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Explaining Terrorist Group Cooperation and Competition

Importante

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Abstract

Why do some terrorist groups cooperate with each other, while others attack each other? Terrorist groups frequently interact. Emerging research shows that these network relationships have important consequences, but it remains unclear why some terrorist groups form ties with other terrorist groups in the first place. This paper builds an explanation of interorganizational relationships, seeking to understand both cooperative and adversarial ties. The argument emphasizes the importance of the motivations of terrorist organizations. In particular, the political goals of a group have divergent effects on the group's likelihood of entering either relationship type. Ethnic groups are more likely to form adversarial ties with other groups, while religious groups are more likely to form cooperative ties. I argue that this is because of the probability of each type of group bargaining with the government, and the implications of potential bargaining. The paper also considers opportunity factors important for tie formation. Hypotheses are tested on a newly-extended time-series global data set of terrorist groups and their relationships, 1987-2005, and results provide support for the argument. An alternative model of alliance formation, the capabilities aggregation model, does not find much support.

Resumen

¿Por qué algunos grupos terroristas cooperan, mientras que otros se atacan entre sí? Los grupos terroristas interactúan frecuentemente. Nuevas investigaciones muestran que estas relaciones tienen consecuencias importantes, pero aún no queda claro por qué algunos grupos terroristas establecen vínculos con otros grupos terroristas en primer lugar. Este documento presenta una explicación de las relaciones interorganizacionales, tratando de comprender tanto las relaciones de cooperación como las de cooperación entre estos grupos. El argumento hace hincapié en la importancia de las motivaciones de las organizaciones terroristas. En particular, los objetivos políticos de un grupo tienen efectos divergentes sobre la probabilidad de que un grupo establezca cualquiera de estas relaciones. Los grupos étnicos tienen más probabilidades de formar relaciones de conflicto con otros grupos, mientras que los grupos religiosos tiene más probabilidades de formar relaciones de cooperación. Yo sostengo que esto se debe a la probabilidad que tiene cada grupo de negociar con el gobierno, y a las implicaciones de dicha negociación potencial. El documento también examina los factores de oportunidad que son importantes para relaciones entre grupos terroristas. Las hipótesis se contrastan empíricamente en una base de datos global recientemente

ampliada, en que figuran los grupos terroristas y sus relaciones, entre 1987-2005, y los resultados ofrecen apoyo para el argumento principal. Un modelo alternativo de formación de alianzas, el modelo de agregación de capacidades, no encuentra mayor apoyo en el análisis empírico.

Introduction

Why do some terrorist groups cooperate with each other, while others attack each other? Emerging research shows that these relationships have important consequences, but it remains unclear why some terrorist groups form network ties in the first place. The extant literature offers little in the way of explanation. This paper presents a framework for understanding the formation of both cooperative and adversarial ties, based on the political goals of terrorist groups. The results offer an important contribution to understanding the behavior of terrorist groups, and therefore terrorism.

A significant development in the study of political violence is increased attention to relationships between actors, instead of assuming that each party acts independently (Hafner-Burton and Montgomery, 2006; Maoz, 2009, 2011). Researchers are using the social networks approach to take into consideration the reality that ties between actors—whether states, individuals, or groups—have non-trivial effects. Research on terrorism has benefitted from this approach as well (Perliger and Pedahzur, 2011). Studies have primarily looked at networks of individual terrorists (e.g., Helfstein and Wright, 2011; Sageman, 2004), but analysts are beginning to focus on interorganizational relationships—networks of terrorist groups. These relationships, whether cooperative or adversarial, have important consequences (see below).

Interorganizational ties between terrorist groups are puzzling because there are reasons why we should expect groups to remain isolated. Cooperation could make groups more visible to the state, and state infiltration of one group could yield information about its allies as well. This might explain why some groups, such as Peru's Sendero Luminoso, have mostly refused to work with other terrorist groups (McCormick, 2001: 120-121). Regarding rivalries or adversarial ties, these types of relationships seem counterproductive. Terrorist organizations focus energy on each other instead of the state. This can destroy involved groups, as happened to several Tamil separatist groups in Sri Lanka in the 1980s (Bush, 2004). Abrahms (2008) cites "terrorist fratricide" as one of the chief puzzles of terrorism, and it is one of the phenomena that leads him to argue that terrorists are not strategic actors. In spite of the challenges associated with cooperation and adversaries, many terrorist groups nonetheless form such ties.

The extant literature has not yet adequately addressed the important question of what explains terrorist group connections. Some case studies offer explanations of why cooperation or rivalry occurred in a specific setting (Bruce, 1992; Schiller, 2001), but it is unclear to what extent these accounts apply to other situations. A few studies theorize sources of terrorist group

cooperation (Karmon, 2005),¹ but there exist no general explanations of adversarial behavior. We have not yet seen a theoretical framework that can explain both cooperative and adversarial ties, so it is unclear if these two different relationship types have similar causal factors.

This paper attempts to address this gap in the literature, offering an argument of terrorist group ties that attempts to explain both cooperative and adversarial relationships. I argue that each group's political goals play an important role in indicating its likelihood of cooperative or adversarial ties. Ethnically motivated terrorist groups should be especially likely to attack other groups, while religious terrorist groups should tend to form alliances with other groups. This difference is because of each type of group's potential for bargaining with the government. Ethnic groups, often fighting for the tangible good of land, are more likely to engage in talks with the state - and this causes the groups to turn on each other over details of the bargain. Religious groups, with less tangible goals and less willingness to compromise, are unlikely to receive concessions and therefore face greater incentives to cooperate. Beyond political goals, I also consider how certain opportunity factors play a role in tie formation, regardless of the type of tie. Hypotheses are tested on a global data set of terrorist groups and their relationships, 1987-2005, and are generally supported.

Terrorist group ties and possible explanations

Terrorism is the threat or use of violence by subnational actors in order to obtain a political goal through intimidation of a wider audience beyond their immediate victims (Enders and Sandler, 2006). Terrorist groups are organizations that use terrorism. In recent years, as global data has become available, scholars have increasingly sought to understand the behavior of terrorist groups, generally (e.g., Cronin, 2009; Jordan, 2009). A substantial number of these studies have examined consequences of terrorist group interactions. There has been very little research, however, into the formation of these relationships, or even description of their global patterns. This section discusses some basics of terrorist group relationships and then presents an explanation for their formation.

Terrorist groups directly interact in a number of ways. The literature basically discusses two types of relationships: cooperative and adversarial.² Cooperative ties involve substantive logistical or operational

¹ Bapat and Bond (Forthcoming) offer an explanation of cooperation between subnational militant groups, but their work is substantially different from mine. They explain when symmetric vs. asymmetric alliances form. I attempt a more general argument, however, seeking to explain the formation of relationships regardless of power symmetry. My paper also attempts to explain adversarial ties.

² To avoid repetitiveness, I sometimes also use the terms "alliance" and "rivalry". However, because these terms already refer to specific concepts in the study of inter-state war, I primarily use the terminology of cooperative and adversarial relationships.

coordination, such as when one group trains another, or when two groups jointly conduct an attack (Karmon, 2005: 49). Terrorist groups also attack each other, and when this is a regular occurrence between two groups, I refer to it as an adversarial relationship. This is basically what some other authors refer to as “competition” (e.g., Bloom, 2005). However, I use a more specific term to imply direct interaction, not simpler notions of groups disagreeing with each other, or coexisting in the same space and indirectly vying for resources.

Cooperative and adversarial ties have occurred in diverse environments around the world. Regarding cooperation, al-Qaeda has been a prominent participant in interorganizational connections. The group is relatively unique for its number of allies, and their global dispersion, but many other terrorist groups have teamed up with other groups for training or attacks. Hamas has basically had terrorist group allies ever since its 1987 founding, and the Colombian group April 19 Movement (M-19) operated with other Latin American groups.

When terrorist groups cooperate, they can share resources, spread information (Horowitz, 2010), and perhaps increase their capabilities. Cooperative ties help terrorist groups access new technology and tactics (Asal, Ackerman and Rethemeyer, 2012; Horowitz, 2010). Groups with allies tend to be more lethal than those without (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Horowitz and Potter, 2011). Perhaps for these reasons, terrorist group cooperation occurs in a broad variety of settings.

Adversarial ties also occur frequently. Sometimes an adversarial relationship starts when a “reactionary” group forms to attack an extant group with opposing political goals. The *Autodefensas* in Colombia, which formed to attack the FARC and other leftist groups, are an example (Romero, 2003). Loyalist groups in Northern Ireland are another (Bruce, 1992). What seems to be more common, however, is when multiple terrorist groups claim to represent the same ethnic group, and attack each other. This has been evident between terrorist organizations purporting to fight for Catholics in Northern Ireland (Clarke, 1987), Palestinians (Schiller, 2001), Tamils (Bush, 2004), Kurds (Gunter, 1996), and other ethnopolitical groups.

Adversarial relationships have important consequences. These ties can encourage terrorist groups to innovate, to try to find ways to stand out. Bloom (2005) argues that this is why groups in competitive situations sometimes adopt the tactic of suicide terrorism. The notion that organizations innovate in the face of competition is consistent with research on firms (Porter, 1985). Other consequences of adversarial ties include the possibility that the groups get into a spiral of escalating tit-for-tat violence, shifting the nature of conflict from an anti-government struggle to sectarian war. This occurred at times in Iraq in the years after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Finally, adversaries

can spoil negotiations between the state and a terrorist group or groups (Kydd and Walter, 2002).

Overall, both cooperative and adversarial ties occur regularly, involve a broad variety of groups, and substantially affect the involved groups and other actors. During the past few decades, almost half of terrorist groups have had an ally, and around 15 percent have had an adversary. Interestingly, while some groups have an ally and an adversary, even more have only one type of tie or the other. Why do some groups have an ally or an adversary, while others do not? The literature does not offer much in the way of explicit answers.

Political goals and bargaining

To shed light on the question of terrorist group relationship formation, it is helpful to consider terrorist group political goals. Recent research shows that differences in goals can lead to substantial differences in outcomes related to terrorist groups (e.g., Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Piazza, 2007, 2009). For example, Miller (2007) shows that the success of counterterrorism strategies depends in part on the goals of the targeted terrorist group. Some approaches that work toward ethnopolitical groups do not appear to work for groups with other motivations. For the study of terrorist group relationships, political motivations are important because they indicate key dimensions of the group's relationship with the government—which can in turn suggest how the group will act toward other terrorist organizations.

Certain types of terrorist groups have relatively tangible goals: a territorial homeland for one's ethnic group, or more representation in government for the ethnic group. Other terrorist organizations have goals that are less tangible, less clearly articulated, and as a result probably less-attainable: bringing about a religious revolution, or communism, for example. The difference between these more-tangible and less-tangible goals should lead to important implications for terrorist group interactions.

Ethnically motivated terrorist organizations, also referred to as ethnonationalist or nationalist terrorist groups, generally have more tangible goals than other types of terrorist groups. Hoffman (2006: 243) argues that ethnopolitical terrorist groups tend to have a "clarity and tangibility of their envisioned future", such as a national homeland. Miller (2007: 344) suggests that they generally have the "least extreme" goals of types of terrorist groups, because they usually do not want to destroy an existing culture or system.

Because ethnically motivated terrorist groups have more tangible goals, and are perhaps less extreme in term of their policy demands, there is a

greater likelihood of some sort of state bargaining attempt.³ This is consistent with Cronin's argument that a precondition for talks is "negotiable terms" based on specific as opposed to vague goals (Cronin, 2009: 179-181). Ethnopolitical terrorist groups seem relatively likely to meet this condition. This can be seen in the case of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), which was approached by the British government for secret talks as early as 1972 (Taylor, 1997: 123-147). Similarly, Israel has repeatedly bargained with the PLO, and Sri Lanka offered substantial concessions to Tamils to try to stop the violence of the LTTE and other groups in the 1980s and 1990s. Governments often talk to terrorist groups (Cronin, 2009: 37), even if these talks are done indirectly or in secret. Ethnically motivated terrorist groups seem to be the most likely type of group to be taken seriously by a state hoping to trade concessions for less violence.

When states engage in bargaining with a terrorist group, this often leads to violence between terrorists. This generally occurs between "moderates" and "extremists", where the latter try to undermine peace efforts (Kydd and Walter, 2002).⁴ In some cases, there is an extant extremist group attacking the moderates. In Sri Lanka, the LTTE was the relatively extreme group because other Tamil terrorist groups were willing to lay down their arms for concessions (Ehrlich, 1991). In other cases, facing the prospect of government talks, the radicals splinter off of a primary group to form a more extreme group.⁵ This was the genesis of the Continuity IRA and Real IRA, formed by IRA dissidents. Many such splinter groups exist in the Palestinian territories. The People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, for example, split from the relatively moderate People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine. In all of the above cases, the more extremist groups not only attacked state targets, but also engaged in back-and-forth attacks with the moderate terrorist groups.

Ethnically motivated terrorist groups seem more likely than other types of terrorist organizations to be engaged in some degree of talks with the state – whether secret or open, preliminary or formal. As a result, this should

³ Regarding political goals of ethnic groups, some readers might think of a territorial homeland, and recall arguments that such territory is said to be indivisible – and therefore impossible or very difficult for actors to bargain over (e.g., Toft, 2003). However, Fearon (1995) argues that supposedly indivisible issues can be negotiated around via side payments and issue linkage. Even if a final negotiation does not conclude, my argument assumes that ethnic goals such as territory provide a starting point for negotiation. I am agnostic about whether or not the bargaining actually results in a mutually satisfactory deal, although Cronin finds that negotiations rarely stop violence (Cronin, 2009: 71)

⁴ Kydd and Walter do not explicitly discuss terrorist groups attacking each other. They discuss violence used by extremists to cause the public and government to lose faith in the ability of the terrorist groups to commit to stopping violence. However, in many cases, the extremists directly attack the moderates, and the moderates often respond in kind.

⁵ This is comparable to the mechanism described by Bueno de Mesquita (2005). He argues that the more violent environment created by concessions should last beyond the negotiations (the "spoiler opportunity"), because moderates have been bought off and the remaining terrorists are more violent. This could be, but is not necessarily, part of the reason that ethnic groups are more likely to attack each other.

translate into a greater probability of violence between ethno-political terrorist groups, as they battle over negotiation terms, or whether to negotiate at all. *Bargaining hypothesis 1: Terrorist groups with ethno-political goals are more likely to form adversarial ties with other groups.*

Group goals and the related potential for state bargaining can also help explain the flip side of adversarial relationships - intergroup cooperation. When groups have a very low likelihood of entering talks with a state, this changes the nature of their interactions with their peers. Terrorist groups in such a situation, not expecting to bargain with a government in the future, are more likely to have cooperative ties to other terrorist groups. This is because disagreements about which concessions to accept from the state are moot, and groups do not need to worry about the potential for such disagreements in the future. This helps terrorist organizations overcome the commitment problem that likely otherwise inhibits coordination. Furthermore, without the prospect of government talks to achieve their goals, groups face incentives to focus instead on maximum destruction - and this is probably more achievable with allies.

Religious terrorist groups, historically, have not been successful at achieving their stated goals. Jones and Libicki (2008) examine 648 terrorist groups from recent decades, and find that 27 of the organizations accomplished their aims ("victory") and gave up violence. Of these 27 groups, none were religious. This is in spite of the fact that religious groups make up more than 20 percent of the sample.

Religious groups are relatively unsuccessful because their goals tend to be broad, are often international (thus considerably more complicated for a single state to negotiate over) and are usually less tangible than those of other types of groups. Many secular terrorists want to change a policy or some part of the current system, while religious groups are more likely to see themselves as "'outsiders' seeking fundamental change in the existing order" (Hoffman, 2006: 89). For example, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which has operated largely in Kashmir, has stated its goal is to Islamicize Kashmir, then India, then restore the Caliphate (Abou Zahab and Roy, 2004: 35). It is unclear how India would begin to approach LeT about a non-violent solution.

In addition to broad goals, states are unlikely to offer concessions to religious terrorist groups because these groups are often seen as unlikely to settle for less than their full demands. As a result, concessions, amnesties, and similar counterterrorism strategies that have worked with other terrorist groups are unlikely to bear fruit with religious terrorist groups because of their "fundamentally alienated worldviews and their often extreme, resolutely uncompromising demands" (Hoffman, 2006: 127-128). Miller (2007: 341) makes a similar assessment, suggesting that religious groups are "the most problematic for states because many are unlikely to compromise, which means betraying their faith..." This is in part related to asymmetric time

horizons: politicians are often thinking relatively short term, while a religious terrorist might have a very different concept of time (Toft, 2006: 57-61). Overall, religious terrorist organizations have a low probability of engaging in talks with a state.

What are the observable implications of the low probability of state negotiations with religious terrorist groups? This seems likely to reduce the chance of interorganizational conflict involving these types of groups. The terrorist organizations do not have to fight over current negotiations, nor do they have to fear the commitment problem of their terrorist group allies eventually selling them out for a deal with the state. However, religious terrorist groups have adversaries, for different reasons. Groups representing different religions, for example, occasionally attack each other as their perceived “cosmic struggle” plays out on earth (Juergensmeyer, 1991, 2003). Therefore, the combined effect of religion on adversarial ties—reduced odds because of no state talks to fight over, but possibly increased odds as groups with incompatible worldviews face each other—suggests that overall religious terrorist groups should be no more or less likely than other groups to have adversaries.

Regarding cooperative ties, however, the logic of potential state bargaining suggests religious groups should be likely to cooperate with other terrorist groups. First, as discussed above, religiously motivated terrorist organizations are unlikely to negotiate with the state. Therefore, allies of religious terrorists do not have to fear the commitment problem of their allies eventually selling them out for a deal with the state. A government deal is unlikely in the foreseeable future, giving potential allies increased certainty about cooperation.

Second, the low likelihood of negotiations means religious terrorist groups perceive that they can only achieve “victory” through brute force. Related to this, religious terrorist groups do not seem to have the concern that other terrorist groups do regarding minimizing fatalities, in order to maintain a degree of political legitimacy (Hoffman, 2006: 88-89; Enders and Sandler, 2012: 55-56). Religious groups are more content with violence as an end (Juergensmeyer, 2001: 189-190), and allies can help with this goal. Because of the combination of reduced concern about negative consequences of alliances and the greater incentives to align to bring about violence, religious terrorist groups should generally be more cooperative with other terrorists. *Bargaining hypothesis 2: Terrorist groups with religious goals are more likely to form cooperative ties with other groups.*

Opportunity factors

Beyond the important consequences of group political goals related to state bargaining potential, we can think of other attributes that can help explain terrorist group relationships. One set of factors could be described as opportunity factors. This suggests that the presence of a tie is in part a function of how much opportunity a group has to form relationships with others, including its visibility. Opportunity factors should be helpful in explaining cooperative or adversarial ties; either could be the result of the group's ex ante opportunity to form them. Emphasizing the role of opportunity is consistent with models of other social science phenomena. Most and Starr (1989) refer to the logic of "opportunity and willingness" when theorizing about inter-state war. They note that some explanations of war use the opportunity framework, while others highlight willingness. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) present an opportunity explanation of civil war, arguing that conflict is most likely when rebels have the best chances of building an army and successfully taking on the state. They find substantial explanatory power with the model.

Visibility is a part of opportunity that should matter for terrorist group ties. Terrorism has been described as "violent communication" (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982) and "violence as propaganda" (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007), and therefore terrorist groups, through their actions, try to be highly visible. The more successful groups are in this endeavor, the more other groups are likely to be aware of their existence. Being known is a first step that is likely to substantially increase the chances of other groups forming ties with a group.

The opportunity/visibility account suggests a number of observable implications. The primary way terrorist groups become or stay visible is through their attacks. Hoffman (2006: 248-249) argues that a terrorist organization's ability to attract attention, and therefore recruits, is largely a function of its ability to carry out attacks. Bombings, shootings, and other types of terrorist attacks should also make a group more noticeable to its peers, increasing opportunities for direct interactions such as cooperative or adversarial ties. *Opportunity hypothesis 1: The greater the number of terrorist attacks a group has perpetrated, the more likely it is to form ties with other terrorist groups.*

Larger terrorist groups, all things being equal, should be more visible to other groups and therefore have greater opportunities to interact with them. Empirical evidence suggests that larger groups, in terms of membership size, tend to last longer than other terrorist groups (Blomberg, Gaibulloev and Sandler, 2011). They also are generally more lethal (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008). As a result of this relative visibility, they should have greater opportunities to form ties with other terrorist organizations. *Opportunity*

hypothesis 2: Larger terrorist groups are more likely to form ties with other terrorist groups.

Another way terrorist groups can have greater opportunities for interacting with other groups is through state sponsorship. When a group receives material support from a state, this aid can help the group to have a greater logistics network, produce more propaganda, or carry out more sophisticated attacks (Byman, 2008: 28). All of these consequences make a terrorist group more visible. Furthermore, regarding cooperative ties, some states actively direct collaboration between the groups that they sponsor. Pakistan is the most prominent recent example (e.g., Reidel, 2011). Through these mechanisms, state sponsorship should provide increased prospects for intergroup ties. *Opportunity hypothesis 3: Terrorist groups with a state sponsor are more likely to form ties with other groups.*

In addition to these terrorist group attributes, there is a structural factor that should indicate part of a group's opportunity to form relationships with other terrorist organizations: the number of other terrorist groups in a group's country. Some states have only one terrorist group operating in their territory, while others, such as Greece and India, have had more than 25 at times. This variation in a terrorist group's environment should be associated with its likelihood of forming ties. Some terrorist organizations simply have more peers in physical proximity with which they can interact. *Opportunity hypothesis 4: Terrorist groups with more other terrorist groups operating in the same country are more likely to form ties with other groups.*

Alternative explanation for allies: Capabilities aggregation

Beyond the model proposed here, there are other explanations for terrorist group relationships. Regarding cooperative relationships in particular, perhaps the most commonly suggested explanation could be described as capabilities aggregation. This is analogous to studies of military alliances between states, which often suggest that the primary function of these alliances is to pool resources against some other actor (Snyder, 1997: 4; Walt, 1997: 157). With the study of terrorist group cooperation, this behavior is seen as capability aggregation against governments.

The most in-depth analysis of terrorist group cooperative relationships is Karmon's (2005) book. Drawing on the balance of threat argument for interstate alliances (Walt, 1987), Karmon asserts that terrorist groups cooperate when threatened by state or states. He finds support for his argument with case studies of terrorist groups in Europe and the Middle East, primarily those that operated during the Cold War. Karmon argues that, at least in the cases he analyzed, groups formed alliances when facing an especially capable state. This provides an alternative story to the opportunity and bargaining explanation. *Alternative hypothesis: The greater capabilities of*

the state in which a terrorist group operates, the more likely it is to form ties with other terrorist groups.

Research design

To test the hypotheses, I use a data set of 622 terrorist groups active at any point between 1987-2005. The unit of analysis is group-year. These data are an extension, with some changes, of Asal and Rethemeyer's (2008) data on terrorist groups and their attributes. The data used in that study contain information on terrorist groups that existed at some point between 1998 and 2005.⁶ Their data are, to my knowledge, the first published social network data on terrorist groups globally.⁷

Asal and Rethemeyer's data begin in 1998, so I went back about 10 years, and gathered data on terrorist groups between 1987-1989. This essentially makes a late-1980s time wave to be compared with Asal and Rethemeyer's late-1990s and early 2000s wave.⁸ Examining some data in time periods is reasonable because finding yearly data for many attributes is unlikely, due to the clandestine nature of terrorism. I assume, for the purpose of these models, that some terrorist group attributes in the late 1980s remain constant through the early- and mid-1990s, until the next data wave begins. This is not ideal, but it offers an advantage over data on terrorist groups that assume group attributes do not ever change (e.g., Blomberg, Engel and Sawyer, 2010; Cronin, 2009; Jones and Libicki, 2008).

The terrorist group data come from two time waves, as discussed, but because groups begin and end in specific years, the data set is structured as group-year. State attributes vary each year. Some group attributes, such as group size, do not vary each year in the data because they are only recorded for the two time periods. However, there is yearly variation in the relationship data when groups form or end, and therefore enter or leave the data. For example, if two groups are in a cooperative relationship in the late 1980s, but police action eliminates one of the groups in 1992, the relationship is coded as ending that year. The surviving group would be coded as not in that relationship from 1993 onward.⁹

⁶ Their data are largely based on information in the RAND-Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) Terrorism Knowledge Base database. These data are now part of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) project hosted by the University of Maryland. The data are here: <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

⁷ Horowitz and Potter (2010) have a working paper on terrorist group networks, which like Asal and Rethemeyer looks at terrorist group lethality and uses time-invariant network data. Horowitz (2010) includes a measure of groups with a link to al-Qaeda, but more general network connections are not measured.

⁸ While I use the Asal and Rethemeyer data as a foundation, some of my variables differ from their original coding. I update their data, to ensure that the same coding scheme is used throughout the 1987-2005 sample.

⁹ Models with relationship data constant during each of the two periods (1987-1997, and 1998-2005) do not change results in a meaningful way.

To determine which groups existed as early as 1987, I first examined the Asal and Rethemeyer data set, which contains the group's "age" as of 1998. I then checked other group databases, primarily the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) Terrorist Organization Profiles (TOPs) and the GTD terrorist incident data set.¹⁰ These data sources are the result of years of work by experts, and are the most commonly used sources of terrorist group data (e.g., Cronin, 2009; Jones and Libicki, 2008). I also checked the Jones and Libicki data set (2008), although this largely relies on the TOPs.¹¹

Most terrorist group attribute variables are based on variables from Asal and Rethemeyer (2008).¹² For years before 1998, I code these variables using the terrorist group databases such as GTD TOPS, as well as newspaper archive searches, and other sources.¹³ The online Lexis-Nexis database was searched for all news articles about each group. These open sources contain a great deal of information about terrorist groups, as terrorist almost by definition publicize their acts - including, often, with whom they act. Some examples of relevant passages from newspaper articles are shown in Table 1. For many groups, every single article about them in Lexis-Nexis during the time period was analyzed. For more prominent groups, more targeted searches or books were used. Variables are coded according to Asal and Rethemeyer's coding scheme (Anderson, Asal and Rethemeyer, 2009), although the measures of relationships are changed somewhat to reflect the more specific concepts described in my argument.¹⁴

¹⁰ The GTD has relatively liberal criteria for terrorist attacks, so I exclude some groups if they appear to only attack military targets in a war environment. This is consistent with the group coding of Cronin (2009) and others.

¹¹ I thank Martin Libicki for sharing this data.

¹² The adversary measure is based on a "negative relationships" variable Asal and Rethemeyer code, but it was not used in their 2008 article. Two variables that did not come from their data are the count of attacks per terrorist group and the number of terrorist groups in each country.

¹³ The variables *ethnic motivation*, *religious motivation*, *group size*, and *state sponsored* for groups in Africa and Asia between 1987-1989 were coded by Ian Anderson of the Project on Violent Conflict at the University of Albany, State University of New York. I thank him for this contribution.

¹⁴ I use different names for some variables, with the intention of greater clarity. For example, my variable *religious* is the same as Asal and Rethemeyer's *contain_relig*, and my *state sponsored* is the same as their *statespon*.

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF CODING SOURCES

QUOTE	SOURCE	TIE TYPE
<i>Authorities said the IRA slaying of a leading Protestant paramilitary leader could lead to reprisals and an increase in violence during the unusually quiet Christmas period...McMichael was second in command of the militant Ulster Defence Association...</i>	Associated Press. By Malcolm Brodie. "IRA Car Bomb Kills Protestant Paramilitary Leader." Dec. 23, 1987.	Adversary
<i>The five-hour clash pitted guerrillas of George Habash's Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine against Syrian-backed fighters of Col. Saeed Mousa's Fatah-Uprising.</i>	Associated Press. "Three Killed, Nine wounded in Palestinian Clashes." Sept. 3, 1988.	Adversary
<i>Dozens of deaths have been reported in factional fights between the Chukaku-ha and the Kakumaru-ha, or Revolutionary Marxist Faction, which supports the Communist Party.</i>	Associated Press. By Eric Talmadge. "Radicalism a Generation Later: Smothered by Affluence." March 24, 1989.	Adversary
<i>Jan. 26, 1988, commandos of the guerrilla groups Alfaro Vive and Montoneros Patria Libre assaulted 10 radio stations in Quito and other cities and forced them to transmit a "proclamation about the political situation in the country."</i>	El País. "Montoneros Patria Libre dice que secuestró a Berrocal." Aug. 31, 1989. [Translated]	Ally
<i>Spokesmen for the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and Hizb-UI-Mujahedeen (HUM) earlier told journalists by telephone that they were jointly fighting the [Indian Border Security Forces] at Sopore...</i>	Agence France Presse. "22 die in fight between Moslem militants, security forces." August 15, 1991.	Ally
<i>[United Liberation Front of Assam] has set up military camps and gets weapons and training from across the Burmese border, aided by the Kachin Independent Army, one of the Burmese ethnic guerrilla groups fighting the Rangoon government.</i>	The Independent (London). By David Wigg. "Assam Under Delhi's Control." Nov. 29. 1990.	Ally

The study uses two dependent variables, *adversary* and *ally*. Each is a dichotomous variable coded "1" if a terrorist group has the respective relationship type in the given year. A terrorist group is coded for *adversary* when another terrorist group physically attacks it or its supporters, or vice

versa.¹⁵ A terrorist group is considered to be in a cooperative relationship with another terrorist group if a source indicates the groups have cooperated on planning for or carrying out terrorist attacks. This is consistent with Karmon's (2005) notion of the concept. He argues that logistical cooperation and operational cooperation are important, but expressions of solidarity are not as meaningful.¹⁶ 91 terrorist groups are coded for *adversary*, and 267 are coded for *ally* - around 15 and 43 percent of groups, respectively.

Adversary and *ally* are coded using sources as described above. News archive searches proved perhaps surprisingly fruitful for determining terrorist group ties. Examples of some sources are shown in Table 1. One additional source for *adversary* is attacks in the GTD attack list. The searchable database classifies types of targets, and two of the target types are "terrorists" and "violent political party". This was helpful in determining when terrorist groups have attacked each other.

Ethnic and *religious* are dichotomous measures indicating terrorist groups that have goals related to ethnicity or religion, respectively. The sources for this variable are the same as previous variables. 233, or around 37 percent, of terrorist groups are coded for *ethnic*. 162, or about 26 percent, are coded for *religious*.

Regarding opportunity factors, *group size* is an approximation of the number of members in a terrorist group. This is an ordinal variable coded 0 if the group has fewer than 100 members, 1 if the group has between 100 and 999 members, 2 if the group has between 1,000 and 9,999 members, and 3 for the few groups with 10,000 or more members. This is not as precise of a measure as we might prefer, but it is the best that is available given the scarcity of information on terrorist group size (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Jones and Libicki, 2008). The most common value is 0, fewer than 100 members. *Attacks* is a count measure of the number of attacks a terrorist group was responsible for in the period. The mean is 14, but there is substantial variation, with the Shining Path in the late 1980s having the most attacks, 1,250.

The dichotomous variable *state sponsored* indicates groups that have received material support from a state. To code *state sponsored*, I consulted research by Byman (2005) in addition to sources discussed above. *Groups in country* is a count variable measuring the number of terrorist groups in the country of the group being analyzed. *Groups in country* ranges from 1 to 33,

¹⁵ This variable differs from Asal and Rethemeyer's "negative relationship" variable in that their variable can include intergroup competition or disagreement that does not manifest itself physically. I use their variable as a starting point, but systematically look for evidence of physical violence between groups.

¹⁶ This marks the difference between my coding and that of Asal and Rethemeyer's "positive relationships" variable. They code groups as being in such a tie if they had one of a broad variety of positive interactions, including if one had expressed solidarity for each other. My concept of cooperation is more specific, so I start with their variable for 1998 onward, but un-code groups that only had been coded because of verbal support for another group, according to TOPs.

with India having the highest value during 2002. The mean is 10. As with relationship variables, this variable changes yearly for many countries as groups begin or end.

To test the capabilities aggregation alternative hypothesis, I use three variables. *Capabilities index* is the Correlates of War project's Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC), Version 4.0. It includes, for each state, annual values of total population, urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditure (Singer, Bremer and Stuckey, 1972). Each country's value is divided by the global share that year so that the variable measures relative capabilities. I also test a variable *Millex per capita*, which uses the military spending data from the CINC. Finally, I also discuss the results of *GDPPC*, although this variable is also used as a control variable in models other than the model of capabilities aggregation. *GDPPC* measures gross domestic product per capita in thousands of 1996 dollars. The source is Penn World Tables. *GDPPC* is a standard proxy for state capabilities. Fearon and Laitin (2003: 80) use it as a measure of "a state's overall financial, administrative, police, and military capabilities."

The models also include a number of control variables. *Left* is a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the group has leftist political goals, but is neither ethnically nor religiously motivated. This comes from the same sources as described above. *Population*, a natural logarithm, is included to capture otherwise unmeasured dynamics with states. For example, terrorist groups tend to last longer in more populous states (Blomberg, Engel and Sawyer, 2010). Additionally, it is possible that groups in country undercounts terrorist organizations due to their clandestine nature, but more populous countries are likely to have more terrorist groups, so *population* takes this into consideration.¹⁷ *Population* comes from the Penn World Tables. All models include *GDPPC*, discussed above, in addition to its use to represent the capabilities aggregation model.

Models also include *regime type*, measured by Freedom House's 1-7 score, reversed so that 7 is the most democratic. Freedom House is used instead of Polity because the latter has more missing data, but Polity results are similar. *Regime type* is included because it has been shown to have important consequences for terrorism (Li, 2005) and possibly for terrorist groups in particular (Blomberg, Gaibullov and Sandler, 2011). Finally, the models also include regional dummy variables, with the omitted category being the Middle East.

The hypotheses are tested with logistic regression, because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable. Because the unit of analysis dictates that each terrorist group is measured repeatedly (each year), the

¹⁷ *Groups in country* and *population* are correlated at .18.

standard errors are likely not independently and identically distributed (Woolridge, 2003; Zorn, 2006). To address this “group effects” problem, I cluster the standard errors by terrorist group. For a more rigorous test of the hypotheses, I cluster robustly (Zorn, 2006).

Results

Table 2 shows the results of the empirical tests. Model 1 shows the test of the first bargaining hypothesis, about adversarial ties. The coefficient for *ethnic* is positively signed and statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, suggesting that terrorist groups with ethnic motivations are more likely than other types of groups to have an adversary. Odds ratios (not shown) are used to calculate substantive significance. Having an ethnic motivation is estimated to increase the likelihood of a group having an adversary by 143 percent. This is a greater magnitude than most other variables in the model.

TABLE 2. LOGIT MODELS OF TERRORIST GROUP RELATIONSHIPS, 1987-2005

Independent variables	Model 1 Dependent variable: <i>adversary</i>	Model 2 Dependent variable: <i>ally</i>	Model 3 DV: <i>ally</i> Capabilities aggregation model	Model 4 DV: <i>ally</i> Capabilities aggregation model
<i>Capabilities index</i>			-.258 (.068)***	
<i>Milex per capita</i>				.217 (.332)
<i>Ethnic</i>	.889 (.426)**	.406 (.273)	.396 (.280)	.476 (.292)
<i>Religious</i>	-.517 (.333)	.614 (.287)**	.710 (.297)**	.659 (.303)**
<i>Left</i>	-.315 (.541)	.352 (.335)	.175 (.345)	.425 (.341)
<i>Group size</i>	.534 (.193)***	.184 (.141)	.253 (.142)*	.164 (.143)
<i>Attacks</i>	.004 (.002)**	.007 (.004)*	.007 (.004)*	.008 (.004)*
<i>State sponsored</i>	1.138 (.324)***	.481 (.280)*	.500 (.289)*	.394 (.288)
<i>Groups in country</i>	.043 (.021)**	.034 (.016)*	.058 (.017)***	.038 (.017)**
<i>Population</i>	-.232 (.108)**	-.034 (.089)	.302 (.122)**	-.034 (.090)
<i>GDPPC</i>	.013 (.028)	-.009 (.016)	.050 (.021)**	-.017 (.020)
<i>Regime type</i>	.069 (.095)	.034 (.078)	-.049 (.083)	.008 (.082)
<i>Asia</i>	2.296 (1.103)**	.149 (.939)	-2.048 (1.087)*	.165 (.966)
<i>Subsaharan Africa</i>	.610 (1.016)	-.843 (.898)	-2.875 (1.041)***	-.730 (.905)
<i>Europe</i>	1.258 (1.032)	.158 (.798)	-2.575 (1.033)*	.253 (.813)
<i>Americas</i>	1.786 (1.070)	.372 (.836)	-.258 (.068)***	.469 (.847)
constant	-1.173 (1.207)	-.484 (.869)	-4.157 (1.258)***	-.471 (.879)
N (number of groups)	4033 (622)	4033 (622)	4022 (620)	3869 (588)

Regarding other variables, neither *religious* nor *left* is statistically significant. All of the variables representing the opportunity/visibility factors (*group size*, *attacks*, *state sponsored*, and *groups in country*) are statistically significant and positive, suggesting that these attributes make terrorist groups more likely to have an adversary. In terms of substantive significance, the

effect of having a state sponsor is estimated to increase the chance of having an adversary by 212 percent, while a change in membership size category increases the chance 71 percent. The change associated with each additional terrorist attack is about half of a percentage point increase, and each additional other terrorist group in the country represents a 4 percent increase in likelihood of an adversary.

Regarding control variables in Model 1, *population* is statistically significant and negative. Terrorist groups in more populous countries are less likely to form adversarial ties. It is unclear what explains this, but it could be that in large countries, states are unwilling to offer concessions to groups because of the fear of encouraging other groups. Therefore the groups focus their attacks on the state, not each other. *GDPPC* and *regime type* are statistically insignificant. This is surprising, given the importance of these factors in many studies of terrorism, but this seems to indicate that group-level characteristics are more important in explaining adversarial ties. Of regional controls, only Asia is statistically significant, and it is positive. Terrorist groups in Asia, then, are more likely than terrorist groups in the Middle East to have adversarial relationships.

Model 2 shows the test of the second bargaining hypothesis, with the dependent variable *ally*. The coefficient associated with *religious* is statistically significant at $p < .05$ and positive, suggesting religious terrorist groups are more likely than other terrorist organizations to have a cooperative tie to another terrorist group. This provides support for the hypothesis. Odds ratios indicate that if a group has a religious motivation, it has an 85 percent higher likelihood than non-religious groups of having an ally. *Ethnic* is statistically insignificant in this model, suggesting no relationship between ethnic motivation and cooperative ties. Taken together, the results for Models 1 and 2 suggest that terrorist group political have important effects on intergroup relationships, but that they affect cooperative and adversarial ties in different ways.

Interestingly, results for other independent variables in Model 2 are similar to those of Model 1, in spite of the different dependent variables. One difference is that *group size* is not significant at conventional levels, suggesting that terrorist group size is not associated with propensity to form cooperative ties. There is less statistical significance for the other variables representing the opportunity/visibility factors, but they are all significant at least at $p < .10$. Of opportunity variables, *state sponsorship* has the greatest impact on the chance of a group having an ally, an estimated 62 percent increase. Overall, opportunity seems to be important for cooperative relationships, but not as important as it is for adversarial relationships. As far as control variables, none are statistically significant in Model 2.

Models 3 and 4 provide tests of the alternative hypothesis, the capabilities aggregation model of cooperative relationships. In Model 3, *capabilities index*

is statistically significant and negatively signed. This is the opposite of the anticipated direction. The more capable the state, the less likely terrorist groups there are to participate in a cooperative tie. Perhaps more capable states are better equipped to prevent or end terrorist group cooperation. If *capabilities index* is lagged, however, results are basically the same. Interestingly, *GDPPC* is statistically significant and positive in this model, consistent with the capabilities aggregation argument. However, this result is not robust because it only occurs if *capabilities index* is also in the model.¹⁸ Regardless, because of the result for *GDPPC* in Model 3, there is some support for the capabilities aggregation hypothesis.

Model 4 uses the measure of military spending per capita, an alternate measure of state capabilities. It is statistically insignificant, as is *GDPPC*. Colinearity does not seem to be to blame, because the insignificance occurs if either variable is in the model on its own. Viewing Models 3 and 4 together, there does not appear to be much empirical support for the capabilities aggregation hypothesis. It does not seem to be that facing an especially strong state is what makes terrorist groups link up.

It is noteworthy that the positive and statistically significant coefficient on *religious* is robust across Models 3 and 4. Some of the measures of opportunity factors retain their statistical significance as well. *Attacks* and *groups in country* keep their significance in all four models, but *group size* and *state sponsorship* are not consistently associated with terrorist groups participating in cooperative ties. None of the control variables are statistically significant in all models.

Discussion

The results in Table 2 provide substantial support for the bargaining model of terrorist group relationships, the notion that political goals of groups affect their propensity to form certain types of ties. Ethnically motivated groups are more likely to have terrorist group adversaries, while religious terrorist organizations are more likely to cooperate with other terrorist groups. I argue that this is because of each type of group's possibilities for negotiating with the state, as some case studies suggest.

The results also show some support for the importance of opportunity in explaining terrorist group interorganizational ties. Certain factors consistently are associated with relationships, whether cooperative or adversarial. These factors are the number of attacks a terrorist group has carried out, state sponsorship, and the number of other terrorist groups operating in the same country. Group size is associated with adversarial ties, but not cooperative

¹⁸ It could be that colinearity between *capabilities index* and *GDPPC* is affecting the result of the latter. The variables are correlated at .40. *Capabilities index* does not seem to be affected, however, because if *GDPPC* is removed from the model, the *capabilities index* result is basically unchanged.

ties. This is interesting because one might expect larger groups to be better able to attract allies.

The bargaining and opportunity explanations seem to offer much more explanatory power than a model of cooperation grounded firmly in international relations theory –capabilities aggregation (Karmon, 2005). Terrorist groups, like other actors, surely team up to increase their capabilities against enemies, and in most cases this enemy is the state. However, common measures of state power are not robustly associated with terrorist group cooperation. Other factors are more important. This lack of finding could be in part due to imprecise measurement of state capabilities. The measures used are common in the literature, but better indicators of state counterterrorism abilities or practices could be constructed. In recent years, scholars have disentangled the way that distinct dimensions of regime type affect terrorism differently (e.g., Li, 2005; Chenoweth, 2010), and a line of research could similarly examine state capabilities. Regardless, as far as the models of this paper go, using standard measures, the capabilities aggregation model did not find nearly as much support as the arguments I proposed - bargaining and opportunity.

Conclusions

What explains terrorist group interorganizational ties? More specifically, why do some terrorist organizations cooperate with each other, while others attack each other? Few scholars have attempted to address these questions, in spite of the important consequences of terrorist group relationships (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Horowitz, 2010). This paper presented an argument to explain both cooperative and adversarial ties, emphasizing the importance of the political goals of terrorist groups. These goals indicate each group's likelihood of negotiations with the state in which they operate, and group-state dynamics in turn inform us about the potential for group-group ties. Ethnic terrorist groups, with the best possibility of talks with the state, are likely to fight other terrorist groups over bargain terms. Religious groups, however, are unlikely to engage the state in talks. As a result, they face incentives to cooperate with other terrorist groups. The paper also discussed opportunity factors, which should be important for a group's likelihood of forming either type of relationship. Empirical tests supported the argument, and failed to find much support for an alternative hypothesis, the capabilities aggregation model.

The results are important for a number of reasons. They help us understand a common terrorist group behavior, direct engagement with other terrorist groups. These relationships make terrorist groups more lethal (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Horowitz and Potter, 2011), encourage and enable them to dangerously innovate (Asal, Ackerman and Rethemeyer, 2012; Bloom, 2005; Horowitz, 2010), and can harm the peace process between states and relatively moderate militant groups (Kydd and Walter, 2002). This emphasis on intergroup relations is helpful to the literature because it is among the few studies of terrorism that do not assume terrorist groups are independent actors. The focus on connections is consistent with the social networks approach, which is increasingly showing promise in research on violence.

The results also raised questions about capabilities aggregation, which has been argued to be important in terrorist group alliance formation, both in academic work and in the popular press. These accounts suggest terrorist groups form alliances out of weakness. This study found little evidence in favor of that. On the contrary, terrorist groups that attack more are more likely to cooperate with their peers. Scholar should perhaps use caution when applying Realist models to transnational actors, because factors such as state power and group power (membership size) do not seem to be as important as other factors. Evaluating the capabilities aggregation hypothesis of terrorist group cooperation was not the primary purpose of this paper, but it should be evaluated more in future research.

Beyond theoretical contributions, the results contribute to counterterrorism policy. First, it suggests potential pitfalls of negotiations with terrorist groups. The results add to literature demonstrating negative side effects of state-group talks (Bueno de Mesquita, 2005; Kydd and Walter, 2002). Many states talk to terrorist groups, but they should be keenly aware of the intergroup violence associated with negotiations. Additionally, policymakers are especially interested in terrorist group cooperation (Bennett, 2011), and this paper provides some information about when we might expect to see such ties form.

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