

THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN COMBATING TERRORISM - SURVEY OF THE CROATIAN ARMED FORCES

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INTRODUCTION

Increased incidence of suicidal terrorist attacks over the past several years and their horrific impact have diverted the focus of the public to the ever-existing threat of terrorism as an unpredictable source of major security crises.

Certainly, such security crises underline the role of the military at the international scene, particularly in recent years.

Croatia has been a target of terrorist attacks too. In the war period (1991-1995) terrorist attacks made a part of the overall enemy actions directed against the country (e.g. bombings in the Jew Community, (unsuccessful) assassination attempts on the presidents of the Republic of Croatia, of the presidency and of the Government of the former Yugoslavia respectively; shooting down of the EU helicopter 100 km off the frontline etc.), whilst in the wake of war they were incidental cases. The most notable case, which had wider international implications, was that of a suicidal bombing in the police headquarters in Rijeka on 20th October 1995, which was an act of the Muslim terrorist organization known as Gam'a Al Islamia, in retaliation for the presumed Croatia's involvement in disappearance of Abu Tallal - one of the principal figures of the organization. It was only with the September 2001 attacks on the United States that international terrorism was perceived as a serious security threat. Croatia's alignment with the Anti-terrorist Coalition has added combating terrorism to the list of tasks of the Croatian military.

The military has a critical role in such crises. In that kind of situations, as in any other field of activity, the viewpoints of soldiers significantly affect their pre-crisis preparation as well as their performance in a crisis situation. In this awareness, an opinion survey of terrorism, the first of the kind, was conducted in the Croatian Armed Forces in November 2001, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the United States of America of September 11, 2001 and in connection with Croatia's alignment with the Anti-terrorist Coalition. In 2002 there was a follow-up survey.

METHODOLOGY

Psychological Combat Readiness Survey

In the Croatian Armed Forces psychological combat readiness has been surveyed since 1992, by examining attitudes on a series of factors affecting soldier readiness for (combat) tasks. The survey is conducted semi-annually on a sample that accounts for 10% of the manpower, but was also undertaken prior to or following operations, exercises, training cycles and the like. The survey is anonymous, and administered by military psychologists. Reports are prepared for the battalion level up.

Occasionally, the basic survey of readiness is enlarged and includes extra variables, measuring additional factors. Extra measures are conducted on a smaller sample that still allows conclusion relevant for the level of the Armed Forces in general or their segments.

Attitude on terrorism is one of the extra surveys. It was first administered in November 2001, followed by the follow-up in 2002.

The Sample

The first survey on terrorism was conducted on an 888-member sample, and the follow-up on a 671-member sample, both being equally representative and enabling a conclusion valid for the Armed Forces.

The survey

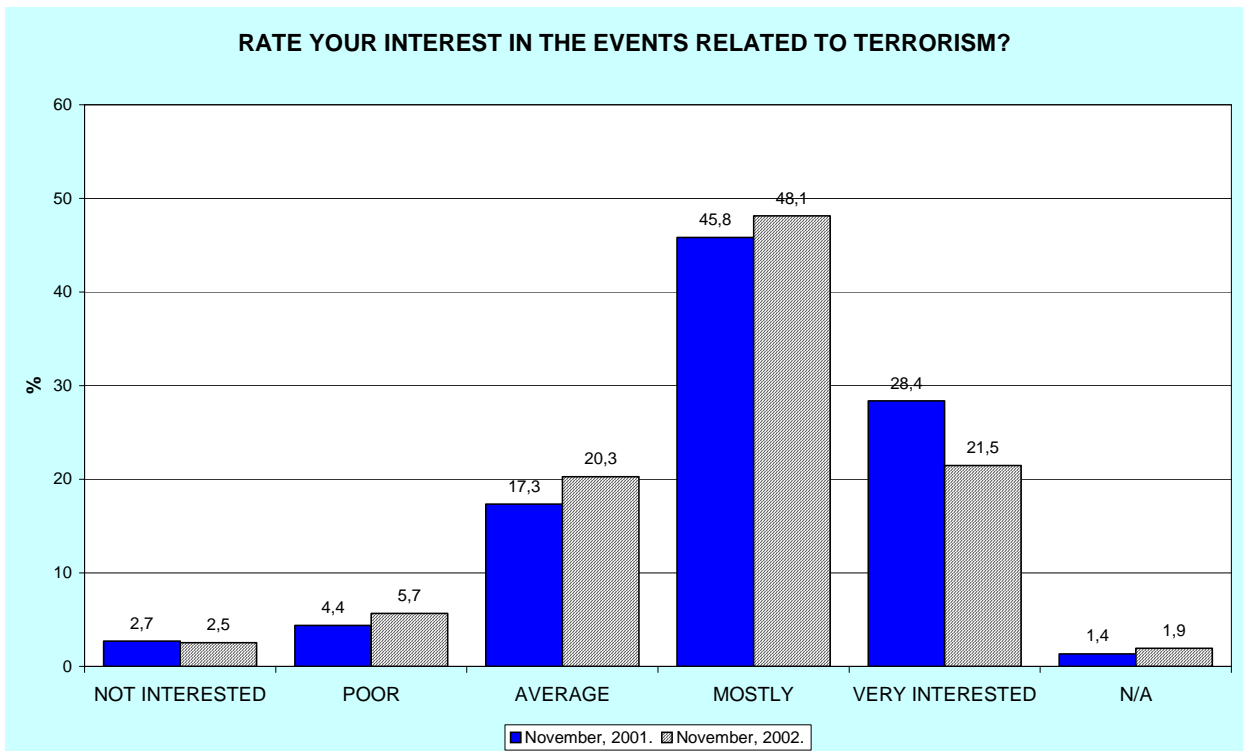
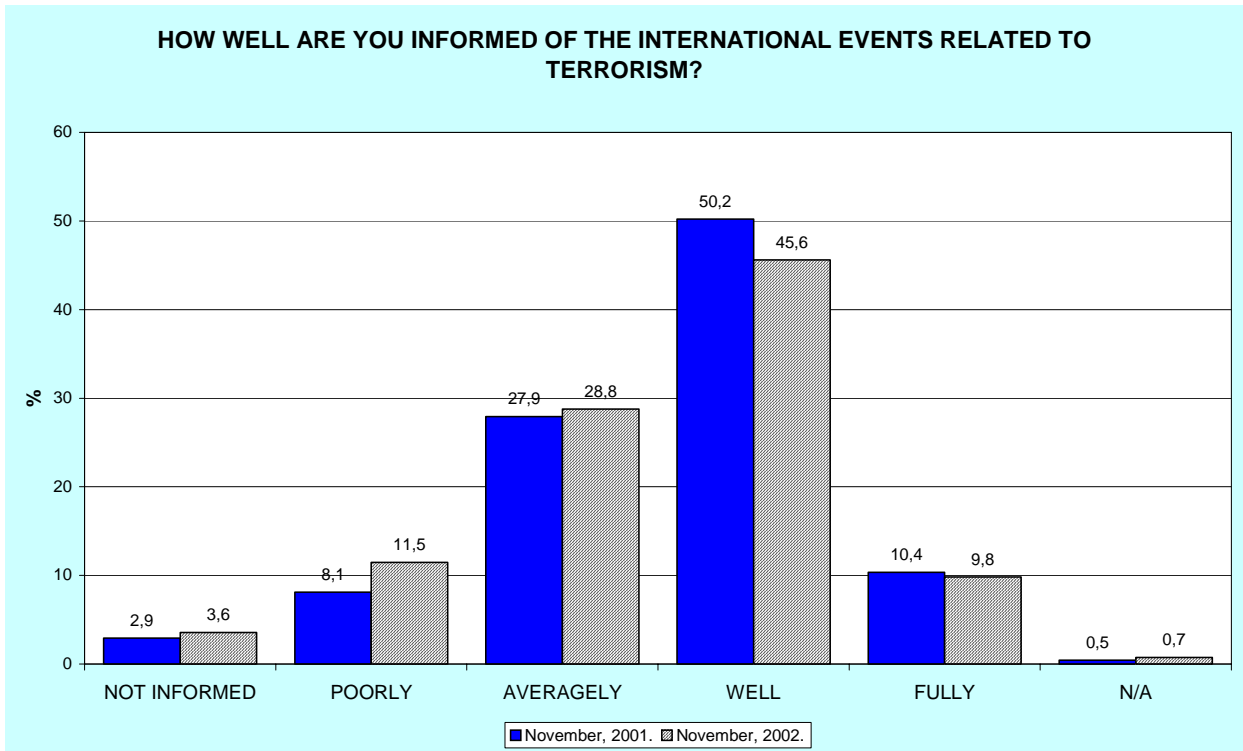
The survey comprised the following domains:

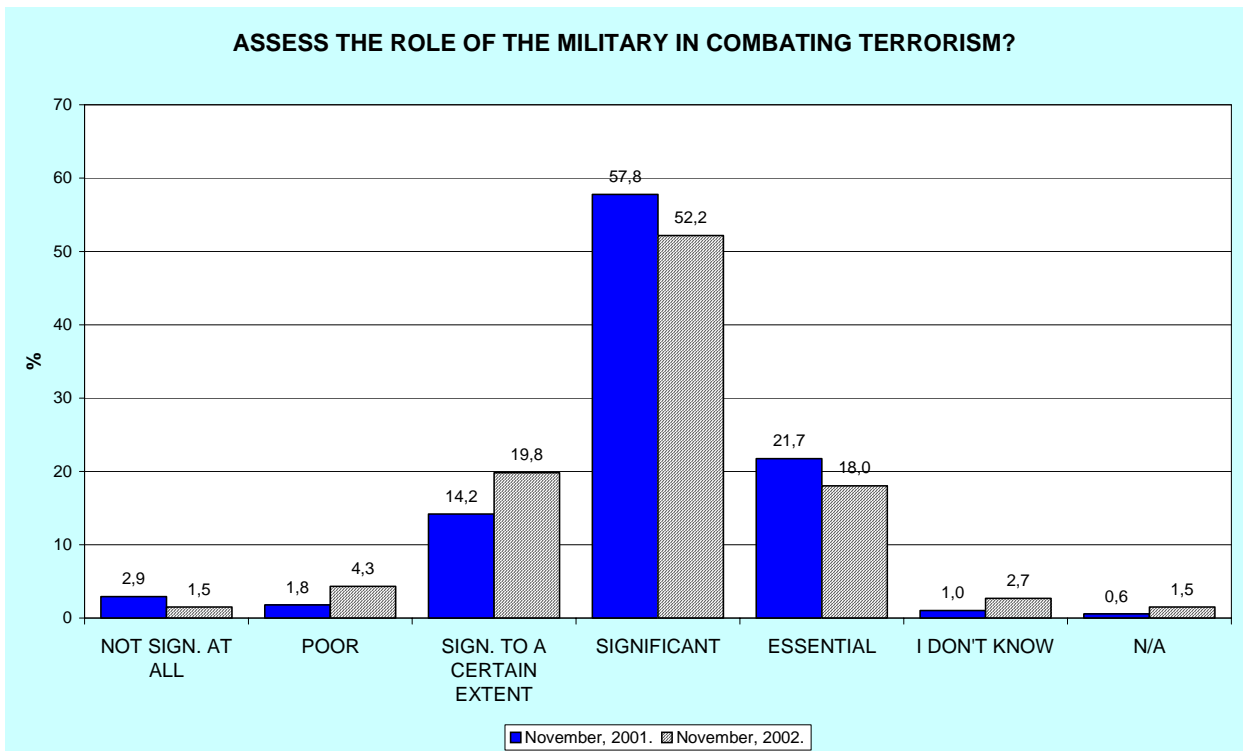
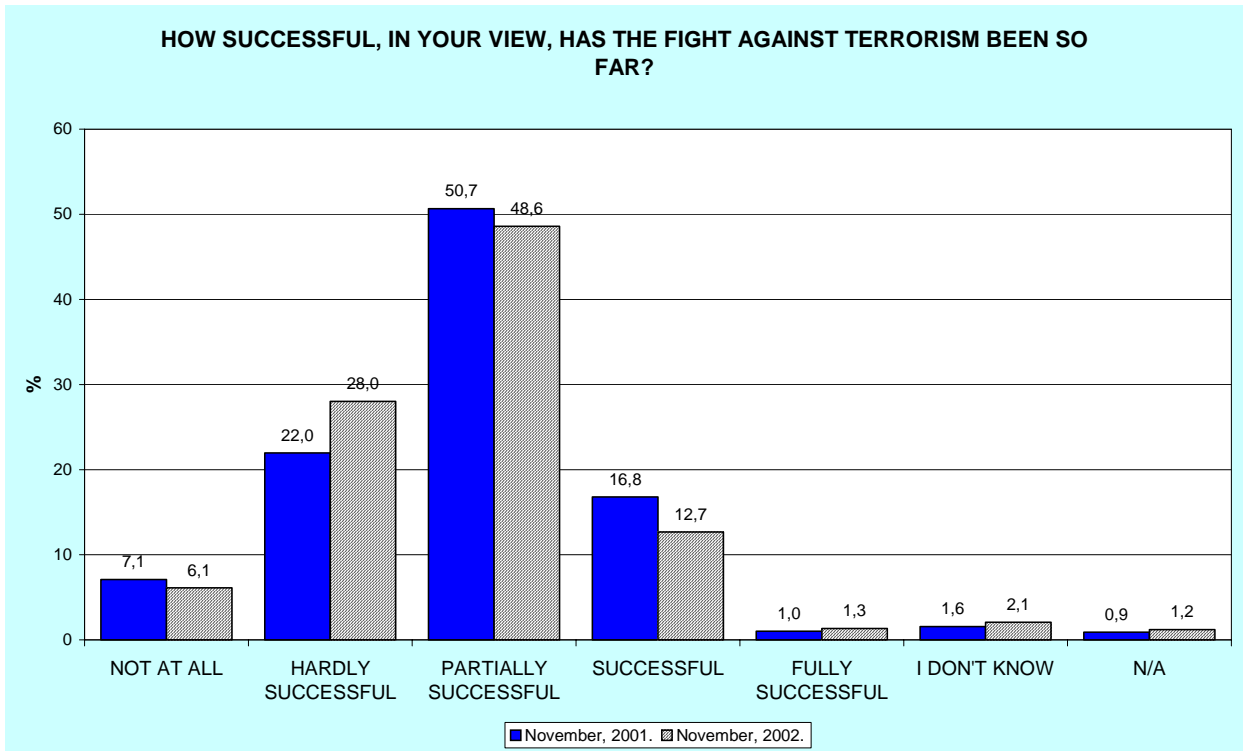
- information availability and interest in the events connected with terrorism,
- general and personal readiness to cope with terrorism ,
- evaluation of the effectiveness of combating terrorism so far ,
- the role of the military in combating terrorism ,
- the attitude on Croatia's joining the Anti-terrorist coalition,
- the estimated time needed for effective fighting of terrorism .

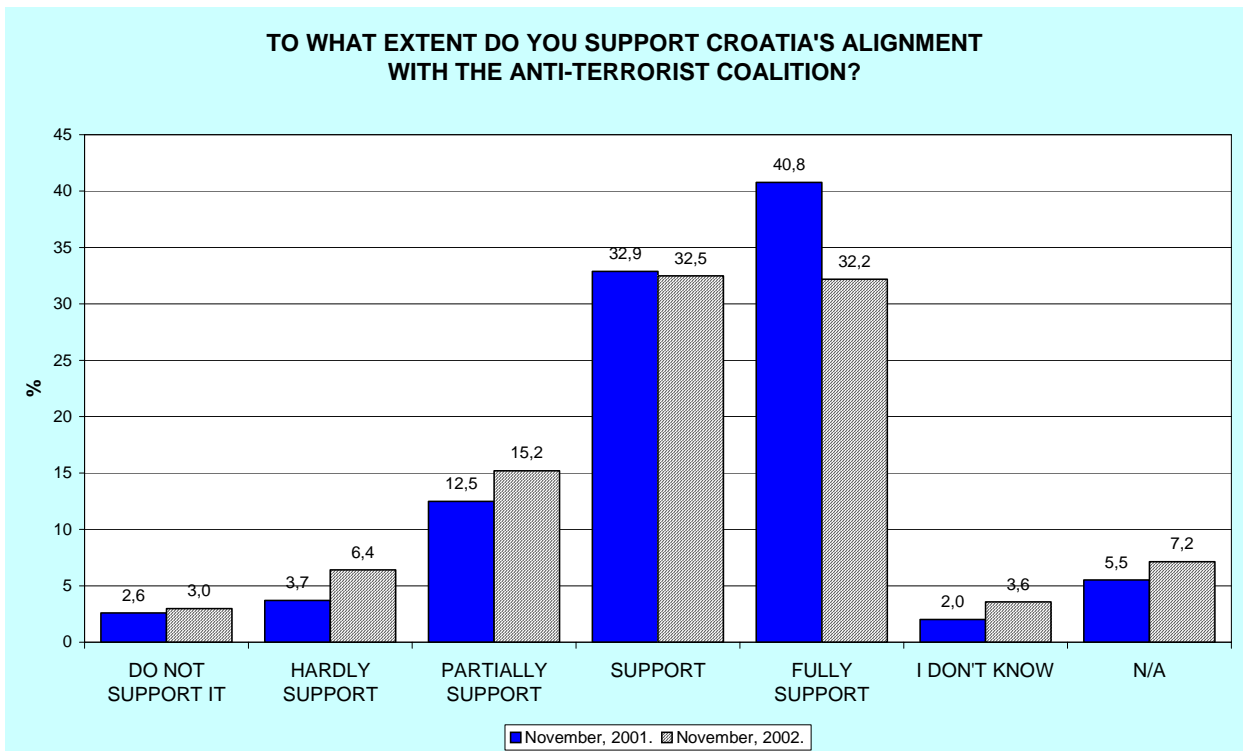
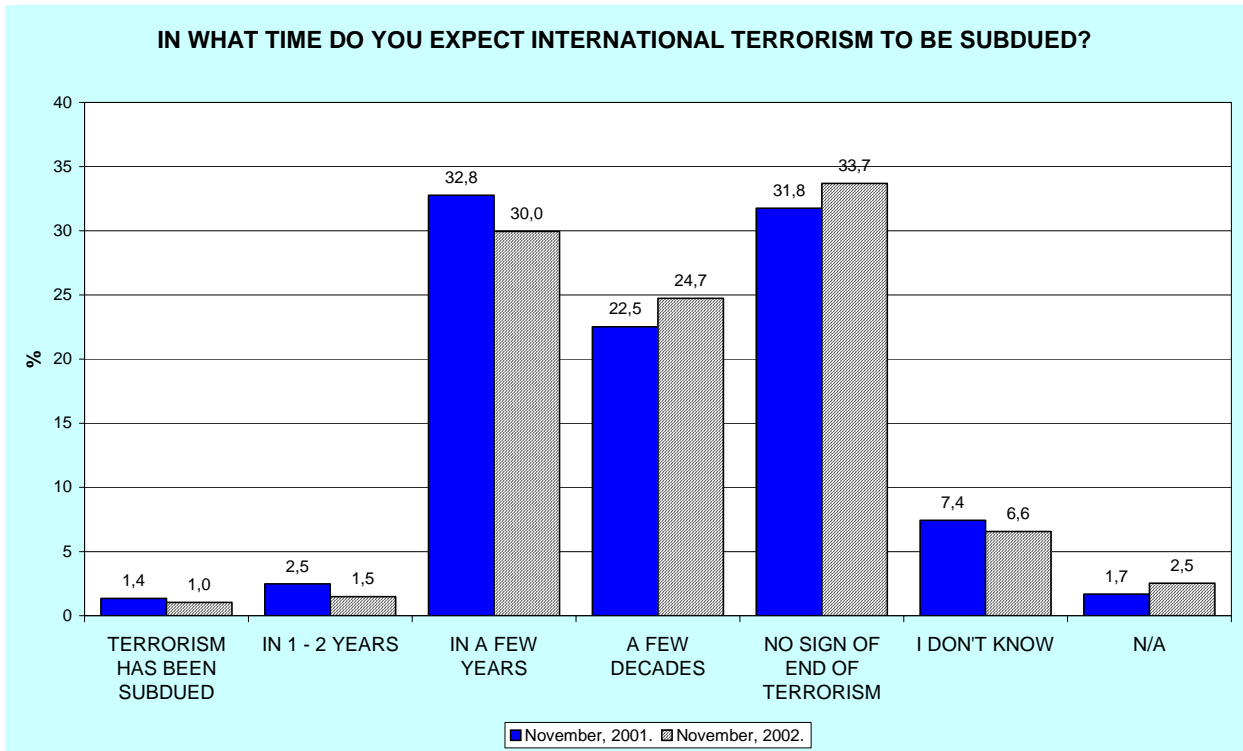
Each of the items covered one domain. The respondents rated the statements on a Likert-type scale and completed the multiple-answer items. The results clearly show the grades and the content of the statements on the scales.

BASIC RESULTS

Below, an overview can be found of the basic results per items. It does not include analysis of the results per sub-groups, nor a lengthy comment, as the paper aimed only to describe methodology and the content of the study.







The results reveal significant interest in and information on events related to terrorism. Success in combating terrorism is rated mediocre, and the role of the military rather important. Furthermore, most of the respondents thought combating terrorism would take a long time and supported Croatia's co-operation with the Anti-terrorist Coalition.

The figures also show differences in results between the two surveys. Statistical significance was tested by means of the Mann-Whitney U test, which disclosed inferior information on and interest in the terrorism issue in the follow-up survey; also, poorer rating of combating terrorism, of importance of the role of the military, and slightly decreased support for Croatia's inclusion into the Coalition. The difference was statistically not significant only concerning the two estimates of the time required to subdue terrorism.

To conclude, the results do not reflect change in attitudes, just slight changes of attitude intensity, and as such are quite as expected and congruent with other indicators. Among the estimates of different threats, terrorism was seen by Croatian soldiers as a international-level problem that affects the Republic of Croatia only to a minor extent (for information, in November 2001 soldiers estimated the impact of 24 different forms of threats to security in the world and the Republic of Croatia respectively; the results placed "intensified terrorist attacks" the second biggest threat to international security and 11th biggest threat to security of Croatia, whereas "terrorist use of atomic weapon" was rated 11th biggest threat to international security and 21st biggest threat to security of Croatia).

CONCLUSION

In Croatia, just as in a number of countries in the wake of the turning-point event of 11th September 2001, combating terrorism has been placed among the priority tasks of the military. Just like in any other activity, the outcomes of combating terrorism are determined by the soldiers' attitude.

The results of this study suggest that Croatian soldiers are aware of the threat that terrorism constitutes, and of the fact that their attitudes related to the problem do not preclude their efficiency in that task. To end with, after a 1-year-period, the follow-up study indicated a reduced estimation of threat of terrorism contrasted with an increased pessimism and a decreased enthusiasm in combating terrorism.

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