THE SYSTEM OF KEY RISK FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO RELIGIOUS TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN THE 21st CENTURY

Mikhail Yuryevich Zelenkov[1,2*], Yuliya Aleksandrovna Laamarti[3], Sergey Zinkovsky[4], Nigina Shermukhamedova[5], Vasily Vasilievich Diaghilev[3] and Oksana Nikolaevna Vasilyeva[3]

[1] *Moscow State Academy of Water Transport, Branch of the State University of the Sea and River Fleet named after Admiral S.O. Makarov, Novodanilovskaya embankment 1, bld., 2, Moscow, 117105, Russian Federation*
[2] *Moscow State Technical University named after N.E. Bauman (National Research University), 2-nd Baumanskaya street, 5, Moscow, 105005, Russian Federation*
[3] *Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Leningradsky prospect, 49, Moscow, 127282, Russian Federation*
[4] *Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Miklukho-Maklaya street, 6, Moscow, 117198, Russian Federation*
[5] *National University of Uzbekistan, University street 4, Tashkent, 100174, Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to identify those factor in the system of religious terrorism that play a key role in introducing an individual to religious terrorist activities in the 21st century, to classify them according to social and group characteristics. The research methodology is a retrospective analysis of the essence and content of religious terrorism, as well as the socio-psychological characteristics of militants of religious terrorist organizations. A holistic system-integrated approach allows identifying the key factors that are leading in the process of radicalization of an individual. The main results of the study are identified key risk factors that contribute to the radicalization of the individual, their classification as well as the creation of a manageable system that contributes to becoming a member in a religious terrorist organization. The obtained results will provide significant assistance in organizing anti-terrorist activities. They will also help to build a system of counteracting the existential threats of an individual, adequate to religious terrorism.

Keywords: terrorism, individual, risk factor, existential threat, anti-terrorist activity

1. Introduction

Religious terrorism is both an internal national and global civilizational phenomenon, an open path to all violent, degrading and intimidating actions. It

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*E-mail: mikhail.y.zelenkov@mail.ru

is implemented without any reservations or observance of moral and ethical principles. Today, it is no longer an isolated, recent, or unorganized practice, but a highly structured network of activities. In this regard, the issue that comes to the agenda is that, despite certain successes of the world's states in the fight against this antisocial phenomenon, it continues to gain momentum and sow panic, chaos and death.

It is necessary to eliminate the source or causes to eliminate a phenomenon. At the same time, we agree with S. Wojciechowski, who notes that an analysis of the literature on terrorism issues reveals significant differences when specifying its main causes [1]. In particular, the well-known English terrorologist P. Wilkinson names the following generators of terrorism: ethnic, religious, or ideological conflicts, poverty, negative consequences of modernization, injustice, revolutionary moods in society, weak governments, internal struggle for power [2]. Similar factors are pointed out by G. Hall, who sees the sources of terrorism in the political, religious and ideological spheres or response to violence [3]. Another extended list was compiled by C. Sterling, indicating, in particular, the following reasons: an initiative was taken on one's behalf or behalf of a specific group; a desire to draw public attention to certain issues; demonstration of rejection and disrespect for the existing legal order, the principles of social coexistence, or the principles of a certain political or religious group; an attempt to undermine the power and its political role, etc. [4].

At the same time, various surveys and analyses of recent decades allow stating that the role of religious factors that also inspire terrorism increases over the years. For example, according to the RAND Corporation (USA), only a small proportion of the world's terrorist attacks in the 1980s were motivated by religion. However, this share is currently high worldwide [RAND Corporation and St. Andrews University in Edinburgh, 2016, http://www.rand.org]. The level of religious terrorism it is relatively low in Latin America while being high in the Middle East or Asia.

We are close to the position and conclusions of Professor H. Olmos (Spain), who believes that the causes of modern religious terrorism lie in: the context of conflicts in the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine), instability in North Africa, the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, and the Horn of Africa, the failure of the Islamists in the so-called 'Arab Spring', structural factors such as poverty, inequality, unemployment and institutional weakness, lack of integration in western societies among some Muslims experiencing exclusion, racism and xenophobia [5].

The results of a study conducted under the auspices of the United Nations in the period from 2015 to 2017 on the reasons prompting a person to join terrorist activities are interesting in this aspect. The study was conducted in African countries (Somalia, Nigeria, Kenya, Sudan, Niger, and Cameroon) and covered 718 respondents who belonged to the various religious terrorist organizations in the past. The reasons for joining a terrorist organization were distributed as follows (the respondents were asked to choose no more than two reasons): religious ideas - 40%, desire to be something within the broader system

- 16%, job search - 13%, faith in the words of a religious mentor - 13%, factors of friendship and kinship - 10%, ethnic reasons - 5%, group political ideas - 4%, adventures and services provided by a terrorist organization - 3%, support for a spiritual teacher - 2%, social isolation and political marginalization - 1%; the percentage of 'other reasons' reached 3% [https://www.scientificamerican. com/arabic/articles/news/marginalization-and-deprivation-are-the-strongest-dri vers-of-extremism].

Another study conducted in Germany, based on a statistical analysis of the country's available data on the history of radicalization of 784 people who left for Syria and Iraq before the end of June 2016 or who actively tried to do so, showed that in more than 60% of cases, agitation carried out in mosques played an active role, 54% - the influence of family and friends, 44% - Islamist proposals on the Internet, 27% - so-called seminars on Islam, 6% - so-called fundraisers, 3% - contacts at school and 2% in prisons [6]. (The respondents were asked to choose no more than two reasons.) At the same time, half of the study participants showed that religion was the main reason.

It is impossible to effectively conduct anti-terrorist activities in the context of such a variety of statistical and sociological data. In this regard, the study aims to identify in the system of factors of religious terrorism those that play a key role in introducing an individual to religious terrorist activities in the 21ˢᵗ century, classify them and identify their interdependence. Achieving this goal is possible by solving the following tasks: analysis of the factors of religious terrorism and identifying among them those that play a key role in the 21ˢᵗ century; classification of these factors according to social and group characteristics; establishment of interdependence between groups of key risk factors and creation of a manageable system that facilitates the introduction of an individual to a religious terrorist organization.

The hypothesis of our research is that the origins of modern religious terrorist activity lie in certain groups of key causes, which together make up an effectively functioning managed system.

2. Methods

The methodological basis of the research was a retrospective analysis of the works of S. Wojciechowski [1], P. Wilkinson [2], G. Hall [3], C. Sterling [4] and other scholars [7] who reveal the problems of modern terrorism and highlight the factors contributing to its spreading in the modern world. Special attention was paid to the works of M. Crenshaw [8] and H. Olmos [6] since the results of their research to a certain extent correlated with the research hypothesis.

Research by the UN [https://www.scientificamerican.com/arabic/articles/ news/marginalization-and-deprivation-are-the-strongest-drivers-of-extremism], RAND Corporation (USA) [http://www.rand.org] and other organizations were selected to analyse and synthesize the epistemological potential of the results of statistical and sociological research. The synthesis of their results made it

possible to substantiate the growing threat to national and international security from religious terrorism and to identify generalized factors that play a significant role in changing the individual's consciousness in the direction of his/her radicalization.

We used the research results of Kruglanski et al [9], as well as individual professional experience, to identify and generalize the socio-psychological characteristics of religious terrorists.

Identifying and classifying key risk factors according to social and group grounds, we turned to the works of such famous scholars as M. Sageman [10], D. Bertini [11], R. Griffin [12], J. Darden [13] and others.

Classification of the identified key risk factors on the socio-group basis was based on a holistic approach, which calls for understanding that the factors of the individual (personal factors), his/her immediate environment (family and peers) and distant environment (society and social interaction) affect him/her in a single complex process since the individual cannot develop and be brought up partially. It is a holistic approach that required to build a managed system that focuses on the development of integrative, rather than specific qualities of the individual, as well as understanding it as a complex socio-psychological structure that has its structure and functions.

3. Results

The results of the analysis showed that the reasons for this choice should be sought in individual psychology, family environment, problematic environment of society, socio-political and socio-economic system of society, historical events, religious traditions, easily accessible pseudo-religious writings, etc. The synthesis of the results of sociological research [http://www.rand.org, https://www.scientific american.com/arabic/articles/news/marginalization-and-deprivation-are-the-str ongest-drivers-of-extremism, 6] allows concluding that the main factors leading adherents to religious terrorist organizations in the median are: 22% - economic difficulties, 18% - 'brainwashing' and 'propaganda', 17% - religious rhetoric, 11% - internal political problems of the country, 7% - marginalization and social inequality, 6% – extremist views of adherents, 5% - the desire to fight external enemies of religion (Figure 1).

Applying a system-integrated approach, allowed classifying the above causes and conditions and identifying three groups of key risk factors that contribute to the formation of a modern person on the path to membership in a religious terrorist organization: personal factors, family and peers, society and social interaction.

The results obtained in the course of the study show that no matter what goals a religious terrorist organization and pursues, it is always possible to meet these three groups of factors when studying the sources of religious terrorism. However, the three groups are not sovereign, but are closely interdependent and form a managed system. The totality of an individual's factors contributing to his/her effective involvement in religious terrorist activity can be understood as a

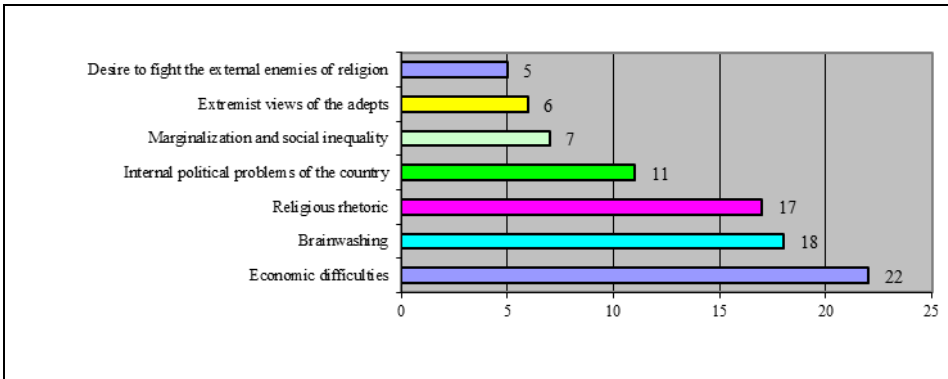controlled system in this case (Figure 2). Let us expand and justify the group elements.

Figure 1. Factors leading adherents to ISIL, in %, source: compiled by the authors.
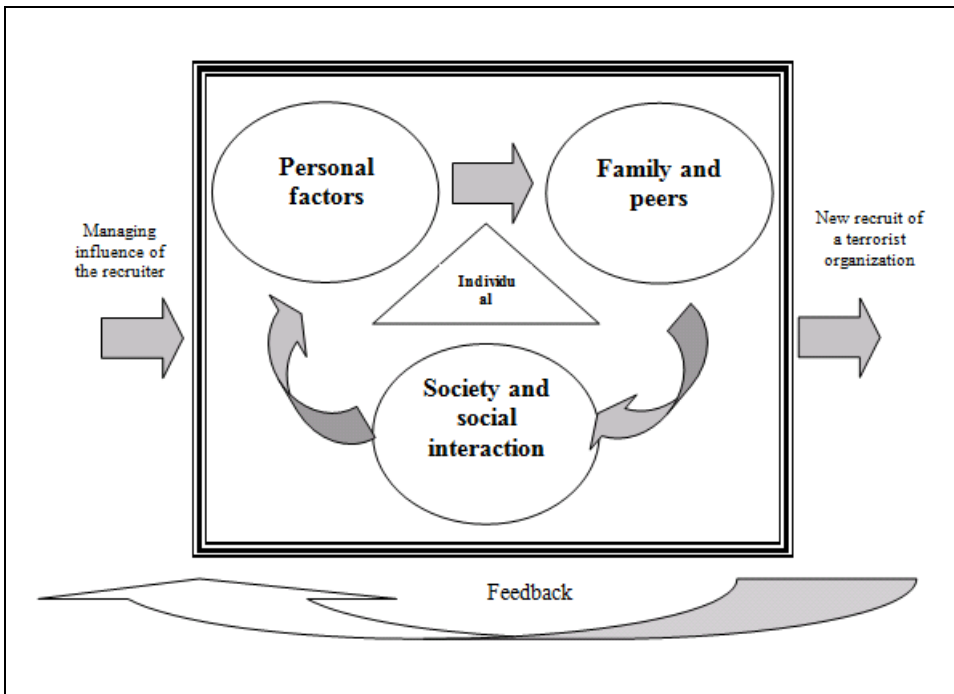

Figure 2. Managed system of key risk factors that contribute to the formation of a modern person on the path to membership in a religious terrorist organization.

3.1. The 'personal factors' group

This group includes elements such as religious beliefs, weak behavioural self-control, impulsivity, hyperactivity and attention problems, low IQ, lack of self-image, low achievements in education and career, an active user of the Internet and social networks and high trust in them.

An analysis of scientific works [9; 14-16; CAIR California, *Unshakable: The bullying of Muslim students and the unwavering movement to eradicate it: CAIR-CA School Bullying Report 2017*, https://ca.cair.com/sfba/publications/ 2017-bullying-report/] shows that terrorist psychology is based on such universal properties of personality consciousness as aggressiveness, unstable psyche, self-doubt, passivity, the excessive internal focus of consciousness and little attention to the feelings and problems of people around. The totality of qualities, skills, and knowledge that create any of the essential attitudes covers physical, mental, and moral qualities, general development, experience and certain special knowledge related to individual existentialism.

3.2. Family and peers group

This group includes factors such as the presence of antisocial friends and peers in the small social groups to which the individual belongs, the low socio-economic status of the family, the young age of the mother of the young individual at birth, low family cohesion and attachment of its members, parental conflict in the family or divorce of parents in early childhood of the individual, severe physical punishments against the individual or physical violence by parents, weak parental control.

The global experience of religious terrorism, especially in the Middle East and Central and South-East Asia, shows that some young people are recruited by sympathetic family members or are convinced that membership in a terrorist religious organization will help them protect their families or communities. Others are deceived, sold, kidnapped or forcibly recruited.

M. Sageman in the course of research concluded that "very often terrorist groups arise based on a certain community of people. This can be a friendly or kinship relationship, a close personal relationship, an apprenticeship, etc." [10, p. 136]

3.3. Society and social interaction group

This group includes such factors as a low level of education in the educational institution where the individual studies, a high level of crime in the area of his/her residence, the presence of locations of terrorist organizations, sellers of weapons and drugs, and a low level of social cohesion.

It is believed that social relations play an important role in the process of increasing the radicalization of an individual and his/her participation in terrorist activities. Social and emotional support, as well as a developed sense of religious identity, are keys in this process.

4. Discussion

4.1. Personal factors - a catalyst for an individual's involvement in religious terrorist activities

The individual is an integrated, organized whole. One of its personal factors is beliefs, which act as a driving force in the behaviour of the individual. D. Bertini [11] notes that all beliefs by content can be divided into factual and non-factual:

- *factual beliefs* describe a state of the world that is based on a particular experience or an ontological structure that defines a particular state of the world;
- *non-factual beliefs*, on the other hand, express a certain semantic point of view (interpretive) that relates to existence and, consequently, to a given state of the world or to the facts that determine the existence and specific states of the world.

Religious beliefs are mostly non-factual and relate to axiological assessments of measuring the nature of a phenomenon that transcends experience [11].

In our opinion, regarding this aspect, R. Griffin identified two main variants of a religious terrorist that are quite easily adapted to their religious profile and the hypothesis of our study:

- a regressive fanatic who seeks to save the traditional community from internal and external enemies, mythically conceived as a sacred and unchanging cosmological and social order or nomos;
- *a modernist* who wants to aesthetically, socially, and politically understand the meaning and purpose of existence and to create a utopian society that forms a new culture on the border or outside the principles of Western modernity [12].

The results of a psychological analysis of the genesis of preparation, commission, or prevention of a terrorist act give grounds to assert that its perpetrators, as a rule, experience an internal motivational conflict. These results can also be projected in the process of joining a religious terrorist organization.

We assume that anyone will challenge the fact that personal key risk factors are the most powerful of all the ones we consider and that they are prioritized over the other two groups. In practice, this means that the individual under their influence will be moved, first of all, in the direction of their parrying, as a rule, as practice shows, through participation in religious terrorist activities. At the same time, we note that we are not talking about terrorist mercenaries, but about individuals who have become religious terrorists based on ideological or psychological beliefs formed in their minds.

4.2. Family and peers as factors of involvement in religious terrorist activities

Analysis of the social characteristics of former and current religious terrorists shows that most of them have something in common socially, but are different ideologically. This refers to the so-called problem family and the immediate environment of the individual. Thus, a study of young jihadists in Tunisia showed that most of them suffer from social insecurity. For example, in 2012, the unemployment rate in Douar Hicher reached 18%, which was 3% higher than the national unemployment rate. At the same time, the number of job applications was 24,000 and there were no more than 5,000 vacancies. All this happened at the 16% poverty level. In their interviews, 58.4% of the city's jihadists said their main task was to provide money to their families, and 81.1% said their mothers were unemployed [17].

Indeed, terrorism and other manifestations of radicalism in the context of the financial and economic crisis, the constant rise in prices, inflation and unemployment are sometimes the only way for a person living in low socio-economic conditions to earn money for a decent life.

Another key risk factor that leads to an increase in the number of modern religious terrorists is the birth and upbringing of an individual in single-parent families or the absence of both parents. For example, in Kenya, 18% of members of the religious terrorist organization Al-Shabaab grew up without a father, 16% - without a mother, 11% grew up without both parents. For Somalia, the figures for this group are as follows: 34% grew up without a father, 16% grew up without a mother. The age at which a future terrorist lost his/her father or mother is particularly demonstrative: 19-23% lost their father and 8-13% lost their mother when they were under 5 years old, 68-81% lost their father and 48-69% lost their mother in between the ages of 16 and 18, 9% lost their father and 23-47% lost their mother at the age of 19-20, i.e. already formed people. Dr. A. Botha of the ISS notes that most Al-Shabaab terrorists lost their parent(s) between early adolescence and early adulthood, at a time when the individual is particularly vulnerable to the loss of their parents [A. Botha, *Radicalization in Kenya. Recruitment to al-Shabaab and the Mombasa Republican Council*, ISS Paper 265, 2014].

An equally effective key risk factor is the forcible recruitment of children through abduction or direct violence, which is not a new phenomenon in terrorist activities. Since 1987, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda has abducted more than 20,000 children. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab recruited about 1,770 young people in 2017 alone, using detention, violence, or intimidation. As ISIL expanded in Iraq, its fighters abducted thousands of children from orphanages, schools and even places where they lived with their families. Children under the age of 14 make up more than a third of the total number of Yazidi children (6,800) abducted by ISIL in Sinjar in 2014. Another 800-900 children were reportedly abducted from Mosul for religious and military training [13].

Research results show that, as a rule, people come from problem families; they easily succumb to suggestion, which promises them a good life and the opportunity to avenge the misfortunes that have 'fallen' on them. Finding consolation in religious faith at a certain point in their lives, representatives of this social group become potential targets of ideological and psychological influence from recruiters of religious terrorists.

4.3. Society and social interaction - the foundation of modern religious terrorism

Terrorists cannot commit their criminal acts without the tacit support of a wide range of sympathizers, without constantly replenishing the ranks of their members. Leaders of religious terrorists tend to emphasize how important it is for them to support the population to compensate for the superior resources of governments.

The results of studies carried out in Germany show the presence of the following external signs of social interaction, most relevant in the 21st century, which indicate an advanced process of religious radicalization in society:

- social isolation, termination of contact with 'unfaithful', participation in polemics or agitation against religious and political opponents or (alleged) 'enemies';
- statements regarding exclusivity in the field of religion, politics and beliefs, zero tolerance for alternative positions and opinions in these areas;
- strict adherence to religious beliefs, precepts, and rites that are promoted as 'the only correct ones' and aggressiveness towards members of other faiths [S. Goertz, *Profilbildung von islamistischen Terroristen*, Veko-online, 2016, https://www.veko-online.de/spezial/122-archiv/ausgabe-1-18/1067-terrorismus-profilbildung-von-islamistischen-terroristen.html].

J. Stern notes that according to the Al-Qaeda Study Guide, a potential recruit must meet the following requirements to become a member of this international religious terrorist organization: be mature, healthy, loyal to Islam and ideological organizations willing to sacrifice themselves; be able to listen and keep secrets; observe obedience, caution, discretion, and truthfulness; have patience, calmness, equanimity, intelligence and discernment; have the ability to observe, analyse and act [18].

For most potential recruits, the desire to become part of the group and to establish social bonds with other members is as important, if not more important, as the ideological attractiveness of the group [19]. For example, ISIL recruiters in Tunisia based their treatment of potential recruits on showing how local-contextual adversity is the fault of the 'other' and portrayed the situation in such a way that the Muslim population is oppressed by non-Muslims (mainly in relation to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict) [20]. This allowed them to justify an existential threat to their targets and to activate their sense of duty to protect the general group (fellow Muslims) to which both the recruiter and the recruit belonged.

Religious terrorism is an independent and integrated intellectual phenomenon that draws its strength from the depths of society and social relations has its projects and goals, which can only be achieved by radical methods. It has its theoretical concepts implemented in dogmatic texts, its armed army of fighters, and the most modern means of defeating and recruiting conscripts. It comes from fundamentalist doctrines that have captured the consciousness of individuals and groups and the field of social interaction within society.

5. Conclusions

A retrospective study and analysis of results of sociological and statistical studies showed that the involvement of an individual in religious terrorist activities is explained by key risk factors. These factors act in concert with each other and always within the framework of the functioning of an integrated managed system. This system implements a variety of interrelated and mutually dependent processes that allow recruiters of religious terrorist organizations to influence the individual's consciousness and change his/her worldview from social to radical. The controlled system perceives the recruiter's control actions, executes them, and informs him/her about the effectiveness of the impact of certain key risk factors, which allows changing the tactics of recruiting potential religious terrorists.

The results obtained allow stating that individuals who are most susceptible to religious radicalization are those whose consciousness is influenced by key risk factors, which we have classified as personal factors, family and peers, society, and social interaction. Thus, it is certain that the hypothesis we put forward has a right to exist.

We understand that our research is only one of the vector approaches to such an urgent problem as religious terrorism. We believe that it is impossible to focus only on the identification and classification of key risk factors; it is necessary to build them hierarchically both in a holistic version and taking into account the regional characteristics of the spread of religious terrorism.

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