

FROM THE EDITOR

THE SPIRIT OF TERRORISM – ITS CONTEMPORARY EVOLUTION AND ESCALATION

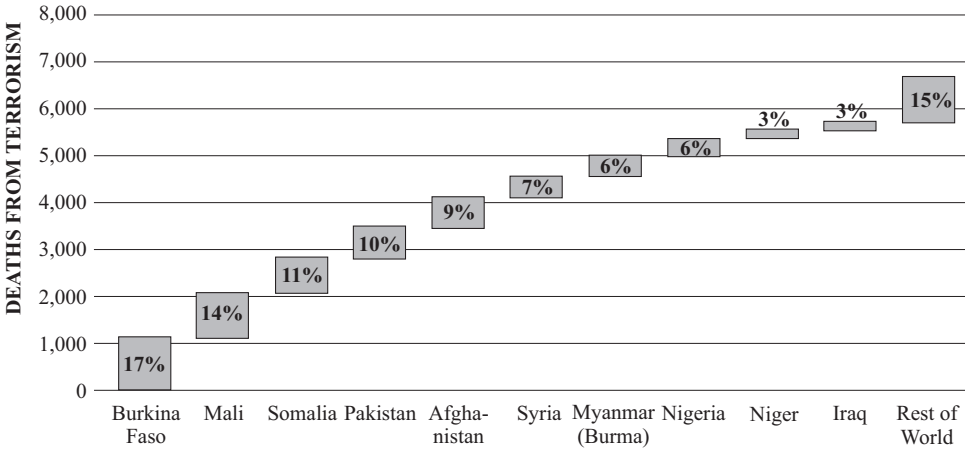
Although the book *The Spirit of Terrorism* by the French sociologist and cultural philosopher Jean Baudrillard was published over twenty years ago, his words remain relevant, “Terrorism, like viruses, is everywhere. There is a global perfusion of terrorism...” (Baudrillard, 2014). The contemporary ‘spirit of terrorism’, including its evolution and escalation, is not only about terrorist attacks in various parts of the world, or the diverse motivation of the perpetrators, but also about the highly varied tactics and strategies of the terrorists.

For the purpose of this study, terrorism is assumed to be a form of political and social violence (or the threat of its use) that is variously motivated and performed in violation of the legal order by individuals or groups of individuals, resulting in physical, psychological, material and other damages, which is carried out using a variety of means and methods of action. This violence is aimed at direct or indirect targets, in order for the perpetrator(s) to achieve their ultimate goal. The fundamental hypothesis of the text is that the decrease in the number of terrorist attacks in the world in 2022 does not necessarily imply a permanent trend, and it may change quickly in the future. Global terrorism may escalate due to, among other things, intensified state terrorism (inspired, for example, by Russia or Iran), the resurgence of some Islamist networks and their influence (including ISIS or al-Qaeda), a significant increase in the activity of other radical currents (such as extreme right-, or left-wing terrorism), and the increasing use of readily available means (e.g., a knife or hammer) or new technological developments, including terrorist cyberattacks.

Today, the evolution and escalation of ‘the spirit of terrorism’ is well illustrated by some of the conclusions of the latest edition of the *Global Terrorism Index 2023. Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (GTI, 2023) and Europol’s study – *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023* (TE-SAT, 2023). According to the GTI 2023 report, for the first time in five years, 2022 saw a significant increase (26 per cent up) in the number of victims in relation to the number of attacks. This means that the attacks carried out proved to be more dangerous and bloody. This occurred despite a drop in the total number of victims of terrorism (nine per cent down). However, this decrease was mainly due to the change in the situation in Afghanistan, and the calculation system adopted. This is because the GTI 2023 does not include acts of terrorism inspired or carried out by state actors, and the Taliban have once again become a state actor having taken power in 2021 (they first ruled Afghanistan in 1996–2001). However, other terrorist formations affiliated with, for example, ISIS or al-Qaeda, operate in Afghanistan, which is why it continues to be among the global leaders of terrorism.

In the remaining parts of the world, deaths from terrorism increased by four per cent. This is especially true for some countries in Africa, Asia or the Middle East, and shows that terrorism continues to have a global dimension, as evidenced by the fact that in 2022 attacks occurred in as many as 42 countries (compared to 43 in 2020).

Figure 1. Ten countries accounting for about 85 per cent of all global terrorism victims, 2022



Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2023, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney 2023.

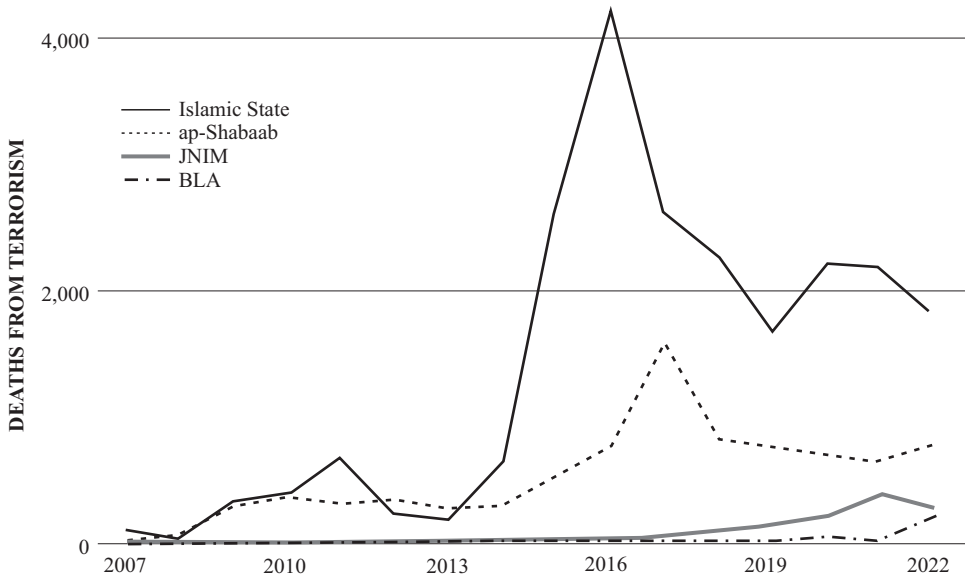
The aforementioned ‘spirit of terrorism’ and the accompanying war on terror can be considered not only in military, political, economic and social terms, but also in its legal, ethical, historical, cultural and other dimensions. A particularly relevant point of reference is, for example, the twentieth anniversary of the attacks of September 11, 2001, or the decision to withdraw NATO forces from Afghanistan, and the Taliban rapidly taking power in its wake. Experts from the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs (a research center at Brown University in Providence) estimated that, between the attacks on the World Trade Center towers in September 2001 and August 2021 – when the Taliban announced that they had seized power in Afghanistan – the cost of the war on terrorism exceeded \$6.4 trillion (in Afghanistan alone, it amounted to \$2.26 trillion). In addition, the war has resulted in over 800,000 fatalities, including around 335,000 civilians, and more than 37 million people have had to flee their places of residence. This has mainly affected Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Somalia. In addition to the threat of terrorism, human rights have been violated and civil liberties curtailed in those countries, which is still the case.

The GTI 2023 study analyzes the situation in 163 countries, accounting for 99.7 per cent of the world’s population. The collected data shows that more than 66,000 terrorist incidents were recorded globally between 2007 and 2022. In 2022, the number of attacks fell by as much as 28 per cent – from 5,463 in 2021 to 3,955. This was primarily due to a lower level of terrorism in Afghanistan and selected Middle Eastern countries, among others.

In 2022, the world’s deadliest terrorist organizations were Islamic State (ISIS) and its affiliates, such as Islamic State – Khorasan Province, Islamic State – Sinai

Province, and Islamic State West Africa, among others. ISIS and its affiliated chapters have remained the world’s deadliest terrorist formation for eight years. In total, they carried out attacks in as many as 21 countries in 2022. Other highly dangerous groups include, most notably, al-Shabaab (AS), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik- e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and Boko Haram (BH).

Figure 2. The four deadliest terrorist organizations, 2007–2022



Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2023, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney 2023.

According to the report’s authors, the highest average terrorist threat for the entire region is currently in South Asia. In 2022, 1,354 deaths from terrorism were recorded there. Although this was a decrease of 30 per cent compared to the previous year, the situation in this part of the world remains very dangerous. This is especially true for Afghanistan (first in the global terrorist threat ranking) and Pakistan, which ranks sixth. In the latter case, the number of fatalities increased by as much as 120 per cent – from 292 in 2021 to 643 a year later. The former Burma (now Myanmar) was ranked 9th by the GTI. Africa remains another high-risk region (Burkina Faso – second in the ranking, Somalia – third, Mali – fourth, Nigeria – eighth, and Niger – tenth), especially sub-Saharan Africa, which saw the largest increase in terrorism fatalities. They amounted to 4,023, accounting for 60 per cent of the global total. The top ten of countries most threatened by terrorism is completed by two countries from the Middle East (Syria – fifth, and Iraq – seventh).

Among European countries, Turkey was ranked highest, in 23rd, followed by Greece in 31st, France in 34th, and Germany in 35th place (where the number of attacks was the lowest since 2015). The following countries were also included in the

Figure 3. Ten countries with the highest terrorist threat, 2011–2022

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Afghanistan	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	1
Burkina Faso	113	113	111	108	52	30	21	15	7	6	4	2
Somalia	5	7	7	7	8	5	3	3	3	3	3	3
Mali	41	23	19	21	16	13	10	9	8	7	7	4
Syria	20	4	4	5	6	7	7	8	6	5	6	5
Pakistan	2	2	2	2	4	4	5	5	5	8	10	6
Iraq	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	7
Nigeria	8	5	5	3	2	2	4	4	4	4	6	8
Myanmar	17	21	24	29	39	42	40	42	23	24	9	9
Niger	49	57	44	34	20	19	18	19	14	12	8	10

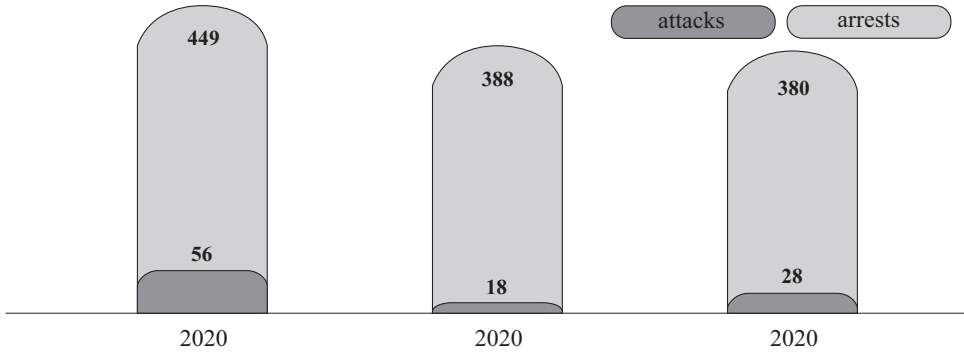
Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2023, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney 2023.

top 50: Great Britain – 42nd, Russia – 45th, and Norway – 49th. Among countries from Central and Eastern Europe (in addition to Russia), Slovakia was the highest – 58th, followed by Ukraine – 73rd, Romania – 84th, and Lithuania – 86th. Poland, ranked joint 93rd with a large group of other countries where the threat index was zero (the same as last year). Among countries of the broadly defined West (which includes, according to the IEP methodology: Western Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand), the number of attacks has consistently been falling since 2017. In 2022, there were 40 attacks, compared to 55 incidents one year earlier. The largest number of attacks was recorded in the United States – with eight. In contrast, the number of deaths from terrorism in this part of the world more than doubled last year, increasing from nine deaths in 2021 to 19 one year later, with 11 cases in the United States in 2022.

As concerns the European Union, according to the latest *Europol TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023*, the terrorist threat has been on the rise. The report was prepared on the basis of data provided by member states for 2022 and the opinion of experts from the European Counter Terrorism Center (ECTC). The report provides information on several key categories, such as completed, failed and foiled attacks, the number of people arrested due to terrorist activities, as well as ongoing legal proceedings. Various forms of terrorism are included, such as jihadist, extreme right, left and anarchist, ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism.

The data in the report shows that there were 28 terrorist attacks in 2022, including 16 completed, three failed, and nine foiled attacks. Compared to 2021 with 18 attacks, this represents an escalation of about 50 per cent. In 2022, terrorist attacks in the EU occurred in seven member states (12 in Italy, six in France, four in Greece, three in Belgium, and one in Germany, Slovakia and Spain each). In 2021, eight countries were attacked (with five attacks in France, three in Germany, two in Sweden, and one in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, and Spain each). In 2020, the attacks occurred in six countries (excluding the UK due to Brexit): 24 in Italy, 15 in France, nine in Spain, two in Belgium and one in Austria. Their geographical location was similar in some cases, e.g. in 2020–2022 the same four countries were attacked (Belgium, France, Germany, and Spain).

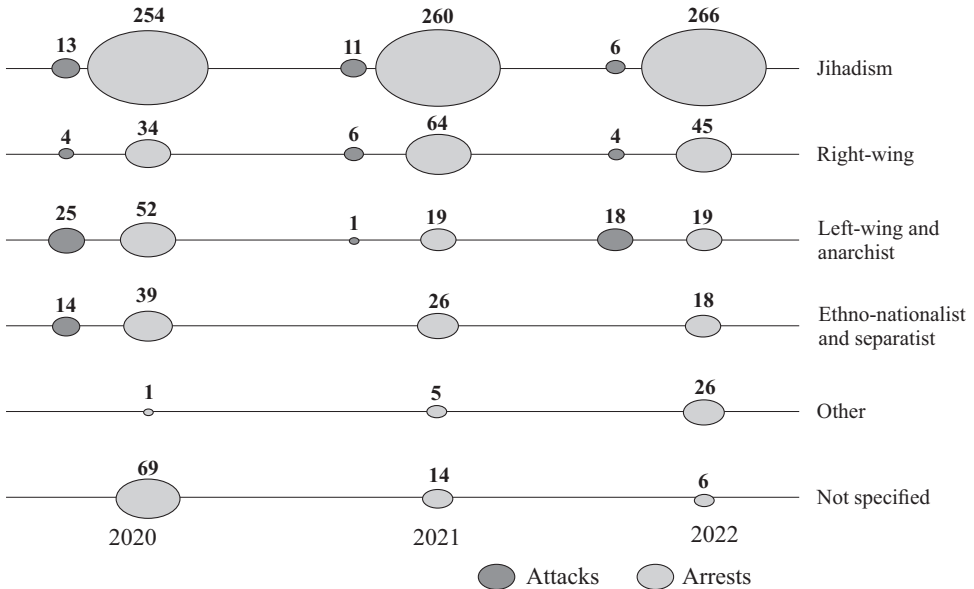
Figure 4. Terrorist attacks and people arrested for terrorism in the European Union, 2020–2022



Source: TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023, Luxembourg 2023.

In 2022, terrorism in the EU was mainly motivated by far-left and anarchist (18 attacks), jihadist (6) and far-right (4) attitudes. Jihadist attacks occurred in France (4) and Belgium (2). Extreme right ones took place in three countries: France (2), Germany (1) and Slovakia (1), while extreme left and anarchist attacks were reported in Italy (12), Greece (4), Belgium and Spain (1 each). Together, they led to four fatalities, including two resulting from Islamist actions and two attributed to far-right extremists. The deadly terrorist attacks reported in 2022 were carried out using bladed weapons and strangulation (by jihadist terrorists), and firearms (by far-right terrorists).

Figure 5. Terrorist attacks and persons arrested for terrorism in the European Union by ideological profile of perpetrators, 2020–2022



Source: TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023, Luxembourg 2023.

In 2019–2021, 1,560 people were detained in EU member states on suspicion of terrorism-related crimes. In 2022, 380 such cases were recorded (388 in 2021). Most of them (266) involved jihadist terrorism and took place primarily in France (93), Spain (46), Germany (30), and Belgium (22). The terrorist offenses considered were mainly related to membership in a terrorist group, planning or preparing an attack, financing terrorism, recruiting for or encouraging participation in terrorist acts.

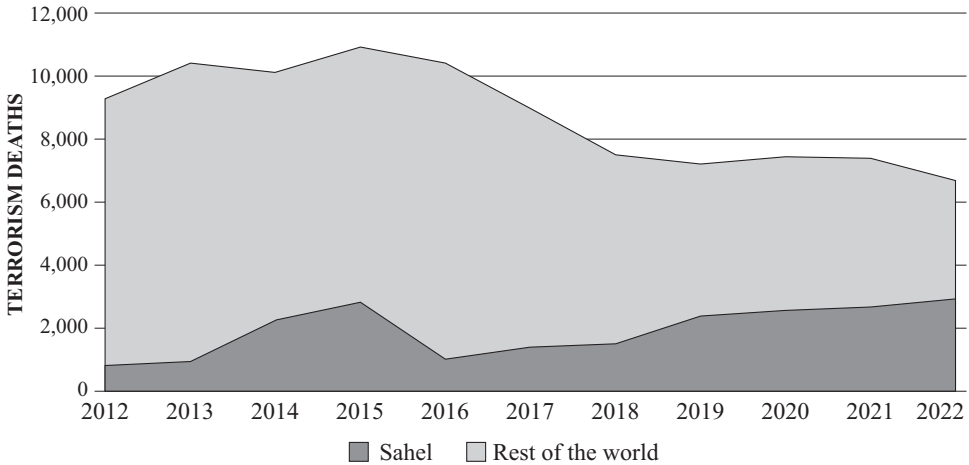
The growing terrorist threat in selected European Union member states could also be observed at the end of 2023, as evidenced by three events. The first situation occurred on October 13 in France, when a 20-year-old Chechen, a citizen of Russia, carried out an attack at a school in Arras. A teacher was fatally stabbed, and two other people were wounded. The French government confirmed that this terrorist act was related to Israel's war against Hamas and the perpetrator's Islamist views. The attacker was known for his radical views. The second spectacular incident occurred on October 16, 2023, when a Tunisian shot dead two Swedish football fans in Brussels and wounded a third one. The perpetrator was in Belgium illegally. In 2011, he arrived by boat on the Italian island of Lampedusa. Italian services identified him as radicalized, since he had chosen to join the jihadists and gone to the front to fight in the fundamentalist ranks. Italian intelligence observed him. He then moved to Belgium. In 2019, he applied for asylum, but his request was rejected. After the assassination, the attacker announced on social media that he was an ISIS member. He fled the scene of the killing, but police shot him dead the next day after a nighttime chase. His main motivation was Quran burning in Sweden. A third example is the December 2 terrorist incident in Paris, when a knife attack occurred near the Eiffel Tower. First, the suspect attacked a pair of foreign tourists. A German tourist was stabbed to death. The attacker fled to attack more people with a hammer, injuring two persons. Earlier, the perpetrator had posted a video in which he referred to the current political situation and the murders of Muslims in Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories. He further expressed his anger over Israel's war with Hamas and accused France of being an 'accomplice' to Israel. The 26-year-old attacker (of Iranian descent but born in France) had a previous record as a radical Islamist. In 2016, he was sentenced to five years in prison for planning an attack, of which he served four years.

The above-mentioned attacks in France and Belgium in 2023, present an adequate picture of the specific nature of contemporary terrorism in the EU. First – they indicate that the current terrorist threat is primarily Islamist and is strongly linked to the activities and views propagated by ISIS. Secondly, it is significantly influenced by the international situation; mainly with regard to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas or Quran burning in Sweden. Third, it is important that the perpetrators frequently use commonly available weapons such as knives or hammers.

The Sahel region is another example of escalating terrorism. The number of deaths from terrorism increased by seven per cent there, exceeding that in South Asia. What is more, the Sahel suffers from the largest number of deaths from terrorism, accounting for 43 per cent of the global rate. It is also facing rapidly advancing climate and social changes. These are systemic challenges such as significant food and water shortages, ineffective governance, rampant crime, the world's fastest demographic growth, and

numerous coups d'état. All of these escalate radical attitudes and views in various ways, also promoting terrorism.

Figure 6. Victims of terrorism in the Sahel and the rest of the world, 2007–2022



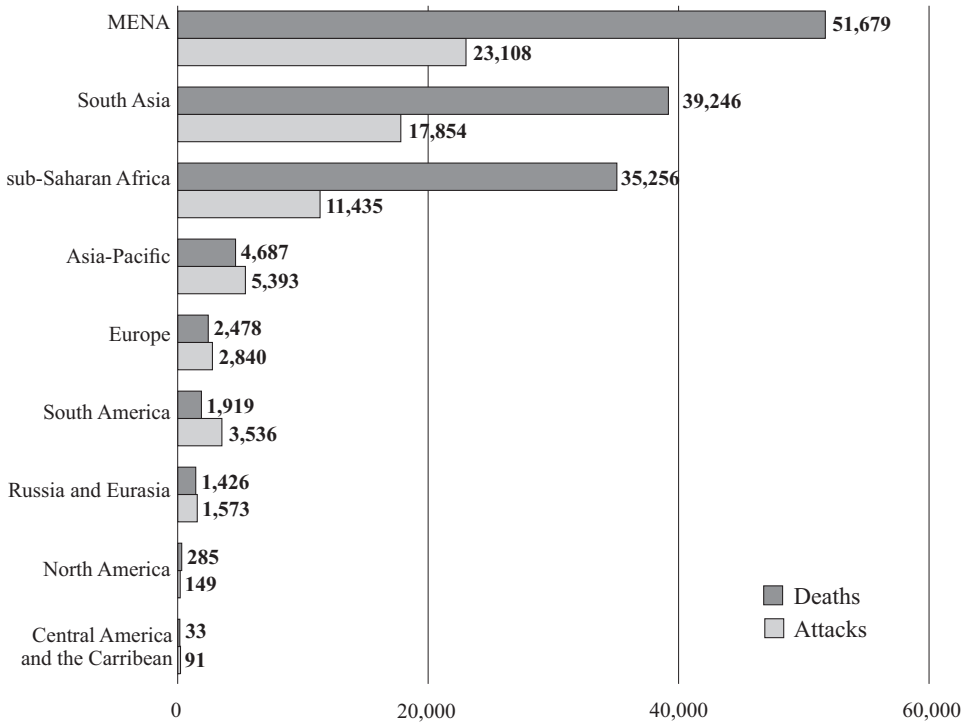
Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2023, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney 2023.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) witnessed the opposite trend, where the terrorist threat declined in 2022, and the region’s share of the total number of deaths from terrorism decreased from 57 per cent in 2016 to less than 12 per cent in 2022. Deaths caused by various forms of terrorism in this part of the world dropped from 791 in 2022, a drop of 32 per cent and the lowest number since 2013. The number of suicide bombings and their victims also fell significantly from 1,947 fatalities in 2016 to only eight in 2022. Over a longer time frame (2007–2022), however, the MENA region was at the top in terms of both the number of terrorist attacks and their victims.

The global decline in terrorist attacks in 2022 indicated in GTI 2023, however, does not necessarily imply a permanent trend, and it may change quickly in the future. Some forms of terrorism are rising rapidly, such as far-right terrorism (which escalated by 320 per cent globally over the past five years). ISIS or al-Qaeda chapters operating in various parts of the globe are posing an increasingly serious challenge. Cyberterrorism is also growing. Terrorism becomes extremely dangerous when the state uses terrorist methods (e.g., North Korea or Russia) or when state structures cooperate with terrorist formations (e.g., Iran).

‘The spirit of terrorism’ continues to evolve all the time in terms of the tactics and strategies of terrorists. Among other things, this means that terrorists use increasingly modern and sophisticated technologies. Also other methods of terrorist operations continue to be very dangerous, ranging from attacks with the simplest devices such as knives or bombs, through kidnapping or attacks in cyberspace, to the threat of using weapons of mass destruction such as bioterrorism, among others. The latter has intensified especially in the context of the recent pandemic. COVID-19 has altered the tactics and strategy of terrorist groups. For example, it has disrupted the move-

Figure 7. Terrorist attacks and their victims by world region, 2007–2022



Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2023, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney 2023.

ment of terrorists, and in many cases changed their logistics, recruitment, training, and fundraising. It resulted in a significant portion of their activity being moved into cyberspace. It is in cyberspace that the process of radicalization, recruitment, hate speech and manipulation has further intensified. The pandemic has also significantly limited the resources, capabilities or determination of the various services fighting terrorists. It had little effect on the escalation of the terrorist threat, though.

The contemporary ‘spirit of terrorism’ can be studied and analyzed in various ways, for example in a three-pronged approach, encompassing the vertical, horizontal and transcendental dimensions. The vertical dimension is related to terrorists using very different and ever new elements of tactics and strategy. The horizontal dimension refers to the potential to attack a variety of targets in different parts of the world or continent. The transcendental dimension addresses the diverse ideological motivations of terrorists. This cannot be identified only with the Islamist, separatist, far-right or left-wing threats. It also takes other forms, linked, for example, to the anti-globalization movement, the environmental movement, the pro- or anti-abortion movement, single issue terrorism, and so on.

The causes of modern terrorism result from a number of factors. They need to be considered comprehensively as indicated, among others, by experts from the National Research Council of the National Academies in Washington, who argue that analyz-

ing individual sources of terrorism independently from one another is a mistake. This is because of the multiplicity and diversity of these sources, but also of the complex connections between them. According to the experts, two levels of the causes of terrorism can be distinguished. The first level addresses the historical, social, political, and cultural conditions providing a favorable environment for terrorism and its escalation. The second level concerns the direct determinants, such as the motivation of individual perpetrators, or additional factors that stimulate terrorist activity.

Another way of looking at this issue is to identify the three main categories of causes of modern terrorism, referred to as the triad of terrorist motivation. The first category addresses various political, ethnic, or religious ideas or ideologies, for example, which the terrorists identify with. The sources of terrorism can be found not only in various, often very extreme and destructive ideas or ideologies and their promotion, but also in their confrontational nature. In this context, terrorism is regarded as a very radical reflection of certain beliefs, attitudes or creeds. It also results from the conflict of political, religious, ethnic, or other interests, or attempts to achieve certain goals ‘at any cost’, regardless of human and material loss. This is the situation we are currently facing, for example, with regard to Hamas, Hezbollah, ISIS or al-Qaeda. Various studies and analyses show that the role of religion in causing terrorism is gradually increasing. For example, as recently as the 1980s, only a small proportion of all terrorist attacks in the world had a religious aspect. As time went by, religious motivation quickly exceeded 50 per cent globally. At present, it depends on the region, ranging from very high in the Middle East and Asia, to low in Latin America, for example. Contrary to popular opinion, it is not currently high in the European Union. According to a recent Europol report, Islamist-motivated attacks accounted for only six of the 28 attacks completed, failed or foiled in the EU in 2022 (however, in 2021 it accounted for the majority of attacks – 11 of 18). Currently, the most dangerous form of religiously motivated terrorism is Islamic terrorism (terrorism by Islamic fundamentalists). However, it should be emphasized that terrorism or fundamentalism can occur within any religious community, including Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and so on. By no means, therefore, should Islam be conflated with Islamic terrorism.

The second group of causes are economic and social factors. They concern diverse and large-scale economic and social problems, including, for example, poverty, illiteracy, or huge disparities between individuals, states or regions. These problems can trigger or intensify various social attitudes, such as discontent, frustration, protest, rebellion, hostility, and so on, or radical actions, including terrorism. This does not mean, of course, that poverty or huge social disparities always generate terrorism, but they can inspire various extreme behaviors, including terrorism. This is referred to as fuel for terrorism. Another aspect of this is terrorists or their collaborators accumulating and using significant financial resources. These can come from a wide variety of sources, such as kidnapping for ransom, assault, racketeering, theft, internet crimes, production and trafficking of drugs, weapons, raw materials, artwork or people, as well as smuggling, donations, contributions and so on. This allows some of the most dynamic and creative terrorist organizations to amass enormous financial resources, as evidenced by ISIS or al-Qaeda in the past, and now by Hamas or Hezbollah.

The third category includes the psychological aspects of various negative attitudes, ranging from aggression to fear, to hostility or desire for revenge. Aggravated prejudice, hatred, sense of threat, humiliation or harm in many cases make it easier to manipulate a person and often make them more inclined to perform extreme actions (e.g., suicide bombers). Some part of the community from which the attacker comes often deems such behavior a heroic act. They believe that the attacker gains ‘forgiveness of all previous sins’ or the ‘glory of the martyr’, and their family enjoys the appropriate praise and respect. The above issues encompass also mental disorders, chauvinism, xenophobia, prejudice and stereotypes. All of these, directly or indirectly, contribute to the emergence or exacerbation of intolerance, hostility, violence or terror. The above three categories of causes dovetail, interacting and creating a mechanism named the triad of terrorist motivation.

Terrorist attacks are committed around the world on a daily basis. Their number varies depending on the methodology adopted. For example, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism – Global Terrorism Database (START, 2023) estimates that more than 132,000 terrorist incidents were recorded between 2000 and 2020. We are therefore faced with a timeless and global challenge, which continues to evolve to a greater or smaller extent. This evolution concerns various aspects, including, among other things, the tactics or strategies of terrorists, ranging from ancient assassins to contemporary cyber-terrorists or ‘lone wolves’. Among other things, this means terrorists using increasingly modern and sophisticated technologies. One possible example of this is the use of artificial intelligence controlling armed robots, vehicles or drones to carry out attacks. Drones are of particular interest, which were used in the past by various terrorist organizations (e.g. Hamas, ISIS and Hezbollah). It should be noted that in 2017, ISIS established a specialist group – Mujahidin Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, and that in 2019, a spectacular attack on Russian military bases in Syria was carried out using a swarm of drones. The advantages for terrorists of using drones include their relatively low cost, the ease of manufacturing or acquiring the equipment, the ability to operate over long distances, the effect of surprise or distraction, or creating an atmosphere of fear. The threat of acquiring and using artificial intelligence to carry out terrorist attacks is particularly serious in the case of state terrorism. A second example of high-tech solutions being used by terrorists is 3D printing, for example, to produce weapons or other dangerous devices such as knives, telescopic batons, and so on. Technological advances also make it possible to 3D print in metal, as evidenced by the production of a Colt pistol replica in 2013, which successfully fired some 600 rounds. Another threat is related to deep fakes being used, for example, to manipulate content, blackmail various individuals, including those holding important public positions, or to impersonate them in order to extort money, information and the like. Another tool, increasingly popular among terrorists, is cryptocurrencies, which are used to fund their activities. This is evidenced by the case of the al-Nasr Brigades – Liwa al-Tawhid organization encouraging donations in cryptocurrencies via Telegram and Facebook. The next, increasingly likely threat is the risk of autonomous vehicles being used in terrorist attacks, for example, by driving them into a crowd. There is also the possibility of terrorists hacking vehicles or other devices, as some experts point out.

All of this might result not only in an increased number of attacks or their victims, but also in the terrorist acts being carried out anywhere in the world, meaning a significant reduction in both the level and sense of security. Advanced technologies can be used by terrorists both offensively – to carry out attacks, and defensively – as a response to similar actions taken by the services that combat them. This becomes particularly dangerous when the state uses terrorist methods (e.g. North Korea or Russia), or when state structures cooperate with terrorist formations (such as Hamas or Hezbollah).

In order to effectively prevent and combat ‘the spirit of terrorism’ the activities and cooperation between individual states and their services need to intensify. They should be concerned with such areas as the financing of terrorism, combating its causes, relations between terrorists and their supporting environment, socio-psychological profiling of potential or actual perpetrators of attacks, terrorists using technological innovations, cyberspace or the possibility of various types of viruses or bacteria being used. All this addresses new areas of knowledge that should be explored by the joint efforts of states and their various specialized institutions.

Effective counterterrorism requires defensive and offensive actions to be combined, which is addressed by the pentagonal model of eliminating terrorism. Its first component is prevention, understood primarily as a set of initiatives aimed at discouraging individuals or groups from advocating any form of terrorist activity. The second component is combating, which entails, among other things, identification (identifying the terrorist or terrorist group – its headcount, connections, and so on), neutralizing and penalizing the actual or potential perpetrator(s) of the attack, as well as preventing the re-creation of the shattered terrorist structure, its communication systems, sources of funding, and so on. Another component includes protection aimed at securing individuals and all infrastructure threatened by attacks as fully and effectively as possible. This is a very complex task that needs to be carried out continuously, taking into account the ever-emerging new threats. This not only increases the costs incurred, but also makes the operation of security services more difficult. Response is the next aspect, which includes a variety of activities related to minimizing and eliminating the consequences of a possible terrorist attack as quickly as possible. Forecasting is the last dimension. It should include, among other things, the analysis of actual as well as potential targets, methods of operation, and profiles of perpetrators. Forecasting brings together all the four elements presented earlier and takes into account their relationships. The implementation of this model in practice is far from easy. It is hampered not only by the scale of the terrorist threat, but above all by its ever-changing nature. We are facing here a global and timeless threat, significantly affecting both domestic and international security.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized once again that we can speak not only of the continuous presence of ‘the spirit of terrorism’, but also of its evolution and escalation, including the tactics and strategies of terrorists. It means, for example, terrorists using increasingly modern and sophisticated technologies as exemplified by the use of artificial intelligence, drones, 3D printing or deep fakes, among other things, to carry out attacks. Other methods of operation that have long been used, including knives, bombs and kidnapping, also remain very dangerous.

Terrorism continues to be among the most important challenges and threats to modern security, according to the *Global Terrorism Index 2023*. More than 66,000 terrorist incidents were reported globally between 2007 and 2022. In 2022, the number of attacks dropped by as much as 28 per cent from 5,463 in 2021 to 3,955 in 2022. This was primarily due to a decrease in the level of terrorism in Afghanistan and selected Middle Eastern countries, among others. The global decline in terrorist attacks in 2022 indicated in GTI 2023, however, does not necessarily imply a permanent trend, and it may change quickly in the future. Global terrorism may escalate due to, among other things, intensified state terrorism (inspired, for example, by Russia or Iran), the resurgence of some Islamist networks and their influence (including ISIS or al-Qaeda), a significant increase in the activity of other radical currents (such as far-right or left-wing terrorism), and terrorists increasingly using readily available means (such as knives) or new technological solutions, including cyberattacks. Importantly, in 2022, for the first time in five years, a significant increase in the number of victims of terrorism relative to the number of attacks was reported (26 per cent). This means that the attacks carried out turned out to be bloodier than in the past, which is a particularly important and very destructive feature of today's 'spirit of terrorism' and its evolution and escalation.

The latest, 16th issue of *Strategic Review* includes four main thematic blocks. The first one, entitled **International Security**, contains texts on various aspects of contemporary international security considered in political, military, economic and criminal dimensions with a particular focus on key flashpoints such as Ukraine or Iran. This section features the following texts: *Iran's Anti-Western Rhetoric as a Sign of Potential Threat to the International Community*; *Iran's Denuclearization and the Legality of Nuclear Weapons Use Under International Law*; *The United States and Ukraine's Aspirations for NATO Membership*; *Neoliberalism as a Challenge to Global Security*; *Economic Security Threats. Determinants of State Functioning and Economic Policy*; *The Impact of Security Issues Related to the War in Ukraine on World Trade Transformations*; *Crime and Criminality. Problems of Definition, the Ability to Analyze this Issue in Conceptual and Structural Terms*.

These issues are related to the second thematic block, **Regional Aspects of Security**, featuring analyses of selected aspects of security in certain parts of the world, such as the Black Sea Region, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Visegrad Group. The list of texts in this case is as follows: *Strategic Significance of Joint Committees for Cooperation Between Three Seas Initiative's Countries and the United Arab Emirates*; *The Black Sea Regional Security and Geostategy Balance: A 'New Cold War' Scenario*; *The Role of Small States in Promoting International Security: Lithuania*; *Inter-Clan Conflicts and the Long Journey to State-Building in Somalia – Internal and International Effects*; *The Problem of Irregular Migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to Algeria in the Twenty-First Century*; and *The Role of the Visegrad Group in the European Security System*.

The above issues are further elaborated in the third thematic block – **National Security** – considering individual case studies such as independence from rare earth elements as raw materials, threats to critical airbase infrastructure, the Ukrainian

president's rhetoric, media disinformation relating to the conflict in Ukraine, and environmental security. The texts in this section feature: *In the Pursuit of Raw Materials Independence. A Comparative Analysis of Donald Trump and Joe Biden Policies Towards Rare Earth Elements*; *Analysis of Potential Threats to the Critical Infrastructure of the 31st Tactical Air Base in the Context of the Security of the Poznan Agglomeration*; *Volodymyr Zelensky's Presidential Rhetoric as a Strategic Resource*; *Disinformation in the Polish Media Space in the First Year of Russia's Full-Scale Aggression Against Ukraine*; and *Christian Democrats in Germany on Ensuring Environmental Security Through International Cooperation*.

The last thematic block directly addresses the domestic and international implications of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and is titled **Russia-Ukraine War – Domestic and International Security Implications**. It discusses, among others, the issue of peace and security, the G-7's efforts to end the conflict in Ukraine, the impact of the Ukrainian conflict on Polish foreign policy, the consolidation of Ukrainian society, the attitude of the South Caucasus countries towards Russian aggression, the information war in Ukraine, and the perception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the Arab world. The last part contains the following texts: *Current Issues of Peace and Security, Taking into Account Aggressive Policy of The Russian Federation*; *"The Ukrainian Issue" at the G7 Summits in Conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict 2014–2022*; *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and its Impact on Poland's Foreign Policy*; *Unification of Ukrainian Society in a Postwar Period as a Preventive Mechanism to Avert the Crisis of State*; *The Attitudes of the South Caucasus Countries Towards the Russian Aggression Against Ukraine*; *How the Information War Becomes Full-Scale: The Experience of Ukraine*; and *Distinctive Narrative of the Ukraine War in the Arab World*.

The dynamics of changes and processes occurring in the modern world, for example, with regard to internal and international conflicts, and actual or potential flashpoints currently emerging in various parts of the globe, such as Ukraine, the Middle East, Africa, Mexico, the Korean peninsula, and around Taiwan, indicate that 2024 will continue to be a highly unstable period having to deal with numerous threats to peace and security. This is additionally accompanied by the ever-increasing rivalry between the United States and China over global hegemony, the continuation of totalitarian destructive policies by Russia and its affiliates, and the intensifying challenges and threats of a migratory, fundamentalist, terrorist, energy or cyber nature. We are then facing the year 2024, again fraught with problems, as illustrated by an old Chinese proverb, often used as a curse: 'May you live in interesting times'.

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