

## THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF TERRORISM DURING COVID-19

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**Abstract:** *The statement that there is no single definition for such a monster, terrorist organization called terrorism sounds not only as a cliché, but also as an alibi for not engaging in certain spheres of exploration and penetration into the essence of this phenomenon. Staying on the surface, do not bother and do not try to delve into the depths of terrorism, means not knowing the complexity of matter, and therefore making the wrong conclusions at the root of a particular phenomenon. That is why the new challenges that appeared, terrorism applies them in its own way, and that is why number of questions are being asked about how terrorist organizations behaved during the time of COVID 19*

*COVID-19 virus or biological weapon? Is it terrorist act or selective killer? What is behind this new treat? These and much more questions go through our heads when we hear for this new invisible thing, called SARS-CoV-2 virus and COVID-19 disease. It seems everything vanished when COVID-19 pandemic started this January 2020. Terrorism and other threats just went away. Many people even did not realize that it happened so.*

*Many governments, governmental and non-governmental organizations fighting global terrorism and at the forefront of all the world's media houses, have suddenly disappeared from public life.*

**Key words:** *terrorism, COVID-19, treat, control*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Looking back at the acts we should leave to future generations, we simply realize that the progress and development of humanity has had, and has, a high cost. Disrespecting nature and its laws, man endangered his survival on the planet, or more precisely, endangered the planet itself. Sometimes, nature remind us of the power it possesses and strikes hard enough to be able to take on the scale of a catastrophe, but apart from such a force, it is no less important than the artificially evoked one that descends from that same man who seeks more, further,

and who does not look before him and what he treads on. The price for the latter is the suffocation in greed, which puts those same people on the opposite side to be feared.

„The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020 arguably created the greatest global security challenge since 1945. Faced with this unanticipated threat, scholars and practitioners from the security and counterterrorism fields have struggled to understand and assess the impact of the pandemic on global and domestic terrorism“(<https://www.cranfield.ac.uk/press/news-2020>).

Namely, without the influence of nature, man has created many conditions for the emergence of artificial, caused disasters, among which is one such as terrorism. The development of technology, which is not always or has not always been so safe and secure, has a continuing negative impact on people, even if the technological processes take place in the intended course. By deliberate human action occurs the event of unexpected or unpredictable consequences in these processes where the end result can be a different one or more human victim. What we are talking about here is the victim of terrorism, caused in a crazy way without any meaning, viewed from a peaceful human side and without any need.

The pandemic has not only exposed social inequities and structural challenges but also provided an avenue for those inequities and challenges to be exploited by terrorists and their affiliates. The report concludes that the counter-terrorism community should seek to address the threats of terrorism and violent extremism in a post-pandemic world based on the principles of cooperation, shared responsibility, and enhanced multilateralism. Existing policies and measures should therefore be adapted in order to ensure an adequate response to evolving challenges (<https://undocs.org/S/2020>). CTED will continue to assess and analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the evolving terrorist threat, counter-terrorism responses, and other emerging issues and challenges, through engagement and consultations with its partners.

## **2. CHALLENGES OF THE PANDEMIC TO TERRORIST THREATS**

For unusual reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic has been reduced to focus just on intelligence and the fight against terrorist threats, including less prevention of violent extremism and radicalization. In addition, terrorist organizations have not made or have been heard (without statements) since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Does a pandemic potentially change the strategy and mindset of a terrorist organization or terrorist personality?

A new report authored by Pool Re and Cranfield University's Andrew Silke, Professor of Terrorism, Risk and Resilience, reveals how the COVID-19 pandemic is already having a significant impact on terrorism around the world ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_terrorist\\_incidents\\_in\\_2019](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_terrorist_incidents_in_2019)).

The report, „COVID-19 and terrorism: assessing the short-and long-term impact“ reveals:

- There is a mixed picture on the level of attacks in the short-term – lockdown measures will tend to inhibit attacks but terrorist propaganda calling for attacks (while authorities are distracted, etc.) 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 government opponents distracted by the pandemic and the opportunity this presents for attacks.
- There is a significant current increase in online extremist activity, raising the risk of increasing short-to-medium term radicalization.

- 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 world.

In COVID's shadow, global terrorism goes quiet. But we have seen this before, and should be wary. Every news is obsessed with COVID-19 pandemic information. As we have seen no extra news about global security or counter terrorism measurements.

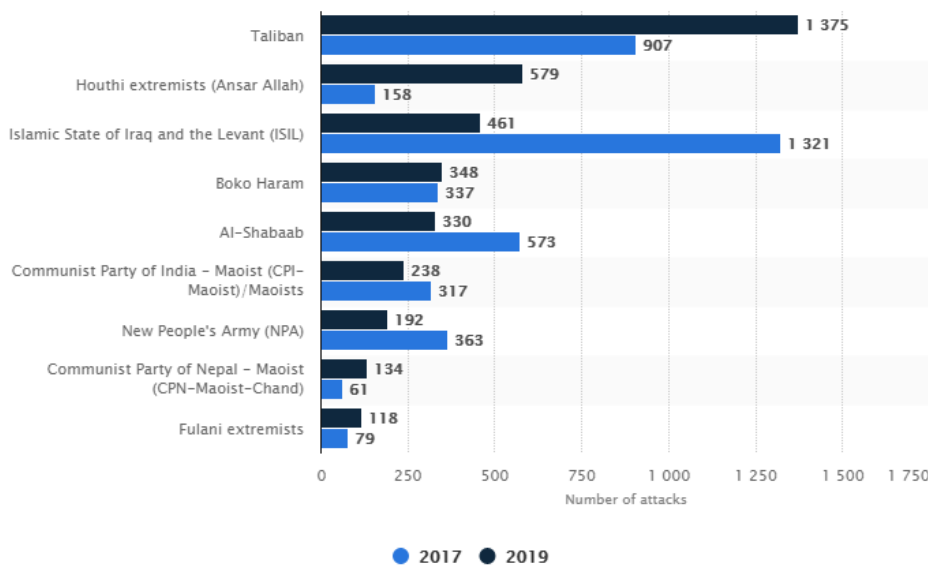
In this pandemic time, we can see good news about terrorism as well. The curve of international terrorist attacks has been flattened. This year, till now, we experienced "just" 26 terrorist attacks all over the World. In comparison with the year 2019, when 73 attacks occurred, it is clearly visible that COVID-19 has great impact to the global terrorism also (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020>).

But we have seen that before. The attacks of 11 September 2001 were followed by a wave of attacks around the World. For example, Bali in October 2002. Casablanca, Istanbul, Jakarta and Riyadh in 2003. Then we saw attack in Madrid in March 2004, followed by Khobar in May and London in July 2005 and Bali in October. At this point I did not mention many other attacks in the Middle East and West Asia.

Since 2005 al-Qaeda has been prevented from carrying out major attacks in western capitals, with the exception of the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris in January 2015.

As we can conclude, here terrorist attacks do not stop. Many terrorist groups tried to destroy major capitols, countries, innocent lives and they tried to make great propaganda for them. Do not forget that even Europe has registered 57 very dangerous individuals and 47 groups or entities inside the EU (data from 2019) (<https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020>).

Just for clearer picture, see below (figure 1) all kind of terrorist attacks in comparison of 2017 and 2019:



**Figure 1.** Most active perpetrator groups worldwide in 2019, based on number of attacks  
*Source: (www.statista.com)*

If we closely look at one very big terrorist attack, like about the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka last year, it is very obvious that we can fail to identify new threat, because we have focus on the other issue. On Easter Sunday (21 April 2019), suicide bombers killed at least 253 people and injured some 500 at churches and top-end hotels across Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan authorities said they believed a little-known local militant Islamist group known as National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ) was to blame. The government admitted a "major intelligence lapse" after it was revealed that an Indian intelligence warning from the beginning of the month about planned attacks was not properly shared by the authorities. Security services had been monitoring the NTJ (National Thowheeth Jama'ath – National Monotheism Organization), but the prime minister and the cabinet were not warned, ministers said.

Most governments invested huge sums in antiterrorism organizations after 9/11, but as history shows, humans find new way of self-destructing. The entire World has faced a persistent threat from terrorism mostly over the past decade, with recent attacks focusing on busy public spaces.

### **3. TERRORIST THREATS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The pandemic has allowed terrorist recruiters and extremists to exploit financial, health and personal concerns opportunistically to advance their own movement and ideology all while using propaganda to reinforce power and influence, and fuel division to further a loss of trust in governance and state authority. Violent extremists have continued to utilize low-tech, low-cost tactics such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), shooting attacks and vehicle ramming that often defy detection and disruption

Domestic threat is also in the States. The COVID-19 (<https://www.controlrisks.com/riskmap>) started new tensions. When people must stay at home it seems like very abusive situation. It is the reason why people raised against the government. As a rule, the wrong rhetoric of the local government has very negative consequences. Recall that the U.S. government made fun of people and the virus. But when the matter got worse and people started dying, however, it was a problem as the population resisted by force. People became violent as the measures began to intensify. Any ban leads to rebellion. In the case of the US, however, the problem is much bigger, as there are extremely violent and brutal minority groups that in no way follow the security authorities (Simcox, 2020). These violent groups can be considered terrorist organizations because of the threat they pose to society. These groups are very well organized and are willing to act in accordance with their plan and understanding of it.

The Chicago Police Department said that domestic-violence-related calls increased 12 percent during a period from the start of the year through mid-April, compared with the same time period in 2019. In other cities, including Los Angeles and New York, the police have seen a drop in calls, but the authorities have said they believed that victims were in such close quarters with their abusers that they were unable to call the police which was published in daily newspaper New York Times (Ackerman, Peterson, 2020)

Anyway COVID-19 pandemic had reduced opportunities for terrorism. The lockdown had seen all over the World high streets and public spaces almost deserted, with most non-essential businesses forced to close, lowering the number of potential terrorist targets.

While lockdown is getting relaxed, danger for terrorist attack rises. People come out to public spaces again, which is very interesting for terrorists. They access more victims at the short period of time. Most of countries have recovery strategy, but they forgot on security. Recovery strategies mention redesigning public spaces to make them "secure", but only focus on the risk of the COVID-19 virus itself. Security also needs to take into consideration the threat posed by terrorism.

Rather than relying on improvised explosive devices or firearms, recent terror attacks have often been “low-tech”, requiring very little planning and featuring weapons that are easily accessible. For example, vehicles were used as weapons by driving them into crowded spaces in attacks in London, Barcelona, Berlin and Nice over the past few years. Media and social networks also negatively affected the spread of the COVID pandemic, and terrorist organizations used this to strengthen their ranks and what can be expected of their actions.

The challenges of disrupting terrorist plots involving vehicles are considerable. Vehicles are common, inexpensive to obtain and easy to maneuver towards crowds. This attack method is likely to pose the greatest threat during the COVID-19 recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the deepest global recession in eighty years and the global economy is expected to lose \$8.5 trillion in output over the next two years. The economic fallout will be especially devastating to countries in the developing world and those dependent on oil revenue - characteristics of many Western counterterrorism partners in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>). Developing economies are already saddled with fiscal deficits and high levels of public debt, while oil-producing states have suffered a collapse of oil demand and prices. (Berisa, 2019)

Most developed countries have already severely reduced the budget for counter-terrorism operations and redirected money to tackle the so-called COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, direct medical costs treating patients infected with COVID-19 virus and preventing disease reached millions of dollars or euros and these numbers are still rising. This means that counter-terrorism budgets cannot get enough money and proper military trainings are already declining. The sum of all these effects will result in a big drop down of counter-terrorism capabilities, which will allow terrorists to spread their influence and cause more actions. The pandemic, however, offers new opportunities for terrorists and poses distinct challenges for the governments that seek to combat them.

While the coronavirus has put the international community in the crosshairs of a crisis like no other since the founding of the United Nations 75 years ago, António Guterres noted that “like the virus, terrorism does not respect national borders” (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020>).

Regardless of the borders, terrorism today skillfully adapts to the current conditions, so that it follows trends, and it is precisely the pandemic that uses it to develop its new action strategies. (Berisa, 2019)

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

„It affects all nations and can only be defeated collectively”, he said, opening the second annual gathering of UN and international experts known as Counter-Terrorism Week, held virtually this year, with a call to “harness the power of multilateralism to find practical solutions”.

We are just at the beginning of a new era of terrorism. The international public has barely begun to get used to the new situation. Terrorists also need to get used to it. They need to find new ways and means to expand their influence.

All this gives us an advantage over terrorists. We can prepare for the now known circumstances and anticipate new possible views of terrorist organizations as well as individuals.

Closing the borders and control over the movement of people has for the ordinary people of enormous bad things. To prevent terrorism, as well as other illegal operations and actions, the current situation is more favorable, as the movements are easier to spot.

Many terrorist groups and individual extremists reacted with enthusiasm to the pandemic. Salafi-jihadist and far-right extremists, in particular, claimed that the pandemic vindicated

their very different ideological standpoints and called for attacks while affected states were at their most vulnerable. However, outside of areas already impacted by armed conflict like the Sahel, there has not been a rise in terrorist attacks during the pandemic. Terrorists of all kinds have stepped up their propaganda, hoping to influence anxious people largely confined to their homes by lockdowns and compelled to spend more time on the Internet and social media. However, the extent to which terrorists have successfully attracted new converts to their cause or active recruits during the crisis still remains uncertain. The pandemic has also raised the specter of bio-terrorism, as there were fears that terrorists might try to use COVID –19 as a biological weapon. Early in the crisis, some extremists used the internet to encourage infected individuals to spread the virus in public places, but there is little evidence of such activities being carried out. As regards more sophisticated attacks, some terrorist groups in the past have aspired to employ bio-terrorism, but the necessary weapons have always proved too difficult for terrorists to successfully develop or deliver.

In any case, we must not neglect the fact that terrorism is a living organism, like a virus, and is spreading in its own way. Terrorism knows no boundaries or limits. Live on and expand.

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