THE NEED FOR NEW RESEARCH ON TERRORISM

by Sebastian Wojciechowski

Terrorist attacks in various parts of the world evidence’s what a complex and dangerous problem we are facing, even though a great number of states and organizations have committed themselves to combating it, deploying a variety of resources and mechanisms for this purpose. Nevertheless, there is no fully efficient method or system to counter terrorism. It is no use hoping that it will emerge soon (or ever), either. Therefore, combating terrorism resembles the struggle of the ‘global community’ with a globally operating enemy.

In his analysis of the global range of terrorism Jean Baudrillard observed that “terrorism, like viruses, is everywhere. There is a global perfusion of terrorism.”¹ This concerns the global range of terrorism, global fear and stereotypes, the global character of terrorist ideas, global terrorist strategy and tactics, the global consequences of terrorism, and globally counteracting the threat of terror.

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Current global research into terrorism can be deemed insufficient in many respects.\(^2\) Too often studies focus on the same issues, concepts or examples. They frequently overlook factors or processes which exert an indirect or direct influence on terrorism (e.g. globalization, integration, financial crisis).\(^3\)

There is also lack of applied empirical research in the field of terrorism studies as exemplified by the analysis of literature by Cynthia Lum, Leslie Kennedy and Alison Sherley, published in 2006. “Reviewing 4,458 peer-reviewed articles on terrorism, they concluded that 96 per cent of these studies were ‘think pieces’, 3 per cent had an empirical basis and only 1 per cent were case studies.”\(^4\) The lack of empirical research in the field of terrorism is also illustrated in the below table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject matter</th>
<th>Peer-reviewed sources (n= 4,458)</th>
<th>Empirical only (n= 156)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weapons of mass destruction (BNC)</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles of special issue (group or incidents)</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political responses to terrorism (war, politics, IR)</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
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\(^2\) Paradoxically, this situation occurs despite the existence of numerous publications on terrorism. For example, it is estimated that over two thousand new books on terrorism were published over the period of 2001–2008, A. Silke, *Contemporary Terrorism Studies: Issues in Research*, in: *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, eds. R. Jackson, M. Breen Smyth and J. Gunning, London 2009, p. 34. If one search for books on terrorism with www.amazon.com, one finds more than 21,000 items (November 2010) and 31,000 items (April 2013) - 28,000 books.

\(^3\) This publication is based on the book: S. Wojciechowski, *The Hybridity of Terrorism. Understanding Contemporary Terrorism*, Logos Verlag Berlin 2013.

\(^4\) Quoted after: A. Schmid, *The Literature on Terrorism*, in: *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, ed. A. Schmid, London–New York 2011, p. 461. A. Schmid shows that C. Lum, L. Kennedy and A. Sherley “missed out many good studies (e.g. all books) that did not fit their electronic research methodology. Nevertheless, their study was a reminder that empirical research is still the exception in the field of Terrorism Studies.”
<table>
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<th>Empirical only (n= 156)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Causes, motivations, psychology, trends of terrorism</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of terrorism (political, social, economic)</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-political responses to terrorism (medical, social, etc.)</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimology, copying mechanisms, psych. effects of terrorism</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (nationalism, democracy, etc.)</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issues surrounding terrorism</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media and public attitudes towards terrorism</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to define terrorism</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-conventional terrorism, cyber-terrorism and narco-terrorism</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion and terrorism</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
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<td>State-sponsored terrorism</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law enforcement responses to terrorism (airport, police)</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research/science of studying terrorism</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic terrorism</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
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One manner of changing the above trend is to create a separate academic sub-discipline to handle the issue of terrorism, both its theoretical (the analysis of its properties, mechanisms, forms, reasons, and so on) and practical aspects (e.g. studies into the instances of terrorism or ways to combat it).

The name proposed for this new sub-discipline is **Interdisciplinary Terrorism Studies**.\(^5\) It has clearly defined tasks, including the following:

1. To analyze individual components of terrorism (such as its reasons, forms, properties, evolution, financing, strategy, tactics, consequences, combating terrorism and so on). A profound understanding of various elements of terrorism will facilitate the comprehension of the entire phenomenon and the more accurate forecasting of its evolution.

2. To present all the relationships between the above components, with particular emphasis on the influence one element exerts on others (for instance, the influence of a given form of terrorism on the selection of the target or methods of attack). This will support better forecasting and counteracting of terrorist attacks.

3. To precisely determine the reasons for terrorism and the factors that can generate or escalate these reasons. Knowledge of the reasons for terrorism is among the least examined issues related to terrorism. Both theoretical studies and practice pay much more attention to countering terrorism, the characteristics of various terrorist organizations or the attacks carried out. Although these issues are significant, without truly understanding the reasons of terrorism it is impossible to understand the given phenomenon or to effectively counter it.

4. To thoroughly analyze the influence of the environment (surroundings), various processes (such as globalization, financial crisis, natural disasters) and actors (such as the states that support or combat terrorism) on the occurrence and escalation of terrorism.

5. To examine and continuously monitor contemporary ways of financing terrorism. This issue has become popular after the September 11, 2001 attacks, but on account of the ongoing evolution of terrorism it calls for uninterrupted analysis.

6. To analyze varied aspects of factors, methods and activities related to counteracting and combating terrorism (counter-anti-terrorism). It is important both in the context of the cooperation of various services and states, but also of the application of theoretical models in practice.

7. To perceive terrorism from the perspective of other disintegration phenomena, such as separatism or fundamentalism and to indicate
the differences and similarities between them, as well as their interactions.

8. The emergence of a new academic discipline will provide an additional stimulus to develop new concepts and models to facilitate the presentation of terrorism and its individual manifestations. It will also lead to the development of a more orderly and extensive research apparatus (for example research methods and instruments) for studies into terrorism.

9. It is also necessary to systemize and apply to a more advanced degree the achievements of many other sciences in research into terrorism, including political science, sociology, psychology, economics, law, history and others.

10. An important element of the Interdisciplinary Terrorism Studies will involve the discussion of highly controversial issues, concerning, for instance, the relationships that occur between using violence in order to ensure security and cases of violating human rights (for instance, by using torture), or the failure to comply with international law (for example, operating in the state of higher necessity). Another very complex example involves the differentiation between terrorism and struggles for national liberation, and their different perceptions by parties to the conflict (e.g. the assessment of Hamas by Israeli authorities and by the majority of the Palestinian community).

11. It is also necessary to design detailed forecasts, taking into account the threat posed by various forms of terrorism in a given territory. Such forecasts should encompass as large a number of factors as possible and concern the short- medium- and long-term time-frames.

12. One of the tasks of Interdisciplinary Terrorism Studies will also involve the explanation of numerous generalizations in the perception of terrorism, such as the definition of the notion of terrorism or the fact that terrorism does not necessarily have only negative connotations, but in some circumstances it can be a positive thing (for instance, when using terrorist methods is the only way to stop ethnic purges carried out by a bloody despot).
It is obvious that the emergence of a new academic discipline will not solve all the problems generated by terrorism by itself. However, it will certainly contribute to still more comprehensive studies and analyses that will make use of the present academic achievements as regards terrorism, as well as the accomplishments of other fields of science. This is necessary on account of the extensive and constantly expanding research field of terrorism, and the scale and specificity of this phenomenon, but also due to the links between terrorism and other threats (such as separatism and extremism).

The notion of ‘terrorism’ analyzed in the present publication, is complex and ambiguous and, consequently, difficult to define. International community has failed to work out a single, commonly accepted definition. At present, there are several hundreds\(^6\) of definitions in the literature on the subject. The reasons for, and consequences of this state of affairs can be sought among various factors, such as:\(^7\)

A. One difficulty with presenting terrorism in a comprehensive and in-depth manner is its evolution. As time goes by, not only does the notion of terrorism evolve, but some terrorist organizations emerge or cease to exist, or new kinds of terrorism appear.

B. Another obstacle involves the inability, impossibility or unwillingness to discriminate between terrorism and other more or less related phenomena, such as terror, guerrilla warfare, national liberation war, irredentist struggle, separatism, etc.

C. The diversity and multiplicity of feasible scenarios of a terrorist attack, and the methods and means of operations applied during such an attack, pose another difficulty in an attempt to precisely define the notion of terrorism.

D. In the opinion of some specialists, terrorism cannot be defined unanimously as it is too broad a notion.

E. Another factor that impedes the defining of terrorism, while simultaneously illustrating its complexity, is the number of existing

\(^6\) As early as the 1990s there were over two hundred different definitions of terrorism in the literature on the subject. See: J. Simon, *The Terrorist Trap*, Bloomington 1994, p. 29.

definitions of terrorism, in particular their number within a single state and its structures.

F. The next problem concerns the laconic (and thereby im precise) or controversial character of many definitions, whether applied or proposed.

G. Words like terrorism/terrorist tend to be avoided. In some cases this applies to the members of terrorist organizations who do not perceive themselves as terrorists and prefer to use terms such as warrior, partisan, liberator, revolutionist, god’s servant, etc. in order to avoid negative connotations.

H. There are cases when decision-making centers (for example politicians) or opinion-forming circles (e.g. the media) intentionally use the term ‘terrorism’, ‘terrorist’, etc. in order to influence public opinion, to discredit a certain individual or organizations, to justify an activity, or as a red herring or to attract support.

I. The absence of a universal definition of terrorism is used for political advantage.

J. The above-described status quo may also be a consequence of the attempts to explain the nature of terrorism by means of the more or less related terms of ‘radicalism’, ‘extremism’, ‘act of terror’, ‘terrorist act’, ‘policy of terror’, etc.

K. The problems with defining terrorism also result from specific individual or group ambitions, sentiments, or emotions.

L. Also of fundamental significance are doubts, discussions and disputes on the notion of terrorism voiced in the forum of international organizations.

The above-presented factors do not exhaust the list of all conditions that impede the coining of a definition of terrorism. However, even taking into consideration only the discussed factors allows us to see how varied and difficult the research issue we are dealing with is. Since defining of the notion of terrorism is so difficult and complex, one might ask why

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a single universal definition should be used, and whether it is necessary to have one in the first place.

Terrorism is a form of political, religious, ethnic or other violence (or its threat) which has various motivations, its implementation violating the existing legal order, and its perpetrators being individuals or groups of people whose activity involve different means and methods results in physical, psychological or material damage. It is aimed at direct target(s) (e.g. individuals representing a given state) or indirect ones used by the perpetrator(s) to produce the final effect.

This definition emphasizes several significant and universal traits of terrorism. First, it reveals the diversity of causes (motivations), which embraces a broad range of factors that generate and escalate terrorism. Second, it stresses the fact that such activity breaches the law, producing an extensive range of consequences. Third, it marks the fact that terrorism covers the activity of groups as well as that of individuals. Fourth, it points to the multitude and diversity of means and methods available to terrorists. This definition should only be treated as a proposal.

In studies on terrorism it should be emphasized that terrorism tends to be perceived from the ‘western point of view’ as attitudes, values, beliefs and the legal or cultural factors associated with it. This image, however, is neither fully objective nor comprehensive. This can be noted when analyzing the differences in defining or characterizing terrorism in Western Europe or the US on one hand, and in Muslim states on the other. Many ‘western’ studies make hardly any references to publications on terrorism connected with Chinese, Indian, or even Russian or Eastern European academic centers. This is not a result of barriers of accessibility or linguistic difficulties, because such publications are more and more often posted in English on the Internet. Taking them into account can in many cases contribute to a better understanding of terrorism as well as of differences pertaining to its analysis.

The issue of the influence of terrorism on security is crucial. Yet, it needs to be highlighted that apart from the obvious, and frequently analyzed, negative impact of terrorism (such as the reduced sense of security, human, material and psychological losses, etc.), terrorism or, to be more precise, the threat of terrorism, can also play a positive role and contribute to the
development of new, more efficient security concepts, mechanisms and procedures. One can therefore speak both about the negative (predomi-
nant) and positive influence of terrorism on security. The same concerns
the other phenomena, such as fundamentalism, separatism etc.

Another highly significant issue when researching terrorism concerns
the concentration on the most accurate understanding of its reasons. This
issue continues to be relatively rare both in theoretical studies and during
practical simulations and workshops.

The sources of terrorism cannot be reduced to a single factor, such as
social or psychological conditions. Although they certainly are significant
determinants, they are not the only ones. A significant role is also played
by ideological, religious, ethnic, economic, historical, cultural and other
aspects. The reasons for terrorism cannot be explained exclusively in terms
of the mechanism of the escalation or radicalization of attitudes, either. The
occurrence of terrorism does not always have to be preceded by the intensi-
sification of certain attitudes or views. It can also be triggered by a single,
brief event. The reasons for terrorism are thus varied and frequently encom-
pass several factors simultaneously. They impact terrorism in an indirect
or direct manner, and they evolve or not. All the factors leading to the
occurrence or escalation of terrorism can be named the fuel of terrorism.

One can observe the ongoing evolution taking place within terrorism.
One of its various manifestations is the increasingly frequent use by ter-
rorists of social media (such as Facebook or Twitter), or selecting more
and more surprising locations for attacks (such as the Boston Marathon).
Therefore one’s knowledge of terrorism constantly needs to be modified.
One of the newest ways to analyze terrorism is the concept of the hybrid-
ity of terrorism.

The complexity and multifariousness of the consequences of terrorism
can be easily observed in the most spectacular terrorist strikes, for exam-
ple the September 11, 2001 attacks. The assessment of their influence on
the escalation or evolution of terrorism, as well as on the international
situation, is highly varied. For instance, F. Fukuyama\(^9\) believes that their

\(^9\) F. Fukuyama, *Ameryka na rozdrożu. Demokracja, władza i dziedzictwo neokonser-
watyzmu*, Poznań 2006, pp. 72–73, 146.
Influence is exaggerated. Z. Brzeziński\textsuperscript{10} reflects on the dangerous disintegration of the international system. S. Žižek\textsuperscript{11} refers to the attack as the end of the liberal-democratic utopia. R. Stelle calls it “the first battle of an asymmetrical war”\textsuperscript{12}, whereas S. Koziej\textsuperscript{13} approaches it as the emergence of a network of various terrorist organizations whose influence on the state of global security is comparable to the influence and capacity of a nuclear power at the time of the Cold War.

It is highly desirable in research into terrorism to forecast, among other aspects, its range, targets, operation methods and evolution. This concerns short-medium- and long-term forecasts. An example here is a program created by experts from Microsoft and Technion – the Israeli Institute of Technology in Haifa, concerning technologies to forecast the future using an algorithm developed on the basis of information provided by the Internet. The authors claim that the algorithm can forecast floods, droughts and epidemics, as well as a number of other events, whether political, socio-economic or terrorist in nature. Another example is provided by Michael Spagat, an economist from the University of London, whose research focuses on the forecasting of the escalation of armed conflicts, or a project jointly developed by Recorded Future, CIA and Google. Christopher Ahlberg, one of its authors, describes this initiative in the following way: “We want the data to tell us what really is going on globally. What has happened and what is going to happen. Obviously, we cannot be one hundred percent sure that it will happen, but we are able to make a logical picture out of various events.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Quoted after: J. Żakowski, \textit{Koniec. Rozmowy o tym, co się popsuło w nas, w Polsce, w Europie i w świecie}, Warszawa 2006.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibidem.
There are further examples of forecasting of terrorism and other, related phenomena. This means not only the actual forecasting ability, but also the ability to associate facts, to identify cause and effect relationships, and the appropriate interpretation of information. This provides the foundations to shape the future on the basis of the past and present, not only in the context of the threat of terrorism.

The struggle with terrorism is compared to a never ending game of chess. By this token, it is emphasized that the struggle is continuing in many ways, involving various subjects (chess pieces) and various parts of the world (chess board), and strategy and tactics play a particularly significant role in this game. A question arises, however, whether the game of chess really illustrates the war with terrorism best?

Percy Kemp, in his recently published book, “Le Prince”, observes that since the Cold War ended we “have been moving around in a space reminiscent of a checkers board rather than a chess one.” The same applies to modern terrorism. In his opinion, one of the reasons for this is that chess pieces are easily recognizable, they have their hierarchy and strict rules of conduct while “the new enemy (terrorist) has neither face nor name.” The same concerns a game of checkers where the pieces are equal and they pose a threat not on account of some hierarchy, but on account of their positioning on the board. “Strategy has given way to tactics, and a long-term vision has been replaced by individual operations.” In checkers the pieces (terrorists or terrorist cells) are characterized by considerable creativity and independence, “a terrorist cell can easily be infiltrated but this tells us nothing of what another, utterly independent cell, can do.”

The ideas of Kemp are certainly interesting and original but controversial at the same time. For example, his arguments concerning the anonymity, creativity and independence of individual checkers is justified, whereas his belief in their equality is disputable. Even if we ignore the hierarchy present within a given terrorist cell, various groups have different means at their disposal (for example combat potential) and, consequently, they

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have different (rather than equal) operational capabilities. The statement that “strategy has given way to tactics, and a long-term vision has been replaced by individual operations” is another highly disputable one. It is obviously true that tactics is highly significant as regards terrorist operations or the war with terrorism, but it always has to be accompanied by a strategy encompassing at least the analysis and forecasting of the activity of the enemy and our own. Another of Kemp’s opinions is somewhat imprecise when he says that “since the collapse of communism the traditional enemy has been replaced by a situational enemy (are al-Qaeda or the Salafi movement of global jihad such an enemy? – S.W.) whose harmfulness is a result of coincidence.” 17 From the philosophical point of view ‘everything may be a result of coincidence’, but terrorism cannot be reduced to a mere ‘coincidence’ as it is the sum total of an enormous number of various elements.

The argument over whether to refer to chess or checkers to symbolize terrorism is not meant to be another academic dispute. It is about identifying a model that will provide the most accurate illustration of the confrontation between terrorists and the counterterrorist entities combating them.

In the author’s of this publications opinion it would be an optimal solution to resort to a model based on Sudoku (where each number represents a separate element of terrorism), or a simultaneous application of a model that combines chess and checkers. It is worth to use a chess game to represent the activities of counterterrorist subjects, while checkers would reflect the activity of terrorists. In this case, a game of chess and chess pieces can symbolize the subjects combating terrorism. They differ from one another, they have their formal hierarchy, various competences, operational capacities and strictly defined rules of conduct. These rules are provided by the restrictions imposed by legal or moral principles which should (at least in theory) bind the subjects that combat terrorists. Strategy and operational tactics play a significant role here and it frequently resorts to set patterns of conduct. The activities of terrorists can be described more

17 Ibidem.
precisely by reference to a game of checkers, where every piece (a terrorist) can attack any enemy in any part of the board. In contrast to chess, here there is no hierarchy or strictly formalized rules of conduct of individual pieces.

So the whole world is a single board where a game/confrontation is carried out by terrorists (symbolized as pieces in checkers) and counterterrorist subjects (symbolized as chess pieces). The merging of chess and checkers is to illustrate the hybridity of terrorism, which is understood as a combination of selected, very different (or even contradictory) elements and the analysis of various relations that occur between them, in order to show the essence, specificity or evolution of the phenomenon analyzed.

Describing this confrontation one can refer again to the words: “The fight against terrorism resembles a never-ending game of chess (or checkers), where the first move is typically that of the terrorists. They choose the time, venue, target, and operational strategy or tactics. Their opponents (for instance, international institutions or states) on the one side can focus on defense and dealing with any losses incurred, while on the other they try to counteract further threats and eliminate terrorists.”