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“The Perseverance of Terrorism:  
Focus on Leaders”

Richard English, Ryszard Machnikowski, Iztok Prezelj,  
Dario Cristiani, Philipp Münch, Asta Maskaliunaite,  
Ahmad El-Buckley, Teun Van Dongen

European External Action  
Service Report

Ryszarda Formuszewicz, Dorota Liszczyk





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**Editor-in-chief:** Marcin Zaborowski

**Managing editor:** Kacper Rękawek

**Copy editors:** Brien Barnett, Anthony Casey

**Proof-reading:** Katarzyna Staniewska

**Cover design:** Malwina Kühn

**Typeset:** Dorota Dołęgowska

**Contributors:**

Richard English—Bishop Wardlaw Professor of Politics and Director of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, University of St Andrews

Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen—research fellow at the Danish Institute for International Studies

Samuel Arbe—research fellow at the Slovak Foreign Policy Association

Wojciech Grabowski—assistant professor at the Political Science Institute at Gdańsk University

Iva Kornfein—research assistant at the Institute for International Relations, Zagreb

Karolina Libront—PhD candidate at the University of Warsaw, Institute of International Relations

Ryszard Machnikowski—associate professor at the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the University of Łódź

Iztok Prezelj—research fellow and assistant professor of Security and Defence Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana

Péter Marton—lecturer at Corvinus University in Budapest

Dario Cristiani—Tubitak Visiting Research Fellow at Fatih University in Istanbul; reads his PhD in International Politics of the Mediterranean at King's College in London

Philipp Münch—PhD student at the University of Münster

Asta Maskaliünaitė—lecturer in War and Conflict Studies at the Baltic Defence College, Tartu

Ahmed El-Buckley—diplomat with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Teun van Dongen—strategic analyst and PhD researcher at Hague Centre for Strategic Studies

Eman Ragab—researcher at Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies

Raimonds Rublovskis—lecturer in Riga Stradins University and Research Fellow of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs

Roxana Apalaghie—research manager at the Middle East Political and Economic Institute in Bucharest

Dorota Liszczyk—analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs

Ryszarda Formuszewicz—analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs

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ul. Warecka 1a, 00-950 Warszawa; tel. +48 22 556 80 00; fax +48 22 556 80 99; e-mail: pqia@pism.pl

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*The threat of transnational terrorism became more evident than any kind of domestic threats. Western leaders have clearly understood the asymmetric nature of terrorism and the urgency to react. Moreover, the fight against terrorism has gained an international hallmark, and the post-Cold War non-interventionism of the 1990s has ceased to exist. This text will attempt to shed light on how the international terrorist should be tackled and where the international effort, resources and emphasis on counter-terrorism should be put.*

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*Leadership decapitation is a part of the counter-terrorism strategy which can be successful if undertaken under certain conditions. On the one side decapitation tactic required very specific amount of resources instead invest in others counter-terrorism measures. But on the other side it can bring “boomerang effect” while the aim of reduce capabilities of the terrorist group can be achieve also by different methods, like pitting one group faction against other. Despite arguments for and against targeted killing, it should be taken as one of a broader set of counter-terrorist measures and should include local authorities. Despite all the most effective strategy combating terrorism seems to be prevent it on different stages before it turn into real threat for the state security.*

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*The effective combating of contemporary terrorism requires a great deal of international cooperation and the employment of various methods and strategies. The European Union is pushing forward for a comprehensive, harmonised joint European policy on counter-terrorist measures. Croatia plays and will continue to play a small, yet important role, because it is the only NATO member that has had recent experience with a defensive war. Also, it is a gateway country that can serve as a bridge between the West and the East and thus help battle terrorism by providing expertise and understanding of the Islamic culture with which it has close contact through Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

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*There is no consent in the literature as to whether targeting leaders is effective, although all researchers agree that in no way it is a magic bullet that would solve the problem of terrorism. It could be effective as an operational component within a broader counter-terrorism strategy rather than as a single instrument. It is also indispensable to bear in mind the normative and moral contexts. Using a combination of measures and strengthening the law enforcement elements of counter-strategies are therefore recommended.*

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**Péter Marton**

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*To claim that calculated actors (i.e., the counter-terrorist decision-makers), interested as they are in securing the indirect goal of political stability, will kill*

*(or capture) terrorist leaders when they are in a position to do so, and with good results in terms of terrorist group mortality, may be a double tautology. This is presented as the puzzle of terrorism decapitation research: the paradox of doubts about the utility of something that may be seen as guaranteed to work.*

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*Leaders still play a decisive role in non-state armed groups. They are, however, not omnipotent as patron-client systems consist of reciprocal relations. Leaders have to constantly ensure the loyalty of their followers by distributing resources and acting in their favour, as frequent splits of non-state armed groups and infighting over command and control shows. Finally, the formation and existence of non-state armed groups is unthinkable without the interests of groups who are excluded from government power and wider social grievances. Therefore, leaders of non-state armed groups should be engaged to influence the behaviour of their followers, but the social context should not be disregarded.*

### **Asta Maskaliūnaitė**

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*The leaders of terrorist organisations should not be completely ignored, but engaging them has to be part of a larger comprehensive strategy. The essence of this strategy should focus on the reduction of the organisations' capabilities to inflict damage, limit the appeal of violent means in its constituency and the denial of recruitment to it. The latter can well be the consequence of the former two, though that is not always the case.*

### **Ahmad El-Buckley**

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*This article argues that while proponents of decapitation and targeted killings of terrorist leaders advance logically sound arguments, empirical studies have often shown that these arguments do not take hold in reality. The article then draws on the Egyptian experience with the deradicalisation of Islamist militant groups to claim that capturing rather than eliminating certain types of leaders can have a substantial impact on efforts to reform weakly committed foot-soldiers of terrorist organisations and non-violent sympathisers, which should be at the heart of all long-term counter-terrorism strategies.*

**Teun Van Dongen**

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*It is true that there have been attempts to find explanations for the effectiveness of leadership eliminations, but those have been largely focused on easily observable and only indirectly relevant factors such as ideology and the age of terrorist groups. Organisational structure has been considered as well, but with little success. In a modest attempt to make up for this gap, the remainder of this article outlines two fairly intuitive policy recommendations regarding terrorist leadership elimination. They are intended to help policy makers decide when—and when not—to try this strategy.*

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**Raimonds Rublovskis**

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*This paper will analyse possible options for a state to engage the leadership of terrorist, insurgent and organised crime networks, and possible legal, military and political consequences of such engagement. However, the main argument of this paper is that every single case of engagement of such leadership is unique and requires highly individually tailored approaches by state institutions.*

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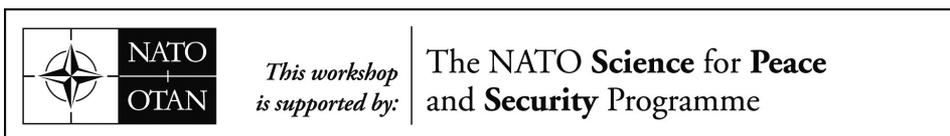
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## A Note from the Editors

This Special Issue of The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs includes contributions from future speakers and participants of the NATO Advanced Research Workshop (ARW) “The Perseverance of Terrorism: Focus on Leaders.” The workshop will be held 24–26 April 2013 in Belgrade, Serbia. PISM analyst Kacper Rekawek serves as co-director of the ARW along with Marko Milošević of the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP).

The objectives of the ARW are as follows: 1. to assess the longevity and perseverance of the terrorist threat to both NATO members and NATO partner countries; 2. to establish the extent to which a terrorist threat is dependent on the leadership of a terrorist group, organisation or network; 3. to disseminate knowledge and exchange information about the recent state of scholarship and expertise related to countering terrorism; 4. to establish long-lasting links and networks amongst workshop participants; 5. to strengthen the links between academia and the think tank community; 6. to provide participants with a platform of contact with the world’s most established terrorism experts; 7. to critically assess the existing knowledge related to countering terrorism and to identify gaps; 8. to identify challenges to policy-oriented research on leadership of terrorist groups, organisations and networks in the post-bin Laden age; 9. to offer a structured set of solutions to counter-terrorism practitioners on how to approach the issue of leadership in terrorist groups, organisations and networks, and how to address this issue in the most efficient manner; 10. to produce guidelines and ideas for future research avenues in the field of terrorism studies. More information on the ARW, including the information sheet and speaker’s bios, is available at: [www.pism.pl/Research/Projects/PISM-is-administering-a-NATO-grant-from-the-science-for-peace-and-security-programme-sps](http://www.pism.pl/Research/Projects/PISM-is-administering-a-NATO-grant-from-the-science-for-peace-and-security-programme-sps).



## Introduction

It is arguable that terrorism research has been transformed even more than terrorism itself during the years since the atrocity of 9/11. This excellent collection of papers reflects on some of the more exciting trends that have developed, interrogates some of the more angular problems that persist, and draws deeply on case-study expertise in order to move numerous debates on terrorism and counter-terrorism very helpfully forward.

The subjects covered here are not all ones that will appeal to the squeamish. Does “decapitation” of terrorist leaderships work? If so, why, and under what circumstances, and at what cost? Is the integration of terrorists into state networks and structures justified and effective as a counter-terrorist tactic? How far should we concentrate on terrorist leaders anyway? The case studies range from Egypt to Algeria to Spain to France to Denmark. Such impressive balance helps avoid some of the problems that have hindered terrorism research in recent years, such as an over-emphasis on Al Qaeda (there are probably now more people studying Al Qaeda than are actually in it), or the lack of scrutiny of those policies which have in practice worked rather well against non-state terrorist groups.

Historically, terrorism has changed world politics much more powerfully through the provocation of large-scale state reactions than it has through its own (admittedly pernicious and blood-spattered) directly violent effects. Both the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries began with incidents of terrorist violence, state reactions to which transformed politics and international relations. This was clearly far more deleterious in the case of the First World War than that of the War on Terror, but the broad and unavoidable point remains: it is state responses to terrorist atrocities that provide the most important variable in this antiphonal relationship as it changes world history in various ways.

And the connection between terrorists and counter-terrorists is indeed relational, mutually shaping, and even intimate. All scholars of terrorism who have worked close-up to their subjects and who have also dealt with counter-terrorist actors recognise the mutual yet hostile understanding that can develop between terrorists and counter-terrorists during periods of cat-and-mouse conflict. The