

Contemporary terrorist threats in the Czech Republic

Aleksander Ksawery Olech

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SUMMARY

1. Terrorism has been evolving and taking different forms since the beginning of the XXI century. It is closely related to the geopolitical situation in the world. The development of research of safety indicates evidently that terrorism currently constitutes one of the biggest threats to the security of the world. For this reason, the analysis of terrorist threats in Central European countries, including the Czech Republic, is indispensable.

2. In recent years, Western European countries are struggling with domestic terrorism which has led to destabilization of national integrity and jeopardised social security. This situation is also important for neighbouring countries and international organisations to which they belong, such as the European Union or NATO. Data collected between 2014 and 2019 shows that the Czech Republic has improved its terrorist threat combating system and it is constantly reducing the impact of threats to the country.

3. Terrorism as a phenomenon, and at the same time a kind of weapon for the increasing number of its proponents, needs to be acknowledged immediately. Its complexity imposes determining ways of countervailing it in the future. The presented analysis is a sort of study on cases in the context of threats with the characteristic of terrorism in the Czech Republic.

The following analysis was prepared during research in the Czech Republic. The author conducted a query under the aegis of The Institute of International Relations Prague (Ústav mezinárodních vztahů). The following very extensive considerations are the only ones in English that cover such a wide spectrum of issues of terrorist threats in the Czech Republic.

Introduction

Terrorism as a social phenomenon affects directly or indirectly the life of individuals, nations and countries. It is marked by dynamics connected with political and technological development and human knowledge. Due to these factors, the possibilities of accessing means that endanger or negatively influence democratic order have been extended. The primary criterion of the definition of terrorism is considering it a crime[1]. This phenomenon is continuously evolving, so its definitions cannot stay static[2] either.

The analysis of terrorism and actions taken within its framework are associated with an attempt to describe phrases and terms relating to it. Interpreting this term, owing to numerous modifications, extensions, and adjustments to national strategies, is necessary in order to determine subjects that will be responsible for combating terrorism. A distinction between terror and terrorism is the foundation of significant research[3]. The first term means domination of a weaker subject by a stronger one, manifesting itself as dictatorship, totalitarianism, tyranny, regime, despotism. Terrorism, on the other hand (in original definitions), is aggression, violence, an attack of a weaker upon a stronger in order to overthrow their power, trigger certain activities, attract attention to a problem or demonstrate strength. It is currently often associated with attacks on the grounds of religion (especially connected with Islam), which affect directly citizens and structures of a certain country. The terrorist organisations and groups whose motives and ideas are justified by faith, political, economic, social, national and even ecological purposes are held responsible[4].

The results of the analysis presented below are aimed at putting terrorist threats emerging within the territory of the Czech Republic in the last 5 years in a broad perspective. Mainly the threats that in their form, idea, area and characteristics may be or are considered terrorist have been taken into consideration. Therefore, this analysis should be treated as a case study. Due to the absence of a consistent, international definition of terrorism, which would be actively used, the author draws on a general description of this phenomenon in European Union countries. Within this conducted research the course of evolution of contemporary terrorist threats in the Czech Republic has also been depicted.

Importantly, terrorism does not occur within the territory of the Czech Republic, but the threat of its expansion from abroad still exists. That is why it is crucial to have a closer look at this phenomenon and analyse it once again. It is pivotal because of the dynamism of transitions in the geopolitical

and safety environment as well as an important position of the Czech Republic in Central Europe. It should be noted that the Czech Republic is a member of, among others, the European Union, NATO, OECD, OSCE, the Council of Europe and the Visegrad Group (V4).

Probable tendencies of these changes have also been presented in the study. Main factors that have been taken into consideration are contemporarily occurring threats, the situation in the Schengen zone and the feasible increase of terrorist threats in the Middle East and Africa, all of which can influence Central European countries negatively. It can be caused by intensified migration, radicalisation of citizens from European countries and escalation of the anti-Muslim, xenophobic and extreme right frame of mind. A profound overview of acquired materials and a multi-phase query made it possible to assess future trends in national security of the Czech Republic.

The analysis of terrorist threats in the Czech Republic in the between 2018 and 2019

In 2018, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defined terrorism as a method of coercion that utilizes or threatens to utilize violence in order to spread fear and thereby attain political or ideological goals[5].

The Ministry of the Interior in the Czech Republic currently classifies terrorist threats on the grounds of four motives of offenders:

1. Islamic radicalism,
2. political extremism,
3. terrorists acting alone ('lone wolves'),
4. foreign combatants.

Notwithstanding, according to the assessment of contemporary threats for the Czech Republic, based on the National Security Audit, the attacks which should be mainly pointed out are: attacks attempted by independent actors (medium risk) and foreign combatants (medium risk)[6]. There is a medium risk that terrorists may use the Czech Republic to obtain or pass financial resources[7].

In the studies on terrorism one should take into account the data of the Australian Institute for Economics and Peace (AIEP), which publishes *THE GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX – MEASURING THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM* report every year. It compares terrorist tendencies changing in time and geography, methods of an attack, the level of engagement of national and international terrorist organisations and also familiarises the economic and political context. The report contains a number of socio-

economic indicators that determine key factors connected with the functioning of terrorism and social safety as well. As the data gathered in studies from the years 2014-2019 show, the Czech Republic has improved its system for combatting terrorism and has been reducing the impact of threats on the well-being of the country.

YEAR 2014

In 2014, the Czech Republic was ranked at the 85th position in the world on the grounds of the impact of terrorism on the situation in the country by the Institute for Economics and Peace. According to IEP, at the turn of 2013 and 2014 1 terrorist attack (in which 1 person died) was recorded[8]. It could be related to an accident in which a Palestinian diplomat died. Some media wrote originally that it had been a terrorist attack. A Palestinian diplomat, Jamal al-Jamal, died, killed by the explosion of the security system of a safe[9]. Nevertheless, Czech service identified this incident as an unfortunate accident, not as a terrorist attack[10]. It should be indicated that in the IEP report from 2014, the Czech Republic was ranked just behind Germany but above Belgium and the Netherlands. It could have been affected by the arrest of 5 people in the Czech Republic, including one jihadist who was a Bosnia citizen and was travelling from Prague to Istanbul with fake documents. The rest of the detainees were described as left-wing anarchists[11]. Furthermore, 5 Czech soldiers died in a suicidal bombing nearby Bagram Air Base in eastern Afghanistan. The attack happened in the morning, while soldiers were conducting a routine patrol beside the air base[12].

YEAR 2015

One year later, in the same ranking, the Czech Republic was ranked at the 68th position in the world and 14th in Europe. The IEP report stated that there had been 3 attacks with the characteristic of terrorism, in which 1 person died[13]. The President of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, made a statement in January, on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, at the 'Let My People Live!' conference. He was talking about the threat of radical Islamists, comparing it to a superholocaust[14]. Then, in August 2015, he pointed out that attention should be paid to incoming migrants who could have been sent by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria as dormant terrorist cells. Zeman added that the European Union should protect its external borders better and if that failed, the Czech Republic would focus on detaining migrants on the border and they would be sent back then[15]. Security service in their reports noted the use of the Czech Republic as a transit country between Middle East and Western Europe. It was indicated that this route had been

mainly used by Islamic radicals[16]. Hence the potential danger of terrorist attacks in the Czech Republic, connected with the activity of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The Czech Republic was among 15 EU member states in which people suspected of Islamic terrorism had been arrested. In total, terrorists attacked at least once in 92 countries in 2015. More than 55 percent of those activities were centred in the five most dangerous regions i.e. in Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria.

YEAR 2016

In the following year, the Czech Republic was placed on a lower position in the IEP ranking, namely, the 71st place in the world (although above incl. Venezuela, Brazil, Madagascar, Spain and Belgium)[17]. Moreover, the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky) pointed out terrorist threats in 2015 and 2016. Above all, the terrorist attacks that had happened in Europe were taken into consideration. The danger of an assassination in the territory of the Czech Republic emerged, therefore actions were taken and measures aimed at decreasing the chance of the occurrence of similar attacks and minimising their potential impact on the state of security in the country were imposed[18]. In 2016, attention was paid to dangers resulting from migration and changes in the society. It could have been connected with the radicalisation of the society, which was manifested by both emerging Islamophobic, anti-migrant groups and incitement to hatred[19]. It can lead to social exclusion and increase the risk of a terrorist attack from both left wing and right-wing parties.

One of the incidents, which was menace and was international in nature, was an attempt of assassination on Angela Merkel during her visit in Prague in August 2016[20]. Czech police detained a man who was not armed, but the items found in his car could have been potentially used as weapon. He was trying to join up with the motorcade during the visit of the German chancellor in the capital of Spain. The police got in his way and had to threaten to use violence[21].

According to the Europol report *TESAT – EUROPEAN UNION, TERRORISM SITUATION AND TREND REPORT 2017*, one person suspected of jihadism and one of left wing views were arrested in the Czech Republic in 2016. What is significant, in neighbouring Austria, as many as 34 people were detained, 30 of whom were jihadists and four separatists[22]. There were no preparations to a terrorist attack in the Czech Republic in 2016. The only crime that may be considered Islamic terrorism, was committed by a twenty-year-old man from the Pilsen region. Jan Silovsky (a Czech citizen) flew to Turkey in order to get to Syria and join the Islamic State of

Iraq and Syria in February 2016. He was detained by Turkish authorities and sent back to the Czech Republic, where he pleaded guilty. He was preparing his actions on his own, without the cooperation of another person[23]. In compliance with the indictment from December 2016, He was sentenced to six years in prison for promoting terrorism, but he was facing 12 years. The court rejected his petition for early release in early October 2019[24].

The Financial Analytical Unit (Finanční analytický úřad – FAÚ), under the Ministry of Finance, operating as the FIU, received in total 2 948 notifications of suspicious transactions in 2016 (in 2015, there were 2,963 such notifications). In some cases, part of funds was taken over in relation to preventing money laundering and financing terrorism. The total amount of funds preserved by FAÚ amounted to 3,836 million Czech korunas[25]. A Moroccan citizen – Mourad T. – was detained in Rybnik in 2016. He was a close associate of Abdelhamid Abaaouda, a member of ISIS, who was responsible for organising terrorist attacks in France in 2015. It was found in the course of proceedings that Mourad T. was in Poland and within other European Union member states such as Austria, Greece and Hungary as well as in Serbia and Turkey since December 2014 to September 2016. He belonged to an international terrorist organisation together with other people. According to the indictment, the Moroccan citizen was supposed to review routes possible to use, check if immigrants are controlled and how detailed these controls are in various countries. Thereafter, he passed information to other terrorists who travelled around Europe. Mourad T. was to come to Poland from the Czech Republic. The Moroccan was sentenced to 3.5 years of imprisonment for belonging to ISIS and three months for minor offences. According to information obtained in the course of the investigation, he had not been planning a terrorist attack in Poland or the Czech Republic.

YEAR 2017

In 2017, experts from the Institute for Economics and Peace drew attention to the significant improvement of the situation in the Czech Republic, especially when it comes to stop the threats with the characteristic of terrorism. In the report from that year, the republic takes 83rd place in the world[26].

Among incidents with the characteristic of terrorism, the behaviour of a 71-year-old Czech citizen, Jaromir Balda, deserves special attention. He cut down two trees by the train tracks, causing two accidents in June 2017[27]. The trains struck dams at the speed of 74 and 67 kilometres per hour. Nobody was wounded. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the

perpetrator dropped leaflets that said 'Allah Akbar' on them on the scene. This way he wanted the Muslim society in the Czech Republic to be accused of the incident. According to the judgement of the Supreme Court from 2019, J. Balda carried out a terrorist attack (he is the first person sentenced for a terrorist attack in the Czech Republic). The convict was explaining that he was afraid of attacks similar to those that had happened in France and Germany.

In 2017, Czech services contributing to security of the country continued the analysis of the impact of threats from jihadists and people and groups that could have radicalised. Extremist ideologies that could influence the society of the Czech Republic and at the same time prompt a terrorist attack, as it had happened in France or Belgium, were taken into consideration. The main lines of investigation concerned Islamophobia, anti-Muslim activity and rhetoric related to tensions around recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Czech police were investigating a few people who could have supported terrorist groups abroad financially or logistically. Some people were engaged in activities in Iraq and Syria. A few people suspected of organising terrorist trainings, providing terrorists with health care or other material support were questioned. Czech services also obtained information about the departure of two Czechs to Syria. For the first time there were Czech citizens among foreign combatants, this way increasing the risk of supporting criminals. Nevertheless, when it comes to internal threats, the Czech Muslim community was defined as presenting no risk and having limited impact on dangers with the characteristic of terrorism[28].

On 19 April 2017, the government approved the Soft Target Protection Concept for the years 2017–2020 (Koncept ochrany měkkých cílů pro roky 2017–2020), based on the anti-terrorism package approved on 31 August 2016, which includes methods and means decreasing the risk of a potential terrorist attack. The aim of this operation was to create the national system of soft targets protection, which would enable flexible, comprehensive and fast reaction to the threats of attacks. It is caused by both the situation abroad and in the Czech Republic itself[29]. It is worth mentioning that terrorism was defined in the Czech Republic by the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (CTHH, Centrum proti terorismu a hybridním hrozbám) as equivalent to hybrid threats.

The Centre began operating in the Ministry of the Interior on 1 January 2017. It is a specialised, analytical unit, whose actions are concentrated on threats (especially the hybrid ones) which are subject to the analysis within the scope of competencies of the Ministry of the Interior. The main task of the CTHH is monitoring threats directly connected with internal security of

the country. The activity of this unit consists in analysing threats and potential incidents related to terrorism, 'soft targets' attacks, migration, extremism, mass events, various criminal activities as well as evaluating disinformation campaigns and other signs of unfamiliar influences. While monitoring, the centre assesses detected problems and presents proposals for substantive and legislative solutions, which would be implemented if necessary. It is worth mentioning that it is the Ministry of Defense that is responsible for combating hybrid threats and terrorism.

In September 2017, an annual meeting of Czech and Slovak government was held in Moravia, in a town called Lednice. Current issues related to cooperation, border surveillance, migration crisis and combating terrorism were discussed. In November 2017, the Czech Minister of the Interior visited Slovakia in order to discuss future bilateral cooperation.

In 2017, Finanční analytický úřad received 3,524 notifications of suspicious transactions. Some of them concerned financing terrorism. The unit preserved in total 2,146 mln Czech korunas. It was also the first year in which FAÚ was operating as an independent authority[30].

YEAR 2018

The situation with regard to the impact of terrorism on the state of security in the Czech Republic improved again in 2018. The country from Central Europe was ranked as 87th in the world. It gained 3 places compared to the previous year and 16 to 2015[31].

Finanční analytický úřad focused on combating financing terrorism. Cooperation with all interested parties at national and international level intensified. The organisation received 2,362 petitions regarding people suspected of violating tax and customs regulations or in connection with financing terrorism. The work of FAÚ was evaluated positively by the MONEYVAL Committee (Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures)[32].

In March 2018, Czech police hosted an important, international Interpol NEXUS conference in Prague. Discussing the improvement of safety in the world and in Europe was a priority during this event. The meeting focused on threats from foreign combatants and terrorist attacks carried out by 'lone wolves' or as a result of the growth of *HOME GROWN TERRORISM*. It is a kind of terrorism aimed at attacking European culture and killing its citizens. The people who usually become terrorists are brought up in European culture but they are at the same time orthodox Islam believers. They are strongly radicalised[33] and carry out attacks within the country

of which they have been citizens since birth[34]. An attack from 23 March 2018 in Carcassonne, in the south of France, when a terrorist killed four people and five were seriously wounded can be example of such activities[35]. He had a French citizenship and lived there permanently[36]. This type of terrorism is also defined as a sociological curiosity because religion dominates rules inculcated by the country[37]. The accusation of terrorism of a former Prague imam, Samer Shehadeh, his brother Omar and his sister-in-law Fatima (previously Kristyna Hudkova) is worth mentioning. Both brothers come from Palestine. Samer had been previously studying Islam in Saudi Arabia. In early November 2018, Czech police had the former imam in custody because of his terrorist activities and cooperation with the Jabhat Fatah al-Sham organisation, at the time Al-Nusra Front (in 2016, the leader of the group, Abu Muhammad al-Golani proclaimed formal separation from Al-Kaida and the change of the name of the group from Jabhat al-Nusra into Jabhat Fateh al-Sham[38]). According to the prosecution, Samer Shehadeh helped his brother get to Syria in 2016, forwarding contacts to other terrorists, arranging details of the journey and passing money to take part in the civil war and the conflict with the Syrian government. He then enabled Omar to marry Kristina Hudkova online and later helped her join her husband in Syria. The accused pleaded guilty, although he did not consider his actions to be a crime or illegal. The former imam did not acknowledge Jabhat Fateh al-Sham as a terrorist organisation. He also claims that he does not accept any decisions made by Czech courts since they are not under the jurisdiction of the Islamic Sharia law. Samer Shehadeh, who was detained in November 2018 in Jordan, stood trial in the Czech Republic on 7 January 2020. He will answer not only for promoting terrorism but also using money obtained from charity to finance and support terrorist organisations. He is facing 15 years in prison[39]. The other two people accused of terrorism are still wanted. The key fact in this case is that the imam attracted attention to himself by stating openly his radical views and declarations in 2016. He was famous for incl. sending messages to other Islam believers in a closed group via the WhatsApp application.

He exhorted them not to take part in actions against terrorism, especially together with Christians (a demonstration against terrorism was held in Jorge de Podiebrad Square on 10 August 2016; both Muslims and Christians took part in it). The imam was supposed to have been observed by the security service much earlier since his attitude indicated the fact that he was radicalising[40].

It should be added that Samer Shehadeh was questioned also in the case of Dominik Kobulnický. They were both supposed to meet several times, among others, in the mosque at Opletalova Street in Prague. Kobulnický

(taking the name of Abdul Rahman), who is of Slovak origin, was arrested in December 2019. He stored chemicals to manufacture explosives. Movies with the representatives of ISIS were found on his computer and he was promoting online fascination with Islam and symbols of ISIS and the Caucasian Emirate. In mid-November 2019, he was sentenced to 6.5 years of imprisonment for undertaking hazardous actions, not for preparing a terrorist attack. During the trial, the accused confessed to considering a terrorist attack in 2015, its target being a bus station in Presov (Prešov)[41]. It is at the same time the first Slovakian citizen and an Islam believer who was sentenced to prison for activities with the characteristic of terrorism[42].

In 2018, the Ministry of Transport (Ministerstvo dopravy) prepared and then, on 18 January 2019, launched a programme for safety: 'Increasing protection and safety of important transport hubs as possible soft targets – 2019' („Zvýšení ochrany a zabezpečení významných dopravních uzlů jako možných měkkých cílů – 2019”). On 27 June 2019, the Ministry of Transport organised a seminar on the protection of soft targets in transport and threats emerging in 2020[43].

The report of the Ministry of the Interior from 2018 draws attention to the phenomenon of radicalisation, which can lead to serious crimes with violence or terrorist attacks. It's important to supervise continuously the level of radicalisation in the society. Any changes or deviations towards incl. right wing, left wing, separatist or Islamic movements must be immediately supervised. It is a long-term strategy to maintain safety in the country by a constant analysis of emerging threats. The Czech Republic was among 5 European Union countries that arrested people suspected of right wing terrorism in 2018. There were 44 such cases within the whole community, 10 more than the detentions of left wing terrorists. In 2015, there were 11 right wing and 67 left wing terrorists detained in the EU. As can be seen, the activities tendency of particular groupings changed over 3 years[44].

In the same year, the Security Information Service (Bezpečnostní informační služba – BIS) informed that together with foreign partners, a network of hacking servers was detected, monitored and finally closed in the Czech Republic in 2017[45]. They were run by a combatant from Hezbollah, a terrorist organisation. The aim of the terrorist was to attack mobile devices around the world using social media. Hackers got access by installing malware. They had uninterrupted insight into personal details, contacts, photographs, calls, SMS messages, information about the location of the owner of a device as well as the possibility to record sounds surrounding a device.

Police accused a few people of supporting or financing religiously motivated terrorism in 2018. In total, the service detected 179 crimes with the characteristic of extremism and 54 people were convicted[46].

YEAR 2019

GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX indicates a significant improvement of the situation in the Czech Republic in 2019. It was ranked 102nd in the world (behind Denmark and above Azerbaijan) in terms of the impact of terrorism on the security of the country. It is an improvement by as many as 15 positions compared to the previous year[47]. The incident that could have a terroristic character was an armed attack in a hospital in Ostrava. 7 people were killed, 9 were wounded and both police and a special counterterrorist unit were sent to undertake counterterrorist action. The culprit, Ctirad Vitásek, ran away and then committed suicide. Nevertheless, this activity was not considered terrorist since the aggressor had mental problems[48]. The shooting in the Ostrava hospital is the second such dramatic event in the history of the Czech Republic. In February 2015, in the restaurant in Uherský Brod, a man shot 8 people and then took his own life. Possibly, he had mental problems too.

Two citizens of Iraq were detained by the Czech service in Prague. They were suspected of activities with the characteristic of terrorism due to their attack on trains in Germany in 2018. According to information provided by the Ministry of the Interior in Austria, which issued an international arrest warrant, the culprits were supposed to have hung a steel rope on the track between Munich and Nuremberg, destroying trains. They tried to damage another train departing from Berlin afterwards. As reported by the investigators, the suspects had put up the ropes incorrectly and that is why nobody was hurt. A flag of ISIS was found around the scene of the attack[49].

Table 1. The position of the **Czech Republic** according to *GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX* in the years 2014 – 2019, describing performance of the country in the context of terrorism

Year	Position in Europe	Position in the world
2014	17.	85.
2015	13.	68.
2016	12.	71.
2017	15.	83.
2018	16.	87.
2019	20.	102.

Source: own elaboration based on: *IEP, GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX 2019 – MEASURING THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM, SYDNEY 2019. IEP, GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX 2018 – MEASURING THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM, SYDNEY 2018. IEP, GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX 2016 – MEASURING THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM, SYDNEY 2016. IEP, GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX 2014 – MEASURING THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM, SYDNEY 2014.*

Reaction to emerging threats

The Criminal Code (Act No. 40/2009 Coll.) is the main collection of penalties for terrorism. Section 311 defines a terrorist attack as ‘the intention to impair the constitutional system or defence capabilities of the Czech Republic, disrupt or destroy the base political, economic or social structure of the Czech Republic or an international organisation, seriously terrify the population or illegally make the government or another public authority or an international organisation to act, omit or tolerate something’. An offender can be sentenced to imprisonment for 5 to 15 years for incl. public encouragement to terrorist attacks and financial (or other) support of terrorists or groups. For causing grievous bodily harm or death and taking part in activities of a terrorist group one can be sentenced to imprisonment from 12 to 20 years. Preparing a terrorist attack is punishable too [\[50\]](#). The penalty for financing terrorism and supporting members or organisations is mentioned in section 312d, *TERRORISM FINANCING*. This activity is punished by imprisonment from 3 to 12 years and the forfeiture of goods. An offender is sentenced to from 5 to 15 years

if they commit a crime as a member of a terrorist group in the state of emergency or war or if significant damage is caused[\[51\]](#).

An amendment to the Criminal Code, implementing criminal prosecution of financing and supporting terrorism came into force in February 2017. The most important changes included defining a terrorist group, defining financing terrorism as a separate crime and changing the jurisprudence of sanctions for preparing terrorist attacks and helping in their organisation. Other crimes such as: departing the country in order to take terrorist action, recruitment for terrorist organisations, conducting trainings and providing materials for trainings were also taken into account.

Terrorist threats emerging in the country are analysed and then threat levels in force are implemented. The first level is marked in yellow (první stupeň – žlutý trojúhelník), the second – in orange (druhý stupeň – oranžový trojúhelník), and the third (the highest) – in red (třetí stupeň – červený trojúhelník). The state of emergency is implemented by the government at the request of the Minister of the Interior. Currently, the first threat level is in force in the Czech Republic. This level has been maintained since March 2016, when an attack on Zaventem Airport in Brussels was carried out. It results from the situation abroad, the membership of the Czech Republic in the Euro-Atlantic structures and its international activity[\[52\]](#). This level indicates that the terrorist threat within the Czech Republic is not known but it signals that there is a general threat of a possible attack with the characteristic of terrorism[\[53\]](#).

It seems that the Ministry of the Interior is aware of terrorist threats. In studies on terrorism, it was indicated that it is a phenomenon that can in principle endanger every country, including the Czech Republic. The attacks or even attempts of assassinations in the world and in Europe must be a warning for the Czech Republic. It is nowadays one of the biggest challenges in the security environment. That is why global cooperation heading for the elimination of terrorist threats in the EU countries is crucial. Commitment in this area is an important contribution to the increase of security in the Czech Republic. The possibility of carrying out a terrorist attack directly in cyberspace must also be taken into consideration[\[54\]](#).

Security forces in the Czech Republic consider activities carried out by 'lone wolves'[\[55\]](#) as the biggest challenge in the following years since they do not have connections with terrorist organisations and act without leaving a trace. After attacks, terrorists often admit having belonged to one of the organisations or groups identifying with these assassinations, albeit it is not true. According to Esri web service[\[56\]](#), there have been no terrorist attacks in the period of 2016 – 2020 in the Czech Republic[\[57\]](#).

Future threats with the characteristic of terrorism to the Czech Republic

In the future, traditional local extremism may constitute the biggest threat to Czech security. There have been no international attacks within the country so far thanks to the effective security policy. That is why the most direct threat will be related to the increasing society polarization. Some tendencies uniting extreme right in actions, which stress inconsistency of Islam with European values and identify Muslims with terrorists, may be observed. On the other hand, the defuse of anti-immigrant climate while the migration crisis is passing is being noticed. Tensions in domestic relations resulting from the need to identify with a particular movement or party are beginning to emerge. Various views and the way of their expression may lead to clashes among different political parties, religions or ideologies.

It should be pointed out that the situation in the Czech Republic has been changing due to actions taken in neighbouring countries or the ones having influence with the Czech Republic. Extremist groups are undergoing deformation, especially in Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. Neo-Nazi or extreme right groups are emerging in these countries. Although these are isolated cases, they can have a general impact on actions taken by their supporters in the Czech Republic. It seems that the biggest domestic threat are social norms and political views that are getting more and more extreme.

Researchers from the Masaryk University in Brno drew attention to threats with the characteristic of extremism as well. They indicate that the latest impetus to right wing extremism emerged with the migration crisis in 2015. Although there were not many attacks against migrants, the increase of hate speech in the Internet is noticeable. It manifests itself mainly with anti-Islamic attitudes, even though only 20 000 Muslims live in the Czech Republic (according to the last census from 2011– 4000 believers of this religion)[\[58\]](#). The media, which present different images of migrants, believers of particular religions and potential threats, definitely have an impact on this situation[\[59\]](#). Divisions are beginning to emerge, extreme anti-migrant attitudes and conflicts about relations with Russia and China are appearing. Supporters of particular movements are radicalising, which may lead them to take actions with the characteristic of terrorism. Moreover, individual cases of violence may be connected with every kind of extremism (left wing, right wing, Islamic, national, and separatist).

The activity of people staying in the country but dependent on groups functioning in the Middle East also should not be omitted. Salih Muslim, the leader of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) can be an example. He was

detained on a warrant issued by the court in Ankara in 2018 but the Czech court set him free. The republic supported the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) after a demonstration supporting a Kurdish politician in Prague. The Turkish government, which considers both PKK and PYD terrorist organisations, expressed its diplomatic objection to the decision of the Czech Republic[60]. Left wing or extremist views should also be taken into account in future considerations of possible threats with the characteristic of terrorism. Supporting particular fractions from other countries can be performed by manifesting views in the Czech Republic.

Attention should be drawn to the need for protecting the energy sector in European Union member States, especially in the Czech Republic. Oil and gas pipelines, refineries, gas processing plants, oil and gas storage facilities, over ground tanks and petrol stations may be potential terrorists' targets. In its combat against the West, ISIS can take actions that would have a strategic character in the ongoing war with terrorism. What is more, they have capability that allows them to carry out simultaneous attacks, which they proved by the assassinations in the French Republic and Belgium. The European Union should invest more money in protecting energy infrastructure and combating terrorism. In addition, the Czech Republic and other V4 countries should earmark more funds from the preventative budget in order to adequately secure infrastructure and eliminate threats aimed at the energy sector[61].

It is worth considering chemical terrorism threats as well. It is the use of chemicals against humanity and critical infrastructure located in a particular area (territory). The contamination occurs as a result of a sudden release of toxic or other dangerous chemicals into environment, causing a mass threat to life, health, great value property or natural environment[62]. Subway in Prague could be such a target.[63]

Czech security specialists are endeavouring emerging threats and possible scenarios of a terrorist attack in the Czech Republic. An appropriate reaction to an assassination and thereby the development of some mechanisms that civilians should use is necessary in the contemporary world. It is important to focus on conditions in which people during the attack will be put and how to react appropriately[64].

A scenario that terrorists will want to take revenge for military operations of soldiers from the Czech Republic cannot be ruled out. From all the Visegrad Group countries, the Czech Republic was the leader in support for Iraq and Kurds in the fight with so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria[65]. Taking into account the acts of terrorism that took place in France, Great Britain and Spain, it is impossible not to get the impression that each of

these countries paid 'a price' for taking part in military operations in the Middle East. The Spanish, after being warned a few times (after the assassination from 2004), decided to withdraw finally their contingents from Iraq[66].

All the more so, the issue of the Czech role in military missions and consequences connected with them remains open[67]. The activity of ISIS in Europe or an independent attack of a supporter of one of the Al-Kaida fractions does not seem to be unnatural if we take into consideration the regularity of terrorist incidents in the European Union countries. It is therefore worth analysing the situation in the country in the context of emerging threats one more time. They are real within the territory of the Czech Republic and they are direct abroad[68].

Conclusions

According to Czech service, increasing efficiency of security systems forces terrorist assassins to continuously seek new means, methods and targets of their attacks. Currently, terrorist attacks are aimed at civilians in public places (soft targets), they are carried out using very simple and cheap, improvised explosive devices. Often built based on an online manual. It seems that in the future terrorist attacks in the Czech Republic may be carried out by lonely, radicalised fanatics ('lone wolves'), without direct connections with terrorist organisations or other structures[69].

As it was repeatedly indicated in reports, the current international situation, as well as the position of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and other Middle East countries, has impact not only on illegal migration but also on terrorism and extremism. It can be assumed, in connection with the ongoing conflict in Syria, that ISIS combatants or their supporters will keep coming to the European continent. They can pose a threat to security in terms of possible radicalisation or preparation to a terrorist attack. It seems though that the Czech government is aware of emerging risks connected with international terrorism[70]. It is important how they will carry out preventive activities aimed at combating terrorist threats. The Czech Republic is currently perceived as a transit country, not as a terrorists' destination[71].

It is crucial to take into consideration social moods which are connected with both cultural and religious circumstances. According to some Czech media, many Islam believers are perceived as a potential threat to the security of the country[72]. It results mainly from the fact that Muslims in other countries, e.g. in the French Republic and Great Britain, organised terrorist attacks. Apart from that, a tendency to anti-Muslim activities that may result in arising tensions in the society is emerging. Consolidating

differences in views and increasingly firm reactions may be the basis for aggression from both sides. Supporters of pro-Russian politics who may argue with nationalists in terms of political beliefs should also be taken into account. An activity with a characteristic of terrorism is usually politically, religiously or ideologically motivated. That is why threats emerging in the Czech Republic should be especially taken into consideration.

Therefore, the government of the Czech Republic should primarily concentrate on continuously monitoring tensions in the society and successively responding to them. Apart from that, it is important to take into consideration the process of radicalisation, in different directions, which has a huge impact on young people (vide: the French Republic)[73]. It will be crucial in maintaining domestic security to monitor people who come to the country. At the external level, actions taken by citizens in the context of their activity in countries in Africa and Middle East should be analysed. It concerns maintaining contacts, travelling and financial support. In conclusion, terrorist threats emerging in the Czech Republic are similar to those in Poland, Hungary or Slovakia. It should be admitted that Central European countries are not currently terrorists' targets. Definitely not to such an extent as France, Great Britain or Russia. Nevertheless, they are treated as transit countries or places where terrorists find shelter before departing to Western Europe. Apart from that, including threats connected with the radicalisation of the society and terrorism with the national and extreme right characteristic will constitute an important part of the future anti-terrorism strategy.

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AUTHORS



Aleksander Ksawery Olech
Institute of New Europe
Contact: akolech@wp.pl