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BETWEEN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH WAVES. THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN TERRORISM

Between the Fourth and Fifth Waves: The Evolution of Modern Terrorism

Assuming that the third decade of the 21st century is a transition period between the fourth and fifth waves of terrorism, in accordance with D.C. Rapoport's concept of cyclicity of terrorism, the article focuses on the evolution of modern terrorism. The main features of the four waves of terrorism identified so far are presented sequentially. Then, reasons for initiating the decline of the fourth wave are identified and the perspectives for the constitution of the fifth wave of terrorism are explored. In the first section of the article, referring to the definition of terrorism and based on D.C. Rapoport's concept of waves of modern terrorism, we demonstrate the determining factors, characteristics and elements which constitute this phenomenon. In the subsequent sections, we seek answers to the following questions: What are the characteristic features of the previous four waves of terrorism? What factors are leading to the decline of the fourth wave of terrorism? Which characteristics of the fourth wave of terrorism may be taken over by the next wave? What are the concepts of the fifth wave of modern terrorism? Research methods and techniques appropriate for the field of social sciences, particularly political science, are used in the study.

Keywords: terrorism, four waves of modern terrorism, fourth wave of modern terrorism, fifth wave of modern terrorism, jihadism.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism, radicalisation, extremism or religious (Islamic) fundamentalism have become the dominant concepts in the political dispute on international security in the first two decades of the 21st century. Over the last decades, the extremely complex and, at the same time, changeable phenomenon of terrorism, which is to a certain extent elusive and hard to define,¹ has closely linked the above-mentioned notions with each other. Its nature is based on its sinusoidal, cyclical character, or as David C. Rapoport pointed out, on its wave-like character. The phenomenon of terrorism consists of the fact that it does not disappear with the change in socio-political circumstances, but it perfectly adapts to the new, changing state of affairs, assimilates with the evolving reality and focuses on one crucial element, which defines the character of the next wave.

According to the concept of waves of terrorism, the fourth wave, which has existed for almost five decades, is focused on the religious factor. It is Islamic radicalism that is its driving force. However, in accordance with the principle of cyclicity, this wave is coming to an end. This means that the third decade of the 21st century will be of key importance for the forming of the fifth wave of terrorism. This decade is the transition period between the fourth and fifth waves of terrorism, whose character still remains uncertain. However, observation and analysis of socio-political phenomena, even at this stage, gives some indication as to the constitutive features of the fifth wave of terrorism and the threats it will pose.

Assuming the third decade of the 21st century is a transition period between the fourth and fifth waves of terrorism, in accordance with Rapoport's concept of cyclicity of terrorism, the article focuses on the evolution of modern terrorism. The main features of the four waves of terrorism identified so far are presented sequentially, followed by a diagnosis of the reasons for the decline of the fourth wave and an exploration of the perspectives for the constitution of the fifth wave of terrorism. We have structured the article as follows. In the first section, referring to the definition of terrorism and based on Rapoport's concept of waves of modern terrorism, we demonstrate the determining factors, characteristics and elements which constitute

¹ T. Meisels, *The Trouble with Terror: The Apologetics of Terrorism – a Refutation*, „Terrorism and Political Violence” 2006, vol. 18, no. 3, p. 470.

this phenomenon. In the subsequent sections, we seek answers to the following questions: What are the characteristic features of the previous four waves of terrorism? What factors are leading to the decline of the fourth wave of terrorism? Which characteristics of the fourth wave of terrorism may be taken over by the next wave? What are the concepts of the fifth wave of modern terrorism?

Research methods and techniques appropriate for the field of social sciences, especially political science, were used in the study. We applied the comparative method to analyse particular waves of modern terrorism (the comparison covered elements such as the duration of each wave, their driving forces, the methods used by terrorists, and specific features; the results of the analysis are presented chronologically), factor analysis to identify the causes initiating the decline of the fourth wave of terrorism, as well as analysis of the subject literature and content analysis to present the state of the current debate on the next wave of terrorism.

DEFINING TERRORISM

Terrorism has long been a complex, multifaceted and multidimensional notion. Although its origins date back to ancient times, it has significantly spread and evolved, in the red – far-left – direction, black – nationalist – direction, as well as green – religious (fundamentalist – Islamic) – direction, over the last three centuries. Defining the concept of terrorism is by no means an easy task. The diversity of motives, aims, ideologies, instruments used, the change in the perception of the role of women and children in terrorist organisations, moving activity to cyberspace, as well as the more and more effective use of modern technologies and communication tools in cyberspace by various terrorist groups, constitute a number of factors which make it impossible to establish a single definition encompassing the seriousness of the threat posed by the phenomenon of terrorism.

However, in order to understand the essence of terrorism, it is necessary to cite at least some of its most widely used definitions.² According to FBI terminology, international terrorism is defined as “violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist

² Z. Stuurman, *Terrorism as Controversy: The Shifting Definition of Terrorism in State Politics*, „E-International Relations”, 24.09.2019, <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/80101> [accessed 19.04.2022].

organizations or nations (state-sponsored)", while domestic terrorism is understood as "violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature".³ Bruce Hoffman defined terrorism as "violence – or equally important, the threat of violence – used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim". He pointed out that "terrorism is designed to create power where there is none or to consolidate power where there is very little".⁴ A similar approach was applied by Louise Richardson, who argued that terrorism "means deliberately and violently targeting civilians for political purposes".⁵ As Antonia Ward pointed out, according to these classic definitions, "if there is no political aim, it is simply a crime and, if there is no violence, it is not terrorism".⁶ Peter Chalk rightly pointed out that the problem with establishing an adequate definition of terrorism is that it has become "a 'fad' word which has been attributed to virtually all types of illegal political activity and violence" carried out by non-state entities. Definitions of terrorism should include elements which are fundamental to this phenomenon, such as symbolism and an "invariably indiscriminate form of psychological political communication".⁷ Importantly, as Jonny Burnett and Dave Whyte emphasised while explaining the difference between the old and new terrorism, the existence of an element characteristic of the new terrorist phenomena should be distinguished, an element that is related to its apocalyptic, transcendent or absolute nature. New terrorist groups are motivated by religious factors and are even "less amenable to traditional forms of control".⁸ Kai Hirschmann identified five key motives for the phenomenon of terrorism: Ideological terrorism (a desire for political changes); ethno-political terrorism (driven by a longing for autonomy or an own state); religious terrorism (based on imposing religious norms, but also on apocalyptic fanaticism); single issue terrorism (its aim is the fight for animal rights, environmentalism

³ FBI, *Terrorism*, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism> [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁴ B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Columbia University Press, New York 1998, p. 44.

⁵ L. Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat*, Random House, New York 2006, s. 4.

⁶ A. Ward, *How Do You Define Terrorism?*, RAND Corporation, 2018, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/06/how-do-you-define-terrorism.html> [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁷ P. Chalk, *The Nature of Contemporary Terrorism: Problems of Definition. The Evolving Dynamic*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 1996, p. 9.

⁸ J. Burnett, D. Whyte, *Embedded Expertise and the New Terrorism*, „Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media” 2005, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 5.

and the fight against abortion); and “chosen ones” terrorism (based on the individual activity of mentally disturbed persons driven by a mission or social philosophy, without a network support).⁹

To sum up the attempts to define the phenomenon of terrorism, it should be noted that terrorism includes planned and organised activities of individuals or groups with various motivations, mainly of an ideological or religious nature (it can also be assumed that religion becomes an ideology), undertaken unlawfully in order to extort specific behaviours and benefits from state authorities and society, which affect the lives of civilians (the deaths of civilians has become an inherent element of terrorist activities). Thus, terrorism encompasses ruthless activities carried out by various means (psychological or physical violence, use of weapons and explosives, use of cyberspace), in the atmosphere of fear generated intentionally in society and with the publicity specially given to them by the media.

THE CONCEPT OF WAVES OF MODERN TERRORISM

An analysis of the evolution of the historical phenomena and circumstances connected with terrorist activity enabled David C. Rapoport, who was one of the first scholars to study terrorism, to aptly capture the change in the nature of terrorist activity and its consequences, as well as the factors determining this change. Rapoport is the author of the concept of the four waves of terrorism, each of which was caused by the influence of a certain political or ideological impulse.¹⁰ Defining the notion of a wave, he stressed that:

It is a cycle of activity in a given time period – a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases. A crucial feature is its international character; similar activities occur in several countries, driven by a common predominant energy that shapes the participating groups’ characteristics and mutual relationships. As their names – ‘Anarchist’, ‘Anticolonial’, ‘New Left’ and ‘Religious’ – suggest, a different energy drives each.¹¹

Rapoport pointed out that each wave’s name reflects its dominant characteristic but not its only feature. The essence of terrorism

⁹ K. Hirschmann, *The Changing Face of Terrorism*, „International Politics and Society” 2000, no. 3, p. 299.

¹⁰ D.C. Rapoport, „The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism”, in: *Attacking Terrorism. Elements of a Grand Strategy*, eds. A.K. Cronin, J.M. Ludes, Georgetown University Press, Washington 2004, pp. 46–68.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

lies in its wave-like nature and in the use of current socio-political circumstances to implement the demands of its current activists. However, “when a wave’s energy cannot inspire new organisations, the wave disappears. Resistance, political concessions and changes in the perceptions of generations are critical factors explaining the disappearance”¹² of one wave and the appearance of another.

Notably, the theory developed by this author has already been widely discussed in the scientific community, and is also as a subject of re-evaluation,¹³ critical reflection or even criticism.¹⁴ Objections to the concept concern, *inter alia*, the debatability of the empirical data used in it or the incompatibility of some facts, for example, the existence of terrorist organisations that escape divisions created by the researcher. Nevertheless, as Jeffrey Kaplan stated, Rapoport’s concept remains “increasingly ubiquitous in the academic study on terrorism”.¹⁵

Defining the subsequent waves of terrorism, Rapoport described the first one as the anarchist wave, which started in 1880 and came to an end in 1914. This wave of terrorism, which he considered as the first global, truly international terrorist experience in history, was characterised by individualistic terrorism with anarchist and revolutionary undertones, as the second half of the 19th century marked the beginnings of the anarchist movement, especially in Russia, which considered terrorist activity as one of the primary methods to achieve a political aim. However, anarchist terrorists concentrated on individual-oriented terrorism, directed against particular persons – usually political leaders – presidents or monarchs (the assassination of the US President William McKinley or the emperor of Russia, Alexander II). The deaths of civilians were not their objective. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June

¹² *Ibidem*, 47.

¹³ For example: M. Sedgwick, *Inspiration and the Origins of Global Waves of Terrorism*, „Studies in Conflict & Terrorism” 2007, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 97–112; M. Chertoff, P. Bury, D. Richterova, *Bytes not waves: information communication technologies, global jihadism and counterterrorism*, „International Affairs” 2020, vol. 96, no. 5, pp. 1305–1325; S.M. Radil, J. Castan Pinos, *Reexamining the Four Waves of Modern Terrorism: A Territorial Interpretation*, „Studies in Conflict & Terrorism” 2022, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 311–330.

¹⁴ For example, see the discussion between authors: T. Parker, N. Sitter, *The Four Horsemen of Terrorism: It’s Not Waves, It’s Strains*, „Terrorism and Political Violence” 2016, vol. 28, no. 2, pp.197–216; and J. Kaplan, *A Strained Criticism of Wave Theory*, „Terrorism and Political Violence” 2016, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 228–235.

¹⁵ J. Kaplan, *Waves of Political Terrorism*, *Oxford Research Encyclopaedias. Politics*, 29 October 2021, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-24> [accessed 13.07.2022].

1914 eventually put an end to this first wave of terrorism, as it hugely influenced the lives of millions of people, bringing about the so-called Great War.¹⁶

The second wave of terrorism, which Rapoport called anticolonial, was dominated by nationalist and separatist ideology. It lasted from the 1920s to the 1960s. Importantly, however, in the 1930s, the notion of terrorism changed its meaning. It was no longer used to describe the activity of revolutionary movements or acts of violence against rulers, but it now referred to mass repressions carried out by totalitarian regimes against their own citizens. The term terrorism described the internal policies of the governments of the USSR, Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany. It was only after World War II that the term regained its revolutionary meaning, as it was mainly used with reference to the rebellions carried out for the cause of independence by the populations occupying colonised territories in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East.¹⁷ The anticolonial wave ended together with the global disintegration of the colonial system, which happened in the early 1960s.

The creation of several new states of the so-called Third World initiated the next, third, wave of terrorism, referred to as the New Left wave, which was active in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. This wave was dominated by left-wing ideology, which involved the return to the admiration for revolution, criticism of Western imperialism, class struggle or the division of the world into the wealthy North and poor South. The New Left wave was characteristic of the period of the Cold War and the political, military and ideological rivalry between the United States and the USSR. Terrorism used during the Vietnam War or the Arab-Israeli wars perfectly fitted into the New Left wave. It should be noted, however, that terrorist acts typical of the third wave of terrorism not only had different ideological foundations and aims from the previous ones, but they also used different methods whose effects were to generate media publicity. Both state authorities and individual persons or groups fighting against the authorities were behind the terrorist attacks carried out during the period of the third wave.¹⁸ Most importantly, however, it was the whole society that became a target for terrorists in the third wave, not its representatives. The victims

¹⁶ S. Atran, *Talking to the Enemy. Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)making of Terrorists*, Ecco Press, New York 2010, pp. 92–98.

¹⁷ A. Woolf, *Terrorism*, Rosen Central, New York 2011, pp. 8–10.

¹⁸ A. Perliger, *Middle Eastern Terrorism*, Chelsea House, New York 2006, pp. 49–51.

of terrorism were deliberately accidental, which was to intensify the feelings of fear in society and give rise to the belief that everyone may become a victim of a terrorist attack. Terrorists, in order to make their attack even more spectacular, hijacked passenger aircrafts, took hostages or planted booby-trap bombs in cars, schools, theatres, at markets, in shopping centres or on public transport. The third wave of terrorism was characterised by significant internationalisation. It was then that terrorism started to be perceived as a complex international problem with diverse foundations.¹⁹ As the third wave diminished, there remained only a few active New Left terrorist groups in Nepal, Spain, Great Britain, Peru and Colombia.

The fourth wave of terrorism was the last identified by Rapoport, which was called the religious or jihadist wave or the jihad era. This wave was initiated by two extremely important events in the global framework, namely the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, which started in 1979, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, as a result of which the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became *velayat-e faqih* and Iran became a theocratic state.²⁰ The fourth wave of terrorism exists in the post-Cold War period, and, precisely, in its first three decades. Importantly, the strong religious, anti-globalisation and anti-hegemonic narrative constitutes the dominant background for the terrorism of the fourth wave, while ultraconservatism, religious fundamentalism²¹ and jihadism became its immanent features.²² The dichotomous perception of the world divided into *dar al-islam* (Arabic: house/abode of Islam) – the area of the world under the rule of Islam, where Islamic law prevails, and *dar al-harb* (Arabic: house of war) – lands which are not under Islamic rule or at war with the Muslims, as well as the areas where Muslim law is not applied and Muslims are subjected to repressions, is internalised by its militants. What constitutes a problem for terrorists (jihadists²³) is the dominance of the neoliberal West, and in particular of the United States as the solitary power or the sole hyperpower, declaring itself above the law,²⁴ as in the case of

¹⁹ R.H.T. O'Kane, *Terrorism*, Pearson Longman, Harlow 2007, pp. 24–26.

²⁰ C. Hemmer, *Which Lessons Matter? American Foreign Policy Decision Making in the Middle East, 1979–1987*, State University of New York Press, New York 2000, pp. 47–90.

²¹ B. Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism. Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2002, pp. 149–157.

²² J. Brachman, *Global Jihadism. Theory and Practice*, Routledge, New York – London 2007, pp. 10–21.

²³ F.A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton – Oxford 2016, pp. 50–97.

²⁴ J. Kaag, S. Kreps, *Drone Warfare*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2014, pp. 97–98.

the invasion of Iraq in 2003.²⁵ The fourth wave is the era of dominance of the lesser jihad, the jihad of the sword, thus it is the period of the so-called holy war of radical Muslims against the unfaithful (followers of other religions). During the period of the fourth wave *dar al-harb*, which should be converted to Islam, became the battleground of the lesser jihad. The fourth wave of terrorism is the time of the activity of Al-Qaeda, which intended to demonstrate the weakness of the United States by carrying out the attacks of 11 September 2001,²⁶ but it is also the time of the formation of the most dangerous ultraradical Salafi terrorist organisation in the 21st century, the so-called Islamic State (IS).²⁷ The attacks of the fourth wave have an anti-West, anti-American, anti-Christian and anti-liberal character. The constitutive elements of this wave include numerous suicide terrorist attacks with a religious (Islamic) background, the dominance of Islamic fundamentalism, the cult of shahids, the activity of lone wolves, targeting a large number of civilian casualties accumulated in one place, the use of the internet as a channel for the communication and promotion of jihad (cyber-jihad), and, finally, the impotence of Western governments in the fight against jihadists.

THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD: BETWEEN THE WAVES

Based on Rapoport's concept, there is no doubt that terrorism exhibits a sinusoidal pattern. Each wave gradually rises, reaches its peak and slowly descends, leading to the formation of another one. Variability is its immanent feature. Terrorists use the changing political, economic and social situation in order to adjust the model of terrorism to the current social needs and challenges. Such change occurs on average every four decades, when a generation ends, however, sometimes the waves overlap. As Rapoport himself pointed out, the next wave should begin to shape around 2025, as "the uniqueness and persistence of the waves experience indicates that terror is deeply rooted in modern culture".²⁸

²⁵ Y. Yazbeck Haddad, *Islamist Perceptions of U.S. Policy in the Middle East*, in: *The Middle East and the United States. A historical and political reassessment*, ed. D.W. Lesch, Westview Press, Cambridge 2003, pp. 483–486.

²⁶ P. Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*, W.W. Horton & Company, New York – London 2003, pp. 12–15.

²⁷ M. Griffin, *Islamic State. Rewriting History*, Pluto Press, London 2016, pp. 8–31, 99–106.

²⁸ D.C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves...*, s. 47.

Therefore, it can be assumed that the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century is also the beginning of the next, fifth, wave of terrorism. The fourth wave of terrorism is now declining, which is consistent with Rapoport's concept, who noted that:

A wave is composed of organizations but waves and organizations have very different life rhythms. Normally, organizations disappear before the initial wave associated with them does. Nonetheless, the wave retained sufficient energy to create a generation of successor or new groups.²⁹

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the religious factor remains omnipresent in terrorism and there is no indication that it would be totally eliminated by the energy of another wave. It will undoubtedly constitute one of the characteristics of the fifth wave of terrorism, however, it will not be its dominant feature or constitutive element, as the significance of the religious factor is currently experiencing a slow weakening and a certain disintegration.

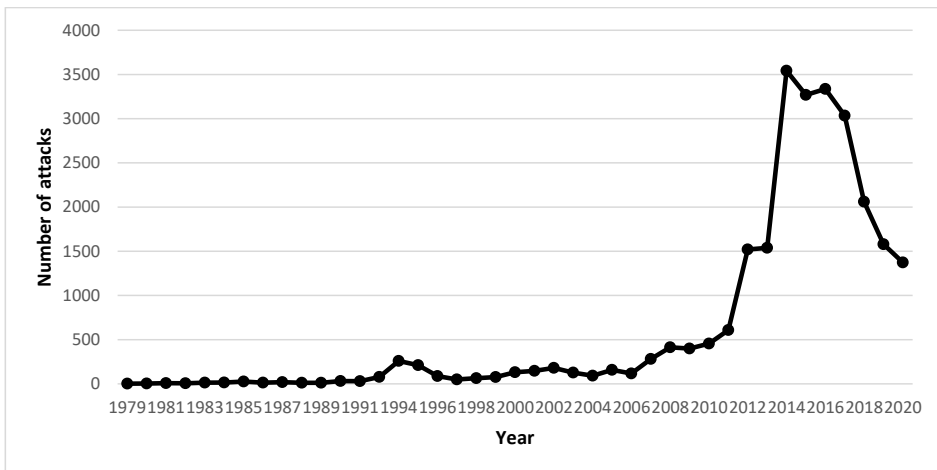
It is worth emphasising that not only the direct application of the wave theory of modern terrorism indicates the depletion of the fourth wave. The thesis is also confirmed by 1) statistical data related to terrorist activity and 2) the global change of political, social and economic conditions (including, *inter alia*, progressing globalisation processes and the vulnerability of economies to crises, increasing global socio-economic inequalities, progressing rivalry for resources, increasing importance of the technological factor). No less important is 3) the evolution of the world order, which is no longer being patronisingly shaped by the West and heading towards multipolarity³⁰ (while jihadism is fuelled primarily by hatred towards the West). Finally, the not-too-distant prospect of the fifth wave of modern terrorism is confirmed by 4) the intensified scientific debate on it.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 48.

³⁰ The issue is widely discussed in the literature and, therefore, it will not be described in this article. See for example: W.C. Dale, *Geopolitics and the Great Powers in the 21st Century: Multipolarity and the Revolution in Strategic Perspective*, Routledge, New York 2007; *Multipolarity in the 21st Century. A New World Order*, eds. D. Murray, D. Brown, Routledge, Abingdon – New York 2013; S.E. Vezirgiannidou, *The United States and Rising Powers in a Post-hegemonic Global Order?*, „International Affairs” 2013, vol. 89, no. 3, pp. 635–651; O. Stuenkel, *Post-western World: How Emerging Powers are Remaking Global Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2016; *Power Relations in the Twenty-First Century. Mapping a Multipolar World?*, eds. D. Murray, D. Brown, Routledge, Abingdon – New York 2018; Alfredo T. Hardy, *China versus the US: Who Will Prevail?*, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore 2020; *The Decline of the Western-Centric World and the Emerging New Global Order: Contending Views*, eds. Yun-han Chu, Yongnian Zheng, Routledge, Abingdon – New York 2021.

As mentioned, the gradual limitation of the activity of jihadist organisations is reflected in the statistical data on terrorist attacks. This is visible in the number of terrorist attacks by organisations with religious (jihadist) motives from 1979 to 2020 (Chart 1). Taking into account the groups on the list of foreign terrorist organisations,³¹ compiled by the US Secretary of State, it should be stated that the fourth wave of terrorism gradually developed in the last two decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. At the end of the first decade, the activity of jihadists grew more vital, reaching a peak in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, which should be associated with the dynamic development of the so-called IS. The decline in the number of religious attacks organised each year is primarily related to global efforts to combat the activity of Al-Qaeda (and its subsidiaries) and the so-called IS (and its cells), which led to the transformations weakening these organisations. Other jihadist groups (especially those on the African continent), although still very effective, operate locally and do not have the potential to expand their activities. Finally, on this basis, it can be concluded that the fourth wave of modern terrorism is now declining.

CHART 1
Attacks by jihadist foreign terrorist organisations, 1979–2020



Source: START, Global Terrorism Database (GTD), <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/> [accessed 15.07.2022].

It is also worth looking at the statistics on the activities of the two most critical terrorist organisations operating during the fourth wave – Al-Qaeda and the so-called IS. Between 2001 and 2020, Al-Qaeda and its subsidiaries performed a total of 2,138 attacks,³² killing at least 12,920 people and injuring 41,138 people. However, in the second half of the second decade of the 21st century, there were “only” 243 such incidents. As a result, at least 708 people died and 708 people were wounded (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Al-Qaeda attacks, 2001–2020

Year	Number of attacks	Killed	Wounded
2001	5	3,004	21,872
2002	18	100	296
2003	21	135	693
2004	29	459	2,145
2005	80	903	2,485
2006	11	123	105
2007	119	1,181	2,967
2008	100	639	1,223
2009	59	426	865
2010	103	440	751
2011	125	713	1,007
2012	513	1,919	3,366
2013	241	844	1,445
2014	312	912	852
2015	159	414	358
2016	119	281	301
2017	57	263	251
2018	27	86	92
2019	26	58	61
2020	14	20	3

Source: START, Global Terrorism Database (GTD), <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

³² Al-Qaeda – 68; Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – 1,113; Al-Qaeda in Iraq – 638; Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – 265; Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent – 17; Al-Qaeda in Yemen – 12; Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia – 8; Islamabouli Brigades of Al-Qaeda – 5; Jadid Al-Qaeda Bangladesh (JAQB) – 3; Al-Qaeda Kurdish Battalions (AQKB) – 2; Al-Qaeda Network for Southwestern Khulna Division – 2; Al-Qaeda Organisation for Jihad in Sweden – 1; Sympathisers of Al-Qaeda Organisation – 4.

In a similar period, the dynamics of the so-called IS and its troops decreased. In total, from 2007 to 2020, terrorists identifying with it carried out 9,562 attacks,³³ resulting in 54,766 people killed and 50,685 people injured. At the end of the second decade of the 21st century, in 2018–2020, the so-called IS organised 2,213 attacks. They generated at least 7,865 casualties and 8,077 injured (Table 2).

TABLE 2
So-called Islamic State attacks, 2001–2020

Year	Number of attacks	Killed	Wounded
2007	18	219	300
2008	20	225	367
2009	57	803	2,728
2010	46	416	964
2011	4	63	130
2013	377	1,461	3,649
2014	1,282	10,431	6,654
2015	1,779	10,319	10,141
2016	2,045	13,777	10,862
2017	1,721	9,188	6,813
2018	977	3,717	4,075
2019	642	2,197	2,580
2020	594	1,950	1,422

Source: START, Global Terrorism Database (GTD), <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

The downward trend proves that jihadist terrorism, which constitutes the fourth wave, is changing its nature. This results from several circumstances, reflecting the factors leading to the decline of the fourth wave of terrorism.

³³ Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – 7,254; Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State – 614; Sinai Province of the Islamic State – 558; Tripoli Province of the Islamic State – 361; Barqa Province of the Islamic State – 169; Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) – 145; Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) – 78; Central Africa Province of the Islamic State – 76; Adan-Abyan Province of the Islamic State – 57; Islamic State in Bangladesh – 44; Fezzan Province of the Islamic State – 35; Sanaa Province of the Islamic State – 30; Caucasus Province of the Islamic State – 29; Islamic State in Egypt – 24; Hadramawt Province of the Islamic State – 17; Najd Province of the Islamic State – 12; Algeria Province of the Islamic State – 11; East Asia Division of the Islamic State – 10; Supporters of the Islamic State in Jerusalem – 9; Hijaz Province of the Islamic State – 7; Al Bayda Province of the Islamic State – 5; Hind Province of the Islamic State – 5; Pakistan Province of the Islamic State – 5; Lahij Province of the Islamic State – 3; Bahrain Province of the Islamic State – 2; Shabwah Province of the Islamic State – 1; Supporters of the Islamic State in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques – 1.

Firstly, significant changes (including primarily leadership, organisational structure and strategy) have affected Al-Qaeda, which became the main target of the Global War on Terror that began after the terrorist attacks in the United States (US) on 11 September 2001. As a consequence of the US-led international intervention in Afghanistan, considerable forces of that organisation were shattered. The group's leader and founder, Osama bin Laden, was eventually captured and killed. Al-Qaeda dispersed its activities and concentrated on operating through regional/local cells. Ali Soufan (a former FBI special agent) indicated that, as a result, "Al-Qaeda has shifted its strategy from global terror targeting the West, or the 'far enemy', to local insurgency and the exploitation of sectarianism and geopolitical conflicts".³⁴ The focus on the "near enemy" led to an increase in Al-Qaeda members, mainly in the Levant, Arabian Peninsula, North Africa and South Asia.³⁵ The decentralisation strategy generated increased activity under the banner of Al-Qaeda in the mid-2010s and then led to a gradual reduction in the scale of attacks carried out. However, it shows the organisation's ability to evolve and adapt to new socio-politic conditions.

Secondly, jihadism in the form of the so-called IS also entered a new stage of transformation, where the so-called IS became a dispersed, umbrella terrorist organisation, which only provides guidance and inspiration to local jihadist groups and radicalised units. In this new version, the expansion of ISIS is limited by the rivalry with the also weakened Al-Qaeda.³⁶ Currently, Al-Qaeda, despite internal divisions,³⁷ still operates, and as far as its activity in Afghanistan is concerned,³⁸ it is even experiencing a renaissance and proclaims victory over the US in connection with the withdrawal of American troops from this state

³⁴ Ali Soufan, *Evolution of Jihadism 20 Years After 9/11*, Wilson Center, 8.09.2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/evolution-jihadism-20-years-after-911> [accessed 19.04.2022].

³⁵ The Soufan Center, *Diminished, but not Defeated: The Evolution of al-Qaeda Since September 11, 2001*, September 2021, https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TSC-Report_Diminished-but-Not-Defeated-The-Evolution-of-al-Qaeda-Since-Sept-11-2001_Sept-2021.pdf: 10-11 [accessed 19.04.2022].

³⁶ A.Y. Zelin, *Jihadis 2021: ISIS & al Qaeda*, Wilson Center, 17.03.2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/jihadis-2021-isis-al-qaeda> [accessed 19.04.2022].

³⁷ M. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2014, pp. 164–166.

³⁸ 12th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2557 (2020) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan, United Nations Security Council, 1.06.2021, <https://www.undocs.org/S/2021/486> [accessed 19.04.2022].

following the decision by President Joe Biden.³⁹ Therefore, Al-Qaeda can be regarded as a terrorist organisation which will transcend this wave and permeate into the next one while preserving its structures, similarly to terrorist organisations remaining active all over the world despite the end of the New Left wave.

Thirdly, the area and sphere of influence of extreme fundamentalist groups have changed. The cells of the so-called IS, following the breakup of the quasi-state structures, have shifted their operations from their heartland in Western Europe, the United States and the Middle East, to Sub-Saharan Africa, although they remain strongly present in Yemen, which is affected by civil war and humanitarian crisis.⁴⁰ The lack of political stability, administrative and economic chaos, dramatic impoverishment of the local population, plus humanitarian interventions, apparently bringing democracy and freedom in the Western style, constitute favourable circumstances for the survival of the new cells of the so-called IS or even a short-term reconstruction of its structures, however, its global impact has been ultimately limited. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2020, in the West, IS directed or inspired at least 78 terror attacks between 2014 and 2019, resulting in 471 fatalities. France recorded the most IS-related terrorism deaths, followed by the US and Belgium. However, there was only one attack recorded in the West in 2019. Forty-one per cent of the total IS-related attacks in 2019 occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the shift in IS-related attacks away from the Middle East. The new trend is that far-right terrorism has increased substantially in the West. GTI points that there was one recorded far-right terrorist attack in 2010, which had increased to 49 in 2019.⁴¹

Last, but not least, with the breakup of its quasi-state structures, the so-called IS – in part deprived of sources of funding – has modified the elements related to its mediality, propaganda and cyber-jihad.⁴² The force of its media influence is no longer as strong as it was in the 2014–2017 period, resulting in the decline in the global impact of IS.

³⁹ *Remarks by President Biden on Afghanistan*, White House, 16.08.2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/16/remarks-by-president-biden-on-afghanistan/> [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁴⁰ C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy. Report*, Congressional Research Service, 5.02.2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43756.pdf> [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁴¹ *Global Terrorism Index 2020. Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Institute for Economics & Peace, November 2020, <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf> [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁴² C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy. In Brief*, Congressional Research Service, 25.03.2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45122.pdf> [accessed 19.04.2022].

Finally, the activity of lone wolves and the global cult of shahids have also considerably diminished. During the fourth wave of its characteristic terrorist suicide attacks, a total of 4,762 were reported, in which at least 56,041 people were killed and 110,295 were injured.⁴³ It should be noted that in the last two decades of the 20th century (1981–2000), there were “only” 72 such incidents and they claimed at least 1,271 victims and wounded 6,208 people. In the 21st century (until 2020), there were 4,690 suicide attacks (Table 3), mainly in its second decade (4,020 attacks). At least 54,770 people died (including 41,990 since 2011) and 104,087 people were injured (including 57,442 since 2011). Taking into account the statistical data, it should be stated that the peak of suicide terrorists’ activity occurred in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, which was associated mainly with the so-called IS’s activeness. Currently, the annual number of suicide attacks is slowly approaching the level recorded in the first decade of the 21st century

TABLE 3
Terrorist suicide attacks, 2001–2020

Year	Number of attacks	Killed	Wounded
2001	38	3,194	22,707
2002	60	604	1,719
2003	55	509	2,253
2004	60	1,097	2,964
2005	82	1,023	2,873
2006	43	467	822
2007	75	1,409	3,594
2008	83	1,330	2,509
2009	82	1,394	4,024
2010	92	1,753	3,180
2011	113	1,501	2,923
2012	273	2,256	4,395
2013	283	2,576	4,848
2014	471	4,819	7,034
2015	747	7,661	10,478
2016	807	9,847	10,846
2017	703	6,862	7,554
2018	288	3,184	4,190
2019	208	2,354	3,776
2020	127	930	1,398

Source: START, Global Terrorism Database (GTD), <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

⁴³ The statistics cover only the attacks carried out by the identified perpetrator, which took place as a result of the activities of terrorist organisations using religious motivations.

Obviously, the possibility cannot be ruled out that any of the subsequent waves will bring a renaissance of the cult of martyrdom for faith, but certainly in a modified form, differing from the passing wave.

Taking into account the above theses, it should be reiterated that it was the breakup of the quasi-state structures of the so-called IS that initiated the decline of the fourth wave of terrorism. Thus, the questions which constitute the essential element of the considerations made, and which remain open, are related to the genesis, name and constitutive features of the next, fifth wave of terrorism, which began at the turn of the third decade of the 21st century.

The academic discourse so far has included, *inter alia*, the following suggestions. Jeffrey Kaplan identified New Tribalism as the driving force of the next wave of terrorism,⁴⁴ based on groups that are “localistic and particularistic, having turned their back on the international waves from which they emerged”.⁴⁵ Despite Kaplan’s position excluding Islamist groups from the fifth wave, Anthony N. Celso indicated jihadism and jihadist organisations (ISIS and Boko Haram) as a variant of this concept.⁴⁶ In turn, Or Honig and Ido Yahel saw the fifth wave in terrorist semi-states, led by rebel groups prioritising territorial control and engaging in governance activities but still fighting (by terroristic means) with other states.⁴⁷ However, attention should be paid to the geographically limited scope of the organisations referred to by the above-mentioned authors, and to their declining strength at the end of the second decade of the 21st century.

On the other hand, Erin Walls concentrated on xenophobia and nationalism as leading narratives guiding terrorists and called the next wave “anti-globalization”.⁴⁸ Muhammad Raza Jalil suggested that the energy driving the fifth wave will be Islamophobia and that “lone wolves charged with hatred and fuelled by policymakers, media, and

⁴⁴ J. Kaplan, *Terrorist Groups and the New Tribalism. Terrorism’s Fifth Wave*, Routledge, London – New York 2012.

⁴⁵ *Idem*, *Terrorism’s Fifth Wave: A Theory, a Conundrum and a Dilemma*, „Perspectives on Terrorism” 2008, vol. 2, no. 2, s. 13.

⁴⁶ A.N. Celso, *The Islamic State and Boko Haram: Fifth Wave Jihadist Terror Groups*, „Orbis” 2015, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 249–268.

⁴⁷ O. Honig, I. Yahel, *A Fifth Wave of Terrorism? The Emergence of Terrorist Semi-States*, „Terrorism and Political Violence” 2019, vol. 31, no. 6, pp. 1210–28.

⁴⁸ E. Walls, *Waves of Modern Terrorism: Examining the Past and Predicting the Future* [thesis], Georgetown University, Washington 2017, pp. 65–68, https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1043900/Walls_georgetown_0076M_13610.pdf?s [accessed 19.04.2022].

intelligentsia” will be its contractors.⁴⁹ Moreover, the inspiration of the fifth wave terrorists with the demands of the far-right wing is also widely discussed.⁵⁰ The discourse in this regard covers the following issues: an expansion of activity of right-wing extremists, a triggering cause for terroristic attacks, its international character and the characteristic of its predominant energy. As Javed Ali indicated, the main problem is that “The diversity of extremist beliefs that condone or support violent action in this New Right wave is broad and defies categorization with a single label”.⁵¹ It covers a wide range of narratives, ranging from white supremacy to millenarism and apocalypticism. However, Rapoport stated that “Right-wing groups have been present in every wave. Usually, they fight against wave groups”,⁵² suggesting that it is the part of the religious wave. Therefore, Jeffrey Simon stated that ideology would be less critical in the fifth wave, as its key feature will be the *modus operandi* itself – the use of technology, which will determine the shape of the forthcoming terrorism.⁵³

Due to the technological progress and dynamic changes in the global political, economic and social situation at the turn of the decades, these approaches seem more pertinent. At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, the primary catalyst of the next wave of terrorism may be the COVID-19 pandemic, which at the same time led to the strengthening of nationalist and anti-globalisation public attitudes and – by the necessity of social distancing – forced a wider use of the internet in interpersonal communication. This became the background, for example, for the spread of numerous conspiracy theories.⁵⁴ Therefore, in the discussion on the driving force of the fifth wave of terrorism, the potential of conspiracy theories should

⁴⁹ M. Raza Jalil, *The Rise of the Fifth Wave of Global Terrorism (Islamophobia)*, „Margalla Papers. A Journal of International Affairs” 2021, vol. 25, no. 2, p. 16.

⁵⁰ For example: V.A. Auger, *Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?*, „Perspectives on Terrorism” 2020, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 87–97; A. Hart, *Right-Wing Waves: Applying the Four Waves Theory to Transnational and Transhistorical Right-Wing Threat Trends*, „Terrorism and Political Violence” 2021, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2020.1856818> [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁵¹ J. Ali, *The 5th Wave of Rebel Terrorism*, „The Cipher Brief”, 24.02.2021, <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column/agenda-setter/the-5th-wave-of-rebel-terrorism> [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁵² D.C. Rapoport, *It Is Waves, Not Strains*, „Terrorism and Political Violence” 2016, vol. 28, no. 2, p. 222.

⁵³ J.D. Simon, *Technological and Lone Operator Terrorism: Prospects for a Fifth Wave of Global Terrorism*, in: *Terrorism, Identity and Legitimacy*, ed. Jean E. Rosenfeld, Routledge, New York 2011, 48–59.

⁵⁴ B.J. Dow et al., *The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Search for Structure: Social Media and Conspiracy Theories*, „Social and Personality Psychology Compass” 2021, vol. 15, no. 9, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/spc3.12636> [accessed 19.04.2022].

not be ignored. As Michael Barkun stated, fringe conspiracy theories are radical narratives based on the belief that “an organization made up of individuals or groups was or is acting covertly to achieve some malevolent end”, which generates the belief that nothing happens by accident, nothing is what it seems and everything is connected.⁵⁵ For example, the QAnon super-conspiracy may be considered as an informal terrorist group. As early as in May 2019, the local FBI bureau in Phoenix warned against the risk of generating domestic terrorism by this movement, admitting that fringe political conspiracy theories “very likely motivate some domestic extremists, wholly or in part, to engage in criminal or violent activity”.⁵⁶ Accordingly, the activity of this movement should not be depreciated, especially due to the rapid pace of radicalisation of QAnon followers, their willingness to resort to violence,⁵⁷ and the recruitment process similar to that carried out by jihadist groups.⁵⁸ Particular attention should be paid to the active involvement of supporters of this conspiracy theory in the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. Due to this concept, it may be argued that this was the event that inspired the start of the new wave of modern terrorism.

CONCLUSIONS

On the threshold of the third decade of the 21st century, terrorism remains one of the main threats to national and international security. Therefore, the Global War on Terror that started in 2001 can hardly be considered over. This is mainly due to the ability of terrorist groups to adapt to changing political, economic and social conditions, which was noticeable in the 20th and 21st centuries. Thus, the cyclical nature of terrorist activities is evident. Rapoport defined it as a wave-

⁵⁵ M. Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2003, pp. 3–4.

⁵⁶ FBI Intelligence Bulletin, *(U/LES) Anti-Government, Identity Based, and Fringe Political Conspiracy Theories Very Likely Motivate Some Domestic Extremists to Commit Criminal, Sometimes Violent Activity*, FBI Phoenix Field Office, 30.05.2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/420379775-fbi-conspiracy-theories-domestic-extremism.pdf> [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁵⁷ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *QAnon Offenders in the United States*, „START Research Brief”, September 2021. https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/START%20QAnon%20Research%20Brief_24September2021.pdf [accessed 19.04.2022].

⁵⁸ A. Warius, B. Fishman, *A Jihadist's Course in the Art of Recruitment*, „CTC Sentinel” 2009, vol. 2, no. 2.

like character. Each wave is based on a different narrative and has a different motive and energy that drives terrorists.

Considering Rapoport's concept of waves of modern terrorism, it should be stated that the ongoing fourth wave (of religious terrorism) is declining. This is mainly due to: 1) the breakdown of Al-Qaeda's core and the decentralisation of its activities; 2) the rivalry between Al-Qaeda and the so-called IS in the mid-2010s; 3) the breakdown of the quasi-state structures of the so-called IS and the dispersion of organisation's activities; and 4) the evolution of the *modus operandi* of modern jihadists.

Moreover, the depletion of the fourth wave of terrorism has coincided with a change in the global social, political and economic situation. The ease of communication, mediality, the huge role of the internet, and particularly of social media, the increasing xenophobia, perceiving reality in hostile and negative terms, the duality in the perception of the world divided into "ours" and "theirs" with the progressing alienation of the authorities, but also a difficult moment in history – the unexpected coronavirus pandemic – are undoubtedly all factors contributing to the transformation of terrorism and the strengthening of its new version. The COVID-19 pandemic, causing deep social stress, and its broadly understood consequences being felt both in the economic and social but also political spheres, should therefore be treated as an essential condition for the coming wave of terrorism.

Accordingly, the third decade of the 21st century will be the period when the fifth wave of terrorism will form. The prospects for forming a new motive analysed so far include, *inter alia*, postulates of small tribalist groups, terrorist semi-states or ideologies based on Islamophobia, xenophobia and nationalism. Increased attention is paid to far-right extremism, although there are also claims that it is not ideologies that will be the hallmark of the fifth wave, but the methods of action, primarily the use of modern technologies. In this context, one cannot ignore the prospect of the shaping of the next wave by supporters of fringe conspiracy theories, based on multi-threaded narratives and mainly using the internet in their activities. However, it can be stated that the fifth wave of terrorism, as can be inferred from the observations of the social phenomena and processes occurring in the international environment in the transitional period between the fourth and fifth waves, on the one hand will take over some of the dominant features of the religious wave, but on the other hand, will create a totally new character of modern terrorism in the 21st century.

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