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THE TERRORISM VIRUS: CONTEMPORARY TRAITS AND MECHANISMS

“Terrorism, like virus, is everywhere. Immersed globally, terrorism, like the shadow of any system of domination, is ready everywhere to emerge as a double agent”.¹ This brief and allegedly very general observation is actually a very accurate rendition of the essence of modern terrorism which emphasizes its key features, such as unpredictability, destructiveness, or global range. There is one additional, particularly important element, which is frequently neglected, though. Namely, terrorism needs to be treated as a ‘system of communicating vessels’. This refers to the individual manifestations or types of terrorism as well as to the multitude and diversity of its components, features, mechanisms or reasons, and above all – the interactions among them.

In order to present and understand the nature of modern terrorism it is important to realize its key properties as well the mechanisms that shape terrorism. Selected properties and mechanisms shaping modern terrorism which can be exemplified by the following:

1. Evolutionary nature of terrorism. This highly important feature of terrorism results from the changes that occur within terrorism and other social phenomena related to it (e.g. fundamentalism, separatism, globalization, etc.). This is not to mean, though, that changes in terrorism are necessarily permanent and refer to all its components, or that the possibility of returning to the state before the changes is ruled out. A number of questions arises here with respect to the range and nature of changes in terrorism and how to present them.

One way to present terrorism and its evolution is to refer to the wave model.² Are waves of terrorism accompanied by waves of retreat from terrorism (as in S. Huntington’s concept)? Or perhaps they are more reminiscent of A. Toffler’s model, where individual waves (of terrorism in this instance) can occur simultaneously.³

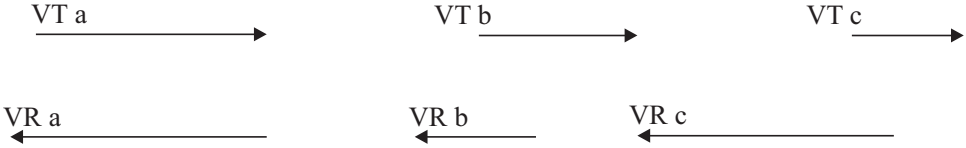
Analyzing the evolution of terrorism in terms of waves one can identify several kinds, namely: A) irregular waves, B) regular waves, C) continuous waves, and D) alternating waves.

¹ J. Baudrillard, *Duch terroryzmu. Requiem dla Twin Towers*, Warszawa 2005, p. 12.

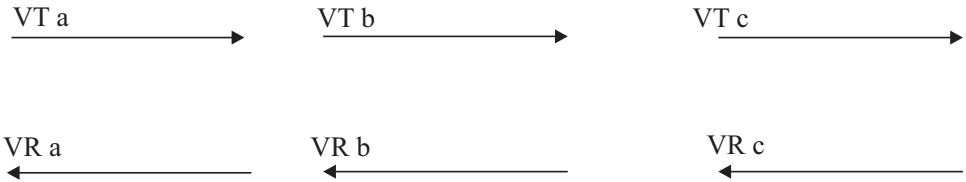
² For more on waves of terrorism, perceived as stages in the history of terrorism, see e.g.: M. Tomczak, *Evolution of International Terrorism*, in: *Terrorist Pandora’s Box. Analysis of Chosen Terrorist Issue*, (eds.) J. Babiak, S. Wojciechowski, Poznań 2008, pp. 7–27; D. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*, in: *Attacking Terrorism Element of a Grand Strategy*, (eds.) A. Conin, J. Ludes, Washington 2004, p. 47.

³ What is meant here is that several different waves of terrorism can overlap, as in the theory of waves of civilization by A. Toffler, see e.g.: A. & H. Toffler, *The Politics of the Third Wave*, Bantam Books 1980.

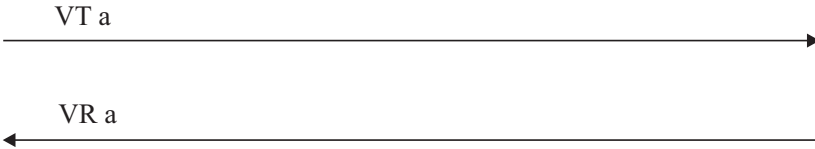
Ad. A) Irregular waves are differentiated in terms of duration, strength, dynamics, etc.
 VT – waves of terrorism a, b, c, etc.
 VR – waves of retreat from terrorism a, b, c, etc.
 VT and VR can occur individually or they can be parallel.



Ad. B) Regular waves are similar to one another in terms of duration, strength, dynamics, and so on.
 VT and VR can occur individually or they can be parallel.



Ad. C) Continuous waves – one wave occurs throughout the entire period under analysis.
 VT and VR can occur individually or they can be parallel.



Ad. D) Alternating waves. VT and VR alternate more or less regularly.



Source: Author’s concept.

The models presented above do not exhaust the entire range of cases. The changeability or repeatability of waves may concern not only their duration or the direction of changes, but also their intensity, which may increase, diminish or stay level.

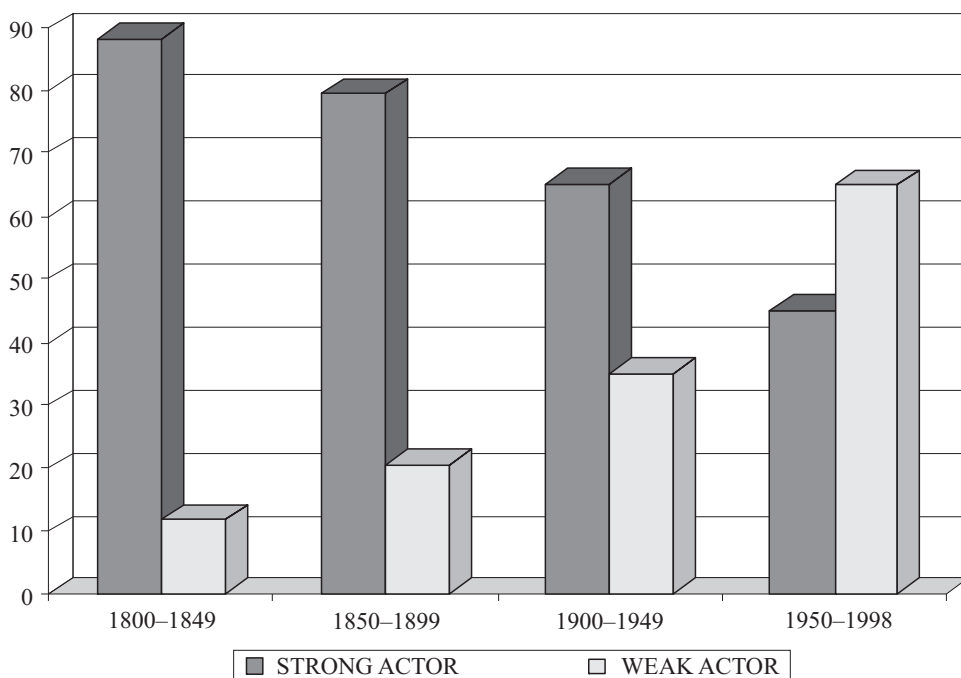
2. Asymmetry of terrorism. Asymmetry is another significant property of terrorism. It concerns, for example, the strength, size or capacity of the parties committed to terrorism, or countering it. C. Carr⁴ emphasizes this, stating that terrorism is a form of asymmetrical armed conflict. Its objective is to maximize the enemy’s losses and

⁴ See e.g.: C. Carr, *Terrorism as warfare*, “World Policy Journal” 1996–1997, Vol. 13, pp. 1–11.

exhaustion. Therefore, violence can be used without limitation, and the only limiting factor is provided by organizational and technological barriers. This attitude is exemplified by the activities of al-Qaeda against the U.S. and its allies.

It does not always have to be the case, however, that an apparently weaker party loses in an asymmetrical conflict, as exemplified by the comparison presented by I. Arreguin-Toft in his paper *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*.⁵ He observes that (over the analyzed period 1800–1998) the probability of victory of the side that is considered to be weaker has successively increased. The reasons for this should mainly be sought in the strategy a weaker opponent applies striving to overcome the advantage of the other side. This also concerns terrorism.

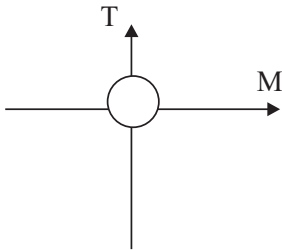
Diagram 1. The percentage of victories won by stronger or weaker opponents respectively during asymmetrical conflicts 1800–1998 (taking into account fifty-year cycles)



Source: I. Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*, “International Security” 2001, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 97, see: J. Pawłowski, *Zagrożenia asymetryczne w wojskowej myśli strategicznej*, in: *Zagrożenia asymetryczne współczesnego świata*, (eds.) S. Wojciechowski, R. Fiedler, Poznań 2009, p. 140.

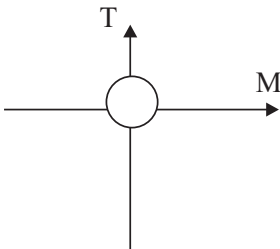
3. Terrorism as a state or process. On one hand terrorism can be perceived to constitute a certain state that occurs in a given territory at a given time-moment (for example September 11, 2001). On the other hand it can also be analyzed as a process taking place in a given territory over a certain period (e.g. 2000–2005).

⁵ I. Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*, “International Security” 2001, Vol. 26, No. 1.

Diagram 2. Terrorism as a state – the state of terrorism (ST)

T – defined territory under analysis (e.g. U.S.)
 M – defined moment under analysis (e.g. September 11, 2001)
 O – symbol of the closed period of time

Source: Author's concept.

Diagram 3. Terrorism as a process – the process of terrorism (PT)

T – defined territory under analysis (e.g. U.S.)
 M – defined period (e.g. 2000–2005)

Source: Author's concept.

4. Interferentiality of terrorism. This is another important property of terrorism. Interferentiality⁶ means a process of mutual interactions of terrorism components that leads to the emergence of new forms of terrorism (in this case of new forms, elements, and mechanisms of terrorism). Interferentiality of terrorism can concern a range of aspects, such as the following:

- A) Objective interference. This applies to various relations that occur between different types or mechanisms of terrorism.
- B) Subjective interference. This encompasses the relations between the entities involved in terrorism (e.g. terrorist organization, terrorist, etc.).
- C) Causal interference. This refers to the relations between various reasons for terrorism, as exemplified by the concept of the **triad of terrorist motivation**, which accounts for three fundamental sources of terrorism. They involve ideological, socio-economic and psychological factors as well as their mutual relations⁷.

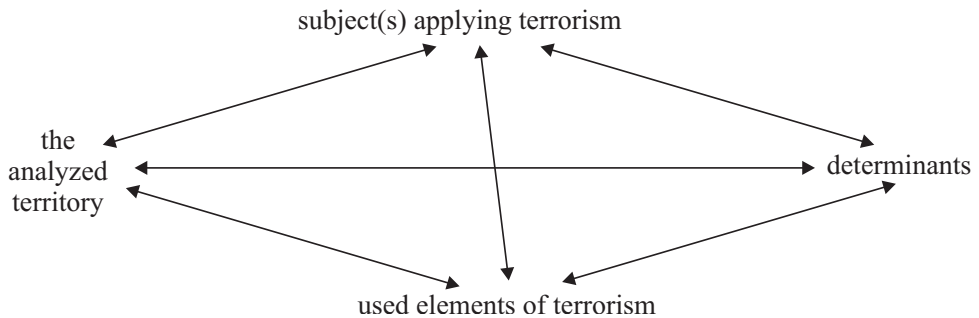
Interferentiality is universal and can be applied to discuss terrorism and its components as well as to analyze other social phenomena, such as nationalism, separatism or fundamentalism.

⁶ The term 'interference' is of Latin origin. It is applied in numerous scholarly disciplines, such as physics or linguistics and is adapted for the needs of the present study.

⁷ See: S. Wojciechowski, *Terroryzm na początku XXI wieku. Pojęcie. Przejawy. Przyczyny*, Bydgoszcz 2013.

5. Multitude of components of terrorism. Numerous authors point to the multiplicity of components of terrorism. For instance, J. Kiras indicates four main elements of terrorism: time of occurrence, territory, legitimization and the support terrorists obtain. P. Wilkinson, in turn, enumerates three main factors: the terrorist intentions of the perpetrators, the model of operations taking into account different forms of violence applied against the victims, and the targets of attacks.⁸ R. Hoffman claims that the key elements of terrorism involve fear, a target and violence.⁹ B. & J. Lutz identify six fundamental aspects, namely the use of violence or the threat to do so, the perpetrator being an organized group, the achievement of political targets, an indirect or direct addressee of violence, legitimate authorities being the victim of terrorism, and treating terrorism as a “weapon of the weak”.¹⁰ Yet another example is provided by the so-called four-element matrix of terrorism, which encompasses the analyzed subject(s) applying terrorism, the analyzed territory, determinants (external and internal factors influencing terrorism), and the used elements of terrorism (for example the forms or strategies of terrorist activities).¹¹

Diagram 4. The four-element matrix of terrorism



Source: Author's concept.

6. Diffusion¹² of terrorism. In the case of terrorism this notion signifies the following:

- A. The changeability of the elements of terrorism (for example of strategy or operational tactics) which results, among other things, from the evolution of political, social, or economic situation. This is the so-called subjective diffusion of terrorism.

⁸ P. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, New York 1986, pp. 54–56.

⁹ B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, London 1998.

¹⁰ B. Lutz, J. Lutz, *Terrorism*, in: *Contemporary Security Studies*, (ed.) A. Collins, Oxford–New York 2010, p. 341.

¹¹ J. Kiras, *Wojna nieregularna: terroryzm i działania partyzanckie*, in: *Strategia we współczesnym świecie. Wprowadzenie do studiów strategicznych*, (eds.) J. Baylis, J. Wirtz, C. Gray, E. Cohen, Kraków 2009, p. 174.

¹² The author has applied this notion taken from science, where it stands, among other things, for the process of particle movement allowing certain elements to mutually permeate (mix) or spread; c.f.: *Słownik pojęć współczesnych*, (eds.) A. Bullock, O. Stallybrass, S. Trombley, Katowice 1999, p. 119. As regards terrorism, the notion is referred to since diffusion is a process that encompasses the changeability of components, their mutual interactions and spreading into new areas.

- B. Simultaneous presence of various forms or elements of terrorism and the interactions between them (such as varied reasons for terrorism). This is the so-called structural diffusion of terrorism.
- C. Every territory where terrorism occurs may become the source of its further escalation or evolution.¹³ This may be illustrated, among other things, by the strategy of creating new battle fronts implemented by al-Qaeda. This is the so-called geographical diffusion of terrorism.

The diffusion of terrorism may follow both from internal factors (such as local political or economic situation) and external ones (e.g. globalization and its consequences).

7. Duality of terrorism. This feature of terrorism is among the more significant, yet frequently overlooked ones. It lies in the fact that some mechanisms or processes related to terrorism (such as terror, fear, fundamentalism, ethnic conflict, radicalism, etc.) can be perceived as both a reason for and a result of terrorism.

8. Positive dimension of terrorism. The notion of terrorism usually evokes negative associations. In some situations, however, it can have a positive dimension. This concerns the circumstances when a bloody tyrant is overthrown, a person destabilizing a state is killed or the infringement of human rights is halted as a result of some manifestation of terrorism. Each such case is different, though, and calls for a detailed analysis.

9. Terrorist system. Terrorism can be analyzed as a system (set) comprising individual components (such as the reasons, methods of operation, the entities running terrorist activities, consequences, etc.) and their mutual relations.¹⁴ This system is to a various extent influenced by other systems (to take the international system for example) and varied political, economic and social factors. This is the realm of influence of the environment.

There also exists the realm of influence of a terrorist system, which encompasses various outcomes of terrorism: financial loss, human toll, political change, etc.

Diagram 5. Terrorism as a system



Source: Author's concept.

10. Diversity of terrorist activity goals. The authors dealing with the issue of terrorism emphasize the multitude and diversity of goals driving terrorist activity. For example, B. Hoffman identifies five main goals of terrorist activity. Drawing attention is the first one. By means of the acts of violence terrorists attempt to attract attention to

¹³ C.f.: J. Yoder, *Unrolling Time: Christian Huygens and the Mathematization of Nature*, Cambridge 1990.

¹⁴ C.f.: S. Wojciechowski, *Selected Issues of the Studies on Terrorism*, in: *The Modern Terrorism and its Forms*, (ed.) S. Wojciechowski, Poznań 2007, pp. 22–28.

their demands or activities, using the media. The second goal involves the so-called 'recognition of presence'. Terrorists try to get publicity in order to win as much sympathy or support from their followers as possible. Their third goal is the 'recognition of rights'. They seek to win acceptance or justification for their own ideas or activity. The next goal concerns the legitimization of their activity and consists in terrorists winning social 'acquiescence' allowing them to carry out changes within a state. Their final goal – 'ruling' concerns taking power. B. Hoffman points out that some terrorist organizations have managed to accomplish goals 1 through 3, but almost no group has so far implemented goals 4 and 5, which is not to mean that they have given up trying.¹⁵ However, it would be difficult to agree with the statement that the two latter goals have not been achieved when the examples of Hamas or Hezbollah are taken into account.¹⁶

The intentions to threaten and shock are frequently emphasized as terrorist goals. "Since the goal of perpetrators is to shock, to instill fear and terror, each subsequent act of terrorism must be at least slightly more terrifying and more shocking than the previous one. This is the only manner to interest the media and public opinion with it".¹⁷ This is an accurate opinion. However, it has to be borne in mind that the above activity may follow from other motives, such as the intention to achieve a formerly planned political goal, or to spread maximum destruction, which W. Laqueur emphasizes is the goal of modern terrorism (so-called postmodern terrorism), next to the dissemination of propaganda and fear.¹⁸

In their studies A. Schmid and A. Jongman highlight the key importance of such goals as violence, fear, threat, coercion – extortion – induction of compliance, publicity – advertising, intimidation, demonstrating power to others and demands made of a third party.¹⁹

The following goals of terrorism and terrorists are indicated by B. Hołyst:²⁰ threat to life, threat to health, threat to relatives, threat to property, threat to career, threat to social position and generation of threat.

J. Habermas refers to a similar concept when he deems that one of the key elements of terrorism is to instill a feeling of uncertainty or danger. He emphasizes that it is not about the classical feeling of fear or doubt concerning one's fate, but the multi-aspect sense of threat expressed in the words: "no one is able to assess risk; there is no realistic possibility to assess the kind, size or probability of risk and no way to determine what regions are potentially threatened".²¹

This is related to perceiving terrorism as a communication strategy. It involves a specific manner of conveying a 'signal' which instills fear, demonstrates power, po-

¹⁵ B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, op. cit.

¹⁶ C.f.: P. Ebbig, R. Fiedler, A. Wejkszner, S. Wojciechowski, *Leksykon współczesnych organizacji terrorystycznych*, Poznań 2007.

¹⁷ M. Tomczak, *Ewolucja terroryzmu. Sprawcy – metody – finanse*, Poznań 2010, p. 10.

¹⁸ W. Laqueur, *Postmodern Terrorism*, "Foreign Affairs" 1996, Vol. 75, No. 5.

¹⁹ A. Schmid, A. Jongman, *Political Terrorism. A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature*, Amsterdam–Oxford–New York 1988.

²⁰ B. Hołyst, *Terroryzm*, Warszawa 2009, Vol. 1, pp. 129–134.

²¹ G. Borradori, *Filozofia w czasach terroru. Rozmowy z Jürgenem Habermasem i Jacques'em Derridą*, Warszawa 2008, p. 57.

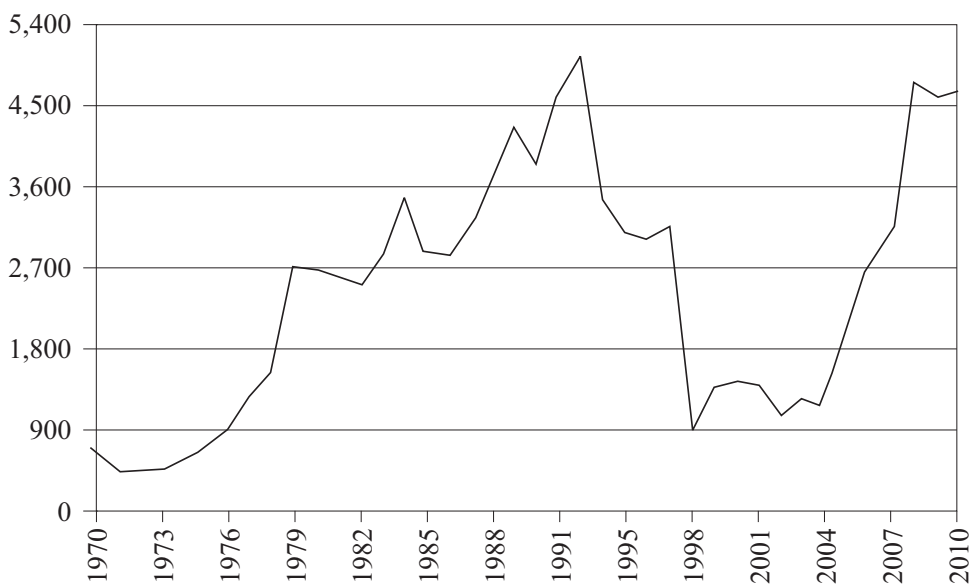
larizes public opinion, or legitimizes one's own activity. Therefore, terrorism is described as a 'form of crime theater'.²²

The following goals of terrorism are indicated by Z. Cesarz:²³

- acknowledging that armed violence is the only and most efficient method of political struggle;
- cruelty and nihilism of actions – on one hand they are to demonstrate terrorists' power and determination, on the other to instill fear of the terrorists;
- causing a strong and widespread sense of threat in the political elite as well as in the entire society;
- publicity in the media;
- political blackmail and enforcement of certain political decisions;
- acts of violence are not always aimed at the overthrow of authorities; in many cases though they are intended to prepare a revolution, intimidation, demonstration of terrorist power, causing repression and restriction of civil freedoms by a state in order to generate radical social sentiments.

11. Changeability of terrorist threat. The changes that occur in modern terrorism are both qualitative and quantitative. This can be evidenced by the statistics of an overall number of terrorist attacks executed globally, and their geographical location.

Diagram 6. The number of terrorist attacks globally 1970–2010



Source: *The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*, <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd> (5.07.2012).

²² M. Juergensmeyer, talks about the 'theater of terror' where at center stage are the acts of terrorist violence themselves 'stunning, abnormal, and outrageous'. M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror. In the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkley–Los Angeles–London 2003, p. 124.

²³ Z. Cesarz, E. Stadtmüller, *Problemy polityczne współczesnego świata*, Wrocław 1996.

Changeability can also be observed when analyzing various forms or kinds of terrorist activity, for example the number of bomb attacks, or so-called armed incidents. These obviously are only selected examples. Their more extensive analysis requires a separate study, and is not the primary purpose of this publication.²⁴

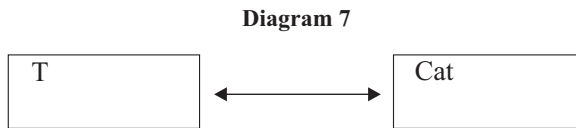
12. The broad and narrow dimension of terrorism. Terrorism can be analyzed in a ‘narrow’ or ‘broad’ semantic context. The former refers to a concrete terrorist attack (e.g. the September 11, 2001 attacks). The latter encompasses the entire range of terrorist manifestations all around the world. Both dimensions intermingle and complement one another both in terms of institutions (e.g. they may concern the same targets and perpetrators) as well as in the realm of ideology and cause. However, the relatively common opinion that the ‘broad’ dimension of terrorism concerns all forms of violence as long as they are politically rooted is surely wrong.²⁵ Such violence can after all concern the realms of religion, ethnicity, or a so-called single cause.

13. Counter-anti-terrorism.²⁶ An important matter concerns the relations between terrorism and various institutions countering it. Such entities and their activity are often named anti-terrorism or counter-terrorism. Anti-terrorism is usually defined as a passive attitude of preventing and identifying terrorist threats. By contrast, counter-terrorism is an offensive approach of actively responding to terrorism.

On account of terminological discrepancies concerning the notions of counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism in academic literature, this study employs a new notion of counter-anti-terrorism. It refers to the entire range of offensive and defensive activities aimed against terrorism. Thus it is counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism combined.

The below comparison illustrates selected theoretical scenarios of relations between terrorism (t) and counter-anti-terrorism (cat).

A. **Separated variant**, where both phenomena are analyzed separately, but exert a mutual influence.



Source: Author's concept.

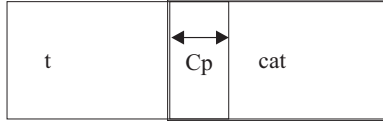
²⁴ For more on the features of terrorism, see for example: *Meeting the Challenges of Global Terrorism. Prevention, Control and Recovery*, (eds.) D. Das, P. Kratoski, New York–Oxford 2003; *The New Era of Terrorism, Selected Readings*, (ed.) G. Martin, Thousand Oaks–London–New Delhi 2004; J. Lutz, B. Lutz, *Global Terrorism*, London–New York 2005; T. Aleksandrowicz, *Terroryzm międzynarodowy*, Warszawa 2008.

²⁵ See e.g. C. Combes, M. Slann, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, New York 2002.

²⁶ For more cf. F. Bolz, K. Dudonis, D. Schulz, *The Counterterrorism Handbook*, London 2002; B. Bolechów, *Terroryzm w świecie podwubiegunowym. Przewartościowania i kontynuacje*, Toruń 2002; R. Moss, *Urban Guerrillas*, London 1972; K. Jałoszyński, *Współczesny wymiar antyterroryzmu*, Warszawa 2008; G. Martin, *Essentials of Terrorism. Concepts and Controversies*, Los Angeles–London–New Delhi–Singapore 2008.

B. **Integrated variant**, where both phenomena have a common part (cp), for example an entity that declares to condemn terrorism while actually using or supporting it itself (as exemplified by the attitude of Libya under Muammar Gaddafi’s rule).

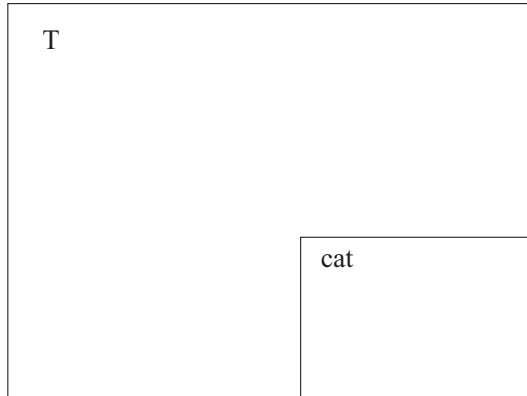
Diagram 8



Source: Author’s concept.

C. **Combined variant**, where counter-anti-terrorism is perceived as a part of terrorism.

Diagram 9



Source: Author’s concept.

In all these scenarios there are multifarious and complex interactions between terrorism and counter-anti-terrorism, which call for separate analyses.

14. Terrorism and state. The confrontational and cooperational character of relations. One of the significant features of terrorism concerns its relations to a state. Typically, these are confrontational and take the form of activity aimed against the interest of the other side, that is a state or a terrorist organization. In an extreme case, both sides strive to annihilate the opponent (e.g. by crushing a terrorist organization or overthrowing the authorities and political system of a given state). A moderate scenario provides for both sides aiming for the maximum possible destabilization and weakening of each other’s opponent in order to attain their own goals.

A state and a terrorist system can also be bound by cooperative relations, as is the case where certain state institutions or authorities support terrorist activity, or where a given terrorist organization directly or indirectly realizes the objectives of a state or its institution (e.g. the ties between Iran or Syria and Hamas and Hezbollah).

15. Calculation and operational strategy. Contrary to common opinion, terrorist acts are frequently thoroughly planned. They usually follow a course of an earlier designed scenario that includes the site of the attack, means employed, participants, and so on. For various reasons these scenarios cannot always be implemented, they are frequently modified or undergo thorough alterations. More than once they take the form of a surprising or spectacular act.

The element of calculation actually applies to various manifestations of terrorism. Operating tactics can serve as an example. Resorting to terrorist tactics [frequently] signifies rational calculation aimed at the cause to achieve a maximum propaganda effect.²⁷ Typically, the structure of a terrorist organization and the selection of targets are also logical and thought out. On the other hand, however, some aspects of terrorism go beyond the rationality principle and violent emotions and desires prevail then.

16. Disintegrational nature of terrorism. Terrorism is an example of a phenomenon of a disintegrational nature, along with separatism, nationalism, and fundamentalism. All these phenomena are characterized by multifarious mutual links and numerous similarities, concerning for example their reasons, features, and mechanisms.

17. Multidisciplinarity of terrorism. Terrorism operates at the juncture of numerous disciplines, such as history, law, political science as well as economics, sociology, psychology, military science, and so on. Their mutual interrelations result in a model of 'communicating vessels'. Since studies into terrorism combine the knowledge of both humanities and sciences (game theory, statistics and others) one can talk about the divergence, or multidisciplinary, of terrorism.

18. Horizontal and vertical dimension of terrorism. Terrorism can be approached as a horizontal, or spatial, phenomenon that occurs in various states on various continents. Another point of reference is provided by the vertical approach, where terrorism is analyzed by virtue of its highly differentiated forms and manifestations, such as separatist terrorism, nuclear terrorism, ecoterrorism, cyberterrorism, and so on.

19. Definitional ambiguity of terrorism. For various reasons, ranging from political factors, through ideology, to the substantive matters, the international community has failed to work out a single, commonly applied definition of terrorism. Consequently, there are hundreds of extremely different and frequently contradictory definitions. As a consequence, the notion of terrorism is ambiguous and imprecise.

20. Timelessness and changeability of terrorism. These two features can be illustrated by means of a 0 – 1/2 – 1 model, where 0 signifies the absence of changes within terrorism, 1/2 – partial changes, and 1 – very serious or thorough changes, for example changes of specificity, features, dynamics, tactics, strategy, or the escalation of terrorism.

²⁷ Ibidem.

