

## Chapter 10

# The narrative of terrorism: evolution of the message of violence

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### Abstract

The following paper is an attempt to examine the compelling narrative of modern terrorism. Describing the phenomenon in historical circumstances, it strives to determine the sources of its current popularity, also in the context of the new media usage and creating a “fashion” for violence among the younger generations.

For a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it seemed that most citizens of contemporary countries understood the necessity of living in peace and cooperation to survive. Gradually we learned even to apprehend that the common enemy – or rather a common threat (these phenomena should not be excessively personified) – is climate change or, as some have wanted, the unusual activity of the sun. It seemed that as a species, we finally achieved an understanding that is instinctive at the individual level: first and foremost, we must survive. Secondly, we must, as liberalism’s supporters wanted, learn to respect the limits of our freedom wherever it violates the freedom of others. Optimists announced an increasing shift towards the so-called “soft power” (see for example: Treverton and Jones, 2005; Nye, 2004; Kurlantzick, 2007). It seemed a conceivable concept – if we were to see cooperation, why not use authority, influence, diplomacy, and mediation in international relations – in the end, we must cooperate to achieve our goals somehow.

The first rift in this positive vision of the human species' development were the Balkans – although, just like in the case of the Middle East, many wanted to perceive them instead as expiring conflicts or a decadent story from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Another sign of change was the attacks on twin towers, the World Trade Center, which brought the beginning of the “Global War on Terrorism.” However, we wanted to believe that the history of wars ended; that the world has achieved a long-awaited state of “being civilized”; that violence will cease to be a natural state of humankind and will be diminished, as the only violent actors left were terrorist organizations. The first 18 years of the 21st century clearly show that those hopes were hollow and that the stage of development that would enable us to stop the endless wars is still far ahead of us.

The above framework is where we began the insight into the phenomenon of international terrorism. When considering issues related to terrorism and its narrative in the public domain, both on the part of the terrorist groups themselves, as well as governments, it is worth stopping for a moment at the very essence of terrorism and attempts to define it. For political reasons, achieving full compliance with the definition of terrorism at the level of international law has proved impossible, as demonstrated by even ongoing efforts to create a comprehensive convention on counteracting terrorism (Deen, 2014).

Academics and researchers, however, have made such attempts, and although the universal definition of terrorism still eludes us, it was possible to identify specific characteristics of the phenomenon that constitute the framework of its definition. Alex Schmidt was the precursor of research in which the term “terrorism” is analyzed through the analysis of constituent elements of its definition(s). He mentions such terms related to terrorism as (Hoffman, 1999):

- the use of violence, force or the threat of their use,
- political motivation of the perpetrators,
- acting to create fear,
- willingness to cause psychological effects and reactions,
- distinguishing the purpose of the attack and the direct victim,
- purposefulness and planning of activities,
- combat method,
- conflict with the rules of social behavior in force,
- extortion,
- using the media to search for publicity,
- a blind crime (random selection of victims),
- the use of symbolism,
- the unpredictability of the perpetrators' actions,
- the hidden nature of an organization using terrorist methods.

Comparative studies of existing definitions of terrorism show that the most critical determinants of the presence of terrorism were:

- violence and force (these phenomena, constituting the essence of terrorism, appeared in 83.5% of its examined definitions),
- political motive (65%),
- fear, terror (51%),
- threat (41%),
- psychological effects and anticipated reactions (47%) (Hoffman, 1999).

It is easy to see why phenomena such as fear, terror and related long-term psychological consequences are essential tools of terrorist groups. To stir them up and then use them properly, it is necessary to use a well-prepared information and propaganda campaign.

After September 11, 2001, terrorism ceased to be a phenomenon that remains in the sole interest of researchers dealing with exotic aspects of national and international security. It has ceased to be a niche phenomenon, affecting individual states with a unique history, and has entered the global scene of events. One of the most critical aspects of this international phenomenon that affects us all – citizens and rulers, soldiers and law enforcement officers, doctors and workers – is its internal and external narrative. Terrorism is at the same time a tool for describing and tool for shaping the reality, the driving force, and the subject of history in which we all become extras on the margins of the plot, doomed forever to react.

The history of the terrorist narrative intertwines with the history of terrorism itself. The best tool for its analysis is the concept created by David C. Rapoport, who in 2002 in his text entitled “The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11” devoted to the issue of waves of terrorism, created a concept ordering the history of this phenomenon. He refined it in 2004 in the essay “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism” (Cronin and Ludes, 2004), included in the work “Attacking terrorism. Elements of a grand strategy.” According to the Rapoport concept, we can separate four waves of modern terrorism (Cronin and Ludes, 2004, pp. 46–73).

As the first of them, Rapoport indicates the terrorism of Russian Anarchists, placing the wave in the 19th century (around 1880–1920). Its representatives described this wave as “propaganda of the deed.” They perceived terrorism both as an action and a message that was to carry with itself content profitable in public space.

The concept of “propaganda of the deed” likely comes from the writings of Carl Pisacane, who claimed that “propaganda with the idea is a chimera;

educating people – absurd. Ideas result from deeds, not the latter of the former of ideas, so education will not give freedom to people, but freedom will make it possible for education” (Grinberg, 1994, p. 220). This idea was at the basis of the new vision of communication, as evidenced by the fact that “we do not know today an anarchist journal made in this era” (Grinberg, 1994, p. 12).

This wave was specific also because of the place it had in the development of Western societies. After one of the incidents constituting the embodiment of this doctrine (the attack of Very Zasulicz on a policeman abusing power with political prisoners), a statement of the perpetrator appeared in public circulation which claimed that “she is not a murderer and a terrorist” (Rapoport, 2002, p. 51). It is important to talk about communication in the context of terrorist threats emphasizing the changing overtone of the word “terrorism” itself. In the language of the nineteenth-century anarchists, it did not have pejorative overtones, so the language itself categorized the terrorist as a “fighter for the cause.” In this sense, somewhat on the margins of the current analysis, one can notice a kind of counter-communication success – no one today considers terrorism as a phenomenon in any positive sense.

The next wave of terrorism identified by Rapoport is anti-colonial terrorism. This movement is connected with the progressive striving to regulate international relations following the principles of self-determination of nations. It was one of the waves of terrorism that achieved the most tangible results. The decade of independence (the sixties of the twentieth century) (Gorman, 2001, p. 151) is the period in which the method of political struggle represented by terrorism has proved useful. The fact is that without trends present in the international environment, direct effects would not be achieved. Terrorist attacks, reducing the economic efficiency of possession and increasing the political cost of ownership, were a contribution to change. Moreover, the existence of this wave of terrorism is directly related to changes in the perception of international reality that have occurred since the end of World War I.

Changes on the map of Europe, justified at the political level by the “right of nations to self-determination” indirectly undermined the legitimacy of the rule of European states in their colonies (Rapoport, 2002, p. 55). The above is another change in the “narrative of reality” that supports the transformation of reality itself.

The third wave of terrorism described by Rapoport is leftist terrorism, it is referred to in English as “new left terrorism.” The so-called “terrorism of the new left” was associated with the pursuit of democratization of social life.

The history of terrorism of the “new left-wing” is closely related to the development of new communication systems. At its sources, as a movement

of “social justice” and pacifism, the Left tended to personalized contacts and information to the face. The change that took place in this area had little to do with the decision of the new left-wing parties themselves (Gitlin, 1980, s. 22). The interest of the media created a specific need for an incident or a tragedy – which became the breeding ground for the symbiotic interaction of the media and terrorist groups of the new left.

In this context, Brian Michael, who more than 40 years ago wrote that „terrorism is taking place in the rhythm of carefully prepared choreography, which is supposed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press. [...] Terrorism is directed at people who look, not at the victims themselves. Terrorism is a theater” (Jenkins, 1976, p. 16). As Walter Laqueur also notes that most experts agree that terrorism means the use or threat of violence, the method of fighting or strategy for achieving specific goals, that aims to intimidate the victim by the state (...), and that publicity is an essential factor in the terrorist strategy” (Laqueur, 1986, p. 88).

| A wave of terrorism                           | Ideology   | Communication methods   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Russian anarchism</b>                      | Eliminating governments, „awakening the masses,” democratizing social and political life                                   | „Propaganda of the deed”  |
| <b>Anticolonialism</b>                        | The right of nations to self-determination, rebellion against metropolises   | Change of language, change of auto-definition (from „terrorists” to „freedom fighters”), also to gain new supporters                        |
| <b>„New Left”</b>                             | The democratization of social and political life, ideology having sources in the Vietnam War                               | Return to the „theatrical” goals that ensure communication and publicity (including kidnapping and hijacking), the use of traditional media |
| <b>Fundamentalism and religious extremism</b> | The emergence of a global caliphate, the creation of the „Prophet’s state” and the introduction of sharia law in the world | The use of new media (creating communication mechanisms that disproportionately multiply the effect obtained by the attacks)                |

Waves of terrorism according to David C. Rapoport (own elaborations).

The wave of terrorism that Rapoport is currently dealing with is a wave of religious terrorism. The primary aim of this generation of terrorist groups is to lead to the establishment of a global caliphate, God's state on earth, which will be governed by a law based on the principles of religion as a basis for social coexistence. This terrorist wave is born, and the spread of the Internet and Network 2.0 and the maturing of the information society are growing.

The information society, and therefore the information and knowledge that has become as important in the production process as capital, labor, and land is the product of the information age and the growing networking of social relations. The production branches related to the manufacturing or mining industries have evolved into mostly secondary branches from information. In the agrarian society, the factor limiting economic development was the land, in the industrial society – capital, while the factor conditioning the economic development of the information society is the access to the information gathered, appropriately transformed into knowledge (Goban-Klas and Sienkiewicz, 1999, p. 48).

Network society, closely related – and identified by many researchers – with the information society is a social structure based on networks managed by information and communication technologies, using microelectronics and computer networks that generate, process and distribute knowledge based on knowledge gathered at nodal points of the network (Castells and Cardoso, 2005, p. 7).

The network, as Castells understands it, already had in the historical perspective unique features related to flexibility, adaptation, and evolution depending on the needs. However, only the technological change made it possible to transfer the network operating principles to a level other than small, private groups, giving such structures the ability to shape entire societies (information and communication networks have become a tool for coordination and decentralization of activities of even the largest entities – while maintaining the competence of the highest management structures) (Castells, 2005, p. 7). New methods of functioning of social structures have also emerged from new technologies. It also caused a change in communication carried out by actors taking part in international events – including terrorist groups.

There has been a kind of “borrowing” by these organizations from the Western world not only of forces (in the form of young, ready-to-fight people), but also funds (including the media, especially new media, with particular emphasis on the Internet). One of the essential characteristics of the way contemporary Western societies operate that was adopted – exceptionally effectively – by terrorist groups, is the network of activities. They use the network not only

to communicate between cells that make up terrorist groups, but also to take advantage of the opportunities offered by social networking sites.

The grouping and terrorist organizations in an extremely fluid manner have adapted to function in a networked environment. The network gave them access to information while ensuring the anonymity of the functioning of individual affiliates only at critical nodes. The network allows organizing conspiracy activities. What's more, it also responds to the tactical needs of asymmetric conflict, in which a small and much weaker organization faces centralized state-equipped tools and resources.

An essential element of information and propaganda campaigns carried out by modern terrorist groups and organizations is the Internet. In the context of their activity, it seems crucial to indicate the most important features that characterize this medium. Among these features should be pointed out especially (Weimann, 2004):

- easy access,
- little regulation, censorship or other forms of government control,
- potential access to a considerable group of recipients around the world,
- the anonymity of communication,
- quick information flow,
- low costs of using and maintaining an online presence,
- multimedia environment (the ability to combine text, graphics, sound, movie), allowing users to download materials,
- the possibility of shaping the message in traditional media, often using the Internet as a source of information.

The strength of the Internet is expressed primarily in the qualitative change regarding potential contact with the recipient. Previous terrorist waves had to rely on the use of public communication mechanisms that were under the control of their "hostile" forces – public or private media, controlled either by the government itself or by capital linked to it.

The Internet and new media have given terrorist groups a large degree of independence from such state-controlled media. In this way, they obtained the ability to produce and disseminate information and propaganda materials about their activities.

It is also worth emphasizing that in undermining the values at the root of Western civilization, the jihadist movement does not hesitate to draw from it patterns that have proven to be a symbol for the collective subconscious. Such activities include even the production of propaganda cartoons, the more



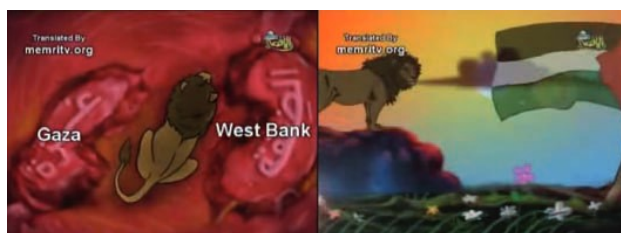
dangerous ones that are directed directly to the youngest recipient (A propaganda cartoon on Hamas-Fatah conflict, 2007).

### Propaganda material by ISIS after Paris attacks as reported by NYT (November 2015)



Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/video/world/100000004166589/isis-video-appears-to-show-assailants.html>  
[05.08.18]

### Animated propaganda cartoon regarding the Hamas – Fatah conflict, using motifs from Walt Disney’s “Lion King” (2007)



Source: Memri TV [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RxtBBSZ5js>]

A similar example of “appropriation” of modern methods of communication is the creation within the broad organizations of a narrower and more “exclusive” movement focused on religious sacrifice and self-denial (up to the readiness to carry out a suicide attack). Also, the terrorist organizations created consumption needs related to the movement and its ideology. It is not difficult to observe the patterns and manner of presenting motifs on the examples of this type of clothing; they are a sign of concessions to a certain universality of visual stimuli appealing to young people (see illustration below).



### Jihadimotifs on clothing



Source: producer's website [<https://plus.google.com/115752447286669315337/about>]

Technological progress, conditioning the change in the way of communication of terrorist groups, is not indifferent not only regarding the research interest in the changes that high technology causes in the functioning of modern societies. The participation of terrorist groups in shaping narratives in new media translates, as already mentioned, into a description of global reality, primarily because the Internet has become a source of information also used to shape the message formulated by traditional media.

The modern world is not only in the face of communication challenges related to functioning in this new security environment. The war of the 21st and the following centuries will be mainly in cyberspace, which terrorists are increasingly using for their purposes. The head of the Office of Transformation of the Armed Forces (USA), justifying the need to undertake actions for the implementation of transformation processes, emphasizes in the report on the application of network-centric methods of warfare that technological evolution from the industrial to information period requires other sources of strength. While in the industrial era the combat force resulted from material resources (in

the sense of the size of the army and equipment), currently it comes from the exchange of information, access to information and speed of response. In his opinion, therefore, in the new theory of war, the network-centric war, not only the tools change, but also the way of conducting war and the sources from which the power comes from (DoD Office of Force Transformation, 2005, p. i).

This transfer of a significant part of the struggle, both on the “state vs. state” and on the “state vs. non-state actor” front, into the purely informational space, makes it impossible to treat issues related to communication of terrorist groups only in terms of content and form.

The use of new media by contemporary terrorist groups carries with it threats that have become part of the world around us. Radicalization and recruitment to terrorist organizations do not take place or take place less and less in the form of personal contacts. The networks, both virtual, online and social, change the way in which the world around us operates. They make direct communication not only unnecessary; it even becomes a threat to be avoided.

An excellent illustration of a similar, though not related to the fight for a global caliphate, is the terrorist attack of Anders Breivik, which took place in July 2012 in Norway. The assassin confessed the anti-immigrant ideology, directed mostly against the representatives of the Muslim minority, but at the same time, he used the tools found on the internet thanks to the people taking part in the global jihad. This free spread of the ideology of violence, but also a ready provision for its use is the price we pay for free and universally accessible new media, especially the Internet.

What, then, is the growing popularity of jihad, not only among the representatives of Muslim minorities, or in countries with indigenous religion and culture, but also in European countries? Can this phenomenon be classified as a kind of fashion: for violence, for adventure, for ultimate experiences?

It seems that such a conclusion is not completely unlikely. Raised in circumstances of stability and peace, 70 years after the end of the last great armed conflict, we seem to forget that in war there is nothing romantic. In the pages of adventure and action books, war appears to be extremely hygienic, filled with heroism and blood brotherhood. One can find the following descriptions only in very few of them:

„[Soldiers’] faces are covered with dust, sand, tar, gun lubricant, tobacco spittle and sewer water from the town. No one’s showered or changed out of the bulky chemical-protection suits they’ve been wearing for ten days. [...] Their filthy faces seem to make their teeth shine even whiter [...]” (Wright, 2011).

Also, a few words about why and how one uses the chemical suit:

„Marine instructors had scared everyone by talking about nerve gases that, as they put it, will “make you dance the funky chicken until you die”; blistering agents that will make your skin “burst up like Jiffy Pop”; and the risks of suffocating in your gas mask if you vomit. “If it’s chunky,” an instructor had said, “you won’t be able to clear it through the drain tube of your mask. You’ll have to swallow it or risk choking on it” (Wright, 2011).

The armed conflict described in this way does not seem captivating – yet many young people raised in a nonviolent Europe are attempting to join the Islamic State units operating in Syria, where chemical weapons are one of the most feared tools of warfare. Perhaps it is not only the power of jihad ideology or the effectiveness of its propaganda: maybe the world is facing potential war, in which on one side there will be people who have nothing to lose and on the other those who are unable to imagine how much they have to lose.

Hence the reflection on jihad is not enough. Communication exists in social contexts and without thorough self-diagnosis, we will not be able to understand how jihad could ever have become a fashion. Fashion is something that according to the Oxford Living English Dictionary is “a popular or the latest style of clothing, hair, decoration, or behaviour.” This popularity comes from somewhere; it is a response to a need. Becoming aware of the fact that there is a need for the bloody narrative of modern jihad is present in our society may be the beginning of understanding how to counteract the communication of terrorist groups and prevent the resulting radicalization and recruitment.