CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM AGAINST RELIGIOUS ENTITIES AND BUILDINGS

Specificity of contemporary terrorism

Terrorism has accompanied the history of human civilization since time immemorial. It has long been an instrument used mainly in efforts to weaken the existing political order. Most often this form of combat was used in asymmetrical conflicts, where the potentially weaker side resorted to its use. Most often, but not always. It is worth mentioning here the development of the so-called state terrorism, which we had to deal with even in the post-war period during the cold war, when strong powers used terrorist groups and the activity of terrorist groups in political conflict for their purposes, supported by countries from the Middle East such as Iran, Iraq, Syria or Libya.

The primary objective of terrorist activity, past and present, is to cause fear. Previously, as a result of the brutal murder of famous persons, now murdering innocent people. As a result of the development of media technologies, this objective now seems to be strongly redirected towards

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creating fear in an increasing number of social groups. By the way, it is worth recalling that the word terrorism comes directly from Latin, where \textit{terror} means fear, fright, horror, intimidation\textsuperscript{3}, and so the name itself already indicates the essence of the phenomenon. The objective of terrorist activities is to create fear, which is to be a kind of bargaining chip in pursuit of the goals. The situation created in this way is to enable real and effective pressure to be exerted on the “power (decision-making) structures of the state (...) exerting pressure on those in power in order to achieve a specific behaviour of the state\textsuperscript{4}”.

It might seem that since human communities have been dealing with this form of violence for centuries, the experience gained over time should provide opportunities to effectively oppose the effects of such actions\textsuperscript{5}. However, in these times of changeable and complex environments, extremely high performance must be demonstrated in order to effectively protect against such risks\textsuperscript{6}. Unfortunately, terrorism is not static in nature and has developed over the centuries together with the development of human thought. Each successive wave of terrorism\textsuperscript{7} is different, more aggressive and ruthless, especially towards completely random people. This trend was already visible many years before the attack on the World Trade Center in New York. It largely refers to the post-war so-called revolutionary terrorism, whose main area of activity was Western Europe, represented by extremist left-wing, right-wing and separatist groups, whose peak activity was in the 1960s and 1970s. The contemporary dimension of terrorism, unlike its previous forms, is much more brutal and ruthless. While the preceding waves of terrorism focused their ideological goals on revolutionary issues, or national liberation issues, the most frequent victims were high-level representatives of states, governmental organizations. Nowadays, it is impossible to overlook the desire of terrorist groups to significantly extend the range of public horror. Contemporary terrorism now strikes not social representatives, but entire societies\textsuperscript{8}.

\textsuperscript{5} More: Kitler W (Ed.), Obrona cywilna (niemilitarna) w obronie narodowej III RP. Warsaw, 2001.
The tragic attacks that took place in Europe over the last few years have made leaders and societies of many countries aware that the institutions responsible for their security, despite enormous efforts and investments, are not sufficiently prepared to identify and combat such threats. These events also confirmed that terrorist organisations are starting to operate globally and that their attacks are prepared and conducted locally. It also turns out that, in order to achieve their goals, they will not retreat from any available form of attack and are able to plan and execute the most unimaginable terrorist attack scenarios. The desperation of those preparing the attacks goes so far, that they use commonly available means (e.g. knives, machetes, sharp objects) to cause greater losses, so that the number of victims or people affected is as high as possible.

To a large extent this transformation makes terrorism a particularly dangerous threat to public life today. Especially, because in the course of its evolution, and in the context of the deliberations conducted here, such a statement seems to be justified, apart from changing the subject of its direct influence on broad social groups, it adapts very dynamically to the directions of development of the modern world. Just as the life of a modern citizen of a highly developed state is increasingly escaping from spatial limitations not only in the material, but also in the communication dimension, terrorism is taking advantage of these opportunities. It reaches for the achievements of modern civilization, not only technological but also media. At this level, terrorist groups control social mechanisms, including communication processes. In fact, it seems that the modern media are the main instrument for evoking social fear and are very willingly used in terrorist activities, unfortunately often with the connivance of their owners.

The fight against terrorism has been a priority for the global community for several decades, especially in areas where the impact of terrorist groups is painfully felt. This does not only apply to the so-called Western culture community, as the threats of attacks and the attacks themselves nowadays relate to a much broader social dimension. Although terrorism is not a new phenomenon, as history demonstrates, it has not yet resulted in such a strong joining of forces of the international community in the fight against it. One of the clear results of this is the establishment of an extensive anti-terrorist coalition, i.e. a platform for close cooperation.

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(political, military, intelligence) of many countries representing the so-called Western culture under the leadership of the United States and Muslim countries under the leadership of Saudi Arabia.

The establishment of the anti-terrorist coalition is, among other things, the result of a vast front of activities of terrorist groups that derive their ideas from Islam, which is interpreted in an extreme way and is aimed at meeting the values of societies representing the so-called Western culture. The origins of this process can be found in the time of the Islamic revolution in Iran, which resulted in “the spread of Muslim fundamentalism consisting in the rebirth of Islam in its original form and the rejection of Western values”\textsuperscript{13}.

But that seems to be not the only reason. Other no less important one is the unexpected efficiency of these groups. Many successful terrorist actions have shown how leaky and, let us not be afraid to use this word, clumsy in the face of such threats are the security systems of modern states\textsuperscript{14}. It can undoubtedly be assumed that the events of 2001 that took place in New York constitute a clear time caesura for contemporary terrorism, in the context of the fight against it. It is on the basis of these events that the United States of America declared war on world terrorism, becoming the leader of a newly formed international anti-terrorism coalition.

Although members of the anti-terrorist coalition have gathered considerable experience in the fight against Islamic fundamentalism since 2001, terrorist groups from this circle can still surprise. Bearing in mind the characteristics of the attacks carried out so far, either in Europe or in the United States, the main objectives of the attacks were identified: large populations of people in widely available places, acting by surprise, necessarily large numbers of injuries and deaths. The attacks carried out so far justified this thesis. It is worth recalling the bloody attacks in Madrid (2004) or London (2005) underground. Also at the Glasgow airport in 2007 and at the Bulgarian airport in Burgas in 2012. This also includes the attacks in the Bataclan concert and theatre hall in Paris, or the Brussels airport and metro station in 2016, and the attack in front of a restaurant in the German Ansbach in the same year.

However, the attacks in Charlie Hebdo’s Paris office in 2015 as a symbol of freedom of speech escape this pattern. Also the truck attack on the Promenad des Anglais in Nice during the French national holiday, as well as the attack at the Christmas market in Berlin in 2016 near the Emperor Wilhelm Memorial Church in the Charlottenburg district. The analysis of the course of these events indicates that regardless of the motivation of terrorists, the materialisation of the threat takes place in public space and affects innocent people”\textsuperscript{15}. It should be stressed that an important

\textsuperscript{13} Izak K, Leksykon organizacji i ruchów islamiestycznych. Warsaw, 2014, pp. 8.
\textsuperscript{15} J. Ziobro, P. Lubieński, Podstawowe problemy powszechności zagrożeń dla ludzi i środowiska [in:] Wiśniewski B (Ed.), Racjonalizacja zarządzania jedno-
connection of the mentioned acts of terror is that terrorists hit not only the material dimension, not only the value of human life, but also other values of extra-material nature extremely valuable for Europeans such as freedom of speech, freedom of democracy, strong traditions resulting from Christian roots, for whom Christmas, among others, is a special time. It is also worth noting that the towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed because they were a symbol of New York, the powerhouse of Western culture. The attack on the Pentagon also had a similar symbolic dimension.

This sequence of examples is extended by the 2016 attack carried out by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) fighters in the small Normandy town of Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in south-western France.

Why this example? Because two attackers during the celebration of a holy mass killed the clergyman leading the celebration and injured those attending the mass, including the nuns. There were no crowds in the church, it was not a busy public place, but it was also not an accidental target. Despite the great scale of drama of the terrorist attacks carried out until that time, the European community had not experienced any direct attacks on Christian places of worship. For Europeans, for whom the centuries-old Christian heritage is the cultural foundation, it was a very painful and unexpected strike at particularly cherished values. Until then, it had not been anticipated that terrorists would raise their hand against Christian churches in Europe, rather focusing on the most crowded public places in order to cause as much fear as possible through the number of injuries and casualties.

The aim of this article is to analyse the scale of the threat generated by contemporary terrorism against the clergy and religious buildings around the world, without division into religions or faiths.

Characteristics of the terrorist threat to religious entities and buildings

The above requires us to consider how vulnerable to attacks by terrorists, but also other madmen, are celebrans and other people directly connected with places of worship. In this publication the author intends to present the characteristics of threats of attacks on buildings and people connected with worship. Due to editorial limitations, the characteristics will be focused on the most important aspects of such threats, such as the dynamics of development over the years (taking into account the attacks on the World Trade Center as a turning point), the location of the attacks, their target, the type of means used to attack and the effect of the attacks.
This analysis will be based on the information gathered in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). It is a very comprehensive database on terrorist incidents occurring all over the world\(^{17}\). It is a very extensive database of terrorist events taking place all over the world. This data is collected and managed by the National Research Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), which deals with research on terrorism and is based at the University of Maryland, USA. Its records include 190,000 cases of terrorist attacks that have taken place all over the world\(^{18}\). Currently, the data collected for the years 1970 to 2018 is available. It therefore takes into account two main waves of post-war terrorism, \(i.e.\) the European one from the 1970s and the contemporary one based on Islamic fundamentalism. For the purposes of data collection, a terrorist act is defined as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation”\(^{19}\). It is worth noting that the definition of terrorism adopted for the purposes of data collection is not limited to attacks on the interests of the state alone\(^{20}\). In order for the data to be included in the database, it must meet the following cumulative conditions:
— the incident must be intentional — the result of a conscious calculation on the part of a perpetrator;
— the incident must entail some level of violence or immediate threat of violence, including property violence, as well as violence against people;

\(^{17}\) The data collected in Global Terrorism Database (GTD) are the result of a number of stages, each of which is based on publicly available, non-classified source materials. These include media articles, electronic news archives and, to a lesser extent, existing data collections, secondary source materials such as books and magazines and legal documents. The original collection of incidents including GTD was created between 1970 and 1997 by Pinkerton Global Intelligence Service (PGIS), a private security agency. The Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) team also collaborated with the Centre for Terrorism and Intelligence Research (CETIS) in the development of the GTD database in order to continue the collection of data obtained after 1997. CETIS collected data on the terrorist attacks that took place between January 1998 and March 2008. After that time, the current data collection was transferred to the Institute for the Study of Violent Groups (ISVG). Since November 2011, scientists from the START project at the University of Maryland have been responsible for GTD data collection. More: Electronic source: http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf, accessed: 14.02.2020.


— the perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors. The database does not include acts of state terrorism.
In addition, at least two of the following three criteria must be met:
— the act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal. In terms of economic goals, the exclusive pursuit of profit does not satisfy this criterion. It must involve the pursuit of more profound, systemic economic change;
— there must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate;
— the action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities. That is, the act must be outside the parameters permitted by international humanitarian law.

The above criteria of data collection indicate that for the analysis of the nature of modern terrorism the collection is highly valuable. Properly formulated search algorithms allow to obtain a lot of valuable information\(^\text{21}\).

Based on the analysis of the data from 1970-2018, it was found that approximately 191,500 attacks were identified during this period. The targets of the attacks were varied. However, most often they were ordinary, random people. Other most frequent targets of terrorist attacks were government, military, police or business facilities. Statistically, religious targets are not among the categories with the highest risk of attack, but in the whole number of incidents the attacks in this direction took place almost 4,700 times, which statistically gives almost 100 attacks per year during the whole analysed period. In the number of registered events, it constitutes about 2.4% causes. For example, taking into consideration the second category as regards the intensity of attacks, and the first one of an institutional nature, \textit{i.e.} military facilities, where the number of attacks is 15.6% of the total, the indicator of 2.4% appears significant. In turn, taking into account the fact that the number of religious ceremonies and the number of places of worship is not so high, \textit{e.g.} in comparison with the number of military, government or business facilities, the coefficient relating to 2.4% of all attacks begins to be perceived in a completely different way (Figure 1). This number includes attacks on religious leaders (imams, priests, bishops, \textit{etc.}), religious institutions (mosques, churches, synagogues, \textit{etc.}), religious places or objects (temples, relics, \textit{etc.}). Missionaries are classified as clergy in the database. The presented number also includes attacks on organisations related to religious entities, which are not NGOs, businesses or schools. Attacks on religious pilgrims are identified as attacks on ordinary citizens and their property\(^\text{22}\).


\(^{22}\) \textit{More:} ibidem.
Over the years 1970–2018, attacks on religious targets had variable dynamics, but throughout the whole analysed period such attacks took place every year, i.e. for almost 50 years. In fact, there was no year in which such an event would not take place. However, according to data analysis, there was a significant increase in the number of attacks since the beginning of the 2000s. By 2001, more than 1,400 attacks had been recorded, but since then, more than 3,000, i.e. more than twice as many. Although in recent years this number seems to be decreasing, it has not yet returned to the level before the dynamic growth (Figure 2), which indicates that in the years 2012-2018 the highest risk of attack on religious targets in the world was recorded in this area since 1970.

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the Global Terrorism Database.
A clear variation in the intensity of the quantity, as with the dynamics of the number of attacks, is also noticeable when trying to determine the characteristics of these attacks in terms of their location. The data collected over the years allow us to observe that the intensity of terrorist attacks on religious buildings varies greatly (Figure 3).

Undoubtedly, the region most vulnerable to such religious purposes is the African continent (especially in recent years) and more specifically North and East-Central Africa and, to a lesser extent, Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is not the only continent in the world with such a high intensity of the threat under consideration. Only a slightly lower number of attacks indicate that South Asia is also a very dangerous region of the world in this respect and, to a lesser extent, South-East Asia. Quite a high level of the intensity of terrorist attacks is also noticeable in the Americas (South and North) and in Europe.

Despite the varying intensity of the attacks that took place between 1970 and 2018, it seems that the conclusion can be drawn that virtually every continent in the world is threatened by terrorist attacks of a religious nature, with the exception of Antarctica, which can certainly be explained by its small population. The map below, which visualizes the intensity of the number of attacks in the analysed period around the world, confirms this assumption. Only a few countries in the world did not record such events (Picture 1). The countries with the highest percentage of such attacks are Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, but also Bhutan, Algeria, Libya, Egypt and Nigeria. However, it is not only this region of the world, because a large number of the attacks were also recorded in India, Indonesia, the USA, Chile, Colombia, or the Russian Federation.
The map of the occurrence of terrorist attacks on religious targets worldwide in 1970–2018

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the Global Terrorism Database.

Bearing in mind that the category of terrorist attacks analysed here is of a global threat nature, it is worth looking at it in more detail. As already stated in the introduction, the analysis includes terrorist attacks of a religious nature, whose targets are celebrants and clergy. The data collected allow us to look at this aspect in more detail, as a division into three subcategories has been worked out within the framework of the objective. In addition to the above mentioned, it also refers to institutions directly linked to places of worship or clergy (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Terrorist attacks on religious targets worldwide in 1970–2018— subcategories

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the Global Terrorism Database.
As it can be concluded from the analysis of source data, almost 60% of all attacks on religious targets were directed at places of worship. A significant number, because 1/3 of the causes were directed directly against clergy. The smallest number of attacks, about 8%, were carried out against institutions related to religious entities. However, there is no doubt that the places where people willing to take part in religious ceremonies meet are the most frequent targets of terrorists. One of the most important reasons for the above is the possible range of impact of the attack and its strong social overtones (sense of terror). It should not be forgotten, however, that a significant risk is also placed directly on those who perform clerical ministry.

With this level of risk it is necessary to look at the methods of attacks used by terrorists against religious targets (Figure 5).

![Figure 5](image)

**Terrorist attacks on religious targets worldwide in 1970–2018 in detail**

*Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the Global Terrorism Database.*

The vast majority of the attacks, almost half of them, are bomb attacks. Referring to the characteristics of all attacks not only on religious targets, whose data were collected in the Global Terrorism Database, this method is the most popular. This is obviously not just about professional explosive devices. Very often it is the so-called IED (Improvised Explosive Device). To a lesser extent, attacks were carried out using different types of firearms. The incidents had often the nature of an attack on important (spiritual) persons or important places of worship. In several hundred cases people were kidnapped. However, hostage-taking took place relatively rarely. Other methods, such as the hijacking of vehicles, planes, or the use of harmful substances, were occasional.

If we take a closer look at the measures used by terrorists in attacks, we can conclude that the vast majority of them uses the most common worldwide means of violence, especially various types of explosives or incendiary materials, as well as firearms (Figure 6).
In these three main (due to their intensity of use) categories of measures used for the attack, some trends can be seen (Figure 7). Among the explosives most frequently used were devices which, due to their specific nature of use (explosion), could not be identified. However, the bomb attacks were carried out by various means. Terrorists often used grenades, missiles (including rockets). Bombs, in addition to the methods already indicated, were triggered on vehicles (a car bomb) and on people (suicide attacks). However, automatic and short firearms (pistols) were most often used for attacks with firearms. A small number of attacks were also connected with setting fire to places of worship, most often with the use of flammable substances such as petrol or alcohol.

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the Global Terrorism Database.
Although the means used to carry out the attacks do not seem particularly sophisticated, they unfortunately proved very effective. As the analysis of source data shows, over the last 48 years, about 14,000 innocent people have been killed in attacks on religious targets. The number of the injured and severely wounded is even higher, oscillating around 25,000. The analysis of the dynamics of the number of killed and wounded compared with the dynamics of the number of attacks in the period 1970–2018 shows a worrying, very clear upward trend. While until the 1990s there had been a low mortality rate as a result of the attacks, it is clear after that time that the mortality rate was very high. Such a significant leap in the number of fatalities is not only explained by the increase in the number of attacks, as these correlations are not proportionate. It seems that a very important factor, which has already been mentioned, should be taken into account here. The modern form of terrorism is extremely aggressive in its dimension, as it threatens large sections of society by targeting them with actions aimed at causing fear and horror. It seems that in the tactics of attacks the main goal is to cause social horror through the extent not so much of destruction as of human casualties. Unfortunately, this can also be seen in the analysis of mortality data in terrorist attacks on religious buildings. It must not be forgotten that the victims of the attacks are also injured, often very seriously, with lifelong consequences. This trend also applies to these people, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

The dynamics of the number of people killed and injured in attacks on religious targets worldwide in 1970–2018

Deads and injuries worldwide as a result of attacks in 1970–2018

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the Global Terrorism Database.

Conclusions

The above analysis, cursory because of the adopted editorial limitations, allows us to notice that for many years, continuously, religious
entities or buildings have been targets of terrorist attacks. In these de-
liberations, no distinction was made between the different religions. The
author intended to present the problem in a broader sense, without in-
dicating which religion is more and which is less vulnerable to terror-
ist attacks. This is not the point. The problem is essentially about the
safety of those who perform spiritual ministry and those who go to places
of worship in complete confidence to devote themselves to various forms
of religious contemplation. These people are not prepared to counteract
or defend themselves in the event of an attack. Their state of spiritual elation,
which is not aimed at being prepared to take action in a life or health
threatening situation, does not allow it.

The above considerations prove that the problem is (in relation to the
analysed period) global in spatial scope and continuous in temporal sense.
Unfortunately, in recent years the number of attacks on people and build-
ings of a religious nature has clearly increased. However, this is not the
only thing that is alarming. The number of deaths and injuries, includ-
ing those very seriously injured, who participated in religious ceremonies
or were associated with pastoral activities, has multiplied. This shows the
increasing aggression of various terrorist groups or lone wolves. It also
shows a certain stage in the evolution of terrorism, which, after all, has al-
ways been aimed at causing fear or horror. Contemporary terrorism does
it in a ruthless way, without regard for human life. Unfortunately, the
trends observed in the area of global terrorism translate directly into the
sphere of religious activity in various parts of the world. Importantly, the
problem does not only concern the areas currently under the fight against
the ISIS, it has a much broader territorial scope.

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Summary: In the era of a clear intensification of terrorist attacks, as well as of the threat posed by them, changes in the current strategy of terrorist groups or persons identifying themselves with their ideology are noticeable. The main change is to focus the attacks on causing the greatest possible fear by increasing the size not so much of the damage, but of the human victims. Unfortunately, such a tactic is very effective. So far, the greatest attention of the so-called Western societies has been focused mainly on very spectacular attacks on public, commonly accessible places, where a dramatic spectacle of death was created in front of hundreds of people. However, the incident in 2016 carried out by attackers who identified themselves with so-called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria took place during the celebration of the Mass, where the clergyman conducting the celebration was killed and people attending the Mass were seriously injured, including the nuns, makes us look at the problem from a different perspective. What makes us reflect on the above is that there were not many people in the church, but it was also not a random attack target. This event inspired the author to take a deeper look at the scale of threats that modern terrorism generates to celebrants or other clergy, as well as religious buildings.