

Criminological and socio-psychological research of suicidal terrorism in the postmodern era

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Abstract. The article examines the criminological and socio-psychological characteristics of suicidal terrorism as a type of political violence at the present stage. The use of the historical method of scientific research allows concluding that although suicidal terrorism manifests itself in different historical epochs, only since the second half of the 20th century, suicidal terrorism has become a widely used violent practice. The analysis of the positions on this topic allows defining suicidal terrorism as a violent practice aimed at causing maximum damage to the population and (or) civilian items, as well as state authorities, institutions, or international organizations to intimidate the population and influence official authorities, which is accompanied by a conscious refusal of the perpetrator to save his/her life. At the same time, suicidal terrorism itself is represented in two forms: classic suicidal terrorism and high-probability suicidal terrorism. Based on the analysis of statistical data on the spread of suicidal terrorism in the world, a sharp trend in the growth of this type of terrorism in the 21st century is determined, as well as correlation changes in the specific coefficient of harm caused depending on the tactics of suicidal terrorism. Two key approaches to understanding the causes of suicidal terrorism are considered. As to the first approach, suicidal terrorism is explained from the perspective of religious self-consciousness and the crisis of cultural and national values that have been historically developed in traditional society. Within the second approach, the determination of suicidal terrorism is due to social protest against an unfair system of social organization and established social relations.

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1 Introduction

Terrorism, being a complex phenomenon, has historically evolved, which leads to the creation of new types of terrorist activities and their extensive spread. The 21st century is characterized by terrorism implemented through the use of suicide bombers as weapons. In the historical context, suicidal terrorism (hereinafter referred to as ST) has been known for a long time [1, 2], however, only since the second half of the 20th century it has become a widely used practice implemented at the international level. The analysis of the literature sources allows defining suicidal terrorism as a violent practice aimed at causing damage to the civilian population and (or) civilian items, as well as state bodies, institutions, and international organizations with the aim of intimidating and influencing official authorities, accompanied by a conscious refusal of the performer to save his/her life [3-5].

2 Results

The probability of a fatal outcome allows distinguishing the classic suicidal terrorism, in which the performer, realizing the nature of the actions performed and the consequences, commits a terrorist act, with a fatal outcome of the performer. This requires special motivation and is expressed in the terrorists undermining themselves through the use of the so-called “Shaheed belt”. Secondly, a high probability of suicidal terrorism, which means that the terrorist act is committed by the perpetrators without suicide, however, further events suggest a high probability of their destruction. The terrorist when implementing the terrorist act is aware of the likelihood of its elimination, and the lack of measures of cover and withdrawal. There is no self-destruction as such, but there is a suicide.

The analysis of suicidal terrorism in the 21st century reveals that the rates of geographical and quantitative distribution are growing: (from 1982 to 2016, 5292 suicidal terrorist acts were committed (52966 deaths, 132423 victims) [6] (Figure 1).

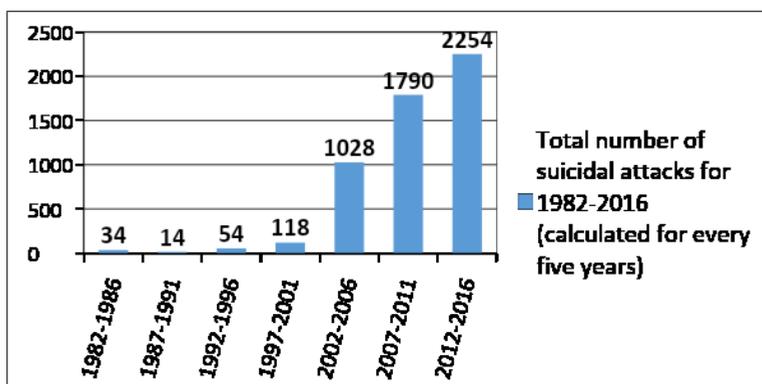


Fig. 1. Dynamics of suicidal attacks.

From 1982 to 2001, in the practice of terrorist activities, suicidal terrorist acts were insignificant: only 220 acts resulted in 5,927 murders and 18,344 injuries to health. The period of 2002-2016 is characterized by intensification, which led to an increase in victims – 5072 (47039 deaths). The geography of terrorist acts changes: from 1982 to 2001, the

majority were committed in Sri Lanka (71), Lebanon (42), Israel (15), Turkey (12), Russia (9); in 2001-2016 in Iraq (2152), Afghanistan (1145), Pakistan (515), Syria (259). The number of terrorist acts is also growing in the countries of the first group: in Russia over the past 16 years – 79, Israel – 99.

The tactics of suicidal terrorism changes: terrorist organizations are focused on new ways of committing terrorist acts – in a generally dangerous way (in 1982-2001, car bombings with explosives – 39.7%; the use of suicide belts – 39.7%; in 2002-2016, 56.4% and 36.5% of all terrorist act during the reporting period). There is a new way of conducting suicidal terrorist acts – aircraft against civilian items, characterized by incredible destructive consequences (2978 people killed and more than 6,300 wounded in 4 terrorist acts).

There is a decrease in the rate of damage caused by suicidal terrorism using vehicles: from 21.2 (1982-2001) to 8.9 (2002-2016). During both periods, there is a multiple increase in their number (83 in 1982-2001, 2781 in 2002-2016), which is illustrated by two patterns: automobile terrorist acts are performed more often, however, a decrease in the coefficient of causing harm indicates a decrease in their destructive effect.

The change in the commission of suicidal terrorist acts with the help of suicide belts shall be mentioned. In 1982-2001, 81 terrorist acts were committed, 634 people were killed and 2,538 injured. The specific harm rate is 7.6. There is a significant increase in the number of such terrorist acts in 2002-2016 (1797 terrorist acts: 18,775 killed, 43,307 injured), which is 2218% (Fig. 2).

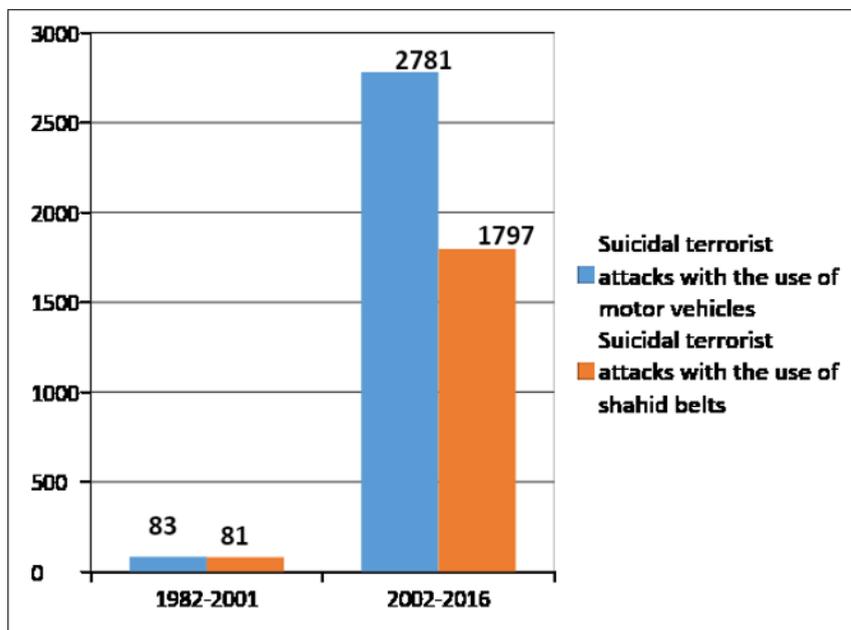


Fig. 2. Changing suicidal terrorism tactics.

The gender differentiation of suicidal terrorism shall be characterized: from 1985 to 2018, more than 300 suicidal attacks involving women were committed (3,071 deaths); terrorist acts committed by men took 55,216 lives. Most of the suicidal terrorist acts with the participation of women fall on such terrorist structures as Boko Haram (48%), Chechen terrorist groups (16%), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (6%), more than 30% of the total number of suicide bombers falls on Cameroon, Nigeria, and Russia [7].

3 Discussion

Not all terrorist organizations in the 21st century implement suicidal terrorism. The analysis of the terrorist acts in 2014 (32685) in relation to the suicidal reveals that they do not exceed 1.8% of the total number (598 in 2014) [8]. The activity of 117 most dangerous terrorist organizations forming the international terrorist international was studied by the method of continuous analysis, only 11 on a permanent and systematic basis use ST [6].

ST is popular among terrorist organizations for a number of reasons. Training a suicide bomber is relatively inexpensive (\$150-2000) with colossal destructive consequences (changes in the exchange rate of the national currency, undermining the authority of the state bodies, tension in society). Historically, the practice of suicidal terrorism is not an absolutely effective means of influencing the policy of foreign states, but it has a significant impact on the military presence of foreign contingents, leading to the adoption of additional security measures of the armed forces stationed abroad and additional financing of foreign campaigns, and can act as propaganda [9].

ST also generates socio-psychological causes. ST is explained from the perspective of religious self-consciousness and the crisis of cultural and national values that have historically developed in traditional society: antagonistic relations arise in intercultural interaction, where traditional values of the Islamic world collide with “Western civilization”, the intervention of the latter generates a crisis of cultural identity [10]. From the psychological perspective, the motives of suicide bombers cover certain fears, desires, phobias that arise in connection with a certain understanding of religious, philosophical, esoteric values that determine the commission of TA. The religious factor of suicidal terrorism has been expressed in programming the actor of suicidal terrorist activity in order to suppress the self-preservation instinct in him/her and develop the desire for “spiritual purification” through heroic suicide. Understanding a better life devalues the value of one’s life and creates a disdainful attitude towards other people. It is always wrong to explain aggressive suicide by religious beliefs: in Islam and Christianity, suicide is categorically denied, perceived as a sin; Hinduism and Shintoism, on the contrary, allow it under certain conditions [11]. Religion itself is not a factor that determines the development of suicidal terrorism, it is better to consider the level of religiosity of the population in the country. Scientists do not confirm the presumption that in societies with a high level of religious consciousness, people commit more suicides, including terroristic, than in countries with a predominance of secular morality [12, 13]. The religious factor in the prevention of suicide is not explained by religion and the state of piety, but by the involvement of a person to a certain religious community that cultivates religious dogmas as imperative requirements (see the theory of Durkheim [14]). However, in terms of the above, it is believed that not all religious teachings of *a priory* provide orientation towards the preservation of human life as a special value. On the contrary, studies of suicidal terrorism prove that religious communities can form intentions for suicidal actions approved by representatives of such associations [15], for example, suicides in destructive sects are repeated.

It should be recognized that the connection between religion and suicidal terrorist acts is not always supported by science and statistics. Scientists note that from 1981 to 2010, the number of suicidal terrorist acts in 35 countries of the world was 2,233; while more than 800 of them (36 %) were committed for religious reasons [16]. It is indicated that suicidal terrorist acts are often committed in order to prevent possible exit from suicidal sects and to punish the guilty [17], or for other reasons [18, 19].

Consequently, the second approach is revealed in the explanation of suicidal terrorism, in which there is a social protest against an unfair system of social organization and established social relations in order to change the existing system of distribution of public goods.

Both approaches have common characteristics. Suicidal terrorist practice becomes possible provided there is a special contingent ready to commit suicide for terrorist purposes. The training procedure includes a number of actions aimed at finding and recruiting candidates and psychological treatment in order to incite them to commit terrorist acts through self-sacrifice. The main emphasis in the selection and recruitment is put on special individuals (those with psychological injuries, relatives of previously destroyed militants, women with an unsettled fate, etc.) [20].

4 Conclusion

There should be highlighted the similarity of the socio-psychological characteristics of suicide bombers: a relatively high level of education, material well-being, and young age. It is mentioned that educated young people have strong altruistic feelings that cause more determined participation in the terrorist acts for the insurance of the public good of future generations [21-23]. Others identify many negative effects of getting an education in terms of the tendency to suicidal terrorist acts (a change in the level of loyalty in the light of obtaining a different value system [24-26].

It is believed that suicidal terrorism with a pronounced progression becomes the most dangerous form of political violence carried out by terrorist organizations in the context of a crisis of national and cultural identity, geopolitical confrontations, and economic processes. The destructive pragmatism of suicidal terrorism is to minimize the costs of preparing terrorist acts while increasing the negative consequences of their commission, manifested in political, economic, and social shocks. Considering the effectiveness of modern suicidal terrorism, it is fair to assume that in the near future and in the long term, this practice of political violence will increase as the terroristic activity increases in general.

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