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Terrorism in the 21st century - selected aspects

Abstract

The article outlines selected aspects of terrorism in the 21st century. Taking into account the historical perspective, the modus operandi used by the perpetrators of attacks (suicide bomber, “lone wolf”) is described, together with examples of the most spectacular attacks: decapitation, use of chemical weapons, attacks with vehicles. Two charts accompany the text: “Number of terrorist attacks in the world (2006-2019)” and “Most active groups carrying out attacks in the world in 2019 by number of attacks”.

Keywords:

terrorism,
terrorist attack,
suicide bomber,
decapitation,
“lone wolf”,
chemical weapons,
attacks using
vehicles

The world entered the new millennium triumphant and hopeful. Francis Fukuyama’s vision of the “end of history”¹, the victory of liberal democracy, was to mean the end of the Cold War and the division of the world into two opposing political and military blocs. The assumption of leadership in this new world order, which could not be questioned by anyone, by a single superpower - the United States of America - was to guarantee only a happy future.

¹ F. Fukuyama, *Koniec historii* (Eng. End of history), translated by T. Bieroń, M. Wichrowski, Poznań 1996.

The year 2001, the beginning not only of a new century, but also of a new millennium, was a breakthrough in the history of world terrorism. Whereas up until then it had been an international phenomenon at best (according to the maxim: international terrorism occurs when terrorists from one country carry out an attack on the territory of another in the interests of a third), after 11 September 2001 it became, due to its nature and scope, a global phenomenon. Of course, this was largely due to the fact that, for the first time since the Second World War, the United States, a global power, was attacked on its territory on that day. In addition, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked by the Al-Qaeda organisation, which, although it had previously carried out attacks in various parts of the world², had until then been a classic hierarchical organisation. However, it quickly evolved into a network organisation covering the entire globe.

Terrorism in the 21st century

Over two thousand years of documented history, terrorist methods have changed as technology has advanced, but it has been more a case of adding new tools to existing, proven ones. Assuming that the first terrorists were sicarios³ operating in 1st century A.D. in Palestine, who carried out attacks (assassinations) with a short sword, dagger or *sica*⁴,

² Among others, on 7 August 1998, in two capitals of East African countries, Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es-Salaam (Tanzania), almost simultaneously (at an interval of several minutes), buildings of the US embassies were blown up - under the debris of the first one, 12 Americans, 32 citizens of other countries and 247 Kenyans were killed, and over 5000 Kenyans, 6 Americans and 13 citizens of other countries were wounded; in the second attack, 10 people were killed and 77 wounded. Incidentally, it was on the occasion of these attacks that the world public became aware of the activities of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. The 20th century also ended with an assassination attempt on American soldiers, to which al-Qaeda confessed: On 12 X 2000, in the port of Aden (Yemen), the destroyer USS Cole was hit by a speedboat loaded to the brim with explosives, causing a large breach in the ship's side and the death of 17 sailors (39 were injured).

³ Sicarios - the most extreme faction of Jewish Zelots fighting against the Roman occupiers; cf. W. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, London 1980, pp. 18-19.

⁴ In modern Spanish *sicario* means paid killer, in Italian and Portuguese it means contract killer.

one could say that after two thousand years, history has come full circle, as today's terrorists also very often use a knife or a sword⁵.

The modus operandi of terrorists in the 21st century

In the 21st century, terrorists use the same methods as their predecessors, adapting them to their needs and capabilities. Therefore, their most common modus operandi includes bombings, ramming vehicles into pedestrians and attacking bystanders with knives.

Suicide attacks

World terrorism in the first years of the 21st century has been dominated by suicide bombers (as were the attackers on 11 September 2001). Suicide bombers often wear explosives under their clothes (the term "shahid belt" has entered colloquial language), carry them in backpacks (as the London bombers did on 7 July 2005) or even hide them in the frames of bicycles. Often, to cause even more damage, suicide bombers drive vehicles filled with explosives.

The modern history of suicide bombing as a deliberate tactic of terrorists is relatively short - it can be dated back to the early 1980s. Analysts point to the dynamics of their increase: "Since 1983, suicide bombing has become the preferred terrorist tactic of insurgent groups from Sri Lanka to Chechnya to Afghanistan. One indicator of this growing preference is the number of attacks, which rose from 1 in 1981 to more than 500 in 2007"⁶.

In the societies of Western civilisation, these attacks have caused shock because they are incompatible with the dogmas of the Christian religion. However, for followers of other religions, suicide is not forbidden, and by non-believers this problem is not considered at all (if at all, then in moral terms). What is more, even in Islam, which for many years did not allow women to engage in terrorist activities, at some point suicide bombings were permitted (the first such missions

⁵ The myth of the sicarios has been referred to by ultra-orthodox Jews from the Sikrikim group, formed in 2005, who attack Israel's secular community.

⁶ Cited after J. Kiras, "suicide bombing," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 13 XI 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/suicide-bombing> [accessed: 28 XI 2021].

were not undertaken by Muslim women, but by Tamil Tigresses; one of them, Thenmozhi Rajaratnam, killed former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in such an attack on May 21, 1991). In Russia, so-called black widows (*smiertniks*) have appeared - Chechens, and in Israel - shahidis, Palestinian women, members of the Army of Roses⁷.

Despite the fact that children are given special care in every community, it is not uncommon for them to take part in armed conflicts or be used to carry out terrorist attacks, including suicide attacks.

In general, the number of suicide attacks represented a negligible percentage of terrorist attacks. Riaz Hassan in his article *What Motivates the Suicide Bombers? Study of a comprehensive database* gives a surprising answer states that in the years 1981-2006 there were 1200 suicide bombings, which constituted only 4% of all terrorist attacks and 14 599 people were killed in them, which constituted 32% of all victims⁸. Therefore, due to their spectacularity, terrorist organisations are very keen to use this method of action.

Decapitation: a new/old method of psychological warfare

Beheading is not a new idea and, still less, was not invented by Islamic fundamentalists. As a means of carrying out a judicial death sentence, this method has been known for millennia. Decapitation was used by the authorities against political opponents and common criminals in ancient times (in China, in Middle Eastern countries), in the Middle Ages (in Europe), in modern times (still in Europe) and even today this punishment is used in Saudi Arabia. Only the tools changed: it could be an axe, sword or guillotine, but whatever the executioner used, it was carried out in public and played a double role - both as punishment for real (or imagined, as often happened during the French Revolution, for example) crimes and as a warning to others, who were to be made aware of what might await them if they opposed the authorities.

Islamic fundamentalists have returned to this method in the 21st century. Just a few months after the war on terror began, on 23 January 2002, the American journalist Daniel Pearl was abducted in Pakistan

⁷ Cf. B. Victor, *Army of Roses. Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers*, London 2004.

⁸ R. Hassan, *What Motivates the Suicide Bombers? Study of a comprehensive database gives a surprising answer*, „YaleGlobal”, 3 IX 2009 [accessed: 28 XI 2021].

and then killed by his captors on 1 February. The video of the execution, posted on the Internet, was entitled *The Slaughter of the Spy-Journalist, the Jew Daniel Pearl*, and depicted the last seconds of the journalist's life, his statement in which he admitted his Jewish ancestry (which many analysts considered manipulated), and the scene of his decapitation. His body was found and identified on 16 May. The abduction and killing of the American was claimed by a hitherto unknown organisation, the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty, but the Pakistani authorities charged and arrested several members of al-Qaeda, including Sheikh Ahmed Saeed Omar, who even confessed to Pearl's murder and was sentenced to death (the sentence was not carried out)⁹. We should also always remember that the same death befell the Polish geologist Piotr Stańczak on 7 February 2009 in Pakistan, who had been abducted by the Taliban several months earlier.

Video footage of the decapitation of those abducted by Iraqi al-Qaeda appeared in 2004 on the Internet and was also broadcast by the Qatari television channel Al-Jazeera. The executor was said to be the group's leader Abu Musab al-Zarkawi (although this information was disputed by people who knew him), who replaced Osama bin Laden on the lists of the most dangerous terrorists. Al-Zarkawi is said to have personally decapitated Nicholas "Nick" Berg (7 May 2004) and Owen Eugene "Jack" Armstrong (20 September 2004). The Americans on 6 June 2006 carried out a bombing raid on al-Zarkawi's home, where he was hiding. Al-Zarkawi was killed, and executions of abducted hostages ceased to be a method used on a massive scale in the fight between Islamic fundamentalists and the West, although they occasionally occurred.

In 2014, thanks to the Islamic State, world public opinion was electrified by the use of decapitation once again as a method not only to eliminate the enemy, but also to intimidate and coerce the group's demands. Between 25 July 2014 and 10 August 2015, at least 300 people (foreign journalists, Syrian and Kurdish soldiers, humanitarian workers, Christian refugees from Ethiopia) were murdered in this way in 24 executions¹⁰.

⁹ Sheikh Omar recanted his confession in 2007 when Khalid Shaykh Muhammad confessed to killing Pearl.

¹⁰ <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/19/africa/libya-isis-executions-ethiopian-christians/> [accessed: 20 XI 2021].

Lone Wolf

According to the media, the new category of terrorists in the 21st century is made up of assassins who are not members of any group, who do not act on the orders of any of their commanders, who do not follow any specific global plan, but loners who prepare and carry out attacks on their own, without any outside help. Nothing could be further from the truth - although, of course, a single assassin's attack on a politician must be distinguished (there have been many such assassins in history, including our own, to mention Michał Piekarski and his attack on King Sigismund III Vasa with an axe) from a terrorist attack. The first "lone wolves" could include Antoni Berezowski, who carried out an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander II in Paris on 6 June 1867, Sante Giovanni Caserio, associated with anarchist circles, the assassin of French President Marie-François Sadi Carnot (24 June 1894, Lyon), and Luigi Lucheni, the assassin of Empress Elisabeth of Austria (10 September 1896, Geneva), or finally Leon Czolgosz, who fatally shot U.S. President William McKinley in Buffalo on 6 September 1901.

There were also many such 'lone wolves' in the second half of the 20th century. Two Americans, Theodore Kaczynski "Unabomber" and Timothy McVeigh, among others, went down in the history of terrorism.

Theodore Kaczynski could perhaps be classed as a representative of the environmental movement or, to use 19th century terms, a Luddist, although he wrote about himself that he was protesting against modern technology¹¹. For 17 years he sent letter-bombs to politicians, scientists and heads of corporations, which killed three people and wounded twenty-nine. He was arrested on 3 April 1996 and sentenced to life imprisonment;

Timothy McVeigh held far-right views and considered the government in Washington to be the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG). He carried out the bombing of the federal government building in Oklahoma City (19 April 1995), which killed 168 people. He was arrested and sentenced to death.

"Lone wolf" was also the Austrian Franz Fuchs, who between 1993 and 1997, for xenophobic reasons, as the "Salzburger Eidgenossenschaft - Bajuwarische Befreiungsarmee" (Salzburg

¹¹ He presented his views in the manifesto *Industrial Society and Its Future*, first published on 19 IX 1995 by The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Confederation - Bajuwarische Befreiungsarmee) sent bomb letters to politicians (including the mayor of Vienna, Helmut Zilk), Green Party politicians and humanitarian activists. He was arrested, tried and in 1999 sentenced to life imprisonment (he committed suicide on 26 February 2000).

In the 21st century, “lone wolves” mainly attack random victims, although they do so, as they say, in the name of an idea. The most spectacular, tragic attack was carried out on 22 July 2011 by the Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik¹², an advocate of extreme right-wing views. He wrote and published online on the day of the attack the manifesto *2083 - A European Declaration of Independence*, which is a compilation of racist, xenophobic, anti-feminist and Islamophobic texts, but also directly taken from Theodore Kaczynski’s *Manifesto*. Breivik first carried out a bomb attack on the prime minister’s residence in Oslo (8 people were killed), and then moved to the island of Utøya, where he massacred participants of a Norwegian Labour Party youth camp with firearms. Sixty-nine people were killed. Arrested, despite many doubts about his mental state, Breivik was found sane and sentenced to the highest possible sentence, i.e. 21 years in prison (with the possibility of its unlimited extension).

In principle, this case could be treated as one of many attacks carried out by mentally disturbed people (Breivik was diagnosed with delusional disorder or narcissistic personality disorder, among other things, he believed himself to be the regent of Norway). This included Stephen Paddock’s shooting on 1 October 2017 at a country music concert taking place outside the Luxor Las Vegas casino - 60 people were killed and 411 injured at the time. At the Century 16 Theater in Aurora, Colorado, during the premiere of *The Dark Knight Rises*, James Holmes injured 58 people with a gun on 20 July 2012. However, these attacks were not terrorist attacks. The fact that Breivik, by his own admission, carried out the attacks for political reasons, and his behaviour during the trial (making the gesture of a fascist salute) make it possible to classify the act as terrorist.

Such doubts are not raised by attacks carried out by Muslims who, although not affiliated with any jihadist group, carried out their individual actions emphasising their profession of faith (*Allah akbar*).

¹² In June 2017, he changed his name to Fjotolf Hansen.

Britain, for example, became the scene of two attacks carried out by fanatical followers of Islam in 2017, one of which can be attributed to a 'lone wolf'. Fifty-two-year-old British citizen Khalid Masood¹³ drove the car he was driving onto the pavement of Westminster Bridge and Bridge Street on 22 March, injuring more than 50 people (four of them fatally) before crashing the vehicle into the fence of the Palace of Westminster. He got out, made his way into the Parliamentary courtyard, fatally wounded a police officer and was shot moments later.

Chemical weapons in the hands of terrorists

On 20 March 1995 members of the Japanese Buddhist sect Aum Shinri-Kyō (Supreme Truth) carried out a terrorist attack on the Tokyo underground using sarin, a poison gas. As a result, 13 people were killed and around 6 000 suffered the effects of gas poisoning, many of whom remain ill to this day and are even still hospitalised. It was the best known, most tragic terrorist attack using chemical weapons and was often presented as the first in history and later, in retrospect, as the only such attack. Although in the media such information was (and still is) very appealing and carrying, it is not true. Aum had made its first attempt to use sarin nine months earlier, on 27 June 1994, in the Kita-Fukashi district of Matsumoto city in Nagano prefecture. The gas sprayed there resulted in the death of seven and serious poisoning of more than 200 residents of the town¹⁴. American sources state, referring to testimonies of Aum members tried in the trials after the 1995 attack, that between 1990 and 1995 the sect carried out 17 attacks or attempted attacks using chemical and biological weapons: four times sarin, four times VX gas (a highly poisonous phosphorus and organosulphur chemical compound of the phosphonate type), phosgene and sodium cyanide, as well as four anthrax bacteria and

¹³ T. Batchelor, *Khalid Masood. London attacker has no links to Isis or al-Qaeda, says Met Police*, „Independent”, 17 III 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/khalid-masood-london-attack-isis-al-qaeda-no-links-police-a7652696.html> [accessed:27 XII 2021].

¹⁴ Information on this topic i.a. in.: D.E. Kaplan, A. Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World*, New York 1996, pp. 137–146; D.W. Brackett, *Holy terror. Armageddon in Tokyo*, New York 1996, pp. 27–43.

three botulinum toxin (botulism)¹⁵. Today, Islamic fundamentalist groups are turning to chemical weapons.

Already in 2004, American special services alerted about the possibility of an attack on US territory, for which terrorists would use chemical weapons, even specifically pointing to chlorine, which is much more easily available than other poisonous gases (such as the sarin used by Aum), and can have comparable effects to them¹⁶. This was related to the chlorine tank fire in Atlanta (25 May 2004), which caused a toxic cloud to contaminate 5 miles² (13 km²) of the suburb of Conyers and necessitated the evacuation of some 10,000 residents. Nine people were hospitalised with symptoms of gas poisoning¹⁷. Experts pointed out that although chlorine gas is easy to obtain due to its widespread use in water purification (e.g. by attacking tanker trucks or railway cars carrying it), it is just as dangerous to those attacked as it is to those who want to use it as a weapon. The American analysts did not take into account that for a suicide bomber this would not be an obstacle.

The authors of the cited analysis draw attention to the potential threat, but admit that al-Qaeda prefers to use classic explosives, such as those used in Madrid, because they are more effective than chemical weapons (193 people died in Madrid, 13 in Tokyo). They are also cheaper to produce: the cost of constructing the charges detonated in Madrid was estimated at USD 10 000, compared to the millions of dollars involved by Aum in its CBW programme¹⁸. And for this reason, the likelihood of terrorists using chemical weapons, like other weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons, is theoretical rather than real.

In Rolf Mowatt-Larssen's 2010 work *Al Qaeda Weapons of Mass Destruction Threat: Hype or Reality? A Timeline of Terrorists' Efforts*

¹⁵ *Al Qaeda and the Threat of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, Stratfor Global Intelligence, 4 XII 2004, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/al-qaeda-and-threat-chemical-and-biological-weapons> [accessed: 20 III 2015].

¹⁶ *Chlorine as a Weapon?*, Stratfor Global Intelligence, 28 V 2004, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/chlorine-weapon> [accessed: 16 III 2015].

¹⁷ *Chlorine-tinged cloud of smoke forces evacuations east of Atlanta*", Associated Press, 25 V 2004, <https://www.accessnorthga.com/detail.php?n=168143> [accessed: 22 III 2015].

¹⁸ *Al Qaeda and the Threat of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, Stratfor Global Intelligence, 4 XII 2004, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/al-qaeda-and-threat-chemical-and-biological-weapons> [accessed: 20 III 2015].

to *Acquire WMD*¹⁹ one may find information about al-Qaeda's preparations to produce weapons of mass destruction, mainly nuclear, but also chemical and biological. Already before the attacks of 11 September 2001, Midhat al-Mursi (alias Abu Khabab) organised training of members of the organisation in the use of such weapons in Afghanistan, while at the turn of 2002 and 2003 Abu Musab al-Zarkawi, bin Laden's deputy, planned to carry out attacks in Europe using ricin and cyanide. At the same time, a group operating in Bahrain was preparing a special device (Arabic: *mobtaker*, an invention) with which they wanted to spray hydrogen cyanide in the New York underground.

The year 2007 brought a series of attacks in Iraq in which chlorine-filled bombs were used. In three attacks on 16 March (two near Fallujah and one near Ar-Ramadi), 8 people were killed (including 6 US soldiers) and several hundred wounded²⁰. Again near Ar Ramadi on 6 April, the detonation of a truck loaded with TNT and chlorine containers killed 27 people (this was the ninth such attack near Ar Ramadi)²¹. On 3 June, a truck filled with chlorine containers was blown up 200 metres from the entrance to the American base in Baquba (capital of Dijala province), causing gas poisoning of more than 60 soldiers.

It is interesting to note that even BEFORE this series of attacks, Stratfor analysts were asking the question, "*Chemical Strikes - the Beginning of a Trend?*"²². After all, a truck loaded with containers of chlorine exploded in Iraq's Ar-Ramadi on 30 January, and a similar attack took place in Al-Taji, north of Baghdad, on 20 February. These incidents were not reported by the media because they did not involve any casualties, but they allowed the authors to draw some general conclusions about the potential use of chlorine in terrorist attacks.

¹⁹ R. Mowatt-Larssen, *Al Qaeda Weapons of Mass Destruction Threat. Hype or Reality? A Timeline of Terrorists' Efforts to Acquire WMD*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge 2010, <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/al-qaeda-wmd-threat.pdf> [accessed: 22 III 2015].

²⁰ *Iraq. Chlorine Attacks Kill 8, Injure Hundreds*, Stratfor Global Intelligence, 16 III 2007, <https://www.stratfor.com/situation-report/iraq-chlorine-attacks-kill-8-injure-hundreds> [accessed: 16 III 2015].

²¹ *Iraq. Chlorine Truck Bomb Kills 27*, Stratfor Global Intelligence, 6 IV 2007, <https://www.stratfor.com/situation-report/iraq-chlorine-truck-bomb-kills-27> [accessed: 16 III 2015].

²² *Geopolitical Diary: Chemical Strikes - the Beginning of a Trend?*, Stratfor Global Intelligence, 21 II 2007, <https://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical-diary/geopolitical-diary-chemical-stikes-beginning-of-a-trend> [accessed: 20 III 2015].

The final one was optimistic on the whole: although chlorine could indeed find use in bomb-making, it would not pose a real threat due to its low effectiveness as a lethal agent and the 'uncontrollability' of the poisonous cloud created by its spray.

And yet, after a few years, chlorine was reached for by another terrorist organisation: the Islamic State. ISIS is believed to have used chlorine charges on 15 September 2014 in the town of Duluja, north of Baghdad, while the Kurds fighting it in Iraq and Syria accuse it of using chlorine bombs at least twice against peshmerga (Kurdish fighters): on 23 January and 14 March 2015. Gen. Aziz Waisi, commander of the Zervani military police units, in an interview on 16 March 2015, complemented this information with another, saying that ISIS had used chlorine in fighting in the mountainous region of Sinjar²³. Perhaps it was as a consequence of the January 24 incident that the Americans attacked, using drones, a convoy of cars travelling along a highway near Mosul and killed Abu Malik, the chief designer of chemical bombs for ISIS.

Terrorism in the 21st century - a new era?

Keeping to the definition of terrorism as a method of fighting to achieve political ends, which varies in time and place, the question must be asked: is this the next generation (wave) of terrorism? However, it is impossible to give a definitive answer, because the political game in which terrorism is used is not a zero-sum game. If we continue to consider terrorism as a method used exclusively by anti-state individuals/groups, then we are obviously not dealing with a new phenomenon. However, if the view is accepted that terrorism can also be used by state institutions, then the formal and legal approach to date needs to be reviewed and it should be recognised that, like war, this is another generation (wave) of terrorism.

Most attempts to define terrorism to date have firstly emphasised the use of physical violence as the sine qua non for any action to be considered terrorist (or at least as a threat), and from 1937 onwards

²³ *Update 3-Kurds report more chlorine attacks, Iraq pauses Tikrit offensive*, Reuters, 16 III 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/16/mideast-crisis-iraq-idUSL6N0WI1OA20150316> [accessed: 20 III 2015].

(Geneva Convention), their anti-state character²⁴. Such legal regulations resulting from political calculation allowed those in power to legitimise their actions not only with the actual threat of politically motivated terrorist crime, but simply to fight the opposition. Any attempt to place terrorism differently within the legal system was doomed to failure, and sometimes those proposing such solutions were even accused of supporting terrorism. It is only in recent years that a new perspective on terrorism has emerged, recognising not only its anti-state nature. In the *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*²⁵, published in 2012, its authors write, among other things, in the entry “Terrorism”:

Terrorism is defined as a destructive method of political action which uses violence to cause fear for political ends. While some political goals may be achieved only through the use of terrorism, terrorists often kill or injure noncombatants or the innocent in order to maximize terror and to seek widespread publicity for their actions. Contemporary terrorism is often conceived in terms of war. While terrorism may be perpetrated by individuals against a state, states can enact policies of terrorism against their own citizens or subjects of another nation or country.

In the second half of the 20th century, Western European countries faced separatist terrorism (Great Britain - Irish Republican Army, IRA, Spain - Basque Country and Freedom, ETA) and ideological (left-wing and right-wing) grounds. The 1970s and 1980s saw the heyday of such groups as the Rote Armee Fraktion or Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann in West Germany, Brigade Rosso or Ordine Nero in Italy, and many others. There was not a country in Western civilisation in those years whose security was not threatened by terrorism. After the attacks of 11 September 2001, the societies of Western countries were intimidated by the terrorism of Islamic fundamentalists. But not

²⁴ Article 2 of the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism* of 16 XI 1937 considered an “act of terrorism” to be “a criminal act directed against a State with the intention or hope of creating a state of fear in the minds of individuals, groups of individuals or society as a whole”, quoted in *Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism. Opened for Signature AT Geneva, November 16, 1937, in Control of Terrorism: International Documents*, Y. Alexander, M.B. Browne, A.S. Nanes (ed.), preface by R.S. Cline, New York 1979, pp. 20-21.

²⁵ *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics. Second Edition*, R. Chadwick, D. Callahan, P. Singer (ed.), Oxford 2012.

because it was born then (in the Middle East, Islamic organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hezbollah, which refer to jihad, have existed and been active for decades), but because it knocked directly on their doors. Until then, Europeans and Americans had at best learned from the media about attacks carried out, for example, in Beirut on the US embassy (18 April 1983 - 63 people were killed), on US and French army barracks (23 October 1983 - 241 US and 58 French soldiers were killed) or others if they involved them. Attacks on all the others were at best noted, and sometimes omitted altogether from news services. However, on 11 September 2001 they became convinced that terrorist attacks by Islamic fundamentalists posed a direct threat to them, and the following years documented this clearly. Since that day and the declaration of war on terrorism by U.S. President George W. Bush, all terrorist attacks, no matter in which part of the world they took place, have been attributed to al-Qaeda. And other Islamic fundamentalist organisations were said to be linked to al-Qaeda (estimates put the number at several dozen²⁶), operating in dozens of countries²⁷.

²⁶ According to the U.S. State Department, prior to the September 2001 attacks, groups cooperating with the Base included: the Reform Advisory Council (Sudan/Afghanistan), Asbat al-Ansar (Lebanon), Ansar al-Islam/Fighters of Islam (Iraqi Kurdistan), Harakat ul-Ansar/Mujahedin (Pakistan), Al-Badar (Pakistan), Armed Islamic Group/GIA (Algeria), Saafi Group for Proselytism and Struggle/GPSD (Algeria), Talaa'l al-Fateh (Egypt), Groupe Roubaix (France), Harakat ul Jihad (Pakistan), Jaish Mohammed (Pakistan), Jamiat- Ulema-e-Pakistan (Pakistan), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Pakistan), Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hezb ul-Mujahideen/Party of the Holy Warriors (Pakistan), Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Egypt), al-Hadith (Pakistan), Hamas (Palestinian Authority), Bayt al-Imam (Jordan), Islamic Holy War (Palestinian Authority), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Uzbekistan), al-Jihad (Bangladesh), al-Jihad (Egypt), al-Jihad Group (Yemen), Laskar e-Toiba (Pakistan), Lebanese Guerrilla League (Lebanon), Libyan Islamic Group (Libya), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Philippines), Guerrilla Movement (Kashmir), Abu Sajjaf (Philippines), Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya/Islamic Unity (Somalia), Jemaah Islamiyah (Indonesia), Union of the Ulema of Afghanistan (Afghanistan) - data after: Y. Alexander, M.S. Swetnam, *Sowers of death. Osama bin Laden and other heads of al-Qaida*, translated by J. Kozłowski, Warsaw 2001, p.49 and own sources.

²⁷ Middle East - Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen; Asia - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India (Kashmir), Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines; Europe - Albania, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, former Yugoslavia (Kosovo), Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom; Commonwealth of Independent States (former USSR) - Azerbaijan, Russian

The milestones in the history of attacks in Europe in the 21st century and attributed to al-Qaeda were the attacks in Madrid on 11 April 2004, which killed 193 people and wounded more than 2 000, and the coordinated suicide attacks in London on 7 July 2005, which targeted the public transport system, killing 52 people and wounding more than 700. This was followed by a few years of pause in the attacks by Islamic terrorists on Europe, but with the rise of the Islamic State came the next wave of attacks. It was then that there was the attack in France on 7 January 2015 on the editorial board of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* (as retaliation for the posting of caricatures of Mohammed, 12 people were killed) and the attacks on 13 November of that year in Paris, which left 130 people dead and more than 350 injured (in terms of one-off casualties the biggest event in France since World War II)²⁸. In 2016, Europeans were shocked by further attacks: on 22 March 2016 in Belgium - two at Brussels Zaventem Airport and one at the Maelbeek/Maalbeek metro station in Brussels (bombs killed 35 and injured 316), and on 14 July in Nice. There Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove into a crowd walking on the Promenade des Anglais, killing 86 and injuring 458. Later, there were many smaller-scale attacks, although the number has fallen since the beginning of 2020. This was not due to counter-terrorism efforts, but to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, which caused potential terrorists problems if only logistically. Does this mean that the threat of terrorist attacks has diminished, because there can be no question of it disappearing altogether? From a European perspective such a thesis could perhaps be put forward, but in the case of other regions of the world it appears to be false. Admittedly, the available sources do not yet take into account the aggregate data for 2020-2021, but if we follow the reports of news agencies, we do not observe any radical decreases in the number of attacks. In the past, there were years in which the number of attacks fell by 50% compared to previous years (e.g. according to Statista,

Federation, Chechnya, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan; Africa - Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire; North and South America - Canada, United States of America, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay - 67 (!) countries in total - data after: Y. Alexander, M.S. Swetnam, *Sowers of death...*, p.50.

²⁸ Description of attacks eg. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Paris-attacks-of-2015> [accessed: 20 III 2015].

in 2012 there were 6771 attacks, and in 2006 - 14 371), which still does not give cause for optimism. Territorial temporal shifts in the frequency of attacks can also be observed, but the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel, the Indian subcontinent are still the most vulnerable areas in the 21st century.

The annual *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017*²⁹ published in September 2018 by the State Department states that:

Despite our successes, the terrorist landscape became more complex in 2017. ISIS, al-Qaeda and their partners have proven resilient, determined and adaptable, and have adapted to increased counterterrorism pressure in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and elsewhere. [Terrorist organisations] have become more dispersed and clandestine, have begun to use the internet to inspire remote attacks by their followers, and as a result have become less vulnerable to conventional military action. Moreover, the return or arrival of new fighters engaged in combat abroad has contributed to the growth of experienced, developed and interconnected terrorist networks that can plan and execute attacks³⁰.

A few months later, completely ignoring the warnings of experts, in confirmation of the successes of the war on terror and the defeat of ISIS, U.S. President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of US troops from Syria and Iraq³¹, which, of course, was met with a wave of criticism and resulted in the symbolic resignation of General James Mattis as Secretary of Defence. In the report cited above, State Department analysts warned that ISIS had not abandoned its activities despite losing territory. It has resorted to new methods of exploiting its sympathisers spread around the world and using unconventional techniques to carry out attacks.

The group encouraged sympathisers to use all available weapons - such as large vehicles - against soft targets and public spaces. Increasingly, the responsibility for deciding where, when and how to carry out an attack dissipated to homegrown terrorists inspired

²⁹ *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017*, United States Department of State Publication, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Washington 2018.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³¹ These plans have already been confirmed by U.S. President Joe Biden in 2021.

or seconded by ISIS to conduct operations far from the war zone. In 2017, we saw such attacks in Manchester, UK; Barcelona, Spain; Sinai, Egypt; Marawi, Philippines; New York and many other places³².

Similarly, threats from ISIS were defined by another State Department Report:

In 2019, Europe continued to face multiple terrorist threats and unrest (...). Despite the complete loss of geographic territory, ISIS continued to operate, inciting attacks on symbolic European targets and public spaces and recruiting individuals from European countries. Most of these incidents took place in Western Europe and Russia and consisted of simple actions carried out by easy-to-execute methods using commonly available tools and vehicles to injure or kill pedestrians³³.

And there is no indication that the threat of terrorist attacks by jihadist groups will diminish in the third decade of the 21st century.

Post scriptum (statistics)

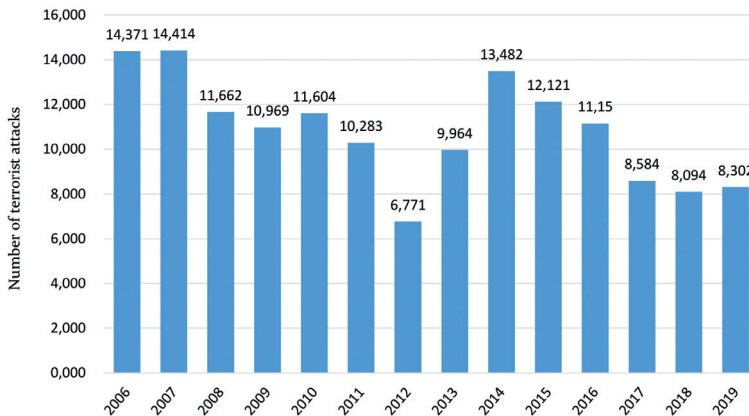


Fig. 1. Number of terrorist attacks worldwide (2006-2019).

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/202864/number-of-terrorist-attacks-worldwide/>.

³² Ibid.

³³ *Country Reports on Terrorism 2019*, United States Department of State Publication, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Washington 2019, p. 60.

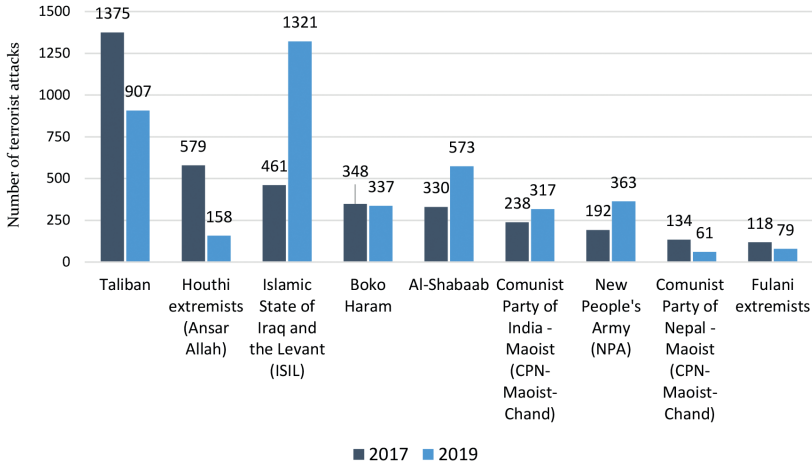


Fig. 2. Most active groups carrying out attacks in the world in 2019 by number of attacks.

Source: <https://statista.com/statistics/937553/terrorism-most-active-perpetrator-groups-worldwide/>.

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