

## INTERPRETATIONS OF TERRORISM: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES

Vakhit AKAEV

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Academician,  
Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic, Professor,  
Department of Philosophy, Academician M. Millionshchikov  
Grozny State Oil Technical University, Leading Research Associate,  
Ibragimov Integrated Scientific and  
Research Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences  
(Grozny, Russian Federation)*

Murat KELIGOV

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor, Department of Philosophy,  
Academician M. Millionshchikov Grozny State Oil Technical University  
(Grozny, Russian Federation)*

Boryat NANAeva

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor,  
Head of the Department of Philosophy,  
Academician M. Millionshchikov Grozny State Oil Technical University  
(Grozny, Russian Federation)*

### ABSTRACT

**T**he variety of specific forms of terrorism and, therefore, its different interpretations are rooted in social, economic, political, geopolitical and religious factors. Theoretical and practical approaches to terrorism help identify its most important characteristics, global and regional specifics and the ways and means to be used to combat it.

A clearer idea of regional specifics of terrorist manifestations suggests specific

forms of prevention and counteraction. Sociological polls among North Caucasian students, in the Chechen Republic in particular, serve precisely this purpose. Prevention depends, first and foremost, on a better understanding of the causes of asocial behavior of those young men who fell into the trap of criminal groups; better understanding is achieved through finding out what the students of the Chechen Republic think about extremism and terrorism.

*This article has been written according to the State Project of the RF Ministry of Education and Science No. 35.930.2017/БЧ.*

**KEYWORDS:** *ideology and practice of terrorism, interpretation of extremism and terrorism, types of terrorism, measures of opposition, sociological poll, student youth, Chechnia, Daghestan.*

## *Introduction*

Today terrorism as a social deviation has already become an international phenomenon. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard paid particular attention to the universal nature and mobility of terrorism: “Terrorism, like viruses, is everywhere ... it accompanies any system of domination as though it were its shadow, ready to activate itself anywhere, like a double agent”<sup>1</sup> and added, “We can no longer draw a demarcation line around it. It is at the very heart of this culture which combats it, and the visible fracture (and the hatred) that pits the exploited and the underdeveloped globally against the Western world secretly connects with the fracture internal to the dominant system.”<sup>2</sup>

We all know that both in the past and today many terrorist groups demonstrated strong religious affiliations.<sup>3</sup> However, terrorism is highly varied; it wears all sorts of masks and adjusts to any intertwining of its political, ideological, religious, ethnic, etc. components, making it hard, or even impossible to identify its different types. The mere fact that terrorism, irrespective of its type or manifestations, negatively affects the relationships between people, social groups, ethnicities and religions and threatens people, societies and states, making the consolidation of anti-terrorist efforts of states and public associations indispensable.

## Theoretical Interpretation of Terrorism

There are many interpretations of terrorism. Some researchers concentrate on ethno-religious terrorism as the most common and the most dangerous type.<sup>4</sup> It is defined as a crime committed to ensure the triumph of one’s nation and/or religion, to realize national and religious ideas up to and including separatist schemes by suppressing or liquidating other national and religious groups (within one and the same religion). This terrorism grows on the soil of extremism, national and religious intolerance, enmity and hatred, inability or unwillingness to see other groups as partners at the negotiation table; as the side with which compromises can and should be achieved and whose interests should be respected and taken into account.<sup>5</sup>

This can be further specified by identifying Islamic, Arab, Chechen and other types of terrorism. Today, American politicians and analysts and their Russian colleagues do not hesitate to use the terms

<sup>1</sup> J. Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, Verso, 2006, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> See: B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism (Columbia Studies in Terror)*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 90-91.

<sup>4</sup> See: M.Iu. Antonian *et al.*, *Etmoreligiozny terrorizm*, Aspekt Press, Moscow, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Islamic terrorism and Islamo-fascism. Viacheslav Sosnin has supplied Chechen terrorism with a historical background, namely, the Caucasian War of the 19th century led by Shamil, who had wanted to establish an Islamic state, and has claimed that this movement was revived in 1991.<sup>6</sup> This is not merely unscientific; it is politically burdened and is, therefore, ideologically toxic.

## Ideological and Practical Opposition to Terrorism

U.N. Resolution 60/288—The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted on 8 September, 2006 clearly confirmed that the international community should close ranks in its counterterrorist struggle. It was for the first time that terrorism of all types was condemned at the highest international level. More than that: the U.N. demonstrated its determination “to develop practical mechanisms to prevent terrorism and to struggle against it.” It intended to remove the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and to invigorate counterterrorist struggle; to consolidate the potentials of states needed to prevent and oppose terrorism, to consolidate the role of the U.N., to ensure universal respect for human rights and the rule of law as the foundation of counterterrorist struggle.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the quoted document says that the U.N. reaffirmed “that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group.”

Despite their extremely cool relationship of the last few years, Russia and the United States do not deny that they should act together to oppose terrorism by coordinated efforts.

Terrorism threatens society and the state, which means that it should be opposed effectively as a social deviation. In the academic context, however, we should separate the concepts of “terror” and “terrorism”. The former describes the material and technological arsenal used in terrorist acts. The struggle against terror is the struggle against those who are directly involved in acts of terror, i.e. terrorists. This is a very specific field of counterterrorist activities carried out by law enforcement structures, intelligence and armed forces that target those who prepare, organize and carry out criminal deeds. (Russia and its Aerospace Forces were fairly successful in the struggle against terrorists and their structures in Syria.)

Struggle against terrorism as an ideology or a system of social, economic, political, religious, ethnic and moral assessments is something very different from the struggle against terrorists. It should be systematic, well-planned and efficient; it seems that we need experts or “ideologists” in Soviet parlance. Meanwhile, the situation is very strange: there is an ideology of terrorism, yet there is no counterterrorist ideology. Not all knowledge and not even knowledge about society can be described as an ideology. Ideology stems from the views and axiological attitudes formulated by politicians, political scientists, philosophers, sociologists, publicist writers and journalists who assess historical and civilizational processes in the context of the basic interests of the state, political movements and organizations, classes and social groups. An ideologist synthesizes knowledge and values into a philosophical construct or an ideology.

It is highly important to liquidate terrorist infrastructure, yet ideology is confronted with a more challenging task: it is expected to liquidate terrorism as a crime against humanity. So far, mankind is not ready to wipe out terrorism, yet the ideological denunciation of terrorism as an anti-human ideol-

---

<sup>6</sup> See: V.A. Sosnin, *Psikhologiya terrorizma i protivodeystvie emu v sovremennom mire*, Institute of Psychology Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> [[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/60/288](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/60/288)].

ogy is highly important from humanitarian and historical positions. Terror and terrorism will not be liquidated, yet the intensity of terrorist acts and their scope should be suppressed.

Which criminal anti-human designs serve the cornerstone of the ideology of terrorism? Which ideas form the foundation of terrorist manifestations?

In the past, for instance, in pre-revolutionary Russia, top officials—prime-ministers, governors and ministers—and even the czar were held responsible for the suffering of the common people, and as such became targets of terrorist acts carried out by fighters of all kinds—Anarchists, Socialist Revolutionaries or members of the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) organization. Today, terrorists are guided by the idea of collective guilt, which means that each and every member of any social community (no exception made for children, women or the elderly) should answer for everything that is going on in society and the state. Indeed, mass deaths as a result of a terrorist act are much more frightening than the death of a state official or even the head of state. This means that contemporary or “new” terrorism is not merely an anti-human ideology and the practice of violence, but an “extremely amoral phenomenon” (B. Pruzhinin) and an “embodiment of absolute evil” (A. Guseynov).<sup>8</sup>

It is highly important to bear in mind that all forms of terrorism, geopolitical, state or sociopsychological, are charged with deterrence and violence. The practical political component makes terrorism a greater or lesser evil irrespective of its specific forms. As an ideology and political practice it is intended to push people into moral and psychological depression, create an atmosphere of fear or even panic to allow terrorists to achieve their aims.

The problem of terrorism and the methods of its resolution defy straightforward approaches: the ideology of terrorism is best described as a patchwork of ideas, while terrorists represent certain sociocultural groups, each with reasons of their own to generate criminal ideas, they are driven by specific motives and specific justifications of their terrorist activities. This variety of ideas and political practices render useless abstract deliberations about terrorism. Those who speak about terrorists as fanatics and fatalists deprived of an ability to think rationally and acting on the spur of the moment merely simplify the problem. “Today terrorists demonstrate the psychology,” writes Valentina Fedotova, “that makes them deeply convinced people, short of Luther (Here I stand; I can do no other), rather than fanatical bandits determined to use arms to commit their crimes.”<sup>9</sup>

Today, those who organize and inspire terrorism rely on all sorts of means and methods to consolidate their convictions to pass them for an ideology. Religion as an ambiguous phenomenon plays a special role in the process. On the one hand, terrorists embrace religion in its distorted forms and rely on it for motivation of terrorist acts and their justification. They use misinterpreted religious ideas to justify their antihuman crimes. Those who support ultra-radical ideas tend to interpret the concepts shahid, jihad, takfir and gazavat one-sidedly and insist that they allegedly speak about the need to fight infidels. In Islam, however, it is not enough to simply uphold the letter of the teaching—its provisions should be studied and comprehended.

In the contemporary world, socially disorientated young men with no prospects of well-being, cultural development or political career become vehicles of extremism and terrorism. The Millionshchikov Grozny State Oil Technical University organized a sociological poll mostly among students in the Chechen Republic to clarify at least some of the sides of the problem. The results are found below.

---

<sup>8</sup> “Terrorizm v sovremennom mire. Opyt mezhdunarodnogo analiza (materialy ‘kruglogo stola’),” *Voprosy filosofii*, No. 6, 2005, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> V.G. Fedotova, “Vystuplenie na ‘kruglom stole’ po probleme: Terrorizm v sovremennom mire. Opyt mezhdistsiplinarnogo analiza,” *Voprosy filosofii*, No. 6, 2005, p. 12.

## Assessment of Extremism and Terrorism: An Analysis of the Results of Sociological Polls among Students

In 2018, research associates at the Opposition to Extremism and Terrorism Laboratory at the Department of Philosophy of the Oil Technical University carried out a sociological poll, within the framework of a State Project of the Ministry of Education and Science, among the students of the Millionshchikov Oil Technical University, the State University of Chechnia and the Chechen State Pedagogical University (a sampling of 500 second-year students) to clarify what the students at these educational establishments thought about extremism and terrorism and specify their personal attitude to these asocial phenomena. A questionnaire compiled for this purpose (Ideas about Extremism and Terrorism and Attitude to These Illegal Actions among the Students of the Chechen Republic) consisted of three blocks. Block 1 contained questions about personal ideas of the polled students about extremism and terrorism; Block 2 was related to students' personal attitudes to extremist and terrorist manifestations and Block 3 contained questions about students' ideas of how extremism and terrorism could and should be opposed.

The question about the most typical features of extremism invited the following answers: 66% of the polled pointed to violence and the threat of violence; 10.5%, to fanaticism and unbridled determination to insist on one's principles; for 47% extremism was a destabilizing factor in the public and state context. Eighty-two percent of the polled students described extremism and terrorism as a detestable crime against humanity; 5.0% of the polled accepted extremism as one of the possible methods of struggle.

The polled students (16.8%) explained the growth of extremism and terrorism as its extreme form by the growth of social and economic contradictions; 36.6%, by mounting political contradictions; 40.6%, by increasing religious contradictions and 6.0% pointed to other reasons. Religious contradictions were identified as the main source of extremism and terrorism, followed by political contradictions; social and economic problems came third. A fairly large share of students (77.2%) pointed to religious and political factors as the roots of terrorism.

The poll revealed the most efficient methods of struggle against religious extremism: moral and spiritual values and traditions of the Chechen ethnicity: historical memory and love of the land of ancestors (32.6%), awareness of responsibility for the future generations (42.0%) and tolerance and dialog (25.4%).

The answers to the key questions of Block 1 showed that the students of the second year had already acquired clear ideas about extremism and terrorism and that their absolute majority denounce them as anti-human. The absolute majority of the polled (77.2%) believed that extremism and terrorism were spreading far and wide along with political and religious contradictions. Six percent of the students pointed to other reasons without specifying them.

The researchers believed that it was necessary to find out whether the polled students were aware that ethnic and traditional values of the Chechens can be used to oppose extremism and terrorism. Historical memory, love for the land of ancestors, acute awareness of responsibility for future generations, tolerance and dialog were identified as the key factors of struggle against extremism and terrorism.

Questions of Block 2 were designed to identify personal attitudes to extremist and terrorist acts. The answers to the question about the methods used to prevent extremist and terrorist outbursts revealed that 56.6% of the polled believed that criminal responsibility should be tightened; 23.0% admitted that liberal methods and administrative responsibility should be used, while 20.4% believed that nothing could prevent acts of extremism and terror in the contemporary world. Thus, one-fifth of the polled was convinced that terrorism could not be liquidated; this was a fairly big share probably persuaded by information often obtained from TV programs and Internet resources.

The question about the reasons that pushed young men into extremist organizations invited the following answers: 17.1% were convinced that money was the main attraction; 10.2% - that they were driven by vanity and possible glory; 72.6% mentioned ideological convictions (without specifying whether they were related to religion, politics or philosophy).

Money as the main attraction was fairly apparent; vanity was realized in slightly more than 10% (lower than the previous one), yet big enough to mobilize a fairly big share of young people. The very high share of young men who join asocial terrorist organizations for ideological reasons cannot but cause concerns. Even if unspecified, it is more or less clear that religious factors dominate.

These answers let us identify the fairly vulnerable spot in the spiritual makeup of the younger generation and supply those who analyze the factors behind religious extremism and political terrorism with food for thought.

Block 3 of our questionnaire revealed what students of higher educational establishments of the Chechen Republic think about the possible methods of opposing extremism and terrorism. The ban on the propaganda of national and religious hatred was selected as the most efficient method by 22.4%; 22.6% believed that public and religious organizations that kindled racial, national and religious strife should be banned, while 54.0% believed that success could be achieved through spreading the knowledge of the humanist essence of Islam, which is incompatible with extremism.

The question whether extremism and terrorism could be successfully opposed by values of ethnic culture drew 25.7% of positive answers, 9.1% of negative answers, while 65.1% of the polled were undecided. This means that students find it hard to identify the potentials of ethnic cultures as an instrument of opposition to extremism and terrorism as its extreme form. The question probably should have been specified and divided into several questions, each relating to one of the components of ethnic cultures: customs and traditions, mental and spiritual specifics.

## *Conclusions*

Young men, who tend to trust everything they find online and all sorts of gatherings, are easy prey to Islamist recruiters. In 2000, 26 teenagers from the same village in Chechnia in search of deeper knowledge about Islam attended lectures of a Wahhabi mullah who preached jihad and the Islamic State as God-pleasing deeds. They joined jihadists and perished, while the mullah merely disappeared from the village.

According to the poll, students in Chechnia, on the whole, condemn participation in extremist and terrorist groups in any state. At the same time, we have established that they have no clear ideas about why these asocial phenomena appeared and how they should be suppressed even if they demonstrated a wide range of opinions about the reasons that stir up terrorist intentions and identified religious and political disagreements as most important.

The respondents, or 22.4% of them, to be more exact, believed that a ban on the propaganda of national and religious hatred would be enough to halt the spread of extremism and terrorism; 22.6% believed that public and religious associations known to kindle social, racial, national and religious disagreements should be prohibited; 54.0% pointed out that people should acquire a deeper knowledge of Islam, the humanistic nature of which is incompatible with extremism. None of them, however, had clear ideas about the ethnic and cultural resources as instruments to be used to prevent the spread of extremism and terrorism and uproot their shoots. Over 65% of the polled had no answer to the question of how ethnic and cultural values could be used to oppose extremism and terrorism.

Chechen students, on the other hand, know that it is highly important to use all sorts of legal instruments to ban socially dangerous groups that threaten national and confessional unity of the society and the state. On the other hand, we all know that legal education of the younger generation, students of higher educational establishments in the first place, is practically non-existent in many regions of the Russian Federation.

Analysts in Dagestan, who study the ways and means through which religious extremism and terrorism is promoted in the republic and the specifics of its spread among young people, have pointed out that this can also be observed in many regions. It turned out that the polled students cannot distinguish between “religious extremism and religious terrorism which they treat as identical phenomena.”<sup>10</sup>

Zaid Abdulagarov, one of the respected students of extremism and terrorism in Dagestan, has written that the Federal Financial Monitoring Service of the Russian Federation (Rosfinmonitoring) regularly publishes lists of physical persons involved in extremist activities or terrorism. The list of 1,781 persons includes 438 people from Dagestan (24.6%), with the average age of 30.3 years; Chechens constitute 10.7%; 6.8% hail from Kabardino-Balkaria; 1.7%—from Ingushetia; 1.1%—from Tatarstan. The author concluded that “this is a well-arranged and carefully planned organization set up with religious aims in view.”<sup>11</sup>

This means that the theoretical provisions formulated above and sociological information suggest that:

- (a) studies of extremism and terrorism presuppose profound scholarly comprehension, exact terminology; training of qualified ideologists able to organize ideological and practical opposition;
- (b) the greater part of the students in Chechnia look at extremism and terrorism as repulsive crimes against humanity; these phenomena are not popular in the student milieu and their support is minimal;
- (c) less than 20% said that young people join extremist and terrorist organizations in hopes of growing rich; slightly more than 10% are believed to be vain enough to seek glory, while nearly 73% of the respondents spoke of ideological convictions. The share is big enough to require further specification;
- (d) students, on the whole, believe that criminal responsibility should be toughened;
- (e) 45% of Chechen students are convinced that propaganda of national, religious and racial hatred and strife should be banned; more than half of them have admitted that hatred and strife are rooted in superficial knowledge of the humanist and peaceful nature of Islam. This suggests a conclusion that the greater part of the young people involved in extremist and terrorist groups do not know enough about religion that makes them easy prey for those whose job is to replenish the ranks of fighters against “crusaders and Jews.” This is true: John Esposito, a prominent American student of political processes going on in Islam, has pointed out that members of extremist and terrorist groups know next to nothing about the true Islam and its fundamental values.

Further studies of what young people think about extremism and terrorism, their involvement in social acts and their specific commentaries will help us assess their philosophy, inner convictions, the degree of tolerance and their understanding of possible mobilization of ethnic and cultural resources, as well as the society and the state for active opposition.

---

<sup>10</sup> *Religiozno-politicheskiy ekstremizm: sushchnost, prichiny, formy proiavleniia, puti preodolenia*, ed. by Prof. M.Ia. Iakhiaev, Parnas, Moscow, 2011, p. 196.

<sup>11</sup> Z.M. Abdulagatov, “O pokazateliakh ekstremizma i terrorizma v Respublike Dagestan,” in: *Strategia i taktika protivodeystvia vyzovam ekstremizma i terrorizma v Rossii na sovremennom etape: Materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii (18-19 November, 2016 g.)*, ed. by Prof. M.Ia. Iakhiaev, ALEF, Makhachkala, 2016, pp. 196-197.