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**Book review: Tomasz R. Aleksandrowicz,
Prognozowanie zagrożeń terrorystycznych. Aspekty metodologiczne (Eng. *Forecasting terrorist threats. Methodological aspects*)¹**



Raising public awareness plays an important role in effective terrorism prevention. Appropriately prepared organisations and services should impart the necessary knowledge and teach life-saving behaviours when a threat arises. In this way, the level of fear can be reduced and the ability of members of society to resist negative phenomena and the actions of others can be increased. Education should be multi-faceted, for different age and social groups. It should be based on sound knowledge, derived both from scientific knowledge and from experience.

The links between science and practice and the role of terrorism prevention are repeatedly mentioned by Tomasz Aleksandrowicz in his scientific monograph *Forecasting terrorist*

¹ T.R. Aleksandrowicz, *Prognozowanie zagrożeń terrorystycznych. Aspekty metodologiczne* (Eng. *Forecasting terrorist threats. Methodological aspects*), Warszawa 2022, Difin.

threats. Methodological aspects, which is the first attempt on the Polish market to face the title issue. The aim behind this publication is to present the methodology of forecasting terrorist threats, i.e. basic methods, techniques and tools used in this process. The author, a professor at the Police Academy in Szczytno and a respected expert in the field of terrorism research, describes these issues against the background of national and international solutions, based on the experience of countries that have a long track record in identifying and combating terrorism, and the findings contained in his book organise the knowledge of these solutions. The primary research method used in his work is system analysis.

It is worth mentioning at this point that foresight is now an essential part of the functioning of states, organisations and individuals alike. Indeed, effective security strategies cannot rely solely on reactive measures, but must focus on anticipating threats. The main thesis of Tomasz Aleksandrowicz's book is that a properly developed forecast allows us to determine with high probability the possibility of a terrorist threat, but it is always an estimation of such a possibility, not a cognitive certainty.

The reviewed monograph covers 128 pages and consists of an introduction, seven chapters, a conclusion, an appendix and an extensive bibliography containing many valuable and, above all, up-to-date studies, which is worth emphasising due to the nature and dynamics of the studied processes. The author has carefully thought through the layout of the publication, which is coherent and logical. In the introduction, he has precisely defined the aim and subject of the research, the scope of the issues raised, the assumptions and limitations of the research, presented his position on the studied subject, and described the structure of the monograph. Chapters I-III are divided into subchapters covering specific issues. In the subsequent parts of the book, their separation was not justified due to the issues raised in them. The book is written in accessible language, at times colourful, as the author does not shy away from references to fiction, which may be of additional value to the reader. It is worth emphasising that the reviewed publication is thematically linked to Tomasz Aleksandrowicz's previous work on terrorism, its recognition and combating, which also speaks for its high level.

The author of the monograph has undertaken a very demanding task. This is because there is no doubt that forecasting is the most difficult part

of information analysis. It should be made clear that making a forecast is based on several categories of information and data. First of all, this is data coming from areas that can be subjected to cognition - this can be analysed, conclusions can be drawn from it, classic analytical questions can be answered: what? What is the result? This is the so-called hard data, which can be called strong signals about future developments. The second category is weak signals, which are identified with difficulty. These are such events (processes) that constitute novelty and are either outside the sphere available to our cognition or ignored. In English, the term *slow-burning issues* is sometimes used to refer to them, as they are almost imperceptible and their impact can only be noticed a long time after the first symptoms appear. In the future, however, these weak signals can have a significant impact. In forecasting, it is also necessary to be aware of the areas of ignorance and their extent and to try to estimate them. It is also important to remember that there is information and data that we do not want to know about. The reasons for this reluctance can range from political (having to make socially unpopular decisions) to psychological (cognitive dissonance). A forecast is therefore never a certainty - its validity can only be verified after a certain period of time, *post factum*. However, a well-prepared one makes us less surprised by the future. The effectiveness of a forecast, understood as the accurate determination of what will happen in the future, is not - especially in the area of security - the only criterion for its evaluation. On the basis of the forecast, decisions are often taken that prevent the occurrence of the risks it warns against. This means that it was both right and effective.

Attention is drawn, among others, by Andrzej Dawidczyk, a specialist in strategic analyses using qualitative and quantitative methods, to the fact that classical forecasting is based on the analysis of only that area of reality which we have been able to learn. In this way, we obtain a fragment of the picture of the future limited by our habits, accepted paradigms, hidden assumptions, determined by established canons of thought. According to Dawidczyk, there is also the aforementioned area outside the sphere of observation, inaccessible to cognition, in which processes take place that have a direct and sometimes decisive influence on future developments². In studies on information analysis theory, such a situation

² A. Dawidczyk, *Analiza strategiczna w dziedzinie bezpieczeństwa państwa. Wybrane metody* (Eng. Strategic analysis in state security. Selected methods), Warszawa 2020.

has been described as a problem of analysis in the absence of sufficient data, and analysts have been urged to look for what is not there. The realisation that there was a need for such an intellectual search was called information awareness. Similarly, David Omand, a former British intelligence agent and security author, notes that our knowledge of the world around us is always fragmented, incomplete and we sometimes make errors of judgement. This is because we do not have all the information we need and, moreover, we feel reluctant to recognise that new data should change the picture of reality already developed. We also have difficulty understanding our opponent's motivations, which is linked to a lack of knowledge of the culture in which they operate and the beliefs they have developed³. Bobby W., an analyst in the CIA's Analysis Department, states that (...) *there is no such forecasting technique that is able to determine the timing of a trend-changing fact (timing of nonlinearity)*⁴. An intelligence analyst can formulate a prediction about the increased sophistication of Al-Qaeda's plans and the increased tension in the Middle East, but he cannot predict when terrorist-hijacked planes will hit the World Trade Center towers or when the self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia will cause civil unrest. The processes leading to changes in activity are gradual, but when a phenomenon starts to go beyond the pattern observed so far, this represents a previously unpredictable tipping point. To the forecasting difficulties indicated, one must add the widespread information warfare, elements of which are disinformation and misleading, including for those trying to predict future developments.

A great asset of Tomasz Aleksandrowicz's book is that the author addresses one of the most difficult and complex analytical themes, which includes forecasting terrorist threats. The starting point for his considerations is the claim that terrorists always have an advantage over the state, as they can attack at a time, in a manner and against a target of their choice, while the state is unable to defend every potential target against every type of attack at all times. This is especially true in democratic states, as terrorists use the basic attributes of democracy, such as freedom of speech, access to information, freedom of movement or the right to privacy, to prepare and carry out their attacks. These attributes unfortunately favour the existence and development of terrorism. The perpetration of a terrorist

³ D. Omand, *How Spies Think. Ten Lessons in Intelligence*, London 2020.

⁴ W. Bobby, *The Limits of Prediction – or How I Learned to Stop Worrying about Black Swans and Love Angels*, "Studies in Intelligence" 2019, vol. 63, no 4.

attack in North Korea, for example, is unlikely due to the total surveillance of everyone on its territory. Freedom and democracy come at a cost - in this case the price is the threat of terrorist attacks.

In the introduction to the book, the author formulates an extremely interesting research problem, based on (...) *resolving the dilemma of whether it is possible to forecast terrorist threats and what should be the methodology for developing such forecasts* (p. 9). He writes that the primary objective of his research is (...) *to develop a methodology for forecasting terrorist threats. The thesis that the author is tempted to prove is that it is possible to forecast terrorist threats using an appropriate methodology in the process of developing them* (p. 9). This justifies the adopted structure of the study - from the systematisation of theoretical issues in the field of forecasting (the author analyses them in the context of security science), through the analysis of the subject of forecasting, i.e. contemporary terrorism, to the proposal of a forecasting methodology in the subject at three levels: strategic, operational and tactical.

Writing about the specificity of security sciences (chapter one), the author of the monograph maintains his view, formulated much earlier, of the multifaceted nature of this discipline (this is also reflected in the literature he cites). His deductions on this subject lead him to correctly establish the object and purpose of the research. The author sees their meaning in the effective provision of state security, which is precisely what the forecasting of terrorist threats is supposed to serve. It can be concluded that the inclusion of the considered issues within the framework of security science is largely justified, however with reservations, which are discussed later in the review.

The author captures the science of security in a way that invites discussion, circling between a broad view and the need to embed it in a more concretised layer of purpose (scientific purpose). In fact, after considering the interdisciplinarity of the security sciences, he formulates the view that (...) *the basic criterion differentiating the security sciences from other scientific disciplines is the object of research, which - despite its signalled broadness - can be reduced to the subject's security environment and its response to the resulting opportunities, challenges, threats and risks* (p. 34). In doing so, he places the considerations in the strategic thinking and action stream, referring to the most important categories ordering security research derived by theorists from the military sciences (challenges, threats, etc.). In doing so, he points out that this kind of research should be in close relation to practice

(chapter two), which is obvious in the context of the constant need to improve security systems. This approach seems appropriate for the search for an appropriate methodology for forecasting threats, not only those of terrorism. It is important that Tomasz Aleksandrowicz recognises and uses the achievements of other authors (e.g. Andrzej Dawidczyk, Mirosław Sułk) describing various methods and their applications in research on security in its various dimensions. According to the reviewer, in future editions of the book, it would be worthwhile to include in the references the latest position by Andrzej Dawidczyk and Justyna Jurczak entitled *Metodologia bezpieczeństwa w przykładach i zastosowaniach* (Eng. Safety methodology in examples and applications), (Warszawa 2022, Difin).

An extremely interesting part of the theoretical introduction to the subject of the study is the one devoted to the American school of intelligence analysis. Here, the author refers both to his own numerous studies on the subject, as well as to the rich literature on the subject and primary sources (documents, accounts). This part of the monograph is an introduction to the author's proposal of forecasting methodology, as it contains a very comprehensive overview of the methods and techniques and approaches used in it.

The next (third) chapter, which presents an analysis of terrorist threats as an object of forecasting, should be considered as equally valuable. The author moves freely in this area, citing the findings of authorities and the results of recent research, and above all verifying his own assessments and theses contained in earlier studies. This part of the publication complements the knowledge based on Tomasz Aleksandrowicz's original approach to the issue in question.

The fourth chapter is devoted to general findings on terrorist threat forecasting. In it, the author describes the practice of identifying and counteracting these threats, related not only to the activities of the services and special units, but also of the administration responsible for state security. Remaining in the analytical trend developed in the USA, he also includes in the analysis domestic legal and organisational solutions. This is a great asset of the monograph.

Chapters five, six and seven are devoted to forecasting at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, respectively.

The description of the strategic level includes a model of the base of terrorist events (attacks) on a global scale. The author refers to existing solutions of this type and indicates the need for a uniform template

for data description. At the strategic level, the fundamental directions of the state's counter-terrorism policy are set and the knowledge needed for forecasting at the operational level is drawn (p. 92), a conclusion that can be considered valid. The primary objective of terrorist threat forecasting at the strategic level is to answer the fundamental questions: does such a threat exist? Could we be forced to face it in the foreseeable future? From what directions might the threat emerge? What might its nature be? What state responses does it require at the strategic level? This is therefore a classic multi-factor analysis and forecast, the results of which form the basis for policy decisions not only related to the projected threat to the state in question, but also arising from the state's legal, international and alliance obligations, such as participation in multilateral conventions, bilateral agreements, accords, alliances, or indicating the need to join such or intensify international cooperation in this regard. In the sphere of domestic policy, the findings of the strategic forecast may (and should) constitute the basis for decisions on the construction of the anti-terrorist system, its shape, components and directions of development, and if such a system already exists - on the directions of its improvement taking into account the changes indicated in the forecast.

The starting point for the construction of a terrorist threat forecast at the strategic level is the creation of a database of attacks on a global scale over a specific time period, which allows the trend in threats to be identified. Of course, it is possible to use publicly available databases, e.g. START, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) or the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT), but attention must be paid to the methodology used in them, i.e. which incidents of violence are qualified as a terrorist attack by the creators of each database. Such a database must contain not only information about the attacks carried out, but also many other records and be relational in nature, i.e. allow searches according to set criteria.

The operational level and forecasting at this level, described in the next chapter, relate to a specific security entity. In this section, the author presents national procedures on the basis of documents, quoting them extensively. This is, in the reviewer's opinion, a legitimate procedure in the context of the purpose of the study.

Forecasting at the tactical level is also described with reference to documents and selected theses taken from national literature. The author emphasises the link between this forecasting and operational reconnaissance, thus stressing the practical dimension of the activity

in question. The starting point for creating terrorist threat forecasts at the tactical level is several categories of data. These are primarily the findings of the forecast at the strategic level, i.e. regarding the main directions of the threats, the preferred targets of attacks and modus operandi, the political time (e.g. elections, strikes and civil unrest, mass events). Based on this information, criteria for the selection of the target, time and modus operandi of the perpetrators can be developed and adapted to local circumstances. When creating a forecast at the tactical level, the data contained in the operational forecast should be used. It allows for the selection of potential targets (objects) of attacks and, therefore, at the same time for the targeting of activities consisting in the recognition of these objects by counter-terrorist services in terms of the characteristics of the terrain, the layout of the premises, the manner of protection, technical security or procedures. It is also necessary to take into account data from ongoing operational reconnaissance, which relates to identified preparations for an attack or an attack already carried out (precisely: in progress), e.g. in the case of hostage-taking.

At this point, it is worth mentioning Tomasz Bajerowski and Anna Kowalczyk's concept of realised risk. According to them (...) *there is a need to supplement risk assessment methods with an analysis of the feasibility (possibility of realisation) of crisis events, where feasibility (possibility) is the deterministic weight of a random phenomenon*⁵. They propose a formula for estimating the risk (using a mathematical method) of specific phenomena or events that includes the feasibility (possibility) of their realisation, with a particular focus on phenomena that are almost improbable, but possible and capable of producing extreme effects. In doing so, the authors distinguish between two concepts: the probability and the feasibility (possibility) of an event occurring.

It should be noted that there is a feedback loop between terrorist threat forecasts at strategic and operational levels. The findings of the strategic forecast are sometimes complementary to the operational forecasts, if only when links between different entities (e.g. individuals or companies implicated in terrorist activities) are demonstrated and the operational forecast shows that they are involved in the identified situation.

⁵ T. Bajerowski, A. Kowalczyk, *Feasibility (Possibility) and Probability in Risk and Crisis Management*, reproduced typescript in the author's possession.

In summary, the concept of terrorist threat forecasting described in the monograph boils down to a synthesis of general forecasting methods existing in science with guidelines for the accumulation of knowledge in the field in question. A threat recognition system designed in this way (partly based on already existing national solutions) is a valuable contribution to the development of security theory and an important contribution to the analysis of existing solutions at strategic, operational and tactical levels. Many of the findings, assumptions and concepts contained in Tomasz Aleksandrowicz's monograph provide a good starting point for further scientific debate, which is another value of this book.

The publication should be of interest primarily to students and researchers in the field of security sciences, as well as those involved in analytical work, crisis management and planning of anti-terrorist and counter-terrorist activities in law enforcement agencies and intelligence institutions belonging to the national counter-terrorism system, which consists of members of the Interministerial Team for Terrorist Threats. Tomasz Aleksandrowicz's book can also be used as a textbook in courses on terrorist threat analysis organised in academic circles and in state administration. It is worth considering an English-language publication so that the Polish perspective on global threat forecasting can complement the literature available in Euro-Atlantic training structures.