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THE ORIGINS AND WAVES OF TERRORISM

Summary

The level of publicity on issues related to terrorism means that in opinions of many it has become one of the main problems of the modern world. But in reality, the phenomenon of terrorism has been present in societies almost from the beginning of human history and its perception may not have changed so much over time. The paper presents the genesis and waves of terrorism throughout history, with special emphasis on the beginning of this phenomenon identified with the activity of Sicarii organisation in the first century; the birth of modern terrorism at the end of the 18th century; its intensification in the interwar period and in the second half of the twentieth century.

Key words: terrorism, the origins, wave, Sicarii

Introduction

The phenomenon currently described by the term ‘terrorism’ had been known long before it was named. Over the years, motivations and goals behind terrorism as well as fighting methods have changed depending on the conditions of functioning of societies. Escalation of anxiety and fear by means of violence and force was used as a method of resistance and the fight against various forms of oppression, both on the part of internal (native) regimes, as well as external forces. In the latter context, terrorism was used as a form of guerrilla warfare, typical for asymmetric conflicts.

In order to present the historical outline of terrorism, several of its characteristic periods were distinguished, in which various forms of fight were assumed, such as:

- Beginnings of terrorism, identified with Jewish and Islamic terrorism;

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- Birth of modern terrorism, initiated during the French Revolution; continued from the second half of the 19th century till the end of World War I; mainly on the revolutionary and anti-state (anti-monarchical) basis; used in conducting the fight for national and social liberation, and only in a few cases the goals were of a different nature;
- Terrorism of interwar period, dominated by the activities of the extreme right and fascist organizations; terrorism of nationalist and nationalist-separatist character remained popular in this period; the 1930s is the dominance of state terror observed in authoritarian and totalitarian states;
- Terrorism of the second half of the 20th century, with a particularly diversified character, including both national, liberation and separatist movements, as well as far left and far right; in the 1960s and 1970s, the beginnings of its internationalization; the 1980s terrorism sponsored by states; late 1990s which saw the rise of the role of religious background;
- Contemporary (post-modern) terrorism, the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, characterized by the growth of its internationalization, with the wide use of religious grounds, used especially by Islamic fundamentalists, with the domination of suicide attacks.

Each mentioned period of intensification of terrorism had its own specificity, however subsequent periods were not the continuation (development) of the earlier ones. For this reason, terrorism should not be treated in historical terms as an evolving process and its stages of development, for this matter the use of the term *waves of terrorism* is more appropriate¹. Despite the passage of time, terrorism in its essence remains the same, only the conditions of its application change, which usually translates into the way of defining this phenomenon in particular historical periods.

¹ Albert Pawłowski is in favor of such a historical approach to terrorism. See: A. Pawłowski, *Terroryzm w Europie XIX - XX wieku*, Lubuski Komitet Upowszechniania Prasy, Zielona Góra 1984, p 36.

1. The beginnings of terrorism

Authors of publications on terrorism referring to the beginnings of this phenomenon point to various historical examples of raising the levels of anxiety and fear by means of violence to achieve goals by specific groups and organizations. It is believed, that the oldest example of terrorism is the activity of one of the radical segments of Judaism, called Sicarii by their opponents. The main goal of Sicarii which is now described as a terrorist organisation, was the liberation of Jews from the Roman rule. It took place in the 60s of the 1st century and led to the outbreak of the Jewish uprising in the year 67, in which Sicarii also took part. The term Sicarii derives from Latin name for a short *sica* dagger, which its members used for secretive killings (people using a dagger). Most of Sicarii attacks were directed against their fellow people (members of Judaism) who either accepted Roman rule, benefited from it, or cooperated with the occupant. Sometimes, however, the victims of the killings were also the Romans themselves. The Sicarii tactics consisted of secretive killings by means of the Sica dagger hidden underneath their clothing. They made their violent acts in public places, e.g. in the city center, especially during large gatherings of people (e.g. festivals), as well as in temples. The assailant usually blended in with the crowd, secretly inflicting fatal pushes on the selected victim, further remaining unrecognizable among the participants of the congregation. It was possible because the killer looked and reacted like a frightened and terrified member of the crowd, which prevented him from being suspected of doing this deed. Such unexpected attacks on fellow worshipers and the intangibility of the perpetrators caused horror and fear among the population. In particular, the Sicarii attacked Jewish notables and priestly elites who were considered to be Roman collaborators, this made them different from the Zealots, who directed their violence only against the Romans. One of the greatest successes of the Sicarii was the murder of High Priest Jonathan². The Sicarii also carried out attacks on the villages, plundering and burning them, in order to evoke fear among Jews who accepted the Roman occupation without any resistance, or

² See: P. Christian, *Who were the Sicarii?* Meridian Magazine, June 7, 2004, <https://ldsmag.com/article-1-4364/>, (downloaded 12.12.2016).

worse, even cooperated with the occupant. They also kidnapped well-known people to enforce the release of imprisoned comrades³.

Sicarii became famous as the steadfast defenders of Masada, where they took refuge in the conflict with the Zealots. Masada in the 72–73 y. was besieged by the Romans as the last center of Jewish resistance. In the absence of the possibility of further defense, Masada's defenders (about 1000 people) committed collective suicide, previously destroying and burning buildings and supplies of food. Today, Masada is considered a symbol of the sacrifice and heroism of the Jewish nation⁴.

From the point of view of the history of religion, Sicarii are a classic example of the tendencies of some religious movements which, in the process of radicalisation, violently reject the existing legal, political and social consensus. Especially unpredictable is the combination of eschatological⁵ fervor with the readiness to radicalize the religious and political program through the use of violence. Such movements, although usually quite small, can be found in major religions in most periods of history. A modern equivalent of fanatical religious attitudes and behaviors is the Al-Qaeda movement, based on a radical interpretation of Islam, with extreme eschatological expectations and readiness to use violence, in order to achieve what they perceive as the will of God⁶.

An example of a religious terrorist organization functioning in the Middle Ages is the Islamic Shia sect of Nizaris, created as an extreme branch of Ismailism, also called the Assassins. The sect was active in 11th and 12th century in the area of Syria and Persia (modern Iran). In Persia, the Nizaris opposed the power of the Seljuks, and in Syria they rose against local emirs and crusaders. Fight against the overwhelming

³ See: A. Zalman, *Sicarii: First Century Terrorists*, <http://terrorism.about.com/od/groupsleader1/p/Sicarii.htm>, (downloaded 12.12.2016). Also see: R. A. Horsley, *The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish „Terrorists,”* *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 59, No. 4, October 1979, pp. 435-458.

⁴ See: P. Christian, *Who were the Sicarii?...*

⁵ Eschatology [gr. *éschatos* 'ultimate', *lógos* 'word', 'science'] part of religious doctrine concerning the ultimate destiny of the world, humanity and man [...] The main motives of eschatology are the concepts of: reincarnation (e.g. in Hinduism), posthumous reward (e.g. paradise for Muslims, heaven for Christians) or punishment (e.g. hell in Judaism and Christianity), various ways of moving to the land of the dead, the final judgment [...] and the end of the world. See: *Multimedialna encyklopedia powszechna PWN*, B. Działoszyński (ed.), PWN, Warszawa 2008, entry: eschatologia.

⁶ See: P. Christian, *Who were the Sicarii?...*

opponent meant that the Nizaris continued to use assassination killings, through which they eliminated significant enemy representatives, especially spiritual and political leaders, as well as lower-rank officials and scholars. Murders usually had a more of propaganda and political dimension rather than military. The Crusaders used to call Nizarites "assassins", deriving the term from the contemptuous Arabic word "Hashishijya", meaning "taking hashish,"⁷ which in the eyes of the Sunnis was to symbolize their irreligion and immorality. According to an orientalist Bernard Lewis, in the 14th century, the term "asa syn" meant a professional killer⁸. One of the most famous Nizarite leaders was Rashid ad-Din as-Sinan, called 'an old man from the mountains', who lived in the second half of the 12th century⁹.

2. The birth of modern terrorism

The birth of modern terrorism is associated with the introduction and dissemination in 1795 of the word 'terror', used in the term 'Reign of Terror', which appeared during the French Revolution to characterize the fear-based, dictatorial way of governance of the Jacobines. According to the leaders of the revolution, who massively killed their opponents, such actions were necessary (and therefore justified) in the transformation of the monarchy into a liberal democracy. The reign of terror was rejected by the revolution itself, and its propagator Maximilian Robespierre was beheaded, dying in the same manner he had used to deal with his enemies. To describe these activities, Oxford Dictionary of English¹⁰ in 1795 used the term 'terrorism'. It is worth noting that the 'reign of terror' was organized and carried out by the state, and its victims were not random citizens, but opponents of the revolution. With the fall of the 'reign of terror', the notion of terrorism took on a negative meaning, associated with the abuse of power in relation to the society.

⁷ It is presumed that the members of the sect were using drugs before the attacks, although no one knew that it really was.

⁸ See: F. Daftary: *Ismailici. Zarys historii*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, 2008, pp. 23-25; also see: A. Zalman, *Assassins (Hashishiyyin) (Persia & Syria, 11th-12th Century)* [<http://terrorism.about.com/od/groupsleader1/p/Assassins.htm>]. Access: 12.12.2016.

⁹ *Multimedialna encyklopedia powszechna...*, entry: nizaryci.

¹⁰ See: B. Hołyst. *Terroryzm*, Vol. 1, LexisNexis, Warszawa 2009, p. 50.

The awakening of anti-monarchy moods inspired by the French Revolution and the socio-economic changes caused by the industrial revolution contributed to the formation of a new trend of terrorism, which is revolutionary and anti-state. Its precursor was an Italian republican extremist Carlo Pisacane (1818–1857) who thought that the idea is best spread through deeds (so called propaganda through action), which may be associated with the use, in this case justified, of violence. The organization that embodied the ideas of Pisacane was Narodna Wola, founded in 1878 in Russia. This organization became famous mainly due to the attack on Tsar Alexander II Romanow in 1881. Although the assassination of Tsar contributed to the downfall of the organization Narodna Wola, their strategy of ‘propaganda through action’ influenced the shaping of the anarchist movement in the years to come¹¹.

In the last two decades of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, the anarchist terrorists killed many representatives of state power e.g. President of France M. Carnot (1884), the Prime Minister of Spain C. de Castillo (1897), the Empress of Austria Elizabeth (1898), the King of Italy Humbert I (1900), President of the USA W. McKinley (1901), yet another Prime Minister of Spain J. Canalejas (1912), the successor to the Austrian throne Ferdinand and his wife Sophie (1914). During the interwar period a victim of terrorism was King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France L. Barthou. In Poland, features of terrorism can be found in the murder of the first president, Gabriel Narutowicz (1922)¹².

3. Terrorism of the interwar period

Terrorism in the interwar period is associated with militarization of the politics, consisting of the formation of militias by political parties whose goal was not only to physically influence a political opponent, but they were also an element of psychological-propaganda. In these circumstances, terrorism was a supplement of the militant terror characterized by street conflicts of para-military organizations. This type of activity became the trademark of fascist organizations in Italy, Spain

¹¹ Zob. B. Hołyst. *Terroryzm...*, pp. 63-65.

¹² *Multimedialna encyklopedia powszechna...*, entry: terroryzm.

and Germany¹³. In the interwar period leftist terrorism was weakened, while the national–separatist sources of terrorism remained strong. They were the basis for the activities of national–liberation movements in Macedonia, Ireland, Croatia and Ukraine¹⁴.

Particularly dramatic were the mass repressions used by authoritarian and totalitarian states against their own citizens. Such practices were used primarily in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Russia. In these countries, terror became the basic method of eliminating opponents and subordinating citizens to the totalitarian state. The state was identified with the only party, and the only party, in turn, was one with its beloved commander. During this period, millions of citizens died at the hands of the state.

4. Terrorism of the second half of the 20th century

In the period after World War II, terrorism is associated with the development of anti–colonial movements in the 1940s and 1950s in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. During this period, terrorist attacks were aimed directly at the centres of power of colonial empires. Even small, symbolic losses on the occupant side had their significance as they showed weaknesses of the allegedly omnipotent occupant, and thus proved that the fight was meaningful. Successes in this area made it easier to recruit new fighters and gain support of the society which is necessary to effectively conduct a guerrilla war. The attacks were carried out in such a way as to avoid causing damage to the local population, so as not to lose its backing in the ongoing fight. This conditioning forced the self–limitation of terrorists in the use of violence, which excludes the use of mass destruction weapons. Colonial societies were confirming the legitimacy of this form of fight for liberation and independence using the term ‘fighters for freedom’ with respect to those committing the acts of terror¹⁵. The tendency to avoid the term ‘terrorism’ with respect to violence and force, depending on the purpose for which they are used, has remained to modern times.

¹³ J. Tomaszewicz, *Od skrytobójstwa do miateżewojny. Ewolucja terroryzmu politycznego w Europie - aspekty ideologiczne, taktyczne i organizacyjne*, Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, no 11 (6) 2014, pp. 123-124.

¹⁴ See: A. Pawłowski, *Terroryzm w Europie...*, p 36.

¹⁵ See: B. Hołyst, *Terroryzm...*, pp. 34 and 69.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the revolutionary character of terrorism was maintained but also new categories emerged, giving this phenomenon a very different character. During this period nationalistic (ethnic-national and separatist) terrorism dominated in the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), France (Breton and Corsican terrorists), the Netherlands (Molukowo), Spain (Basques), Italy (Upper Adige), Cyprus (Cypriot Greek), Turkey (Kurds), the Middle East (Palestinians, Kurds, Eritreans) as well as extreme left terrorism, based on opposition to social and economic inequality in capitalist liberal-democratic parties, and also opposing American intervention in Vietnam, or construction of nuclear power plants (the United States, Italy, France, Germany, Japan)¹⁶.

The late 1960s saw the beginning of the internationalization of terrorism, and its first manifestation was the kidnapping of an Israeli liner on 22 July 1968 by terrorists from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, one of the six groups that make up the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This attack triggered a change in the nature of terrorism. In order to attract more publicity, terrorists went out of their own country, and took as the targets of their attacks citizens of other countries who had no connection with the case terrorists were fighting for. Such fundamental changes in the character of terrorism were possible due to technical advancement in communication, technology, fast and cheap travel, as well as in the sphere of mass media, enabling good quality broadcast realized in real-time¹⁷.

The PLO as a precursor of international terrorism in later years consistently developed international orientation by conducting training courses for members of various terrorist organizations in their training camps, for example in Jordan, Liban or Yemen. Palestinians from the PLO became teachers of left-wing revolutionary terrorists, who operated in the 1970s and 1980s. The PLO was also involved in providing logistic support and weapons for them. This activity was also commercial and allowed to accumulate significant funds, which helped PLO to gain more and more political and financial influence¹⁸.

¹⁶ See: M. Tomczak, *Terroryzm w RFN i w Berlinie Zachodnim - źródła, strategia i konsekwencje działalności terrorystycznych ugrupowań skrajnej lewicy*, Poznań 1986, p. 13.

¹⁷ B. Hoffman, *Oblicza terroryzmu*, transl. H. Pawlikowska-Gannon, Grupa Wydawnicza Bertelsmann Media, Warszawa 2001, pp. 64-65.

¹⁸ B. Hoffman, *Oblicza terroryzmu...*, p 81-82.

In the mid 1980s, the number of terrorist acts increased, in particular on military and diplomatic American objects in the Middle East. The acts were supported by the governments of other countries. Terrorism sponsored by the states, directed against other countries became their tool to fight bigger and stronger opponents. Its use was not associated with higher costs or risks, because officially states did not admit to this type of activity. Special state services were also involved in conducting such activities. One of the best examples, of not only the sponsorship of terrorism, but also of the use of special forces, was Libya. A widely known example of Libyan activity is the attack carried out on 21 December 1988 on the Pan American airplane (a bomb exploded on board of the plane over the Scottish town of Lockerbie). The agents of Libyan intelligence were responsible for this attack.

The 1980s and 1990s are also associated with a new phenomena related to terrorism described as 'narcoterrorism' and 'shadow economy'. Narcoterrorism refers to a criminal type of terrorism involving the use of terrorist methods by criminal organizations in the fight against state institutions. The name narcoterrorism derives from the nature of the organizations who use this type of activity i.e. organized drug cartels. Narcoterrorists use acts of terror to disorganize and destabilize the state and secretly take over control of economy and politics by corrupting government officials. The victims of narcoterrorism are those who in some way may be an obstacle for conducting criminal activity and whose actions may threaten the interests of drug-dealing terrorists e.g. rival criminal organizations as well as persons holding high official positions in the country. For example, in 1990 during the presidential campaign in Colombia three candidates applying for this office were murdered. Attacks of narcoterrorists are also directed against representatives of law enforcement agencies, police, soldiers and journalists. Casual people are also victims of attacks. Drug dealing is accompanied by other negative phenomena, such as violence, corruption and laundering money from selling drugs. Bloody scores between criminal organizations moved from provinces to the cities, terrorizing the inhabitants and paralyzing the state¹⁹.

¹⁹ See: W. Molendowski, *Narkoterroryzm*, [in:] *Leksykon współczesnych międzynarodowych stosunków politycznych*, Cz. Mojsiewicz (ed.) Atla2, Wrocław 2000, pp. 229-230.

The largest increase in drug production and dealing after the World War II is associated with secret operations carried out in various parts of the world by American intelligence agencies. They used the world network of drug dealers as allies in the expansion of American influence during the Cold War. The heads of organizations smuggling Afghan opium were supported by the CIA, anti-Soviet partisans (mujahedinis), who financed the fight with the occupant from profits coming from drug dealing. Similar activities were also carried out in the 1980s in Central America.

The dispersion of narcoterrorism contributed to the emergence of so-called 'grey economies' in different parts of the world, which are beyond any control from the state. Drug dealers and partisans who often cooperate with each other control whole regions or territories. The 'shadow economies' cover significant parts of Central Asia (Afghanistan and north-west Pakistan, former Muslim republics of the USSR and Kashmir) and Latin America (Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador). The fight against drug cartels, despite the involvement of the army, is very difficult, mainly due to corruption on the highest levels of state power, among members of the government, parliament and the judiciary²⁰.

Summing up the deliberations on the waves of terrorism in the second half of the 20th century, it is worth quoting the assessment of this phenomenon formulated in the mid 1980s by Maria Tomczak, who in her publication of 1986 (25 years before the terrorist attacks on World Trade Centre in the USA) wrote: *Without too much exaggeration, it can be stated that in the second half of the 20th century terrorism became one of the most frequently used methods of solving political and social conflicts*²¹. Assessing this thesis from the perspective of the past, it is easy to see how strong the impact of terrorism was on shaping the sense of security, even under the conditions of cold war at the time. Nowadays, the scale of this phenomenon is many times higher, it is not obscured by the threat of the cold war period, which suggests that its influence on shaping the sense of threat is higher than ever before.

The term 'contemporary terrorism' or 'post-modern terrorism' can be referred to the characteristics of this phenomenon at the turn of the

²⁰ See: W. Molendowski, *Narkoterroryzm...*, pp. 229-231.

²¹ M. Tomczak, *Terroryzm w RFN i w Berlinie Zachodnim...*, p. 13.

20th and 21st centuries. This issue is, however, discussed in the next paper.

Conclusions

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon because it had been known long before it was given a name. Its essence has remained unchanged for centuries, although the actors, goals and methods of fight changed along with the evolution of societies. In such a situation, it is difficult to talk about the evolution of terrorism, it is more adequate to use the term 'waves of terrorism'. In the analysis of the history of terrorism the following stages may be differentiated: the beginnings of terrorism in the ancient world and the activity of the Sicarii, the birth of modern terrorism at the end of the 18th century, terrorism in the interwar period and in the second half of the twentieth century, and lastly, current intensification of the phenomenon. Each period has its specificity distinguishing it from others. But the essence of terrorism has always been the same – arousing anxiety and fear by spreading violence in order to achieve political goals.

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