CONTEMPORARY DEFENCE STUDIES

Coordinators

Ghiță BÂRSAN   Vasile CĂRUȚAȘU

Gheorghe UDEANU   Mircea POPA

CONTEMPORARY DEFENCE STUDIES

The authors take full responsibility of the content of their articles.

CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM AS A GLOBAL THREAT

Mirosław SMOLAREK, Marian ŻUBER

Military Academy of Land Forces, Wroclaw, Poland,
msmolarek@go2.pl ;marian.zuber@poczta.fm

Abstract: Terrorism has been present in human history since ancient times, but it was not considered a serious threat for global security. The attacks on the World Trade Center have demonstrated that it is a threat of a global nature. It is an effective weapon used by the "weaker" against the stronger opponents. The subject of terrorism is very complex, difficult and elusive. There is a divergence among the scholars in understanding terrorism studies due to the lack of uniform criteria for the determination of a clear definition. Therefore, this article is an attempt to characterize the diversity of the terrorist activities that deviate from the "conventional" terrorism such as agro-terrorism, cyber-terrorism, super-terrorism, etc.). In addition, the paper stresses the need of combating terrorism as a partial solution to improve the safety of the international community.

Keywords: terrorism, agro-terrorism, cyber-terrorism, combating terrorism, security

Nowadays terrorism is considered as one of the most pressing problems of the contemporary world. Political scientists, psychologists, politicians, and the mass media constantly wonder what will be the next action of Hamas, Hezbollah or Al-Qaeda. Terrorist threats are not a new phenomenon, nor are they limited to a specific geographical or cultural area. It can be said that almost every continent has encountered the cruelty and the effects of terrorist attacks, and the terrorist methods have been used especially wherever the weak have fought against the strong.

Terrorism is an extreme expression of the fragmentation of social life, as it involves the infringement of all existing moral and legal standards, as well as the violations of public order on a micro-social and international scale [1].

"Terrorism constitutes a serious threat to peace, security and stability that can endanger the territorial integrity of States" [2] - this quote, presented at the Washington Summit on April 22 1999, proves that the international community is well aware of the specific threat to peace posed by terrorism.

It would seem that defining the phenomenon should not pose any difficulties. However, there has been no established clear-cut definition so far, which would be fully accepted by all organizations and groups dealing with the issue of terrorism. In an attempt to describe the phenomenon of terrorism, it is difficult not to notice that we are dealing with something that evolves and develops alongside with the changing world, and thus its definition is also constantly evolving.

As early as 1984, in his work *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide* [3], Alex Schmid analyzed 109 different definitions of the *terrorism* concept, in an attempt to discover a universally acceptable and relatively accessible explanation of the

term. Different ministries, or departments of the same government have very often used various definitions of terrorism. Among the fundamental elements included in the existing definitions, the most common ones are: violence, political nature, fear, threat and psychological consequences. These elements allow for differentiation of political terrorism from organized crime or from ordinary criminal activity, which are often regarded as equivalent.

Currently, there is no definition that would be widely accepted both on the basis of international law, as well as on other disciplines, which unambiguously describe the terrorism phenomenon. Irrespective of which formula is established for this term, whether it is accepted by all, or whether it remains the source of disputes, the undeniable fact prevails that terrorism constitutes a significant threat not only to affected regions, but to the entire contemporary world.

The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center made the worldwide communities realize that even though superpowers' military strength protects them from war, which could threaten their independence or territorial integrity, they are in no way protected from the inside, which is manifested in the defenselessness against terrorist attacks. Further attacks on the freedom and security of the worldwide community in subsequent years have confirmed this fact. The attacks in London, Madrid, Beslan, Sharm El Sheikh, on the island of Bali, and finally the recent attack on the Egyptian resort of Dahab, attested to the lack of preparation of the forces responsible for the inner security of these countries against terrorist attacks. It also proved that not only the Western states are under a threat of such attacks, but also the Muslim ones even though such attacks are intended primarily against the citizens of Western countries, especially those of the United States.

The material damage and human losses caused by terrorism increase together with the number of attacks that are carried out. Additionally, their psychological effect is of paramount significance, as they blindly strike the ordinary people, surprising them in everyday situations and places where they should feel safe.

Terrorism is undoubtedly a "spectacular" phenomenon, as everything that is related to it raises a lot of interest, and excites the human imagination. News of activities and events related to terrorism often make up an amusing story or create an interesting screenplay. Photos, images, commentaries, human tragedies, efforts of authorities and security services, determination and cunningness of bombers, all make up a peculiar movie with violence in the background.

Thanks to its spectacular display, terrorism can be particularly effective in putting pressure on the public opinion in order to propagate a certain ideology. It can also act as an element of strategic pressure against certain states. The aim is then no longer to defeat or conquer the opponent's territory, but to persuade him towards certain behaviors, which not only interfere with the functioning of societies, but above all aim at the authority of power structures, demonstrating their frailty and low efficiency against the coercion to which they are exposed. Such intimidation of authority, through exposure of its infirmity, is its greatest fear. Making the public aware of its powerlessness can lead to the overthrow of the existing social order and disruption of the political, economic, and military influences, or cause changes in posts within governmental circles. A good example of such a case was the lost election of Jose Maria Aznar's party, after the terrorist attacks on the suburban railway in Madrid.

At present, the distinction between terrorism and warfare is becoming blurred. Terrorism often gives "a foretaste of war", as the aim of terrorists is to cause maximum human or economic losses. When terrorism is motivated by religion, it constitutes a

paramount threat, although it can also be the tool of people with different goals and beliefs.

Terrorism is an age-old weapon of the poor and the weak. Those who cannot openly attack the strong organize attacks on their territory or around the world, acting against the interests of an enemy, thereby attempting to force him into submission. For example, Syria, not having the means to officially declare war and being dissatisfied with the position of France, which guaranteed the territorial integrity of Lebanon, resorted in 1995 to organizing and inspiring a series of armed attacks against the citizens and important targets in France [4].

Terrorists can contribute to an induction of international wars, although the state in which they reside can have good relations with the state that is under their attack. However, a state that tolerates the existence of terrorist groups within its territory bears at least an indirect responsibility for the consequences caused by the terrorist activity. In such situations, retaliation of the state attacked by terrorists against the state that serves as their base should be taken into account. A more appropriate action, however, (one that directly involves the forces of the attacked state) is the pressure exercised on the base state to undertake steps to combat terrorists [5].

An equally complicated situation arises when a weak state is overrun by terrorists, who use terror against their own population and selected countries. A possible solution in such a situation is an international counterterrorism coalition. Equally complex is a situation in which terrorists deliberately settle in a country where they intend to attack the infrastructure, authority and its structures, while terrorists cooperating with them from outside the country undertake the necessary efforts to divert attention from such terrorist attack preparations.

Terrorism is a phenomenon that is going to occur in the future. This is highlighted by the numerous signals of attacks coming from all over the world. The emergence of new terrorist organizations, hitherto unknown, shows that the terrorist "trend" is not disappearing. The dual moral evaluation of the same acts committed by "one's own" and "enemy" terrorists is the main reason why the scope of terrorism coverage extends worldwide. Someone regarded as a degenerate criminal in one country is sometimes considered a freedom fighter hero in another. He does not deserve punishment, according to the people who support his actions, because he is fighting for a moral and noble cause. Therefore, the role of individual states and of the entire international community is an appropriate, rational and, above all, an effective preparation for combating this phenomenon. The fact that terrorism is equally as immoral and inefficient will not appeal to extremists - desperation is deaf to the voice of reason.

Regardless of beliefs or ideological undertones, in the future terrorists will organize the activities in a completely different manner than they are done today. The main opponents of the authorities responsible for the internal security of a given country and the perpetrators of terrorist attacks of small groups or individuals will be loosely connected. They will not operate under a single strategic plan, but on the basis of a certain ideology, preached in various forms and duplicated by the media. Certainly, such actions make it difficult for the surveillance of terrorist environment, anticipation of their actions, and elimination of their structures by the secret service. We have come across this phenomenon since the events of September 11, after which there have been a series of attacks carried out by groups, which although linked to Al-Qaeda, were not the striking force of this organization.

The terrorist activities were always characterized by a certain, limited variety of forms and applied tactics. In the past, the terrorist groups, motivated by political or ideological incentives, focused mainly on

spectacular attacks, kidnappings, or bomb outrages. In their operations, the terrorist groups of the future will resort to the latest technology. Terrorists will remain committed to the traditional ways of carrying out their attacks, but at the same time will resort to more deadly and astounding methods of struggle.

It cannot be ruled out that part of these efforts will succeed. Even a small, partially successful attempt, to use chemical or biological substances in an attack can have serious psychological consequences. It can paralyze the society and security services with a series of false alarms or panic fueled by the mass media.

The studies of specialists in terrorism claim that the main goal of terrorists is currently to cause mass casualties, or inflict maximum economic damages to a state, against which actions have been directed. Consequently, from the standpoint of the logic of terrorist activities, the use of weapons of mass destruction becomes the most desirable solution. Of no less importance is the effect of panic and fear that can be triggered by a mere threat of putting such weapons at use.

Due to the unpredictability and irrationality of contemporary terrorist operations, it is virtually impossible to assess where, when, how, and which of the terrorist groups could carry out a potential attack using unconventional weapons. Contemporary terrorist organizations are highly adaptable to the new conditions and, as intelligence data suggest, there is strong evidence showing that terrorist organizations seek to acquire chemical and biological weapons, mainly by means of self-production [6, 7].

The American experts in terrorism point out the possible threat of attacks on the agricultural sector using animal and plant pathogens. Through the destruction of crops, terrorists can cause serious economic losses, both directly (through the loss of crops), as well as indirectly (through the need of appropriation of additional budgetary resources for food imports). The economic losses are enormous for a state even when the epidemic occurs naturally; an example of this was the slaughtering of pig herds after the cases of food-and-mouth disease in Great Britain.

Agro-terrorism can cause widespread fear, significant economic losses, and even destabilization of a given state.

We must mention cyber-terrorism among the new forms and varieties of terrorism, which is the implementation of advanced computer techniques to achieve the objectives of different groups. It cannot be ruled out that in the future the computer network will serve both cyber-terrorist attacks, as well as the conduct of criminal activity focused on gathering funds for the "real" fight, for example, by breaking into banking systems. It makes the skin crawl to envision a cyber-terrorist attack on power systems, aimed at paralyzing the economy, emergency services, or other important economic entities. Equally dangerous would be the interception of flight management systems, or the disruptions of aircraft guidance systems.

Tomorrow's terrorism will be truly unique. Individuals and small, spontaneous groups will have increasingly better conditions to lead this fight separately (which will make their detection and destruction even more difficult). Today, we mainly see the eruption of religious terrorism, which is especially dangerous because of the irrational, metaphysical motivation, and the resulting determination of terrorists. However, it cannot be ruled out that the success of this type of violence will not find numerous imitators in other environments. The technical conditions make the motivation of resorting to terror in minor matters, such as casual interests of small groups, etc. increasingly prevalent. The terror of those groups will concentrate on demonstrations rather than on actual fights.

The arena for future wars will be among the suburban slums rather than in remote, jungle villages. In the fight against guerrillas, technological superiority will

become insignificant. All kinds of technological gadgets can be purchased, while terrorists' exclusive advantage will be their fanaticism and desperation.

The terrorist activities not only threaten public safety and the political system, but also the elementary social ties. The intentions of perpetrators in those operations are determined by their desire to achieve absolute efficiency.

The existence of terrorism raises the necessity of building the national security, while taking into account any risks involved in this phenomenon. In addition to intelligence and reconnaissance, it should include the preparation to protect and defend thousands of structures and institutions from attacks of terrorist groups, the preparation of the armed forces, the police, and border guards to strengthen protection and border defense, as well as the conduct of deception operations on a large-scale [8].

Terrorism must be fought against, but certain standards which are of great importance in the civilized world must be maintained. Often under the pretense of counterterrorist operations and combating any symptoms of threat, the restriction and even violation of basic civil liberties, inherent in a democratic state, can occur. An average citizen will not raise objections against human rights violations directed at terrorists, but will object when his/her own freedoms are restricted, or in fear against an emergence of a police state.

In the early twenty-first century, the fight against terrorism has taken on a global character, becoming not only a possibility, but a necessity. The contemporary struggle against terrorism aims at a fight to the death. In reality, the attempts of political and social solutions are not delivering the desired results, in most cases proving their ineffectiveness.

*Translated from Polish by **Izabela Lewis***

To ensure an effective fight, the most efficient approach is to deprive a terrorist organization of public support, as it cannot function properly without a broader base of supporters, or without a circle of collaborators, who provide it with logistical assistance. Such support for extreme activities is prevalent among people who feel oppressed, cornered, harmed, and deprived of ways to assert their rights other than by means of drastic violence [9].

On November 6, 2001, a Conference on Combating Terrorism was held in Warsaw, during which the Polish president, Aleksander Kwasniewski said, "We cannot allow the processes, which enable humanity to grow, to turn against it. We mustn't also forget that the terrorist activity finds public approval, mainly in those countries and communities where people are poor and deprived of hope. They suppress their hatred towards the world, towards modernity. This is why we must put greater emphasis on international dialogue, mutual tolerance, upbringing and education of young people" [10].

There is no doubt that it is necessary not only to cut off terrorist groups from their source of funding, but also to convince societies that the fight against terrorism rests on the shoulders of all citizens in order to effectively combat terrorism States should closely collaborate with each other not only by exchanging information in joint military and police operations, but also by emphasizing to broader social groups that it is in the interest of each citizen's safety to participate in the fight against terrorism. Hence, it is so important to discuss, present, and listen to the views of an average citizen, as well as to raise awareness of the threats brought by intolerance, hatred, and nationalism, which are all the basis of terrorism.

References

[1] Borkowski J., *Terroryzm jako patologia społeczna* w: *Terroryzm a broń masowego rażenia. Diagnoza, poglądy, wnioski.* Zeszyty Naukowe AON, Nr 1 (50) A, Warszawa 2003, p. 73

[2] Washington Summit Statement, 24 April 1999, p. 42

[3] Schmid A., *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide* (Transaction Books, New Brunswick), 1984

[4] Bonifacy P., *Atlas wojen XX wieku*, Dom Wydawniczy Bellona, Warszawa 2001, p. 18

[5] Jakubczak R., *Teoretyczny wymiar terroryzmu*. Myśl wojskowa, Nr 1/2003, p. 48

[6] Żuber M., *Groźba użycia broni masowego rażenia w atakach terrorystycznych* [in:] Katastrofy naturalne i cywilizacyjne. Zagrożenia i reagowanie kryzysowe. WSOWL Wrocław 2006, pp. 131-141

[7] *Możliwości pozyskania i wykorzystania przez grupy terrorystyczne broni biologicznej, chemicznej i promieniotwórczej* w: *Terroryzm a broń masowego rażenia. Diagnoza, poglądy, wnioski*. Zeszyty Naukowe AON, Nr 1 (50) A, Warszawa 2003, p. 36

[8] Marczak J., Pawłowski J., *O obronie militarnej Polski przełomu XX-XXI wieku*, Bellona, Warszawa 1995, p. 109

[9] Białek T., *Terroryzm – manipulacja strachem*. Wydawnictwo Studio EMKA, Warszawa 2005, p. 254

[10] Kwaśniewski A., *Zatrzymać terroryzm!*, Perspektywy Press, Warszawa 2002, pp.26-27