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Selected Issues of the Studies on Terrorism

Irregardless of the number and diversity of materials as well as opinions on terrorism it still remains a difficult area of research. This is a result of the scope and dynamic nature of this issue, of the frequent lack of plausible and verifiable data, of the factors that go beyond the scope of science (such as political factors) and a number of other conditions. A range of examples can illustrate the complexity and difficulty encountered in the research on terrorism. Despite their multiplicity I will concentrate on three only.

The first one concerns the problem with defining the notion of terrorism.

1. The essence of terrorism?

At present terrorism is among the most frequent words that are uttered in nearly every existing language. To paraphrase the statement of Zygmunt Bauman on globalization it can be observed that "[terrorism] is on everybody's lips. A fad word fast turning into a shibboleth, a magic incantation, a pass-key meant to unlock the gates to all present and future mysteries [...] All vogue words appear to share a similar fate: the more experiences they pretend to make transparent, the more they themselves become opaque."¹ This is happening to terrorism as well.

It is a fact that there is no single, universal, commonly adopted or applied definition of the notion. It is also difficult to indicate the number of definitions that have already been originated. There are various statistics that generally bring their number to several hundred. It is also certain that every month new definitions of the notion are coined and will continue to be coined in the future. This is a certain syndrome of a 'bottomless well,' or rather a gap, that the scholarly world has been trying to fill with individual scholars or institutions aspiring to have their own definition. However, other reasons also need to be considered. Some scholars dealing with the issue of terrorism claim that it is virtually impossible to define this notion in a proper and exhaustive manner.

¹ Z. Bauman, *Globalizacja. I co z tego dla ludzi wynika*, Warszawa 2000, p. 5.

Therefore such attempts make no sense.² Other scholars are of the opinion that the phenomenon is too complex and diversified to be enclosed in a single definition. Consequently, one should focus on creating the definitions of particular types of terrorism, e.g. narcoterrorism, cyberterrorism, global terrorism,³ state terrorism, etc. Other specialists make 'heroic attempts' to analyze the components of terrorism and thus coin a universal definition.

In the latter case, however, the question of how to select those components (elements) arises. According to A. Pawlowski, seven can be indicated; namely a terrorist operation, activity, violent act, indirect strategy, strategic target, tool and fanaticism.⁴ A. Schmid and I. Jongman suggest an interesting solution. They have compiled the main features of terrorism on the basis of 109 various definitions of this notion. Their exhaustive list is as follows:⁵ 1. Violence, force – 83,5%; 2. Political – 65%; 3. Fear, terror emphasized – 51%; 4. Threat – 47%; 5. Psych. effects and reactions – 41,5%; 6. Victim-target differentiation – 37,5%; 7. Purposive, planned, systematic, organized action – 32%; 8. Method of combat, strategy, tactic – 30,5%; 9. Extranormality, in breach of accepted rules, without humanitarian constraints – 30%; 10. Coercion, extortion, induction of compliance – 28%; 11. Publicity aspect – 21,5%; 12. Arbitrariness, impersonal, random character – 21%; 13. Civilians, noncombatants, neutrals, outsiders as victims – 17,5%; 14. Intimidation – 17%; 15. Innocence of victims emphasized – 15,5%; 16. Group, movement, organization as perpetrator – 14%; 17. Symbolic aspect – 13,5%; 18. Incalculability, unpredictability, unexpectedness of occurrence of violence – 9%; 19. Clandestine, covert nature – 9%; 20. Repetitiveness, serial or campaign character of violence – 7%; 21. Criminal – 6%; 22. Demands made on third parties – 4%.

The above list encompasses the elements that are most frequently considered in the definitions of terrorism, such as the use of violence – power (over 83% indications) or the political nature of the operation (65%) on the one hand and some infrequent ones, such as the criminal aspect (6%) or the demands made of third parties (4%) on the other. It contains the aspects that are obvious and indispensable when characterizing terrorism, such as threat, anxiety, violence, tactics – strategy, as well as controversial ones, such as the repetitive, serial nature of violence that can be but is not necessarily an obligatory element of each form of terrorism.

The selection combined with the actual frequency of the factors presented above is disputable. As other definitions of terrorism are analyzed (such as the

² W. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, London 1977, p. 7 or W. Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism*, Boston 1987, pp. 142–156.

³ S. Wojciechowski, *Global Terrorism*, in: *The Faces of Terrorism*, ed. S. Wojciechowski, Poznań 2006.

⁴ A. Pawlowski, *Terroryzm w Europie XIX i XX wieku*, Zielona Góra 1980.

⁵ A. Schmid, A. Jongman, *Political Terrorism. A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature*, Amsterdam–Oxford–New York 1988, pp. 5–6.

more recent ones; Schmidt and Jongman referred to those from the period from 1936 to 1981) both the order of some features and their proportions are likely to be altered. This is not the point, though. What is more significant is the grasping of certain 'key' of features to provide a foundation for a precise, yet concise definition. Three elements out of those enumerated, namely violence – power, political nature and anxiety, have been indicated in over 50% of definitions. They seem to be significant, if not indispensable, components of terrorism. However, B. Bolechow rightfully observes that these features are characteristic of more than just terrorism.⁶ Therefore they are too general to define this notion exclusively with reference to them.

K. Indeck points to the following main indicators of terrorism: violence, making recourse to the defined tactics and strategy of terrorism (although one should instead talk about terrorists' strategy), objectives, motives of terrorism (or terrorists) and the multitude of its types.⁷ Yet even this model seems to be insufficient, despite its larger complexity. What about the remaining elements which are indispensable when describing terrorism, such as threat and terror to name but two? The above features may need to be further ordered and expressed in terms of five key questions:

I) Who? – who is the initiator, organizer, sponsor or executioner of the attack/attacks?

Item 16 on Schmid – Jongman's list concerns it directly whereas items 19 and 21 concern it indirectly.

II) How? – How was the attack prepared, conducted, executed?

This concerns items 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 directly and items 3, 4, 6, 12, 13 and 15 indirectly.

III) Why? – Why has a terrorist attack come about? This is a question about the sources, reasons, motives, etc.

This concerns items 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 17, 20 and 22 directly and items 1, 12, 15, 18, 21 and 22 indirectly.

IV) Who/what was the target? Who/what did the instance of terrorism concern? This is a question about the subject(s) – object(s) of the attack.

The elements 6, 13 and 20 refer to it directly and the elements 2, 7, 12, 15 and 22 indirectly.

V) What is the outcome? – This is a question about the consequences.

This makes a direct reference to the features no 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20 and 22, and an indirect reference to 6, 7, 9, 12 and 21.

The above factors can be presented statistically in the following table (which does not take into consideration the details and disputes concerning both the questions and respective answers):

⁶ B. Bolechów, *Terroryzm w świecie podwubiegunowym. Przewartościowania i kontynuacje*, Toruń 2002, p. 33.

⁷ K. Indeck, *Prawo karne wobec terroryzmu i aktu terrorystycznego*, Łódź 1988.

Statistical analysis of the components of the notion of terrorism

Question no	I	II	III	IV	V
The number of elements concerning it directly or indirectly *	3	20	18	8	19
Total number of elements	22	22	22	22	22

* The content and the number of elements assigned to some questions directly and indirectly is disputable.

Source: Author's own analysis

Mathematically it is easy to observe the prevalence of elements assigned to three questions: **How? Why?** and **What is the outcome?** How can we interpret this? What are the implications?

A relatively small number of features that characterize terrorism are devoted to the perpetrators and their victims. The elements that concern the form and method of operation, the reasons and the outcomes seem to prevail. Although the above table should not be assigned a particular significance, it clearly illustrates which elements are stressed in individual definitions. Does this mean that these features are particularly significant to determine what terrorism is? Or is it rather a certain tendency typical of a certain group of authors or a period when the definitions were coined?

The former seems unlikely given the fact that the analysis comprises over a hundred definitions coined by the representatives of various scholarly circles. The latter does not seem likely, either. While the definitions that are analyzed may not be most recent, the newer ones illustrate a similar approach. Yet focusing exclusively on three main groups of factors (How? Why? What is the outcome?) will certainly distort the meaning of the notion under analysis. Going back to the model of five values we can treat it as a starting point (a kind of a 'key') for more extensive considerations of the notion of terrorism.

2. Schematism of thought

The difficulties presented above, which refer to the definition of the notion of terrorism, are only one in the entire range of problems that accompany the research on terrorism. Another deficiency, which is observed less frequently, is an excessively schematic analysis of the above research problem. A definite majority of studies and papers concerning terrorism illustrate two modes of presentation. Some attempt to present this phenomenon exhaustively or to present its clearly demarcated part, such as terrorism in Western Europe or in the Middle East, air terrorism or terrorism at sea, the outcomes of terrorism, etc. Others devote their analyses to a selected single element, such as Al Qaida, Hamas, IRA, Osama bin Laden, etc. The above forms of presentation seem to be highly

justified due to the complexity and multidimensional character of the issue. However, a question arises whether they are sufficient. Aren't they excessively general and schematic? Do they enable us to grasp the entire range of the issue? In my opinion the two approaches, which can be labeled a 'general' and a 'detailed' model, should be complemented. They frequently fail to consider a broader context of the processes and subjects related to the issue under discussion. What I mean is the so-called 'environment' comprising the elements that impact the issue under analysis directly or indirectly. These elements might involve social, economic, cultural, religious, historical, geopolitical, ideological, psychological or ethnic conditions, to name but a few. Some of these aspects are obviously considered, for example in the analysis of Al Qaida operations or terrorist attacks in Israel, yet not to a satisfactory extent. This may significantly impede the presentation of an exhaustive picture of the situation and thus result in drawing erroneous conclusions. Such a scenario concerns numerous issues apart from terrorism. It has an adverse impact both on theoretical considerations and on concrete activities or political decisions.

The overgeneralized and fragmentary picture of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan may be one of the significant reasons for the failure of the American and allied forces there. One frequently gets an impression that this picture is reduced to the political and military aspects whilst neglecting the realms of society, ethnicity or religion or actually rejecting local, cultural, historical or psychological conditions. There is absolutely no guarantee that the allocation of substantial amounts of money to the restoration of a local school, mosque or bridge is bound to result in reduced aversion or suspicion towards the aggressors even though their intentions are good, and they do not want to be invaders. They stand a considerable risk though that this is how they will be perceived, at least at the beginning. Later assessment depends on a combination of a great number of various factors. In some situations the relations with a local community may be of greater significance than financial aid. We need to bear it in mind that the 'newcomers,' who took power by force and represent a different culture, as is the case in Iraq and Afghanistan, have a different system of values. The process of winning trust or popularity may be a more complex one where money and power are not necessarily most important. Failing to understand local reality, dialogue and actual collaboration the allied forces will be perceived as the aliens – aggressors – invaders. The locals who cooperate with them may be considered to be collaborators and the aid will symbolically resemble the beads handed to Indians by white colonists. This is not a desirable solution then. An exhaustive list of errors committed is significantly longer. Some have already been corrected, others remain. A classical example is imposing certain norms and behavioral models on the local community, or the perception and assessment of reality. This is accompanied by the problem with communicating both in terms of verbal and nonverbal exchanges, contradictory interests, the feeling of 'superiority,' wounded pride and many others.

An efficient solution to this difficult situation in Afghanistan and Iraq may involve the complementing or gradual replacement of American and NATO troops with stabilization forces composed of soldiers from the given region. This might eradicate a range of differences such as cultural, religious and mental barriers, etc. although the emergence of such troops would be far from easy, given the individual interests of the states involved. Regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States or the Organization of the Islamic Conference could be of aid here.

To return to the main theme, one can refer to the example that illustrates that it is necessary to expand present analyses by adding new elements and forms of research that would go beyond the 'general' and 'detailed' model, that is the issue of terrorist organizations. The literature of this subject usually analyzes it either with respect to a given organization or to an area where it operates. However, the analysis frequently neglects the elements that are related in a direct or indirect manner. This issue is therefore worth considering in a broader perspective.

Fortunately, the notion of the terrorist organization (group) is neither as controversial nor ambiguous as the notion of terrorism. However, this is not to mean that there is a single, commonly applied definition of this term. The literature of the subject frequently defines a **terrorist organization** as a structure – group – formation that adopts terrorism as the principal or the only form of operation.⁸ The US Department of State defines each group that applies international terrorism, or that is subdivided into the subgroups that apply international terrorism as a **terrorist group/organization**.⁹

The above definitions are too general, though. They neglect a number of elements that are typical of a majority of organizations, including terrorist ones. Thus, the suggestion to expand these definitions by a statement that the above-mentioned structure – group – formation has more or less concrete objectives, methods and modes of operation as well as its own institutions. However, the differences among individual terrorist organizations and different ways of characterizing them need to be emphasized. There are two theoretical models of analysis of how terrorist organizations are structured. The first – 'structural' – one treats an organization as a more or less organized group with its objectives, operation methods, logistical support, financing sources, etc. Another – 'methodical' – approach mainly emphasizes terror/terrorism as a strategy/method of the organization's operation.

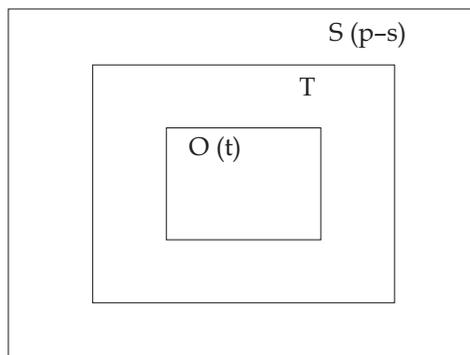
⁸ B. Bolechów, *Terroryzm w świecie podwubiegunowym. Przewartościowania i kontynuacje*, Toruń 2002, p. 38; D. Szlachter, *Walka z terroryzmem w Unii Europejskiej. Nowy impuls*, Toruń 2006, p. 25; A. Roberts, *Terrorism and International Order*, in: L. Freedman, A. Roberts, R. Vincent, P. Wilkinson, P. Windsor, *Terrorism and International Order*, London 1988, p. 10.

⁹ Section 2656f (d) of Title of the United State Code, in: *Country Reports on Terrorism 2005*, Statistical Annex, National Counterterrorism Center, 7 April 2006.

Functioning of a terrorist organization can in turn be analyzed on many levels:

- Firstly, an organization is a separate structure with its leaders, members, objectives, etc.;
- Secondly, it is a part of a broader system labeled 'terrorism'. This system involves the following elements, to name but a few:
 - relations between terrorist organizations;
 - interactions between these organizations and state and suprastate institutions, as well as the factors that shape such interaction;
 - methods and principles of the operations of terrorist organizations;
 - motives encouraging terrorist activity;
- Thirdly, a terrorist organization constitutes an element of a political or social system of a given state, region, or the world.

A multilayered range or operation of a terrorist organization



O(t) –terrorist organization

T- terrorism as a 'system'. O(t) is one of its components.

S (p-s) –political and social system. O(t) is a component of T.

T is a component of S(p-s).

Source: Author's own analysis.

In the realm of management or logistics some terrorist organizations resemble great business corporations and they frequently copy certain models or operational procedures from them. The above may be considered controversial, especially when referring to such great concerns as IBM, Ford, General Motors on the one hand and such organizations as Al Qaida, Hamas or Hezbollah on the other. Yet similarities between these two groups of organizations do exist. Their enumeration would be quite long, given both groups' endeavors to have an optimum structure (e.g. management model) as well as optimization of profit. The profit means different things, yet it frequently has the same, common, interdisciplinary and multilayered nature that involves financial, promotional, political and other elements.

These similarities are also well illustrated by the analysis on the basis of the theory of organization and management. It involves five main factors indispensable for an organization to exist: the objective, communication between the organization's parts, collaboration of these parts, boundaries that separate the organization from others in its surroundings and a repetitive nature of operations aimed to attain the objectives.¹⁰ A definite majority, if not all the above elements, pertain both to various institutions and terrorist organizations.

The analysis of terrorist organizations' activities may also apply the features ascribed to political organizations. The main features involve:

- a) formal social ties originated both on the basis of subjective motivation (e.g. needs) and objective requirements of efficient operation of individuals who have the same or similar needs or interests;
- b) formalized organizational structure of a more or less complex nature;
- c) decisions are made by the power centers at different ranks of the organization;
- d) political activity is to execute the decisions;
- e) controlling procedures determine the rights of different elements of the organization;
- f) set of formal and/or informal sanctions applied within controlling procedures;
- g) specific personal composition, symbols, objectives, methods or the means of operation.

It would clearly enhance and broaden the perspective if the above elements were applied to analyze the issue of the functioning of terrorist organizations. Yet, it still fails to encompass the entire perspective of the issue. A number of other aspects should be considered to a larger extent. One of the most significant ones is the problem of the so-called environment of terrorist organizations that is the elements and interactions between these elements. This environment involves the following components:

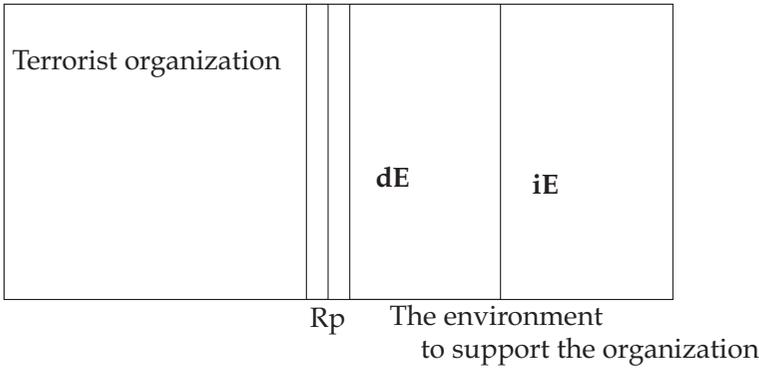
- A. Range of permeation (Rp).** This refers to the individuals or groups of individuals who may become a part of a terrorist organization or its direct or indirect environment (see below) depending on the external conditions and their own beliefs. These may be mercenaries, hired by the organization, or members of another organization collaborating for some purpose or for some period of time. Both groups may terminate collaboration for personal or other reasons, or just the opposite - they may become an actual part of the organization.
- B. Direct environment (dE)** - the subjects (individuals, organizations, institutions, etc.) who maintain a direct contact with a terrorist organization or its representatives. They provide support in terms of logistics, financing or training but it may also involve passing of instructions, orders, messages or joint planning or execution of operations.

¹⁰ A. Bednarski, J. Szlendak, *Wprowadzenie do teorii organizacji i zarządzania*, Toruń 1997, p. 95.

C. **Indirect environment (iE)** – the subjects (individuals, organizations, institutions, etc.) who maintain contact with a terrorist organization via intermediaries. Collaboration may involve weapons trafficking, buying and selling information, obtaining contracts for murders or running training and many other issues. Using the services of intermediaries (e.g. another organization or state representatives) may follow from numerous political or logistic reasons.

The support, whether offered in terms of **dE** or **iE**, may result from political, ideological, religious, ethnic or financial aspects. It always attempts to attain some short-term or long-term benefits, understood in a broad perspective.

A terrorist organization and its supporting environment



Source: Author’s own analysis.

Both parties, i.e. a terrorist organization and its (direct or indirect) environment may be equal partners with each other or one party may dominate over another (for example for financial reasons, due to political influence or threat) and dictate terms. Such disproportion can be observed when a state or another sponsor finances a terrorist organization. However, a scenario is also feasible in which an organization changes its environment entirely or partly seeking new patrons or undertaking collaboration with other organizations. It frequently happens that both a terrorist organization (mainly the leaders) and the environment itself initiate the expansion of collaboration by entering the new realms, such as new territories, or intensify collaboration by means of personal contacts.

The latter aspect is exemplified by Osama bin Laden’s marrying off of his eldest daughter to the Taliban leader, Mullah Muhammad Umar, while himself marrying a young Pashtun girl from an influential Taliban family to be his fourth wife. Owing to this he ensured the aid and loyalty guaranteed by the Pashtunwali, a traditional code of the Pashtun.¹¹ The Pashtun, Taliban and

¹¹ Y. Bondansky, *Osama bin Laden. Człowiek, który wypowiedział wojnę Ameryce*, Warszawa 2001, s. 250 i n.

their associations with Al Qaida provide an excellent illustration of the practical existence of such elements as examples of the range of permeation, direct or indirect of the environment.

3. The changeable picture of terrorism

The third difficulty while presenting the issue of terrorism in an exhaustive and profound manner is the evolving and expanding scope of research. With time, individual terrorist organizations emerge or cease to exist, their activity or its assessment changes, and new forms and types of terrorism come into existence. New notions, such as ecoterrorism, bioterrorism, cyberterrorism or global terrorism exemplify these changes.

To take an example of global terrorism, it can be said that it is identified with the terrorism of Muslim fundamentalism irrespective of the place of occurrence. This trend is simultaneous with local terrorism, represented by such organizations as the IRA, ETA or the Tamil Tigers. As time goes by, it is global terrorism that assumes the greatest importance. This is so because on the one hand we are at the stage of the permanently 'rising' wave of global terrorism, mainly inspired by Muslim fundamentalists. On the other, we can observe a decrease in local terrorism (whether temporary or not). This was obviously illustrated by the recent IRA's declaration of the abandonment of terror.

It can therefore be proposed that this is another stage of terrorism evolving by a partial substitution of one form with another one. However, this is not necessarily a permanent process. It is obviously not going to be an ultimate process, either, that is local terrorism will not be eliminated completely. It will not involve all the organizations, in particular those that take advantage of international support (such as Hezbollah or Hamas). One cannot exclude the possibility that in the future a contradictory phenomenon may occur leading to the increasing importance of local forms of terrorism.

Global terrorists, literally and figuratively create a network of mutual dependencies and ties. Apart from the best known example of Al Qaida one should also mention the defeated group of so-called Algerians with their cells in Germany, France and Great Britain, who were planning to strike in London and Paris using chemical weapons.

The issues presented in the paper only show the subject of research rather than exhaust it. This requires a significantly broader analysis and taking into consideration numerous other complex elements, such as the differentiation between terrorism and struggle for independence, between guerrilla warfare and terrorism, the issue of typology of terrorism, terrorist techniques and methods, methods of drafting, training, financing or overcoming terrorism; forecasting new threats, terrorists' psychology, etc.