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Trends in terrorism in 2021

Introduction¹

Experts list several possible trends in terrorism in 2021. In his article titled “Trends in Terrorism: What’s on the Horizon in 2021?” Clarke identifies several factors that could influence terrorism in 2021: the assassination of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF) commander Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns, protests, and a bitterly contested presidential election in the U.S.² Clarke lists several developments that could increase terrorism in certain parts of the world: potential openings and power vacuums, the activities of the Islamic State (ISIS)³ and Al-Qaeda and their affiliates, terrorists’ growing reliance on emerging technologies, the growing threat of the far-right and domestic terrorism, ideologies that could impact trends in terrorism, including conspiracy theories, and the potential deprioritization of counterterrorism, as countries focus inward on dealing with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ The 5 terrorism trends to watch in 2021, according to Johnson: conspiracy theory extremism, violence against faith-based institutions, domestic extremism, complex coordinated attacks, ISIS and Al-Qaeda moving forward.⁵ Terrorism and security threat trends in 2021, according to Crump: the likelihood of states testing the re-

solve of the new U.S. administration, and increasingly polarized populations are factors that will influence 2021. Terrorism is experiencing a resurgence globally, due to the consequences of the pandemic. The situation offers opportunities to would-be threat actors. 2021 will see a revival in risk levels. In the West, particularly in Europe, the controversy between France and the Muslim world will be the immediate concern going into 2021. While jihadists will remain the most obvious threat, since 2015 the growth of the right wing has been much more concerning.⁶ According to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), the threat of Islamist terrorism has disappeared, and the pandemic offers space to regroup and radicalise. COVID-19 and government responses to it have created opportunities for identifying and highlighting political, social, economic and racial grievances. Against this backdrop, the re-emergence of right-wing extremism is gathering pace, fuelled by social division and, in the U.S., a stridently partisan politics. And meanwhile on the Left, anger and frustration about climate change threaten a more violent activism.⁷ It would be a nearly impossible task to introduce every possible new trend in every type⁸ of terrorism in 2021. The goal of my article is to shed light on the most alarming present and upcoming trends.

The structure of my paper is loosely based on the structure of Clarke’s article:⁹ the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on terrorism, trends in jihadism¹⁰, the growing threat of the far-right, domestic terrorism in the U.S., terrorists’ use of emerging technologies, ideologies that could impact trends in terrorism. Finally, I examine the attack on the U.S. Capitol, which demonstrates the rise of domestic terrorism in the U.S., and the dangers of conspiracy theories.

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² Colin P. Clarke: Trends in Terrorism: What’s on the Horizon in 2021? <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/01/trends-in-terrorism-whats-on-the-horizon-in-2021/> (26/02/2021).

³ The Islamic State merged with part of the Al-Nusra Front in 2013, and after that, the organization used the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) designation, and finally, the term Islamic State. In Syria the name al-Davlat (The State) has spread. Western media uses the term ISIL or ISIS, to indicate that it is an armed organization and not a state. This is highly debatable, false even, because the organization emphasizes the creation of a state. Source: József Kiss-Benedek: Az Iszlám Állam által támasztott kihívások a terrorizmus elleni küzdelemben. In: István Resperger – Lóránd Ujházi (Eds.): A vallási elemek jelentősége napjaink fegyveres konfliktusában és biztonsági kihívásaiban. Dialóg Campus Kiadó–Nordex Kft, Wolters Kluwer, Budapest 2019. p. 31.

⁴ Clarke, Op. cit.

⁵ Bridget Johnson: 5 Terrorism Trends to Watch in 2021. <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/infrastructure-security/5-terrorism-trends-to-watch-in-2021/> (26/02/2021).

⁶ Justin Crump: Terrorism and security threat trends in 2021. <https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/94219-terrorism-and-security-threat-trends-in-2021> (26/02/2021).

⁷ Terrorism – Old Threats Returning, New Threats Emerging: What Are The Key Longer Term Trends Business Needs To Worry About? <https://rusi.org/event/terrorism-%E2%80%93-old-threats-returning-new-threats-emerging-what-are-key-longer-term-trends> (26/02/2021).

⁸ Terrorism can be classified in many different ways. See: Dávid Tóth: The history and types of terrorism. Law Of Ukraine: Legal Journal: Scientific-Practical Professional Journal. 2015. Vol. 11. No. 1. Paper: UDC 343.326 pp 1-24.

⁹ Clarke, Op. cit.

¹⁰ More on the topic of religious terrorism: László Kóhalmi: Gondolatok a vallási indítatású terrorizmus ürűgyén. Belügyi Szemle, 2015. Vol. 63. No. 7-8. pp 52-71.

1. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on terrorism

Regarding the expected impacts of the pandemic, Gál states the following: "1) the coronavirus is expected to claim more deaths worldwide than international terrorism has so far collective in world history, 2) the global economic crisis generated by COVID-19 will be comparable with 2008, and with the 1929–33 crisis. The current situation can be even more severe than the other two downfalls. 3) Like any economic crisis, this will also have an impact on crime, and the number of known crimes in specific categories of crimes will be increased at least temporarily."¹¹ According to Gál's conservative predictions based on the experiences of the past centuries, his initial hypothesis is that criminality is likely to increase from the second half of 2020, and this increase will continue for at least 1-2 years, after that. The only question is the extent of the rise and how we can slow or moderate the rise.¹² According to Gradoń, one of the impacts of the pandemic is the rise in cyber-enabled crime, terrorism, and information warfare including – but not limited to – disinformation campaigns and fake news propagation, that are undermining social fabric, causing civil unrest, and increasing the emotional consequences: fear, anxiety and uncertainty. This means increased challenges for the law-enforcement agencies and institutions.¹³ The pandemic has a significant impact on terrorism in a variety of ways. The impact on the level of attacks in the short-term is mixed. Lockdown measures will tend to inhibit attacks, but terrorist propaganda calling for attacks will incite some incidents. Much propaganda – and particularly that connected to far-right extremism – is focusing on conspiracy theories connected to COVID-19, and this has already inspired plots and attacks. Islamist extremist propaganda is focusing more on the vulnerability of governments distracted by the pandemic and the opportunity this presents for attacks. There is a significant increase in online extremist activity, which raises the risk of increasing short-to-medium term radicalisation. There are strong long-term concerns that states weakened by the serious economic consequences of the pandemic will be more vulnerable to the emergence/resurgence of terrorist groups in many parts of the globe.¹⁴ COVID-19 has accelerated a variety of

global trends. Some are ultimately positive, for example moves towards more investment in AI and automation, or a growing focus on making lasting changes to benefit the environment. Many other trends are concerning. Terrorism is experiencing a resurgence due to the consequences of the pandemic on a global level. 2021 will see a revival in risk levels. This increase will be catalyzed by the consequences of the pandemic, with the situation offering opportunities to would-be threat actors. Drivers include increased economic hardship in many countries most impacted by terrorism; international distraction mitigating effective responses to threats; the ability to exploit and benefit from inter-state rivalries, for example Turkey employing former Syrian fighters in Nagorno-Karabakh; and over-stretch of domestic security services. Lockdowns have also given people time to research and radicalize, with societal divisions and stress hardening mindsets.¹⁵ As countries remain focused inward on dealing with the fallout from the pandemic, counterterrorism could be deprioritized, further compounding the challenges of an increasingly complex and diverse terrorism landscape.¹⁶

2. Trends in jihadism

Regarding the threat of ISIS and Al-Qaeda, the United Nations Security Council states the following: During the second half of 2020, developments within ISIS showed a high degree of continuity from trends earlier in the year. Regarding its leadership and strategic direction Al-Qaeda faces a new and pressing challenge, following a period of attrition of its senior leaders in various locations. The pandemic continued to have an effect on the threat posed by ISIS and Al-Qaeda. In conflict zones, the threat continued to rise as the pandemic inhibited forces of law and order more than terrorists. In non-conflict zones, the threat remained relatively low, despite a series of attacks in Europe that illustrated the resilience of radical ecosystems strengthened by online propaganda and ineffective disengagement programmes. The economic and political toll of the pandemic, its aggravation of underlying drivers of violent extremism and its expected impact on counter-terrorism efforts are likely to increase the long-term threat everywhere, according to the UN Security Council. Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic remain the core area for ISIS, and the Idlib area, where Al-Qaeda also has affiliates, a source of concern. The trajectory of ISIS activity in this arena is unclear, with periodic surges that have not been sustained. There is no indication that ISIS will be able to take and hold territory in the short

¹¹ László István Gál: The Possible Impact of the COVID-19 On Crime Rates in Hungary. Journal Of Eastern-European Criminal Law, 2020. No. 1. pp 166–167.

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p. 167.

¹³ Kacper Gradoń: Crime in the time of the plague: fake news pandemic and the challenges to law-enforcement and intelligence community. Society Register, 2020, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 134.

¹⁴ Andrew Silke: COVID-19 and terrorism: assessing the short-and long-term impacts. Cranfield: Pool Re Solutions, 2020. p. 2.

¹⁵ Justin Crump: Terrorism and security threat trends in 2021. <https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/94219-terrorism-and-security-threat-trends-in-2021> (26/02/2021).

¹⁶ Clarke, Op. cit.

to medium term, although the group will certainly exploit its capacity to remain in a region with limited stabilization and reconstruction prospects. Afghanistan remains important to both ISIS and Al-Qaeda, and the peace process key to suppressing the long-term threat from both. The Taliban's fulfilment of its commitments stands to aggravate Al-Qaeda leadership difficulties. Consolidation of ISIS and/or Al-Qaeda in other conflict zones would likely lead to the revival of external attack plans that would eventually have an impact on non-conflict zones. The arenas where the groups have made recent progress in this regard are located mainly on the African continent. Terrorism continues to spread in West Africa. The region of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique is among the most concerning areas. The fragile consensus between Al-Qaeda and ISIS to fight a common enemy is over, as both groups are now involved in violent confrontations in all conflict zones apart from Libya. Neither ISIS nor Al-Qaeda is assessed to have made significant progress regarding the abuse of technology by terrorists, especially in the fields of finance, weaponry and social media in late 2020.¹⁷ On February 29, 2020 the Trump government and the Taliban made a historical deal agreeing on the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan. The troops have been fighting in the country for almost 20 years, and nowadays it is hardly imaginable, that in 1996 the Washington government came close to recognise the Taliban as the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan.¹⁸ With the U.S. drawing down forces in the Middle East, South Asia, and throughout Africa, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their respective affiliates could make a renewed push to capture new territory and destabilize countries and regions. 2021 could be a successful year for Al-Qaeda as it seeks to reassert itself through affiliates around the globe. There could be openings for terrorist and insurgent groups to take advantage of potential power vacuums, as the U.S. continues to shift resources and redeploy troops in various scenes. The pandemic did little to slow the operational tempo of ISIS attacks in Syria. 2021 may present more opportunities for terrorists to recruit and launch strikes throughout the Levant. U.S. forces are scheduled to be reduced to 2,500 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, presenting serious advantages to the enemies of the U.S. In Iraq, Iran has already moved to increase its influence by supporting various Shia militias groups. Encroaching Iranian influence could push Iraqi Sunnis back to ISIS. As a state sponsor of terrorism, Iran may also look to increase its support

to various proxies. With the U.S. drawdown in Afghanistan, there are growing concerns that the Taliban will dominate the country once again. In West Africa and the Horn of Africa, jihadist groups are gaining momentum, which will likely continue in 2021. Many of the countries most at risk of terrorist attacks are now located in Africa, a shift in the counterterrorism center of gravity from the Middle East.¹⁹

Although statistics show that the spread of COVID-19 in Africa was far from the same as in China, Europe or the Americas, the world's strictest restrictions had to be put in place to stop the pandemic. At the same time, Africa has cut itself off from its main supporters, making its economic situation more difficult and risking the already weak stability of African societies.²⁰

Even as the physical caliphate of ISIS has been destroyed, the organisation continues to expand through affiliates, especially throughout Africa, where it now maintains provinces in West Africa (ISWAP), the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Central Africa (ISCAP). Al-Qaeda- and ISIS-linked jihadists have destabilized countries that had previously escaped terrorism, including Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and Mozambique. These groups will intensify their operations in 2021. Their efforts could increase in 2021, especially if resources from counterterrorism are diverted to other pressing needs, including public health.²¹ Africa has seemingly taken on the mantle of the Middle East as the cradle of jihadism. Endemic government failures have seen long-running insurgencies escalate over 2020 and many now threaten to spread into new theatres. Mozambique has seen the most significant development in militancy over the last year, with the Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado threatening to establish territorial control over urban centres and launch more frequent operations into neighbouring Tanzania. While this is not likely to spread fully along the continent's east coast, networks run from north to south, and link into criminal interests. This has long been the trend in the north-west of the continent, where Nigeria and the Sahel countries remain unable to rein in Islamist and tribal militants that have basically displaced state authorities in rural areas. Levels of activity are increasing and this is drawing attention from Western countries, with military action gradually escalating in an attempt to contain the threat. Long-running militant violence in South Asia threatens to spike in 2021, especially on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and in Kashmir. Narendra Modi's bullish approach to the latter will provoke militant groups to launch new campaigns, with any backlash among Hindu nationalists threatening

¹⁷ Letter dated 21 January 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaeda and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council. S/2021/68. United Nations Security Council, New York, 2021. p. 3. <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2021/68> (26/02/2021).

¹⁸ Péter Wagner: „A talibok is fundamentalisták, de nem olyan Amerikaellensével, mint Irán – inkább a száudiakhoz állnak közel.” („The Taliban Does Not Practice the Anti-U.S. Style of Fundamentalism Practiced by Iran – It Is Closer to the Saudi Model.”) KKI-elemzések: A Külgügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet időszaki kiadványa, E-2020/52. p. 3.

¹⁹ Clarke, Op. cit.

²⁰ János Besenyő – Marianna Kármán: Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on African health, political and economic strategy. Insights into Regional Development, 2020. Vol. 2. No. 3. p. 630.

²¹ Clarke, Op. cit.

to the spread of politicised sectarian violence in India more broadly.²² ISIS has evolved out of necessity and it is still evolving. Their strongest parts are the network of supporters and recruiters and propaganda artists deeply ingrained online, ultimately posing a greater threat in the long term than a physical caliphate in Syria and Iraq, as they recruit, inspire, and teach homegrown violent extremists anywhere in the globe. ISIS still publishes their weekly newsletter al-Naba, but some of the most consistent media reaching out to an English-language audience in 2020 came from supporters in India, underscoring how the terrorist organisation is reliant on its geographical diversity for recruitment and distance learning. ISIS laid down a framework of borderless jihad and a blueprint for growing a terror movement both on the dark web and the surface web that is impossible to control.²³

To date, no violent non-state actor has harnessed social media as effectively as the Islamic State.²⁴ COVID-19 has had ISIS thinking more about bioweapons and unconventional attacks. Their provinces are still active, particularly through attacks in West Africa and Afghanistan. The relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda seems good since the Taliban inked a deal with the U.S. on February 29. As First Vice President Amrullah Saleh said, trying to separate the deeply intertwined groups “is harder than desalination.” Yet, as the Taliban self-identified as a jihad-centered political entity, they traded a promise for U.S. withdrawal for a promise to behave. Taliban propaganda has long boasted that they would bring “to their knees” American “crusaders,” and as their headlines scream that they essentially accomplished their goal it can serve as a shot in the arm to other terror groups operating with the same aims. A victory against a common enemy is viewed at its core a victory for all, and that is feeding the ever-growing and accessible ideological marketplace of terrorist ideas, methods and inspiration – in addition to the physical assistance the Taliban and their terror allies share. Al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab also have been using current events to recruit and inspire attacks, as the latter group watches the pullout of U.S. forces that had been training Somali forces to battle the terrorist group. In response to the attacks in France, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and al-Shabaab issued statements urging followers to emulate the attacks, with the latter declaring that the terrorists were “gallant knights”. The terrorist group then advised others to follow in those footsteps as well in a “war” against secularism, naming recent attackers in France “and the other unknown soldiers of Allah.” Al-Qaeda had

previously issued a statement declaring France to be a target and inciting attacks after French President Emmanuel Macron said in an October 2 address that “Islam is a religion which is experiencing a crisis today, all over the world,” and said there is a need to build an “Islam des Lumières,” or Islam of Enlightenment. These groups will be using perceived gains in 2021 to recruit, inspire, and move into their next era.²⁵ In the West, particularly in Europe, the controversy between France and the Muslim world will be the immediate concern going into 2021. As seen in the last few months, lone wolves will continue to launch attacks in Western cities, although media corporations and social media platforms will also be vulnerable if perceived to be promoting anti-Muslim sentiment. More established terrorism risks will continue to impact the energy and mining sectors in Africa and the Middle East, with the former overtaking the latter and even South Asia as a center for activity. In particular, an intensifying insurgency in Mozambique is increasingly threatening its gas industry, while in Iraq, Shia militia violence and anti-government protesters will threaten to disrupt the country’s oil sector. Disruption is particularly likely during the first half of the year as Iran seeks to test U.S. resolve. The 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks is also a possible trigger, and this will certainly focus public attention on jihadism around that time.²⁶ The close of 2020 has demonstrated the capacity for cultural and religious fault lines to generate tensions, either inadvertently or deliberately, following hostile rhetoric towards France and French interests from leaders in the Muslim world, which arose as a consequence of Macron’s assertion of the right to freedom of expression in the wake of Islamist terrorist attacks, but exemplifies the differences in societal values and norms that have the capacity to provoke violence when sensitivities are either misunderstood or ignored. The response both in the form of a public embargo of French goods in Islamic countries and, of concern, violent attacks was swift and highly impactful – showing how serious such issues can be. This will likely be a lasting problem.²⁷

3. The growing threat of the far right

Violence committed by individuals and groups inspired by far-right ideologies is increasingly seen as a transnational threat. This type of terrorism has be-

²² Justin Crump: The evolving terror threat in 2021. Counter Terror Business Magazine, 2020. No. 45. p. 23.

²³ Johnson, Op. cit.

²⁴ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross – Colin P. Clarke – Matt Shear: Terrorists and Technological Innovation. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/terrorists-and-technological-innovation> (26/02/2021).

²⁵ Johnson, Op. cit.

²⁶ Justin Crump: Terrorism and security threat trends in 2021. <https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/94219-terrorism-and-security-threats-in-2021> (26/02/2021).

²⁷ Justin Crump: The evolving terror threat in 2021. Counter Terror Business Magazine, 2020. No. 45. p. 23.

come more frequent. Far-right groups operate within and across borders. David C. Rapoport argued that the emergence of distinctive types of terrorist activity in different historical periods could be explained by new underlying political and ideological forces. Rapoport identified four “waves” of terrorist activity since the late 19th century.²⁸ According to Auger, considerable evidence and analysis support an argument, that a fifth, far-right wave of global terrorism may be underway.²⁹ Observers have signalled the decline of violent Islamic movements and the rise of far-right extremist activities. According to Spence, if right-wing violent extremism is the new fifth wave of modern terrorism, the negative societal impacts of the pandemic will only help accelerate the radicalization of its adherents, and if the duration of the previous four waves have taught us anything, this new wave could be around for many more years to come.³⁰ According to the 2020 Trends Alert published by The United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), CTED has been alerted by Member States to their increasing concern at the growing and increasingly transnational threat posed by extreme right-wing terrorism. Ten of the 31 States in which CTED conducted assessment visits on behalf of the CTC in 2018 and 2019 raised this threat as an issue of concern. Research indicates that there has been a 320 per cent rise in attacks conducted by individuals affiliated with such movements and ideologies over the past five years. Most such attacks have been carried out in Western States.³¹ According to Europol’s European Union Terrorism Situation And Trend Report 2019 (TE-SAT), the number of arrests linked to right-wing terrorism remained relatively low, but increased for the third year in a row. Right-wing extremists prey on fears of perceived attempts to Islamicise society and loss of national identity. With regard to terrorism trials concluded in 2018, jihadist terrorism convictions remained the highest in number; but there was a noted increase in leftwing and right-wing terrorism convictions.³² The trend continues: According to the European Union Terrorism Situation And Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020 in 2019 three EU Member States reported a total of six right-wing terrorist attacks (one completed, one failed, four foiled), com-

pared to only one in 2018. Additionally, two attacks not classified as terrorism under national law but committed by right-wing extremists were reported by Germany and claimed the lives of three people. In 2019 the right-wing attacks in Christchurch (New Zealand), Poway (USA), El Paso (USA), Bærum (Norway) and Halle (Germany) were part of a wave of violent incidents worldwide, the perpetrators of which were part of similar transnational online communities and took inspiration from one another. Both jihadist and right-wing extremist propaganda incite individuals to perpetrate acts of violence autonomously and praise perpetrators as ‘martyrs’ or ‘saints’, respectively.³³ The far-right is becoming a greater threat both transnationally and domestically in specific countries, including the U.S. and Germany. The lag effect of COVID-19, the growing anxiety among large segments of the population, severe economic malaise, increased firearms sales may make 2021 a banner year for domestic terrorism. An election is added to the mix, that Trump has repeatedly attempted to delegitimize, and many counter-terrorism analysts are predicting a sharp rise in domestic terrorism, especially attacks conducted by anti-government extremists and others on the far-right.³⁴ Issues such as migration, global trade, global security, and support for international organizations have driven polarization in the political landscape and any such shift always feeds a fringe extremist element. Unlike jihadism, the far right is harder to identify, especially in liberal democracies. Far right threat actors also tend to be both more aligned with the security services that are tasked to counter them, and more decentralized, making networks far harder to counter – as shown by the fact that 60% of successful terrorist attacks are carried out by unaffiliated individuals, whether they be jihadist or right wing. This threat will remain most evident in Europe, with Germany, Greece, Italy, and the U.K. arguably being the countries most likely to see incidents. While solo actors have the highest chance of landing a successful attack, a number of complex plots have been only narrowly prevented in the last few years, some even being linked to members of the respective country’s armed forces. Migration is a significant catalyst, and increased protectionism³⁵ is likely in 2021, as a consequence of the economic impacts of COVID-19. In addition to the countries previously mentioned, Hungary, Austria, and Sweden have also seen mass migration³⁶ and so it is not

²⁸ Vincent A. Auger: Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave? Perspectives on Terrorism Vol. 14. No. 3. p. 87.

²⁹ ibid. p. 93.

³⁰ Sean Spence: The New Wave of Global Terrorism Is Right-Wing Extremism. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2020-10-22/right-wing-extremism-the-new-wave-of-global-terrorism> (26/02/2021).

³¹ CTED Trends Alert: Member States Concerned By The Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism. United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2020. p. 3. https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism.pdf (26/02/2021).

³² European Union Terrorism Situation And Trend Report 2019 (TE-SAT). pp 6–7.

³³ European Union Terrorism Situation And Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020. pp 5–6.

³⁴ Clarke, Op. cit.

³⁵ Border control also plays an essential role to protect the Schengen border-free area from threats to public health, especially those related to pandemics. 2020 in brief – Frontex. p. 1. https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/In_Brief_2020/20.0147_inbrief_2020_11th_web_fixed4.pdf (26/02/2021)

³⁶ Migration can be both a tool and a catalyst for acts of terrorism. See: Zoltán Hautzinger: A terrorizmus elleni küzdelem idegenjogi eszközei. In

surprising that these countries will continue have an active far right threat. Lockdown has to some extent mitigated incidents, but far right groups have been particularly active in anti-stringency protests. Identification with this cause and, increasingly, the anti-vaccination movement is being fueled by deliberate disinformation campaigns on social media, offering increasingly bigger pool for recruitment. Larger scale economic issues, international tensions, government policy failures, and societal tensions coupled with emerging triggers such as a new wave of threatened migration via Turkey will further fuel this trend. Mental health is also a driver particularly for “lone wolves”, and the risk of people being influenced by social media echo chambers is very high. The U.S. has experienced a similar uptick in far right activities, which drew particular attention ahead of the elections in November 2020, and this also risks catalyzing the left wing as well as part of a violent cycle. Despite few successful attacks, the general level of activity has already particularly impacted the tech sector, where de-platforming of those involved in spreading far right views has become an imperative. Corporations increasingly feel unable to take a neutral position on touchstone issues, with not making a statement being seen as a statement. When executives are motivated speak out, either in a personal capacity or for their company, a negative reaction will seriously risk attracting isolated acts of violence.

The far right will likely become much more technically agile as a result of the measures forced by the pandemic. Messaging has also changed, away from more obvious neo-Nazism towards a more sophisticated national identity message, particularly driven by an influx of younger recruits. The various disparate elements have failed to find a common cause, particularly in Europe, although the “stop the steal” issue in the US risks providing a more coherent narrative there. The coalescence of messaging is a major indicator we are watching for in the coming months, as economic impacts of COVID-19 are becoming more severe.³⁷

4. Domestic terrorism in the U.S.

In the U.S. there is a “considerable amount of ambiguity over domestic terrorism, what it means precisely,

[and] how it’s charged.”³⁸ This ambiguity arises from the lack of a standalone criminal offense outlawing domestic terrorism.³⁹

How is domestic terrorism defined in the U.S.? “Domestic Terrorism for the FBI’s purposes is referenced in U.S. Code at 18 U.S.C. 2331(5), and is defined as activities: Involving acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; Appearing to be intended to: Intimidate or coerce a civilian population; Influence the policy of government by intimidation or coercion; or Affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping; and Occurring primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.”⁴⁰

According to Johnson, in 2021 we may see more reactionary violence from domestic extremists, either by multiple members of a group or movement or lone attacks with manifestos like the 2019 El Paso Walmart shooting, in response to real or perceived policy shifts that come with a new administration – or even in reaction to how a newly led Justice Department may address and confront domestic extremist movements. Political and social tensions will also likely influence recruitment and growth in some domestic extremist movements.⁴¹ The FBI warned the U.S. about the growing dangers of domestic violent extremists and called it the number one terrorism threat in 2021.⁴²

5. Terrorists’ use of emerging technologies

Terrorists take advantage of technological advances in many ways.⁴³ As Cronin points out: “The worldwide dispersal of emerging technologies, such as commercial drones, cyber weapons, 3D printing, military robotics, and autonomous systems, is generating gaping fissures in the ability of conventional

³⁸ James Cullum: No Domestic Terror Charge? Lack of Law Reflects ‘Considerable Ambiguity,’ Says DOJ Official. <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/no-domestic-terror-charge-for-domestic-terrorism-lack-of-law-reflects-considerable-ambiguity-says-doj-official/> (26/02/2021). Cited by: Amy C. Collins: The Need for a Specific Law Against Domestic Terrorism. Program on Extremism, George Washington University, 2020. p. 3. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/The%20Need%20for%20a%20Specific%20Law%20Against%20Domestic%20Terrorism.pdf> (26/02/2021).

³⁹ Ibid. p. 3.

⁴⁰ Domestic Terrorism: Definitions, Terminology, and Methodology. p. 1. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/fbi-dhs-domestic-terrorism-definitions-terminology-methodology.pdf/view> (26/02/2021.).

⁴¹ Johnson, Op. cit.

⁴² Sarah Schulte: FBI warns America about domestic terrorism following attack on US Capitol. <https://abc7chicago.com/domestic-terrorism-fbi-us-capitol-building-the-internet/9634442/> (26/02/2021.).

⁴³ Dávid Tóth: A pénz- és bélyegforgalom biztonsága elleni deliktumok büntetőjogi és kriminológiai aspektusai. Pécsi Tudományegyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar, Pécs 2020. p. 121.

Gyula Gaál – Zoltán Hautzinger (Eds.): Pécsi Határör Tudományos Közlemények XVI.: Modernkorú veszélyek rendészeti aspektusai, Magyar Határtudományi Társaság Határör Szakosztály Pécsi Szakcsoportja, Pécs 2015. p. 203.

³⁷ Justin Crump: Terrorism and security threat trends in 2021. <https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/94219-terrorism-and-security-threat-trends-in-2021> (26/02/2021.)

armed forces to combat lethal capabilities of non-state actors, most notably terrorists, but also rogue lone actors, insurgent groups, and private armies.”⁴⁴ According to Clarke, another trend likely to continue in 2021 is violent non-state actors’ growing reliance on emerging technologies. ISIS, Houthi rebels in Yemen, and the Taliban have demonstrated willingness and capability to deploy unmanned aerial systems for combat and reconnaissance purposes. The barriers to entry for acquiring and skillfully maneuvering drones have decreased drastically, and commercial off-the-shelf drones are readily available and easy to obtain. After observing drones’ successful employment in conflicts in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, terrorists may be encouraged to acquire them, viewing them as a force multiplier in any asymmetric conflict. In 2021, there could also be further interest from terrorists in homemade 3D printed firearms, as witnessed in a 2019 attack by a far-right extremist in Halle, Germany. Far-right extremists have shown a particular interest in 3D printed firearms.⁴⁵ The internet: The digital space has become a new battleground for ideological warfare; radical groups are actively using it for recruitment, propaganda, and radicalization. Especially, during the pandemic, internet became the latest weapon in the hands of violent radicals who used it to spread hatred against the government and civil bodies.⁴⁶

6. Ideologies that could impact trends in terrorism

According to Clarke, there are a number of ideologies that could impact trends in terrorism in 2021, including traditional left-wing grievances related to economics and the environment and conspiracy theories like QAnon and the associated campaigns to push back against everything from vaccines to 5G technology. There are also threats emanating from extreme misogyny and the so-called “Incel” movement.⁴⁷ Coronavirus conspiracy theories have had serious public health consequences by encouraging people to not take the threat seriously, compounded by vaccination opponents claiming Bill Gates wants to microchip people or asserting other claims about the goals of inoculation programs. Con-

spiracy theories that have warranted the attention of homeland security also include those pushed by QAnon supporters alleging “deep state” conspiracies and more, the 5G conspiracy theories that allege the technology is used to track people and/or spread COVID, and the white supremacist “great replacement” theory that claims there is an organized plot against whites and has been cited by mass shooters in Christchurch and El Paso.⁴⁸ The FBI for the first time has identified fringe conspiracy theories as a domestic terrorist threat. The FBI intelligence bulletin from the bureau’s Phoenix field office, dated May 30, 2019, describes “conspiracy theory-driven domestic extremists,” as a growing threat, and notes that it is the first such report to do so. It lists a number of arrests, including some that have not been publicized, related to violent incidents motivated by fringe beliefs. This document specifically mentions QAnon.⁴⁹

Feminist researchers believe the rise of disenfranchised middle-class white males is leading to increased toxic masculinity within society, as evidenced by the increased popularity of the so-called manosphere to share extremist ideas and vent their grievances. Law enforcement agencies are concerned that the manosphere and similar online communities are radicalizing young men to commit violence to achieve their goals.⁵⁰

7. Attack on the U.S. Capitol – domestic terrorism and the dangers of conspiracy theories

A group of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, and clashed with police in violence that left four people dead. They were attempting to prevent the confirmation of Joe Biden’s election victory. They descended on the Capitol after Trump made a speech to his supporters, imploring them to „fight” to stop the „steal” of the election. Police officers shot one woman dead, while three more Trump supporters died of „medical emergencies.” U.S. Capitol Police later released a statement confirming one of their officers had also died of injuries sustained during the riots.⁵¹ A leader in the

⁴⁴ Audrey Kurth Cronin: Power to the People: How Open Technological Innovation is Arming Tomorrow’s Terrorists. Oxford University Press, New York 2020. p. 1.

⁴⁵ Clarke, Op. cit.

⁴⁶ Soumya Awasthi: Annual Review of Islamic State and Al Qaeda. What is on the Horizon in 2021? <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2021-january/21/annual-review-of-islamic-state-and-al-qaeda-what-is-on-the-horizon-in-2021> (26/02/2021).

⁴⁷ Clarke, Op. cit.

⁴⁸ Johnson, Op. cit.

⁴⁹ Jana Winter: Exclusive: FBI document warns conspiracy theories are a new domestic terrorism threat. <https://news.yahoo.com/fbi-documents-conspiracy-theories-terrorism-160000507.html> (26/02/2021).

⁵⁰ Sean Spence: The New Wave of Global Terrorism Is Right-Wing Extremism. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2020-10-22/right-wing-extremism-the-new-wave-of-global-terrorism> (26/02/2021).

⁵¹ James Franey: US Capitol storming: What you need to know. <https://>

QAnon conspiracy theory movement was one of the rioters storming the Capitol: the so called “Q Shaman” or “QAnon Shaman” aka “Jake Angeli” (or Yellowstone Wolf⁵²), whose real name is Jacob Anthony Chansley. The movement has played a big role in organizing nationwide „Stop the Steal” protests in the two months since President-elect Joe Biden won the 2020 election.⁵³

Joe Biden called the pro-Trump mob that sieged the Capitol „domestic terrorists”. The offenders should not be called protesters, rather „a riotous mob, insurrectionists, domestic terrorists,” Biden said.⁵⁴ Sacco in the report titled “Domestic Terrorism and the Attack on the U.S. Capitol. CRS INSIGHT, 2021.” discusses whether or not participants and their actions may be categorized as domestic terrorists and domestic terrorism, and issues around designating domestic fringe groups, such as the Boogaloo Bois and Proud Boys who were allegedly involved in the attack, as terrorist organizations.⁵⁵ The federal definition of domestic terrorism describes domestic terrorists as “Americans who commit ideologically driven crimes in the United States but lack foreign direction or influence.”⁵⁶ The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) generally relies on two sources to define domestic terrorism. First, the Code of Federal Regulations characterizes “terrorism” as including “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”⁵⁷ Second, 18 U.S.C. §2331(5) more narrowly defines “domestic terrorism.” This definition comes from Section 802 of the USA PATRIOT Act (P.L. 107-56). According to 18 U.S.C. §2331(5), domestic terrorism occurs primarily within U.S. territorial jurisdiction, and involves “(A) acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; (B) appear to be intended— (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction,

assassination, or kidnapping...”⁵⁸ According to Sacco, the participants’ actions seem to fit both definitions.⁵⁹ While the participants’ actions on January 6 may be consistent with the definition of domestic terrorism, Sacco notes that domestic terrorism is not a chargeable offense on its own. While individuals involved in the attack may belong to extremist groups such as the Proud Boys and Boogaloo Bois or adhere to their ideology, Sacco states that the federal government declines to designate these groups as domestic terrorist groups and instead focuses on the violent criminal acts of individuals, whether members of these groups or not.⁶⁰ U.S. President Joe Biden ordered law enforcement and intelligence officials to investigate the risk of domestic terrorism following the attack on the U.S. Capitol.⁶¹

Conclusion

The aim of my paper was to call attention to the most alarming present and upcoming trends in terrorism in 2021. I agree with Resperger, that we have to ensure that our security agencies, law enforcement and defence organizations are alert, and their staff are trained to be ready to face the newest challenges. In addition to offensive operations by terrorist organisations, their media activities on multiple social media platforms which they use to spread their propaganda to their sympathisers and to intimidate their opponents must be countered.⁶² Law enforcement agencies should be aware of the latest trends in terrorism, to be able to successfully prevent future attacks more efficiently.

www.dw.com/en/us-capitol-storming-what-you-need-to-know/a-56154560
(26/02/2021.).

⁵² Rich Schapiro – Michael Kosnar: Capitol rioter in horned hat gloats as feds work to identify suspects. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/capitol-rioter-horned-hat-gloats-feds-work-identify-suspects-n1253392> (26/02/2021.).

⁵³ Rachel E. Greenspan – Haven Orecchio-Eggersitz: A well-known QAnon influencer dubbed the ‚Q Shaman‘ has been arrested after playing a highly visible role in the Capitol siege. <https://www.businessinsider.com/q-shaman-qanon-influencer-capitol-siege-washington-dc-protest-riot-2021-1> (26/02/2021.).

⁵⁴ Joe Biden slams pro-Trump mob as ‚domestic terrorists‘. <https://www.dw.com/en/joe-biden-slams-pro-trump-mob-as-domestic-terrorists/a-56163969> (26/02/2021.).

⁵⁵ Lisa N. Sacco: Domestic Terrorism and the Attack on the U.S. Capitol. CRS INSIGHT, 2021. p. 1. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11573> (26/02/2021).

⁵⁶ ibid. p. 1.

⁵⁷ ibid. p. 1.

⁵⁸ ibid. pp 1–2.

⁵⁹ ibid. pp 1–2.

⁶⁰ ibid. p. 2.

⁶¹ Joe Biden orders review of US domestic extremism threat. <https://www.dw.com/en/joe-biden-orders-review-of-us-domestic-extremism-threat/a-56321162> (26/02/2021.).

⁶² István Resperger: Methods of militant Islam in the Islamist State and the Book Haram terror organizations. In: Lóránd Ujházi – József Kaló – Ferenc Petruska (Eds.): Budapest Report On Christian Persecution 2019. Híttér Kiadó, Budapest 2019. p. 72.