

Abstract

This thesis explores the topic of targeted killings and their effectiveness as a tool of counter-terrorism. The study begins with discussing the employed theory of decapitation and the legal and ethical questions the use of this method raises. The effectiveness is studied in two cases of leadership decapitations, specifically the case of Ahmed Abdi Godane, the former leader of Al-Shabaab, and Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the former leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The analysis was conducted through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approach and the timeframe has been set as two years before and two years after the decapitation. The results from the short-term perspective seem to suggest that leadership decapitation does decrease the organization's capability, with the scope of it depending on individual groups. In the medium to long-term timeframe, the results of the analysis were ambiguous as in the case of Al-Shabaab, there was no significant decrease in the capabilities of the group present due to the decapitation, however, in the case of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, there was a serious decrease occurring in all of the studied indicators. Finally, the thesis suggests that using targeted killings as part of more complex counter-terrorist operations greatly improves its effectiveness.