



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Europe and the US are under a rising threat of terrorism - individual now but perhaps organised in the future



Dominique Bernard, a beloved literature teacher at a high school in Arras, northern France, was probably the first victim of terrorism in the West resulting from Hamas' terrorist attacks on Israel.

While the French public, including the security services, are still debating whether or not this was a terrorist act, warnings of an increased risk of terrorist acts have been piling up throughout Europe and in the US.

Professor Bernard's killer, Mohammed M., pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and expressed his hatred for France on social media. There remains very little doubt that Hamas terrorism in Israel was the trigger for his action.

At the same time, Mohammed M.'s attack was an individual act, possibly isolated from any extremist organisation, but even as such, no less dangerous.

Lone wolves feel encouraged

The climate created in the West after the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 benefits the activation of the "lone wolves" of Islamic extremism. Mass protests in Western capitals in support of Palestine are accompanied by a significant increase in anti-Semitism, including incidents on an anti-Semitic basis.

A whole series of extremist and terrorist organisations in the Middle East called for actions against Western interests after the Hamas attack.

"Here in the United States, our most immediate concern is that violent extremists — individuals or small groups — will draw inspiration from the events in the Middle East to carry out attacks against Americans going about their daily lives," said FBI Director Chris Wray in a recent testimony before the US Congress.

The rise of anti-Semitism in Western Europe has epidemic proportions. Within a few weeks of the Hamas attack on Israel, as many as 600

anti-Semitic incidents were registered in the UK (UK's Community Security Trust), of which 185 were online, which is 6 times more than a year ago.

In Germany, there are two and a half times more anti-Semitic incidents than a year ago (RIAS). In the US, the number of incidents has increased by 400%, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

Taking the threat of terrorism lightly

The danger of the spill over of terrorist actions from the Middle East to the West is sometimes taken lightly due to the traditional mutual intolerance among the organisations that have carried out terrorist acts in the West so far. Among them, Hamas is often regarded as an "apostate" organisation.

ISIS, for example, has for years rejected Hamas, which, because of its goals of destroying Israel, neglected the struggle to establish an Islamic state (caliphate), which is the goal of ISIS.

However, there is general solidarity in the Islamic world with the Palestinians, including extremist and terrorist organisations, who consider Israel's military response to the Hamas attack as justification for resuming operations in the West.

The fact that there has never been a significant presence and activity of ISIS or Al Qaeda in the Palestinian territories, the events from October 7 onwards could drastically change that. Hamas's war against Israel comes as an ideal occasion for Islamic extremists to inspire new terrorist actions after years of stagnation.

"I believe we're at greater risk today for a major terrorist attack in the United States than we have been at any time since September 11," said Republican Senator Ted Cruz recently.

Hesitation about treating

Hamas as a terrorist organisation

Calls for action by global jihadist groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda after October 7 do not necessarily mean their direct participation in the preparation and execution of terrorist attacks in the West.

However, they undoubtedly stimulate individual actions of their supporters, which have already occurred in the West, similar to the knife attack in a French school or an attack by a Tunisian migrant on 2 Swedish football fans in Belgium.

Hamas has been on the list of terrorist organisations in most of the Western world for years: the US since 1997, the UK, Australia, Canada and the EU. However, there was always less concern about its ability to carry out terrorist operations than other organisations (ISIS and Al Qaeda) because they showed greater aggressiveness.

The prevailing Western attitude towards the Palestinians limited counterterrorism measures against Hamas. A compromise was sought between providing humanitarian relief and other forms of assistance to the people living in the Palestinian territories and severing ties with Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007.

Switzerland is currently facing the legal dilemma of declaring Hamas a terrorist organisation, which the federal government requested on October 11.

Given that Switzerland provides aid to the UN agency that supports Palestinian refugees (about 20 million CHF annually) and to Palestinian NGOs (around 5 million CHF), there is opposition to such a decision because it cannot provide assurances that some of that aid does not finish with Hamas.

Do extremists come with migrants?

If Israel's war against Hamas continues, the already real risks of individual acts of terrorism by Islamic extremists could become more organised.

At the very start of the conflict, some EU members decided to restore the regime of controls on their open borders to reduce the risk of the unrestricted movement of extremists.

Turkey and Cyprus expressed concern about a potential increase in the number of refugees leaving the conflict region. They tightened security protocols to prevent extremists from entering through the first European border with migrants.

However, these measures will never be sufficient to eliminate the risk of militant Islamist infiltration, even after Israel's war against Hamas ends.

Even though they often compete with each other, Islamic terrorist organisations want to use the current conflict as an occasion for their return to the scene, where they can now be joined by Hamas, with its supporters from both the Middle East and the West.