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Criminological Characteristics of Terrorism-Related Crimes and Measures to Prevent Them

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Abstract

Introduction: the article is devoted to the criminological analysis of terrorist crimes in the context of the growth of terrorist activity and digitalization of society. The article considers international legal and national foundations of countering terrorism, statistical indicators, and personal characteristics of subjects of terrorist activity. *Purpose:* to conduct a comprehensive criminological analysis of terrorism-related crimes, identify their specific features, development trends, determinants, and develop recommendations for improving their prevention system by expanding the institution of voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes and special grounds for exemption from criminal liability. *Methods:* historical, comparative law, statistical, legal methods, methods of interpretation of legal norms, analysis of international and national legislation, study of doctrinal positions. *Results:* the analysis of statistical data has revealed a steady increase in the number of terrorism-related crimes in Russia, due to the increasing influence of digital technologies on recruitment and radicalization through social networks and messengers. The criminological portrait of the terrorist includes young people under the age of 25 or people aged 30-50 with low socio-economic status and aggressive destructive thinking. Inchoate crimes articles 205.1–205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation excludes the use of voluntary refusal with rehabilitative consequences, creating inequality before the law in comparison with Article 205 and encouraging more dangerous crimes. *Conclusions:* it is advisable to eliminate conflicts between general rules of the institution of voluntary refusal and special grounds for exemption from criminal liability, consolidating the rehabilitative nature of the latter with timely renunciation of criminal activity. It seems that special grounds for release should become a tool for preventive anti-terrorist policy aimed at early detection of threats, encouraging withdrawal from terrorist organizations and personal resocialization.

Key words: characterization of the terrorist's personality; terrorism-related crimes; countering terrorism; social networks; determinants of terrorism; voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes; exemption from criminal liability.

5.1.4. Criminal law sciences.

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Introduction

Terrorism remains one of the critical problems that requires a comprehensive analysis and improvement of theoretical and methodological approaches to its study. The crisis in global political development, economic instability and social tension create a favorable basis for terrorist activity, which gives relevance to the study of criminological characteristics of terrorism-related crimes.

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive criminological analysis of terrorism-related crimes, identify their specific features, development trends, causes and conditions of commission, and develop recommendations for improving their prevention system. To achieve this goal, it is proposed to consider the conceptual framework and criminal law characteristics of terrorist acts, analyze statistics and the dynamics of this type of crime, study personal characteristics of subjects of terrorist activity and factors of their criminal behavior, and determine criminal mechanisms and methods of committing terrorist acts. The key task is to find new legal and socio-psychological tools that can reduce terrorism rates and encourage the abandonment of criminal intentions at the early stages of their formation.

Regulatory and legal framework for countering terrorism

International law is the basis for the adoption of national counter-terrorism measures and the establishment of effective inter-state cooperation to prevent and combat terrorism. The United Nations (UN) Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 8, 2006 defines a combined approach based on national, regional and international efforts. The Russian Federation actively backs the realization of this strategy by cooperating with foreign states, international organizations and UN bodies in accordance with the federal law of March 6, 2006 (as amended on February 28, 2025) No. 35-FZ “On countering terrorism” and the ratified international treaties, including coordination with the United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee.

In addition to the UN acts, there are a number of international treaties regulating the prevention of terrorism, such as the International Convention against the Taking of Hostages (1979), the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing (1997), the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999), the Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005), the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation (1971) and Maritime Navigation (1988), Convention on the Marking of Plastic Explosives (1991).

Domestic legislation also regulates issues related to terrorism. The federal law “On countering terrorism” defines terrorism as an ideology of violence and the practice of influencing decision-making of state authorities, local governments, or international organizations related to intimidation of the population and other forms of unlawful violent acts. The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation contains special rules that establish liability for terrorism-related crimes (articles 205, 205.1–205.5, 206, 208, 211, 220, 221, 277–279, 360, 361).

Criminological characteristics of terrorism-related crimes

Terrorism-related crimes in Russian criminal law are an extensive system of interrelated crimes, the common purpose of which is to destabilize activities of the authorities or international organizations or influence their decision-making. The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation contains a list of such acts covering not only the direct commission of terrorist acts, but also numerous forms of assistance to terrorism, organizational and ideological activities related to propaganda, justification and support of terrorism.

Statistical data indicate a significant transformation of the criminal situation in the field of terrorism in recent years. According to the information prepared by the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation, in 2025, 4,467 terrorist crimes were registered in January–September (+75%). Of the total number of registered terrorism-related crimes, 2,075 (+72.6%) were committed that year, includ-

ing: 275 (+32.9%) were terminated at the stage of preparation and attempted murder, 124 (-8.8%) outside the Russian Federation [1]. There were 2,600 terrorism-related crimes (+49%) in the same period of 2024 [2] and 1,713 in 2023 [3]. So, the number of terrorism-related crimes has gone up in recent years.

Criminology considers terrorism as a systemic, ideologically based, socially or politically motivated complex of criminal acts committed using violence or the threat of its use against people's lives, health, rights and legitimate interests of various subjects, the purpose of which is to intimidate society and force a third party to make the required decisions [4, p. 89]. Terrorism-related crimes occupy a special place in the system of criminal law and criminological threats, having signs of not only criminal, but also military and political danger, which determines the need for fundamentally different approaches than to countering ordinary crimes.

The distinctive features of terrorism-related crimes are a high degree of organization, a variety of motivational complexes and forms of manifestation.

Criminological research identifies various typologies of terrorism: political, national, religious, mercenary criminal, anti-state, informational, economic and suicidal [5, p. 2]. Modern terrorism, based on statistical data, can be characterized by an increased relationship with organized crime, the danger of using objects of mass destruction, the internationalization of terrorist organizations, and the development of digital propaganda and financing channels [1].

The main criminal act in the system of terrorism-related crimes is a terrorist act (Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), which is the commission of an explosion, arson or other actions that frighten the population and create a danger of human death, causing significant property damage or other serious consequences, in order to destabilize the activities of authorities or international organizations or influence their decision-making.

Terrorism-related crimes are determined in Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, Article 205.1 (assistance to terrorist activities covering incitement, recruitment, financing of terrorism and aiding); Article 205.2 (public calls to carry out terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism or propa-

ganda of terrorism); Article 205.3 (training in order to carry out terrorist activities); Article 205.4 (organization of a terrorist community and participation in it); and Article 205.5 (organization of the activities of a terrorist organization and participation in the activities of such an organization). This category also includes hostage-taking (Article 206), organization of an illegal armed group or participation in it (Article 208), hijacking of an air or water transport vessel or railway rolling stock (Article 211), illegal handling of nuclear materials or radioactive substances (Article 220), theft or extortion of nuclear materials or radioactive substances (Article 221), encroachment on the life of a state or public figure (Article 277), violent seizure of power or forcible retention of power (Article 278), armed rebellion (Article 279), an attack on persons or institutions that are under international protection or the threat of its commission (Article 360) and an act of international terrorism (Article 361).

The system of terrorism-related crimes can be classified according to several criteria. According to the object of encroachment, terrorism-related crimes should be divided into several groups [6, p. 16]. The first is crimes that infringe on security in general (that is, both public and state security) (articles 205–205.5, 206, 208, 211 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), including terrorist acts, assistance to terrorist activities, public calls for terrorism, organization of a terrorist community, hostage-taking and piracy. The second group covers encroachments related to violations of the rules for handling generally dangerous items (articles 220–221 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) – illegal handling of nuclear materials and radioactive substances. The third group is formed by crimes against the legitimacy of state power (articles 277–279 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), such as encroachment on the life of a statesman, violent seizure of power and armed rebellion. The fourth category includes international crimes of a terrorist nature – attacks on persons or institutions that are under international protection, or the threat of its commission (Article 360 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) and an act of international terrorism (Article 361 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation).

According to the method of commission, violent and non-violent terrorism-related crimes can be distinguished [7, p. 61]. Acts classified according to articles 205.1–205.5, 208–211, 220, 221 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (propaganda of terrorism, financing, recruitment, training and organizational activities) are non-violent. Violent forms of terrorist activity are realized through a terrorist act, hostage-taking, vehicle theft and other actions that pose an immediate threat to the life and health of citizens.

Personality of a terrorist

The criminological characteristics of the personality of subjects of terrorist activity demonstrate that the motivational structure of terrorists is diverse and depends on the type of terrorist organization. Motives of terrorist actions include political demands, the desire to obtain financial resources, demands for the exercise of official powers by government representatives, as well as the goal of ensuring the success of criminal activity [8, p. 39].

The psychological characteristics of the personality of terrorists reveal their negative worldview, inconsistency of the image of an ideal model of the world with reality (“I am good, the world is bad”), aggressive and destructive thinking. The terrorist demonstrates a sadomasochistic position, a limited ability to understand the arguments of those who think differently, and a certain loss of rationality in the field of ideas about accessible and inaccessible goals [9].

Analyzing the statistical data for the first half of 2025, prepared by the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, it is possible to identify key socio-demographic characteristics of persons who have committed terrorism-related crimes. To begin with, it should be noted that 670 people were convicted during this period. The largest number of such crimes were committed by young people aged 18 to 24 (18.21% of the total number of convicts), as well as by people aged 25 to 30 (18.06%) who do not have a permanent source of income (404 convicts or 63.95% of the total number), mainly with secondary vocational education (33.43%) [10].

Causes of terrorism-related crimes and measures to counter them

The causes and conditions of the spread of terrorism-related crime are complex. The main

determinants of terrorism include socio-economic factors (inequality, unemployment, and poverty), political contradictions, ideological differences, ethno-religious conflicts, historical heritage, weakness of state institutions and ineffectiveness of preventive measures. The processes of globalization, digitalization of society, and increased access to terrorist-related information and propaganda materials are of increasing importance. Practice shows that the timely use of diagnostic methods, including financial analytics, can prevent up to 40% of potential terrorist attacks, since financing often acts as an indicator of impending crimes [1].

Countering terrorism-related crimes in the Russian Federation is carried out on the basis of the federal law “On countering terrorism”, which establishes the principles of preventing terrorism, combating it and minimizing its consequences. Activities of the state authorities in this area are coordinated by the National Anti-Terrorism Committee headed by the Director of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. At the regional level, these functions are performed by the anti-terrorist commissions of the subjects.

Despite the measures taken by the state, theoretical, methodological and practical problems of combating terrorism-related crime remain insufficiently studied, especially given active development of digital technologies that have become weapons in the hands of criminals.

Social media has become a powerful tool of terrorist organizations for propaganda, recruitment and radicalization. Social network algorithms designed to maximize user engagement inadvertently contribute to the spread of radical content [11, p. 342].

For example, the perpetrators of the terrorist attack in Crocus City Hall were recruited through Telegram chats [12]. This is due to the fact that the messenger has a high level of security, which is provided by the MTProto messaging protocol, which simultaneously strengthens the inviolability of personal data of ordinary users, but at the same time creates the ground for criminal activity, including the spread of terrorist ideas.

Research shows that algorithms prefer emotionally charged, sensational, and radical content because it elicits more clicks and reac-

tions [11]. Users find themselves in information bubbles and ideological echo chambers, which enhances the processes of group polarization and radicalization.

Monitoring the information space on the Internet using modern methods, purposeful search for persons potentially capable of committing terrorist acts, and the application of individual preventive measures to them are becoming priorities for law enforcement agencies. In this regard, on November 11, 2025, the State Duma in the second and third readings adopted a law toughening criminal liability for sabotage and terrorist attacks. Thus, the federal law No. 420-FZ of November 17, 2025 "On amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation" provides for the reduction in the age of criminal liability from 16 to 14 years for crimes under articles 205.1, 205.4, 205.5, 281, 281.1–281.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. In addition, life imprisonment is imposed for involving minors in terrorist activities and inciting them to commit sabotage as punishment. This measure is preventive, because minors are the most vulnerable of the population. Spreading false ideas among them and engaging in criminal activities creates potential terrorists, therefore, tougher penalties for this crime is a reasonable and correct decision on the part of the state.

Special grounds for exemption from criminal liability as a preventive mechanism

The introduction of tougher penalties and new compositions of crimes are not the only measures to combat terrorism. Russian criminal legislation provides for separate, special grounds for exemption from criminal liability for persons who have participated in the preparation of terrorist acts, assistance to terrorist activities and other crimes of this category. The notes to articles 205, 205.1, 205.4 and 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation provide that a person may be released from criminal liability provided that he/she provided timely warning to the authorities or otherwise contributed to the prevention of a terrorist act and his/her actions do not contain any other corpus delicti. It is important to note that these norms are not universal, but special in nature and apply only in the presence of factual circumstances indicating the abandonment of a crime at the stage of preparation or attempt

and the promotion of harm prevention. Similar provisions can be found in Article 255 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Article 289 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, which indicates the state's desire to combat terrorism in all ways, including providing preferences for persons who assist in the detection and prevention of such crimes.

In addition, a "hazardtalks" mechanism (preventive conversations) and re-socialization and deradicalization programs are used in Germany and France. Besides, recognition of valid cooperation with law enforcement agencies or assistance in crime prevention can significantly mitigate punishment [13].

In the light of the adoption of new amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation on strengthening responsibility for the involvement of minors in sabotage and terrorist activities, institutions of voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes and active repentance are of particular importance for the prevention and suppression of terrorist attacks.

Minors involved in terrorism often become victims of manipulation by recruiters themselves and require a special approach. The possibility of stimulating their voluntary renunciation of criminal activity through the expanded application of the notes to articles 205, 205.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation can significantly increase the effectiveness of preventive anti-terrorism policy.

In this regard, it is necessary to develop a differentiated approach to minors in order to combat terrorism. Thus, three options are proposed for action if they are charged with these acts, namely:

1. Full exemption from liability provided that active assistance is provided to expose recruiters.
2. Significant mitigation of punishment for voluntary renunciation of criminal activity in the early stages of preparation for the commission of sabotage and terrorist acts.
3. Possibility of using compulsory educational measures instead of criminal punishment in accordance with the conditions provided for in Article 90 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

In addition, these measures, with minor modifications, can also be applied to adults who have fallen under the influence of terrorist

organizations, but who realized in time public danger of the acts.

These measures also seem reasonable, taking into account the consideration of foreign experience, especially historical. Thus, in Italy, during the “lead years” (annidipiombo), there was a premium model of criminal policy based on encouraging the repentant (pentiti, collaboratoridigiustizia) for active cooperation with the state. This model was combined with strict extraordinary legislation and subsequently became one of the patterns for other European countries [14]. This method provided for the release or substantial mitigation of punishment for members of terrorist organizations for active dissociation and assistance in the investigation. The mechanism worked in those years, when the testimony of former members of the “Red Brigades” made it possible to destroy conspiratorial structures and reduce the level of political violence [15].

Institutions of voluntary renunciation and active repentance in the fight against terrorism

Speaking about the prevention of terrorist crimes, it is also worth considering the possibility of applying the provisions on voluntary refusal provided for in Article 31 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and special grounds for exemption from criminal liability provided for in the notes to Articles 205-205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

The key discussion in the doctrine revolves around the legal nature of the notes to articles 205–205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and their competition with the rule on voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes (Article 31). For example, D.K. Veselkov questions the very possibility of applying the institution of voluntary renunciation of terrorism-related crimes [16, p. 217]. The main argument is that most inchoate crimes (articles 205.1–205.5) are considered completed at an early stage (for example, from the moment of the start of financing or training). Consequently, classic voluntary renunciation, which is possible only at the stage of an unfinished crime, cannot be applied in such criminal acts, and notes are the only workable mechanism for release, functioning according to the model of active repentance provided for in Article 75 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which is not entirely

beneficial for a person who has refused to commit acts of a terrorist nature.

There is another point of view, according to which the notes to these articles should be considered as special types of voluntary renunciation, fixed in the Special Part of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation [17, p. 37]. Proponents of this approach point to the similarity of the goals of these norms – encouraging a person to stop criminal activity before the onset of serious consequences. However, this position has been criticized. E.P. Kim and K.A. Kostenko emphasize the difference in legal consequences: voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes (Article 31) is a rehabilitating ground (excludes the criminality of the act), while the release according to the notes is non-rehabilitating (the person is released from responsibility, but the fact of the act is not annulled) [18]. In this regard, S.N. Bulgakov emphasizes that law enforcement practice often follows the path of applying special grounds for exemption from criminal liability, indicated in the notes to articles of the Special Part of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, ignoring the provisions of Article 31 even where it may be applied, which worsens the situation of the accused [19].

Of particular interest is the issue of competition of norms in the qualification of preparation for a terrorist act (Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). In the work of L.V. Inogamov-Hegai [20, p. 159], a conflict is analyzed, the essence of which boils down to the following: if a person voluntarily stopped preparing a terrorist act and prevented it, what rule should be applied – general (Article 31) or special (note to Article 205)? The dominant position in many studies is that if there are elements of both institutions, priority should be given to Article 31 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation as the norm most favorable for a person (full rehabilitation), while special notes should be applied vicariously – when the conditions of voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes (for example, timeliness or finality) were not fully met, but the person prevented the onset of consequences by his active actions [16; 20; 21, p. 23].

Against the background of the presented positions, there is a need to rethink the legislative framework in this area. The current system

creates a paradox: a person who has committed an inchoate crime (for example, undergoing training in order to participate in a terrorist act, Article 205.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) can be released only on non-rehabilitating grounds, whereas a person who committed a more serious act (for example, preparing a terrorist act directly, Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), but renounce criminal intentions on time can receive full rehabilitation under Article 31 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. This difference, related to the legislative consolidation of the moment of the end of the crime, violates the principle of equality before the law and creates incentives to commit more dangerous actions: in order to obtain favorable consequences, a person may commit acts of preparation for a terrorist attack (which can be considered more serious due to the possible occurrence of the consequences specified in the disposition of the article) than to engage in training (Article 205.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation).

In this regard, it is necessary to consider the position of D.K. Veselkov, who offers his own solution to the question of the ratio of general and special norms on exemption from criminal liability. He proceeds from the fact that the notes to the articles of the Special Part of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, providing for exemption from liability (including articles 205–205.5) are special norms in relation to the general provisions of the General Part of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (articles 31, 75) [16, pp. 218–219]. According to his approach, when general and special norms compete, the “*Lex specialis derogat generali*” rule applies, that is, the special norm takes precedence. However, this rule should not be applied mechanically, it is necessary to consider which norm is more favorable for the person. It seems that if there are signs of both voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes and the conditions provided for in the notes, the rule that entails more favorable consequences for the person should be applied, which corresponds to the principle of humanism and individualization of responsibility. This means that if a person’s actions are fully within the scope of Article 31 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (voluntariness, finality, timeliness), it is this

norm that should be applied with its rehabilitating effect, even if there is formally a special note on exemption from criminal liability.

It should be noted that, according to Paragraph 14 of the Resolution of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation No. 1 of September 2, 2012 “On certain issues of judicial practice in criminal cases of terrorism-related crimes”, persuasion, recruitment or other involvement of a person in the commission of crimes provided for in Part 1 of Article 205.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, are regarded as a completed crime from the moment of the commission of these actions, regardless of whether the person involved has committed a corresponding terrorism-related crime. In this regard, it becomes impossible to apply the norms of the institution of voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes to the instigator. In cases where the organizer or instigator timely informs the authorities or otherwise contributes to the prevention or suppression of a crime, Article 31 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation with all its rehabilitating grounds cannot be applied to these persons. In this case, it is possible to apply only the notes to the specified article.

Conclusion

Thus, current criminal legislation restricts the possibility of applying voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes to exclude criminal liability of organizers, accomplices and instigators of terrorism-related crimes, since their acts are assessed as an independent crime, namely, assistance to terrorist activities (Article 205.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), which excludes the possibility of applying Part 4 of Article 31 of the Criminal Code [22, p. 14]. In this regard, it is proposed to supplement Part 4 of Article 31 with the following sentence, “these rules do not apply if the actions of the organizer, instigator, or accomplice are specifically provided for in articles 205, 205.3, 205.4, 205.5, parts 3 and 4 of Article 206, and part 4 of Article 211 of this Code”.

To ensure the certainty of criminal legislation, it is advisable to supplement Article 31 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation with a special part regulating voluntary renunciation of terrorism-related crimes with a clear definition of the end of the crime and conditions for the applicability of the institution of volun-

tary renunciation to inchoate crimes. It should be borne in mind that the notes on exemption from criminal liability to articles 205.1 and 205.3–205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation are special grounds for active repentance, which by their very nature arise after the moment of the legal end of terrorism-related crimes. This means that active repentance and voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes regulate different time stages of the commission of a crime: if voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes is applied at the stage before the completion of the act, then active repentance is applied after its completion. Consequently, the exclusion of voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes from the scope of Article 31 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation creates inconsistencies in the criminal law system for accomplices in terrorism-related crimes, as it leaves individuals without legal protection who has refused to continue their criminal activities at an early stage. Therefore, it is advisable to apply the rules of Article 31 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation to cases of voluntary renunciation of criminal purposes in

the commission of terrorist crimes, which will promote socially useful behavior, regardless of the stage at which the person renounces criminal intentions. The proposed addition will make it possible to avoid conflicts and create a single, transparent mechanism for stimulating socially beneficial behavior of persons involved in terrorist acts by refusing to impose or implement criminal liability in the event of a deliberate and final failure to finalize a terrorism-related crime. It seems that this will be important for the preventive policy of the state in the context of modern threats to national security.

Thus, special grounds for exemption from liability should become a tool for the formation of a preventive anti-terrorist policy focused on early detection, encouraging non-commission of crimes and re-socialization of the individual. Such a system of legal preferences, taking into account the stage of involvement in terrorist activities, the degree of assistance to law enforcement agencies and the harm prevented, will make it possible to more effectively counter the terrorist threat at all levels of its manifestation.

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