

TERRORISM IN EUROPE: TRENDS AND COUNTER RESPONSES AFTER MADRID INCIDENTS

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Abstract

Although the history of terrorism is longer than the modern nation-state, the fourth wave of terrorism has become a global scourge, affecting development and security of modern state and citizens' life. The world has been witnessing new trends of terrorism that is more fanatical, more lethal, and more global than any time of the history. The contemporary trend is also a departure from the phenomenon even as recently as after the 9/11 incidents. The new trend is often portrayed as leaderless or network of local groups. Today the true menace has been generating from loose-knit cells or a multitude of informal local groups. In the context of Europe, particularly after the Madrid tragic events in 2004 and the London bombings in 2005, terrorism has become a very real security and strategic threat. This paper reveals three basic trends of terrorism in Europe. First, the rise of micro actors in terrorist activities those are not easy to detect or counter. Second, the tragic events of Madrid and London, and subsequent foiled plots in European states demonstrate the rise of home-grown terrorism. Third, the Islamist terrorism has been perceived as the main threat to European security. To address such threats, fighting against terrorism has been on the agenda of the European Union since long but intensive and concerted actions started after the Madrid tragedy in 2004. Europe has developed counter terrorism strategy and institutional frameworks at the regional and national levels based on pan-European approach. Even with the flurry of initiatives by the European Union, individual member states, and inter-governmental institutions, there are paradoxes in counter-terrorism efforts. The key paradox is that the governments are agreed to co-operate at the EU level because of the transnational nature of the terrorist threat but, on the other hand, they are slow to transfer power and resources to the Union to make it truly effective in counter terrorism.

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1. Introduction

Terrorism has become a global scourge, affecting development and security of modern state and citizens' life. Although the history of terrorist activities is longer than the modern nation-state, it has now become more fanatical, more lethal, and more global than any time of the history. Today terrorism is more diverse in terms of motivations, financing, and security implications. In turn, it is now more apocalyptic in perspective, methods and techniques. Eventually, all the regions of the world have been hitting by the different types of terrorism. It is not likely that all terrorists are religiously motivated or religiously motivated terrorism is the new phenomenon in terrorism discourse. In words of David Rapoport, religiously motivated modern terrorism is the fourth wave in the evolution of terrorism. The other three waves of terrorism are related to the break up of empires, de-colonization, and anti-Westernism.¹ Again Islamist extremism is not the only form of catastrophe.² There are other forms of terrorism inspiring by the other religious or political ideologies.³ However, whether it is wave of vulnerability or fourth wave, the contemporary trend is a departure from the phenomenon even as recently as after the 9/11 incidents. The technical sophistication or quality of attack has increased all over the world. A trend analysis report identifies three new trends of contemporary global terrorism. First, the emergence of micro-actors in capability of the terrorist groups, i.e. reduction of the operational capability, but increase of their ideological, motivational, and propaganda ability. The second is the promotion of operational sophistication of terrorist activities, using modern technology and global information flow. The third is the increasing trend of overlapping terrorist activities with transnational crime, using the same supply,

¹ David C. Rapoport, "The Fourth Wave: September 11 and the History of Terrorism," *Current History*, December 2001, pp. 419-24.

² Morgan Matthew J., "The Origins of the New Terrorism," *Parameters*, v. 34, no. 1 (Spring 2004), pp. 29-43. Available at: <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/04spring/morgan.pdf>, accessed on 12 December 2007.

³ The Japanese religious cult Aum Shinrikyo was conducted the first major terrorist attack using chemical weapons on a Tokyo subway in 1995. The bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma revealed similar extremism by American right-wing militants.

transport, and money-moving networks.⁴ Marc Sageman, the eminent author of *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century*, has revealed the new trends of terrorism by portraying it as leaderless or network of local groups. He argues that today's terrorist threat has evolved from a structured group of masterminds to a multitude of informal local groups. These groups have been trying to follow their predecessors by conceiving and executing operations from the below. He states that the true menace has been generating from loose-knit cells.⁵

Like many other regions of the world, terrorism has been identified as one of the key strategic and security threats facing contemporary Europe. According to the Europol annual report, terrorist activities during the year 2007 have largely been increased in Europe. The numbers of real and attempted terrorist attacks have increased than 2006. During the year 2007, nearly 583 such attacks have recorded in Europe which is 24 percent increase of the previous year. Alarming, the micro-actors are getting importance in activities of different terrorist groups. The ideological, motivational, and propaganda abilities of terrorist groups have significantly increased. Frequently, electronic media has been utilized as the key strategic instrument in disseminating propaganda activities, recruiting new members, spreading technology of terrorism, preaching ideologies, etc. The report has documented a large number of incidents relating to the process of radicalization, recruitment, training and propaganda activities in Europe.

As a part of operational responses, the law and security enforcement agencies have arrested 1,044 persons in 2007 owing to terrorism related crime in Europe. It is 48 percent increase in compare to the previous year. Again, according to a terrorism risk map of 2007 by the Aon Corporation, threat level along with other pivotal states has increased in three European countries, namely United Kingdom, France, and Norway. Many research analysts argue that the home-grown terrorism

⁴ Raphael Perl, *Trends in Terrorism: 2006*, CRS Report for Congress, 21 July 2006. Quoted in M. Aynul Islam, "Mapping Terrorism Threats in Bangladesh", *BISS Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 2, April 2008. p. 154.

⁵ See, for details, Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. Quoted in Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 3 (June 2008).