

THE PHENOMENON OF TERRORISM AS A THREAT TO INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

The article presents terrorism as a threat to international security in the 21st century. The problem with defining terrorism has been present for many years and the available definitions are developed based on the main features of terrorism. The article emphasises that terrorism has evolved through the 20th and 21st centuries. Terrorist incidents have become more unpredictable in terms of place and time, and so did methods of carrying out the attacks. The further section describes the impact of terrorist attacks on public opinion and the perception of terrorism. The consequence of presenting terrorist incidents in the media is the widespread sense of threat of terrorism. Terrorists use the mass media to convey their ideologies and the medium that is most used by them is the Internet. Based on examples, the author demonstrates that terrorism has an influence on policies adapted by countries and is an economic threat. Finally, the article states that despite the lower frequency of incidents in Europe, terrorism is still a problem and subsequent terrorist incidents are only a matter of time. Fewer terrorist attacks in Europe do not mean that terrorist organisations are weaker.

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorism remains a difficult phenomenon to define. Terrorist attacks must be carried out in the media and cause panic in society. Thus, studies carried out immediately after terrorist attacks show that the sense of terrorist threat is growing and is felt not only by those who have experienced the attack. In the 21st century, in Western Europe, we are dealing primarily with Islamic terrorism. Recently, new forms of terrorism have emerged. In recent years, there has been a trend towards the use of white arms. Terrorist attacks continue to have a significant impact on international security. Terrorism continues to be a challenge and a threat to both internal and international security.

Nowadays, one can observe many threats that affect both national and international security. Such threats may include: armed conflicts, problems related to energy and environmental security, or asymmetric threats (e.g. organised crime, non-state use of weapons of mass destruction, cyberspace threats). In the 21st century there is no shortage of threats to both national and international security. Migration and one of the asymmetric threats, terrorism, are important examples of such threats:

Terrorism, in fact, is a complex and multivariate phenomenon. It appears in many different forms in many parts of the world in pursuit of many different objectives. It occurs in democracies, autocracies, and transitional states and in developed, underdeveloped, and developing economies. It is practiced by adherents of many religions and by adherents of none. What all terrorist groups have in common is that they are weaker than their enemies and that they are prepared deliberately to murder non-

combatants in furtherance of their objectives. The adoption of terrorism as a tactic to effect political change is, therefore, a deliberate choice.¹

1. PROBLEMS WITH DEFINING TERRORISM

The literature has repeatedly pointed out that terrorism is not a new phenomenon. However, to date, there are still problems with the definition thereof and the dispute concerning this has not been resolved.² One of the definitions is that proposed by the League of Nations in 1937, which considers terrorism to be “all criminal activities directed against states, whose aim is to create a state of terror in the minds of people, groups of people or society”.³ Another definition was adopted by the academic community; according to it, terrorism is “an ideologically motivated, planned and organised activity of individuals or groups resulting in the violation of the existing legal order, undertaken in order to force the state authorities and society to perform certain behaviours and services, often violating the interests of others. These activities are carried out with the utmost ruthlessness and by various means (physical violence, the use of weapons and explosives) in order to make them public and to deliberately create fear in society”.⁴

According to the Polish Criminal Code, “a crime of a terrorist nature is a prohibited act punishable by imprisonment, the maximum limit of which is at least 5 years, committed for the purpose of:

- 1) serious intimidation of many people,
- 2) forcing a public authority of the Republic of Poland or another state or an authority of an international organisation to undertake or abandon specific actions,
- 3) causing serious disturbances in the system or economy of the Republic of Poland, another state or international organisation – as well as the threat of committing such an act”.⁵

¹ L. Richardson, *The Roots of Terrorism: An Overview*, [in:] *The Roots of Terrorism*, L. Richardson (ed.), New York 2006, p. 2].

² See R. Borkowski, *Terroryzm ponowoczesny. Studium z antropologii polityki*, Toruń 2007, pp. 37–45.

³ *Definicje terroryzmu*, “UNIC Warsaw – Ośrodek Informacji ONZ w Warszawie”, <https://unic.un.org.pl/terroryzm/definicje.php>

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ustawa z dnia 6 czerwca 1997 r. Kodeks karny*, Dz.U. nr 88, poz. 553 ze zm. [The Act of June 6, 1997. Penal Code, Journal of Laws no. 88, item 553, as amended.

Further definitions of terrorism continue to be published to indicate particular characteristics of terrorism. Analysing the terrorist acts carried out, one can conclude that the main features of terrorism include:

- unpredictability in terms of place and time,
- unpredictability of the means and methods used to carry out the attack,
- the range, escalation and consequences of the phenomenon,
- danger to life and health of the bystanders,
- intention to intimidate civilians,
- contact of the perpetrators with the public using the media and showing the motives for their actions.

2. TERRORISM IN THE 20TH AND IN THE 21ST CENTURY – DIFFERENCES

It is worth mentioning that in the 20th century, terrorism mainly posed a threat to the internal security of these European countries in which terrorist organisations were located. The activities of these organizations were limited to the territory of the country or, in very few cases, escalated to the neighbouring country.⁶ These groups were characterized by varied pedigree and activity. The most famous terrorist organisations in Europe include ETA Homeland and Freedom from Spain, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) from Ireland, the Red Army Faction (RAF) from Germany, the Red Brigades (BR) from Italy. The activities of terrorist organisations located in Western Europe were relatively predictable. Many times, the groups sent information about the planned assassinations in advance, which resulted in a smaller number of victims and the scale of damage.

A few, if not the only, terrorist attacks organised by a non-European terrorist organisation on the territory of the Old Continent in the 20th century were those carried out by Black September. A famous assassination attempt took place at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich.⁷ Nevertheless, the victims were not Europeans but athletes from the Israeli Olympic team.

It was only in the 21st century that another form of terrorist acts in Europe and elsewhere emerged (exemplified by the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001), initiated primarily by non-European organisa-

See B. Sobolewska, *Terroryzm jako zagrożenie bezpieczeństwa państwa*, [in:] *W trosce o bezpieczeństwo jutra. Reminiscencje i zamierzenia*, Z. Ciekanowski, K. Górecka (eds), Poznań 2018, p. 156.

⁶ See M. Tomczyk, *Ewolucja terroryzmu. Sprawcy – metody – finanse*, Poznań 2010, pp. 103–114.

⁷ See *Encyclopedia terroryzmu*, A. Zasieczny (ed.), Warszawa 2004, pp. 301–302.

tions.⁸ Thus, the attacks became unpredictable, in terms of both place and time. Terrorist organisations stationed outside Europe (e.g. Al-Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State) have used and are using for their activities underground warriors who live on its territory or come there. Radicalisation, the spread of ideologies and the interpretation of religion have a significant impact on the recruitment of potential perpetrators. Such people are ready to act independently and consider their actions justified in the name of God and religion. This results in attacks carried out by individuals or small groups that identify themselves with a terrorist organisation.

An example of such an autonomous action was the attack carried out in March 2018 in France. The attacker was 25-year-old Radouane Lakdim, born in Morocco and living in Carcassonne. It has been confirmed that in the years 2016–2017 he was observed due to “radicalisation”. On Friday, 23 March 2018, the assassin stopped an Opel Corsa car at about 10 a.m. and then killed the driver and shot the passenger. Then he drove the vehicle to military barracks. That was where the gendarmes were shot at from the car. He then moved to a supermarket in Trebes, a few kilometres away. At about 11 a.m. he entered the shop claiming that he was a soldier of the so-called Islamic State and screaming “Allah Akbar”. He then opened fire, killing one supermarket employee and one client. The attacker took hostages. He demanded the release of Salah Abdeslam, who was suspected of having committed terrorist attacks in November 2015 in Paris. As a result of the storm on the supermarket, the assassin was killed. One hostage was also killed on the spot.⁹

It should be noted that individual actions make it difficult to prevent potential terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, it should also be kept in mind that in many cases, assassins have been observed due to radicalisation. This shows that the actions taken are not always effective, and that in case of people suspected of radicalisation it is not known when they may commit a terrorist act.

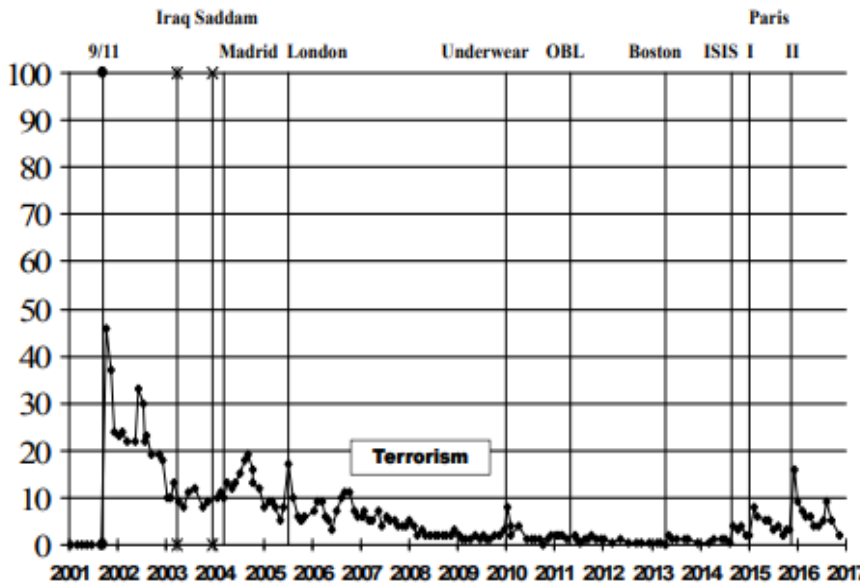
⁸ See M. Borucki, *Terroryzm. Zło naszych czasów*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 71–82; B. Hołyst, *Terroryzm*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 705–706, 708–709.

⁹ Chrisafis A., Willsher K., *French supermarket siege: gendarme dies after taking place of hostage*, “The Guardian”, 24 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/23/french-police-called-to-trebes-supermarket-amid-hostage-reports-shootings> (accessed: 28.04.2018).

3. IMPACT OF TERRORIST ATTACKS ON PUBLIC OPINION – USING MASS MEDIA BY TERRORISTS

The great number of attacks has led to the permanent presence of terrorist activities in the public consciousness. Unfortunately, this is no longer so surprising for the international community. However, the number of victims and that of the methods used to carry out the attacks are still high. This forces states and services responsible for security to introduce new forms of prevention of terrorist activities.

CHART 1. THE PERCEPTION OF TERRORISM AFTER TERRORIST ATTACKS AS THE GREATEST THREAT TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC



9/11: Terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; **Iraq:** Beginning of the Iraq War, March 20, 2003; **Saddam:** Capture of Saddam Hussein, December 13, 2003; **Madrid:** Terrorist bombings in Madrid, March 11, 2004; **London:** Terrorist bombings in London, July 7, 2005; **Underwear:** Underwear bomber, December 25, 2009; **OBL:** Killing of Osama bin Laden, May 2, 2011; **Boston:** Terrorist bombings at Boston Marathon, April 15, 2013; **ISIS:** First beheading of an Americans by ISIS, August 19, 2014; **Paris I:** Charlie Hebdo shootings, January 15, 2015; **Paris II:** Multiple shootings, November 13, 2015, followed by the San Bernardino shootings 20 days later.

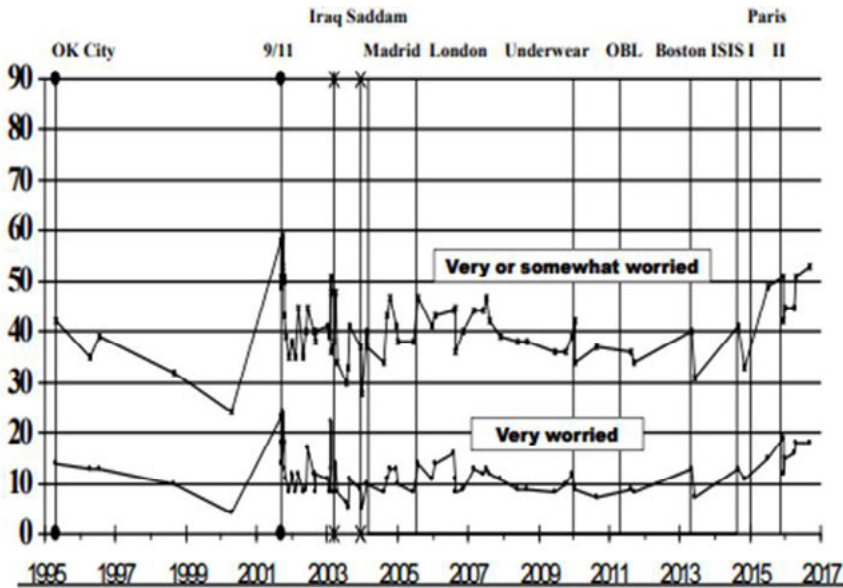
Source: Gallup, [qtd. in:] J. Mueller, M.G. Stewart, *Trends in Public Opinion on Terrorism*, "Department of Political Science. The Ohio State University", 22 March 2018, p. 2, <https://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/terroypolls.pdf> (accessed: 28.04.2018).

The graph above shows the generally accepted tendency that after every attack the public perceives terrorism as the greatest threat. This is in line with the assumption of the perpetrators of terrorist activities, whose aim is to be perceived by the public and create fear among citizens. The biggest surprise for society was the attack of September 11, 2001 in the United States and its consequences. Thus, the sense of threat of terrorism was the highest in comparison to the following years and was maintained by the United States together with anti-terrorist actions (including the anti-terrorist coalition). Terrorist acts in Europe, including Madrid in 2004, London in 2005 and Paris in 2016, confirm once again that the perception of terrorism as the greatest threat follows the attacks.

Terrorism affects the behaviour of individuals and society as a whole. A successful terrorist attack causes panic, chaos and insecurity.¹⁰ Importantly, it is not only the feeling of those who have experienced the attack, but also of the entire community, both local and international. Individuals identify themselves with the victims of the attack and fear that their own lives may also be at risk.

¹⁰ See K. Kiszka, *Terroryzm a ewolucja państwa demokratycznego*, [in:] *O terroryzmie jako zagrożeniu dla bezpieczeństwa społecznego*, A. Indraszczyk, M. Lipińska-Rzeszutek (eds), Warszawa 2017, pp. 80–81.

CHART 2. INCREASED SENSE OF BEING A VICTIM OF TERRORISM AFTER VARIOUS TERRORIST ATTACKS¹¹



OK City: Terrorist bombing in Oklahoma City, April 19, 1995; **9/11:** Terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; **Iraq:** Beginning of the Iraq War, March 20, 2003; **Saddam:** Capture of Saddam Hussein, December 13, 2003; **Madrid:** Terrorist bombings in Madrid, March 11, 2004; **London:** Terrorist bombings in London, July 7, 2005; **Underwear:** Underwear bomber, December 25, 2009; **OBL:** Killing of Osama bin Laden, May 2, 2011; **Boston:** Terrorist bombings at Boston Marathon, April 15, 2013; **ISIS:** First beheading of an Americans by ISIS, August 19, 2014; **Paris I:** Charlie Hebdo shootings, January 15, 2015; **Paris II:** Multiple shootings, November 13, 2015, followed by the San Bernardino shootings 20 days later.

Source: *USA Today*/Gallup and CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, [qtd. in:] J. Mueller, M.G. Stewart, *Trends in Public Opinion on Terrorism*, “Department of Political Science – The Ohio State University”, 22 March 2018, p. 3, <https://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/terrorpolls.pdf> (accessed: 28.04.2018).

¹¹ "How worried are you or someone in your family about becoming a victim of terrorism? Very worried, slightly worried, not too worried, or are you not worried at all?"; source: *USA Today*/Gallup and CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, [qtd. in:] J. Mueller, M.G. Stewart, *Trends in Public Opinion on Terrorism*, “Department of Political Science. The Ohio State University”, 22 March 2018, p. 2, <https://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/terrorpolls.pdf> (accessed: 28.04.2018).

Once again, it is visible that shortly after successful attacks the sense of threat of becoming a victim of a terrorist act increases. The negative emotions it evokes are very justified, as it is civilians that are the victims of terrorist attacks. Terrorism is a phenomenon that needs spectators, means of media communication, and spectacularity. Acts of terrorism without notification to the public become worthless. Television shows not only information on the fact that an attack has taken place and on its effects, but also reports on the act of terrorism step by step. The viewer may often get the impression that the action of the drama takes place before their eyes. Also in the printed press there is no selection of materials and drastic photos increase the circulation of the issue. An additional problem is the Internet, which is used by billions of people around the world. "The Internet, and the advent of the World Wide Web in particular, have significantly increased the opportunities for terrorists to secure publicity. This can take the form of historical information, profiles of leaders, manifestos, etc. But terrorists can also use the Internet as a tool of psychological warfare through spreading disinformation, delivering threats, and disseminating horrific images".¹² It is a place where executions are shown, ideologies are presented, information is provided and members of terrorist organisations are recruited.

In 2007, the author of the research *The Al-Qaeda-media nexus: the virtual network behind the global message*, Kimmage, obtained 450 pieces of material from various websites that constituted the message of Al-Qaeda. The media coverage on the Internet was divided into the following sections: firstly, a section on current events; secondly, information on jihadism; and thirdly, audio-visual material, poetry, and debates. It is important to note that the organization, for fear of the possibility of losing control and of internal conflicts, banned the creation and posting of materials by supporters or visitors to the site.¹³

Weimann draws attention to the use of the Internet, including its use by terrorist groups, to promote various ideas. Above all, it is an easy tool that enables global communication with almost no regulation or control. Additionally, when using the Internet, one deals with anonymous communication, fast information flow and small financial outlays to prepare and

¹² M. Conway, *Terrorism and the Internet: New Media – New Threat?*, "Parliamentary Affairs", 2006, vol. 59, issue 2, DOI 10.1093/pa/gsl009, p. 286.

¹³ T. Goban-Klas, *Media i terroryści. Czy zastraszą nas na śmierć?*, Kraków 2009, p. 208; D. Kimmage, *The Al-Qaeda-media nexus: the virtual network behind the global message*, Washington, D.C. 2008.

maintain websites. It should also be noted that the message reaches the recipient in various forms: text, graphics, music and film.¹⁴

FIGURE 1. OBJECTIVES OF ELECTRONIC JIHADISM



Source: Own calculations based on: B. Bolechów, *“Baza” w sieci. Wykorzystanie Internetu przez Al-Kaidę i jej zwolenników*, [“Base” in the Internet. Usage of the Internet by Al-Qaida and its supporters], [in:] *Terroryzm w medialnym obrazie świata [Terrorism in the media image of the world]*, K. Liedel, S. Mock (eds), Warszawa 2010, p. 150; see also A. Wejkszner, *Globalna sieć Al-Kaidy. Nowe Państwo Islamskie?*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 168-175.

4. IMPACT OF TERRORIST ATTACKS ON POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

The perpetrators of terrorist attacks also want to influence the policy of a given country and force concessions to terrorist organisations. In the 20th century, the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, the head of the Christian Democracy Party by the Red Brigades, was an example of such action. In March 1978, he was abducted from his car after the assassination of five bodyguards. Five weeks after the kidnapping, the party demanded the release of the imprisoned members of the organisation. However, after 55 days in the hands of the kidnapers, Aldo Moro was found dead in the trunk of a car.¹⁵ In the 21st century, the terrorist attack in Madrid in 2004 and the forced withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq can serve as an example.¹⁶

Terrorism is also an economic threat. An example is the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001. According to estimates, the economic

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 202–203.

¹⁵ V. Grotowicz, *Terroryzm w Europie Zachodniej. W imię narodu i lepszej sprawy*, Warszawa – Wrocław 2000, pp. 185–186.

¹⁶ See G. Tremlett, *Furious voters oust Spanish government*, “The Guardian”, 15 March 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/mar/15/spain.gilestremlett> (accessed: 28.04.2018).

costs amounted to USD 27.2 billion.¹⁷ The attack on the oil tanker *Limburg* in October 2002 off the coast of Yemen can serve as another instance. The lost cargo in the form of barrels of oil and the destruction of the unit was estimated at USD 45 million. Yemen also suffered losses due to the absence of port charges. Due to the possibility of a terrorist threat, individuals have begun to bypass dangerous ports, including Yemen. It is estimated that the Yemen port suffered losses of 3.8 million dollars in a month. The destruction of the sea shores and the consequent huge losses in fishing can also be added to the costs.¹⁸ The economic impact of terrorism in 2017 was USD 52 billion.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

The threat of international terrorism is still present. The movement of people, not sufficiently controlled, and exacerbated by the migration crisis, encourages terrorists to move to Europe. In addition, radicalisation is taking place in the Old Continent, leading to an increase in the activities of individuals identified with the ideologies of terrorist organisations. This arouses aversion, above all towards the Muslim community of indigenous citizens, who fear for their own safety. The question also arises: is multi-cultural society indeed able to assimilate and form a single whole?

States and international organisations take numerous measures to prevent and combat terrorism at various levels. Both in the 20th and in the 21st century, a number of measures were taken to protect citizens from potential terrorist attacks. According to Petter Nesser, despite the reduction of terrorist acts carried out by Jihadists in 2018 in comparison to previous years, it is difficult to speak of a victory over terrorism.²⁰ Acts inspired

¹⁷ "...USD 14 billion for the private sector, USD 1.5 billion for state and local government enterprises, USD 0.7 billion for the federal government and USD 11 billion for rescue and cleaning services", A. Tyszkiewicz, *Sanckje ekonomiczne jako instrument przeciwdziałania międzynarodowemu terroryzmowi*, Warszawa 2008, p. 83

¹⁸ K. Kubiak, *Przemoc na oceanach. Współczesne piractwo i terroryzm morski*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 91–92.

¹⁹ Z. Kuźniar, M. Olesiuk-Okomska, *Współczesny terroryzm a bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe. Wybrane aspekty*, [in:] *Kultura bezpieczeństwa w teorii i praktyce*, J. Gierszewski, M. Kubiak (eds), Toruń 2019, pp. 222.

²⁰ See *Europie daleko do zwycięstwa w wojnie z terroryzmem* [*Europe is far from winning the war on terror*], M. Broniatowski (ed.), "Onet Wiadomości", 8 December 2018, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/europie-daleko-do-zwyciestwa-w-wojnie-z-terroryzmem/xw6186g> (accessed: 8.12.2018).

by the so-called Islamic State and carried out on the territory of Europe continue to be a problem. It cannot be said that reducing the frequency of attacks is tantamount to the weakening of terrorist organisations. Moreover, the reduction in the number of acts carried out in Europe is also due to the fact that in many cases counter-terrorism services have prevented potential attacks. The assumption that terrorist networks will develop their activities through the admission of new members, mainly from the Middle East, should be maintained. In addition, it has been estimated that 100.000 extremists are living in Western Europe.²¹ The problem of international terrorism, therefore, continues to be a topical issue affecting international security.

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²¹ *Ibidem*.

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