European Union's Counter-Terrorism Policy and the Problem of Lone Actors

Nikolay PAVLOV

Centre for National Security and Defense Research, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Abstract. The paper explores the problem of lone actor terrorism in the context of the evolving counter-terrorism policy of the European Union. As e relatively new security threat in the European Union lone actor terrorism has not been adequately addressed in relevant strategic documents, legal acts and policies. The need for an ideological approach in countering lone actor terrorism at the European level is emphasized.

Keywords. Lone actor terrorism, European Union's counter-terrorism policy, European Union's crisis management policy, ideological approach

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore lone actor terrorism in Europe in the context of the evolving crisis management and counter-terrorism policies of the European Union (EU). Lone actor terrorism is a relatively new security threat which so far has not been adequately addressed at the EU level. Cases of European lone actors (or "lone wolves") will be analyzed in order to find the deeper roots of this new phenomenon and to propose measures for countering it. Lone wolves terrorism is one of the most puzzling and unpredictable forms of terrorism which has complex societal, psychological and ideational underpinnings. Therefore, a new ideologically-oriented approach to lone actor terrorism is needed.

In this paper the term lone actor ("lone wolf") is used in line with the definition of Stewart and Burton who define a lone wolf as a person who acts on his or her own without orders from – or even connections to – an organization.[1] A lone wolf is a standalone operative who by his very nature is embedded in the targeted society and is capable of self-activation at any time. The lone wolf might be a member of a network but this network is not a hierarchical organization in the classical sense of the word. Very importantly, the acts of lone wolves are politically or religiously motivated and aim to influence public opinion or political decision-making.[2] These are ideologically motivated terrorist acts and not just criminal acts of violence. *Lone actor terrorism is political crime perpetrated by self-organized individuals.* The second limitation in the

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[1] Scott Stewart and Fred Burton. Lone Wolf Lessons, 3 June 2009, STRATFOR, available at: <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090603_lone_wolf_lessons>

[2] Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf. Lone Wolves. How to Prevent this Phenomenon? – Expert Meeting Paper, International Centre for Counter-terrorism – The Hague, November 2010, p.2

paper is that the analysis of counter-terrorism policy and measures is focused on the EU level and not on Member States level.

1. EU Crisis Management and Counter-Terrorism Policy

European Union's counter-terrorism policy is one of the recent developments within the broader framework of EU's crisis management. Unlike NATO which has crisis management as a core task from the outset, the European Union was not designed to play the role of a crisis manager. The ideological rationale behind European integration has little to do with common defense, crisis management and counter-terrorism. However, changes in the international environment after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and especially after the Kosovo crisis in 1999 have led to a gradual process of opening the Union to crisis management.
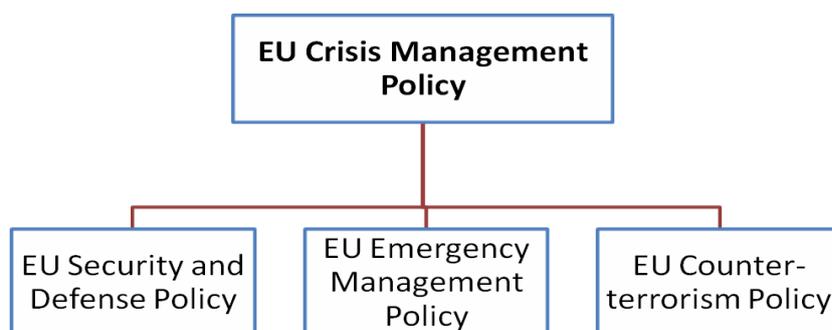
One of the main consequences from the Kosovo crisis for the EU was the development of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) which was later renamed to Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Presently CSDP is one of the three "building blocks" of EU crisis management. In the period after 2003 the European Union has carried out over 30 ESDP (CSDP) missions and operations on three continents (Europe, Africa and Asia). Some of these missions have contributed at least indirectly to the fight against terrorism in terror-stricken countries. The Union is considered as a "positive" and "humanitarian power", as a new category of international actor which has no enemies and doesn't play traditional power politics.[3] CSDP missions and operations are focused on the so-called civilian crisis management where civilian capabilities as a rule have prevalence over military capabilities. This is connected with the unwillingness in most Member States to develop strong military capabilities at the EU level which lowers the military component in EU missions and operations. Therefore, the European Union is seen mostly as a civilian crisis manager, similar to the United Nations.

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 the European External Action Service (EEAS) was established which is headed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission. The EEAS is one of the main innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. The new European "diplomatic" service was created in 2010 and incorporated former CSDP structures. It is seen as the key institution to help the EU become a more visible and effective foreign policy, security and crisis management actor, but in practice its policy remit is limited.

As shown on Figure 1 the second building block of EU crisis management is EU's emergency management policy. EU's emergency management policy is carried out by the European Commission's Directorate-general Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO). Two of the main instruments for EU emergency response are found within DG ECHO and consist of the Civil Protection Community Mechanism and the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC). The ERCC constitutes the basis of cooperation within the area of Civil Protection at the EU level. DG ECHO has considerable financial resources – approximately 1 billion EUR for year 2013 (mainly for humanitarian aid) but its operational capacity is considered limited.

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[3] Sven Biscop (ed.). The Value of Power, the Power of Values – A Call for an EU Grand Strategy. 33 Egmont Paper, 30 (Brussels, Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations 2009), p.19-24

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Figure 1. Building blocks of EU crisis management

EU counter-terrorism policy is the third "building block" of EU crisis management which was developed recently. EU counter-terrorism is one of the consequences of the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001. Counter-terrorism was explicitly included as an objective of EU crisis management in December 2003 when the Council of the EU adopted the European Security Strategy (ESS).[4] In the European Security Strategy support for third countries in combating terrorism was included in the spectrum of crisis management operations to be covered by the Union, along with joint disarmament operations and security sector reform. However, despite the provisions in the ESS so far counter-terrorism has not been fully integrated in ESDP missions and operations.[5]

In 2005 the EU's Counter-Terrorism Strategy was adopted.[6] This Strategy commits the Union to combating terrorism globally, while respecting human rights and allowing its citizens to live in an area of freedom, security and justice. The EU's Counter-terrorism strategy has four pillars:

- o   Prevention against radicalization and terrorist recruitment
- o   Protection of citizens and infrastructure from terrorist action
- o   Pursuit and investigation of terrorist organizations and individuals
- o   Response to a terrorist attack and measures to minimize its harmful consequences

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[4] A Secure Europe in a Better World – The European Security Strategy', available at <http:// www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=391&lang=EN – 42k>.

[5] Gijs de Vries. The Nexus between EU Crisis Management and Counter-terrorism – In: Steven Blockmans (ed.) The European Union and Crisis Management, The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2008, p.371

[6] The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Brussels, December 2005)

One of the important features of the EU's Counter-Terrorism Strategy is that it declares the need for developing collective capability at the EU level. However, the practical steps in this direction, especially in terms of collective intelligence capabilities and intelligence cooperation are not satisfactory. The Strategy does not address the problem of lone actor terrorism at all. This is a major shortcoming of the Strategy in the light of the rising number of lone wolf terrorist acts in Europe in the last years.

A step further in terms of legal regulation was done in 2009 with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty which is a substitute for the failed European Constitution. In Art.43 of the Lisbon Treaty counter-terrorism is included among the missions of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). In addition, the Lisbon Treaty includes a solidarity clause stating that the Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member state is the victim of terrorist attack or natural or manmade disaster. The solidarity clause envisages Member States to support each other following an attack. It does not oblige mutual assistance to prevent terrorist attacks.

Unlike CSDP and emergency management the EU's counter-terrorism policy is not institutionalized. In general crisis and terrorism fall within the remit of the European Commission's Directorate-general Home Affairs (DG HOME). The Commission's main role in this area is to assist Member States in carefully targeted actions and initiatives, primarily within the "prevent" and "protect" strands of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Commission also supports Member States by approximating the legal framework in full respect of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles. In practice, DG HOME activities in the area of counter-terrorism are mostly administrative and project management-related. Due to political constraints the formulation and implementation of integrated European counter-terrorism policy is still not feasible. The same holds true for developing operational counter-terrorism capabilities at the EU level which is not realistic in the near future. At the operational level counter-terrorism relies almost entirely on the responsibility of individual Member States.

2. Lone Actor Terrorism in Europe

Lone actor terrorism is a comparatively new phenomenon in Europe. The first cases of lone wolf attacks occurred in the 90-ies of the twentieth century and are relatively rare. However, from the beginning of the XXI c. there is a clear rising trend in lone actor terrorist attacks in Europe. This trend could be connected with the global rise of terrorist activities and, specifically with the rising trend of lone actor terrorism world-wide. Although the number of lone actor terrorist attacks in Europe is not very high there is a clear rising trend as shown in Table 1. It seems that lone actor terrorism in Europe is influenced by two major "sources of inspiration". On the one hand, lone wolf acts in the US have impact on lone wolves in Europe, especially in cases of psychopathic acts such as the Breivik case. In his second stage terrorist act on the island of Utøya Breivik used the tactics of American school shooters. On the other hand, the influence of Islamic terrorism acts in the Near East is very evident in lone wolf acts perpetrated by violent Islamists in Europe (e.g. in the cases of Mohammed Merah and Mehdi Nemmouche). The emerging European lone wolves are either influenced by American originals in the US or by Islamic originals – mostly in the Near East. The external influence and the personal idiosyncrasies are essential for the emergence of lone wolves in Europe.

Table 1. Selected cases of lone actor terrorist acts in Europe

Year and country	Name of the lone wolf / age / origin / motivation	Brief description of the terrorist act
1993-1997, Austria	Franz Fuchs (44 y.), Austrian / hate towards foreigners	Fuchs used improvised explosive devices and mail-bombs to attack foreigners or individuals he considered to be "friendly to foreigners". He killed 4 people (Romani) and injured 15, some of them seriously.
2011, Germany	Arid Uka (21 y.), Kosovo Albanian / Islamic Fundamentalism	Uka murdered with a pistol two U.S. Air Force airmen and severely wounded two others at the Frankfurt Airport.
2011, Norway	Anders Breivik (32 y.), Norwegian / Islamophobia	Breivik bombed government buildings in Oslo, killing 8 people. He then killed 69 people, mostly teenagers, in a mass shooting at the Norwegian Labour Party camp on the island of Utøya.
2012, France	Mohammed Merah (23 y.), French national of Algerian origin / Islamic Fundamentalism and anti-semitism	Merah murdered 7 people and injured 5 others in three gun attacks targeting French soldiers and Jewish civilians in the cities of Montauban and Toulouse.
2013, Bulgaria	Oktay Enimehmedov (25y.), Bulgarian Turk / resistance against the political dominance of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms over the Turks in Bulgaria.	Enimehmedov made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the honorary leader of the Political Party of the Turks in Bulgaria (official name – Movement for Rights and Freedoms) using a gas pistol at a political rally.
2014, Belgium	Mehdi Nemmouche (29 y.), French national of Algerian origin / Islamic Fundamentalism and anti-semitism	Nemmouche killed 4 people at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels using a handgun and a Kalashnikov rifle. Nemmouche is considered to be the first "European" terrorist fighter in the Syrian war who commits attacks upon returning to Europe.

A wide variety of lone actor terrorist acts have been done in Europe during the last years. All of them are marked with the specific characteristics and with the psychological disturbances of the different lone actors. However, a certain ideology (as understood by the actor himself) is one of the absolutely necessary elements of the terrorist act. Recent cases have shown two main ideologies behind lone wolf acts. Islamic fundamentalism is the dominant ideology in most recent cases of lone actor attacks in Europe. It is clearly represented in the cases of Arid Uka (2011), Mohammed Merah (2012) and Mehdi Nemmouche (2014). The second type is an improvised self-made "hybrid ideology" as demonstrated in the Breivik case. Anders Breivik mixed existing ideologies to a completely new, deadly cocktail which has led terrorism expert Dr.Magnus Ranstorp to call him a "cut-and-paste terrorist".[7]

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[7] See: William Boston. Killer's Manifesto: The Politics behind the Norway Slaughter – In: TIME, July 24, 2011

3. Developing an Ideological Approach to Lone Actor Terrorism at the EU Level

In April 2012 the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator proposed to Member States a Note on preventing lone actor terrorism.[8] In this unofficial document the EU Counter-Terrorism coordinator sets out preliminary ideas on addressing this type of terrorism. As an administrative document it is a positive first step for putting this issue on the political agenda of the Union. Some of the main conclusions from this document are, as follows:

- o The prevention methods which have been increasingly successful against terrorist groups may not have the same degree of success against lone actors.
- o In the recent years there is greater concentration by Al Qaeda on encouraging lone actors.
- o Lone actor terrorism does not take place in a vacuum
- o Lone actors are an enormous challenge for the security and law enforcement agencies as they are not only difficult to detect, but also extremely hard to defend against.
- o Individuals considered as peripheral figures of a network can act on their own.
- o Many lone actors make use of the Internet in the preparation of their attacks.
- o There is still need to make it more difficult for lone actor terrorists to obtain weapons and explosives.
- o Enhanced monitoring of terrorist travels abroad and especially monitoring of "foreign fighters".
- o Improved measures for counter-radicalization
- o There is a clear need to criminalize participation in terrorist training camps

The proposed analysis and measures are adequate for countering lone actor terrorism at the operational level. However, they cannot be efficient in strategic terms as they lack a strong ideological basis. The problems posed by Islamic fundamentalism in Europe and the negative sentiments in European societies towards ultra-liberal multiculturalism are carefully avoided. The new measures for counter-radicalization are not specified.

Similarly, the revised EU Counter-radicalization Strategy[9] which was adopted in 2008 by the Council of the EU is a typical bureaucratic document which does not have a strong ideological basis. The declared comprehensive response is not well substantiated. Some of the proposed measures, such as "empowering mainstream voices" and "developing a non-emotive lexicon" are not convincing. It is difficult to define which European voices are "mainstream", i.e. allowed and which are "underground", or not-allowed. Freedom of speech is one of the fundamental democratic freedoms and defining exactly what "hate speech" is can only be done by the court of competent jurisdiction in concrete criminal proceedings. Otherwise, the accusation of "hate speech" could be used arbitrary as a tool for undemocratic control over the population analogous to similar practices in totalitarian states. The so-called "non-emotive lexicon" which must avoid linking religion to terrorism is a new form of misunderstood political correctness which sets the EU's policy apart from reality. Another major shortcoming of proposed counter-radicalization measures is that

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[8] Note from the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator on Preventing Lone Actor Terrorism (Brussels, 23 April 2012)

[9] EU Strategy for Combating Radicalization and Recruitment to Terrorism (Brussels, 14 November 2008)

integration policy is aimed exclusively at immigrant communities. In the present unfavorable socio-economic situation in Europe radicalization can spread in many segments of European societies such as the far-right groups. So far there is no common EU policy towards far-right groups and on Member States level they are treated mostly in the context of criminal law enforcement. As demonstrated in the Breivik case this approach is wrong. Much more emphasis must be put on prevention of radicalization and on integration of far-right groups and individuals in European societies. By demonizing this underground group European policy makers prepare the grounds for the next terrorist organization or the next lone wolves.

Ideology is the major challenge for the EU's policy for countering terrorism and lone actor terrorism in particular. On the one hand, the EU's crisis management policy is still underdeveloped as it lacks a strong ideological basis. The more powerful Member States are unwilling to share sovereignty in the area of security and defense and, respectively, the development of European defense and security capabilities is very limited. In addition, the ultra-liberal approach that "Europe has no enemies" blocks the development of defense capabilities, including the development of counter-terrorism capabilities. And the alternative to the liberal approach is still under-developed. There is still no common European ideology (i.e. system of values, strategic goals and ideals) to form the basis for the Union's Common Security and Defense Policy.

Secondly, the EU establishment is still not able to overcome the official "mainstream" EU narrative based on political correctness. The Union does not have strong ideological resilience vis-à-vis the monolithic ideology of Islamic fundamentalism and cannot prevent the emergence of new improvised violent ideologies. The great European historical, religious and spiritual tradition is used by the EU establishment only very selectively and in the spirit of the "non-emotive lexicon". Organized terrorists and lone wolves by themselves cannot destroy the Union but they show its ideological vulnerability. Therefore, strengthening the ideological basis of the European Union will be one of the greatest challenges for EU's counter-terrorism policy in the near future.