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MOTIVATION BEHIND SUICIDE ATTACKS

Preliminary notes

The purpose of the article is to present the specificity of terrorist suicide a method used by terrorists to intimidate countries and the international community. Additionally, the article draws attention to the motivations behind terrorist suicide, which are important in analysing the use of such suicide as an asymmetric threat.

A basic clarification of the terms addressed in the article must include that the term 'terror' was originally used to denote a form of reign where the primary method involved intimidating society with bloody repression against political opponents (state terrorism). As time went by and terrorist acts became more frequent in various types of conflict, the term started to mean destructive extremism oriented towards fighting against organised society and the state (individual terrorism) [Pawłowski 1984, 10].

The current definition of terrorism is different. Pawłowski notes that the terms 'terror' and 'terrorism' are not treated as synonyms. 'Terror' means acts of violence of "the stronger" (e.g. government authorities) against "the weaker" (e.g. citizens), while terrorism means violent behaviour of "the weaker" (e.g. citizens) against "the stronger" (e.g. government authorities) [ibid., 14].

The attempts to define suicide undertaken in the literature present it as a violent act of taking one's own life, as the most serious act of self-aggression, where the individual's behaviour it oriented towards self-death. Suicide is a type of voluntary death of a person [Hołyst 1999, 598].

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Next to the emphasis on the violence of a suicidal act, there are also concepts approaching suicide as a process spread over time [Idem 1983, 34-35]. Suicidal behaviour is discussed in this context as "a series of reactions which are triggered in an individual once suicide enters their mind as an anticipated fact and goal" [Idem 2002, 113]. According to this concept, suicidal behaviour encompasses the following stages[1] [Idem 1999, 619]: 1) envisaged suicide; 2) desired suicide; 3) attempted suicide; 4) committed suicide.

Each subsequent step of suicidal behaviour is marked by the individual's growing commitment to the suicidal intent. Treating suicide as a process emphasises the causal complexity of suicide and highlights the fact that suicide, despite usually ending in violent death, is preceded by a long period (sometimes lasting for years) when the individual gives up on life and by the multifaceted preparations to achieve the goal of suicide.

1. Specificity of a terrorist suicide

Czabański notes that "Suicide terrorist missions are co-defined by two elements: willingness and readiness to kill combined with readiness to die. A successful terrorist attack generates more casualties" [Czabański 2009, 269]. There are also other factors that determine successful use of suicides by terrorist organisations, namely [ibid.]: 1) the impact of the suicide attack on the targeted community; 2) the extent of the international condemnation of the attack; 3) the political pressure on the financing and sponsoring organisations; 4) the media effect of the attack.

In view of the foregoing, the use of suicide in terrorist operations must also be analysed in the context of the significance of the mass media (TV, Internet, press) in furthering terrorist objectives. Terrorist organisations are fully aware of the commonness and power of TV, online, radio and press messages and their impact on the audience, and they consistently take advantage of

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[1] Envisaged suicide is described as a condition where the individual realises that they may solve their life problems through self-annihilation. The distinctive feature of desired suicide is not just thinking about suicide but desiring it. At that stage, suicide becomes a goal, something for which the individual strives. Attempted suicide means taking specific actions to kill oneself (a suicide attempt). For an act to be classified as attempted suicide, the suicide attempt must be unsuccessful at this point. Committed suicide happens when an individual successfully takes their own life.

those factors. A suicide attack is the best means to instil the emotion of fear and weaken the opponent's society.

The terrorist attack on World Trade Centre and Pentagon that took place in the United States on 11 September 2001 marked the beginning of a new age in global terrorism, characterised not only by destruction of the opponent's structures but also by killing as many ordinary citizens as possible – a random crime [Hołyst 2009, 643-44].

The attack was carried out by 19 suicide terrorists acting for the organisation of Osama bin Laden – Al-Qaeda, who used aeroplanes as missiles in executing the plan for a "holy war" against the United States [ibid., 643]. The group consisted of 15 Saudis, 2 citizens of Arab Emirates, one Egyptian and one Lebanese [ibid.]. The majority of them came to the United States several months before the attack, and the leadership had been taking flying lessons in American schools since the middle of 2000. Hołyst states that "Sleeper terrorists Mahomed Atta, Marwan Al Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah, assigned to hijack three different planes, had lived in Hamburg for years. Atta was the leader of the group and the one who hit the north WTC tower" [ibid., 644].

Krzywda emphasises that "The tragic September events revealed a new form of terrorism, which had been so far treated as a non-military threat. The consequences of the suicide attacks resulted in a completely new classification of the terrorist threat, which is now considered the most dangerous and the most likely form of threat" [Krzywda 2002, 30].

Terrorist suicides are nowadays considered as typical modus operandi of terrorist organisations [Bolechów 2003, 39] and terrorist suicide attacks, especially those committed by religious fanatics, are referred to as 'New Terrorism' [Czabański 2009, 263].

The research regarding terrorist suicides reveals their specificity versus non terrorist-suicides. In this context, Hołyst notes that it is hard to speak about any type of relationship between terrorist suicide and drug or alcohol use; moreover, few suicide terrorists can be diagnosed with any mental illness or personality disorders [Hołyst 2012, 817]. There is also no specific type of "[...] personality prone to suicide who commits acts of terror. Suicide bombers who blow themselves up together with their victims are usually normal young people aged 16 to 28, coming from the middle class and having higher education. There are plenty of university students (male and female)

among terrorists. Suicide terrorism emerges in [...] a criminal process of a terrorist career" [Idem 2009, 650].

In the context of the general characteristics of a terrorist's "criminal career," one must mention (after Hołyst) certain special traits typical of suicide terrorists, namely [ibid., 650-51]: 1) the upbringing (socialisation) which future suicide terrorists receive is characterised by hatred and violence, and isolation from other environments; 2) the psyche of suicide terrorists is shaped through family, school and the mosque which worships martyrdom; 3) a suicide bomber has experienced at least one catalytic event. They have seen a close relative or friend being killed, hurt or humiliated. Due to that experience, they are guided by hatred and a desire for revenge; 4) the suicide of the terrorist is prepared by a terrorist organisation. It is the organisation that makes the decisions and manages the training of the future bomber[2] [ibid., 650]; 5) the suicide attack also has a characteristic course: "The already expressed wish to die is reinforced by additional factors, which makes it easier to commit the act. The bomber dies for Allah and has been chosen for that special mission" [ibid.]; 6) terrorist suicides are altruistic, they are referred to as "holy explosions," "Islamic human bombs."

A suicide terrorist is usually a man but there are also documented cases of terrorist suicides committed by women. The attempts to explain that phenomenon include the views that this is because women strive for equality and have a need to prove that they are just as courageous as men [Czabański 2009, 271].

Research involving Islamic suicide terrorists leads to a conclusion that the bombers are young, educated, usually single people, whose family and financial situation is stable, they are not exceptionally religious, they have no prior suicidal tendencies, and they are not burdened with any social pathology [ibid., 315].

A terrorist organisation using suicide attacks for its own purposes recruits, selects, trains and indoctrinates the future bombers based on strict criteria. The diversification of the process of finding, choosing and preparing candi-

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[2] "[...] good-bye letters and video recordings are made for the family. The majority of organisations pay a pension to the families of suicide bombers. They also build a new home for the family if the old one has been destroyed in revenge. A terrorist organisation finds support in the psychosocial atmosphere of a hateful society."

dates for suicide missions is to minimise the risk of mission failure. The risk usually involves: complete failure of the mission, threat of repression from the opponent against the terrorist organisation, and depletion of various resources (personal, financial, material, military) as a result of an improperly carried out attack [ibid., 291].

The criteria considered in the recruitment process include: the religious commitment of the candidate, their predispositions, and the ability to keep a secret, which is to guarantee the success of the future suicide mission. During the recruitment, the organisation also looks out for the risk of collaborating with the enemy. Bomber candidates are selected because there are more people willing to sacrifice their lives in a suicide attack than organisations need. The number of volunteers permits finding a candidate that meets all of the organisation's criteria. At the selection stage, it is important not only how the candidates perceive death but first and foremost how they approach life. Depressed individuals, who seemingly meet the criterion of accepting death by suicide, are not valuable for an organisation. This is because they cannot be counted on to be efficient on missions that entail more complex execution, i.e. ones that require certain independent action[3] [ibid., 288].

Sometimes several years can pass between one's decision to carry out a suicide attack and its execution, which makes it hard for the terrorist to organise their life. Strict confidentiality is required, often accompanied by a life in isolation as an émigré and by uncertainty – both due to the general threats from the enemies of the terrorist organisation and in terms of the time and place of the suicide mission. Living in such unusual mental and environmental conditions requires a suicide bomber candidate to have a number of special personality traits other than just the willingness to sacrifice their life.

A depressed person with suicidal tendencies is too risky for an organisation. A suicide bomber candidate who is to become a martyr once completing the mission must want to live [ibid., 289]. Choosing candidates with such an attitude to life additionally shows that suicide bombers are not mentally ill, they are not people who would be stereotypically called "madmen."

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[3] The 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States are a very good example in this respect. They were characterised by several stages of various level of difficulty.

Researchers of the subject claim that terrorist organisation mobilise more fighters than they actually need in order to make sure they have someone to execute the attack even if the previously selected candidates need to be eliminated [ibid., 288]. The diversification of recruitment criteria and the complexity of a specific suicide mission increases the likelihood of such a necessity, and its use has a direct impact on the success of the organisation's actions.

A future suicide bomber is prepared through training that involves both religious indoctrination and political propaganda [ibid., 290]. The purpose of the training tasks is not only to provide the required knowledge to be used by the trainee at further stages of their membership in the organisation[4] but also to check their commitment to the cause of the organisation and to the suicide mission. A future bomber undergoes spiritual cleansing through fasting, night time prayer and atonement for their sins [ibid.]. As the literature discussing the characteristics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict emphasises, a suicide mission candidate must, within their indoctrination, confirm their faith as well as their knowledge and understanding of specific passages from the Koran. They also prove their courage and their ability to keep secrets. They usually abandon their family home without leaving any traces. The candidate's readiness to die is checked during the training, for instance through participation in the so called "trial funerals," where they are put in a grave (first with others and then on their own) and then they recite a passage from the Koran. After some time, the trainee is released and left alone for two days and nights, during which time they are expected to read the Koran. Such a trial is followed by the determination of their final suitability for the suicide mission.

A special element of the bomber's final preparation for the suicidal death is to make a last will in the form of a letter, a compact cassette or a video recording. The farewell is recorded with the organisation's banner or another symbol in the background. Additionally, just before the execution of the sui-

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[4] The knowledge passed during the training is related primarily to the execution of the attack. In this respect, the candidate is instructed to choose a highly populated place (shopping centre, tourist or religious location) and to wait with the bomb until there are as many people inside as possible, as well as to avoid any check points (personal or technical security checks conducted using devices that monitor or detect weapons and explosives).

cide mission, the bomber completes all the rituals – for example puts on clean clothes and joins others in prayer [ibid., 291].

Terrorist organisations try to send a suicide bomber on the mission soon after their preparation is complete. In this way they want to additionally reduce the risk of the candidate changing their mind about the mission and revealing any information about it to anyone, and to minimise the probability of enemy forces uncovering the bomber and the plan. The need to keep the future attack a secret is the primary reason for the fragmentation of the suicide planning, with clear division of the decision-making responsibilities and the operating tasks, such as providing the bomber with fake documents, weapon, clothes or other elements to conceal their true identity, as well a means of transport.

It is hard to find typical suicide behaviour risk factors [Hołyst 2012, 817], such as use of alcohol or drugs, mood disorders, schizophrenia, substance dependency or prior suicide attempts [Białek 2005, 106], among the suicides committed by members of terrorist organisations.

The issue of terrorist suicides is also problematic due to the fixed social stereotypes regarding those who commit terrorist suicide [Czabański 2009, 313-14]. A suicide terrorist is usually considered a "madman" – someone who displays mental health abnormalities. The relevant research fails to confirm such a tendency[5] [Taylor 1988, 93; Horgan 2008, 30-35; Bolechów 2010, 28-32]. The stereotype is a result of attempts to rationally explain behaviour that invokes justified horror, drastically rejects the biological need to preserve one's own life, and violates socially accepted standards. The stereotype of a suicide terrorist suffering from a mental disease is shaped through press and TV commentaries, and through similar use of the motif of terrorist suicide in feature productions.

While discussing the issue of stereotypical approaches to the phenomenon of terrorist suicide, Czabański notes that "A terrorist is sometimes presented as someone whose behaviour differs from that of the rest of society and is irrational. Such a stereotype is built to explain that cruel events are the

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[5] A mentally ill person could be unable to complete the task. According to literature on the subject, it is impossible to confirm that the majority of terrorists displays mental health abnormalities, which could prove a relationship between the terrorist's personality disorder and the specificity of their acts of aggression.

work of crazy people. The public needs an explanation for bloody terrorist attacks [...]. In search of a justification for behaviour that is shocking to the public, such as suicide terrorist attacks, people tend to develop a belief that they are a form of madness" [Czabański 2009, 314]. This may be considered a way of defending society from the substantial threat in the form of a terrorist attack committed by a suicide bomber. Classifying suicide bombers as mentally ill helps people believe that such individuals are in the minority in society and, by extension, hope for the low frequency of such threats.

Research into terrorism and suicide shows that even if the acts committed by suicide bombers bear the traits of madness, they cannot be treated as proof of madness [Białek 2005, 103]. A terrorist's suicide during a terrorist mission committed in order to secure the goal may be a work of a mentally ill person but it may just as well be an action of someone who is fully mentally healthy but extremely ruthlessn [ibid.].

Both the terrorist organisation and the bombers themselves are aware of the effect of fear that is achieved through the use of suicide in pursuit of terrorist goals[6] [Czabański 2009, 314].

Czabański notes that "Israeli research proves that a group of extremists needs a certain set of social, cultural and political circumstances to commence suicidal attacks. In such conditions, almost everyone may become a suicide bomber" [ibid., 315]. Such observations confirm the findings of other authors that there is no specific suicide-prone personality type that leads to committing acts of terror[7] [Hołyst 2005, 104; Horgan 2008, 52-53].

2. Motivation behind a terrorist suicide

There is a clear connection between the individual motivations of suicide terrorists and the conditions in which terrorist organisations operate[8] [Cza-

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[6] "Terrorists [...] are aware that few events impact people as much as suicide does."

[7] Psychology literature uses the term "profile" to identify "unusual" or "pathological" individuals; they differ as to ideological zeal and leadership or proneness to extreme or illegal intents.

[8] "Suicide terrorist attacks are the outcomes of specific macro and micro-social circumstances. Almost anyone may become a suicide bomber if they encounter the right organisation

bański 2009, 473]. A terrorist organisation cannot use suicide attacks if it lacks members ready to take their own lives. On the other hand, even someone with the greatest motivation to die by suicide might not be able to execute a successful terrorist attack without the support of an organisation. Additionally, the organisation has a considerable impact on the individual motivation behind a suicide attack. It may initiate such motivation where a new member has no developed suicide behaviour motivation, and it may consolidate and build on it where the terrorist already has basic suicide motivation at the recruitment stage. It may also ultimately catalyse a suicide attack by providing all the technical measures and choosing the place, time and circumstances of the attack. The literature is unanimous in emphasising that suicide terrorism would not have been so successful without the support of a terrorist organisation. After all, it is the organisation which provides the resources required to prepare and execute the conflict. It is also the one responsible for securing the funds to finance all the activities and procure weapons, for recruiting, training and indoctrinating the future suicide bombers, and for choosing the strategy and the targets.

In the context of such interrelations, it must be assumed that the motivation behind terrorist suicides is subject to two groups of factors: individual and organisational [ibid., 268-69]. The individual factors include both personality traits and the environmental impact the individual faces as they grow (family, school, peers, religious community), which shapes their motivation for suicidal conduct. The organisational factors encompass the direct activity of the organisation's structures in pursuit of its goals, which may differ as to intensity at particular stages of a terrorist's membership in the organisation. This includes indoctrination, training, assignment to various tasks and participation in the conflict – activities that on the one hand prepare a terrorist to perform certain "general" tasks within the organisation, i.e. ones that are not specific for the suicide attack method, and on the other hand push the terrorist specifically toward the suicidal goal.

The individual factors include: a desire to benefit in the afterlife and a wish to avenge the harm to or the death of one's loved ones (family members, friends). The organisational foundation of a terrorist attack is characte-

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implementing total indoctrination, also through a charismatic leader who can convince people that sacrificing oneself is the right thing to do."

rised by strong political justification (the organisation's motivation to achieve political goals) and tactical considerations. The motivation behind a terrorist suicide is presented as a specific combination of religious, personal, nationalistic, economic, sociological and psychological motives, which encourage terrorist suicide attacks [ibid., 271].

Terrorist suicide attacks are also highly motivated by the need to win back one's dignity and sense of pride, which have been considerably undermined by humiliating and demeaning experiences for either the terrorist themselves or their loved ones [ibid., 275]. What matters is the promise of honour and the fear of disgrace [ibid., 316]. The indoctrination taking place in a number of environments (home, school, terrorist organisation) gradually builds the need to sacrifice one's life for the "good cause," the appeal of such death. The recognition of suicide terrorists as martyrs reinforces the conviction of young people recruited by a terrorist organisation that such a model of warfare is valid and that they play a special part in it. It is of significance that "Leaders of Islamic terrorist organisations take advantage of the poverty and backwardness of followers of the Koran to build their hatred for Western civilisation by identifying it as the source of their penury and privation" [Jałoszyński 2011, 12].

In his analysis of the religious motivation behind suicide terrorists based on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Czabański claims that the "Islamic movement sees the West and Israel as powerful threats to Islamic culture. As a result, it claims that holy war is an act of self-defence against the "enemies of God." This means that suicide terrorist attacks and other acts of violence are considered as legitimate and justified means of self-defence" [Czabański 2009, 272]. Hołyst offers a similar presentation of suicide terrorism [Hołyst 2012, 811]. Analysis of the motivation guiding suicide terrorists leads to the conclusion that the worship of martyrdom is especially important.

What is important in the religious motivation behind suicide is the firm belief that a person who loses their life in the conflict will be rewarded in the afterlife. The thought of improving one's social status after death is also highly motivating. A suicide bomber may even be an object of special worship in a community supporting such attacks as a conflict resolution method [Czabański 2009, 273].

The religious and ideological foundations of a suicide attack often radicalise if the bomber lives as an émigré [Hołyst 2012, 810-11]. With lack of support from those around and a sense of isolation from the community of the country where the person stays, and with the extreme differences in terms of values, attitudes and behaviours, the desire to fight becomes more powerful.

Analyses of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the motivations behind the terrorist suicides identified within it draw special attention to the motive of revenge for the death of a loved one. "Due to the small territory of the conflict [...], its duration, high population density and high casualty rate (encompassing those killed or injured), almost every Palestinian personally knows or knew someone who was wounded or killed during the conflict. So calls for revenge are not left unanswered" [Czabański 2009, 274].

Nationalistic motivation is also of significance. The fighting carried on by terrorists (including suicide bombers) is justified with the need to recover a territory that has been unjustly seized.

Another side motive that is important in suicide terrorism is the economic motive, determined by the low financial status of the terrorist and their family.[9] The motive is not treated as the primary one since the mere presence of poor economic situation of a suicide terrorist candidate is not enough for the decisions and actions aimed at taking one's own life. There are cases of societies where the economic and financial situation is very rough, yet suicide terrorism is absent. Many suicide terrorists also come from well-off families, which proves that financial difficulties alone cannot be treated as a motive. The economic motive should be considered as coexisting and additionally reinforcing the motivation shaped by the other factors, for example ideological ones. A poor economic situation gives the person a reason to look at their life without hope. Lack of prospects for changing that situation accompanied by strong religious and ideological foundations for the fight against the enemy justifies sacrificing one's own life to defend the values held dear, concurrently being a form of liberation from the hardships of privation and poverty. One's inability to succeed in a community that is limited territo-

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[9] A terrorist's suicide is often followed by improvement in the situation of their family. This may take the form of a better financial standing of the family (receipt of a specific amount of money, a better dwelling, support in kind in the form of household equipment) and a higher social status (recognition in the community).

rially, economically and culturally makes the perspective of standing out through death by suicide particularly enticing. Gaining the status of a martyr is an alternative for such a difficult position because a suicide volunteer enjoys tremendous recognition, and the attitude and approval of the community combined with the worship of martyrdom turns an ordinary individual into someone exceptional and incredibly valuable, also from the point of view of the community.

The worship of a suicide terrorist as described above is an important reason why young people express a willingness to die and take the steps leading directly to their death within a terrorist organisation. This social reinforcement of individual motivations behind the attack leads to a situation where suicide terrorism has both its supporters, approving such a method of conflict, and volunteers – completely ready to sacrifice their lives. An analysis of every case of suicide, terrorist suicide included, requires establishing the presence of both individual and organisational motivation [Ismayilov 2010, 16-20].

Final notes

Analysis of the motivations of suicide terrorists invokes certain doubt as to definitive classification of such a suicide as altruistic behaviour. Even though the motivation revealed by those who take their own lives is always described as altruistic (fight for the independence of their nation, defence of religious or cultural values), the information gathered about the subject renders such determination inconclusive. Suicide terrorists choose to sacrifice their lives in order to be rewarded (even this is to take place in the afterlife); they also expect their family's status to improve and they are guided by a desire for revenge. Such motivational foundations "distort" the picture of terrorist suicide as altruistic behaviour.

The problem of terrorist suicides analysed from the perspective of the altruistic motivation also appears in the context of copycatting or "suicide marketing" [Czabański 2009, 472].

Its distinctive feature is that "both suicides that are political protests and terrorist suicide attacks sometimes provoke a whole series of copycat missions"[10] [ibid., 473] which is not irrelevant for the scale of the phenomenon.

The specific justification of the presence of suicide in terrorist warfare presented in the article suggests that they should be analysed from a number of different points of view, with a multifaceted approach.

Some of the people executing suicide attacks for terrorist organisations are consistent with the profile of a suicide terrorist to a certain extent, but there are bombers whose personality and behaviour fails to comply with such a description and the general recruitment rules of terrorist organisations.

As we analyse terrorist suicides from the perspective of specific individual, special and organisational behaviour, we must remember that there are sleeper terrorists [Hołyst 2012, 810-11] many countries who are waiting for an order to carry out a suicide terrorist attack [Idem 2009, 645]. Identifying them is incredibly difficult. This is one of the reasons why terrorism is defined as a highly unpredictable threat, and combating it is a challenging, slow and costly task [Lisowski 2011, 102].

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[10] "During the conflict in Lebanon, every subsequent suicide hit resulted in mass volunteering for suicide groups. These single attacks were deliberately publicised with details and they all encouraged subsequent missions. Whereas for altruistic suicides committed for political reasons such strings of copycat actions were fairly spontaneous, similar copycat terrorist suicide attacks were steered by terrorist or political organisations (both in the Middle East and in Sri Lanka). Moreover, it is out in the open that Tamils and Palestinian inspired each other with their suicide attacks."

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Motivation Behind Suicide Attacks

Summary

The article describes the problem of terrorist suicide. It explains the definitions of terrorism and suicide. Suicide is presented as a specific engagement method of terrorist organisations. The study describes the motivation behind terrorist suicides, including individual, social and organisational motivation. Suicide terrorism is presented as part of the criminal's terrorist career. Terrorist suicide is a characteristic of the so-called "New Terrorism" and a type of altruistic suicide

Key words: terrorist suicide, motivation, method, terrorist attacks, terrorist career, terrorist organization

Motywacja samobójstw terrorystycznych

Streszczenie

Artykuł opisuje problem samobójstw terrorystycznych. W zakresie omawianego zagadnienia wyjaśniono definiowanie terroryzmu i samobójstwa. Samobójstwo zostało przedstawione jako specyficzna metoda walki organizacji terrorystycznych. Opracowanie zawiera charakterystykę motywacji samobójstw terrorystycznych, z uwzględnieniem motywacji indywidualnej, społecznej i organizacyjnej. Terroryzm samobójczy został przedstawiony w artykule jako część kariery terrory-

stycznej przestępcy. Samobójstwo terrorystyczne jest cechą tzw. nowego terroryzmu oraz rodzajem samobójstwa altruistycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: samobójstwo terrorystyczne, motywacja, metoda, ataki terrorystyczne, kariera terrorystyczna, organizacja terrorystyczna

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