


Chapter 2

Prioritizing Threats: AHP–Based Assessment of Terrorist Intention and Capability for Intelligence Operations

I Made Wisnu Wardhana

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4756-9448>

Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Intelligence analysts play a vital role in evaluating terrorist threats, a process that demands objectivity, consistency, and analytical rigor. To move beyond intuition-based assessments and reduce subjective bias, this paper introduces a structured methodology grounded in the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) a decision-making framework developed by Thomas L. Saaty. This approach focuses on two fundamental indicators central to terrorism threat analysis: intention and capability. By assigning weights and ratings to relevant sub-indicators, AHP allows analysts to systematically prioritize persons of interest (POIs) based on quantifiable threat levels. The paper further enhances its practical relevance through a series of illustrative case studies that simulate real-world profiles, demonstrating how limited information can be transformed into actionable intelligence. This research offers a scientifically grounded, scalable model that supports intelligence and law enforcement agencies in making informed, data-driven decisions in the fight against terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of terrorist operations is highly adaptive, with perpetrators continuously modifying their methods to evade detection by intelligence and law enforcement

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-3522-2.ch002

Copyright © 2026, IGI Global Scientific Publishing. Copying or distributing in print or electronic forms without written permission of IGI Global Scientific Publishing is prohibited. Use of this chapter to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited. The publisher reserves all rights to license its use for generative AI training and machine learning model development.

agencies. This ongoing evolution challenges conventional approaches and demands increasingly sophisticated techniques to identify and disrupt emerging threats. Intelligence and law enforcement bodies must therefore enhance their analytical tools to proactively assess and respond to these threats. One of the primary objectives of such tools is to enable early intervention by strategically identifying and neutralizing individuals or groups with the potential to conduct violent acts. However, assessing the threat posed by a potential terrorist remains a complex task due to the absence of a standardized and operationally reliable framework for evaluating both intent and capability.

To address this analytical gap, the study proposes a structured, scientific method for evaluating terrorist threats using the AHP, a decision-making model developed by Thomas L. Saaty in 1980. This approach introduces a scalable and replicable framework that translates qualitative indicators into quantitative assessments. It begins by identifying two fundamental dimensions of a terrorist threat: intention and capability. Each dimension is further subdivided into measurable sub-indicators—such as behavioural activities, personal and familial backgrounds, access to resources, and technical proficiency. Furthermore, intelligence analysts rate each Person of Interest (POI) on a 1-to-9 scale for each indicator. The weighted scores are then integrated into a risk matrix, classifying individuals into low, medium, or high threat levels. This systematic method enhances the consistency, transparency, and operational utility of threat assessments in dynamic field environments.

While this model presents a significant advancement in operational decision-making, it is crucial to situate it within the broader body of research on terrorist threat assessment. Over the past two decades, numerous scholars and practitioners have explored behavioural indicators associated with terrorist activity particularly those related to intent and capability. However, existing models have often been descriptive, inconsistent across case types, or lacking in empirical validation. The literature remains fragmented, with varying methodologies offering limited guidance for real-time intelligence work. The following review synthesizes key contributions by scholars, outlining the evolution of thought in this domain and highlighting persistent gaps that justify the development of a structured, quantifiable model like the one proposed in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intention and Capability

Understanding and predicting terrorist acts hinges upon accurately identifying a perpetrator's intention and capability. Across the literature, various conceptual

26 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/prioritizing-threats/392815

Related Content

Cyber-Physical Systems: An Overview of Design Process, Applications, and Security

Lydia Ray (2020). *Cyber Warfare and Terrorism: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 128-150).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/cyber-physical-systems/251422

Ascertaining Trust Indicators in Social Networking Sites

N. Veerasamy and W. A. Labuschagne (2013). *International Journal of Cyber Warfare and Terrorism* (pp. 22-37).

www.irma-international.org/article/ascertaining-trust-indicators-in-social-networking-sites/101938

Filtration of Terrorism-Related Texts in the E-Government Environment

Rasim M. Alguliyev, Ramiz M. Aliguliyev and Gunay Y. Niftaliyeva (2018). *International Journal of Cyber Warfare and Terrorism* (pp. 35-48).

www.irma-international.org/article/filtration-of-terrorism-related-texts-in-the-e-government-environment/216878

Slow Education and Cognitive Agility: Improving Military Cyber Cadet Cognitive Performance for Better Governance of Cyberpower

Benjamin James Knox, Ricardo G. Lugo, Kirsi Helkala and Stefan Sütterlin (2019). *International Journal of Cyber Warfare and Terrorism* (pp. 48-66).

www.irma-international.org/article/slow-education-and-cognitive-agility/224949

Media-Related Strategies and "War on Terrorism"

Randal Marlin (2014). *Exchanging Terrorism Oxygen for Media Airwaves: The Age of Terroredia* (pp. 124-142).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/media-related-strategies-and-war-on-terrorism/106156