the top positions of Aum Shinrikyo were filled by members who had close personal relationships with Shoko Asahara and deeply believed in his divine nature. Shoko Asahara was so effective in centralizing his authority that after he was captured, the secondary leaders of Aum Shinrikyo found their authority over individual members of Aum Shinrikyo deeply degraded. To counteract this, some secondary leaders isolated members of Aum Shinrikyo from the news that Shoko Asahara had been arrested because they knew if the rank and file found out they would lose their authority.

14. Yes. As said in criteria 13, all of the top leaders of Aum Shinrikyo held close personal relationships with Shoko Asahara. This cemented Shoko Asahara's authority at the top of Aum Shinrikyo.

Charismatic Authority of Ahmed Yassin[254]

1. Yes. Yassin drew heavily from traditional notions of Islamic authority to enhance his own standing within Hamas.

2. Yes. The presence of Israel and the loss of Palestinian land was used as a justification for Yassin's authority.

3. Yes. Among the followers of Hamas there was a feeling that Yassin was unnaturally wise.

4. Yes. Yassin was paralyzed from the waist down and had been since he was sixteen, but he used this physical impairment to enhance his own cult-of-authority.

5. Yes. As mentioned earlier, Yassin drew heavily from the traditional authority of Islam by living very piously and modestly.

6. Yes. He was given the title of the spiritual leader of Hamas and he was considered essential to the organization.

7. No. Although Yassin was recognized as a leader of Hamas and beloved for his spiritual wisdom, there was not a method through which individual recruits were socialized to his authority.

---

[254] Information for scale compiled from Matthew Levitt "*Hamas: politics, charity, and terrorism in the service of Jihad*," (Yale University Press: 2006), 34-37. And Khaled Hroub "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisi," *Journal of Palestinian Studies,* Vol. 33 No. 4, Summer 2004, 21-38.

8. Yes. He did feature very proximately in the story of Hamas. However, he was not the only figure to do so, and he did not attempt to rewrite the story of Hamas to just be centered around himself.

9. No. Hamas is a networked organization and, at the local level, the authority of the central leadership was significantly less important than the will and connections of the local leader.

10. No. There was a wide variety of other sources of authority within Hamas that Yassin tolerated. Even within the central leadership, Yassin competed with other leaders.

11. No, Although Hamas would change its positions on issues, decisions were reached through consensus within the organization's leadership rather than the arbitrary will of one leader.

12. No.

13. No. Again the structure of Hamas was really focused on consensus building as opposed to centralization.

14. No. It was more important for leaders to have a network within their community than it was for them to have a strong personal relationship with the central leadership.

Charismatic Authority of Abdullah Öcalan[255]

1. Yes. Öcalan's authority was derived from Kurdish culture and he established his organization to take advantage of these ideas.

---

[255] Information for this scale compiled from Özlem Pusane "Turkey's Military Victory over the PKK and its Failure to End the PKK Insurgency." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 5, 2015, 727-741.

2. Yes. Öcalan's organization effectively used the repression of the Kurdish people by the Turkish government and the desire of the Kurdish people for a Kurdish state to enhance his own authority.

3. Yes. Öcalan was not simply the leader of a liberation movement; he became the idea of Kurdish liberation for many of the followers of the PKK. He was viewed as the father of the modern Kurdish nation.

4. No.

5. Yes. Öcalan borrowed heavily from the ideas of nationhood and nationalism to enhance his own authority within the PKK.

6. Yes. As mentioned earlier, Öcalan came to be viewed as the father of the Kurdish nation and was viewed as a messiah figure.

7. Sort of. There was less of an emphasis on recognizing the special powers of Öcalan but the PKK was very picky when it came to recruiting fighters. One of its criteria for fighters was how deferential they were to authority.

8. Yes. Öcalan was not the sole founder of the PKK, but he fixed that by purging his fellow co-founders and consolidating the group's story behind him.

9. Yes. The organization of the PKK was incredibly centralized with all decisions flowing from Öcalan down. Other leaders within the PKK were simply there to execute the will of the leader.

10. Yes. Öcalan was incredibly intolerant of individuals within the PKK who threatened his authority. He conducted frequent purges within the organization to ensure that leaders could not establish their own following within the organization and his

purges were notorious for targeting even those who were close to him. He even tried to have his own wife assassinated.

11. Yes. Although he wasn't officially its leader at the time, his decision to switch tactics to negotiating with the Turkish state after being captured illustrates how strong his charismatic authority was within the organization.

12. Yes.

13. Yes. As stated earlier other leaders within the PKK were transactional, functioning as tools to execute the will of Öcalan.

14. Yes. The other leaders within the PKK all relied on their personal relation with Öcalan to gain their positions, and when that relationship deteriorated, they were quickly purged.

Charismatic Authority of Osama Bin Laden[256]

1. Yes. Osama Bin Laden barrowed heavily from Islamic cultures and practices to enhance his own charismatic authority. He was very conscious about presenting himself as an excellent and devout Muslim.

2. Yes. The basis for Al Qaeda was that Middle Eastern regimes were secular and did not represent the values of Islam. This dissatisfaction with traditional society led individuals to Al Qaeda.

3. Yes. Osama Bin Laden had distinguished himself in the Soviet Afghan war as a military commander. He quickly built up a myth about his leadership abilities.

---

[256] Information for this scale compiled from Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank "Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 35, 2012, 1-36. And Rohan Gunaratna and Aviv Oreg "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* Vol. 33, 2010, 1043-1078.

4. No. Unlike some charismatic leaders, Osama Bin Laden did not use a physical disability as a means to enhance his charismatic authority.

5. Yes,.Osama Bin Laden frequently paid homage to traditional Islamic authority as a way to enhance his own authority within Al Qaeda.

6. Yes. Osama Bin Laden was frequently claimed to be the only figure in the Arab world who could defeat the West.

7. Sort of. There was less an emphasis on individual members being socialized but a greater emphasis on existing organizations that were incorporated into Al Qaeda recognizing the supreme authority of Osama Bin Laden.

8. Yes. Osama Bin Laden founded Al Qaeda with his own capital. He was essential to the story of the group.

9. Yes. Osama Bin Laden was the ultimate authority within Al Qaeda. He dictated the direction and goals of the organization to underlings who worked to fulfill his wishes.

10. Yes. Although there were other leaders within Al Qaeda, they were all secondary to Osama Bin Laden and decisions by other leaders always had to be justified in terms of what Bin Laden wanted.

11. Yes. The switch of Al Qaeda from trying to overthrow Arab regimes to targeting Western countries is a good example.

12. Yes. Osama Bin Laden effectively reorganized the priorities of Al Qaeda without losing the faith of the members of the organization.

13. Yes. The organization of Al Qaeda was incredibly centralized and reliant on the authority of Osama Bin Laden.

14. Yes. All of the upper level leaders within Al Qaeda had close personal relationships with Osama Bin Laden.

Criteria for High Levels of Institutionalization[257]

1. Do the structures in place in the organization reduce uncertainty during an external shock?

2. How well known is the structure of the organization to its individual members?

3. How many resources does the organization have at its disposal?

4. Are there effective lines of secure communication within the organization?

5. Does the organization have access to external forms of legitimacy?

6. Does the organization have access to internal forms of legitimacy?

7. How effectively is the organization able to recruit members?

8. Is the organization able to maintain complex linkages between different actors?

9. How well integrated is the organization?

10. How strong is the motivation of individuals within the organization to work toward its goals.

---

[257] These criteria were inspired by Rene Bakker, Jörg Raab, and Brinton Milward, "A preliminary theory of dark networks resilience." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Winter 2012, 33-62.