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# Theoretical aspects of terrorism

## Теоретические аспекты терроризма

Summary

The article covers one of the major pheno-mena threatening the security of the modern world, which undoubtedly is the phenome-non of terrorism. It primarily aims at expla-ining the concept and genesis of this phe-nomenon, its essence, identifying its most important sources and motives, and at the same time it tries to identify actions that can reduce the threat of terrorism in the modern world.

Резюме

Статья была посвящена одному из основных явлений, угрожающих безопасности современного мира, что, несомненно, является феноменом терроризма. Статья в первую очередь направлена на объяснение концепции и генезиса этого явления, его сущности, выявление наиболее важных источников и мотивов возникновения, и в то же время попытаться определить действия, которые могут уменьшить угрозу терроризма в современном мире.

Keywords: notion of terrorism, essence of terrorism, genesis of terrorism, sources of terrorism.

Ключевые слова: терроризма, генезис терроризма, источники терроризма.

# Introduction: genesis of terrorism

Given the variety of definitions of terrorism and the possibility to fit them to almost every act of violence that affects the human psyche in the form of fear and anxiety it can be argued that this phenomenon has existed since the dawn of humanity, although it may have been called otherwise at different times.

Terrorism in antiquity did not reveal all the aspects that characterize the current phenomena and acts of terror. Of course, also the weapons and means used by terrorists differed diametrically from those currently in use. Consequently, it can be argued that terrorism has evolved over the centuries[1].

In antiquity and the Middle Ages, it was mainly used as a political tool. Tyrants in the ancient world ruled with power and terror what gave the ground to the theories that justify the use of all forces and means by people who oppose criminal power.

The history of ancient Rome is a constant struggle between aristocrats. The most famous act of terror in the ancient world was the assassination of Rome's dictator Julius Caesar by conspiracy by Roman senators on March 15, 44 BC. This act was recognized by the researchers as a pioneering, individual act of terrorism[2].

It should be emphasized that Herostratus of Ephesus, who set fire to the Temple of Artemis in 356 BC was called the first terrorist in history. An unknown shoemaker just for fame set fire and destroyed the temple which was considered one of the wonders of the world. For this shameful act the court sentenced him to death in torture, and his name was to be deleted from all the books and tables. But it turned otherwise because of the extant information written by Theopompus[3].

Analysis of past centuries shows that terrorism was a tool for fighting against a stronger opponent. Over the years, it has developed into organizations where perpetrators have joined forces in larger communities, what gave them possibility to attack their opponents more effectively and kill on a large scale.

An example of such an organization was a religious sect called the Sicarii originated in Palestine and created in the years 66–70 AD. The most spectacular acts of terror were the destruction of the Herod's palaces and the sabotage of water supplies to Jerusalem.

Organization similar to the Sicarii was Assassins established in Syria and Persia in the early 11th century. The sect was used by the Seljuk Turks to murder for political and religious reasons. The Egyptians and the Mongolians, in the 13th

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1    B. Hoffman, *Oblicza terroryzmu*, Wyd. Bertelsmann Media, Warszawa 1999, p. 34.
2    J. Tomasiewicz, *Terroryzm na tle przemocy politycznej. Zarys encyklopedyczny*, Wyd. Apis, Katowice 2000, p. 38.
3    R. Borkowski, *Konflikty współczesnego świata*, Wyd. Akademii Górniczo-Hutniczej im. Stanisława Staszica, wyd. I, Kraków 2001, p. 120.

century, destroyed this organization and brought it to a complete disintegration. However their brutal achievements have never been forgotten[4].

Another historical example is the rule of Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1564–1572), who was famous for the use of the bestial terror in his rule[5].

During the French Revolution, which took a toll of more than 40,000 lives and almost 300,000 people oppressed, the rule of the Committee of Public Safety was called "the great terror" and Jacobins were called "terrorists"[6]. Most of the executions took place without court verdicts. The bloody period of French terror was ended when Robespierre and his followers were guillotined.

In summary, the phenomenon of terrorism, understood as various acts of violence, has existed since the dawn of humanity, although until the mid-nineteenth century they were identified with various forms of intimidation and elimination of opponents.

Contrary to contemporary meaning, terrorism was a tool of power or a weapon to maintain the unity of the state and fight against threats. Modern terrorism developed in the second half of the nineteenth century as a result of the fall of the French Revolution, the development of capitalist thought and the emergence of new ideologies. Anarchists propagating rebellion against the existing social order are deemed as precursors of modern terrorism.

The end of the nineteenth century was a period of terrorist attacks in Europe. An example of a terrorist organization operating in Spain was Mano Negra (Black Hand). During this period, several heads of states were attacked. French President L. Cornot (1884), Spanish Prime Minister C. deCastillo (1897), Austrian Empress Elisabeth (1898), Italian King Humbert (1900), US President W. McKinley (1901) were assassinated then.

After the end of the Second World War, terrorism again began to refer to its historical-revolutionary links which it is most often associated with. The struggle of various nationalist organizations against the colonial powers has returned. It is thanks to such moves that the states such as Cyprus, Algeria, Kenya and Israel owe their independence. Groups fighting for autonomy, as well as for the right to self-determination were called "freedom fighters" by the international community[7].

By the end of the 1970s, terrorism was perceived in a revolutionary context, but its scope covered separatist national and ethnic groups without colonial connotations as well as motivated ideologically radical organizations. For many national minorities condemned to exile and stripped of voting rights, terrorism

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[4]    J. Wassermann, *Templariusze i asasyni. Dwa tajemne zakony – chrześcijańskich templariuszy i muzułmańskich asasynów*, Wyd. Bellona, Warszawa 2007, p. 67–69.

[5]    R. Borkowski, *Konflikty…*, p. 12.

[6]    P. Jaroszyński, *Terroryzm dawnej i dziś*, Wyd. KUL, Lublin 2010, p. 77.

[7]    B. Hołyst, *Kryminalistyka*, Wyd. LexisNexis, Warszawa 1981, p. 74–75.

was a medium which they could use to inform the world about their problems, goals and existence.

The turning point of the modern terrorism was the day of July 22, 1968, where members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked a plane belonging to the Israeli El Al lines. By forcing the government to contact them directly terrorists discovered the power of the media for the first time[8]. The price for hostages freedom was the release of Palestinian terrorists from the Israeli prison. This action, regardless of its failure, drew the world's attention to the Palestinian problem[9].

The 90s of the twentieth century since the collapse of the Soviet Union were another phase of terrorist evolution. The activity of terrorism inspired by the communist ideology has expired, and it was replaced by Islamic terrorism, initiated by the Iranian revolution in 1979. Examples include Palestinian Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Algerian Islamic Salvation Army.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a terrorist fundamentalist group with the greatest international publicity was Al-Qaida. On September 11, 2001 members of this organization have committed the largest terrorist attack in the history of humanity attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon[10].

In recent years, the greatest problem of the modern Christian world and the developed Western countries is the so-called. ISIS. In practice it is a self-proclaimed caliphate based in Iraq and Syria. The goal of this group is to create an Islamic state based on Sharia law that defines rituals and religious customs, as well as the organization of religious power and the life of every Muslim. It is an organization of Sunni extremists trying to reach their goals in the bestial and ruthless way.

In summarizing the genesis and development of terrorism, it is important to mention that the 21st century marks the development of postmodern terrorism which has no boundaries and is characterized by absolute lack of ethical principles. Terrorists representing this trend do not make a precise choice of targets. They have no rational, no demands that can be fulfilled, nor they formulate a message addressed to society. Their action are religiously and ideologically motivated, and their attacks are considered by their partners to be sacred.

## Sources and causes of terrorism

In order to understand the nature of terrorism one should know its source. In addition, in order to accurately determine the cause of terrorism, it is necessary to discover where it originates. One of the main areas for generating terrorism is politics. In essence, the political source is born of pluralism of views and diffe-

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8   A. Kozieł, *Media masowe wobec przemocy i terroryzmu*, Wyd. ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2009, p. 45.
9   W. Dietl, K. Hirschmann, R. Tophoven, *Terroryzm*, PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 34.
10   J. Tomasiewicz, *Terroryzm…*, p. 195–316.

rent political interests. The standard scheme of operation of the political machine prevents the weaker party from achieving success and blocks the possibility of its occurrence in the political arena. In these conditions, the belief in the rightness of political arguments motivates the use of radical means that often go beyond the generally accepted methods of political struggle[11].

Another example that needs to be mentioned is a social source which stems from a peculiar set of events that initiate attempts to carry out rapid and radical social changes triggered by the lack of satisfaction from the current life standard[12]. Such embarrassment, which is not accepted by individuals and social groups, motivates actions aimed at improving the economic and financial situation using terrorist methods.

The most unpredictable source, which is the result of a variety of interactions that cause mental disorders, is the psychological one[13]. In this case, the disorder refers to a particular person. In comparison to the previously mentioned sources, it is more dangerous because it is not possible to reduce and eliminate it[14].

In turn, the strong influence on the followers of different religions that cause terrorism constitute religious sources. This influence due to religious identity is especially vivid for Muslims, because Islam as a religion that determines all areas of life. Mainly, they are areas such as society, politics and culture. In this case, spreading the faith among the growing number of followers may, by virtue of its strength, be the cause of deviation when use of terrorist methods is acceptable.

Civilizational and cultural source is the result of the existing cultural differences. They are defined by conflicts between two attitudes that are contradictory or somewhat different. Examples of these are the different lifestyles, different moral patterns that can contribute to fighting each other using terrorist methods.

Situations that determines the nature and intensity of activity, the background of the organization originate from cultural background. Whether it is socially acceptable or not depends largely on the cultural background that shapes social attitudes and determines the perception of reality as well.

Lack of civil liberties, democracy and the rule of law often associated with weak or failed state are the most frequently mentioned causes of terrorism. Other causes may be rapid changes and modernization. Other causes for the emergence of terrorism are secular or religious extremist ideologies. Historical events, such as political violence, outbreak of civil war, revolution, creation of dictatorship, or occupation, can trigger terrorism. Other causes that have to be mentioned are hegemony and inequality of powers and illegal or corrupt government. Impul-

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[11]  T. Białek, *Terroryzm – manipulacja strachem*, Wyd. StudioEMKA, Warszawa 2005, p. 62.
[12]  R. S. Robins, J. M. Post, *Paranoja polityczna. Psychologia nienawiści*, Wyd. Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1999, p. 167.
[13]  J. Horgan, *Psychologia terroryzmu*, Wyd. PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 34.
[14]  Ibid., p. 63.

ses that create acts of terror can be strong external entities supporting the illegal government.

One of the causes mentioned above is usually enough to trigger a tragedy. Depending on the circumstances, terrorism can also be generated by several causes at once. It seems that the best way to win the fight against terrorism is to eliminate and limit its causes.

## The concept and typology of terrorism

It is difficult to clarify the concept of terrorism because time and certain events have changed the meaning and application of this term. It should be noted that it is problematic to distinguish terrorism from other processes that may be more or less related[15]. Whether the action should be deemed as terrorism or criminal crime is often subjective because it is considered in the political and moral context of the struggle in which some political parties are involved[16].

In 1937 League of Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism it was defined as a form of criminal activity directed against states aimed at creating a state of terror in the minds of people, groups or societies[17].

The UN International Law Commission defines terrorism as "undertaking or encouragement by the authorities of a State of terrorist activities in another State". In this case, we include criminal activities that are directed against the population of the state or other state, and any acts aimed at triggering a state of terror in the minds of officials, groups or the whole of society[18].

Although the concept of terrorism has been debated at various international conferences, it has not been clearly defined yet. Currently there are over one hundred definitions of terrorism. Political conditions are undoubtedly the main reason for the lack of a clear explanation for this notion[19].

The European Commission acknowledged that terrorism is "any intentional acts committed by individuals or organizations against one or several countries, their institutions or population with the aim of: seriously intimidating and seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation"[20].

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[15]  K. Liedel, *Zarządzanie informacjąm w walce z terroryzmem*, Wyd. TRIO, Warszawa 2010, p. 14.

[16]  T. Goban-Klas, *Media i terroryści. Czy zastraszą nas na śmierć*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2009, p. 2.

[17]  R. Borowski, *Terroryzm ponowoczesny. Studium z antropologii polityki*, Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006, p. 38.

[18]  Pawlak, *Terroryzm międzynarodowy – aspekty polityczne i prawne*, „Sprawy Międzynarodowe"1982, no 9, p. 21–32.

[19]  K. Sławik, *hasło „Terroryzm"*, Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN, t. 6, Warszawa 1997, p. 370.

[20]  J. Pawłowski, *Terroryzm we współczesnym świecie*, Wyd. Wojsko i Wychowanie, Warszawa 2001, p. 12.

On the other hand, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe considered an act of terrorism to be "any offence committed by individuals or groups resorting to violence or threatening to use violence against a country, its institutions, its population in general or specific individuals which, being motivated by separatist aspirations, extremist ideological conceptions, fanaticism or irrational and subjective factors, is intended to create a climate of terror among official authorities, certain individuals or groups in society or the general public".

Since the second half of the twentieth century, terrorism has been defined as an organized activity of individuals or groups aimed at disorganization of social life. During this period, researchers attempted for the first time to delineate concepts of terrorism and terror. There were foundations of the theory of terrorism. According to B. Bolechów, terror is the way in which the state affects its citizens through the use of crime, fear and violence[21].

On the other hand, M. Gołaszewska defines terrorism as a political movement that has arisen as a result of mental disorders as well as frustration, characterized by a desire for publicity and power, naivety and brutality[22].

The multidisciplinary nature of the phenomenon of terrorism creates difficulties in precise definition of this issue. It can be said that almost every act of violence against the public can be called a terrorist attack[23].

American experts claim that terrorism is determined by means used, not by the origin and identity of perpetrators, or the cause of the incident. *Modi operandi* cannot, however, be considered from the perspective of the attack, ie. techniques and tactics at the scene of the act. Therefore, all phases of the attack should be considered comprehensively from intention up to using the results of the executed criminal act as a combination of these factors.

According to the definition adopted by the academics terrorism is various ideologically motivated, planned and organized actions of individuals or groups that result in violation of the existing legal order, undertaken to force specific behavior and benefits from the state and society, often violating the interests of outsiders. These actions are carried out with total ruthlessness, using various means to give them publicity and purposefully create fear in the society.

All of the above definitions are general and their basic role is the most precise description of the characteristics of terrorism. However, the development of a single, universal definition that covers the whole range, absolutely all aspects and variations of such a complex and complicated phenomenon as terrorism does not seem to be possible.

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[21]  B. Bolechów, *Terroryzm w świecie poddwubiegunowym. Przewartościowania i kontynuacje*, Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2002, p. 27.
[22]  M. Gołaszewska, *Fascynacja złem. Eseje z teorii wartości*, PWN, Warszawa-Kraków 1994.
[23]  R. Borkowski, *Terroryzm ponowoczesny. Studium z antropologii polityki*, Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006.

A typology of terrorism gives a completely different view of this phenomenon. B. Bolechów created a typology in which the criterion of division is the goals of terrorist activities. He distinguished three types of terrorism: state, ethnic and international.

*Encyklopedia terroryzmu* (*The Encyclopedia of Terrorism*) presents three types of terrorist activities, such as revolutionary terrorism, terrorism related to military activities carried out by the political opposition and state terrorism. Taking into account the political strategy terrorist activities are divided into terrorism of "propaganda by deed", which acts as a detonator of rebellion, indicating the existence of a group fighting for specific ideals, thus deluding like-minded people to join in a common struggle; direct terrorism which aims at bringing down the existing order and replacing it with another, organized by terrorists; indirect terrorism – terrorist activity leading to political change in the country characterized by reluctance to assume responsibility for the exercise of state power, eg Ku Klux Klan[24].

There is no single universal concept of terrorism that covers all its aspects. To study this shady area of human activity it is necessary to apply and use many sources and definitions. Sometimes it is necessary to create a new definition that is a patchwork of existing theories in order to accurately describe and understand the particular act of terror.

## Conclusions

In order to reduce the scale of terrorism, a lot of effort is needed to reduce social injustice. If prevention of this kind can help to save at least one human life – it is worth to develop a global culture of solidarity and equality that gives the society a hope for a future free of terror. Equally important is the role of state investment in prevention, training and the development of anti-terrorist systems and programs.

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