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Peter Krause. “The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence: A Two-Level Framework to Transform a Deceptive Debate.” *Security Studies* 22:2 (2013): 259–294. DOI: 10.1080/09636412.2013.786914.

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Clearly, terrorism is effective in many ways. By definition, it harms civilians and instills fear. If these are the goals of terrorism, then it has a 100 percent success rate. Political scientists are more concerned, however, with whether terrorism works politically. The prevailing scholarly opinion underwent a sea change once it was subjected to empirical scrutiny. Initially, political scientists assumed that non-state challengers perpetrate terrorism because of its strategic effectiveness, particularly as an instrument of coercion. Yet a growing body of empirical research contradicts that assumption. Empirical studies find that terrorists almost never attain their political demands from governments and that their poor success rate is inherent to the tactic itself. In the May issue of *Security Studies*, Peter Krause mischaracterizes the literature en route to advancing his own theory on the efficacy of terrorism.¹ In this response, I aim to clarify the research landscape.

¹ Peter Krause, “The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence: A Two-Level Framework to Transform a Deceptive Debate,” *Security Studies* 22: 259–294 (2013).

Krause contends that the apparent debate among empirical scholars over the political effectiveness of terrorism is artifactual because their differences result from case selection and other methodological decisions. In fact, the debate over terrorism's efficacy is not among empirical scholars. The debate is between those who have systematically tested the political effects of terrorism and those who instead rely on the unfounded assumptions of bargaining theory. Implicit in the rationalist literature on bargaining over the last half-century is the political utility of violence.² Given our anarchical international system, which is populated with egoistic actors, violence is thought to promote concessions by lending credibility to their threats. In dyadic competitions between a defender and challenger, violence enhances the credibility of the challenger's threat via two broad mechanisms that are familiar to theorists of international relations. First, violence imposes costs on the challenger, credibly signaling resolve to fight for his given preferences. Second, violence imposes costs on the defender, credibly signaling pain to him for noncompliance. All else being equal, this forceful demonstration of commitment and punishment capacity supposedly increases the odds of coercing the defender's preferences to overlap with those of the challenger in the interest of peace, thereby opening up a proverbial bargaining space. Numerous political scientists have seized on bargaining theory to argue that terrorism, like other forms of violence, must therefore raise the chances of government compliance.³

An empirical consensus has emerged, however, that terrorism is actually a losing tactic for inducing government concessions. In 2006, I published in *International Security* an article entitled "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," the first large-*n* study of terrorism's political effectiveness.⁴ What I found in my sample of terrorist groups is they achieved their strategic demands far less often than bargaining theorists predicted. Subsequent studies of other samples by RAND and by Audrey Cronin have found that, if anything, my estimates of terrorist success were too high.⁵ Krause suggests that the tactic of terrorism may be epiphenomenal to government intransigence. He claims that empirical studies have "summarily" dismissed the possibility that terrorist groups are hampered

² David A. Lake, "Authority, Coercion, and Power in International Relations," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC (Sept. 2010); James D. Fearon, "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38: 236-269 (1994).

³ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31 (2006): 49-80; David A. Lake, "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century," *Dialog-IO* 1 (2002): 15; Per Baltzer Overgaard, "The Scale of Terrorist Attacks as a Signal of Resources," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38: 452-478; Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 97 (2003): 343-361.

⁴ Max Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security* 31 (2006): 42-78.

⁵ Seth G. Jones, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida*, Rand Corporation, 2008; Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31 (2006): 7-48.

by their weak capability, which he recommends proxying in terms of their membership size (266 fn. 16). When membership size is taken into account, he asserts, the debate “disappears” (267). In actuality, many coercion studies have controlled for the capability of non-state challengers using membership size and other relevant proxies including the age of the group, its external support, and use of suicide tactics. The findings stand even after controlling for such factors; non-state challengers reduce the odds of bargaining success by employing terrorism regardless of the nature of their demands.⁶

Studies which employ public opinion rather than government concessions as the dependent variable offer additional empirical evidence that capability alone is not responsible for the poor coercion rate. These studies show that terrorism raises popular support for right-wing leaders who are opposed to appeasement, such as the Likud in Israel.⁷ Laboratory experiments have reached similar results, further ruling out the possibility of a selection effect.⁸ In a précis of the literature, Claude Berrebi shares this assessment: “Terrorist fatalities, with few exceptions, increase support for the bloc of parties associated with a more-intransigent position. Scholars may interpret this as further evidence that terrorist attacks against civilians do not help terrorist organizations achieve their stated goals.”⁹ In sum, the empirical literature is rather united across methodological approaches on the opinion that terrorism lowers the odds of bargaining success by strengthening politically intransigent hardliners. Not only do bargaining theorists systematically overestimate the political success of terrorists, but they are unable to explain why this form of violence defies their predictions by impeding non-state challengers at the bargaining table.

⁶ Max Abrahms, “The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited,” *Comparative Political Studies* 45 (2012): 366-393; Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict” *International Security* 33 (2008): 7-44; Virginia Fortna, “Do Terrorists Win? Rebels’ Use of Terrorism and Civil War Outcomes,” *Rebels’ Use of Terrorism and Civil War Outcomes* (2011); Anna Getmansky and Tolga Sinmazdemir, “Success Breeds Failure: The Effect of Terrorist Attacks on Land Control in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” presented at *APSA (2012)*; Khusrav Gaibulloev and Todd Sandler, “Hostage Taking: Determinants of Terrorist Logistical and Negotiation Success,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46 (2009): 739-756.

⁷ Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor, “On Terrorism and Electoral Outcomes Theory and Evidence from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50 (2006): 899-925; Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor, “Are Voters Sensitive to Terrorism?: Direct Evidence from the Israeli Electorate,” Rand Corporation (2008); Christophe Chowanietz, “Rallying Around the Flag or Railing against the Government? Political Parties’ Reactions to Terrorist Acts,” *Party Politics* 17 (2011): 673-698.

⁸ Tom Pyszczynski, Zachary Rothschild, and Abdolhossein Abdollahi, “Terrorism, Violence, and Hope for Peace A Terror Management Perspective,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17 (2008): 318-322.

⁹ Claude Berrebi, “The Economics of Terrorism and Counterterrorism: What Matters and Is Rational-Choice Theory Helpful?” In *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together*, Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin, eds., Santa Monica, Calif: RAND (2009): 189-190.

Krause maintains that empirical studies of terrorism's effectiveness are too reductive because its practitioners may deem terrorists' actions as successful regardless of whether governments politically comply. He observes that terrorists are motivated by not only strategic goals, but also organizational ones—namely, to gain supporters, thereby outbidding rivals and extending the longevity of the group. I fully agree that terrorists are often motivated by non-strategic ends, particularly the selective benefits of participating in a tightknit group.¹⁰ In fact, the discovery that terrorism impedes government concessions suggests that its practitioners are often driven by non-strategic incentive structures.¹¹

But does terrorism actually help groups organizationally? Krause argues that group membership size is determinative of both strategic and organizational success. But if terrorism helps groups organizationally mainly by attracting supporters, why do terrorist groups have so few members in comparison to groups that eschew this tactic? As others have noted, the physical risks of engaging in terrorism are high, constraining the number of potential participants.¹² So, too, do the audience costs of indiscriminate bloodshed, which erode organizational support as al-Qaida leaders acknowledge.¹³ Krause should be commended for devising a two-level framework that incorporates both the strategic and organizational goals of terrorist groups. But the empirical record offers scant evidence that attacking civilians with terrorism assists non-state challengers with either objective. Future research should continue to investigate where the utility of terrorism resides.

Max Abrahms is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Northeastern University and a Term Member at the Council on Foreign Relations. He has published many papers on the political outcome of terrorism, including "The Credibility Paradox: Violence as a Double-Edged Sword in International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* (December 2013); "Why Terrorists Overestimate the Odds of Victory," *Perspectives on Terrorism* (October 2012) with Karolina Lula; "The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited," *Comparative Political Studies* (March 2012); "Does Terrorism Really Work? Evolution in the Conventional Wisdom since 9/11," *Defence and Peace Economics* (December 2011); "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2

¹⁰ Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy," *International Security* 32 (2008): 78-105.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Chenoweth, Erica and Adria Lawrence. 2010. *Mobilization and Resistance: A Framework for*

Analysis, in *Rethinking Violence: States and Non-State Actors in Conflict*, Erica Chenoweth and Adria Lawrence, eds., Cambridge, MA.: MIT; Gould, Roger V. 1995. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

¹³ See Max Abrahms, "Bin Laden Realized the Truth: Terrorism Doesn't Work," *Baltimore Sun*, 21 May 2012.

(Fall 2006); and “Al-Qaeda’s Scorecard: A Progress Report on Al-Qaeda’s Objectives,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (July-August 2006).

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