THE CHALLENGE OF TERRORISM – CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE POST POST – COLD WAR ERA

Olesa TARANU
Post-PhD Fellow, SOP HRD/159/1.5/S/133675 Project, Romanian Academy, Iaşi Branch, olesa.taranu@yahoo.com

Abstract: Considered by some as the meta-event of the XXlst century, the 9/11 terrorist attacks have brought to the center of debate a phenomenon with ancient origins which has undergone a significant change since the end of the Cold War. With the destruction of the twin towers, we have seen a major shift of political terrorism in a new form, irrational, unpredictable and difficult to control and this trend was reconfirmed by the attacks in Madrid, London, Beslan, Domodedovo, Chicago or Paris to name just a few. The major impact of the terrorist attacks was threefold: they eliminated the confidence, affirmed at the end of the Cold War by the liberals, in the peaceful future of the international system. The wars in the ex-Yugoslavia have shocked the international public opinion by destroying the image of the invincibility of the U.S., and they highlighted the vulnerability of Western states, showing, among other things, the perverse effects of globalization. Also, we cannot ignore the renewal and development, within this context, of the discussion regarding the changing nature of warfare, the profile of the new asymmetric combatant and the states’ decisions to adopt controversial policies or reorientation of national security strategies and international actors’ (states and organizations) decisions to move the terrorist threat from the periphery to the center of the security agendas. Asserting new terrorism as a severe threat to international security generated a major impact on academics, among theorists that contribute to the development of security studies discipline. Whether they assumed a traditional perspective, state centered and militarized, or they militated for the extending/deepening of security, all considered terrorism as a challenge that requires a thorough analysis of the new realities. This article aims to identify the elements of continuity and change in the new international order, highlighting a number of paradoxes that seem to shape the post-Cold War security environment.

Keywords: Terrorism, assymetric threat, security studies, post-Cold War

Introduction
The disappearance of the Soviet Union from the international arena has led to the dismantling of the bipolar order based on the rivalry of the superpowers which dominated the international relations since the end of the second world conflagration. The period that followed the end of the Cold War until September 11th, 2001, the date of the terrorist attacks against the United States of America, may be considered a transition era from the bipolar system specific to the Cold War, to the one-sided system unipolar order based on the domination of the United States of America. This post-Cold War era began in an atmosphere of hope, confidence and optimism under the auspices of the liberal democratic precepts which regained the attention of analysts and politicians. While Francis Fukuyama stated the famous thesis of the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 1992), in an address in front of the Congress on September 11th, 1990, the American president George Bush expressed his confidence in a new era liberated from the threat of terror, powerful in seeking justice and peace, an era in which the nations of the world could prosper, in which the rule of law replaces the law of the jungle, a world in which nations share the responsibility for ensuring freedom and justice, in which the powerful respects the right of the weak (Clark 2001, 636). Nevertheless, the expectations regarding the security of the international system in the conditions of the victory of democracy and capitalism in the confrontation with the communist system and the centralised and planned economy were rapidly dispelled by the concrete evolutions on the international scene. The wars in the ex-Yugoslavia have shocked an Europe which hadn’t been confronted with the cruelties of armed conflicts since the end of the second world war, but wars of an extreme violence carried out in Rwanda and Somalia at the beginning and at mid 1990s or the series of conflicts burst in the ex-Soviet region have managed to shatter, forever, the illusion of peace and stability of the global system. The relative stability of the bipolar system was replaced by the instability of the unipolarity. The agenda of the international security also registered significant transformations: the central place of the threat related to the mutual assured destruction (MAD), concept emerged from the duality specific to the Cold War, is seized by ethnic, local and civil conflicts, economic instability, the widening gap between the rich North and the poor South, the threat of the conflicts burst among the great civilisation layers (see Samuel Huntington with his ‘Clash of Civilisations’) etc. This is the period when the globalisation has given a new momentum to the neoliberal economic order, placing a considerable power in the hands of the multinational corporations, which has led to a significant reduction of the states’ role as key actors in International Relations. The terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 against the United States of America marked the end of this transition period since the Cold War and led to the beginning of a new era in which terrorism has become the main threat to the international security. A group of individuals not associated to a national army, not wearing the official marks of a state and armed with non-conventional weapons managed to transform the unipolar system, assumed by the USA, and militarized, or they militated for the extending/deepening of security, all considered terrorism as a challenge that requires a thorough analysis of the new realities. This article aims to identify the elements of continuity and change in the new international order, highlighting a number of paradoxes that seem to shape the post-Cold War security environment.
moment, the document noted nevertheless that Europe was confronted with more diverse threats, less visible and less predictable1 such as terrorism, Europe being a target as well as a basis for such a type of terrorism (logistical bases of Al Qaeda were discovered in the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Spain and Belgium), and that their concerted action at European level was essential. This phenomenon was seen as the result of certain complex causes which included the pressure of modernisation, the cultural, social and political crises as well as the alienation of young people living in foreign societies.

The evolution of the contemporary terrorism related to the relaunch and development of the discussions on the asymmetrical type of war and the explanation constitutes the belief of some authors according to which the terrorist represents the archetype of the asymmetrical warrior (Thornton 2007, 25). As in the case of terrorism, the asymmetrical war is not a 20th century product. Even from the beginning of the history, the protagonists of wars adopted what is known as the asymmetrical approach, found even in the oldest writings of ancient Greece, a principle on identifying and targeting the vulnerable points of the adversary adopting a different and surprising behaviour². The asymmetrical tactics were efficiently used by the Germanic tribes against the Roman legions, by the English infantry against a much more numerous French force at Agincourt in 1415, by the irregular Spanish troops in the Napoleonic wars, by the Vietcong against the American opponents, by the Afghans in their fight against the Soviet people. Today they have become the main tactic of some smaller and weaker sub-state actors such as terrorist groups, guerrilla and insurgent movements, even in the form of chosen targets of the distantus (Thornton 2007, 19), to others, much more comprehensive such as that offered by Steven Metz and Douglas Johnson, according to which the asymmetrical war supposes acting, organizing yourself and thinking differently from your opponent with the aim of maximising your own advantages, exploiting your opponent’s weaknesses, undertaking initiative or obtaining a much more significant freedom of movement. This war may take a strategic-military, strategic-political or an operational form or a combination of these forms, including different methods, technologies, values, organizations, temporal perspectives (Thornton 2007, 20). It has become evident to everyone that the asymmetrical war is a huge one. And, although the phenomenon is not a new one, being used for thousands of years by the weaker combatants against a stronger opponent, there have been important changes in its manner of conduct, from the irrationality of certain actions to the specific targeting of civilians, the use of techniques and weapons produced and marketed in the West which turn against the American soldiers, the diversification of the combatants while the rampant rhythm of globalisation does nothing but to favour the development of this phenomenon. The capacity of adaptation and transformation of the practices, techniques and asymmetrical combatants is high. At a time when the military supremacy of the United States is undisputed, with no rival able to defeat America today in a conventional war, it has become evident for those trying to challenge the West that only the asymmetrical tactics could succeed against major powers benefiting from advantages on military, logistical, financial and organizational levels (Frunzeti 2006, 99-100). And if the asymmetrical war becomes the great challenge to security in the 21st century and the determination of the new combatants of engaging themselves in an endless war against the West is undisputed (Dunne 2006, 112), increasing in turn the flexibility, the reaction force and the efficiency of the new missions and troops engaged in a distant front respect the international rules of war, in a foreign and hostile environment.

The contemporary terrorism – continuity and change in the field of Security Studies

The terrorist attacks from 2001 represent, beyond doubt, a turning point in the evolution of Security Studies as a discipline, the terrorist phenomenon representing a major challenge, both for professionals and academics. The transformation of the political terrorism into a new, irrational, unpredictable form, extremely difficult to control, the manifestation of this phenomenon and the scale of the consequences triggered by the actions of the terrorist groups in a complex environment have determined prompt political reactions from state actors, seeming to bring to the fore the topic related to national security and the redefinition of the importance of the military strategies challenging at the same time the great theoretical movements outlining this discipline. Some authors hastened to declare the

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2 These asymmetrical principles result from the works of Thucydides, Sun Tzu, Sun Bin or Niccolo Machiavelli

381
September 11th attacks as the meta-event of the 21st century, with an impact similar to the USSR collapse predicting the fact that the Global War against Terror will mark the evolution of the Security Studies in the same way that the Cold War marked the evolution of this discipline during the previous century. Although the interest given to terrorism does not represent a novelty element, with a vast literature analysing the appearance, the development or the consequences of this phenomenon, it should be noted, after the events from September 2001, the transfer from bottom to the top of the issues on the security agenda, aspect confirmed by the security strategies of the states and international organizations, as well as by the significant volume of works on this topic. The transformation of terrorism from a marginal issue into a central one has represented a major challenge both for the adepts of the traditional perspective on security and for the representatives of the theories questioning the traditional assumptions, asking and militating for the extension and/or the deepening of the Security Studies. In the following, we shall try to briefly present the way in which the Security Studies, as an academic discipline, have adapted in a new context and have reflected the evolution of terrorism on security agendas.

The adepts of the traditional perspective on security, of realist/neorealist origin, have given special weight to the new challenges and events determined by the terrorist phenomenon in general and by the terrorist attacks from 2001, respectively the Global War against Terror initiated as subsequent response, in the particular. The fervour of these analysts seems to be explained by the fact that, at least at first sight, the new events seemed to confirm older scenarios on the instability of the unipolar order presenting a huge conflictual potential (see John Mearsheimer' thesis on "return in the future"), the emergence of new threats of military or civilisation nature, the realist traditional agenda proving a major basis for the discourses on terrorism. War era seemed to give justice to the traditional assumptions on security, marking the active return of the war issue, the September events took by surprise even the traditionalists who didn’t foresee the possibility of an attack on the territory of the USA, nor the consequences of such an attack (the involvement of the USA and the allies in two wars). Two major challenges to the traditionalist theories can be found (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 230-231) – on one hand, the initiation of the GWT emphasizes the interest for using force and war in general and, on the other hand, the new era has determined the questioning of the state-centric assumptions and of those related to the actors’ rationality. In the first case, certain questions arise on the changing nature of war in the new context, when the state is challenged by non-state actors (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 230-231). The second case, the surprising element was the fact that the terrorist attacks in the USA represented the action of 19 individuals not of an army created and organized to fight on behalf of a state. Although the American administration made significant efforts at discourse level immediately after this event in view of establishing a connection between the individuals responsible for the attacks and a certain state, the issue related to the new non-state combatants has not disappeared. Another interesting aspect that can be noted in the new context is the questioning of the neo-realistic assumptions on actors’ rationality. If for the neo-realist Kenneth Waltz and for those sharing his point of view, the state is considered a potential carrier of insecurity. These findings reaffirm the importance of the topic related to bio-security and infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS, avian influenza or any other virus possessing the capacity of globally expanding itself), they reaffirm the interest given to the aspects correlated with the policies adopted to ensure frontiers through visas and alert to any other individual, group, activity or work, the human body being considered a potential carrier of insecurity. These findings reaffirm the importance of the topic related to bio-security and infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS, avian influenza or any other virus possessing the capacity of globally expanding itself), they reaffirm the interest given to the aspects correlated with the policies adopted to ensure frontiers through visas and the introduction of the biometric passports or the excessive increase of threats and risk factors in the contemporary society, favouring “daily risk management” practices, as Ulrik Beck expressed it (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 249-250).

In the conclusion of this study, we notice that the events from September 2001 and the Global War against Terror have represented a special challenge not only for the political factors involved in the process of drafting security policies for the representatives of the academic environment. It must be
recognised that the Security Studies researchers have assumed their intellectual obligation of analysing the new events and of adapting the discourses and analyses to the new realities, offering thus an answer to the challenges of the post post-Cold War era depending on the intellectual background and the theories to which they adhered. The presence of the continuity elements on the security agenda was doubled by the development of new processes or phenomena, noticing sometimes a series of paradoxes that outline the contemporary security environment. To this end, we shall mention the fact that, although the terrorist actions question the conception according to which the state is the main reference object of security, the answers adopted in terms of security policies clearly reaffirm the importance and role of the state, placing the national security at the heart of the discussions. As regards the relation between internal and external threats, the aspects that can be noted are, on one hand, the capacity and even the specificity of the terrorist phenomenon of manifesting itself and acting at transnational level, beyond the classic frontiers, and on the other hand, the states’ intention and decision of ensuring the security of physical as well as of biometric and digital frontiers. In respect of the prevailing types of threats in the new international environment, it is noticed the reaffirmation of the importance of the traditional military threats but, at the same time, we observe the continuous presence of certain issues supported mostly by the new approaches concerning about environmental threats, societal security, gender-based security, the relation between religion and security, etc.

**Conclusions**

The terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 have marked the beginning of a new post post-Cold War era. From a marginal topic, considered mostly by those nations confronting themselves with a series of political-identity conflicts, terrorism occupies nowadays a central place on the security agendas of the states and main international organisations. The terrorist threat has contributed to the transformation of security strategies and politics, has favoured the reconsideration of the state's role in the new global order and has emphasized the pervert side of globalization, generating an environment marked by uncertainty and insecurity. This form of asymmetric war, adopted by terrorists, has affected the international security, has transformed civilians into favourite targets, has generated a new type of combatant who does not fight in the name of a country or for a country, has emphasised the limited efficiency of the classical traditional fight tactics of the West and has demonstrated the enhanced adaptability, the flexibility and the innovative character of the terrorists. Certainly, the war is no longer what it was and the world cannot be today as it was before September 11th (Olson 2011, 3).

Irrespective of the group to which we adhere - the traditionalists or the adepts of extension and/or deepening of security, terrorism represents a major challenge for the contemporary international environment. For the traditionalists, the importance of the phenomenon is due to questioning the state’s role in the new environment as well as to the possible consequences of the use of mass destruction weapons in case the terrorists would manage to take possession of them. For the adepts of the extension and/or deepening of security, the importance of the new phenomenon is explained by the ability of the illegitimate actors of generating, in response to their destructive activities, discourses powerful enough to reduce or even to override the legitimacy of the liberal order. However, nowadays there is no unanimous agreement among the Security Studies analysts on the clear directions of evolution of the international security environment. When asked about the significance of the French revolution, the Chinese Prime-Minister Chou En Lai declared that it was too early to give an opinion on it (White, Little, Smith, 2005, 1). It is more than evident the fact that the difficulty to which we are confronted today, namely that of creating scenarios on the future of the current order, still in an ongoing process of configuration, is huge and the futurology exercises are not covered by such an approach.

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