How to fight terrorism? Political and strategic aspects

Erich Vad*

Department of International Relations, Geschwister-Scholl-Institute for Political Sciences, Ludwig–Maximilians–University of Munich, Munich, Germany

"Fighting terrorism is like eating soup with a fork" (Shimon Peres). Peres's quote symbolically captures the key problem of countering terrorism. 9/11 proved to be a hallmark in the global perception of modern terrorism. The following questions form the framework of the present essay: What is the essence of modern terrorism? How did it develop during the past two decades? Who are the key players within the terror framework? What are the root causes for global terrorism? How are we to deal appropriately with the global phenomenon of terrorism? Are there any solutions (short-, medium-, long-term) to terrorism? If yes, where do we have to look for them? The underlying essay provides a strategic overview of antiterrorism policy that is based on the author's years-long experience as a high-level expert and advisor within the security policy framework. For this reason, citations are expressly not included. The key target audience comprises laypersons interested in the phenomenon of global terrorism and its social interplay.

Ideational Framework

Western societies have become accustomed to terrorism over the past 15 years. 9/11 opened a kind of "gate" for this phenomenon. Recent terrorist attacks have demonstrated the ever-growing and comprehensive vulnerability of Western societies, although terrorists have changed their structural and ideological faces since 9/11.

Terrorism sponsored by Al Qaeda and, gaining prominence in the past 4 to 5 years, Daesh, has become a global, border-transcending phenomenon. Salafists, another group of current relevance, includes some 10,000 followers, thousands of whom are prone to violence, as well as being ready and willing to act as terrorists. Taking our own interest into account, we must not put all Salafists under general suspicion. Certainly, it is not true that all European Salafists are sympathizing with terrorism. One thing we do know about is the phenomenon of returnees—persons who were involved in operations in the Middle East but, instead of remaining, returned to Europe. Many of them are deeply radicalized and show a high potential to engage in terrorist activities. I would like to stress the notion of

"potential" as a caveat. Nevertheless, secret service findings and studies indicate that many of the recent assassins had a history of being fighters in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Others were radicalized by the intractable conflicts in these countries or inspired by the role model of radical fighters in these conflicts.

Terrorists who are inspired or even sponsored by Daesh or other radical organizations view Western states (with their open and democratic societies and their liberal way of life) as their key enemies. These terrorist groups are clearly aware of their military inferiority vis-à-vis Western military capabilities. For this reason, they are engaged in a long-term battle of attrition seeking the largest possible number of victims. It is not the quick fix, the short-term victory, which is their aim. Numerous smaller attacks on different targets is their approach to demoralizing Western societies. Those attacks have been organized in a decentralized manner, always more or less out of the blue, mostly unforeseeable, since decentralization provides terrorists with huge leverage over Western security forces. Terrorist groups are acting like the heads of a hydra. For this reason, eliminating a single element or even wiping out leading figures does not lead to a collapse of the overall organization. Decentralization works like protective gear and keeps up groups' striking capability.

Although not immediately apparent, terrorism forces us to take a stand and fight for our values. If we are not

* Address for correspondence: Erich Vad, Brigadier-General (ret.), Department of International Relations, Geschwister-Scholl-Institute for Political Sciences, Ludwig–Maximilians–University of Munich, Oettingenstrasse 67, 80538 Munich, Germany. (Email: Erich.Vad@gsi.uni-muenchen.de)

ready to do this, terrorism will be the trigger for the dissolution of our world and our way of life. Fighting terrorism is an existential matter for us. And it is *long past time* that we recognized this fact.

Fighting Root Causes and Prevention

Fighting terrorism requires a thorough and permanent analysis of the root and underlying causes. The results of those analyses form the basis for preventive measures. Various literature provides ample analysis on the root causes and underlying issues. For this reason, I will delve immediately into prevention.

Acting against Daesh in Iraq and Syria is directly related to domestic security and stability in our Western societies. Terrorist groups can follow migration routes or make use of them to distribute their ideology in recipient countries. This spreading of ideology is directly impacted by terrorist activities in conflict regions, which help to worsen tensions between ethnic and religious groups in Western countries.

Terrorism may contribute to radicalization in open, free, liberal, and democratic societies. Additionally, it may lead to social destabilization. On the domestic level, counterterrorism aims to minimize parallel societies, ghettos, no-go-areas, or problematic suburbs in major cities. Zero-tolerance programs and police forces who are adequately equipped and specialized seem a proper way to prevent home-grown terror cells. Additionally, people who live in those areas need alternative paths and perspectives to develop their lives. It is about solving the problem where it is rooted. In its essence, it is not about solving the problem in the country of import.

Social support needs to be done mainly within the framework of the Islamic community. They should be encouraged to assist in preventing radicalization. On the other hand, if those organizations become safe havens for terrorists, they have to be forbidden. For this reason, their logistic and financial flows from abroad have to be monitored. It is important to initiate public points of contact that are embedded. They serve as a link among governmental, federal, and communal authorities.

The key focus must be to socially ostracize terrorism and delegitimize it. We must try to separate terrorists from their safe havens and their supportive environment. They must not have any further safe havens for regeneration within our societies. There must not be intact options for recruitment via the internet. It is of essential importance to make the scope and brute force of terrorist attacks public, particularly via pictures. This is another way to delegitimize terrorism.

Parents, teachers, imams, street workers, and psychologists can be most valuable preventative assets. However, they must not be seen as agents of the state. This can lead to their delegitimation and can be counterproductive for counterterrorist efforts. Nevertheless, these community leaders and professional, who work at the microlevel, should also coordinate their efforts with security institutions in order to provide a more effective approach. It would be best to keep the relationship informal or discreet to avoid potential counterproductive effects.

Media and Social Networks

Social media such as Twitter and Facebook have been frequently used by terrorist organizations to spread their messages and ideas. Live streams of attacks are meant to gain additional attention in the broad public. There have even been virtual marketing campaigns launched by terrorist organizations. Particularly Daesh has become a perfect emulator. It produces and presents its footage as if it was a high-end Hollywood trailer. Terrorist organizations have found that a punchy picture is worth more than a thousand words.

It is a weird situation: both need each other, the media and terrorist organizations. This might be a provocative thesis, yet it is worth considering. The World Wide Web is open to everyone. It is open to all kinds of ideas, no matter whether they are supportive for the general public or destructive. Of course, it is always a matter of perspective and position when judging about supportive or not supportive. Yet, our preventive countermeasures must begin within social networks. This is crucial for influencing target groups about our agenda.

Current terrorism's target is to kill in the most brutal way to raise the threat and shock level among the general population to its maximum. Injured and bleeding victims on the road are not their target, but their means. The center of attention is the broader public—its insecurity and panic. For this reason, it takes pictures—from the sea front, from shopping centers, from Christmas markets, dead bodies lying around as a symbol of destruction, juxtaposing the summer atmosphere, shopping on a lazy Friday afternoon during the holiday season and, finally, just as a showcase, countering the pre-Christmas mood in one of Europe's largest cities.

What happened in the days after? Commentators and experts presented themselves on camera and talked about giving up some fundamental rights for the sake of security. For sure, nothing will change in the case of the next attack. Experts are amply available. Journalists and photographers are dependent on sensational news. The general public has to be fed, and it has the right to information. The system is bluntly beating itself with its own means. Everybody plays their assigned part, often without being conscious of doing so. Of course, some know pretty well how to drive the public and how to make use of the mainstream and social media. No one is innocent. Recently a whole "industry of widespread

concern" has appeared. And is it continuing to grow. It has become fashionable to "show social media concern." It is easy to express concern via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, etc. It is easy to quickly type some words or lines. It is easy to copy and paste a picture of concern. A new community of mourning and weeping has been emerging right after attacks. Compassion has become shallow. "Je suis" storms have become a new, short-lived phenomenon. What I am trying to express is a self-repeating situation with a kind of escalatory pattern.

Terrorism has become an extreme manner of communication and provocation. The media and means of communications are employed as weapons, airplanes in the case of 9/11, mostly in a self-repeating way.

I would go a step further. I claim that, without modern media, international terrorism in its current shape would not exist. Social media and media as such are key drivers in creating our political and societal reality. They offer pictures and narratives of terrorism, thereby spreading anxiety, shock, and awe. We participate in real time in the ongoing events as news agencies put terrorist attacks in the spotlight. This is exactly what terrorists want. The media plays an enhancing role. Indirectly or directly, they motivate broad spectrums of the public to mentally and psychologically take on the next chapter of the story. We are not only the audience and potential victims but also the culprits and actors. Modern terrorism is perfectly tailor-made for our media landscape. During the counterterrorist operations in France and Belgium in Brussels, the police had to ask the news agencies not to show pictures of ongoing operations. During the operation in January of 2015 in Paris, the police could not storm the hostage-takers' hideaway since everything was on live TV. Terrorists often observe preparations by the police on TV or on the internet, which makes it easier for them to adapt their plans.

One could even say that terrorism and media are two sides of the same coin. Journalists and the growing number of self-acclaimed "terror experts" are highly paid profiteers of terrorism. It is worthless and useless for terrorists if an attack is not broadly and extensively laid out and discussed in the media. Journalists and media cannot act differently. In fact, their hands are tied. They carry the message of terrorism on because they feel forced to tell what is going on. This is their job. And they thereby become the unwitting accomplices of terrorists.

Daesh produces highly professional texts, pictures, and videos each day. Every terrorist organization has a team of media specialists. Success is measured by how long and how often the attack is reported in the news. The size of a headline in the print media is a measure of success. Success is judged by the importance attached to an attack.

At first glance, keeping an attack secret might seem to be the best solution to contain terrorism. Maybe it would

be a means to push terrorism from our screens. Yet, we are living in the time of the internet, social media, and smartphones. They are the burgeoning realms of publication. Silencing an attack would open up space for conspiracy theories. Nevertheless, the media must not support the spread of fear and awe during and after terrorist attacks by promoting them and offering them broad coverage.

Some years ago, for instance, CNN showed videos of decapitations. Fox News broadcast a film of the burning of a Jordanian pilot on its website. None could explain the reasoning doing so, apart from the sheer lust for sensation and, of course, expressing indignation afterwards.

What about the following: what if professional journalists would hesitate automatically for a moment before they spread news?

Speed has become a weak point in the media. One could even say that "speed kills." Professional journalists ask, "Cui bono if I spread the news? Do I contribute to the solution? Or do I become, even subconsciously, an accomplice of terrorism?" This might be the first step, a kind of positive self-restriction.

However, the media is driven by the principles of the free market, and the chances are that competing agencies would not act cooperatively to suppress sensationalism. It seems to be a solvable problem. For this reason, terrorism and media have a strong connection. Saying it even more bluntly: they are mutually complicit.

It is of utmost importance that our media develop an internationally accepted code of conduct. It has to include ways and means for how to deal with terrorism and what must not be done. Additionally, one could use social media consciously to prosecute terrorists.

Smartphone users may be asked to take part in the hunt for terrorists on the run. If a terrorist can meet everybody, at any time and at any place, why not turn the tables? Why not ask the public to support the police by providing informal information? It would provide the public with a feeling of at least doing something against terrorism and not being only a powerless victim. One could also search by means of digital profiling. We simply have to turn the tables and make use of the modern means of communication as an instrument of counter-terrorism. Some ideas may involve a delicate balancing act between personal freedom and public safety, while others will be easy and even simple to implement. We must be proactive.

Who prevents us from digitalizing people by DNA profiling to simplify the fight against criminals and terrorists? Our freedom is much more challenged and endangered by international terror networks. Terrorists started to use the internet as a recruitment platform and to plan terrorist attacks a long time ago. Increasing

security is not free of charge. If we want to fight terrorism successfully, we must take a huge and courageous "digital step." Much will be new, simply because the existing frameworks and models do not work anymore.

Defeats as a New Training Ground

Defeats are not necessarily negative. To the contrary, a defeat in fighting terrorism can offer a series of alternatives on to-does, on not-to-does, and on alternative courses of action. Simply speaking, defeats, seen properly, could offer new training grounds as lessons identified and lessons learned.

When Palestinian terrorists took hostages during the Munich Olympic Games in 1972, none of the local authorities were prepared to react appropriately. German security forces were empty-handed. One of a number of consequences was the establishment of the GSG-9 counterterrorist unit. Some years later, this very unit was successfully and spectacularly freeing hostages in the wake of a plane hijacking in Mogadishu.

Numerous experiences such as the years-long fight against the Red Army Faction (RAF) or the rightwing group "NSU" have made the weak points in counterterrorism rather obvious.

In the meantime, a merciless competition between security authorities and terrorists is underway. The 9/11 attacks cost some hundreds of thousands of USD to carry out. Renting or stealing a truck and using it as a lethal weapon is comparatively inexpensive—as witnessed in Nice, Berlin, and Stockholm.

It is obvious that terrorists inspire others to become terrorists and that their attacks show a certain pattern and share a number of commonalities. It seems to be a chain of unrelated and at the same time related attacks created by inspiration.

How do we deal with this phenomenon? Currently, there are no quick fixes close at hand. This is most likely the key issue related to the overall situation, providing a huge opportunity for those who are radically prone to exploit. It is virtually impossible to trace them in a reliable manner. For this reason, containment is wishful thinking, but there is no real option at the moment.

Terrorist groups have changed their face over the past 15 years. Al Qaeda-style attacks have morphed into homegrown terrorists and inspired groups without a direct link to Al Qaeda as such. The same may be said of Daesh. Recently, lone-wolf attackers have come to the public's attention. Yet, even if we follow the lone-wolf hypothesis, there is certainly a network of supporters and accomplices. Probably not in the classical sense, but there is certainly a strong ideational background. Lone-wolf attacks of larger scope are rarely spontaneous. They need thorough planning, organization, and logistics— even if it is a rather simple-appearing attack with trucks

and handmade explosives. There is still a logistical chain, be it in a material way or in terms of being an inspiration.

At the same time, the internet provides many options to take action without causing a big stir. It is a rather complex and sometimes contradictory situation that we are confronted with. Of course, there are similarities between the terrorist attacks. Yet, they do not take the same patterns. That makes it more difficult to get hold of terrorists, since much develops and transpires beneath the surface.

One of the key challenges is fast radicalization via the internet and the unrestricted migration to Europe. The Wurzburg terrorist lived in Germany for months, without documents and without being checked by German authorities. His German host family did not think for a moment that they were giving room and board to a terrorist. External European borders are still open for everybody, and the fight against terrorism begins at the borders.

The 2011 Norwegian lone-wolf attacker misled security authorities for a long time before he did his murderous work. Security authorities stood on the sidelines, because action forces did not have the logistics for a quick and efficient counterattack.

Mumbai-style attacks (in 2008, 10 terrorists killed 170 and wounded hundreds in a hotel using automatic rifles) vividly demonstrated the police force's limitations. For this reason, it is of utmost importance to have a considerable number of high-quality and centrally located special forces. Centralization enables deployment via helicopter to hotspots.

Basically, each location must be reachable by reaction forces in a quick manner and at any point in time. Yet, this will not prevent terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, the secret services form the core for prevention of terrorist attacks.

Resilience Instead of Pacifism

Pacifism has a long tradition in the Western world. Two world wars in the 20th century and a population that has been deeply shaped by war form the background for pacifism in Europe. At the same time, a peaceful period of more the 70 years has created a number of generations that have never experienced the horrors of war. There is a mood of preserving the peace and at the same time being afraid of war that is shaping the attitude of many Europeans. Our social model, which offers considerable and comprehensive freedom, has created a mass of people who appreciate convenience, hedonism, liberalism, and all kinds of freedom (e.g., as laid down in the four freedoms by the European Union).

Now the liberal social model is at risk due to a number of issues, including terrorism, demographic change, economic issues, the reemergence of nationalism, and a huge wave of refugees. Europe is no longer innocent.

So what to do? We do need resilience in our liberal, open, and democratic societies to counterbalance the new waves of terrorist violence. Resilience is a matter of changing the mindset of the population. There is definitely room for improvement and development.

Terrorism challenges us in an existential way, whether we want it to or not. Contrary to us, the terrorist loves to fight for life and death. He/she does not view us as a partner in dialogue and conflict. The only idea is to destroy our way of life. He/she is not afraid of death, but awaits it coolly. He/she is deploying life to destroy life. He/she seems to toss life away for a seemingly higher cause. He/she lives as a freedom fighter, bound by his/her worldview, and his/her religiosity, which makes her/him apparently unique.

This way of living stands in stark contrast to the primarily hedonist Western worldview. His/her approach provides him/her with a robust narrative. He/she has a distinctive personality. He/she exercises power over us by terror. He/she never learned to trust in borders so as to be able to live an acceptable life. He/she wants to be free in an archaic manner, by taking life and by putting his/her life at the disposal of a grand cause.

Friedrich Nietzsche may have offered an explanatory background to better understand what is going on. We, the Western world, was viewed by Nietzsche as the "last man." We live in societies that are shaped by materialism and self-interest. Our main focus is this world and the accumulation of material wealth. We may talk together and seem struck by terrorist events, but we lack deep social cohesion. If the fight against terrorism becomes too expensive, we are ready to give up. This attitude is well-known among terrorists, and this is one of the reasons why they scorn us so deeply. Moreover, terrorists force us to spend huge amounts of money on protection and countermeasures. This means that we do not have those resources available for other important issues and social concerns. Forced budgetary and resource redistributions change our societies. We are wealthy, rich, old, and weak. We manage crises only within a framework of peaceful discourse and harmony that is free of domination. Supremacy leads us into internal and external capitulation and submission. We prefer to surrender instead of undertaking courageous steps. If we are confronted with brute force, we are concerned or even enraged—at worst.

The more an attack rocks the lives of people, the more our will is lessened to fight these opponents. Our religion is at its core hedonism, borderless personal self-fulfillment, and pure consumption. We cover our cowardice by calling it pacifism. We forget to fight for life and death. We cling to material goods much more than to our freedom. In actual fact, the Western mass democracies have basically lost their freedom. Everything has become like a supermarket, stuffed with worldviews and different narratives. Anything goes. Nothing is valid, and we remain noncommittal. Everything has become interchangeable and unselected. This stands in stark contrast to the Islamist terrorists. We call it diversity, but in its essence it is unselective. We are not in a position to "give birth to stars" as Nietzsche wrote. We cannot defend our narrative and our way of life in a courageous way. We live in a world where "no one wants to die." In contrast, there are young terrorists who are ready to commit suicide while at the same time killing others. There is a nearly unlimited reservoir of young people who are ready for jihad and who are willing to commit terrorist attacks. Two different anthropologies, very different ways of life, and clashing motivations for action.

Sound Judgment and Patience

Terrorists and insurgents are usually rooted in the growing number of failed states and societies undergoing civil war. Some 1.5 billion people currently live in such situations. More than half of the international community of states are classified as fragile. More than 50 million people are refugees. Only a few of them are willing to return to their home countries. To the contrary, those have-nots are desperately seeking shelter in the countries of those who have. Europe has become the "New Jerusalem" for many of these have-nots, since Europe still has rather open borders and is not willing to protect itself appropriately.

With its murderous and brutal hatreds, Daesh is dragging us into counterreactions. Our resources are tied up. Our hands are knotted. Terrorists want to trigger panic, hatred, insecurity, and retaliation. Their target is to set off a spiral of violence. From their point of view, it is a limitless process, one that will go on and on, since their resources are almost inexhaustible. There will always be someone who is dissatisfied, who feels personally derailed enough to feel dragged into a terrorist network at the right moment. Attacking seems to be a "logical" step.

We shall not please them by allowing them to put our societies in turmoil. Daesh terrorists know well that they are in a no-win situation vis-à-vis Western societies, since we will cut off and destroy their refuges and their infrastructure. Our military and technological capacities and capabilities far superior to theirs. We are in a position to fight terrorism successfully. For this reason, they must attack our inner social core to break our resistance.

We have to oppose terrorism with sound judgment and patience. In the 1970s, Germany resisted sacrificing fundamental rights and employ unnecessary counterforce when challenged by the radical leftist terror of the RAF. The RAF challenged the German state by trying to "tear off its fascist mask." In addition, Germany avoided

reintroduction of the death penalty, although many citizens loudly demanded that the government do so.

As a counterexample, the United States waged a rather senseless war against Iraq. Finally, Iraq descended into total chaos and fell apart. It was and is still definitely worse than ever before. The 9/11 terrorists' calculus proved to be completely successful. They provoked the Western superpower to launch a disproportionate military reaction. Torture was even temporarily legitimized. The secret services were inflated to a new level. Yet, they were powerless to thwart the two "Boston bombers." However, one has to note that there have been no large-scale terrorist attacks on American soil since those broad measures were employed.

Terrorists are usually part-time warriors. They are motivated by idealism and by a number of personal reasons, which are understandable to a certain extent. Many of them try to lift their personal, social, and material status. It is about breaking up the established civil war economy in the countries concerned.

Taking a medium- to long-term stance, a sustainable economic and development policy in the countries concerned will help to counteract the root causes of terrorism. If people have a reasonable and sustainable level of living, fewer will be receptive to radicalism. Educational programs are an additional and important piece of the puzzle in the fight against the root causes of terrorism. It will take huge amounts of money, patience, and time. Such factors as demographic developments, rapid population growth in Africa and the Middle East, little economic prosperity, corruption, weak infrastructure, and conflicts of interest do not provide fertile ground for optimism. Taking demography as a single factor, it does not point in a positive or productive direction. The demography crunch may even force people to join terrorist organizations, since there are virtually no life-affirming alternatives.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) and special forces in the regions of concern are indispensable to minimize the terrorist threat to the free world. Nevertheless, they are highly dangerous if they are not coordinated enough or properly by state authorities, particularly if there is collateral damage among civilians.

Each dead civilian, uninvolved and innocent, is an advertising bonanza for promotion of terrorist activities. In the medium term, education of security forces in these regions may help to influence developments. Eliminating international money flows that are attached to terrorism could constitute a huge asset in countering terrorism. Without money and without logistics, terrorism quickly reaches its limits. Financial support, support in education, technical support, as well as limited military missions and weapons supplies may help to stabilize a region in crisis. Those measures must be accompanied by military means, particularly when it is

not possible to act on one's own territory, when police forces are unable to take effective action and armed resistance is simply too strong.

Counterterrorism, stabilization operations, state building, and shoring up key governmental institutions require patience, time, and money. The Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan are vivid examples. Another example is the decades-long fight between British security forces and the Irish Republic Army, where there was a high death toll on both sides.

In its essence, it is not about spending more money for our armies, which are not in a position to win wars, as Martin van Creveld rightly highlighted in his book *Pussycat* (2016). It is about a balanced and efficient amalgam of military means, secret service activities, and police-related measures, accompanied by social programs that may constitute the right strategy for countering modern terrorism.

It is about reviving resilience and lost virtues, such as bravery, assertiveness, the will for demographic stability, and clear-cut resistance toward those who want to destroy us. It is about zero tolerance vis-à-vis those who threaten our freedom, the inner core of our societies, in conflict regions and on the global level.

Transnational and Domestic Cooperation

Multilevel cooperation is essential in the fight against terrorism. National egoism has to be overcome, since borders have achieved a different connotation when we talk about global terrorism. Much is communicated via digital media and dark-net channels. Borders have lost their importance on this level of communication. Cooperation must be adapted to these developments.

The connection between cooperation and war has been at the top of the international agenda when talking about fighting terrorism. Particularly since 9/11, the notion of "war" has been regularly injected into the political and societal debate. "War" is a clearly defined notion in international law. Let me offer you some clear remarks. If we want to wage "war" against terrorism, we have already failed and been trapped by the terrorists. Clausewitz defines war as an "extended combat" of at least two opponents. The key goal is to make the opponent defenseless.

Introducing the notion of war in the area of fighting international terrorism automatically implies two opponents who are on the same level, at least in terms of international law. Following this idea, terrorists receive a legitimized position. Western societies deprive themselves of the legal and moral high ground. This concept has to be reconsidered and firmly taken into account when discussing fighting terrorism. Do we want terrorists to be considered on the same level as states? Just think about that!

Another burning issue related to countering terrorism is this: who is better equipped and therefore responsible to fight terrorism? It is generally accepted that the nation-state as a legal construct, and its institutions, which are affected by terrorist attacks, know the operative situation best. They know parallel societies and countercultures, which often are the hotbed for terrorists. For this reason, the nation-state is often much better equipped to undertake appropriate and proportional countermeasures.

National security authorities are usually better off in terms of reconnoitering members of parallel societies. Identifying and fighting them has to be a national chore. However, internationally acting terrorists operate within a number of varieties and groups, thereby leaving national borders outside of consideration. Their modus operandi is transnational in quality and quantity. For this reason, appropriate measures for reasonable cooperation (such as with and between the FBI, Interpol, and Europol) are required to fight terrorism in an efficient and sustainable manner.

Neither our strategic nor our operative course of action must remain only national. Countermeasures must be coordinated and controlled primarily on the state level, thereby integrating state-specific laws and rules. It takes close coordination and cooperation between various secret services, police forces, and law-enforcement authorities located in other states.

Overblown and bureaucratic authorities and unclear competences, particularly in federally organized states such as Germany, constitute the key obstacles for an efficient fight against terrorism. Despite its problematic historic burden, Germany in particular has to accept that it will not be in a position to tackle terrorism without centrally coordinated state-sponsored countermeasures and tight international cooperation between Western secret services and related institutions.

Summing Up

Global terrorism has become one of the most dramatic phenomena during the past 15 years or so. Certainly, some countries are more affected than others, but it is a phenomenon from which no one can detach themselves. It permeates Western societies. For this reason, it is up to those societies to take appropriate measures. The time for talk has passed. Lip service is no longer the right tool. It is time for prudent and strategic action. Some of those actions may be painful. Some may be costly. Some may even curtail our personal freedoms, which have already been diminished by terrorists.

Putting all migrants, returnees, and religiously zealous persons under general suspicion would also play into the hands of the terrorists. It is an important part of their strategy. Activities against the whole group are grist for the mills of their followers who are ready to employ violence. Antiterrorism operations must be finely targeted. Collateral damage has to be avoided at any price. Targeted action requires access to personal data, continuous communication, and an unimpeded exchange of data between secret services and security authorities. Those who do not follow this rule are fetching and promoting terrorism.

It is impossible to wipe out terrorism in a single step with one fatal strike. For the moment, Western societies are forced to live with terrorism. It has become part of our way of life. This does not mean that we accept terrorism as such, but we are trying to understand the phenomenon and its roots and underlying causes, which by itself is most challenging. Yet, it is of utmost importance to come to grips with what is going on and why we are being hit with terrorist attacks so often.

The one who has the stronger will and more endurance will be victorious. At its core, it is an existential fight between two opposing wills, as already described by Clausewitz. It is about making the opponent defenseless. The course of action is highly flexible. It will not follow any fixed rules. The terrorist's main goal is to act with brute force in a surprising manner at unprotected and un-protectable locations. Creating shock and awe is the meta-goal. The strategy is a long-term project. The number of fighters is uncountable. The reservoir from which to recruit new members is nearly inexhaustible.

Terrorism needs Western societies as a kind of counter-picture, a picture they can hate. It is a mixture of hatred and jealousy, and a deep-seated and often historically burdened feeling of rejection. At the same time, the have-nots desperately try to achieve some standard of living, as many have, by coming to Western societies. It is a parallel picture of "we want at any price" and "we hate for whatever reason."

Sketching the general situation in an overview

- Western societies can be hit anywhere at any time
- The overall vulnerability of societies has been demonstrated
- It is impossible to foresee attacks
- Terrorism creates insecurity among the public
- Public authorities are unable to prevent lone-wolf attacks
- There is a hide-and-seek game going on between terrorists and public authorities

"Action manual" for Western societies

- Regain their core values
- Be mentally and materially prepared for further attacks

- Extend general and particular awareness among the general public that terrorism has become a social phenomenon
- Regain "social media sovereignty"

Patience, prudence, courage, and cooperation are our most important currencies. Cooperation includes micro-/macrolevel collaboration. Since everyone is vulnerable, everyone has to contribute. It is the right mixture that will yield long-term effects in countering terrorism. It has to be complemented by numerous short- and medium-term measures that may include a good deal of self-restriction. This will be a new experience for many of us. It will be a hotbed for a new self-perception of Western societies and what they are capable of doing, particularly in terms of self-affirmation. It is worth thinking about. It is definitely worth doing.

Disclosures

Dr. Erich Vad does not have anything to disclose.