

SELECTED PROBLEMS RELATED TO MANAGING TERRORIST ORGANISATION

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Abstract

The unique aims of the terrorist organisations fail to work as a protection against problems that are typical for other types of activity and those connected with managing the ongoing activity. As in financial organisations, leaders of the terrorist groups face the challenges of recruiting properly qualified members and motivating them, they seek efficient ways to control the actions of their subordinates or try to reduce internal bureaucracy. The article aims at pointing out some of the most typical of the aforesaid problems relating to organisation management.

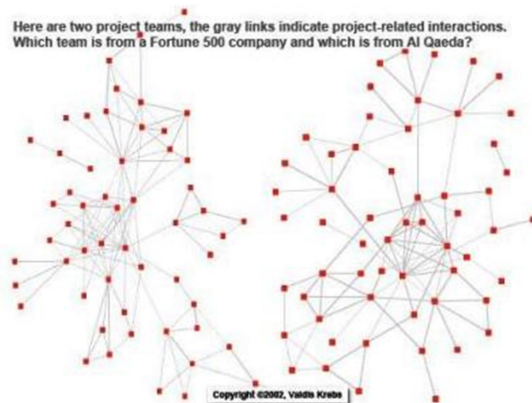
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Controlling members of organisations in terms of the quality of the tasks they complete, recruiting candidates who can demonstrate adequate professional competences and moral standards, efficient motivation of the subordinates to fully engage in the missions, keeping planned actions in secret, hiding them from the competition and finally capability to ensure the organisation growth in the future – these are some of the problems faced not only by the leaders of large economic organisations or public institutions but also the heads of terrorist groups.

Much has already been said about the similarity between the terrorist organisations and other types of organisations (public, economic, social, etc.¹). The presented infographic proves how little, in spite of appearances, from the institutional point of view, differs Al-Qaeda from the world's largest corporations announced every year by Forbes magazine; the figure illustrates the communication between the members of the task team preparing the attack and the team working on a project dedicated to new product implementation.

¹ Compare for example: Shapiro 2007a: 56-74.

Figure 1. The ways of intra-group communication of two teams: Al-Kaida and a company listed on the Forbes top “500”



Source: Axe, 2006, Vote: Fortune 500, or Al-Qaeda?, available at: <http://defensetech.org/2006/05/12/vote-fortune-500-or-al-qaeda/> (accessed 10 April 2014).

Of course, terrorist organisations have their own specificities which include emphasising security aspects and classifying the activity or attributing importance to political views, religious beliefs and moral standards of the group members, nevertheless, it does not change the fact that they are subject to some general processes that apply to all organisations.

The article aims at indicating selected problems relating to organisation management encountered by terrorist groups and attempts to evaluate how the leaders of the terrorist organisations “cope” with them.

1. Problem one: trust and control

As Jacob N. Shapiro, a researcher exploring the functioning of terrorist organisations, points out, the secret nature of their activity prevents them from using “check and balance” method when raising funds and spending the resources – just as any other financial organisations would do – at least not to such a degree as an open organisation might be able to do. The “cell” structure combined with relatively high level of freedom of action enjoyed by the units [i.e. squads] is the reason why the leaders of terrorist organisations have usually very little information on the activities carried out by mid-level commanders and their subordinates, and they simply have to rely on them when entrusting funds for the terrorist activity (Shapiro, 2007a: 57-58). Of course, such trust may be sufficient only when all members of the organisation are equally, completely and immensely engaged in achieving the goals. Yet, such status is purely theoretical because the gap between leaders’ personal goal and the operational level of the organisation can be

huge. As Shapiro reminds us, often the mid-level management likes to live in luxury and spend the resources received for purpose of the activity for their own pleasures². In organisations with a longer record, some members engaged in task execution start to demonstrate natural and understandable willingness to avoid dying during the mission. They often want to move to organisational and logistic positions perceiving them as a chance for staying alive and gaining additional financial profits³. Similarly „popular” are the tasks connected with fund raising as they offer a prospect for additional benefits. As a result, terrorist organisations lack unified strategy and line of operation that would be designed by the heads of the organisations as we are used to believe when analysing the effects of their actions – their way of acting is usually a product of the intentions of the main leaders and organisation’s executive level.

Two of the aforesaid tendencies demonstrated by the members of terrorist organisations (a wish to stay alive and enjoy financial benefits from the terrorist activity (Sageman, 2004)) pose an enormous challenge for the leaders of the groups when it comes to managing human resources. On the one hand, they cannot avoid transferring the funds to the units and the cells deployed in the field because it could not only cause concealment of activities but also disintegrate the existing groups, on the other hand – they cannot and do not wish to agree to the mid-level management defrauding any part of the funds. As Shapiro says, the situation is additionally complicated by the fact that as far as a few years ago in Al-Qaeda we could observe practically fixed division into people executing field work and those behind organisational activities (fund raising or logistics), yet, following the loss of Afghan bases, those roles have been mixed and the whole decision-making system became less hierarchal (Shapiro, 2007a: 59). It also seems that different types of conduct available to the leaders in such situation (including mid-level management in the process of controlling the expenditures, payment for the task upon receiving performance confirmation or severe punishments for those caught in embezzling the organisation’s resources) are extremely costly for the organisation (not only financially but also – or first and foremost – in terms of ensuring the secrecy and security of the operation.) The need to establish additional contacts in order to better control the organisation’s cells may lead to exposure, which would mean that the attempt to solve the problem relating to organisation management may

² An example of such conduct is the leader of HUM, Pakistani groups dislocated in Kashmir who was famous for his love for luxury cars, similarly to other members of the organisation who were engaged in raising funds for Hezbollah in the USA.

³ Benefits offered by the positions “in the second row” of the organisation are noticeable even in the situation a terrorist responsible for logistics or fund raising is captured. According to the statistics quoted by J. Shapiro, in every 33 such terrorists captured in 2001-2003, only 1 was killed (Shapiro, 2007a: 61).

result in the destruction of the organisation.

Another difficulty faced by terrorist groups involves applying the strategy of commissions that are so eagerly implemented by open financial organisations in the event of particularly successful transaction (here: large amounts of money raised for terrorist activity); as a result of the secrecy of the groups' operation and the process of minimising the number of interactions with the head office, which are necessary to maintain the conspiracy, leaders rarely receive information about the amounts provided by the donors from sources other than the raising agent-member of the organisation. The aforesaid limited capabilities to control the activities of the agents reduce leader's ability to determine the real amount provided for the organisation's "statutory" activity. Should he decide to pay commissions, he would still fail to be sure whether the amount received is full: hence, the motivational character of such form of award would be disputable. Another case related to the above-discussed issue involves leader's competences to evaluate costs of individual operations undertaken by the field cells. Faced with incomplete information and no real knowledge about actual costs (at least concerning the number of people engaged in an operation), when transferring the payment, the leader has to base on the calculations presented by the heads of the units. It will be no surprise that it is yet another potential malpractice zone for the latter ones. Virtual bookkeeping, artificial cost inflating, false positions in the budget – even if they seem a little bit abstract – are common problems encountered by the leaders of those groups.

So we return to the very issue I started this chapter with – that is confidence in the subordinates as well as their personal integrity and engagement in the tasks they pursue. Limited controlling tools will force the leaders of terrorist organisations to focus on recruiting members whose goals, motivation and ways of acting are as close to the intentions of the heads of organisations as possible. In particular, it will include the attitude towards the "amount" of violence used as a tool to achieve the presumed goals and the objects selected to be attacked in order to avoid discouraging some of the followers supporting terrorist organisation due to an excessively grand act of violence⁴.

2. Problem number two: motivation for dying, promotion paths

Common belief concerning members of a terrorist organisation includes an assumption that it is a person driven by strong ideological motives, cer-

⁴ This problem has been raised by Sean Twomey in his IRA analyses. See: S. Twomey, *Staff Report. Technical report, Irish Republican Army*, September 1977.

tain about political/social/religious goals of the organisation and ready to commit sacrifices including the final one (death for a cause). However, research conducted by Shapiro or Sageman shows that an equally strong reason behind people's decision to join terrorist organisations is the improvement of their financial situation. In many countries that terrorists are recruited from, financial situation of an average low-level member of the organisation is better than the average situation of the country's citizen (Shapiro, 2008:3). Because perfect, extreme types are quite rare, it is safe to assume that there are not many people who join the terrorist groups just for the cause or just for the money while a significant number of them is driven by both motivations, in different proportions. Joining terrorist organisations at a low level is treated in the same way as as the worst job in a corporation, that is, a path to further professional career. Here, the understanding is clear: by no means it involves dying for one's beliefs rewarded by Allah with a band of virgins but it is rather the opportunity to move in the future to logistic positions connected with fund raising, which are recognised as better because they stand higher in the hierarchy and are connected with additional financial benefits. In spite of appearances, the awareness that mid-level terrorists, heads of the units may officially earn ten times more for their work than those who were personally participating in the operation (or their families, as a compensation, should the terrorist be killed) is not a secret even in such highly conspired organisations.

It seems that a rational strategy would be recruiting more and more new members who demonstrate strong beliefs and motivation for terrorist activity to carry out tasks on the operational level and move the experienced ones to the positions in the "second row" (safer and financially more profitable, from the point of view of those people). However, both the recruitment of new members and the growth of organisational bureaucracy (since the positions in logistics are rarely relieved and keep being attractive for those who hold them at the moment, then in order to satisfy new members' ambitions one should create new "positions") is extremely expensive in both aforesaid dimensions (financial and security).

3. Problem number three: overgrown bureaucracy

Similarly to other organisations that focus on tasks other than killing the enemy, terrorist organisations undergo similar problems resulting from the unavoidable process of the organisation's institutionalisation (Adamczuk, 2012: 105), which may include not only the weakening of the charismatic leader's role against other members of the group (particularly questionable and dangerous for the organisation such as terrorist group from the per-

spective of the objective implementation) but also the strengthening of the branches, sub-groups that operate under the organisation or the creation of internal bureaucracy with all its pathologies observed in social organisations, public or business institutions.

As Shapiro points out “such different terrorist groups as Red Brigades, Basque ETA, Fatah or Al-Qaeda use planners, document templates, report forms that – if not for the violent character of the conducted activity – could be efficiently used by any traditional organisation” (Shapiro, 2008: 4). A dilemma concerning how to combine conspiracy with the need to analyse the operations, their efficiency and quality has already been raised in this article. Regardless of how important it is for the leaders of the individual terrorist organisations, each produces specific documents and forms, develops procedures to settle funds received for terrorist activity; it also happens that members of those organisations must apply for the office expenses to be covered. Interviews conducted with the leaders of different organisations (Shapiro, 2008: 6) show that they require their subordinates to provide proofs of their expenses (e.g. plane tickets, hotel receipts, equipment purchase receipts!) indicating blatantly that they do so because they are afraid of corruption. The interviewed leaders of the Indonesian organisation Jemaah Islamiyah went as far as bragging about such acts of control while at the same time they ensured that there was no corruption detected which was supposed to prove the high moral standards among the members of their organisation (ICG, 2003). Similar behaviour was demonstrated by the successor of Osama bin Laden, the head of Al-Qaeda – Ayman al-Zawahiri who was said to accuse his subordinates of replacing office equipment too frequently, especially the printers or the fax machines, while they still worked quite fine. He even happened to conduct an interrogation in such matter. Data collected by the American intelligence agencies about the current leader of Al-Qaeda agree on one thing: he may be a good terrorist but he surely is an awful boss (Shapiro, 2013b).

Contrary to common opinions stating that terrorists’ main activity is to exercise future attacks in hiding, the analyses of their activity provide us with a completely different picture of their daily routines: research conducted on the members of the Red Brigades relating to their activities in 1970s and 1980s clearly indicates that the leaders of the organisation spent more time on bookkeeping and controlling individual terrorists than training or planning future operations (Della Porta, 1995). On the other hand, members of the Irish Republican Army were obligated to prepare daily reports on their activities and provided written proposals for their future operations (Twomey, 1977). So it is no surprise that the intelligence agencies of the countries fighting with terrorism are able to, from time to time, seize full

documentation relating to the operations performed by those organisations, including payrolls, lists of purchases, delegations and business trips undertaken as well as costs of office equipment service (Qin et al. 2005). Such growth of bureaucracy in terrorist organisations is not surprising if one takes into account the fact that it is one of the very few forms of control that the leaders have over the members and branches as well as sub-groups of the organisation. After all, the head of Al-Qaeda cannot report his subordinate - who moved significant financial resources out of the organisation without the management's knowledge and consent – to the law enforcement authorities as it happens in traditional organisation and then wait for the results of investigation. It is also rather impossible to engage an external audit to be performed by independent experts in order to evaluate how the finances are managed. Terrorist organisations' leaders are fully responsible for fund raising for the activity, planning how the funds are going to be spent and controlling whether they were used properly. In order to do so, they are not able to use most of the planning and control tools available to the leaders of other organisations, groups or institutions. They must listen to their intuition, network of internal informers and follow procedures conducted personally by the subordinates. So it is no surprise that in order to do it they seek the support of internal bureaucracy.

4. Crisis of terrorist organisations?

Due to the limits of the article, the aforesaid merely outlined problems that terrorist organisations confront with indicate that they are familiar with the challenges faced by the organisations with different goals achieved through methods other than killing those who do not agree with the organisation's objectives. Nevertheless, does the identification of problems allow to hypothesise that terrorist groups will face an organisational crisis at all? Can the excessive growth of internal bureaucracy or insufficient control of the members of the organisation lead the group to a situation when it stops completing the objectives? Undoubtedly, it is a question that requires more extensive research to be conducted by an expert specialising in the fields of counter-terrorism and theory of organisation.

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