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*„LONE WOLF” TERRORISM
AS A CONTEMPORARY THREAT*

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

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CONTENTS

Contents	3
Pictures List	5
Introduction	7
Chapter I	
The evolution of the phenomenon	19
1.1 "Lone Wolf" attacks in history	19
1.2 "Lone Wolf" in collective mind	34
Chapter II	
The concept development	40
2.1. The concept roots	40
2.2. The "lone wolf" terrorism contemporary concept	48
Chapter III	
The "Lone Wolf" Terrorism Global Trends	64
3.1. General issues	64
3.2. „Lone Wolf" terrorism in Romania	71
3.3. Particularities of „lone wolf" terrorism in Israel	78
3.4 „Lone Wolf" car ramming attacks	89
3.5. Women in „lone wolf" terrorism	108
3.6. The Fifth Wave	112
Chapter IV	
„Lone Wolf" Terrorism Definition	118
4.1. Institutional Definitions	118
4.2. Academic Definitions	130
4.3. The Author's Definition	153

Capitolul V	
Radicalization	155
5.1. Radicalization process	155
5.2. „No-Go Zones” role in radicalization	166
5.3. Prison Radicalization	172
5.4. “Lone Wolf” interaction with social enviroment	182
5.5. Rationality and Patology in “lone wolf” terrorists radicalization process	192
Chapter VI	
„Foreign Terrorist Fighters” crisis in „lone wolf” terrorism	201
6.1. „Foreign Terrorist Fighters” phenomenon occurrence	201
6.2. „Foreign Terrorist Fighters” concept	203
6.3. Risk posed by „foreign terrorist fighters” families	214
Conclusions	227
Annexes	232
Bibliography	241

Summary

Key words: terrorism, extremism, political violence, radicalization, "lone wolf" terrorism, "leaderless jihad", "leaderless resistance", individual terrorist attacks, car ramming attacks, foreign fighters, illegal immigration, the fifth wave of terrorism.

The primary subject of this thesis is "lone wolf" terrorism and the danger that it represents for contemporary security.

In the first chapter I followed the evolution of "lone wolf" terrorism, that followed the general phenomenon of terrorism through centuries, from the very appearance of it thousands of years ago. This paper followed the historical path of this phenomenon back to the "assassins" and "anarchists" and defined the notion of "lone wolf" terrorism through the prism of its composing elements, an occasion that allows us to try to identify the structural elements of the concept that were rejected or neglected, in my opinion, by the majority of authors that have approached the research of this concept.

In the second chapter I established what were the premises that were the foundation of the appearance of this concept, how it developed in relation with the international security situation and how it is defined in contemporary times, in order to make the difference between it and the general phenomenon of terrorism on one hand and between it and other forms of political violence on the other hand.

In the third chapter I described what the actual evolutionary tendencies of this phenomenon are, especially in the context of the usage as weapons of instruments that are easy to obtain, such as knives and vehicles, the situation of "lone wolf" attacks in Romania as well as female implication in this type of terrorism.

In the fourth chapter I analyze the most accepted definitions of the terrorist phenomenon in general and the "lone wolf" terrorism in particular, elaborating at the end of the chapter my own definition that will cover the entirety of the manifestation domain of this type of terrorism. In their overwhelming majority, the few authors that have tried to define "lone wolf" terrorism, have limited themselves just to the general characterization of the phenomenon, in an inconsistent manner with the multitude of methods in which this type of violence can be committed.

In the fifth chapter I describe the radicalization process of "lone wolf" terrorists, the role in the process of "no go zone" types of urban agglomerations, how inmates are radicalized in prisons and how some of them end up becoming "lone wolves", as well as

the relation between rationality and pathologic in the radicalization of the terrorist type that acts alone and isolated, without aid or guidance from an terrorist organization.

In the sixth chapter I approach the “foreign terrorist fighters” crisis in the context of “lone wolf” terrorism, the circumstances that led to the appearance of the “foreign terrorist fighter” phenomenon, as well as the potential risk for European security as well as international security posed by them and their family members.

Through the impact they have on our society, international terrorism has become an issue so acute that it is a need more than ever for a firm and united response to combat this phenomenon. Contemporary society registers an exponential increase and without precedent of “international terrorism” in its varied forms, from which some haven’t been completely understood even today, becoming a threatening phenomenon for international and European security.

The September 11 attacks of 2001 have shown the destructive force of a new type of political violence at the confluence between unconventional hybrid war and terror in its purest form. In this landscape convulsed by violence, in which it is very easy to confuse terrorism with national liberation fight, a new form of terrorism emerged as well, the individual one, which is perpetrated by a self-radicalized individual, who is not a member of any terrorist organization but acts in the name of their ideology.

The violent action of the “lone wolf” are much simpler than those of classic terrorist groups under the aspect of their planning and execution but just as lethal. The author of the attack is at the same time its ideologue, planner, organizer and executioner of his own actions, this operational “loneliness” being the one that determines the specific of the terrorism form which today we name “lone wolf” terrorism, in order to keep the Anglo-Saxon lingo, the space in which the term was actually born.

Ramming pedestrians, in a premeditated way and with the intention of killing, by using a vehicle in motion, in places commonly frequented by tourists, beheading soldiers that are on leave, gunning down active duty policemen in public spaces, stabbing civilians with sharp tools and knives on the street or shops, massacring students in campuses or those that participate at outdoor concerts, are uncommon violent incidents with a strong emotional impact of such nature to instill a state of fear at national and international level, in a world already concerned by armed conflicts, economic crisis, unemployment, climate change and so on and so forth.

An important aspect that I have touched in this thesis regards the moment, quite controversial itself, from which we can consider the beginning of the “lone wolf”

phenomenon and if we are actually speaking about a phenomenon. I used this occasion to debate the issue of the next “wave of terrorism”, its apparition being talked about for a couple of years but nobody managed to pin-point it by using scientific arguments beyond simple speculations and presumptions.

I consider that through my analysis upon what I believe that the “lone wolf” terrorism phenomenon actually is, I have pointed out and argued not just that it will be the “fifth wave of terrorism” but also the fact that this wave had started at least a decade ago and now we are in its period of evolution.

The modern concept of individual terrorism was elaborated and promoted by US right-wing extremists. In 1983, in a moment where right-wing extremist groups were under immense pressure by the F.B.I., being under close surveillance and combated through methods that were at the border of legality, Louis Beam, a member of a right-wing extremist organization “Aryan Nation” and Ku-Klux-Klan as well, had published a manifesto through which he urged for a “leaderless resistance” in the face of the US government.¹ By promoting the “leaderless resistance” ideology, Beam urged the creation of small action cells, with no structure or hierarchy and without being tied to a terrorist organization.

Another representative of right-wing extremism that popularized the “lone wolf”, with the explanation of an individual fighter, isolated, extremist and violent adversary of the government, being Tom Metzger, leader of the right-wing extremist movement “White Aryan Resistance”, a group with its headquarters in the American state of Indiana.

He posted on the movement’s site a manifesto which presented itself as “a call to arms”, with the title “Laws for the lone wolf”², which is at the same time a mini-guide with instructions for conspired subversive action and how lone wolves fighters can obtain and hide necessary funds for operations, how to avoid the surveillance of the security agencies, how to act if they are discovered and so on.

Jihadist organizations with global terrorist ideologies have promoted as well the concept of the “lone wolf” among the Muslims of the world. Once with the intervention of the American troops and those of the international coalition as well in Afghanistan in 2001, followed by that in Iraq in 2003, Al Qaeda had lost its operational structure and the

¹Gardell, Mattias, “Gods of the blood: the pagan revival and white separatism”, Duke University Press, 2003, pag.23-31

²Tom Metzger, “Laws for the Lone Wolf”, available at electronic address www.stormfront.org/forum/t454864/, online accessed on data de 08.02.2019

territories from which it obtained funds and had its training and indoctrination camps for its fighters.

Osama bin Laden was forced to take refuge in Afghanistan and the few members of Al Qaeda that had escaped from the hands of the international coalition dispersed everywhere in the world lacking, in the absence of funds and the pressure of the authorities, of any possibilities to produce any significant terrorist attack. In this context, in 2003, an article was published on the Al Qaeda site named "Echoes of Jihad" in which Muslims from around the world were urged to "take actions without waiting for instructions".³

The journey of an individual, from the state of a rational member of social group, to that of a "lone wolf" is done through radicalization. Radicalization describes the process in which an individual becomes the partisan of an extremist ideology, be it religious, social or political. It is the process that pushes an individual towards "lone wolf" terrorism and those that confront themselves with this process present behavioral changes that can be observed by the members of the family but as well as by friends and those from the community in which the individual lives. Radicalization that leads to violent extremism and terrorism is not a new phenomenon, but the process in which it is conducted in the present at an alarming speed and scale.

A peculiar part of radicalized individuals is represented by those that have gained combat experience on the Syrian and Iraqi front, named as "foreign fighters", which at times in some circumstances can become "lone wolf" attackers. Their return to Western countries will be a major match for the security forces because of the military training, complex ideological indoctrination and urban warfare experience accumulated in the Syrian and Iraqi conflict zones make them perfect candidates for "lone wolf" type attacks.

"Lone wolf" terrorism will be an enormous match for anti-terrorist forces from around the world, even for those with ample experience in combating the terrorist phenomenon. This phenomenon doesn't replace the organizational one that continues to be a major threat as demonstrated by the attacks in Sri Lanka from the 28th of April 2019,

³Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf" Preventing Lone Wolf Terrorism: some CT Approaches addressed", in *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 5, No. 5/6, December 2011, downloaded online on 26.02.2018, from electronic address https://www.jstor.org/stable/26298538?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents, pag.43-50

committed by a small terrorist group affiliated with the Islamic State, resulting in 259 deaths and 500 wounded.⁴

“Lone wolf” terrorist attacks are just as frightening because they happen at such a rate that they leave the impression that state institutions are incapable to perform their duty. While the major terrorist attacks, perpetrated by terrorist organization, manifested in Western countries once a couple of years, the “lone wolf” ones occur on a weekly rate, like in the case of the summer of 2019, when in an interval of two weeks there were perpetrated six attacks of this type.

At the end of this thesis I have formulated a few major conclusions. We find ourselves almost at the end of the year 2019, a year that has registered one of the bloodiest “lone wolf” terrorist attack, from the Christchurch mosques in New Zealand with 58 deaths, to the synagogues in San Diego and Poway with five deaths and the Walmart in El Paso, Texas with 22 deaths, totaling tens of deaths and other tens or even hundreds of wounded.

Besides these major attacks, the rest of the world possibly suffered tens of other “lone wolf” type attacks of lower intensity and with fewer victims, which were probably unheard by the public at large because they were labeled as hate crimes (race related), or as common crime and some just passing unnoticed which puts us in the frustrating situation of not having the complete picture of this phenomenon.

The emergence in the last 10-15 years of an increasing wave of “lone wolf” attackers is not an evolution into a military strategy or an insurgent one of the “last wave of terrorism”, neither a change of tactics, but a reaction to the socio-political processes of the western democratic society, a follow up of the economic crisis, radicalization of the political environment from conflict zones or from countries with dictatorial regimes, like it was the case of the “Arab Spring” and the migrants crisis.

A decade has almost passed since authorities started to realize that this new form of terrorism had become a phenomenon just as lethal as the one practiced by the terrorist organizations.

In the last few years of combating “lone wolf” terrorism, counter-terrorist and law enforcement institutions had gathered and systemized data and information about the methods, means and motivations of “lone wolves”, which had led to a significant

⁴ BBC, “Sri Lanka attacks: What we know about the Easter bombings”, in *BBC News*, from 28.04.2019, accessed online on 14.05.2019, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48010697>

improvement of knowing of the "lone wolf" phenomenon but hadn't offer strategic solution in combating it.

This can be due to the fact that the academic community had just recently and sporadically gave attention to this phenomenon and the strategies combating this. In an initial phase, the law enforcement and academic community had failed to observe that we are in the presence of a distinct form of terrorism that needs to be analyzed autonomously from the central body of the terrorist phenomenon.

With all this in consideration, the measures taken so far by the law enforcement agencies of the countries that face this phenomenon the most, have not yielded but partial results and only in the sector of combating it but in preventing it, which is actually the most important. At the community level, state institution need to apply programs of strategic communication that promote tolerance, solidarity and combat discrimination.

In this sense social dialogues and inter-religious dialogues are appropriate forms of combating radical rhetoric and extremist ideology. These programs need to be supported and through social programs in the educational field, especially in less fortunate communities and through creation of jobs for the categories that are at risk for radicalization.

Regarding the combating of radicalization in prisons, programs of the same nature need to be adapted to the specific of the penitentiary environment and after the release of former inmates, it is imperative for the existence of a method or measures for reintegration in society and social rehabilitation. A couple of years ago the European Union started a process of adopting decisions and measures to harmonize the legislation of the Union with the new challenges and threats brought by individual terrorism, "foreign fighters" phenomenon and illegal immigration.

That is why this fight against terrorism in general and that of "lone wolf" terrorism in particular needs to be done in close cooperation, in which countries and governments need to put aside differences of political nature, to eliminate distrust between them and promote the exchange of information that will allow the limitation of this phenomenon and boost the development of a mental resilience of the population in the face of effects that are sometimes devastating of such attacks.