

Daniel Boćkowski

Institute of History and Political Sciences of the University of Białystok, Poland

Big Shopping Centers as an Objects of a Potential Terrorist Attacks

Abstrakt

Large shopping centers are one of the most sensitive soft targets. They are susceptible to attacks with both firearms and various types of white weapons, especially knives. They are attractive to emotionally and mentally unstable people who want to be famous. Despite monitoring and protecting the facility, it is almost impossible to stop the attack of a potential terrorist. Shopping centers combined into one unit with rail and bus stations are extremely difficult to secure because conflicting security procedures are often used here. It is advisable to build special safety procedures for such hybrid.

Keywords: *security threats in shopping centers, active shooter, securing commercial facilities, safe space*

Creating the English-language version of the journal "Securitologia" is financed under contract No. 724/P-DUN/2018 from the funds allocated by the Minister of Science and Higher Education for dissemination of science.



Introduction

Big shopping centers are one of the most sensitive soft targets. Because of its service and recreational character they attract, especially on non-working days and evenings, thousands of people. They are very difficult to protect because of enormous traffic, many various entrances, a complicated set of pedestrian paths, numerous escalators, many nooks and crannies, where the potential attacker can prepare for attack or hide a weapon. They are sensitive to active shooter attacks, with both firearms as well as various types of white weapons, especially knives. Also, they attract people who are not mentally balanced, who can easily obtain publicity and without much effort pick a chosen or random target. Only from 1998 to 2006 there were over 60 terrorist attacks on shopping centers practically all over the world: Colombia, Venezuela, Turkey, Israel, Philippines, France, Estonia. From 2006 to today at least as many, including a series of attacks which were carried out by people inspired by fundamentalist ideology. Many such events are recorded in the USA, where the main ground mentioned is the emotional instability of the perpetrators.

Public space ceases to be secure. Strangers can not only get into cities, but also into new sanctuaries of consumerism, large shopping centers (Jasiński 2009). Places where entire families choose to spend their free time. Security systems in modern shopping centers are built on the basis of video monitoring introduced in the centers of cities struggling with a growing terrorist threat.

A perfect example is the London Ring of Steal. The task of monitoring is not only to prevent theft. It is supposed to be a support in case of various security threats. The first line of potential defense. Modern large-area retail objects resemble, in the micro version, commercial spaces (passages) of cities, which in this way were protected against terrorist threats. However, these are not universal solutions, because every large shopping center, analogically to large city centers, have their specificity, their strengths and weaknesses.

The real problem of large stores is the attempt to reconcile security with attractiveness. As Kenneth Button points out in his article, to get commercial attractiveness the shopping centers must be “open” by nature, with a wide, unbound access for retailers and buyers, with a large parking capacity. All this makes them not only easy but the most obvious target and their potential weakness is very high (Button 2008, pp. 129-130).

The first serious report on how to minimize the risks arising from terrorist attacks on shopping centers was created with the RAND Corporation in 2006. An interesting trend was pointed out there in terms of attack methods. Over 71% of all attacks were carried out using explosives, but in a majority of cases, these were not suicide attacks. Today the main tools are still bombs placed in front of shopping centers, however – in contrast to the period 1998-2005 discussed in the report – we have significant increase in attacks using sharp tools (knives, machetes, axes) and firearms directly on the premises of commercial establishments. Until 2005, we had just one confirmed case of using a knife and a firearm (LaTourrette *et al.* 2005, pp. 9-10).

Goals and research problems

The study will attempt to describe the problems caused by functioning of large shopping centers connected to extensive transportation junctions and their protection in the event of a terrorist attack or an active shooter attack.

The basic assumption of the research is to assess the threat posed by functioning within one organism of two completely different in the scope of anti-terrorist security facilities with a variety of procedures and internal services.

Therefore, the following research problems were formulated:

- What are the risks of combining large shopping areas and large transportation centers (rail bus or coach) into one organism;
- what security threats appear or may appear in the combination of trading and transportation hubs;
- how to prepare for security threats of a terrorist nature, what procedures to implement, which of terrorist threats recorded so far in Europe and in the world are the most likely in Poland.

This study uses analytical research, using deduction and conceptual modeling, as well as a case study.

Security threats in shopping centers

Until the attack, despite installed monitoring and the law enforcement operating under cover or openly, it is not possible to predict potential action of an attacker, because

white weapons (knives, cleavers, machetes and others sharp tools) can be stocked during the stay in the facility, in the shops located there without much problem. He can get chemistry products in a similar way both household and industrial, which can be used to construct primitive chemical weapons. Staying on the site he can use technical rooms, bathrooms to arm himself or hide his identity, and in the case of large stores, he can also use changing rooms located in many of them.

All this makes the active killer or madman not to have to start his own attack only when he enters the facility, but he can calmly move to a place where the number of potential victims can be considered optimal. Because there is no possibility to monitor each person – unless he behaves in a way that is different from the norm, or just being within the range of the industrial camera – you can assume that alarm procedures can be implemented with quite a significant delay. There is also no certainty that it will be possible to manage to control the crowd, especially if people have not experienced this type of activity before, eg during drills.

Today, shopping centers are not yet key targets for terrorist groups especially Islamist, but from 2015 Al-Qaeda, al-Shabab, and especially the so-called Islamic State, which calls continuously to attack with a firearm or knives any sensitive areas, including shopping centers, to enhance fear among Europeans. Most of these types of calls appear in the holiday season. In 2015 al-Shabab called on the Internet Muslims living in the UK to attack London's shopping centers at Oxford Street or Westfield. Similar calls appeared in the online magazines "Dabiq", "Inspire" and "Rumiyah".

Attacks in shopping centers – a case study

Over the past few years, we have recorded a dozen of terrorist attacks, with criminal, fundamentalist or imbalanced psychic state of the attacker background. This applies to both Western Europe and Poland.

On October 14, 2012, the mentally disturbed attacker attacked the doctor lecturer at the shopping center CHR Galaxy in Szczecin (Onet Szczecin 2012). In July 2015, an emotionally unstable attacker attacked with a knife in a shopping mall in Praga Południe (Sawicki 2015). On February 18, 2017 the police shot an emotionally disturbed woman who was threatening with a knife people in the hypermarket at Malborska street in Warsaw (Gazeta Prawna.pl 2017). In the last two cases, there was luckily no intrusion of the

armed person on the premises, however parking lots around shopping centers can be successfully used as a potential attack site because they are relatively easy not only to make it, but also, using the confusion, safely move away.

The most tragic result was the attack of a madman armed with two bayonets in the Shopping Center in Stalowa Wola in October 20, 2017, as a result of which one person died and another 8 were seriously injured (Wiadomości WP.pl 2017). Due to the place of attack, selected objectives, manner of carrying out and the scale we can certainly recognize it as one of the first cases of active killer. What is important, the gallery was not prepared for this type of attack, and the attacker was captured by – risking their lives – civilians. The key question for this case is what would have been if the attacker had had firearms.

On July 26, 2018, most likely, a mentally disturbed resident of Stalowa Wola district, with the help of a farm tractor rammed the entrance door to the Tesco shopping center in Stalowa Wola, after that, using an ax, he started to destroy the jewelry store's window. Fortunately, he did not attack any of the people staying in the facility. After the destruction, he left the site and rammed the entry gate leading to the police headquarters in Stalowa Wola. Only then the police managed to overpower him (Wiosło 2018). The security of the facility was not prepared for this type of attack. It also did not have any robbery features.

In Europe, the most spectacular attack turned out to be the shooting in the Olympia Commercial Center in Munich on July 22, 2016. 18-year-old armed attacker got to the site, then attacked the people sitting at McDonald's restaurant. Taking advantage of the panic and the chaos caused by the shooting, he got outside without any troubles wounding and killing more people. He eventually committed suicide (mk, tmw 2016). As a result of the attack, 9 people were killed and 35 were injured. Giant confusion prevailing on the site and in the areas around the shopping center and the information chaos completely paralyzed the city. People inside and outside could not estimate how many attackers were there. Fortunately for everyone who was staying in the mall, the employees and buyers, the attacker left the area of commercial facility after the series of shots. Without doubt If he had started a systematic hunt for people walking around there would have been more victims. The 18-year-old was mentally ill. He bought weapons and ammuni-

tion which he used in the attack on the Internet, without any problem. He was a passionate of weapons and he was fascinated by the figure of Adreas Brevik (after changing his first and last name – Fjotolf Hansen).

December 23, 2016, two days after the terrorist attack on the Christmas market in Berlin, the German police managed to prevent another attack on the shopping center, this time in Oberhausen, on the border with the Netherlands. In this case, we had preparations for the much more complicated operation, which is undoubtedly the attempt to bring and launch the explosive systems on the premises (Tag24 2016).

If the attack in Munich can be additionally categorized as the phenomenon of a murderer, clearly acting out of the desire to take revenge on fellow citizens, the failed attack in Oberhausen was part of the logic of IS activities calling for attacks on all places where Christmas and New Year's fairs and festivals take place.

Counterterrorist activities

Because, after the attacks in Nice and Munich, the police are very rigorous to secure mass events against the threat resulting from the attack with trucks, we can assume that shopping centers, like airports and railway stations, can become key objects for performing spectacular media attacks, whether using explosives or using firearms or white weapon, or even various caustic or suffocating chemicals.

Trading outlets are not equipped with advanced security systems and metal detectors at the entrance, as this would make it impossible for them to function. Without any doubts this makes it easier to carry out an attack, for example, on a Friday evening or Saturday, when the amount of buyers is the largest.

Analyzing the recent terrorist attacks, it is clearly visible that the attackers do not decide on actions leading to their killing or suicidal death, but they try to safely retreat and hide after the attack, which further aggravates chaos and confusion by forcing the emergency services to cut off large areas of city tissue around the place of impact.

How hard it is to conduct an effective anti-terrorist action in the case the intrusion of a trained and armed group of attackers into the shopping mall is best testified in the experience of the attack on the Westgate Mall shopping center in Nairobi September 2013. An attack of a group of terrorists equipped with machine guns and grenades from Somali Al-Shabaab ended with the death of over 60 people. Cleansing it lasted

nearly 80 hours. The army and officers of security services there were having regular combat operations on the premises. The volume of the building, the character of the stores, the number of rooms in which you could hide made it one of the heaviest anti-terrorist operations carried out in large-scale in a commercial object. Importantly, the effectiveness of terrorist operations in many places were obstructed by armed citizens who could not only use weapons, but also hide under fire and support the evacuation of other unarmed civilians (BBC News Africa 2013).

Similarly complicated was the action of neutralizing ISIS assassins who on January 11, 2016, conducted a coordinated attack on the shopping center in Bagdad killing and injuring over 60 people, including policemen protecting the center. In the attack, a car was used, in which an explosive charge was detonated before entering the center and then a group of fighters burst in, trying to kill and hurt as many people as possible. The operation of the liquidation of assassins lasted over 4 hours (Arango 2016).

In the case of Western Europe and Poland, operation on such a scale seems to be scarcely probable, nevertheless several people equipped with semi-automatic weapons can effectively defend themselves and hold hostages for many hours. One of the biggest problems during the cleaning operation of the building is space, where it is extremely difficult to hide from a potential assault, making the element of surprise that is crucial for such action to fail. It is extremely difficult to search and secure all rooms in the facility, because it involves huge operational forces. The advantage of taking actions can be the transmission of the image from CCTV provided that the attackers do not barricade themselves e.g. in technical rooms, warehouses, store back-up etc.

Trade and transportation hubs

Another problem that should be taken into account in the case of attacks on shopping centers is when they are connected to large transportation nodes. Securing this type of infrastructure is even more complicated because we do not know whether potential bombers will want to use the shopping mall as a “corridor” to help them attack the train station, bus station or metro station, or whether through these elements of critical infrastructure, they will try to attack large-scale commercial facilities.

A symbolic example of this type of threat is undoubtedly the attack in the Louvre from the beginning of February 2017. In the case of Poland, we have a lot of such

modern facilities. They are all extremely hard to protect, and conduct an effective anti-terrorist operation in them.

So far, we have not witnessed any combination attack on this type of objects. Also most of the terrorist attacks targeting mass transport were focused either on the bombs on the platform or underpass (29 March 2010 – Moscow, 11 April 2011 – Minsk, 1 December 2015 – Istanbul, 22 March 2016 – Brussels, 3 April 2017 – Saint Petersburg) or on the attack directly on the train (18 June 2016 – Würzburg, 7 March 2017 – Bhopal-Ujjain, India).

In the case of this type of objects, combined operations can be particularly dangerous – firing of an explosive or explosives at the station – which will cause panic in the entire facility, followed by an attack aimed at maximizing the number of victims or taking potential hostages. The penetration of attackers into the area of such an object will not pose any logistic problems. More importantly, explosives can be brought in earlier and placed in self-service lockers for traveler’s luggage.

There are a lot of examples of such shopping centers connected by underground passages with railway stations. The largest and extremely difficult to counter-terrorist activities (including efficient evacuation), we can count Galeria Karkowska, Poznań City Center Gallery, Galeria Wileńska in Warsaw or Golden Terraces connected to the Central Railway Station. The smaller ones include, for example, Galeria Metropolia Gdańsk Wrzeszcz and Galeria Wrocławia. A similar location is the newly built Łódź Fabryczna station.

A separate issue in this case is cooperation, coordination of activities and communication of various entities responsible for the protection of objects, their level of training, qualifications and knowledge of the “roommate” area. Key factor is also the level of training for companies responsible for security, and especially the question of whether at any time, both in the shopping center and at the station, attention is given to the possible occurrence of such a threat as in the case of Stalowa Wola and whether any operational algorithms were created in the event of a combinational threat. In the guide prepared by the Anti-Terror Center ABW (2015) *Anti-terrorism protection of large-area objects* these cases have not been included in any way, which is quite dangerous gap in AT risk analysis.

A separate issue is the protection of shopping centers due to potential the use of vehicle-traps, filled with explosives (Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device,

VBIED) or an attempt to use trucks vans or cars in parking lots, as in the case of Nice and Berlin. Another example of this type of threat is the incident in shopping center in Heidelberg on February 27, 2017, where a man with a knife ran into a group of people wounding two and killing one (BBC News 2017). In the case of large, glazed wall surfaces around entrances to buildings it should be assumed, as probable, an attempt to drive the car inside the building to kill or hurt as many people as possible.

When analyzing potential threat algorithms one should take into account the attacks of various people armed with knives or more dangerous tools – machetes, axes, chainsaws. In this way, a young woman died in 2016 in Minsk, in the “Europe” shopping gallery. The impeccably dressed attacker invaded the store area through a technical entrance armed with a chainsaw and ax, which he hid in a guitar case. He attacked a group of teenagers sitting at a table and then a person in a transportation passage (RT 2016). A group of attackers at the Stradford Center in London on September 24, 2017 used sprayed acid as part of the gang war (Kurowicki 2017), which, however demonstrates the potential high effectiveness of such a terrorist attack.

Conclusions for people responsible for securing shopping centers

Therefore, plans for securing facilities should take into account the most obvious threats, such as fire, smoke or leakage of harmful substance as well as a number of terrorist threats:

- bomb attack using a cargo placed inside the gallery or around in the parking lots and directly at the building;
- intrusion of a person armed with firearms;
- intrusion of a person armed with a knife, ax or other dangerous tool;
- attack by a madman or an emotionally unstable person;
- attack using funds obtained, bought or stolen from stores located in the gallery;
- attack on people entering or leaving the gallery using firearms, knives or other dangerous tool, chemicals;
- using a motor vehicle as a potential attack tool in front of the gallery or inside;
- combined operation in case of merging a shopping mall with a particular sensitive transportation junctions.

Ending

The analysis of cases of attacks on shopping centers in recent years indicates that their character is definitely changing. The authors of the text of the report referred to at the beginning (LaTourrette *et al.* 2005, pp. 21-23), took into account experiences from the turn of the 20th century and the 21st century and considered the most likely attacks using cargoes out of shopping malls, self-assault bomber fighters carrying explosives, hidden bombs on the commercial premises, car-traps in underground parking lots or outside facilities, snipers, strikes of armed groups outside.

Attacks of lonely people armed with firearms or other sharp tools as well the use of cars to hit pedestrians was not among potential threats, which shows how difficult it is to perform such analyses. These changes should be taken into account when planning security procedures for Polish large-area commercial centers. The threat is more often the unbalanced person equipped with white weapons and even using a tractor and an ax than potential bombers armed with explosives. This requires changes in the training of people responsible for reacting when a crisis situation occurs and also developing a series of alternative evacuation procedures.

In shopping centers connected to railway junctions, alarm algorithms common to both areas should be developed and rules for cooperation should be established to evacuate or block entrances to make it difficult for attackers to enter the gallery or the area of platforms and passageways. It is also necessary to carry out joint exercises of services responsible for the safety of the buildings from time to time, not to allow multiplication of chaos and panic during the immediate threat to life. It is important to focus on the threat from mentally disturbed people who may become self-radicalised. Increasingly, they are the recipients of content developed by radical Islamists.

Large shopping and communication centers, due to their openness, are an interesting target of a terrorist attack. It will be characterized by huge scale of paralysis of the attacked area, very big difficulties with quick and effective elimination of the threat by specialized services due to information chaos, the possibility of causing a crisis in one part of the object resulting in immobility of total infrastructure, the possibility of developing a multi-vector impact, the relative ease of withdrawal or merging into the crowd as part of a rescue operation, if we will not deal with a bomb attack.

In large area stores due to similar threats, including those mentioned earlier attacks by unbalanced people, the rules should be refined as how to use technical rooms as a safe room. A proof of effectiveness of such solutions is accompanying the attack on the editorial staff of “Charlie Hebdo” attack on kosher shop, during which a large group of people was taken hostage. The salesman working there hid some of the people in the cold store, thanks to which they survived safely the hostage situation and the assault of police units.

In a similar way, it is worth considering the use, by appropriately trained staff, technical infrastructure of the galleries themselves, especially the back office warehouse stores as well as technical and order rooms. This type of infrastructure can also be an additional evacuation route from the danger zone.

References

- Arango T. (2016), *ISIS Attack on Baghdad Mall Kills 17*, “The New York Times” <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/12/world/middleeast/isis-attack-on-baghdad-mall-kill-s-17.html> [20.12.2017]
- BBC News (2017), *One dead, two injured in Heidelberg car attack*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39091858> [20.04.2018]
- BBC News Africa (2013), *Nairobi siege: How the attack happened*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24189116> [20.04.2018]
- Button K. (2008), *The economics of shopping mall security*, „Journal of Transportation Security” Vol. 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/S12198-007-0011-7> [10.11.2018]
- Centrum Antyterrorystyczne ABW (2015), *Zabezpieczenie antyterrorystyczne wielkopowierzchniowych obiektów handlowych*, <http://docplayer.pl/8786271-Zabezpieczenie-antyterrorystyczne-wielkopowierzchniowych-objektow-handlowych.html> [20.04.2018]
- Gazeta Prawna.pl (2017), *Strzelanina przy hipermarkecie w Warszawie. Policjanci ranili uzbrojoną w nóż kobietę*, <http://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1020875,strzelanina-przy-hipermarkecie-w-warszawie-policjanci-ranili-uzbrojona-w-noz-kobietę.html> [12.03.2018]
- Jasiński A. (2009), *Wielkomięjski dylemat – przestrzeń publiczna czy przestrzeń bezpieczna*, „Przestrzeń i Forma” nr 12

- Kurowicki M. (2017), *Wlk. Brytania: Atak kwasem w centrum handlowym w Londynie*, Polska Times.pl, <http://www.polskatimes.pl/fakty/swiat/a/wlk-brytania-atak-kwasem-w-centrum-handlowym-w-londynie,12511786/#> [20.03.2018]
- LaTourrette T., Howell D.R., Mosher D.E., MacDonald J. (2006), *Reducing Terrorism Risk at Shopping Centers: An Analysis of Potential Security Options*, Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR401.html [5.05.2018]
- mk, tmw (2016), *Atak w Monachium*, TVN24.pl, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiate,2/monachium-strzaly-w-centrum-handlowym-w-monachium,662949.html> [12.03.2018]
- Onet Szczecin (2012), *Atak nożownika w centrum handlowym*, <https://szczecin.onet.pl/atak-nozownika-w-centrum-handlowym/tzzfq> [5.05.2018]
- RT (2016), *Attacker wielding chainsaw & ax kills woman in Minsk shopping mall*, <https://www.rt.com/news/362055-chainsaw-attack-belarus-shopping-mall/> [20.04.2018]
- Sawicki M. (2015), *Atak nożownika w centrum handlowym na Pradze Południe*, WawaLove, <https://wawalove.wp.pl/atak-nozownika-w-centrum-handlowym-na-pradze-poludnie-6178499913229953a> [12.03.2018]
- Tag24 (2016), *Polizei Verhindert Möglichen Anschlag auf Einkaufszentrum*, <https://www.tag24.de/nachrichten/oberhausen-centro-essen-duisburg-polizei-verhindert-moeglichen-anschlag-auf-einkaufszentrum-195865> [20.12.2017]
- Wiadomości WP.pl (2017), *Stalowa Wola: atak nożownika w galerii handlowej. Jedna osoba nie żyje, osiem jest rannych*, oprac. Baran V., <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/stalowa-wola-atak-nozownika-w-galerii-handlowej-jedna-osoba-nie-zyje-osiem-jest-rannych-6178847343069313a> [12.03.2018]
- Wiosło M. (2018), *Stalowa Wola: Wjechał traktorem do centrum handlowego i siekierą rozbijał witryny*, RMF24, <https://www.rmf24.pl/fakty/polska/news-stalowa-wola-wjechał-traktorem-do-centrum-handlowego-i-sieki,nId,2611856> [12.11.2018]