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## **The triad of terrorist motivation – Introduction**

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the events at Dubrovka, in Bieslan, Bali, Madrid, Chechnya, Israel, Iraq and countless other acts illustrate how complicated, complex as well as dangerous and unpredictable a problem we are facing. Without any doubt terrorism may be considered one of the most serious global problems of our times. The manifestations of terrorism occur nearly everywhere with varying frequency, intensity or dynamics and they cause profound human and material loss. This continues to happen despite many states' and organizations' involvement in the battle against terrorism and despite taking a range of measures against it.

The problem of terror and terrorism is deeply rooted in history. Its various forms have accompanied man for ages. The reasons for terrorism comprise a total of numerous, highly diversified factors, such as issues of ideology, politics, religion, nationality or territory as well as those related to economy, society, culture, history or the frequently neglected psychological factors, to name a few.<sup>1</sup>

As we interpret terrorism as a cause-and-effect phenomenon, we need to emphasize three main groups of factors that very often affect the motivation of terrorism:

- ideas – political, ethnic, religious, etc. ideologies (“the realm of idea – heart”);
- economic and social conditions in terrorist homelands or places of residence, e.g. poverty, unemployment or material inequality of these regions (“the realm of the body”);
- psychological aspects that evoke various attitudes of terrorists (“the realm of the mind”).

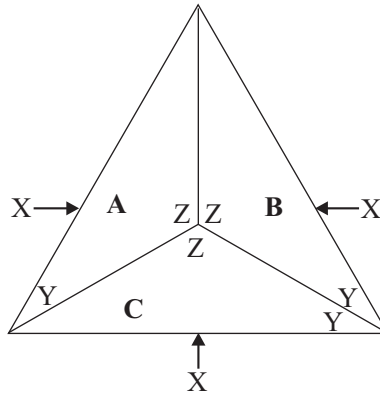
The three elements above, that is the realm of the “idea – heart”, that of the “body” and the “mind” overlap and mutually influence each other as well as numerous other internal (e.g. cultural diversification of a given state or region) and international (such as the attitude of other countries) factors. This produces a phenomenon called the “triad of terrorist motivation”.

The above elements may also be mathematically analyzed when the indicators A, B, C or X, Y and Z are assigned values and reflected on a scale or in the formulas that pres-

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<sup>1</sup> W. Laqueur, *The New Terrorism, Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*, New York–Oxford 1999; C. Combs, *Terrorism in the Twenty – First Century*, New Jersey 1997; L. Pettiford, D. Harding, *Terrorism, The New World War*, London 2003; J. Zulaika, W. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo, The Follies, Fables and Faces of Terrorism*, New York–London 1996.

Figure 1. The triad of terrorist motivation

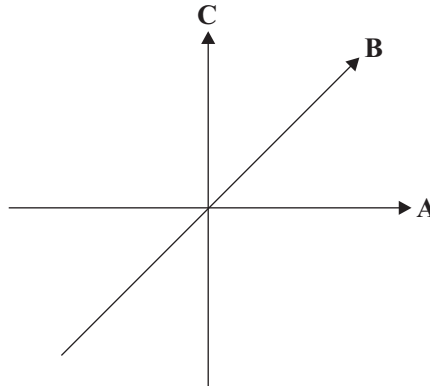


A – “the realm of the idea – heart”; B – “the realm of the body”; C – “the realm of the mind”;  
 X – external factors; Y – internal factors; Z – mutual interaction

Source: Author’s materials.

ent the scope of reasons for terrorism, the interactions that occur between them, the level of terrorism intensifying in a given state or region, etc.

Figure 2. Mathematical measures of the scope of terrorism – taking into account the ‘triad of terrorist motivation’



Source: Author’s materials.

The first and most frequently described group of factors is the “realm of the ideas” that consequently requires the least comment. The sources of terrorism are to be found both in the presence of different ideas or ideologies, which are frequently extreme, radical or destructive, but also in their mutual contradictions or confrontational nature. In various geographical regions this nature may assume various forms with a more or less

theoretical justification. Thus terrorism is the most radical reflection of certain beliefs, opinions or faiths. It is a product of a political, ideological, religious, ethnic or other conflict of interests. It is an attempt to achieve “something” at any price regardless of human or material costs.

The second realm is that of the “body.” In the analysis of the reasons for terrorism one must not neglect the economic and social aspects, including the widening gaps that occur both inside certain states or regions and between the rich and developing Northern hemisphere and the Southern hemisphere which is lagging more and more behind.

The difference between the North and the South may be measured in terms of statistics. They show that approximately 25% of the world population live in the North whereas the remaining 75% inhabit the South. This juxtaposition becomes particularly expressive and meaningful when accompanied by certain economic ratios, such as the share in the consumption of the global output. The differences are yet more striking here as the North consumes 85% and the South 15% of the global output. It should also be emphasized that the two ratios referred to above are dynamic. Certain numbers may change considerably even over quite short periods of time, which is often the case. These changes tend to be unfavorable for the underdeveloped countries. With reference to the example above it may be demonstrated that the proportion of the population living in the North is declining while simultaneously tending to increase its share of global consumption at the expense of the South.

Gross National Product (GNP) is another ratio that amounts to over USD 10,000 per capita in the North while not exceeding USD 2,000 per capita in the South. The disproportion is even more dramatic when comparing particular states that may represent each group. In the case of the world leaders GNP ranges between USD 30,000 and 40,000 per capita (Luxembourg – USD 43,000, Japan – USD 38,000, Norway – 36,000, USA – USD 34,000, Switzerland – USD 33,000) while the world outsiders oscillate around a hundred dollars (Burundi – USD 100, Ethiopia – USD 100, Sierra Leone – USD 130, Eritrea – USD 150).<sup>2</sup>

The same disproportion applies to numerous other phenomena or processes; for example approximately 85% of world refugees come from the South. This region is also the place where a clear majority of the approximately 200 wars and armed conflicts after 1945 have occurred; the same refers to the majority of various disasters, epidemics, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Another problem is the lack of sufficient medical care, efficient administration, education, welfare, independent media, respect for the basic rights and standards which women, children, minorities, etc. are entitled to. The problem of famine is extremely distressing. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) esti-

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<sup>2</sup> *Świat w liczbach 2003*, “The Economist”, Warszawa 2003; *Północ – Południe. Konflikt czy współpraca?*, Warszawa 2001; *Der Nord – Süd – Konflikt*, “Informationen Zur Politischen Bildung” 1982; *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2003*, New York 2003.

<sup>3</sup> SIPRI Yearbook, *Armaments, Disarmament and International Security – Yearbook 2000–2003*, Oxford; P. Boniface, *Atlas wojen XX wieku. Konflikty współczesne i w przyszłości*, Warszawa 2001; *Atlas świata. Zagrożenia XXI wieku*, Poznań 2004; [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch).

mates that over 850 million people are suffering from hunger or undernourishment whereas a further 2 billion are struggling with restricted access to food. Other statistics show that on average every couple of seconds somebody dies from starvation. The number of such deaths amounts to 15,000 daily and within a year it corresponds to the population of the eight largest cities in Poland.

Nearly a half of the world population (approx. 2.7 bn), mainly in the South, spends no more than 2 dollars per day to survive. Over a billion people live on less than one dollar a day. Extreme poverty mainly affects around fifty of the least developed countries, mostly in Africa.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3. People living on less than USD 1 a day**

	<i>millions</i>		<i>%</i>	
	<b>1990</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2001</b>
East Asia and Pacific	472	284	29.6	15.6
China	377	212	33.0	16.6
Europe and Central Asia	2	18	0.5	3.7
Latin America and Caribbean	49	50	11.3	9.5
Middle East and North Africa	6	7	1.6	2.4
South Asia	462	428	40.1	31.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	227	314	44.6	46.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,219</b>	<b>1,101</b>	<b>27.9</b>	<b>21.3</b>

Source: World Bank, quoted after: [www.developmentgoals.org](http://www.developmentgoals.org).

**Figure 4. People living on less than USD 2 a day**

	<i>millions</i>		<i>%</i>	
	<b>1990</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2001</b>
East Asia and Pacific	1,116	868	69.9	47.6
China	830	596	72.6	46.7
Europe and Central Asia	58	94	12.3	19.7
Latin America and Caribbean	125	128	28.4	24.5
Middle East and North Africa	51	70	21.4	23.2
South Asia	958	1,059	85.5	76.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	382	514	75.0	76.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,689</b>	<b>2,733</b>	<b>61.6</b>	<b>52.8</b>

Source: World Bank, quoted after: [www.developmentgoals.org](http://www.developmentgoals.org).

In many cases there is a more or less clear relation between the intensification of acts of terror and economic and social problems. This is reflected in Afghanistan, Paki-

<sup>4</sup> [www.developmentgoals.org](http://www.developmentgoals.org); [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

stan, Palestine, Iraq, India, Indonesia, The Philippines, Columbia, etc. Even Saudi Arabia is not an exception here, as this rich state is fighting similar problems as exemplified by the child mortality rate of around 20%, male illiteracy rate of over 15% and of over 30% among women.<sup>5</sup>

The above tendencies may be interpreted as a social and economic encouragement for terrorism. Obviously, this principle is not obligatory. Not every poor country has observed or may be expected to observe intensified terrorism. Similarly, a high GNP is not a guarantee against terrorism, as exemplified by the USA, UK, France or Spain. Some of the attacks in these countries may to a certain extent be explained with reference to economic and social factors by saying that the attacks were organized by the representatives of the poor ‘South’, or of ethnical groups living at a lower material level (ETA, IRA, etc.) or by organizations that condemn capitalist principles (e.g. the Red Brigades). This factor does not necessarily predominate though. Frequently it should be considered in relation to a religious, ethnic or ideological factor.

The third realm, that of the “mind”, comprises various psychological factors. These encompass various attitudes ranging from indifference or depression to an intensified inclination for spectacular or radical activity. An increased level of aggression or hatred and the sense of a mission or the feeling of deprivation both facilitates the manipulation of such people and makes them more susceptible to devote their own lives and take away others’ lives in the name of some principle (e.g. suicide bombers).

A part of the local community the assassin comes from quite frequently considers his or her act to be heroic. Such a heroic act ensures the actor both forgiveness for all earlier sins and eternal life in the glory of a martyr while his or her family are commonly admired and respected. The number of victims killed in the attack is an additional reason for pride and it contributes to yet greater postmortem glory, however gruesome or irrational it may sound. Unfortunately, this scenario is far from rare. It may be observed in Iraq, Chechnya or in Palestine where many families raise their children in admiration for such attitudes and for people acting accordingly.

A brutal act of violence or terror inspired by one party frequently triggers an automatic retaliatory act in the form of an even more bloody and ruthless revenge. This may start a vendetta scenario to last for many years to come and to be transferred from one generation to another along with the mother’s milk. The scenario involves not only the reprisal for one’s own but also raising young generations in an atmosphere of extreme hostility and hatred towards the enemy. Speaking colloquially, under such circumstances, evil breeds evil and hatred breeds hatred.

The above issues are also related to those of chauvinism, xenophobia, prejudices and stereotypes. All the above contribute directly or indirectly to deeper intolerance, aggression, hostility and the further expansion of terror. This finds reflection both in further, increasingly bloodier terrorist attacks and in the breaking of limits that used to be informally respected by the attackers or organizers of the attacks. This may be exem-

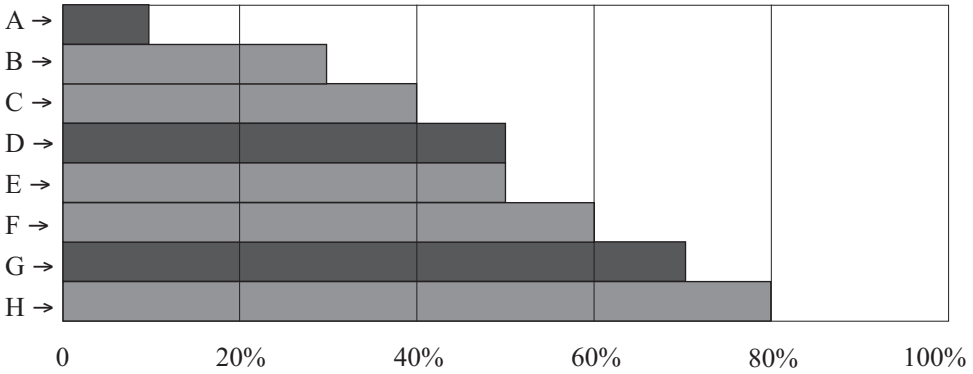
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<sup>5</sup> A. Bińkowski, *Almanach państw świata 2003*, Warszawa 2003.

plified by the events in Bieslan in 2004. The target of the terrorists was the children and their parents assembled at a ceremony of the beginning of the school year. This tendency is also expressed by increasingly frequent incidents of Muslim terrorists cutting the throats of female hostages. Could the use of the atomic bomb be the final limit the terrorists will refrain from breaking?

In the analysis of the psychological aspects of terrorism it is necessary to take into consideration the changes that affect the psychology of both the victims and the actors of terrorist attacks. These are included in the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that has been an official disease since 1980. Despite intensive research conducted over the last two decades neither the scale nor the scope of this disorder in relation to terrorism has been thoroughly recognized. The disorder is very likely to resemble some psychological disorders resulting from war.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 5. The most frequent psychological disorders following war**



A – Serious mental illness; B – Psychological disorder impairing normal functioning; C – Serious conflict in the family; D – PTSD; E – Fear of authorities; F – Search for justice/revenge; G – Physical and mental exhaustion; H – Demoralization % of total population

Source: “Świat Nauki”, September 2000.

This finds confirmation in the findings of psychologists and psychiatrists assisting civilians after the terrorist attack in Bieslan: “children are afraid of walking in the streets. They do not sleep at night, they scream. They do not believe it is a nightmare... Bieslan will remain a city of seriously ill people. For many years.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Z. Ratajczak, *Contemporary Terrorism from the Psychological Perspective*, in: *Contemporary Society and Global Terrorism*, Poznań 2004; E. Staub, *The Roots of Evil. The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, Cambridge 1993; [www.ncptsd.org](http://www.ncptsd.org).

<sup>7</sup> P. Reszka, *Nie zapomnimy tej wilczej zbrodni*, “Rzeczpospolita” 9.09.2004.

The terrorists also suffer from various mental disorders that frequently augment their ruthlessness, determination or aggression. Not much is actually known about this problem and it requires further research and analysis.

To sum up, it may be said that terrorism is frequently caused by a conflict of interests, the shortage of certain goods (both material and intangible values) or psychological conditions. The image of terrorism is frequently made up of charismatic leaders, fanatical members, desperados or lunatics that are possessed by a vision or idea and attempt to achieve their goals regardless of the means required. These goals are not priorities for them but they are rather absolute, unconditional, eternal and frequently even holy values.

One of the most significant obstacles in fully realizing and understanding the problem of terrorism is the difficulty of defining the notion in an unequivocal and scientific manner. Despite long years of attempts to do so and several hundreds of completely different definitions of terrorism, the international community has not been able to develop a single, universal and commonly accepted definition of the notion of terrorism.<sup>8</sup> Initially, ideological and theoretical differences posed a difficulty. For a very long time (nearly up to 1999) Western countries rejected the idea of a holistic convention on terrorism and promoted the idea of sector conventions that would refer to particular types or manifestations of terrorism. At present the main issue of concern is a separate Article 18 that stipulates the conditions providing for the convention not to apply. A conflict of interest arises here between those states that are either for or against applying the convention articles to a struggle for independence.

Under such circumstances the definition of international terrorism may refer to more general notions. These would define terrorism as the use of violence, or threatening to do so, by an individual or by a group who undertake activities (breaking international law) aimed against individuals, institutions, states or objects in order to achieve certain, mainly political benefits. A terrorist organization is a more or less formalized group, unified by common goals, program or views, that undertakes such activities.

The problem of terrorism is difficult to present exhaustively and profoundly due to its constant expansion. Terrorist organizations emerge and disappear, their activities change, the assessment of these activities also evolves, or the new forms and kinds of terrorism appear. Take for example the relatively new notions of ecoterrorism, bioterrorism or cyberterrorism.<sup>9</sup>

It is an interesting concept to treat terrorism as a cyclical phenomenon – a rising and falling wave. Thus the phenomenon has high and low points and periods of stability.

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<sup>8</sup> *Meeting the Challenges of Global Terrorism, Prevention, Control and Recovery*, ed. D. Das, P. Kratoski, Lanham–Boulder–New York–Oxford 2003; H. Henderson, *Library in a Book, Terrorism*, New York 2001; B. Hoffman, *Oblicza terroryzmu*, Warszawa 2001; A. Schmid, A. Jongman, *Political Terrorism. A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature*, New Brunswick 1988.

<sup>9</sup> B. Bolechów, *Terroryzm w świecie podwubiegunowym. Przewartościowania i kontynuacje*, Toruń 2002; S. Atkins, *Terrorism, A Reference Handbook*, Sant Barbara–Denver–Oxford 1992; *Encyklopedia terroryzmu*, Warszawa 2004.

The frequency, dynamics and fluctuation of the wave depend on a number of various political, economic, social, religious and other factors. These follow from the internal conditions in various states and from the situation of a given region or international relations in general. The situation is also influenced by various mechanisms, such as the avalanche or domino effect or the action – reaction scenario. The syndrome of coincidence is also significant here. This signifies a purely accidental combination of events that happened to occur at a given time and place and produced certain consequences. Alternatively, it may be assumed that there are no coincidences in politics and society, which is quite a common approach.

From the point of view of the dispute on the role and status of the USA in the modern world, the problem of terrorism and particularly the events of September 11 and the consequent war against terrorism may be treated as a measure of both the internal and international potential and significance of the US.<sup>10</sup> The opponents of American domination found their culminating argument to be the ultimate end of the US hegemony or its image. The adversaries treated these events as a signal of how important the world leader is and that it is only the US that may lead the international crusade against terrorism. However, the US would have to modernize and reformulate some of its priorities. From the theoretical point of view (the concept of Long Cycles) the war waged against terrorism may be treated as a new war of hegemony that will start or that might have already started the second “Long Cycle” of American global domination.

Terrorism may also be interpreted as one of the most significant factors in the destabilization of many parts of the world. It is both the cause and the result of the escalation of global tensions. It appears to be one of the many crucial and timeless actors on the international stage. Scientific analysis will allow for better comprehension of a number of other phenomena, such as fundamentalism, separatism, nationalism, globalization, etc. and their mutual interaction.

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This publication is the outcome of a research project on various aspects of contemporary terrorism conducted by the Institute of Political Science and Journalism at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. The project involved both scholars from the Institute and other researchers, representatives of other Polish scientific centers, who deal with the problems of terrorism.

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<sup>10</sup> *History and September 11<sup>th</sup>*, J. Meyerowitz (ed.), Philadelphia 2003; *11 września 2001. Jak to się stało i co dalej?*, J. Hoge, G. Rose (eds.), 2001; P. Griset, S. Mahan, *Terrorism in Perspective*, Thousand Oaks–London–New Delhi.