PHD THESIS

RELIGION AND POWER
IN INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

- Summary -

Project Director:
Professor PhD Nicu GAVRILUȚĂ

PhD Student:
Maria-Cristina ABOBOAIE

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Introduction

The devastating events of 11 September 2001 in New York, as of 11 March 2004 in Madrid and 7 July 2005 in London showed that international Islamist terrorism has become the main threat to the international community.

In this context, the present work aims at creating an objective research, surpassing the culturalist approaches, a research of the manifestation of international terrorism as comprehensive and clear as possible.

The thesis is based on a fundamental distinction between domestic terrorism (territorial) and international terrorism. While domestic terrorist actors limit their actions to their state, international terrorism is not territorial, meaning that an area is not limited to certain victims, targets, its militant nationalities. As a result, when sub-groups include multiple nationalities militants acting simultaneously in many countries, we talk about international terrorism.

This type of terrorism is the theme of our thesis, more specifically, **Islamist terrorism as the main form of manifestation of international terrorism.**
Chapter I
Sociology of international terrorism: challenges and priorities

The first chapter is dedicated to the review of the specialized literature of the international terrorism research in the social sciences. To achieve it we will consider both the quantitative aspects of terrorism research, with reference to all the books, journals and databases of the terrorist incidents and the aspects of quality of research, highlighting the three schools of thought: psycho-sociological, political-rational and the critical study of the terrorism.

Chapter II
International terrorism: history, evolution, manifestations

1. The definition of the international terrorism

We have organized a two-tier analysis, namely the institutional side and that of scientific research. At the international level, there is no generally accepted definition, however, there are common law definitions formulated by the European Union and other regional organizations, such as the Organization of Islamic Conference and the Organization of African Unity.
Within scientific research there were outlined three traditional approaches to the concept of „international terrorism”: the pragmatic, normativistic paradigm and the positivistic one.

From the perspective of sociological investigation, terrorism is considered an asymmetric conflict between groups, within which the „powerless” group assumes the right to attack the powerful group, the extreme violence being considered to be a legitimate method before facing the „social closing” process.

In our view, the international terrorism refers to the illegal use of force or violence by substate or state actors or groups against peaceful targets in order to intimidate or coerce a Government or a civilian population in order to achieve political objectives.

2. The international terrorism. Emergence and evolution

The adoption of the historical perspective contributes to making the contemporary terrorism less sensational and also to making it more rationally known.

Although the word „terrorism” is an artifact of the French Revolution, the origins of the international terrorism are contained in the classical Antiquity, in the zealots and the assassins' actions. From this period dates a classic method used by the terrorists of today, the assassination of political figures and the
the attack of important buildings to create a feeling of vulnerability and fear at the level of public opinion.

For the presentation of contemporary terrorism we will approach the terrorism wave theory that states the thesis of the existence of four separate waves of modern terrorism: anarchist, anticolonial, the „New Right” wave and the religious wave. These „waves” provide sensitive information about the wide variety of terrorist campaigns and the elements of continuity in the use of violence.

3. Social types of the international terrorism

From the traditional perspective, terrorism can be committed by state and substate individuals, groups, institutions.

State actors may be involved in three forms of terrorism:

- state-sponsored terrorism;
- terrorism committed by the intelligence or commando units;
- state terrorism.

Noting that, throughout the 20th century, the state terror against the masses did more victims than terrorism directed against the state.

The non/sub/ antistatal terrorism is approached in relation to four distinct categories of violence:

- nationalist terrorism;
revolutionary - left-wing and right-wing;
reactionary and religious.

Chapter III
Social action methods of the international terrorism

1. Conventional methods

We consider, first and foremost, the main methods of conventional action, namely the assassination, the kidnapping and hostage taking, the bomb attacks, sabotage or putting fires and diversions.

2. Unconventional methods

An increasingly higher attention is granted by the international community to the unconventional methods, due to the interest of terrorist organisations to achieve them and to the destructive impact and that the use of these weapons may have.

A detailed presentation of the four types of weapons of mass destruction - biological, chemical radiological and nuclear, along with the concrete situations of use or test for use by states and terrorist groups, helps us to analyse the real risk that the weapons bring to safety and security. Thus we may conclude that although the terrorist organisations have not so far used weapons of mass destruction, it does not mean that there is no risk of using
them. This risk should not be oversized or undersized, but designed at its true value.

The cyber-terrorism has become a real threat, the „digital weapons” becoming increasingly attractive to the Islamists militants, thanks to the numerous advantages of the use of the Internet. Along with the conventional use of the Internet, the terrorist groups are using cyberspace as an area of confrontation with the States. The methods that can be used to launch cyber attacks are different. Because of this, towards the end of the chapter, we appreciate that the security of the public information systems and the security of the critical infrastructures must become a priority for every state and the states together.

Chapter IV

The Islamic fundamentalism - a social form of the international terrorism

1. Sociological aspects of the relationship between religion, power and terrorism

In this chapter we show that while religion and warfare have always coexisted, religion has been a few times the main cause of the war. Sometimes, however, religion has had a decisive role in amplifying or extending conflicts.
Another notable fact of the first subheading is that killing in the name of God is not the exclusive domain of Islam, the Crusaders being known in history for the fear that they used to provoke among Muslims. They were fighting on behalf of the Cross to take the „Holy” land of Muslims, for lory, promises related to the Earth and even the Pope's promise to secure a place in heaven.

3. The Islamic Fundamentalism. Concept, theoretical approach, extreme social forms

To eliminate social confusions, we highlight the enormous diversity of the organisations aiming to change the Muslim society. Thus, we highlight the distinction between the Islamic fundamentalism and the political Islam (Islamic activism). While the first concept aims at reviving Islam and return to the strict application of Islamic law and practices, but does not engage in political action, the political Islam recourses to direct political action in support of fundamentalist goals. In other words, the political Islam is a form of Agency of Islam for political purposes, including both nonviolent and violent political movements. Within this framework of thought, the militant Islam, also called „global Jihad” is just one part of the political Islam. It lies in a direct relationship with the terrorist activism, currently the Islamist
terrorism being the main form of manifestation of international terrorism.

In short, the Islamist terrorism refers to a type of political violence, motivated by a system of absolute religious beliefs that deviate from the fundamental interpretations of Islam and that promote violence as the only means of achieving the political objectives.

In the last part of the fourth chapter we analyse the militant Islam from the perspective of the social science theories on the causes of the formation of terrorist groups and an individual's motivations for joining such groups. Our analysis led us to the idea that the violence that characterizes the Middle East arose from a complex combination of historical colonial and post colonial factors, within political, economic, social and cultural processes.

There are thus a number of real grievances of the Muslims, at home and in the West, which militant Islamist groups use for their benefit.

The concept of “social closure” is based on the binary contrast „we” versus „others” that develops „mirror images” of each other, in which each side sees the other as being the opposite. The motivation for committing violence is achieved through the symbols of the ritual of blaming „the other”, which legitimates the scapegoat destruction ritual.
Chapter V
The radical Islamism

1. Militant Islam as an ideological base for terrorism

From the contributions of the main founders of the militant Islamism, we bring into attention, inter alia, the ideas of Sayyid Qutb, father of Sunni revolutionary Islam and those of Ibn Taymiyya, the author of the most extremist interpretations of the violent Jihad.

2. The genealogy of the militant Islam

The genealogy of the radical Islam is presented in terms of the three periods of Islam, stressing that the first Islamist movements have not been violent. A series of events and internal and external failures contributed to their evolution in a radical and violent movement.

3. The global Jihad

Because the concept of „Jihad” is unknown in the West and controversial in the whole world, we dedicated to it a whole chapter. With reference to this concept, we highlight the distinction between „Jihad” as a religious doctrine- the core concept of the Islamic doctrine- and „Jihad” as a political ideology. In this second hypostasis, Jihad is defensive, with some ideological changes, and terrorism is considered a legitimate and necessary
form against the invaders of the „holy land”. We will present the Islamic premises of the ethics of Jihad, as well as the premises of Jihad, with the arguments and counterarguments stated by each side.

Three types of Islamist groups are using force to achieve political goals:

- **the Islamic nationalists**;
- **the militant Islamic opposition**;
- **and the global Jihad**.

According to the current theorists of Islam, *the global Jihad starts to become irrelevant in the post-September 11, 2001 environment.*

The terrorist threat evolves from the structured type al-Qaeda to small groups, consisting of individuals who act autonomously-*the Jihad of the individualized terrorism*. In the new context, suicide attacks have become the most dangerous action of Islamist terrorism.

### 4. The manifestation of Jihad in Europe

In Europe, there is *a European ethnic form of the radical Islam*. There are both well organised terrorist cells and small cells, made up of radicals born in Europe - *the internal jihadist terrorism*, who expressed their clear intention to launch attacks in the region, including in the States which have not so far been
attacked. We complete this section with the idea that the reduction of the political, economic, social and cultural conditions that contribute to the emergence of radical manifestations should be an important part of the strategies to prevent and combat terrorism.

Chapter VI

The prevention and combating of the international terrorism in Romania. Sociological perspective

1. The impact of the terrorist threat on society after September 11, 2001

The terrorist risk is a real one, being boosted sometimes to justify the more or less legitimate interventions. We support the view that, at this stage, Governments are the main drivers in the formation of the perceptions about the terrorist risk and we believe that they should be, for this purpose, more responsible.

2. The theoretical aspects of the prevention and fight against the international terrorism

After a clarification of policies which are against terrorism-antiterrorism and counterterrorism, we consider that it’s important to present the theoretical aspects of combating terrorism, meaning use of force, and the non - military repressive actions, the conciliating and legal actions. We bring into attention the opinion of the majority of the experts according to which the military
intervention and the use of force should be used as a final solution in combating terrorism. *We emphasize the importance of the informative work of the services and draw the attention that, internationally, there is a comprehensive and on a long-term basis strategy to combat terrorism.*

3. **The institutional framework of the regional prevention and combat of the international terrorism**

   Although in the international area, there are no organizations that facilitate the interstate cooperation, *the United Nations* and *the European Union* meet the starring roles in combating the international terrorism, even if they have their limits, and some aspects should be improved.

4. **Good practices in preventing and combating terrorism**

   By presenting the main strands of action of *the United States*, *Russia and Germany* in countering terrorism, we contextualize similar Romanian actions and identify a number of best practices that can be taken into account in improving Romanian policies in this field.

   We reveal *the institutional comprehensive structure, the permanent evaluations* of the anti and counterterrorist policy and *the continuous adaptation* of the counterterrorist strategies to the evolution of the events.
5. The socio-institutional context of the combat of the international terrorism in Romania

The social policies to prevent and combat the international terrorism of Romania are focused on prevention and anticipation, given the activities of a number of groups/Islamist cells in our country.

Romania is not faced with a domestic motivated terrorism, but with the manifestations derived from the developments of the phenomenon in the international area. The National System of Prevention and Combat of Terrorism, supported by a specific legal system, is addressed to such manifestations as well as the new developments in the field, of which we mention the cyber-terrorism.

Chapter VII

Sociological research on the prevention and combating of international terrorism in Romania

1. The social policy to counter terrorism in Romania. Case study on the activity of prevention and combating international terrorism in Romania

In the seventh chapter we aim to identify the specificity of the Romanian social politics to prevent and combat the international terrorism within the framework of a qualitative
investigation. The research aims to bring a series of personal contributions to the work of combating this phenomenon. We start this endeavor through a careful analysis of the Romanian contributions to the universe of the terrorism and counterterrorism literature.

As research tools in our approach we used the documentation, the interview and the case study.

Our research was carried out on four coordinates and assessed the views of people on different activity levels: experts from competent responsible institutions, academics, parliamentarians, members of the Commission for Defense, public order and national security in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, the obtaining the official views of the institutions components of the National System of Prevention and Combating of Terrorism.

The Objectives of the research were:

(1) The identification of the experts, academics and the Parliamentarian's the perception on the factors that lead to the emergence of international terrorism.

(2) Sociological research on how radical interpretation of the religious text stimulates the violence and international terrorism.
(3) Investigating the sources of the Islamist threat in Romania, based on the perception respondents.

(4) The identification of the types of activities carried out by Islamist groups in Romania according to persons who participating in the sociological research.

(5) The establishment of institutional mechanisms to prevent and combat terrorism.

(6) The identification of the extent to which current strategies take on models of good practice or create new models to counter international terrorism.

(7) If the competent institutions are concerned with the formation and promotion of safety culture.

(8) If the institutions and society are prepared to deal with international terrorism.

The proposed hypotheses to be demonstrated are:

The main factors that lead to the emergence of international terrorism are the feeling of injustice, religion and separatism.

(1) The main sources of the terrorist threat on the national level are the Islamic groups/cores and the wolves loners (not confirmed).

(2) The Islamic groups are pursuing a number of activities in Romania to support the organizations they come from (not confirmed).
(3) Romania has the necessary machinery to counter the Islamist manifestations, but the work in this area needs considerable improvements in line with the current developments of the phenomenon (confirmed).

(4) The social component is missing from the Romanian mechanism to prevent and combat terrorism (confirmed).

(5) The social component is missing from the national system to counter terrorism (confirmed).

A few conclusions confirm or refute the assumptions of research, as follows:

(C1) Religion, the perceived feeling of injustice and poverty are thought to be the major three factors leading to the emergence of the international terrorism.

(C2) Islamist groups/cores and the internal extremist groups are the main Islamist threats to our country.

(C3) The Islamist groups/cores of our country carry out various and complex activities in support of organizations they come from, such as those of propaganda and proselytism, recruiting new members, planning and study of interest objectives, as well as illicit economic-financial activities. These activities are monitored at institutional level in cooperation with similar institutions of other states.
(C4) Romania holds the necessary mechanisms for preventing and combating international terrorism, but it requires *substantial improvements in the legislative and institutional level*. The national system for preventing and combating terrorism should be updated in line with the developments in the legislation of the terrorism phenomenon and of the specific action strategies.

(C5) The social component is missing from the national system to counter terrorism. Although, outwardly, the responsible institutions state that the partnership with the civil society is important, in practice these institutions have a refractory attitude towards society and are not sufficiently transparent in their activities. They generally communicate little, passive and one-way direction only. This directly affects the security culture of the citizens of the culture and the degree to which they are prepared to meet the new security challenges.

The sociological perspective **solutions** on prevention and combating the international terrorism:

*I – at the scientific research’s level:*

1- the development of *joint research projects* between the responsible institutions and the academic institutions with a social profile;
2- the development of common public events- debates on the causes, factors, forms of manifestation of the radical terrorist manifestations etc.- bringing together military experts, practitioners, experts from the social sciences as well as in other areas of activity, leaders of the Muslim community from Romania;

3- creating associations/research institutes independent of the work of state institutions, to carry out objective analyses and evaluations regarding various aspects of the anti-terrorist activity;

4- creating a course of „Sociology of terrorism”, held in collaboration with institutions such as the National College of Defence, the National Police Academy, and other educational specialized institutions.

II - With regard to the National System for Preventing and Combating Terrorism, at the institutional level, we appreciate that it takes:

5- the introduction of a single system of terrorist alert in the international area, or at least at European level;

6- setting up a permanent body on the issue of combating international terrorism- Counterterrorism Department, at level of the Supreme Council for the Defence of the country, after the American model of the Internal Security Department.
III- at the legislative level:

7- urgently adopting a new law on the prevention and combating of terrorism, adapted to the dimensions, forms of manifestation and evolution of current trends of the phenomenon;

8- the permanent evaluation and completion of the national legislation on combating terrorism;

9- the adoption of a new strategy for preventing and combating the international terrorism, considering that the current strategy was adopted in 2002 and that, meanwhile, there have been adopted a number of other specific strategies with which it must be put in the agreement;

10- the adoption of Cyber-Security Strategy of Romania, in the debate since last summer.

IV - With regard to the relationship with civil society, it’s necessary to build a relationship of mutual trust between these responsible institutions and the citizens.

11- the development of a communication strategy for the prevention and combating of terrorism of a public character, and preparing specialists in public communication within the responsible institutions, in order to ensure the information at the level of civil society on this issue;

12- the increase of the decision-making transparency on public information related to the terrorist activities in Romania;
13- reforming the SRI;
14- increasing the visibility of the continuous and difficult action of the competent institutions through the implementation of concrete measures to improve public communication;
15- launching education projects at the level of society, with the objective of raising awareness and providing information needed by the population for understanding the phenomenon at its real level, in order to change the attitude towards this phenomenon and to lower the social states of panic;
16- the active involvement of the civil society, including the community of researchers from the Academia, the business community and others in the debate and identifying solutions to the various types of threats to national security.

2. Case study: the Romanian „Muslim brother”

M.A. was the first Romanian recruited by an Islamic terrorist organization, the „Muslim Brothers”.

M.A. case marks the first possible incident of domestic (internal) terrorism, organized by a Romanian against the Romanians. It shows that personal disappointments, regardless of their type, may result in a person's involvement and desire to perform terrorist acts, as a revenge on the system.

This case study, along with other incidents that occurred in our country, highlights the fact that Romania is not outside the
terrorist risk. Though it seems hard to believe, this type of single incidents can take place, and their effects can be devastating. The safety culture and the cooperation with the civil society can help the responsible institutions to detect such deviant behaviors, and more.

Chapter VIII
Conclusions

1) Despite the counterterroriste efforts of the international community, the terrorist threat has not diminished a lot, but has been adapted, including less-coordinated attacks from the „lone wolves”.

For this reason, we believe that future research should be focused on the emergence of a new phenomenon, the manifestations of the „lone wolf”.

2) Despite the measures taken, the terrorist threat is diverse and is maintained by a series of internal and external developments.

3) These realities of the Muslim world are exploited by Islamist groups. These groups are adapting quickly to the developments of the internal and external environment.

4) Muslims of the second or third generation from the West and the immigrants continues to be a source of radicalization.
5) Islamist organizations, such as „al-Qa'ida“, encourages groups and individuals affiliated, with the individual behavior, from the Western countries to carry out small-scale attacks in countries where they live.

6) Social theory helped us overcome culturalist interpretations and establish social processes underlying the militant Islamist movements.

Contrary to the majority of the opinions, the religious interpretation of the Islam is a product of the modernity. Jihadi groups were able to use religion to justify violence and extremism through secular interpretations deviated from the traditional Islam. Therefore, violence and terrorism are not due to religion and the Muslim civilization.

7) In our thesis we have shown that violence and terrorism are not due to religion and Muslim civilization.

Another important aspect in understanding the phenomenon of terrorism is to prevent understanding the Islamist violence only through religion. While the economic and political grievances are the primary cause of the international terrorism, religion is a means of justifying and outreach to violence.

8) The Jihadist global movement is thus the reflection of the globalization and uprooting. An effective strategy for defeating
it should be *multidimensional* in its approach, *global* in purpose and *flexible* in practice.

In this regard, for the effective action of the states, we think the there is a need for strengthening the organizational capacity, for adaptation of the personal forms of organisation in response to the organizational system of the Islamist groups, and an organizational management within the security structures of the state. At the same time, we support the pro-activity and the development of personal assessments of the risks, based on specificity.

Along with the enhancement of the security measures, the states must also offer a series of *societal and cultural responses*.

9) *Countering the extremist ideologies* is an element less approached in countering the international terrorism, but with an important role in weakening and undermining the terrorist organisations.

10) Moreover, *Islam disapproves the acts of terror* caused by jihadists in the West, heading in Iraq, indiscriminate killing of Muslims and Westerners and so on.

11) Exploitation of *the fracture between militant Islamic thinkers and their followers*, helps to counter extremist ideology.
12) Another important aspect in understanding of terrorism is to avoid understanding of the Islamist violence only through religion.

13) The political and military institutions of the states should cooperate with a wide range of local and international actors- religious institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, financial and banking institutions, media and others.

14) As regards the civil society, it is important for Governments to educate the civil society about the threats of the 21st century and their management.

15) It takes the debates on the international terrorism that would unite people around common ideas. It is necessary to overcome the military size of the scientific research of the phenomenon and to involve the social sciences in order to win the populations that support the terrorism and to isolate it.

We need the promotion of liberal values, such as tolerance, intercultural dialogue, respect for human dignity, and others. We also need to take account of the views of the legitimate opinions of the marginalized people, the legitimate discontents and the aspirations of all the ethnic and religious communities. It requires the promotion of achievable projects and programs, in order to minimize the political, cultural, socio-economic conditions which
can promote the real or imaginary feeling of humiliation and the desire for revenge.

Because, irrespective of the actors who commit it, be they state or non-state actors, those who manifest illegal political violence against non-combatant populations do acts of terrorism, and this phenomenon must be defeated.