FROM THE EDITOR

THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC OF TERRORISM
– ANOTHER MUTATION OF THE TERRORIST VIRUS

Public opinion, as well as some political elites and experts who are focused on the energy crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, unfortunately often forget about other challenges or threats in the world. Terrorism is one of these problems, as it not only remains but, worse still, is gaining momentum in some aspects, and parts of the world. Moreover, despite the end of the NATO operation in Afghanistan, the war on terrorism continues and will continue to be waged on various continents.

The phenomenon of terrorism can be compared to an ever-mutating virus (hence the notion of pandemic of terrorism) that has a global range, and attacks in successive waves (Rapoport, 2013). At the time of COVID-19, this image is both evocative and, unfortunately, still relevant. This is also alluded to by the thesis, which emphasizes that, despite the war on terrorism that has been going on for more than two decades and the associated military, political and financial involvement of many states and international institutions, terrorism remains one of the most significant and most dangerous security threats. In the next few years, this problem may escalate even further due, among other things, to the rise of state terrorism, the resurgence of the influence of certain Islamist networks, including ISIS and Al-Qaeda (Wejkszner, 2016 and 2017), a significant increase in the activity of other radical currents (such as far-right terrorism), and terrorists more and more frequently using new technological solutions, in the form of cyberattacks, drones, and so on (*Country*, 2021).

Despite the increase in both the threat of, and interest in terrorism, particularly after the attacks of September 11, 2001, developing a single universal and commonly used definition of terrorism has been not been possible (Richards, 2019: 13–21). The analysis of the various definitions of terrorism demonstrates their huge diversity, both in terms of content and form. Identifying the most important, common components, terrorism is a form of politico-social violence (or its threat) that is inspired by various motives and performed in violation of the existing legal order by individuals or groups of individuals using a variety of means and methods which results in physical, psychological or material damage. This violence is aimed at direct or indirect target(s) in order for the perpetrator(s) to achieve a final outcome. This approach highlights several important and universal characteristics of terrorism. Firstly, it reveals the diversity of causes (motives) forming a broad range of factors that generate and escalate the phenomenon under consideration. Secondly, it highlights the fact that these actions violate the law, while producing an extensive range of consequences. Thirdly, it points out that terrorism (as is often wrongly assumed) not only involves the actions of groups, but also those of individuals (e.g. the lone wolf syndrome). Fourthly, it stresses the diverse means and methods terrorists may use (Wojciechowski, 2017: 26–27).

FACETS OF THE WAR ON TERRORISM

The war on terrorism can be considered not only in military, political, economic and social terms, but also in its legal, ethical, historical, cultural and other dimensions (Lubin, 2021; Krzesak, 2013: 87–97). A particularly relevant point of reference is, for example, the twentieth anniversary of the attacks of September 11, 2001, or the decision to withdraw NATO forces from Afghanistan and the Taliban rapidly taking the power in its wake. Experts from the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs (a research center at Brown University in Providence) estimated that, from the time of the attacks on the World Trade Center towers in September 2001 until August 2021 – when the Taliban announced that they had seized power in Afghanistan – the cost of the war on terror exceeded $6.4 trillion (in Afghanistan alone, it amounted to $2.26 trillion).[1] In addition, the war has resulted in over 800,000 fatalities, including around 335,000 civilians, and more than 37 million people have had to flee their places of residence. This has mainly affected Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Somalia. In addition to the threat of terrorism, there have also been human rights violations and curtailment of civil liberties, and which continue to occur on a regular basis in these countries (Watson, 2021).

During the period under review, Afghanistan was one of the most important fronts in the fight against terrorism. Despite committing huge financial resources and the presence of more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan, NATO has failed to achieve all of its goals. These included not only defeating the terrorists or Islamic fundamentalists, but also in bringing security and stability to the country, including by financing, training and equipping Afghan forces. As time passed, the Taliban began to regain the initiative. The US administration, not wishing to increase financial outlays and human losses (more than 2,200 dead in total) and hoping that the Afghan authorities, with the support of government security forces, would maintain control over at least part of the territory, decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. How was it possible for the Taliban to defeat the strongest alliance in the world? This question requires a separate study indicating the diverse reasons for such a state of affairs, including, among other things, the Taliban's strategy, their determination and ruthlessness, the terrain, profits from drugs, among other things, external aid, the support from and intimidation of part of the population, the exploitation of NATO mistakes and the ineffectiveness of the Afghan authorities, and so on. All this made the United States enter into negotiations with the Taliban, which led to an agreement concluded by President Donald Trump. According to its provisions, US forces were to leave Afghan territory before May 1, 2021. However, due to the Taliban's failure to fulfil some of their commitments, among other things, this date was initially contested by new President Joe Biden (Kuznets, 2022), who proposed to gradually reduce the US military presence, and do so later than agreed. Unexpectedly, however, despite significant criticism even from some in his own administration, on April 14,

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[1] This is without additional costs, such as lifetime pensions for veterans or servicing the debt incurred to finance the military operation, as well as new operations against terrorists. So this amount is increasing all the time.

President Biden suddenly changed his mind and announced that US troops would leave Afghanistan by September 11, the twentieth anniversary of the 2001 attacks. In the aftermath of the American decision, other NATO member states, recognizing that "there is no military solution to the challenges facing Afghanistan," decided to withdraw their troops as well. This symbolically took place on August 30, when the last American soldier left Afghan territory, thus ending one of the key elements of the war on terror.

The pace and momentum of the Taliban offensive surprised experts and politicians alike. Colloquially speaking, twenty years of efforts by part of the international community to build a reasonably stable, democratic and secure Afghanistan were wiped out in twenty days. How was that possible? What happened to the over 300,000 strong Afghan security forces, which the United States alone spent over $88 billion on training? These formations were supposed to guarantee that control would be maintained over at least part of the territory, even after the withdrawal of NATO troops. This case is likely to undergo extensive examination in various training and analytical centers around the world for a very long time. Yet the first conclusions can already be made. They point to, for example, a long list of errors in the structure and logistics of Afghan armed formations, the low effectiveness of training courses and even lower morale of both soldiers and officers. All this is complemented by significant support for the Islamists among the soldiers, and omnipresent corruption, resulting in entire military units, as well as city or provincial authorities taking the Taliban side. There were also frequent cases where data on the numbers, training or equipment of the army or police were invented in order to obtain additional funds. Many uniformed Afghan personnel lacked the will and motivation to fight. All this was compounded by the decisions of their superiors (e.g., allegedly, President Ashraf Ghani secretly ordered the Pashtuns serving in the army, who constitute the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, not to fight the Taliban) (Kulis, 2021). In this way, the Taliban regained power almost without a fight, but this further complicated the situation both in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole.

TERRORIST THREAT AT PRESENT

Information gathered by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), using TerrorismTracker data, shows more than 60,000 terrorist incidents recorded worldwide between 2007 and 2021 alone (including more than 20,000 in the Middle East and North Africa or MENA).[2] The number of attacks and their consequences, including human losses, among other things, vary depending on the region under consideration. For years, three regions have clearly been in the lead, namely the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, as the following table shows in detail.

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[2] More long-term calculations, based on a different methodology, by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) show that, globally, more than 201,000 manifestations of terrorism occurred between 1970 and 2019, including over 129,000 between 2001 and 2019 (National, 2022).

Table 1

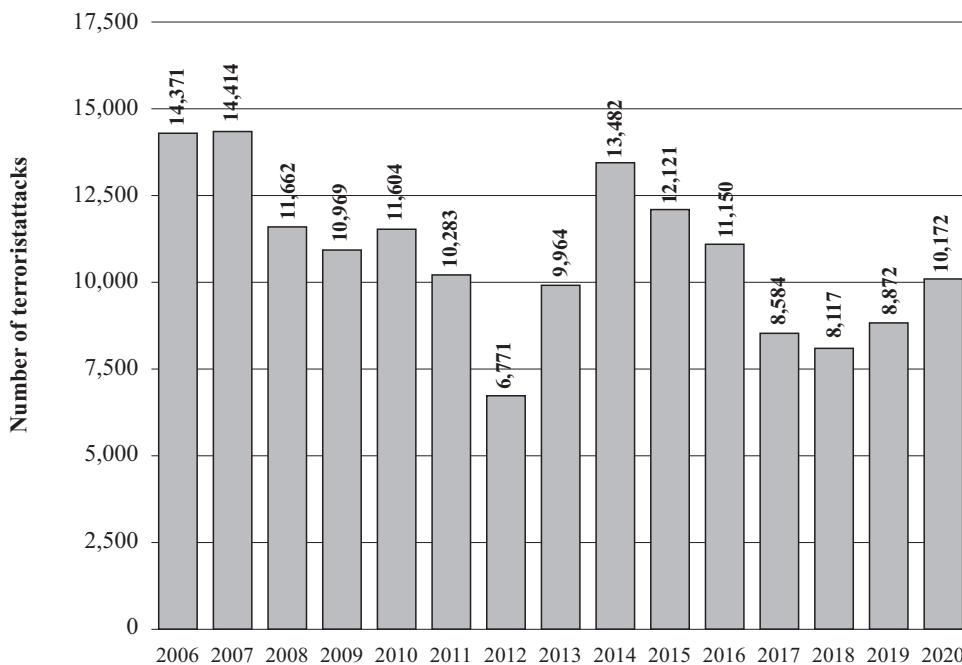**Number of terrorist attacks and fatalities in selected regions 2007–2021**

Region	Number of fatalities	Number of terrorist attacks
MENA	49,674	21,926
South Asia	37,001	16,765
Sub-Saharan Africa	30,557	9,863
Asia-Pacific	4,411	4,560
Europe	2,322	2,779
South America	1,835	3,090
Russia and Eurasia	1,399	1,535
North America	273	153
Central America and the Caribbean	33	91

Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2022, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney, March 2022, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web.pdf (26.09.2022).

So what is the contemporary picture of terrorism and what are its key trends? The first element, which unfortunately has negative overtones, is the increase in the number of attacks worldwide by up to 17 percent in 2021 compared to the previous year. There were a total of 5,226 attacks compared to 4,458 recorded in 2020. Worse still, this was the highest rate since 2007. To a large extent, this escalation is due to the increase in violence in the Sahel (e.g. Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso) and the political instability in several other regions, best exemplified by the case of Afghanistan or Myanmar (Burma). The largest number of attacks was recorded in Afghanistan 837, Iraq 833, Myanmar 750, Syria 338, Mali 333, Somalia 308, Burkina Faso 216, Nigeria 204, Pakistan 186, and Niger 74. In the West (identified by the report's authors as comprising Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand), the number of attacks has decreased over the past three years. Last year, there were 59 attacks and nine fatalities, a decrease of up to 68 percent and 70 percent respectively, compared to the record year 2018 (Global, 2022).

The escalation of the terrorist threat in some parts of the world is also highlighted in their reports by other think tanks and government institutions, including, for example, the Bureau of Counterterrorism of the U.S. Department of State. Although they use a different methodology when analyzing and recording terrorist attacks than the Institute for Economics & Peace and TerrorismTracker, the upward trend in recent years is also evident there. This is illustrated, for example, in the following summary of the number of attacks worldwide (*Country*, 2021).

The Bureau of Counterterrorism of the U.S. Department of State, in its reports, rightly emphasizes that the terrorist threat is increasingly geographically dispersed and that some forms of terrorism are growing extremely rapidly, with far-right terrorism being one example. The UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee has seen far-right terrorism escalate by as much as 320 percent globally over the past five years. Once again, ISIS cells operating in various parts of the globe are an increasingly serious problem, gradually regaining lost influence. Although ISIS has almost entirely lost control over territories in Syria and Iraq, State Department experts point out that

Figure 1. Number of terrorist attacks worldwide 2006–2020

Source: Terrorism: number of attacks worldwide 2020, Statista https://www.statista.com/statistics/202864/number-of-terrorist-attacks-worldwide/ (11.08.2022).

the organization continues its terrorist campaign, as evidenced by the fact that in 2020 alone, ISIS affiliates (outside Iraq and Syria) caused more fatalities than ever before. However, other terrorist networks, such as those created and recreated by Al-Qaeda (*Country*, 2021: 2–5), also pose a serious challenge.

The Global Terrorism Index 2022 shows that, in the past year, the highest level of terrorist threat among the 163 countries considered (accounting for 99.7 percent of the world's population), taking into account the rate of terrorist incidents, fatalities, injuries or hostages, was recorded in the countries listed in Table 2 below (Global, 2022: 6).

For comparison, Turkey ranked 23rd (6 places up from the previous ranking), the United States ranked 28th (2 places up), Israel was 30th (4 places down), the United Kingdom was 31st (no change), Germany 33rd (1 place up), France 35th (6 places up), Russia 44th (6 places up), the Netherlands 66th (7 places down), China 67th (3 places up), and Poland 93rd (5 places down).

Considering the problem of the terrorist threat over a longer time frame, for example between 2011 and 2021, several patterns emerge. Firstly, for the last eleven years, two countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, have remained in the lead. In the next report, the situation is likely to change in the former case, where the number of attacks in 2022 has decreased (so far) in the wake of the Taliban takeover, although they have not been eradicated completely due to the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP). The second trend is clear in Somalia, which has ranked third for the fifth consecutive year,

Table 2

Global Terrorism Index – ten countries most threatened by terrorist attacks in 2021

RANK		COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE
1		Afghanistan	9.109	↔
2		Iraq	8.511	↔
3		Somalia	8.398	↔
4		Burkina Faso	8.270	↓ 2
5		Syria	8.250	↔
6		Nigeria	8.233	↑ 2
7		Mali	8.152	↔
8		Niger	7.856	↓ 4
9		Myanmar	7.830	↓ 15
10		Pakistan	7.825	↑ 2

Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2022, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney, March 2022, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web.pdf (19.10.2022).

having previously been slightly further down the list. The opposite of this is Pakistan, which was at the top of the ranking between 2011 and 2019, but is now successively lowering its position. The third significant pattern is the significant increase in the number of African countries in the top ten – there were already five of them in the latest ranking. However, when comparing the last two years, 2020 and 2021, the changes in the top ten were not significant and only concerned two countries, Niger (up from 12th to 8th position) and Myanmar (up from 24th to 9th).

Table 3

**Top ten countries with the highest terrorism risk according to the GTI 2011–2021**

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Afghanistan	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1
Iraq	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Somalia	5	7	7	7	8	5	3	3	3	3	3
Burkina Faso	113	113	111	108	52	30	21	15	7	6	4
Syria	20	4	4	5	6	7	7	8	6	5	5
Nigeria	8	5	5	3	2	2	4	4	4	4	6
Mali	41	23	19	21	16	13	10	9	8	7	7
Niger	49	57	44	34	20	19	18	19	14	12	8
Myanmar (Burma)	17	21	24	29	39	42	40	42	23	24	9
Pakistan	2	2	2	2	4	4	5	5	5	8	10

Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2022, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney, March 2022, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web.pdf (18.10.2022).

Another trend is that the number of fatalities caused by terrorism decreased by 1.1 percent to 7,142 in 2021, continuing a trend that is now in its fourth year. Since 2015, when 10,699 people were killed, the decrease has been 33 percent. The main reason for this is a reduction in the intensity of conflicts in Iraq and Syria related to ISIS activity. In contrast, the number of fatalities is growing in three out of the nine regions: Asia-Pacific, North America and South Asia. The escalation amounted to as much as 303 percent, 66 percent and 8 percent, respectively, as was emphatically demonstrated in the cases of Myanmar (+497) and Afghanistan (+174). In contrast, the largest decreases occurred in some African and Middle Eastern countries, for example, Mozambique –414 percent, Nigeria –391 percent, Syria –236 percent, and Chad –95 percent. In 2021, about 85 percent of all deaths caused by terrorism occurred in ten countries, including Afghanistan 20 percent, Burkina Faso 10 percent, Somalia 8 percent, Mali 8 percent, Niger 8 percent, Iraq 7 percent, Myanmar 7 percent, Yemen 6 percent, Syria 7 percent, and Pakistan 4 percent. In 2020–2021 the numerical values of the above percentages were as follows.

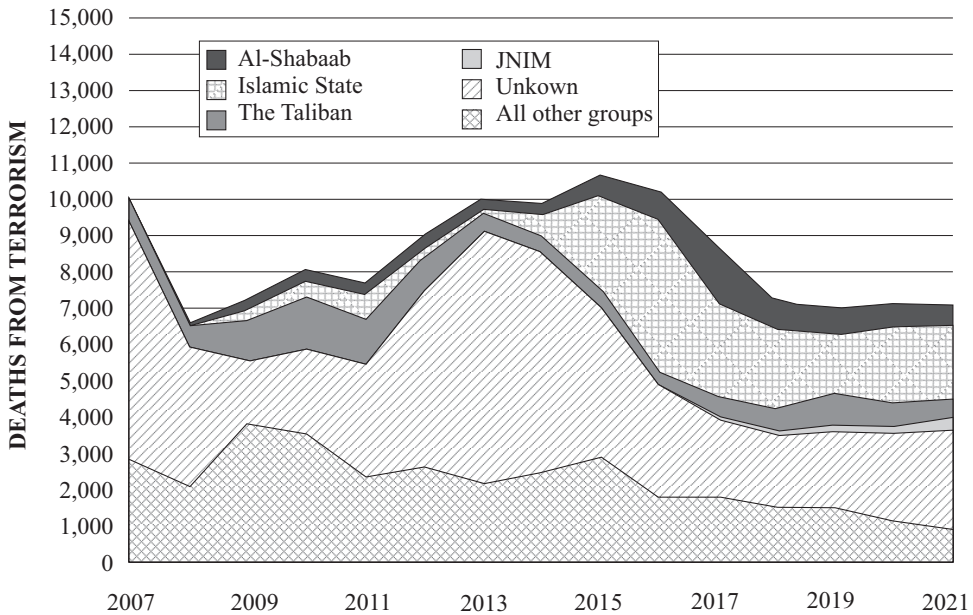**Figure 2. Number of terrorism-related fatalities in selected countries 2020–2021**
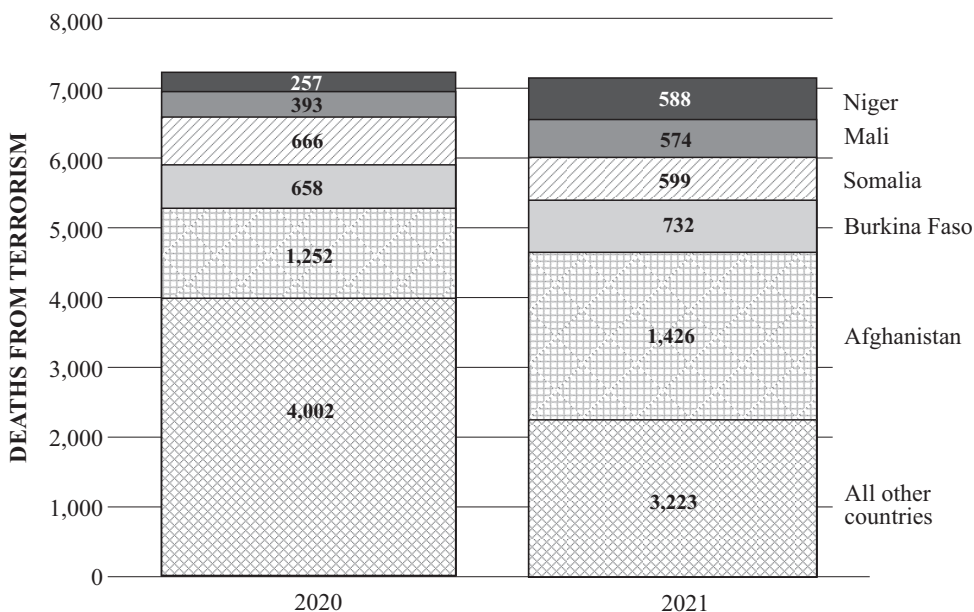
Source: *Global Terrorism Index 2022, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney, March 2022, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web.pdf (23.11.2022).

In 2021, 44 countries recorded at least one death resulting from terrorism. This compares with 55 at its peak (2015). Of the 163 countries analyzed in the "Global Terrorism Index 2022, Measuring the Impact of Terrorism," almost two-thirds of them recorded no attacks or deaths due to terrorism in 2020 and 2021.

The next major issue is the most dangerous terrorist organizations today. Their number and list varies depending on the source, for example, the assessments by the

United States or the European Union. According to the Bureau of Counterterrorism of the U.S. Department of State, there are approximately 70 active formations globally today (*Country*, 2021: 246 et seq.). Four of these (ISIS, Al-Shabaab, the Taliban and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen – JNIM) were responsible for the majority of deaths in 2021. Together, they accounted for 3,364 deaths, representing 47 percent of all terrorism victims in 2021. In comparison, in 2012, these groups were responsible for only 16 percent of fatalities (Global, 2022: 15–18). Today, this number may be even larger because the four organizations often have regional affiliates, or groups associated with, or emulating them. This is one of the reasons why, in as many as 2,775 deaths, the perpetrators could not be identified or attributed to a specific organization. The dynamics of the operation and the number of victims of selected terrorist structures are shown in the chart below.

Figure 3. The most dangerous terrorist organizations and their victims 2007–2021

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Terrorism can be compared to an ongoing chess game, where it is not so much the players' potential that counts, as the strategy and tactics used. Individual persons often decide about victory or defeat on the "terrorist chessboard," and their decisions affect the future of entire states or nations. This was the situation we dealt with, for example, on September 11, 2001. Contemporary terrorism can be studied and ana-

lyzed in various ways, for example in a three-pronged approach, encompassing the vertical, horizontal and transcendental dimensions. The vertical dimension is related to terrorists using very different, new elements of tactics or strategy. The horizontal dimension refers to the potential to attack a variety of targets in different parts of the world. The transcendental dimension addresses the diverse ideological motivations of terrorists. This cannot be identified only with the Islamist, separatist, far-right or left-wing threats. It also takes other forms, linked, for example, to the anti-globalization movement, the environmental movement, the pro- or anti-abortion movement, single issue terrorism, and so on.

Unfortunately, terrorism is part of our reality, as evidenced by the fact that terrorist attacks occur every day in the world. Their number varies depending on the methodology adopted. For example, according to the Bureau of Counterterrorism of the U.S. Department of State, in 2019 there were 8,872 attacks resulting in more than 25,000 fatalities, nearly 20,000 casualties and approximately 3,000 victims kidnapped (*Country*, 2020). Meanwhile, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) estimates in the Global Terrorism Database that, in the same year, there were 6,722 attacks that killed more than 13,000 people, injured more than 14,000 and that terrorists organized more than 4,000 kidnappings (*Global*, 2020).

We are therefore faced with a timeless and global challenge, which continues to evolve. This evolution concerns various aspects, including, among other things, the tactics or strategies of terrorists, ranging from ancient assassins to contemporary cyber-terrorists or "lone wolves" (Chaliand, Blin, 2020). Among other things, this means terrorists using increasingly modern and sophisticated technologies. One possible manifestation of this is the use of artificial intelligence controlling armed robots, vehicles or drones to carry out attacks. Drones are of particular interest, which were used in the past by various terrorist organizations (e.g. Hamas, ISIS or Hezbollah). It should be noted that in 2017, ISIS established a specialist group – Mujahideen Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, and that in 2019, a spectacular attack on Russian military bases in Syria was carried out using a swarm of drones. The advantages for terrorists of using drones include, for example, their relatively low cost, the ease of manufacturing or acquiring the equipment, the ability to operate over long distances, the effect of surprise or distraction, or creating an atmosphere of fear. The threat of acquiring and using artificial intelligence to carry out terrorist attacks is particularly serious in the case of state terrorism. A second manifestation of high-tech solutions being used by terrorists is 3D printing, for example, to produce weapons or other dangerous devices such as knives, telescopic batons, and so on. Technological advances also make it possible to 3D print in metal, as evidenced by the production of a Colt pistol replica in 2013, which successfully fired some 600 rounds (Olech, Lis, 2021: 76 et seq.).

Another threat is related to deep fakes being used, for example, to manipulate content, blackmail various individuals, including those holding important public positions or to impersonate them in order to extort money, information and the like. Another tool, increasingly popular among terrorists, is cryptocurrencies, which are used to fund their activities. This is evidenced by the case of the al-Nasr Brigades – Liwa al-Tawhid organization encouraging donations in cryptocurrencies via Telegram and Facebook. The next, increasingly likely threat is the risk of autonomous vehicles being used in

terrorist attacks, for example, by driving them into a crowd. There is also the possibility of terrorists hacking vehicles or other devices, as some experts point out (Jones, 2017: 105).

All of this can result not only in an increased number of attacks or their victims, but also in the terrorist acts being carried out anywhere in the world, meaning a significant reduction in both the level and sense of security. Advanced technologies can be used by terrorists both offensively – to carry out attacks, and defensively – as a response to similar actions taken by services that combat them. This becomes particularly dangerous when a state uses terrorist methods (e.g. North Korea or Russia), or state structures cooperate with terrorist formations (e.g. Iran) (*Unconventional*, 2022).

Other methods of terrorist action also remain highly dangerous, ranging from attacks using simple devices such as knives or bombs, through to hijacking or attacks in cyberspace, to the threat of using weapons of mass destruction in the form of bioterrorism, among other things. The latter threat has particularly intensified in the era of pandemics. COVID-19 (Wojciechowski, 2020: 9–16) has influenced the tactics and strategy used by terrorist groups, too. For example, it has disrupted the movement of terrorists, in many cases changing their logistical operations, recruitment, training or fundraising. It resulted in a significant portion of activity being moved into cyberspace (Rogers, 2019: 253–264).

It is in cyberspace that the process of radicalization, recruitment, hate speech or manipulation has further intensified. Some groups, such as Al-Shabaab, have encouraged supporters to actively spread the virus among members of religious or ethnic minorities. In order to reinforce their narrative, individual ISIS cells have proclaimed that the virus was "God's wrath on the West." The pandemic also greatly reduced the resources, capabilities or resolve of the various services fighting terrorists. However, it had little impact on the escalation of the terrorist threat in both 2020 and 2021 (Global, 2022: 14–15).

Effective prevention and combating of the terrorist threat requires intensive action and cooperation between individual states and their services (Clutterbuck, 2019: 375–383). This includes areas of activity such as the financing of terrorism, combating the causes of terrorism, the links between terrorists and their supporting environment, the socio-psychological profiling of potential or actual perpetrators of attacks, terrorists using technological innovations and cyberspace, and the possibility of their using different types of viruses or bacteria. This continues to open up new fields of study, which should be explored through the joint efforts of both practitioners and theorists representing various areas of knowledge, including security, criminology, law, political science, international relations, psychology, sociology, geography, management, information technology, new technologies, and so on. In addition, current shortcomings in research into terrorism should be eliminated as soon as possible. The most important of these include, for example, the lack of a universally accepted definition of terrorism, problems in creating interdisciplinary concepts or research teams, the predominantly "Western-centric" viewpoint, which often ignores the findings and experience of scholars and experts from other parts of the world, uncritical reference to "authorities," the under-representation of publications and research that can be applied in practice, and so on.

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We are pleased to present another issue, the fifteenth, of *Strategic Review*, hoping for a friendly reception on the one hand, and constructive comments and remarks on the other. We have divided the journal into four sections this year. The first one, **THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY** focuses on selected aspects of the theory of international relations and security and features the following texts: (1) *The Smell of Internationality. Towards a Sensual Approach to International Relations*, (2) *The Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy in Syria: A Neoclassical Realist Perspective*, (3) *Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Towards Turkey During and After Arab Uprisings: A Defensive Realism Approach*, (4) *Realism – a Forgotten Theory for Peacebuilding.*

The second section addresses selected aspects of internal and international security, such as terrorism and jihadism in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the response of public security institutions to contemporary terrorist attacks, securitization and hybrid warfare in Iran-Israel relations, fake news and content manipulation under Russian information aggression and the problems in the interaction between international non-governmental organizations and other international actors in ensuring peace and security. This section is entitled **INTERNAL/EXTERNAL ASPECTS OF SECURITY** and features the following articles: (1) *Terrorism and Jihadism in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (2) *Abraham Accords Against the Backdrop of the Middle East Political Mosaic*, (3) *The Practical Dimension of the Response of Public Security Institutions to Contemporary Terrorist Attacks*, (4) *From Speech Acts to Extraordinary Measures – Securitization and Hybrid Warfare in Iran-Israel Relations*, (5) *Mohammed bin Salman's Rising to Power. Chances for Transition in Saudi Arabia?*, (6) *Insecurity in the Middle East: Why Do the Reformist Movements Constantly Fail? Towards a New Conceptual Framework*, (7) *Fake News and Content Manipulation Under Russian Information Aggression*, (8) *Peculiarities, Models and Problems of Interaction of International Non-Governmental Organizations with Other International Actors in Ensuring Peace and Security*.

This corresponds with the third section, **FOREIGN POLICY,** which discusses, among other things, the issues of the policy of the People's Republic of China towards territorial disputes in the South China Sea, US geopolitical policies on the divergence of the Islamic world, and the evolutions and relevance of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. It features the following articles: (1) *The Scarborough Shoal Standoff and the Policy of the People's Republic of China Towards Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea*, (2) *The Study of the Effects of US Geopolitical Policies on the Divergence of the Islamic World*, (3) *The Policy of Maximum Pressure on Iran. US Policy Objectives and Effects*, (4) *Japan's Taiwan Policy in the Xi Jinping Era: Moving Toward Strategic Clarity*, (5) *The Evolutions and Relevance of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) in Shaping the Asylum and Migration Securitization Process in the European Union*.

The fourth section is entitled **COMPARATIVE STUDIES.** It includes texts which present various aspects of the phenomenon under consideration, such as: (1) *Cuba and Poland: A Comparative Analysis of Totalitarian Regimes*, (2) *From Rhetoric to*

Posture: A Comparative Study of G. W. Bush, Obama and Trump's Stances Towards DPRK Nuclear Issue, (3) *The End of Arctic Exceptionalism? New Arctic Approach After February 24, 2022*, (4) *Historical Development of Cybersecurity Studies: A Literature Review and its Place in Security Studies*, (5) *Scientific Research in Austrian Security Strategies and Research on Security and Defence*, (6) *The Politicization of Intellectual Property Rights in the Context of Karabakh*.

It should be noted that not only is the range of topics presented in this issue highly diverse, but also, the journal once more demonstrates a high internationalization index, as manifested, among other things, by the diversity of the authors, who represent such countries as the USA, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, Ukraine, Turkey, Switzerland and Azerbaijan.

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Sebastian WOJCIECHOWSKI
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