

Opportunity, Challenge, Risk and Threat — Review of Definitions and Relations

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Abstract. *The article presents fundamental issues related to vital problems with a view to research on internal security, namely — opportunities, challenges, risks and threats. The reason for treating these phenomena in such a way is the fact that they most often occur together. It also seems important that today there is a substantial perception and awareness of opportunities, challenges, risks and threats. This can be achieved by making information and knowledge widely available. A significant source of the latter is scientific research which provides systematically improved and highly objective collections of reliable information about reality together with the methods for their skilful and effective use. The considerations presented are based on a review of the Polish and foreign literature used in security research conducted within the framework of security sciences. It has been used to present basic identification problems and mutual relationships among opportunities, challenges, risks and threats. The analysis presented indicates a lack of uniformity in the perception of the concept of risk. Completely different is the situation with regard to identifying opportunities, challenges, risks and threats. There are here many common areas referring mainly to sources and effects. The considerations presented have made it possible to identify mutual cognitive and utilitarian relations between the subject phenomena. The conclusions of the article include a summary of the above-mentioned considerations.*

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Introduction

The scientific literature recognises opportunities, challenges, risks and threats as those shaping the nature of each actor's security environment. Any existence can be threatened and, therefore, in order to ensure a proper functioning of the country and its citizens, each of these needs to be guaranteed in advance by the relevant actors.¹ This is reflected in a strategic approach and strategic documents. The essence of risk prevention is to be knowledgeable about risks, thus forming the basis for designing relevant algorithms, in case they can occur. In this context, it seems appropriate to state that these phenomena concern each human being, group or organisation. Therefore, the sphere of consciousness is important, which

¹ Socha R, Kaczmarczyk B, Teoretyczne aspekty zarządzania kryzysowego, [in:] Chojnacki W, Kaczmarczyk B (Eds), *Optymalizacja procesów zarządzania kryzysowego*. Lubąń, 2011, pp. 48–49.

should be understood as a specific state of mind or consciousness in the perception of the phenomena or 'an internal and objective state of being aware of something, a state of vigilance'.² Humanity is faced with more and more opportunities, challenges, risks and threats. This, in turn, complicates the process of meeting one of its basic needs — security.³ Without satisfying this need, a person becomes deprived of the full basis (conditions) for a proper functioning, including personal development, which, at the same time, has a direct, significant and, unfortunately destructive impact on the general condition of communities and even on humanity as a whole.⁴

Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities should be seen as temporary or short-term opportunities which help to achieve the goals set. In this respect, it is important to be able to identify them accurately and quickly and, consequently, take advantage of them when undertaking activities. Challenges, on the other hand, are problems the solution to which lies in the fact that it is difficult for the security actor to choose between the two equally important arguments. Undoubtedly, any attempt to take up challenges increases the probability of opportunities to occur in the future. If they are ignored, the process of shaping security slows down or has a negative impact on it. So, there can be clearly seen a chain of relations between the challenge and opportunity. Noteworthy are also the research findings quoted by Andrzej Dawidczyk, carried out by the renowned centres⁵, whose activity focuses on researching the state environment in relation to the identification of conditions crucial for its security. As a result of this research, security challenges for the 21st century have been identified and they are as follows:

- a rapid development of nuclear technology and other types of weapons of mass destruction, and universal access to them;
- development of research into technology that enables us to affect the planet;
- a very dynamic development in the field of space exploration carried out not only by the states but also supra-state organisations, including criminal and terrorist ones;
- revolutionary changes in quantum mechanics; i.e. computer and bimolecular revolutions;
- deepening exploration of the surface and ocean waters of the deep sea;
- changes in geology and climate;
- rapid demographic changes worldwide;

² Strelau J (Ed.), *Psychologia*. Podręcznik akademicki. Gdańsk, 2000, p. 78.

³ Jarmoszko S, *Ku pedagogii bezpieczeństwa w mikroskali*, [in:] Wiśniewski B, Fehler W (Eds), *Edukacja obronna społeczeństwa*. Białystok, 2006, p. 46.

⁴ Jarmoszko S, *Odmiany ryzyka społecznego w kontekście procesów globalizacji — próba konceptualizacji*, [in:] Pająk K, Zduniak A (Eds), *Edukacyjne wyzwania początku XXI wieku*. Warsaw-Poznań, 2003, pp. 104–114.

⁵ Including, amongst others: Harvard University, RAND Corp., National Defence University, Hudson Institute.

— changes in the geopolitical and geostrategic system of the world.⁶

The term 'risk' also plays an important role in the above-mentioned considerations.

Risk and Its Contexts

The term 'risk' is closely linked to that of 'damage' and refers to the probability with which a particular type of damage caused by an existing threat can occur. It is important to take into consideration the scale of damage in order to assess the probability of its occurrence. Risk is perceived as 'an activity in which at least one of the elements involved or the probability of its occurrence is unknown. The probability can be measurable or only felt by the risk-taker, and the perception of the risk constitutes an integral part of the decision-maker's emotional state'.⁷

According to Ricky W Griffin, risk is a situation in which at least one of the elements involved is unknown but the probability of its occurrence is known (or the probability of the occurrence of more than one element, if there are more elements). The probability can be measurable or felt only by the decision-maker. Risk conditions only exist if past experience with similar events can be compared with the present situation. Problems arising from a risky situation can be solved if its elements are measurable. It can be achieved by using, for instance, the theory of probability or statistical methods'.⁸ Other sources state that 'a risky state is a situation where the availability of different options and potential benefits associated with each of them are known with an estimated probability'.⁹

According to the definitions discussed, risk ought to be understood as a certain kind of threat, which means that different phenomena are not going to happen in harmony with the previously accepted plan. Simultaneously, it should be noticed that 'risk includes potential and hidden danger or hazard'.¹⁰ When analysing the situation outlined above, it should be taken into consideration that unforeseen circumstances may always arise which may lead to the planned activities not being carried out as expected and, as a consequence, to a completely different turn of events from that anticipated.

Risk may also be determined as 'a state of a situation, e.g. risk of security is a state of a security situation, the signs of which may suggest a threat to security of the entity. On the international level it means, for example, the threat to a country's independence, and on the internal level — the threat to lives of citizens, to the stability of the political development, to democratic freedoms, etc. to such an extent that they could endanger the security of the whole world. The risk is characterised by a varying level of probability of occurrence, as well as by an unpredictable

⁶ More: Dawidczyk A, Bezpieczeństwo państwa na początku XXI wieku. Ważniejsze problemy, [in:] Jemioła T, Rajchel K (Eds), Bezpieczeństwo narodowe i zarządzanie kryzysowe w Polsce w XXI wieku — wyzwania i dylematy. Warsaw, 2008, pp. 19–22.

⁷ Penc J, *Strategie zarządzania*. Warsaw, 1994, p. 11.

⁸ Encyklopedia organizacji i zarządzania. Warsaw, 1982, p. 456.

⁹ Griffin R.W, *Podstawy zarządzania organizacjami*. Warsaw, 1996, p. 271.

¹⁰ Sabak Z, Królikowski J, *Ocena zagrożeń bezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*. Warsaw, 2002, p. 36.

duration of the process of transforming from the moment of activation into a real threat.¹¹

When discussing the risk issues, the sociological perspective of human risk seems to be a very interesting one, particularly at the moment when a society is entering the phase of the so called *late modernity*. One of the features of this concept is the appearance of new forms of risk, which as a rule has been a part of the social life for ages.

As Ulrich Beck notices, in our times risk is of a completely different quality.¹² The current reality is packed with technological solutions, therefore, risk is unnoticed in the contact with the natural environment. For this reason, it can be said that a society lives in the world of the *manufactured* risk. One may get the impression that not only an individual person, but also experts do not control the situation any more. One cannot get released from it, nor effectively secure. We have to live in its presence.¹³

Anthony Giddens sees the *profile of the contemporary risk* in the objective and subjective context. In the first sense he indicates the global expansion of risk which more and more frequently touches millions of people in the world. The risk affects everyone without exception. It goes beyond traditional class differences, it is the threat to the poor and rich, to the educated and uneducated, to the healthy and the sick, to politicians and citizens, to the young and elderly. It can be noticed that this situation is constantly gaining universalism, with the consequence that there are no exceptions. The phenomenon of intensification accompanies the above as well, the sign of which are dangers directed at human life.

The Object-subject Scope of Risks

A threat is a situation which may lead to damage. Therefore, the essence of the threat situation, as Tadeusz Tomaszewski rightly sees it, consists in the fact that a person anticipates occurrence of damage which they will suffer (or may suffer) if they do not protect themselves against the damage.¹⁴ When discussing damage, the loss of life, health or property is usually taken into consideration. In fact, these are not the only sorts of damage which may happen as a consequence of a threat. In order to provide a better understanding of the issue, it is essential to highlight the following types of damage:

- physical, which is a permanent or temporary damage to health or health disorder, e.g. body injury, an illness, pain, suffering or discomfort;
- relating to psyche, which is for example negative self-perception, unpleasant emotional experiences, such as fear, shame or guilt, as well as behavioural disorders;
- in the area of social relationships consisting in unfavourable interpersonal relations, such as discrimination, stigmatisation, ostracism, which leads to the loss of a good name;

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

¹² *More*: Beck U, Risikogesellschaft. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1986; Sztompka P, Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa. Cracow, 2010, p. 580.

¹³ Sztompka P, *op. cit.*, pp. 575–577.

¹⁴ Borkowski J, Dyrda M, Kanarski L, Rokicki B, Słownik terminów z zakresu psychologii dowodzenia i zarządzania. Warsaw, 2000, p. 104.

- legal, such as prosecution, arrest or trial;
- financial, connected with direct or indirect economic losses;
- relating to the human dignity, which is violating privacy and habits.¹⁵

In the context of the discussion so far, the opinion of Stanisław Dworecki often quoted in scientific literature seems essential and it states that 'a threat is a combination of internal events or in international relations in which conditions are likely to be reduced or lost to an undisturbed existence and internal development or in which the sovereignty of a country and its partner's treatment in international relations are undermined or lost as a result of political, psychological, economic, military, etc. violence'.¹⁶ The analysis of the above definition shows that the risk is, in general terms, a situation where there is a high probability that a certain phenomenon will cause significant difficulties which are seen as global challenges.

A hazard can also be seen in a narrower and wider sense. The first occurs when 'in a person a fear of the loss of highly valued values is born, with his or her own life in the first place'.¹⁷ Therefore, a risk is understood as a situation of which the subject is aware.¹⁸ In the broader sense, 'risks also include situations of which the subject is not aware'.¹⁹

In the philosophical sense, a threat is considered as a situation 'when a person is threatened with some kind of evil, because it is only evil that causes fear and terror'.²⁰ From the psychological point of view, a threat appears in situations where there is a threat of physical (loss of life, disability, illness), social (disgrace, humiliation, ostracism) or ideological (possibility of losing values highly valued by the individual) nature.²¹

The related literature also refers to the safety risk of an individual, the essence of which is to indicate the existence of individual sensitivity to risks, which consists of two groups of factors: the nature of the threatening situation and the characteristics of an individual. More dangerous situations are those that immediately cause negative consequences, such as: beating, assault, burglary, injury, theft, extortion. Less dangerous, on the other hand, are those with long-term effects (drug use, alcohol addiction and smoking).²²

The perception of threats by individuals is influenced primarily by beliefs about the location of control, ideas about the causes of an undesirable situation, taking into account temperament which results in perceiving more threats. To sum up, the individual threat is 'a situation in which there are shortages which cause discomfort in life, in the scope of goods and values valued by an individual and necessary for their safe existence and development'.²³

¹⁵ Ethical and Policy Issues Involving Human Participants. Volume I. Report and Recommendations of the Bioethics advisory Commission, Bethesda, 2001, [in:] Czarkowski M, Zagrożenie, ryzyka i szkoda w badaniach klinicznych. Warsaw, 2005, pp. 71–72.

¹⁶ Dworecki S, Zagrożenia bezpieczeństwa państwa. Warsaw, 1994, p. 61; Słownik terminów z zakresu bezpieczeństwa narodowego. Warsaw, 1996, p. 89.

¹⁷ Hołyst B, Wiktymologia. Warsaw, 1997, pp. 64–65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²³ *Ibid.*

A threat to social groups, in turn, is a situation in which relatively long-lasting and widely occurring difficult life situations happen among individuals, smaller or larger groups of people which cause conflicts or disturbances in their lives.²⁴ Therefore, these are all natural disasters, technical failures, intentional or unintentional human activities.

A threat can also be understood as “an event caused by random (natural) or non-random (intentional) causes, which has a negative impact on the functioning of a given system or causes adverse (dangerous) changes in its internal or external environment. Accumulated and unresolved threats may lead to crisis situations both in the system under consideration and in a specific system environment”.²⁵

There is also a view that the sequence of disasters in which the effect or consequences of the first disaster are the cause of another disaster.²⁶ Analysing the above content, taking into account that a disaster as defined in the Polish Language Dictionary is: “an event causing tragic consequences” and “a total failure of an undertaking”²⁷ it should be stated on the basis of the analysis of events from the past, that this very often happens. For example, flooding generates ecological and epidemiological disasters, and a railway disaster becomes a cause of death, loss of health, and environmental disaster in the first place.

The origins and effects of a hazard are important in the consideration of the risk. The main causes of natural and technical hazards include: the forces of nature, that is water, fire, earth, air, space, the organic world, and human activity against the laws of nature and against man. Environmental disasters, accidents and armed conflicts may occur as a result of the action of natural and human forces. Threats can also be epidemics, pandemics of human, animal and plant diseases, injuries, poisoning. The effects of a threat depend on the type of threat and its severity, as well as on the individual circumstances on which they operate. In this reasoning, the notion of victimogenic potential takes on significance, which means “such a system of individual, group and social macro-structure characteristics, institutional organisation, state organisation and features of living conditions that leads to the occurrence of a threat”.²⁸

When a threat is understood as a mental or legal condition in which the individual is not certain that they will be supported by another person or through a well-functioning legal system, it should be perceived as: a threat of expulsion from school, a threat of marriage breakdown, a threat to contemporary civilisation.

In the professional literature we can also find “civilization threats”, which are unwanted, by-products of technological development of societies. The increasing standard of living of people is closely linked to the interference of the natural environment. The world is immersed in huge amounts of waste, waste water and

²⁴ Fehler W, Zagrożenie — kluczowa kategoria teorii bezpieczeństwa, [in:] Jałoszyński K, Wiśniewski B, Wojtuszek T (Eds), *Współczesne postrzeganie bezpieczeństwa*. Bielsko-Biała, 2007, pp. 38–39.

²⁵ Ficoń K, *Inżynieria zarządzania kryzysowego. Podejście systemowe*. Warsaw, 2007, p. 76.

²⁶ Kopeć T.W, *Zarządzanie bezpieczeństwem powiatów, miast i gmin w zakresie ochrony środowiska. Zagrożenia*, 2000, No. 3–4, p. 5.

²⁷ *Słownik języka polskiego*. Warsaw, 2006, p. 183.

²⁸ Hołyst B, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

exhaust gases, which generate new sources of danger to human health and life.²⁹ Waste, or rather landfill, is a problem for the whole world.³⁰ The source of waste is industry, mining, agriculture and the place where people live today. A significant proportion of waste, in particular from the chemical, pharmaceutical and energy industries, is toxic and poses a direct and long-standing risk to human health and life.³¹ At the end of the twentieth century, a particularly dangerous phenomenon appeared concerning the introduction of waste, impurities and toxic substances into the territory of some countries. Rich countries are looking for waste importers because their countries have strict environmental regulations, high costs of storage, landfill and waste disposal. The main focus of the search is on poor countries which, for economic reasons, agree to illegal transactions. The transaction is beneficial for both parties, so the procedure in question had, and still has, a *raison d'être*. Therefore, highly toxic substances are transported to a region of a country in violation of the law in force, where they are hidden in the ground or stored in a manner that violates all safety rules. Certainly, there are many such "ecological bombs" and their number is practically impossible or very difficult to locate.³²

In the field of bio-sciences, there is a talk of global threats to changes in the biosphere. They are characterised by a tendency to expand when they no longer cover a large area or the Earth. They have a particularly harmful effect on the living conditions of people and other organisms, on economic development and on people's ability to choose their way of life. Global threats include the greenhouse effect and climate change, ozone depletion in the atmosphere, shrinking forest areas, desertification, extinction of plant and animal species, water, air and soil pollution, industrial waste, the cross-border shipment of waste, nuclear war and environmental disasters and wars.³³

The definitions of 'occupational risk' and 'significant risk' also deserve attention. According to the order of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, an occupational hazard should be understood as a condition of the working environment which may cause an accident or illness, whereas a "significant hazard" is a situation which may cause serious and irreversible damage to health or death, occurring in particular during the performance of particularly hazardous work.

According to Janusz Sztumski, three attitudes can be distinguished in the approach to threats. The first is a fatalistic one, recognising the inevitability of the threats that have occurred and giving faith in the existence of supernatural forces that determine its order. Those who adhere to this principle do not see the possibility of any risk prevention. This philosophy is also adhered to in the second fideistic approach, and attention is also drawn to the influence of certain activities, such as: praying, making sacrifices or casting spells to these supernatural forces, which in turn will eliminate the dangers. The last third attitude, scientific, is based on rational examination and systematic research as well as application in practice

²⁹ Małaczyński M, Zagrożenia ekologiczne. *Zagrożenia*, 2001, No. 1, p. 4.

³⁰ *More*: Kaczmarczyk B, Zarządzanie zasobami osobowymi Straży Granicznej na szczeblu terenowym w warunkach zagrożenia państwa. Rozprawa doktorska. Warsaw, 2009, pp. 55–56.

³¹ Zięba R, Instytucjonalizacja bezpieczeństwa europejskiego. Warsaw, 2001, p. 111.

³² Janusz M, Sawczak S, Zagrożenia XXI wieku. Wrocław, 2007, p. 18.

³³ Encyklopedia szkolna — Biologia. Warsaw, 1999, p. 1178.

of social life, knowledge gained in this way in identifying, preventing and combating threats is the one which effectively enables action for the benefit of security.³⁴

Conclusions

Man faces more and more opportunities, challenges, risks and threats. This in turn complicates the process of meeting one of its basic needs — security. Without security, man is deprived of the full basis (conditions) for a proper existence, including personal development, which at the same time has a direct, significant and, unfortunately, unconstructive impact on the general condition of societies, and even of the entire mankind.³⁵ The classification of the above mentioned phenomena has long been the responsibility of people from science and practice. Their discussion is ongoing and will continue, so it is impossible to close down their catalogues. Their classification is difficult and complex due to their subjectivity as well as their complexity. The circumstances presented above allow us to conclude that the concepts contained in the title of this paper are in a close cause-and-effect relationship, and therefore their separate consideration is based on science and erroneous practice. It is certain that these circumstances will lead to, and will continue to lead to, a thorough, systematic scientific exploration of the concepts in question.

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³⁴ Sztumski J, Brak bezpieczeństwa jako problem społeczny, [in:] Fehler W (Ed.), Bezpieczeństwo publiczne w przestrzeni miejskiej. Warsaw, 2010, p. 311.

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Streszczenie. W niniejszym artykule zaprezentowano zasadnicze zagadnienia dotyczące istotnych problemów z punktu widzenia badań bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego, tj. szans, wyzwań, ryzyka i zagrożeń. Podstawą takiego potraktowania zjawisk jest fakt częstego wspólnego ich występowania. Ważne wydaje się również to, że dziś percepcja i świadomość szans, wyzwań, ryzyka i zagrożeń jest na bardzo wysokim poziomie. Powyższy stan można osiągnąć dzięki powszechnej dostępności do informacji i wiedzy. Niebagatelnym źródłem tej ostatniej są badania naukowe, które dostarczają systematycznie doskonalonych i wysoce obiektywizowanych zbiorów wiarygodnych informacji o rzeczywistości wraz z metodami ich umiejętnego i skutecznego wykorzystania. Przedstawione rozważania autorzy sformułowali na podstawie przeglądu literatury polskiej i zagranicznej wykorzystywanej w badaniach bezpieczeństwa prowadzonych w ramach nauk o bezpieczeństwie. W artykule zaprezentowano podstawowe problemy identyfikacyjne oraz wzajemne relacje między szansą, wyzwaniem, ryzykiem i zagrożeniem. Przeprowadzona analiza wskazuje na brak jednolitości postrzegania pojęcia zagrożenie. Zupełnie inaczej przedstawia się sytuacja w zakresie określeń szans, wyzwań i ryzyka. Tu bowiem występuje wiele wspólnych obszarów odnoszących się w głównej mierze do źródeł i skutków. Zaprezentowane rozważania pozwoliły na wskazanie wzajemnych relacji poznawczych i użytecznych między przedmiotowymi zjawiskami. W konkluzji artykułu dokonano podsumowania prezentowanych rozważań.

Резюме. В настоящей статье представлены основные вопросы, касающиеся важных проблем с точки зрения исследования внутренней безопасности, т.е.: возможностей, вызовов, рисков и угроз. Основой для создания такого описания стало то, что они чаще всего встречаются вместе. Важным кажется также тот факт, что сегодня восприятие и понимание возможностей, вызовов, рисков и угроз на очень высоком уровне. Вышеуказанный уровень можно достигнуть благодаря широкому распространению информации и знаний. Значительным источником знаний являются научные исследования, которые предоставляют постоянно усовершенствованную и высоко объективизированную достоверную информацию о действительности вместе с методами умелого и эффективного ее использования. Представленные рассуждения были сформулированы после обзора польской и зарубежной литературы, используемой в исследованиях безопасности, проводимых в рамках наук о безопасности. В статье представлены основные проблемы идентификации и взаимоотношения между возможностями, вызовами, рисками и угрозами. Проведенный анализ указывает на отсутствие единообразия в понимании термина «угроза». Совершенно по-другому выглядит ситуация, если речь идет об определении возможностей, проблем и рисков, так как существует несколько общих сфер, связанных главным образом с источниками и последствиями. Представленные рассуждения позволили определить взаимные познавательные и утилитарные отношения между данными явлениями. В заключительной части статьи представлены итоги данных рассуждений.

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