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## THE HUNGARIAN PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF TERRORISM

*Dr. Ferenc Molnár*

*Deputy Head, Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies,  
National Defence University, Budapest, Hungary*

[molnar.ferenc@zmne.hu](mailto:molnar.ferenc@zmne.hu)

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## 1. Introduction

September 11, 2001 was a turning point in our perceptions of the actors and developments in the international order, the meaning of security, and the world of security-related organisations. The most significant cause of these changes was the new concern about terrorists' capabilities; to be more exact: where and when terrorists would be able to strike, the extent of the damage, and the consequences of such an attack. If anybody had any doubts after 9/11 that re-evaluating our concepts about world, regional, national, or even individual security was urgent, the attack on Madrid and its consequences in the Spanish domestic politics or the attack in Beslan ultimately dispelled them.

Although the "fronts" of the war against terrorism became quite clear (political and diplomatic; administrative, economic and financial measures; intelligent services; the military),<sup>1</sup> processes that could improve the capabilities of the national and international organisations on these fronts will take a while. At the same time, formulating policies, legal frameworks, organisations, and operations against terrorists calls for social support in democracies.<sup>2</sup>

Achieving a certain level of social support is not easy in many respects but is especially difficult in the case of out-of-area military missions. The reason is that a significant part of security threats and risks (just like illegal arms trade, sub-regional conflicts, etc.) are not as visible as foreign troops on a border, and so it is not so obvious how to act against them. It is particularly true in the case of terrorism in a country, which has not suffered such an attack, even though terrorists, politicians, and state officials appear in the media stating that nobody is absolutely safe and that every country has to contribute to security.

All of the above mentioned processes and circumstances raise the questions as to how the public perceives terrorism among other security threats and risks and what, and to what extent, would the public accept as measures against terrorism. Our first

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<sup>1</sup> Péter Tálas, "Fighting Terrorism as a New Type of Warfare" in Tálas, Peter (ed.), *Response to Terrorism* (Budapest: SVKH-Chartapress, 2002) pp. 58-62.

<sup>2</sup> It means more than the obvious political interests of the ruling political parties. The public will to co-operate is crucial to the introduction of security measures, the carrying out of evacuations, etc.

empirical research on terrorism (as a pilot project) addressed these questions, using a representative sample (based on sex, age, residence, and education level), of one thousand Hungarian citizens.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Is there a fear of terrorism?

Hungarian data show a correlation with the main, post-Cold War theoretical considerations concerning security threats and risks. It means that Hungarians do not perceive particular risks and threats as endangering the Hungarian nation-state but more the developed part of the world (if not the whole world). This phenomenon seems to prove that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the meaning of “national security” has been redefined as “international security” where security threats pose a hazard to the state-system rather than the nation-state.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it also means that security, and so its guarantees too, appear in a much broader sense than military security (migration, environmental security, etc.). Hungarian society evaluates various threats and risks as being of a high degree, providing evidence that, due to globalisation, risks and threats have become central elements of our lives in the sense of quick, local consequences and accessible information about distant events.

Neither large armed forces nor high-tech arsenals are able to provide a complete defence. Emerging international terrorism and related news have likely increased this risk/threat-centred nature in the developed part of the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Center for Strategic and Defence Studies' research: sata collection carried out in June 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Shaw, “The Development of ‘Common Risk’ Society’: A Theoretical Overview” in Kuhlmann – Callaghan (ed.), *Military and Society in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Hamburg: LitVerlag, 2000) pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> New-type terrorism: unrealistic goals, unlimited target options, special target on the macro level (symbolic objects) and undistinguished targets on the micro level (civilians), weaponry not only traditional but also nukes, non-localised effects, international-type, no warning, and suicide actions.

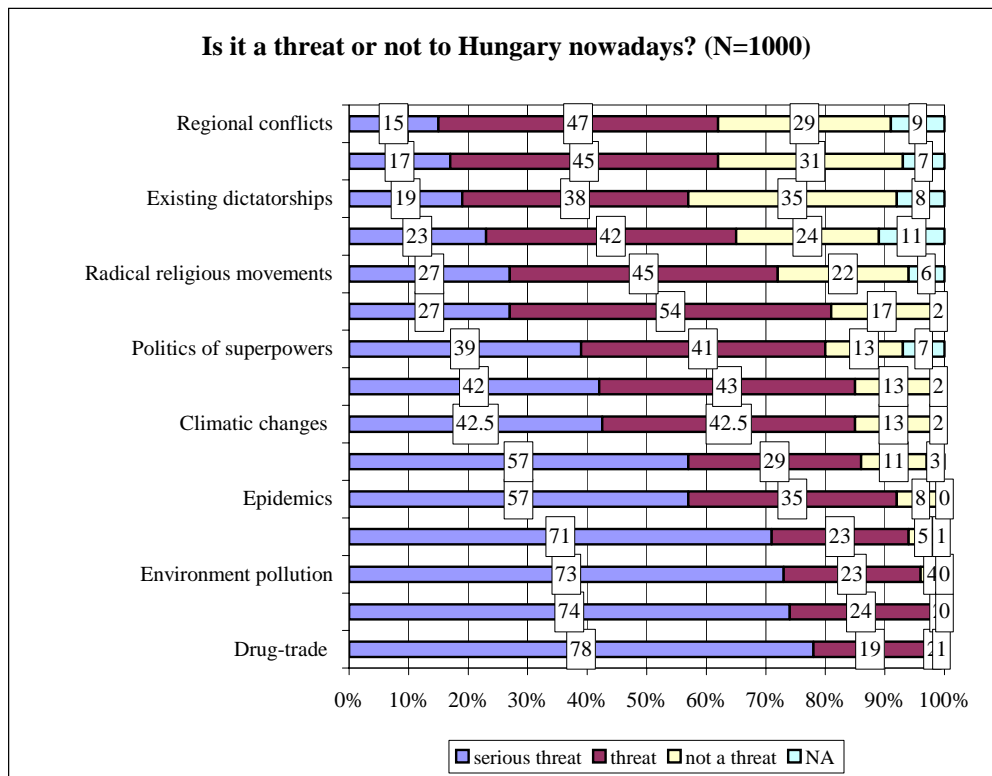
<sup>6</sup> Martin Shaw, *Post-Military Society - Militarism, Demilitarization and War at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Stanislav Andreski, *Military Organization and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> The revival of Morris Janowitz' concept in the 1990s. See, for example, Marina Nuciari, Flexibility Towards Diversity – New Skills for Military Personnel in PSO <http://www.nato.int/ims/2002/cwinf2002/cwinf-03a.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> However, as we experienced, the public attitude toward military losses is highly dependent on the particular circumstances, including the justification of the military activity and its relevance to domestic political dynamics.

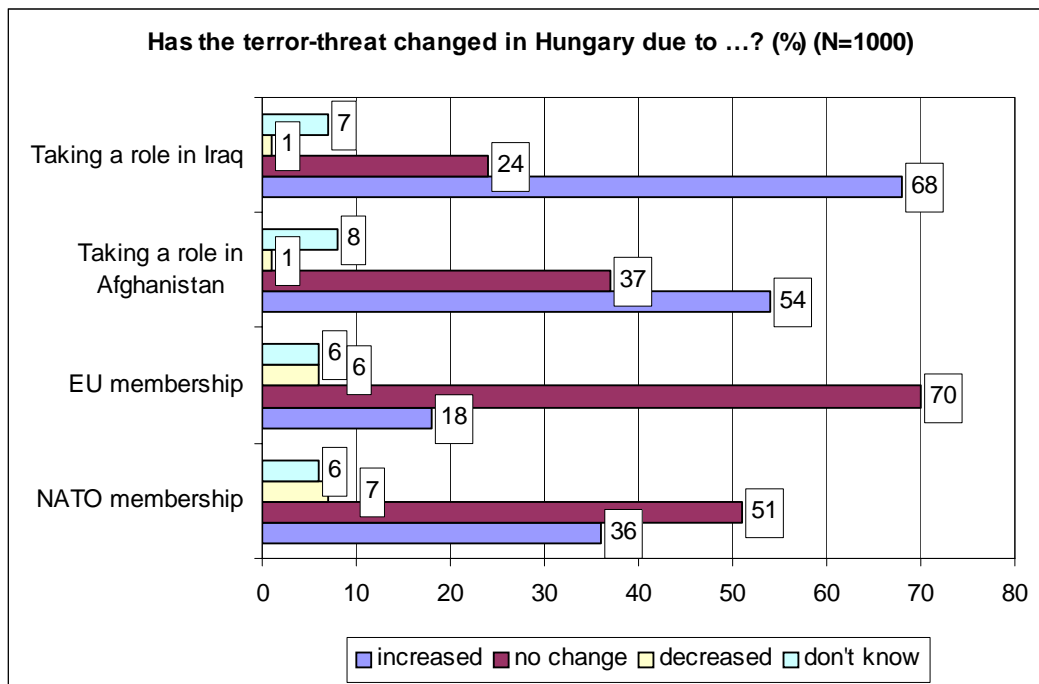
Hungarian society perceives security threats as of being at a high level and multidimensional. This is true in the case of people's primary associations with security, as well as of the evaluation of different security threats and risks. Respondents put four of fifteen threats/risks, related to three different dimensions of security, at the top to a very similar extent: public security, environmental security, and economic security. (Nevertheless, the public evaluated every aspect of security threats as relevant.)



In spite of the strong presence of terrorism reported by the media, it is not evaluated as a topical threat; however, it is still considered more serious than dictatorships or regional conflicts. The majority (85%) of respondents perceived terrorism as a serious, or minor, threat, but a real threat, while 13% answered that is not a threat to Hungary. Analyses show that terrorism is more likely to be seen as a threat by women, citizens of Budapest, and people with higher education.

Most of the people think terrorist attacks will come from Arabic countries (69%) and from the Balkans (45%). They also consider that our nuclear plant, oil and chemical

industrial areas are the most likely targets, while politicians and public administrative institutions are less threatened in Hungary. Although the possibility of a terrorist attack against Hungary is not so high according to the respondents, it is higher than it was earlier mainly due to the military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.



### 3. What is terrorism and what are its causes?

Most of the people consider terrorism in terms of the original meaning of the word: violent things that pose a threat. Nevertheless, they see significant differences among violent activities while defining terrorism. An activity is seen rather as terrorism when it targets innocent civilians to achieve the goals of a particular group. Although two thirds of the respondents thought that terrorism was not a new phenomenon, people linked it primarily to Arabs and Islam. In this way (extreme religious terrorism, terrorism targeting special industrial complexes and affecting civilians, international terrorism), the public has somehow given a definition which puts it closer to the so-called new type of terrorism.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, many of them (54%) did not know what kind of other crimes relate to terrorism. Educated people and those who live in Budapest were aware of some of

them, and they mentioned illegal arms and drug trafficking the most frequently.

As far as the causes of terrorism are concerned, the analyses of ten variables show that the public is quite divided on it. More than one fifth of them believed that globalisation is behind this phenomenon, definitely not a particular religion or nation (educated and younger population). Another somewhat smaller group resisted the idea that globalisation or the US would cause terrorism (less educated population, women, and those living in small towns). The third and largest group (more than one third of the adult population) saw so-called “historical, political” causes and this highly correlates with Arabs and Islam. (None of the identified sociological variables differentiated this group.) Finally, there was a group (a bit less than one fifth of the population) which believed that the role of the US was definitive; however, Arabs and Islam were also included (people with secondary school education and those living in big cities).

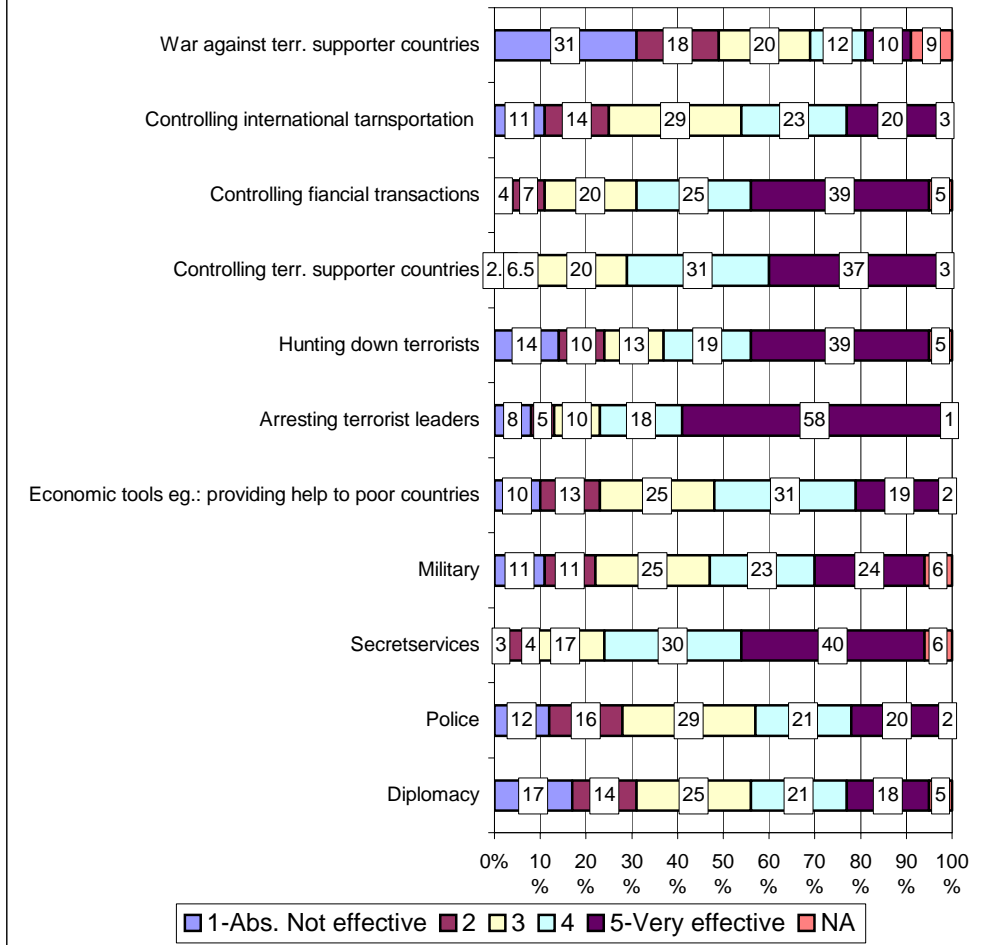
In sum, the majority of the opinions were strongly influenced by considerations about Arabs, Islam, and the US. It is no wonder since what included Hungary in this danger was Islamic radicalism and the coalition with the US.

#### **4. Counter-terrorism and the role of the military**

Hungarians shared the opinion that counter-terrorism was the duty of every nation; however, they largely assigned it to international organisations; namely, the UN and NATO. In the evaluation of the present performance against terrorism, the US got the highest score, meaning it does a bit too much, and NATO also got a respectable score. The UN, as well as the EU, got scores that showed they do not do enough.

Concerning tools in counter-terrorism, respondents scored organisations and activities as well. The public is convinced that secret services are the most effective against terrorism, then militaries and police forces respectively. Interestingly enough, a significant percentage of them thought that the military and police were absolutely ineffective. In the end, the public realised that there is not only one (there is no single answer?) answer to terrorism.

### How effective do you think the following tools are in counter-terrorism? (N=1000)



The military, and activities that were at least partly performed by the military, also got high scores. These activities are “controlling countries which support terrorism”, “hunting down terrorists”, and “arresting terrorist leaders”. Nevertheless, war against countries supporting terrorism got the lowest score and an apparently high percentage of the population answered that war against countries is absolutely not an effective way to counter terrorism.

In regards to military missions, the public has a high moral sense concerning war, which results in innocent victims in any case. Hungarian society also cares about the legal background of missions and sees a UN mandate as a necessary condition for

military operations. Besides moral and legal questions, solidarity also appears in society as mutual military support or duty to an alliance, etc. Nevertheless, this solidarity is quite fragile according to the output of this research. When the public senses the dominant interest of a super power such as the US (e. g.: in Iraq), they start to oppose Hungarian military participation.

## **5. Summary**

In summary, Hungarian society has a complex idea about security and considers several threats and risks (in different dimensions) to be of a high degree. Terrorism is one of them, and most people (42%, “serious threat”, 43%, “threat”) perceive it as a real threat; however, it is not as topical as, for example, the drug trafficking, organised crime, or a declining standard of living (pauperisation). Society is quite divided about the causes of terrorism (globalisation, historical-political causes, the role of the US), but the majority associates it with Islam and Arabs.

As far as counter-terrorism is concerned, most Hungarians accept the fact that it is the duty of every nation; however, they highlight the role of the UN and NATO. They believe that the military has a role in the fight against terrorism but not a primary one. Hungarian society evaluates the role of the military in counter-terrorism as a typical “post-military”,<sup>6</sup> or post-modern society. This society is not dominated by war preparation, the “military participation ratio”<sup>7</sup> is low, and the majority supports PSOs (peace support operations) which serve the stability of the present status quo and are acceptable morally. The public perceives the military rather as a constabulary force<sup>8</sup> and as an equal partner to other security/defence organisations in counter-terrorism. This military is supported by the public.

Although the military as an organisation and those activities which call for military capabilities are an important part of Hungarians’ considerations about counter-terrorism, wars against countries (even supporters of terrorism) are not acceptable to the majority. Respondents have a high moral and legal sensitivity. They are quite sensitive about wars, military losses,<sup>9</sup> and those who are more educated are concerned about the international (UN) authorisation of out-of-area military missions.

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Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF):  
rue de Chantepoulet 11, P.O.Box 1360, CH-1211 Geneva 1, Switzerland  
Tel: ++41 22 741 77 00; Fax: ++41 22 741 77 05  
E-mail: [info@dcaf.ch](mailto:info@dcaf.ch)  
Website: <http://www.dcaf.ch>