

<https://doi.org/10.26565/2220-8089-2025-47-03>

УДК 323.28

Maryna Tseluiko

Associate Professor, Ph.D in Political Science, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University,
4, Svoboda Sq., Kharkiv, 61022, Ukraine,

marytseluyko@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8195-6837>

TERRORIST METHODS IN RUSSIA'S ARMED AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE (USING THE EXAMPLE OF KHARKIV)

The essence of the phenomenon of terrorism has been considered, highlighting its key features through the prism of current events in Ukraine and Kharkiv in particular. The features inherent not only to terrorism, but also to other phenomena of socio-political violence have been emphasised. These features have been determined and the specifics of terrorist activity have been separated from the related phenomena.

Attention has been paid to the establishment of the subject of terrorism as one of the most manipulative issues. It has also been indicated that there are multiple objects of influence as the main feature that characterizes terrorist activity. Namely, the presence of two objects of influence: the object of physical violence and the object of psychological pressure, which do not coincide, since they are components of the mechanism of indirect influence on the final object in order to force it to make a certain decision or take certain actions. The socio-political component of the phenomenon of terrorism is highlighted, which consists in the socio-political context of the emergence and spread of terrorism, the presence of a certain social base and goals related to making certain political decisions. The definition of the phenomenon of terrorism has been suggested.

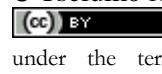
Using these and other features, the appropriateness of using the term «terrorism» to characterize violent actions in Ukraine during the modern war period has been determined. The activity that has the main features of terrorism has been established. The logic of the emergence and spread of terrorist activity on the territory of Ukraine, such as bombings, arsons, aimed at destabilizing the situation within the country, reducing the authority of the authorities, reducing the unity of the population in resisting military aggression has been determined. The dependence of the activities of terrorists is noted. The terrorist component of the Russian-Ukrainian war is presented using the example of events in the city of Kharkiv as a border city.

Keywords: *signs of terrorism, terrorist methods, Russian-Ukrainian war, terrorist activity in Kharkiv.*

In cites: Tseluiko, M. 2025. Terrorist Methods in Russia's Armed Aggression Against Ukraine (Using the Example of Kharkiv). *The Journal of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Series «Issues of Political Science»* 47: 26-31. <https://doi.org/10.26565/2220-8089-2025-47-03>.

Just 10 years ago, we could only discuss the prerequisites for the emergence and activity of terrorist groups on the territory of Ukraine, distinguishing between both internal and external factors. At the same time, Islamist organizations and individuals associated with them were still perceived as the most dangerous. The threat was considered more external than internal and could come either

© Tseluiko M. 2025.



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0.

from the Crimean peninsula, where radical Islamist movements were trying to spread their popularity, or from individuals from the so-called «hot spots» and terrorist-dangerous countries who entered the territory of our country. Under these conditions, the fight against terrorism was far from the primary task of our law enforcement agencies, although, responding to international events and challenges to national security, certain steps to combat terrorism in the legislative and economic spheres in our country were nevertheless taken starting in 1998, when the

Criminal Code stipulated responsibility for a terrorist act.

The modern armed conflict, which began in the Donbas region and grew into a large-scale war, has put the problem of terrorism at the forefront for Ukraine. Many cities have already faced systematic terrorist attacks, especially in the eastern and southern regions of the country, and the capital and the rest of the territory are facing the threat of their spread. Kharkiv in particular today is suffering from daily large-scale violence in various manifestations, from rocket attacks and aerial bombings to the detonation of improvised explosive devices on the streets. However, what exactly is terrorism and what violent armed actions can be attributed to it, who can be considered terrorists, should be determined.

The first necessary step in understanding any phenomenon is to define its concept. As for terrorism, there are certain difficulties here, due to the fact that there is still no definition of terrorism agreed upon both at the international level between countries and in the scientific field between researchers. This situation is caused both by the complexity of the phenomenon itself and, obviously, by political reasons. So today, each country has its own official definition, and there are also numerous scientific approaches developed within the framework of a particular science, which accordingly bear its imprint. In particular, research within the framework of jurisprudence has made a significant contribution to revealing the essence of this phenomenon (V. Yemelianov, V. Lipkan, O. Saviuk), in the field of psychology (V. Ostrouchov), of sociology (M. Sageman), history (J. Zenn, P. Taylor), military affairs (V. Antypenko), philosophy (H. Hofmeister, J. Baudrillard, M. Trebin), political science (R. Aron, B. Hoffman, G. Kepel, W. Laqueur), and theology (S. Bacchiocchi). The diversity of approaches, on the one hand, allows for a more complete disclosure of the phenomenon, and on the other, it confuses the understanding of key characteristics and the separation of terrorism itself from other phenomena similar in manifestations. Therefore, based on the numerous manifestations of modern terrorism over the past decades, taking into account the fact that one list of methods of terrorist actions (which is found in international documents) does not fully reflect the essence of this phenomenon, and also, taking into account the diversity of its manifestations (which blur the boundaries between terrorism and other violent acts: war, genocide, etc.), it is necessary to

determine the main features of terrorism that would take into account its specific features and characteristics.

1. Firstly, the systematic use of violence or the threat of violence. This is contained in all definitions of leading scholars, politicians, and terrorists themselves.

2. Secondly, the peculiarity of the subject of terrorism. This feature causes a lot of discussion among scientists and politicians, which, in particular, is reflected in different positions on the subject (Weinberg 2004). However, based on the history of the emergence and development of terrorism in the world, on the origin of this term in the 19th century to denote certain methods of asymmetrical struggle of the weak against the strong, the subject of terrorism is non-state structures, that is, organizations of private individuals who are not in the service of the state and do not have supreme power over the objects of violence. The actions of state services should be called by their proper names: military attack, genocide, terror, etc. or the state that sponsors terrorism.

3. The third feature can be considered the multi-objective nature of terrorist attacks. It reveals the socio-political nature of this phenomenon. Terrorism as a phenomenon that occurs in society has a certain impact on it. This cannot but concern the power structures that conduct domestic and foreign policy. The mechanism of pressure on the authorities is an activity that consists of two stages: 1) the influence of terrorist groups on the social masses in the state (through violent actions or threats by them); 2) the pressure of the social masses (groups) on the authorities, which forces the latter to take certain actions. This refers to physical violence that is used against some individuals, while psychological pressure, with the aim of inducing them to behave in a certain way or make a certain decision, is exerted on other individuals. The object of physical violence is mainly social groups (group), and the object of psychological pressure is the governing bodies of the state (Schmid 2023). For terrorists, it is not always mandatory to immediately fulfil their demands (they may not declare them immediately) during the capture of hostages or after a certain explosion. They do not expect this. For them, it is much more important to create a social atmosphere that will contribute to the fulfillment of their demands (fear, tension, anxiety, etc.). Therefore, pressure on the final object is not carried out directly, but indirectly, mostly through the population.

4. A characteristic feature of terrorism is the goals of a terrorist group. In any case, they

relate to state policy. Some researchers believe that terrorist groups can pursue goals that do not concern politics. For example, the release of members of the organization from prison, robbery or hostage-taking, etc. However, the connection between actions with purely political goals and actions that, at first glance, have no relation to politics, is that a terrorist organization, in addition to the main goal, has the so-called «intermediate goals» (tasks) (Hoffman 2017), aimed at ensuring the existence of the group (material, personnel, ideological and other types of support). These tasks are subordinate to the ultimate goal, which concerns the state policy in any area: economic, national, religious, legal, environmental, etc. The tasks can also include pressure on the population or individual social groups: intimidation, inducing a feeling of irritation or appeal to pragmatism (comparison of losses and benefits from a certain policy). These tasks are a means of achieving much more far-reaching goals. Therefore, ensuring the achievement of the ultimate goal, which concerns the political actions of the state, occurs through the implementation of intermediate tasks.

5. The fifth sign of terrorism is the ideological motivation of violence. The point is that each terrorist organization has a certain ideological foundation on which it was created and which now serves as a formal motive for its activities. A certain ideology as a holistic system of views and ideas is generated by the objective conditions in which it arises. It reflects the awareness and attitude of a certain group of people to reality and to each other, social problems and conflicts, and also contains the goals of activity aimed at changing or maintaining existing social relations. In particular, terrorist ideology is a complex of extremely radical ideological orientations (far left, far right, national-extremist, separatist, great-power, religious, socio-economic and spiritual-psychological), which serve as a theoretical justification for the use of violence in various forms on an illegitimate basis in order to achieve certain goals (Hirschman 2000). Based on these goals, tasks are determined, as well as the means and methods of their implementation..

6. Another characteristic of terrorism is its public orientation. This is indicated in the first attempts to give an international definition of terrorism, in particular, in Article 1 of the draft resolution on terrorism of the Third International Conference on the Unification of Criminal Law (Brussels, 1930). As many scholars have noted, terrorism is to some extent

a spectacle that is played out with the help of the media in order to create an atmosphere of danger, irritation, crisis. Therefore, in most cases, organizations still take responsibility for terrorist acts, even if they are committed by others. At the same time, the media is a necessary tool in the strategy of influence of terrorists.

7. Another sign of terrorism is the lack of attachment, dependence of a terrorist group on the population of a certain territory. Terrorists do not need mass support from the population; unlike partisan or insurgent groups, they do not depend on it. In material terms, terrorists can provide for themselves by robbing banks and stores, racketeering, obtaining ransom through hostages, from drug trafficking, etc. In addition, they can receive financing and other types of material support from diasporas, wealthy supporters and sympathizers, other terrorist organizations, as well as assistance from states. Human resources are replenished through the widespread practice of recruiting from relatives and acquaintances of members of the organization, propaganda activities among young people, charity among the poor strata of society, thus attracting them to their side, or recruitment through social networks. Also, professional fighters who participated in a certain local war (in Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Chechnya, Iraq, Libya, etc.) join the ranks of terrorist movements. These are qualified personnel who earn money by conducting certain armed operations, that is, they practice military mercenary work.

Thus, the above characteristics allow us to propose a definition of modern terrorism as a type of socio-political struggle of non-state formations, which consists of systematic, ideologically justified, public, generally dangerous violent actions or the threat of such actions against the entire population or individual social groups in order to achieve goals related to state policy.

Returning to the war in Ukraine, we can say that along with conventional military methods, all other possible means of struggle are used (sabotage, cyberattacks, information methods, terror against the population of the occupied territories and other prohibited methods of warfare, political pressure, etc.), in this case, terrorist ones. Taking into account the above features of terrorism, we can distinguish among the methods used by Russia to wage war, those that relate to it. First of all, this is violence by non-state actors (ordinary citizens not united in any structures or small groups, not in the service of state bodies, and acting on

orders and/or under the influence of a certain ideology). Often they are schoolchildren, teenagers, young people, sometimes unemployed, recruited by Russian special services through social networks to prepare and carry out a terrorist attack, or former military personnel, people with a criminal past (Дуляба 2025). However, this is a so-called related feature that is inherent not only to terrorist activity, not all actions of non-state actors fall under it. To attribute a phenomenon to terrorism, the presence of an appropriate mechanism of action and other features is also required.

Terrorist activity is most evident in border regions, in particular in Kharkiv, and consists in preparing and carrying out bombings and arson attacks near the premises of the Central Trading Center, police stations, and military units where random people are. These have been done using improvised explosive devices planted in a car or simply left on the street. This activity has already resulted in human casualties and has characteristic features of terrorism. First, physical violence is carried out in a territory over which the perpetrator or the customer has no power. Second, the object of physical violence is not the army or non-state military formations. Third, traditional weapons are used in unconventional ways (bombing public facilities, cars, and office buildings). This allows us to consider this activity as asymmetric, carried out using methods of indirect confrontation, the so-called «strategy of terrorism», the main goal of which is to undermine the morale of the population.

Another sign that these actions on the territory of Ukraine are terrorist is the presence of an indirect mechanism of influence, when the purpose of physical violence is creating a certain psychological atmosphere among the population, which should subsequently affect the activities of the authorities, their adoption or non-adoption of certain decisions in the interests of terrorists or their sponsors. Such a struggle becomes protracted. In Kharkiv, terrorist attacks are used not only to intimidate the target group (TCC employees, police officers, officials), but also the wider society in general, so that no one feels safe. Such actions cause fear, dissatisfaction with the authorities, which are unable to stop the terrorists, which is worse – panic, despair, and stress. In this case, the number of sober-minded citizens decreases, and the number of those who are inclined to search for simple and quick solutions increases. The object of these decisions, as a rule, are representatives of the authorities who are guilty

of not resolving the situation. It is precisely this thought that terrorists push the population to. This is the first task – to undermine the position of the authorities in the eyes of society. This should lead to the presentation of demands to the authorities (beneficial to terrorists, their sympathizers or customers), mass actions of disobedience or anti-government violence. The second point – in addition to intimidation, terrorist attacks force some citizens to think and take a certain socio-political position: setting some against terrorists and their ideas (the actual liquidation of Ukraine as a state), causing anger and a desire for revenge. While setting others to a position of appeasing terrorists (ending the war under any conditions), the second category includes both latent sympathizers of the ideas of terrorists and neutral to them, but frightened citizens. In the context of our country's continued military resistance to Russian aggression, this division of opinion is all the more dangerous. The terrorist attacks in Kharkiv, as a border city, are intended to demonstrate an even greater threat to the lives of residents, as well as to show the presence of a contingent of people in the city who support a pro-Russian position. The aggressor country, through these people, is, as it were, demonstrating its presence, thus trying to attract more supporters. However, here there is a risk for terrorists and their sponsors to cause a backlash and increase active resistance (as happened, in particular, in Spain). To this end, the Security Service uses quite successful counter-methods, conducting an information campaign for the population with explanations and providing ample opportunities for reporting recruitment attempts.

Also, as signs of terrorism, there is an orientation towards maximum publicity, public effect and independence of terrorists from local resources. After all, it is known about external briefings and instructions to terrorists, that is, their activities do not require large resources and can easily have external sponsors (СБУ знешкодила в Харкові бойову групу російського 2024).

Thus, we can say that some of the methods of warfare used by Russia have terrorist characteristics. These methods are used as asymmetric in the areas where there are no hostilities, especially in border cities such as Kharkiv. They are aimed at undermining the authority of the authorities, reducing unity in resistance to military aggression, and destabilizing order within the country. However, as in other similar conflicts, terrorism coexists with other violent phenomena

(symmetrical military actions, sabotage, terror, and others). Among all the diversity of violence in this conflict, only a separate part that corresponds to its essential features (asymmetry, multi-objective nature of attacks, focus on publicity, political goals) can be considered terrorism. Accordingly, terrorist groups or terrorists can be considered subjects of this activity, who are at the same time a tool of the aggressor country.

REFERENCES

1. Weinberg, L., Pedahzur, A., Hirsch-Hoefer, S. 2004. The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol.16, No.4: 777–794. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095465590899768>
2. Schmid, Alex P. 2023. Difining Terrorism. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)*.. <https://doi.org/10.19165/2023.3.01>
3. Hoffman, Bruce. 2017. *Inside terrorism*. Third Edition. New York: Columbia University Press. URL: <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/first/h/hoffman-terrorism.html?r=1>
4. Hirschman, Kai. 2000. *The Changing Face of Terrorism*. *IPG* 3: 299-310. URL: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/ipg/ipg-2000-3/arthirschmann.pdf>
5. Dulyaba, Natalia. 2025. A Russian agent who made explosives to blow up a military base was exposed in Kharkiv. *Portal.lviv.ua* 14.03. URL: <https://portal.lviv.ua/news/2025/03/14/u-kharkovi-vykryly-rosijsku-ahentku-iaka-zrobyla-vybukhivku-dlia-pidryvu-vijskovo> (in Ukrainian).
6. SBU neutralized a combat group of the Russian GRU in Kharkiv. 18.11.2024 URL: <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/gotuvali-terakti-v-harkovi-sbu-zneshkodila-boyovu-grupu-rosiyskogo-gru-novini-ukrajini-50467261.html> (in Ukrainian).

The article was received by the editors 26.02.2025

The article is recommended for printing 31.03.2025

Марина Євгенівна Целуйко

доцент, к. політ. н., Харківський національний університет імені В.Н. Каразіна,
майдан Свободи, 4, Харків, 61022

marytseluyko@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8195-6837>

ТЕРОРИСТИЧНІ МЕТОДИ У ЗБРОЙНІЙ АГРЕСІЇ РОСІЇ ПРОТИ УКРАЇНИ (НА ПРИКЛАДІ М. ХАРКІВ)

Розглядається сутність явища тероризму з виділенням його ключових ознак крізь призму сучасних подій в Україні та Харкові зокрема. Зроблено акцент на наявності ознак, притаманних одночасно не тільки тероризму, а й іншим явищам соціально-політичного насилия. Визначено ці ознаки і відокремлено специфіку саме терористичної діяльності від суміжних явищ.

Приділено увагу встановленню суб'єкта тероризму як одному з найбільш маніпулятивних питань. Також вказано на багатооб'єктність впливу як основної ознаки, яка характеризує терористичну діяльність. А саме наявність двох об'єктів впливу: об'єкт фізичного насилия та об'єкт психологічного тиску, які не збігаються, оскільки є складовими механізму опосередкованого впливу на кінцевий об'єкт з метою змусити його прийняття певне рішення або вчинити певні дії. Виділено соціально-політичну складову явища тероризму, яка полягає у соціально-політичному контексті виникнення і поширення тероризму, наявності у нього певної соціальної бази і цілей, що стосуються прийняття певних політичних рішень. Запропоновано визначення явища тероризму.

Використовуючи ці та інші ознаки, визначена доречність застосування терміна «тероризм» для характеристики насильницьких дій в Україні в сучасний воєнний період. Встановлено діяльність, яка має основні ознаки тероризму. Визначено логіку виникнення і поширення терористичної діяльності на території України, такої як підриви, підпали, орієнтовану на дестабілізацію ситуації всередині країни, зниження авторитету влади, зменшення єдності населення у спротиві військовій агресії. Відзначено несамостійність діяльності терористів. Наведено терористичну складову російсько-української війни на прикладі подій у м. Харків як прикордонному місті.

Ключові слова: ознаки тероризму, терористичні методи, російсько-українська війна, терористична діяльність у Харкові.

СПИСОК ЛІТЕРАТУРИ

1. Weinberg, L., Pedahzur, A., Hirsch-Hoefer, S. 2004. The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism” *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol.16, No.4: 777–794. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095465590899768>
2. Schmid, Alex P. 2023. Difining Terrorism. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)*. <https://doi.org/10.19165/2023.3.01>
3. Hoffman, Bruce. 2017. *Inside terrorism*. Third Edition. New York : Columbia University Press. URL: https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/first/h/hoffman-terrorism.html?_r=1
4. Hirschman, Kai. The Changing Face of Terrorism. *IPG* 3: 299-310. URL: https://library.fes.de/pdf_files/ipp/ipp-2000-3/arthirschmann.pdf
5. Дуляба Наталія 2025. У Харкові викрили російську агентку, яка зробила вибухівку для підтримки військового. *Portal.lviv.ua* 10.03. URL: <https://portal.lviv.ua/news/2025/03/14/u-kharkovi-vykryly-rosijsku-ahentku-iaka-zrobyla-vybukhivku-dlia-pidryvu-vijskovooho>
6. СБУ знешкодила в Харкові бойову групу російського ГРУ. 18.11.2024 URL: <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/gotuvali-terakti-v-harkovi-sbu-zneshkodila-boyovu-grupu-rosiyskogo-gru-novini-ukrajini-50467261.html>

Стаття надійшла до редакції 26.02.2025

Стаття рекомендована до друку 31.03.2025