Targeted Killings and Compellence:
Lessons from the Campaign against Hamas in the Second Intifada

by Charles Kirchofer

Abstract

There is little consensus among scholars on whether targeted killings of members of terrorist and militant groups work, though some have argued that they do, at least under certain circumstances. Most of the work so far has focused on the ability of targeted killings to disrupt targeted groups' ability to function. In many cases, work has centered on whether they work and not addressed how they work if they do. There has been insufficient study of the coercive effects of targeted killings and these studies have often produced mixed results, with violence sometimes increasing and sometimes decreasing after targeted strikes. This article argues that the focus on disruption and a failure to differentiate between deterrence and compellence and properly to account for the timing of attacks may be at least partly to blame for the mixed record observed from the use of targeted killings. It asserts that targeted killings are inherently compellent and can therefore only be used to change a status quo and potentially establish new "rules of the game." They cannot be used to deter (i.e. to maintain current rules). Taking this into account could shed new light on discussions of the appropriateness of targeted killings in given situations and their effectiveness overall.

Keywords: *counter-terrorism; Hamas; Israel; deterrence; compellence; Intifada*

Introduction

Targeted killings are one of the most controversial tactics in states' counterterrorism toolkits. This controversy even extends to the definition of "targeted killing." This article adapts Carvin's definition of targeted killing and defines them as "the planned direct killing of an individual because of their perceived membership (and often perceived leadership)" of a militant organization.[1] There have also been plenty of arguments on the legality and morality of targeted killings as well as, on a more fundamental level, their effectiveness. Most studies posit (or assume) that targeted killings work by disrupting a given terrorist group and reducing its operational effectiveness. The use of targeted killing for deterrence or compellence has often either not been evaluated or has been rejected in the belief that they lead to worsening violence. Israel provides a wealth of data and scholarship on targeted killing and this article therefore focuses its attention there. It will argue first that disruption alone cannot account for the effect of targeted killings of militant political leaders and that the missing element is compellence. Second, the apparent mixed bag when it comes to assessing the effectiveness of targeted killings may be the result of a failure to differentiate between deterrence and compellence. Finally, it will illustrate that these two factors mean that, while the observation that targeted killings do not deter over the short-term is basically correct, their usefulness in establishing medium-term deterrence via compellence has largely been overlooked.

Rationality

This article argues that disruption is generally not enough to explain the successes claimed for targeted killings; compellence plays a decisive role. As a coercive tactic, compellence accepts that opponents have choices and assumes they are rational. Some might argue that suicide terrorists, by their willingness to blow themselves up, show that they are irrational. This may be true according to the conceptions of rationality held by most people, but as Bryan Caplan has argued, there is more than one type of rationality, while terror

networks are made up of more than just bombers.[2] Robert Pape illustrates one such type of rationality, arguing convincingly that suicide terrorism follows a strategic logic and is therefore rationally justified. [3] For Thomas Schelling, rationality implies only that a person's behaviour is "motivated by a conscious calculation of advantages, a calculation that in turn is based on an explicit and internally consistent value system."[4] The idea of acting according to a "value system" adds flexibility to the conception of rationality: A person or group may value political goals over survival and may consider fighting more important than winning, for example. Such rationality implies that even a highly motivated group or individual would still hesitate to undertake actions that would threaten their political cause. Extended targeted killing campaigns can threaten to weaken a group considerably by creating a leadership vacuum, which would in turn endanger the very cause the group is fighting for. This is the standard of rationality used here and is the rational choice mechanism by which this article proposes that targeted killings effect compellence.

The Literature

Scholars disagree over whether targeted killings work, with several asserting they have no effect or even cause increased violence. Mohammed Hafez and Joseph Hatfield conducted a multivariate analysis of targeted killings during the Al-Aqsa (or "second") Intifada in Israel and Palestine. They conclude that targeted killings have no effect, positive or negative, on violence.[5] Kaplan et al come to much the same conclusion. They use a "terror stock model" for their analysis, which "models suicide bombing attempts as a function of the number of terrorists available for the planning and execution of such attacks."[6] Steven David asserts that "No compelling evidence exists that targeted killing has reduced the terrorist threat against Israel. By May 2002, after eighteen months of targeted killings carried out at an unprecedented scale, the number of Israeli victims of Palestinian terror had reached an all-time high of nearly 500. […] A much stronger case can be made that targeted killing actually increases the number of Israelis killed, by provoking retaliation."[7]

Other authors argue targeted killings may work. Asaf and Noam Zussman use the "forward-looking, information-aggregating nature of asset markets to claim that the stock market should react positively to news about effective counterterrorism measures but negatively to news about counterproductive ones." They show that the stock market views targeted killings of political leaders as counterproductive while viewing those of militant wing leaders positively (falling after the former and rising after the latter). They proffer disruption as the mechanism: "[T]he assassination of a military leader, relative to a political one, has more potential to disrupt terrorist operations severely." In addition, they argue that "attempts to assassinate a senior political leader would tend to increase greatly the motivation for retaliation."[8] While their reasoning on the mechanism for disruption is sound, their assumption that the stock market is a reliable proxy is questionable and their analysis, like most, does not consider how compellence could be used to Israel's advantage.

Other authors focus more on the targeted killing of political leaders. Daniel Byman argues that targeted killings can be effective at disrupting groups that engage in terrorism. He also emphasizes, though, that groups can adapt to the threat of targeted killing by adopting a decentralized structure: "Today's PIJ [Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a group close to Hamas] and its counterparts are so loose in their organization that true decapitation is no longer possible." Nevertheless, he notes that Hamas became less effective over the course of the Second Intifada.[9] Statistics support this (see Figure 1 below). Hamas' remaining leadership also made sudden decisions to change course following the targeting of their political leaders. This suggests coercion, not just disruption. "Before his death, [Hamas leader Abdel Aziz] Rantisi conceded that the killings had made things harder for his organization. And Hamas never retaliated for his death. In 2005, the group even declared that it would unilaterally accept a 'period of calm' because of the losses it was suffering among its senior cadre."[10] Steven David also supports Byman's observation. He states that "there is strong evidence that the policy of targeted killing hurts Palestinian organizations to the extent to which they are willing to

alter their behavior," for example in encouraging them to accept ceasefires in exchange for a halt to killings.
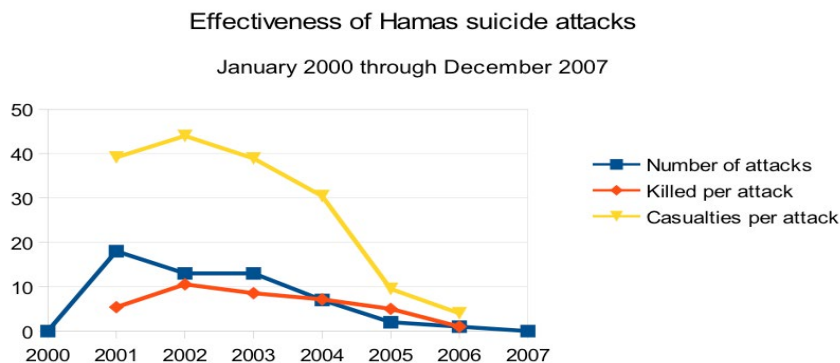[11]

Effectiveness of Hamas suicide attacks

January 2000 through December 2007

Figure 1[12]

This effect from targeting the senior leadership of Hamas is also confirmed by Ophir Falk: "It is evident that the targeting of high value ideological leaders, primarily in Gaza, was usually effective in decreasing subsequent suicide bombing fatalities."[13] Falk's study is limited to determining that a decline occurred; he does not attempt to explain why. Avi Kober argues that "the decapitation of Hamas' political and spiritual leaders seemed to have accounted for the organization's decision to suspend hostilities against Israel, which essentially meant the end of the second intifada."[14] He suggests that this occurred due to a leadership vacuum and that killing political leaders was more effective in disrupting Hamas than killing military leaders. Matt Frankel's study of 20 historical cases of "high value targeting" (HVT) also claims some campaigns have been successful—but highlights failures as well, though his study includes capturing militants as well as killing them.

Discussion

The above studies have limitations. For starters, and as Stephanie Carvin has argued, the multiple studies of targeted killings have used definitions and cases too varied to produce a reliable judgment on whether targeted killings work (or do not) in general, rather than just in the specific circumstances the authors cover. [15] This author agrees with that assessment, while adding that, even within cases, a failure to distinguish between political and militant leaders as well as the lack of consideration of coercion, the difference between deterrence and compellence, and the timing within the cycle of escalation, all make attempts to understand targeted killings difficult and determination of their effectiveness all but impossible. A different approach is needed.

There are also issues unique to each study. In their own words, Hafez and Hatfield's investigation of the use of targeted killings for deterrence "assumes that repression against violent strategies is applied consistently," but Hamas' political leadership was targeted only rarely and much later than its military leadership. If the targeted killing of political leaders has a greater impact than that of military leaders, this is a significant oversight. The authors also do not consider compellence and its potential uses when examining the hypothesis that targeted killings lead to a backlash. To compel a group to end violence, a strike must be alarming enough to overcome the provocative nature of the strike itself and a period of calm must be on offer if the group complies. If a strike comes during a period of relative quiet, this violates the implicit offer of calm that comes with deterrence and can thus be expected to cause escalation. On the other hand, if a strike during a period of violence is not provocative enough, it may fail to lead to compellence even as it fails to spark further escalation, potentially because the militant group is already operating at its maximum. Failure

to take these factors into account makes the observed outcome dubious. The authors' also fail to find effects for disruption from targeted killings. The time horizon needed for disruption to begin to take hold is not clear and depends on the relative rates of killings and recruitment and training. It is dubious to judge targeted killing campaigns with horizons of weeks or months, as several months or even years may instead be needed.

The study by Kaplan et al assumes targeted killings achieve their effects via disruption and also focuses mostly on the targeted killing of militant members rather than political leaders, even as other authors have suggested that targeting political leaders has been the most effective. The terror stock model also does not account for functional differences between various members of a militant network. Not all members of the organization are equally capable. Beyond that, it is clearly not the case that a larger "stock" necessarily equals more attempts. Hamas carries out far fewer attacks now than it did during the Second Intifada, but the reason for this is not because it has fewer militant members. Hamas makes strategic and tactical decisions. It is not simply a machine for converting recruits into attackers. Quantitative, statistical analyses will always struggle to take such factors into account.

Frankel asserts that "the end goal with an insurgency is generally to bring the movement into the political process, while the end goal with a terrorist organization is its elimination."[16] Putting aside the difficulty of deciding what sort of group one is dealing with and how realistic a political process may be, this statement highlights another crucial difference: Targeted killing to restore even a temporary calm is a very different animal from targeted killing meant to disrupt and ultimately eliminate an opponent. If the goal is elimination, the group in question cannot be deterred or compelled, only disrupted. Coercion is an attempt to change an opponent's cost calculus. That opponent must survive in order to do this. If the would-be coercer is not willing to accept a group's continued existence, that group has no incentive to stop fighting and every incentive to fight on for the sake of its very survival. Studies of targeted killings in such situations should not expect to find coercive effects. Many other studies should, however, and have overlooked such effects.

Hamas has choices and considers them carefully.[17] Its political leaders make the big decisions on the overall direction in which the organization is heading and on whether or not to participate in ceasefires. They do not decide on individual operations on the ground.[18] This makes Hamas more difficult to disrupt, but leaves it open to compellence. Targeted killings are by their nature provocative and therefore always compellent rather than deterrent; that is, they seek to change the status quo rather than maintain it. As scholars of deterrence like Lawrence Freedman have argued, compellence is much more difficult to achieve than deterrence.[19] Thomas Rid has shown the result in practice: When Israel has attempted to change the status quo, higher levels of violence have been required than when it has attempted merely to maintain it.[20] If targeted killings are a tool for compellence rather than deterrence, the question of whether militants or the senior leadership are targeted becomes central, as compellence must be dramatic if it is to work. Finally, as Charles Brockett and others have argued, timing is also important. His study found that repressive measures were more likely to succeed when mobilization had not yet begun or was already at its peak, but likely to intensify mobilization between these two extremes.[21] This is precisely what a study of compellence would lead one to expect.

Israel's Targeted Killings on Hamas in the Second Intifada

As the above graph (Figure 1) shows, Hamas began a deadly campaign of suicide attacks from 2001, shortly after the outbreak of the Second Intifada. As Figure 2 below illustrates, Israel began targeting Hamas members that year as well. Figures 2 and 3 show that these targeted killings did not initially reduce Hamas' effectiveness, as the number killed and injured per attack actually rose in 2002. This trend then reversed in 2003, though the difference was too small yet to draw clear conclusions. Partly as a result of the initial failure, Israel upped the ante towards the end of 2002. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was keen to capitalize on

the momentum provided by revelations arising from the Karine A. affair that Yasser Arafat was involved in supplying terrorist groups. He wished to start killing Hamas' top military commanders one by one.[22] The first was to be Raed Karmi, who had long evaded capture. Karmi's death sparked a massive wave of violence from Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups similar to that caused by killing Yahya Ayyash ("the Engineer") in 1996, the last time Israel had targeted such a prominent member of the military wing.
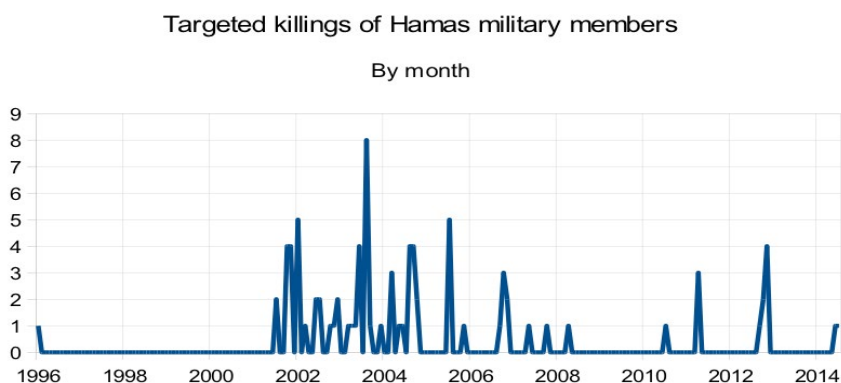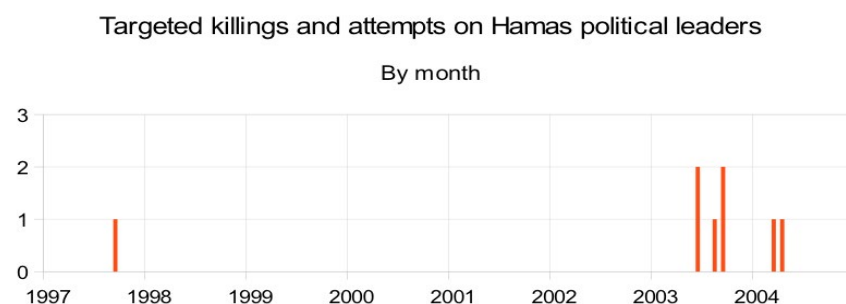

Figure 2[23]

Figure 3: Targeted killings of Hamas political leaders. This chart includes attempts, for even attempts can be expected to have effects due to their relative rarity and audacity. The first incident is the attempt on Khaled Meshal in Jordan. The second includes the successful killing of Dr. Ibrahim al-Makadme and an attempt on Abdel Aziz Rantissi in June 2003. The third is the killing of Abu Shenab in August 2003, with a fourth showing the attempts on Sheikh Yassin and Mahmoud Zahar in September of the same year. The final two represent the successful killings of Yassin and Rantissi in March and April 2004, respectively.[24]

Israel had thus far refrained from targeting the leaders of Hamas' political wing since 1997, when Israel attempted to poison Hamas political leader Khaled Meshal in Jordan. That effort backfired miserably. It resulted in international condemnation (President Clinton eventually pressured then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu into releasing the antidote), damaged relations with Jordan, and landed Hamas a public relations coup and a flood of donations from around the region. Nevertheless, Israel's leadership decided it was time to try this particular tactic again in 2003 by targeting Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantissi.

The response from Hamas and the world was very different this time around. Ziad Abu Amr, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council who was involved in ceasefire negotiations with Hamas in 2003, recalls:

I think the attempt on Rantissi's life [on 10 June 2003] was a catalyst of some sort. Especially when certain intelligence came to the Palestinian side to the effect that Israel was determined to liquidate all the Hamas leaders. And I think the Hamas leaders and we, too, took that very seriously. And I remember I asked… are you better off with your leaders around, is Hamas better off with its founders and top leaders around, or do

you think this is irrelevant? If you think it is important... I think we have to do something political about it right now.[25]

Major General Giora Eiland, then head of the IDF's Planning Directorate, agrees. "The unsuccessful attempt to hit Rantisi caused Rantisi, who was one of the worst extremists among the Hamas leaders, [...] to change his mind overnight and to suddenly accept requests by the Palestinian Authority and the Egyptians to give a chance to the hudna. [...] the effect of the attempt on his life was immediate."[26] Hamas and other Palestinian groups thereafter agreed to a ceasefire. Hamas did not commit a single attack throughout the month of July 2003.

As so often, that ceasefire began to fray after a series of tit-for-tat actions that began with the death of four Palestinians in an Israeli raid in Nablus, followed by suicide attacks by Hamas and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades that killed two and wounded a dozen more, and ended with Israel's killing of Mohammed Seder, a member of Islamic Jihad, a group close to Hamas, in August 2003. Hamas retaliated, perhaps more aggressively than intended: "[T]he Hamas leaders later acknowledged [that their retaliation] in Jerusalem [was an] overdose."[27] Israel hit back again, this time killing Hamas leader Ismail Abu Shenab, also in August 2003. Shenab had a mixed military and political background but had most recently been involved in ceasefire negotiations with the PA and espoused moderate views in favor of a halt to suicide bombings.[28] The tit-for-tat violence ended as violence rose rapidly instead, as it had after the killing of Karmi the year before. The PA's Dahlan asserts that Israel's choice of Shenab, who was a moderate, showed there could be no ceasefire.[29] Hamas viewed the killing of Shenab as breaking the rules when it had been minded to keep things quiet and had seen its actions as merely proportionate retaliations.

To counter the rising violence, Israel attempted its most audacious killing yet: Hamas founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.[30] Hamas did not initially change course, but Israel struck again immediately after Hamas' next attack, targeting the house of Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar, killing his son.[31] Although Hamas once again vowed revenge, the rest of 2003 was quiet, with it carrying out just one attack on an Israeli settlement in Gaza in October, none at all in November, and a single rocket attack in December, which harmed no one.[32]

The lull at the end of 2003 was not the consequence of disruption. It was the result of a decision by the Hamas leadership to enact a cessation of attacks within Israel's pre-1967 borders in exchange for a halt to the targeted killing of its members.[33] Israel reciprocated, without explicitly agreeing to any ceasefire, and did not carry out any targeted killings in October or November.[34] It carried out just one, of a bomb-maker, in December, to which Hamas responded with the aforementioned non-deadly rocket launch.

Hamas engaged in a few attacks in January 2004, perhaps in response to Ariel Sharon's announced plan to withdraw Israeli troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip. It carried out no attacks in February. Nevertheless, the January attacks illustrate that the targeted killings had not yet produced extensive deterrence. Israel therefore began to hit Hamas again in March, when it killed three senior Hamas militants in a missile strike. Hamas responded with a rocket attack that caused "minor damage" to nearby shops.[35] Israel took out five al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades militants shortly thereafter, for which the two groups responded with a suicide attack. Finally, Israel responded by attempting again to kill Sheikh Yassin, this time with success. Hamas' response was limited: It launched rockets from Gaza, engaged in a shooting attack on a West Bank settlement, and committed a suicide attack on 17 April 2004 that killed only the bomber (though it wounded four Israelis).[36] Israel responded immediately by successfully killing Abdel Aziz Rantissi that same day.

Hamas' attacks declined sharply after the death of two of its most important leaders. It carried out just two suicide attacks the following year and then, in 2006, announced that it was halting suicide bombing altogether.[37] What explains this dramatic turn of events? Kober is of course correct when he asserts that no direct causal link can be proven between targeted killings and the reduction of violence chronicled here. [38] The rapid shifts in Hamas' behavior observed in the immediate aftermath of the targeted killing of each

of its political leaders, including agreeing to a ceasefire, meeting to propose ceasefires, and generally reducing attacks, along with reports from negotiators like Abu Amr, who indicate Hamas was concerned about the decimation of its upper echelons, however, all strongly suggest that targeted killings were affecting Hamas' decisions. There is no doubt that Hamas' activities were simultaneously being curbed by Israeli security operations and the West Bank barrier and it is also true that such developments themselves will have led Hamas to reconsider its options. However, the evidence that targeted killings had effects, too, is strong.

Israel's targeted killings led Hamas to reconsider its actions and change behavior, shifting away from the actions that most angered Israel—suicide bombings. In other words, Israel coerced Hamas into halting its suicide operations. This still leaves us with the question of why targeted killings sometimes provoked greater violence and sometimes induced calm. To understand this, it is necessary to look at the different dynamics of two aspects of coercion: deterrence and compellence.

Deterrence vs. Compellence: Coercion with a Difference

The above section showed that targeting militant leaders can lead Hamas to retaliate as much and sometimes more than it does after the targeting of one of its political leaders. This is not always the case, though, as Israel continued to target militants throughout the Second Intifada and beyond. Targeting high-up military-wing leaders can be as audacious as targeting political leaders, however, and this hints at the key to the puzzle: the "rules of the game."

Israelis have for some time talked about "mowing the grass" in Gaza. This refers to periodically curtailing Hamas' capabilities while "hoping that occasional large-scale operations also have a temporary deterrent effect in order to create periods of quiet along Israel's borders." This is meant not only to deter Hamas, but also to send deterrent signals to others in the region who might think of attacking Israel.[39] Gabi Siboni, of Israel's Institute for National Security Studies, advocates using "force that is disproportionate to the enemy's actions and the threat it poses. […] Such a response will… [increase] Israeli deterrence and [reduce] the likelihood of hostilities against Israel for an extended period." Although he was speaking specifically about the threat from Hezbollah in this instance, he makes clear that this applies to Hamas in Gaza as well.[40] As Thomas Rid argues, the question is not whether deterrence demands "proportionate" or "disproportionate" force. Instead, the "disproportionate use of force may be demanded if the goal is to redefine the rules of the game. When the goal is maintaining the rules and keeping them from eroding," however, "proportionate" force is more appropriate.[41]

This is correct, but it betrays a misconception of deterrence. Deterrence is the threat of retaliation unacceptable to an opponent to convince that opponent to refrain from actions the deterring side dislikes. As such, it is by definition a tool for maintaining the status quo. Any attempt to "redefine the rules of the game" is therefore an attempt at compellence, not deterrence. Compellence is the threat or *use* of force to convince an opponent to *change* behavior or a status quo the compeller dislikes. Although often used as though it were nearly interchangeable with deterrence, compellence is different. Because deterrence seeks to maintain the status quo, the limits of a deterring party's demands are clearly defined (refrain from something the opponent is not currently doing, anyway). This also means that compliance with a deterrent threat is invisible and can always be rationalized, saving face. Compellence, in stark contrast, has no intrinsic limits. The opponent cannot be certain that compliance with one demand will not simply invite further demands. Furthermore, because compellence demands a *change* in behavior or the status quo, compliance is blatant and therefore humiliating. Finally, because it seeks to alter the status quo, compellence appears more aggressive than deterrence. Complying with a compellent demand therefore brings with it the fear that giving into aggression will signal weakness, thus reducing the opponent's own ability to deter. For all these reasons, compellence is far harder to achieve than deterrence.[42]

It is true that deterrence situations often shift into compellence situations. Lawrence Freedman gives the example of the Cuban Missile Crisis, during which he asserts that the US attempted both to discourage the USSR from constructing further missile sites in Cuba (compellence) and to discourage it from attempting to pass through an American blockade (deterrence).[43] In fact, *both* these actions were attempts at compellence, since the Soviet ships were already underway and turning them around involved a public change of course, not the maintenance of the status quo. The US naturally saw itself as the defender in this situation and therefore as maintaining the status quo, but the USSR saw the opposite. For Khrushchev, his own actions were intended to bolster deterrence in Cuba against a possible US invasion–the Soviets were therefore the defenders in his eyes and the American blockade was an attempt to compel them to give in to American aggression.

The tendency for both sides to see themselves as defenders and the fact that deterrence situations can morph into ones of compellence means the two cannot be discussed in isolation and may explain why few authors even mention compellence–and then only in conjunction with deterrence. This is an unfortunate oversight. This distinction is often overlooked even among eminent scholars on Israeli deterrence. In one article, Shmuel Bar mentions compellence only together with deterrence, as if the two were essentially one tactic; in another, he makes no mention of compellence at all.[44] Thomas Rid, Jacob Amidror, and Doron Almog also make no mention of the concept of 'compellence' in some of their important articles on Israeli deterrence, despite the important role it has played.[45] Daniel Byman's book on Israeli counterterrorism is not about deterrence, but he does occasionally mention it–without reference to compellence.[46]

Although deterrence situations can and do blend into ones of compellence, it is possible to differentiate between the two and the rule of thumb is this: If a given defender is issuing threats to forestall actions that have not yet occurred and the target of those threats could still back down without this appearing to be a capitulation, this is deterrence. If a given defender is issuing threats to halt attacks that have already begun or otherwise attempt to change a status quo–however new that status quo may be – this is compellence. Seen this way, the US's prevention of the Soviet shipments to Cuba was clearly compellence: The Soviet Union could no longer back down without this being obvious. The action the US deemed unacceptable was already underway. The status quo the US felt had been violated, namely that of no nuclear weapons being located in Cuba, had already ceased to exist. Restoring it now required compellence, which is why the crisis was so nerve-wracking.

Determining whether deterrence or compellence is the goal with targeted killing is easy, especially when it involves prominent members of an organization. Targeted killing is by its very nature provocative. It threatens the very survival of the targeted group via its decision makers. It therefore cannot be used to signal resolve in an attempt to maintain the status quo. It is instead always an escalation and therefore signals a change in the status quo. In other words, the actual use, as opposed to the threat, of targeted killing is compellent, not deterrent. This explains the different results achieved in the cases mentioned above. The killings and attempted killings of Karmi, Shenab, al-Makadme, and the failed attempt on Yassin all resulted in increased violence. Both the attempt and the successful killing of Rantissi and the attempt on Zahar led to falls in violence. The effect of the successful killing of Yassin is unclear: Hamas initially continued attacks, but Israel killed Rantissi very soon thereafter, which led to a fall in violence. It is not possible to say whether one killing would have been enough or if both were required. It is clear that Hamas violence dropped thereafter.

The difference between the killings that increased violence and those that decreased it had less to do with the type of person they were targeting (they were all high-up members of the organization and were mostly political) and much more to do with timing. When Israel carried out killings at a time when Hamas viewed itself as exercising restraint or still adhering to a ceasefire, this provocative move encouraged Hamas to abandon the ceasefire and retaliate. There was no incentive for Hamas to maintain a ceasefire when its most important leaders were being killed regardless. When violence was already high, Hamas would reduce

attacks in the hope of receiving a reprieve from targeted killings. Israeli decision makers are aware of this effect, though it seems none have referred to it having to do with the concept of compellence. For example, both Giora Eiland, Head of the IDF's Planning Directorate, and Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer opposed the targeting of Karmi because they knew it would end the ceasefire in place at that time.[47]

Conclusion

Targeted killings may successfully disrupt the operations of terrorist and militant groups, but their effects go beyond this when a group's high-level leadership is targeted. There is potential to use targeted killings to coerce an opponent into accepting a ceasefire. Crucially, however, the group would need an incentive to accept being deterred thereafter. To provide that incentive, targeted killings of the group's political leadership must be avoided during ceasefires and other periods of calm if maintaining calm is the goal. Considering the coercive effects of targeted killings, as well as the type of targets and timing of strikes, may shine a new light on the effectiveness of targeted killings in other cases as well. The insight on compellence and targeted killings elaborated in this article has implications far beyond Israel, as it is not the only country to engage in the practice of targeted killings and the difficulties inherent in compellence and deterrence-through-compellence are universal. When governments plan strikes, they must consider whether they wish only to disrupt or also to coerce. If the latter, they would do well to keep the difference between deterrence and compellence firmly in mind. It can be the difference between escalation and calm.

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Notes

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