Artur WEJKSZNER[1]
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland
ORCID: 0000-0002-7638-9708

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STRUCTURAL NETWORKING OF CONTEMPORARY TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS – ANALYSIS OF THE SUPER-NETWORK OF THE ISLAMIC STATE IN EUROPE

The analysis of the organizational structure of contemporary terrorist organizations was discussed in many scientific studies from the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. These include publications by authors such as: M. Kenney (Kenney, 2007), V. Asal, R. K. Rethemeyer (Asal, Rethemeyer, 2008); J. B. Volders, F. S. Pearson, I. Akbulut, M. O. Lounsbery. In their publications, the findings regarding the following issues deserve special attention: typology of the internal structure of terrorist organizations; factors influencing the shape of this structure; the impact of the internal organization of a terrorist group on the effectiveness of terrorist activities; the relationship between the method of internal organization and the security of a terrorist organization. The issue of the network nature of organizational structures of terrorist organizations became a popular subject of scientific inquiry only at the beginning of the 21st century. Many authors, including Marc Sageman (Sageman, 2008), John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Arquilla, Ronfeldt, 2001), using various analytical tools (including game theory) tried to find out the essence and most important variables influencing the dynamics of the development of the above structures. This research was continued in the next decade by researchers such as J. Kilberg (Kilberg, 2012), A. Basu and S. T. Zech and M. Gabbay (Zech, Gabbay, 2016). However, the above problem was nothing new. Already several decades earlier, the basic research category, i.e. social networks, was subject to thorough analysis in the works of sociologists and political scientists studying the nature and evolution of social movements. This analysis was called Social Network Analysis (SNA). Researchers such as R. L. Curtis, L. A. Zurcher, M. N. Zald and J. McCarthy studied, among others, the influence of the network location of individuals on their actions and behavior within the network structure. These studies referred to earlier studies, created at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, by researchers such as: A. Bavelas (Bavelas, 1948), H. Leavitt (Leavitt, 1949) and S. Smith (Smith, 1950). They were also based on studies by authors such as R. L. Burges (Burges, 1969): M. Glanzer, R. Glaser (Glanzer, Glaser, 1961); M. E. Shaw (Shaw, 1964); A. Snadowsky (Snadowsky, 1972) and E. M. Rogers and R. Agarwala-Rogers (Rogers, Agarwala-Rogers,

1976), mainly concerning network communication techniques in organizations. Many previous studies were also devoted to the analysis of network structure, including the problem of the network center/periphery. The most important ones include the publication by L. C. Freeman (Freeman, 1979).

This article attempts to achieve the following research goals: identifying key related variables influencing the construction of nodes (cells) of the Islamic State terrorist network in Europe; finding differences and similarities between local Islamic State sub-networks in selected European countries; indication of the hierarchy of importance of individual European countries based on the criterion of the size and degree of operational activity of the jihadist network (strategically important countries, tactically important countries, countries of no strategic and tactical importance); indicating the essence and identifying the differences between at least two degrees of peripherality within the network organizational structure of the Islamic State in Europe.

Taking into account the above research assumptions, the basic research hypothesis was formulated as follows: the terrorist super-network of the Islamic State in Europe is characterized by structural and operational diversification of its subnetworks (regional networks) related to the following factors: the place of creation of the network (in this case, the key factor is whether its nodes were created in strategically important European countries for the Islamic State or not), the degree of mutual interactions between its important nodes (terrorist cells – the increase in the number of these cells, the diversity of the scope of specialization and interactions between them indicates the place of individual subnetworks (and therefore nodes) in structure of the super-network) and the level of operational activity. Therefore, two groups of subnetworks can be distinguished: central (composed of key nodes) and peripheral (related to marginal nodes). The central subnetwork (the center of the European super-network) of the Islamic State operates in European countries of key political, economic and social importance, which claim to play a leading role in the international environment and therefore pose a critical threat to its survival. The peripheral subnetwork (super-network periphery) operates in countries of secondary importance. The central sub-network (the center of the European super-network) of the Islamic State operates in European countries of key political, economic and social importance, aspiring to play a leading role in the international environment and therefore posing a critical threat to its survival. The peripheral sub-network (the periphery of the super-network) operates in countries of secondary importance, being the logistical or operational support for the jihadist fight and is not uniform in nature. It is divided into two types: semi-peripheral and peripheral. They differ primarily in the degree of internal differentiation (the less diverse the structure, the higher the degree of peripherality), the degree of interaction with other elements of the terrorist super-network (the fewer interactions, the higher the degree of peripherality) and the level of activity undertaken (the lower the activity of the micro-network, the higher the degree of peripherality).

During the research on the issues indicated above, the following research tools were used: case study, system analysis and social network analysis. The case study is classified as a qualitative scientific method. The main reason for its use in this article was to illustrate the indicated phenomenon. The second of the indicated methods is associated with the distinction of a specific conceptual model (a system of intermediate-

level network relations – the so-called super-network) serving to better understand the subsystems that make it up (the so-called network subsystems, and de facto micro- and macro-networks). The third of the mentioned methods consists in the analysis of relations between various elements of the terrorist network of the Islamic State in Europe (individuals, groups of people), to capture various types of principles and patterns shaping the indicated relations. In the studies on the European super-network of the Islamic State, the continuous model of social networks by Stephen P. Borgatti and Martin G. Everett (Borgatti, Everett, 2000) was used, which allows for the distinction of the structure: core – subperiphery – periphery.

The concept of a "terrorist network" consists of two separate elements: "network" and "terrorism." An additional term that appears during the analysis of the network structure is the term "micro-networks," "macro-networks," "super-networks" or "hyper-networks." It is worth noting here that each of these concepts refers to a different level of network analysis. The term "micro-network" refers to the lowest (local) level, where only small groups of people function (consisting of at least three units cooperating with each other on previously established principles). A synonymous term often found in the literature is the concept of a "terrorist cell". The next level is the level of the "macro-network" (this is a sub-regional level, but also quite often regional). In the simplest sense, it is a group of at least two interconnected micro-networks. These connections are personal and objective in nature (the latter aspect concerns the issue of micro-network specialization and the resulting connections between them). The third level of analysis is the level of the "super-network." In this paper, the position was taken that this term refers to a group of at least two macro-networks operating in a territory covering the entire continent. "Hyper-network" is the highest level of analysis and denotes the global dimension of the activities of terrorist organizations. This term describes the activity of at least two "super-networks." To sum up, a "micro-network" is a group of at least three people, a "macro-network" is a network consisting of at least two micro-networks; a "super-network" is a network consisting of at least two macro-networks; a "hyper-network" is a network consisting of at least two super-networks. The term "jihadist network" should be understood as a dynamically changing structure in relation to the time vector, composed of individuals or groups of people professing similar political and religious views of a radical nature (referred to as jihadist ideology) cooperating with each other within various types of interpersonal connections and relations to implement the intentions resulting from the above views. The concept of terrorism has been analyzed in many other authoritative scientific works and has been the subject of many debates in the scientific community. The author of this article, however, is a supporter of the following definition of terrorism: "terrorism is based on violence or the threat of its use for strictly political purposes and is associated with deliberate, planned, covert and illegal activity of organized groups of people, or in exceptional situations, individuals, rationally selected from among other methods of political struggle. Its aim is to cause terror and fear in relation to the wider community (the indirect target of the attack), through successively undertaken, arbitrary and unexpected attacks on innocent people or destruction of property (which are direct targets). Such attacks are of a criminal nature and involve breaking the generally accepted rules of domestic or international law. They are intended to enable the perpetrators to gain

publicity and reach the real (indirect) target of the attack with a symbolic message (demand). The effect of such attacks is to be the implementation by terrorists of specific tactical or strategic plans on the national or international level" (Wejkszner, 2010: 38–39). The main subject of the analysis, i.e. the "Islamic State," is treated as the proper name of a specific structure that is an example of both a terrorist organization and a so-called proto-state. However, it also has historical connotations. The term "Islamic state" can be understood as a state structure created by the followers of Islam. One of its classic emanations was the caliphate. This term has been appropriated in modern times by radical jihadists fighting for the restitution of the classic Islamic state as the proper name of an entity that was created on the territory of Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State can, and even should, be analyzed through the prism of the theory of terrorism and treated as a sui generis terrorist organization. It can also be considered justified to claim that the Islamic State is a modern "proto-state." The first part of the latter term comes from the Greek language (from the word "protos" – first) and can be translated in many ways – for example as "imperfect," "primitive," "earliest formed" but also "original" or "first of many." Each of these words appropriately refers to the second part of the term, i.e. the word "state," in the context of the analyzed phenomenon. The Islamic State analyzed through the prism of the modern proto-state is distinguished by four important features. The first is the territory inhabited by Muslims. The second element is the basing of the order established in this territory on the rules of Sharia law. The third feature is the conflictual attitude towards one's own neighbors and the resulting inability to establish and maintain any relations with them (as well as with other state entities). The fourth element is, finally, the rather fluid, if not conventional, borders of the proto-state thus understood, functioning outside the contemporary system of international relations (Wejkszner, 2020: 16–17).

The analysis of the available factual material, covering 16 European countries and several dozen nodes of the Islamic State terrorist super-network in Europe. At the very heart of the super-network were regional structures located in the following countries: France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Turkey. On the periphery, there were terrorist sub-networks in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Portugal, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Norway, and Switzerland (Wejkszner, 2020, 2023). The collected facts allowed us to formulate the following conclusions.

1. The strategic map of the European continent analyzed from the perspective of the Islamic State terrorist network allows indicating three important groups of countries:

a) countries of strategic importance (an attack on such countries has significant political consequences in the context of the cause fought by Islamic State fighters/terrorists) – the nodes of the jihadist network in these countries are included in the center of the European super-network;
b) countries that are important from a tactical perspective, but of marginal political importance (terrorist networks on their territory offer tactical and/or logistical support for terrorist operations on the territory of other countries: sometimes some European countries are treated as transit countries or those offering safe havens, but relatively rarely are they an area of active operational activity) – the nodes of the jihadist network in these countries are classified as subcentral or peripheral;

c) other countries without political significance (terrorist networks on their territory are not created for strategic and tactical reasons) – there is no active jihadist network on their territory.

The terrorist activity of jihadists operating under the banner of the Islamic State had, according to the definition of the analyzed phenomenon, a political context. The aim of such activity was to exert pressure on public opinion by illegal means to force it to take actions that favor the interests of jihadists. Sowing seeds of fear in selected European countries was to enable them to indirectly manipulate political processes. Among the articulated motives for such behavior was, above all, forcing the ruling elites to withdraw from active combat with jihadists in Syria and Iraq. The fighters of the Islamic State were fully aware of the geostrategic significance of the countries that were covered by their terrorist activities. They repeatedly recognized their political weight and strategic significance, treating them in their propaganda messages as the main enemies, calling on their fighters to take the necessary actions of an asymmetric nature. The center of the European super-network of the Islamic State should therefore be viewed from the perspective of the specific political strategy of this organization. The stronger (especially in terms of military potential) and more active in the international arena (proactive in terms of implementing foreign policy) the state, the greater the probability of being considered strategically important and included in the above center. The political aspects underlying such a decision are not the only variables influencing such a decision. They should be associated with several other elements indicated below and always treated together (Wejkszner, 2020: 292–293).

2. The construction of the Islamic State terrorist network in Europe was closely related to a few key variables:

a) the use of previously existing jihadist structures (related to the Al-Qaeda hyper-network),
b) the openness of a specific country to migration processes (the more liberal the migration policy, the greater the chance of the emergence of terrorist micro- and macro-networks),
c) a large Muslim diaspora,
d) its lack of assimilation and a high degree of radicalization of the young generation of Muslims,
e) the availability of communication channels in the local language for the propagation of propaganda messages,
f) a strongly developed recruitment network,
g) low effectiveness of jihadist deradicalization policies and counter-terrorist activities in key European countries.

The creation of nodes in the Islamic State terrorist network in Europe was closely linked to the social base that engaged in such activities. The target audience for propaganda messages was the young generation of descendants of immigrants or first-generation immigrants. Among the places that served recruitment purposes, mosques, Muslim cultural centers, and private homes are worth mentioning. Recruiters often had experience in building other jihadist structures (primarily associated with Al-Qaeda and its affiliated organizations). Sometimes previously existing and expanded terrorist structures became, in part or in whole, an element of a new jihadist super-network. All

that was needed was a change of affiliation, which was done in a purely symbolic way (by pledging allegiance to the new caliph). The influx of new immigrants increased recruitment activity. A relatively large number of very young, newly arrived refugees from the Middle East (especially from Syria) found their way into the Islamic State micro-network. Similar successes were achieved with respect to descendants of immigrants who were born and raised in Europe. They were correlated with positive messages from territories controlled by the Islamic State. The reconstruction of the caliphate structures (and de facto a proto-state with no chance of independent, lasting existence) was the fulfillment of the expectations of the radical Islamist group, which had been articulated for at least three decades (Lia, 2015). It also seems significant that many members of the super-network structure of the Islamic State in Europe had previously been in the circle of interest of the secret services. In many cases the services ignored the growing threat, not engaging sufficient forces and resources in activities monitoring specific radical circles (Wejkszner, 2020: 294–295).

3. The terrorist network of the Islamic State in Europe did not have a uniform shape it consisted of several basic elements:

a) network nodes, created by the so-called lone jihadists (Wejkszner, 2018: 42–47) – acting independently, whose activities, however, fit into the broader, super-network strategy of the Islamic State,
b) local micro-networks – operating autonomously, they consist of, depending on specialization, two people (dyads), three people (triads) or more people,
c) macro-networks operating at the regional and international level), composed of several micro-networks.

The Islamic State terrorist super-network is characterized by great diversity in terms of network structure, especially in relation to the area of European countries of particular importance to the above organization. This diversity can be seen in both the subjective and objective aspects. Individual nodes (micro-networks or terrorist cells) consist of both individuals (lone jihadists) and a larger number of them (usually from two to eight). Lone jihadists rarely demonstrate any network activity, although on the other hand, their decision to act independently is almost always the result of earlier arrangements within super-network or hyper-network structures. In other words, they relatively often establish contact with representatives of other nodes belonging to other macro-networks (often part of another super-network (e.g. Asian). Micro-networks usually limit their activity to a specific geographical area. Its scope is most often local, less often regional. They rarely operate in isolation from superior network structures, i.e. macro-networks. From the objective point of view, an important feature differentiating the importance and scope of activity of individual micro-networks is their specialization. In the public opinion, the operational nodes that carry out terrorist attacks are present above all. Meanwhile, especially in the case of the super-network center, recruitment, logistics or support nodes are of great importance. A separate issue is the location of management nodes. Due to the nature of the network structure, there is no need for their geographical location in the area covered by operational activity. They can just as well be part of other super-networks and create, using network terminology, bridges (and thus build special types of relations) with the structures of a specific super-network (Wejkszner, 2020: 295–296).

4. The terrorist network of the Islamic State in Europe was distinguished by:

a) dynamism – in terms of:
   i. creation of new structural elements,
   ii. growth of interactions between existing network nodes,
b) interoperability (ability to cooperate in a common cause/realization of a common goal between representatives of different structures of this network),
c) structural regeneration – ability to rebuild network nodes by the emergence of new super-network elements, in place of previously eliminated ones. However, this was not an automatic process, nor did it guarantee the reconstruction of an identical network structure.

The dynamism is understood as the ability to quickly create new nodes (terrorist cells) and increase the number of interactions between a large part of them. Due to the specialization of individual nodes of the super-network, it turned out to be necessary to achieve a high level of interoperability, i.e. the possibility of effective cooperation between many cells with different specializations, as well as nodes of the same type (operational cells). A positive effect of such cooperation for terrorists turned out to be the possibility of carrying out spectacular actions (e.g. in Paris in 2015). An important characteristic feature of the super-network structure is also the possibility of quickly replenishing eliminated nodes (through self-destruction – or in other words suicide attacks or anti-terrorist activity of individual countries). However, this is not an automatic process, and newly created nodes do not have to take over identical operational goals. The meaning of the structural regeneration process is to ensure the possibility of effective operation of the entire super-network. This may involve, for example, ensuring a steady supply of recruits, providing resources needed for operational activities (weapons, explosives, financial resources) or appropriate propaganda coverage of terrorist actions already carried out on behalf of the Islamic State (Wejkszner, 2020: 296–297).

5. The semi-peripheral and peripheral nodes of the European super-network of the Islamic State were distinguished by several important features:

a) average operational activity of nodes classified as semi-peripheral and low or zero activity of peripheral nodes (existence of so-called sleeper cells),
b) specialization and lack of broad structural differentiation of semi-peripheral and peripheral nodes,
c) relatively more frequent establishment of special communication ties with nodes outside the European super-network (creation of so-called bridges) than in the case of central nodes.

What distinguishes central nodes from semi-peripheral and peripheral nodes is, above all, higher than average activity in the entire network. This feature is also correlated with the issue of full subject differentiation in the scope of specialization of nodes belonging to the central group. In other words, participants in this part of the network undertake the entire spectrum of activities, and not only selective manifestations of it, as is the case in the peripheral part. Another important issue seems to be the changing dynamics of the interactions mentioned above. This is closely related to many additional factors of an internal and external nature. Interactions between central nodes are intensified in special cases, almost always correlated with a prepared (not

always successful, due to detection before the execution stage, for example) terrorist action. Many members of operational cells have established and maintained contacts with representatives of the network nodes of the Islamic State hypernetwork located outside Europe (for example, by undergoing a series of ideological or paramilitary training). The aim of such interactions was primarily to improve one's own competences and high esprit de corps (readiness to follow orders or will to fight). It also seems reasonable to assume that it was there that the general goals of future operations were formulated. Decisions as to the time and manner of their execution were left to specific executors. In the absence of direct contact, similar suggestions were passed on in an indirect manner (e.g. via Internet communication channels) (Wejkszner, 2023: 132–134).

6. The scope of activity of the Islamic State jihadist terrorist network in Europe was characterized by:

a) similarity of modus operandi (thanks to jihadist propaganda, the way of operating of individual cells is unified),
b) tactical convergence in the selection of targets and methods of attacks; in the case of selecting targets of attacks, these are most often:
   – random people who were in a popular place at the wrong time,
   – symbolic targets (churches, etc.),

   In the case of selecting methods of attacks, these are exclusively classical methods (there are no examples of the use of CBRN weapons, although attempts were made to obtain them), which include:
   – improvised explosive devices,
   – cold steel weapons (usually knives),
   – firearms (pistols, rifles),
   – non-conventional use of motor vehicles (e.g. for ramming passers-by),
c) relatively low operational activity, however, associated with the organization of spectacular terrorist actions from time to time (involving several operational units and resulting in a significant number of injured people),
d) relatively low effectiveness of implementing the jihadists' operational intentions – many plans for terrorist attacks failed (due to their detection) already at the planning or preparation stage (Wejkszner, 2020: 297–298).

One of the important features of the European super-network or even the hypernetwork of the Islamic State has become the unification of methods of conducting jihadist warfare. This situation results from the process of rationalization of asymmetric warfare conducted by jihadists for many decades. Jihadists, in other words, choose and use previously proven methods of action (especially in terms of attack methods). Their main tool of warfare has become terrorism, which is quite often identified (or even confused) with urban guerrilla warfare, both in media reports and in the literature on the subject. Terrorism is not, for example, the volitional, conscious and premeditated attack on representatives of uniformed services. For propaganda and media reasons, terrorists care about publicity, which allows for increased effectiveness of the campaign of intimidation of public opinion by shocking with violence. Accidental civilian casualties or attacks on symbolic targets cause a large part of public opinion to lose its sense of security, demanding actions that are largely in the interests of terrorists (e.g.

limiting counter-terrorist activity on the international stage or withdrawing from some repressions against the Muslim diaspora). Political polarization leads to increased effectiveness of propaganda and recruitment activities and an increase in morale on the jihadist side. This in turn fuels a spiral of violence and retaliation on both sides of an asymmetric conflict. The asymmetric activity of the Islamic State in Europe is an example of a low-intensity conflict. Terrorist attacks occur relatively rarely. However, jihadists make efforts to make this activity spectacular. This is because the so-called psychological leverage effect is at work. The scale of media interest and the strength of the psychological impact of such actions increase. In relation to the central part of the Islamic State's terrorist super-network, there is also an effect of scale.

7. Some European countries are outside the strategic and tactical scope of interest from the Islamic State. It seems that it does not matter in this case whether any of them is or is not a member of the European Union. Other factors are decisive in this case. Considering the reasons for interest in the three groups of countries in which the Islamic State's terrorist sub-networks operate, one can indicate several specific features constituting the lack of interest in these countries (these include primarily the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (including Poland). The most important include:

a) limitation or closure to migration movements from the Middle East and North Africa region,
b) lack of an incoming Muslim community in the first or second generation,
c) relative ethnic and cultural homogeneity of societies,
d) relatively small number of radical converts and so-called foreign fighters fighting under the flag of the Islamic State,
e) lack of international activity (or marginal activity) of a specific European country that harms the interests of the Muslim community,
f) relatively effective anti-terrorist policies of the authorities of these countries,
g) other factors – including unique geographical location and presence outside the Schengen area (Wejkszner, 2023: 124–127).

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to address the issue of the evolution of the network organizational structure of the Islamic State in Europe. Its key components are indicated in the form of: micro-networks and macro-networks, as well as regional sub-networks composed of both types of structures. The super-network in Europe presented in the article is, on the other hand, part of the global terrorist hyper-network. The article also attempts to highlight the differences between the central and peripheral nodes of the above structure; to identify key variables influencing the construction of various types of terrorist cells; and finally, to indicate the hierarchy of importance of individual European countries based on the criterion of the size and degree of operational activity of the jihadist sub-network (strategically important countries, tactically important countries, countries of no strategic and tactical significance).

Keywords: Islamic State, terrorism, organizational structure, Europe, super-network

STRUKTURALNE USIECIOWIENIE WSPÓŁCZESNYCH ORGANIZACJI TERRORYSTYCZNYCH – ANALIZA SUPERSIECI PAŃSTWA ISLAMSKIEGO W EUROPIE

STRESZCZENIE

W niniejszym artykule próbowano zająć się problematyką ewolucji sieciowej struktury organizacyjnej Państwa Islamskiego w Europie. Wskazano na jej kluczowe elementy składowe w postaci: mikrosieci i makrosieci oraz złożonych z obu typów struktur: regionalnych subsieci. Przedstawiona w artykule supersieć w Europie jest natomiast częścią globalnej hipersieci terrorystycznej. W artykule starano się też uwypuklić różnice pomiędzy centralnymi a peryferyjnymi węzłami powyższej struktury; zidentyfikować kluczowe zmienne mające wpływ na budowę różnych typów komórek terrorystycznych; wreszcie wskazać hierarchię ważności poszczególnych państw europejskich w oparciu o kryterium wielkości i stopnia operacyjnej aktywności subsieci dżihadystycznej (państwa strategicznie ważne, państwa taktycznie ważne, państwa bez znaczenia strategiczno-taktycznego).

Słowa kluczowe: Państwo Islamskie, terroryzm, struktura organizacyjna, Europa, supersieć

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