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The Romanian Anticommunist Revolution and the “Terrorists” of December 1989

ABSTRACT

The so-called terrorist phenomenon marked the bloodiest anti-communist revolution in Eastern Europe, i.e. the Romanian Revolution. This study examines not only the nuances the phenomenon in question acquired during and especially after the events of December 1989, but also its manipulations at the hands of the various factions involved in the events of December 1989, pinpointing the implications and consequences of these manipulations.

KEYWORDS

Romania; Nicolae Ceaușescu; Anticommunist Revolution 1989; Securitate; Manipulation; Counterrevolution; Terrorists; Diversionists.

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Strange though it may appear – or perhaps not so strange after all – the first to talk about “terrorist actions” in December 1989, was dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, in his rallies against a would-be foreign plot against Romania, which the dictator denounced during the last meetings held with the members of the Political Executive Committee (Comitetul Politic Executiv) – CPEX. The phrase was also employed by his brother, General Ilie Ceaușescu upon several official visits the latter paid to various garrisons in Cluj, Arad, Oradea, in December 1989, during the Timișoara insurrection. In the course of these visits, Ilie Ceaușescu allegedly briefed the soldiers and the commanding officers by selling them stories about the existence of 2000 foreign terrorists who were to carry out a massive attack against Romania. It is very likely that those who launched the phrase “terrorists”, namely the forces that seized power after Ceaușescu’s flight, drew inspiration from the former dictator. The forces in question were the National Salvation Front (NSF), which became the new political body after the fall of Ceaușescu’s regime. Later on, at the garrison of Târgoviște, when charged with genocide and the murders that the so-called terrorists had committed among the civilians, spreading panic throughout the country, Ceaușescu, who was detained here,



suspected the terrorists were members of the *Securitate*, the notorious Political Police of communist Romania, even while considering himself betrayed by the *Securitate*, despite the fact that, ironically, the “terrorists” in question, who had instilled such fear in the population, could in that instance be but some of Ceaușescu’s loyalists.

The second person to use the term “terrorist” and the phrase “terrorist phenomenon”, between 22nd and 31st December, was General Nicolae Militaru, whom NSF had appointed as head of the Ministry of National Defense (the acronym of which in Romanian is MApN). In an interview given on 23rd December 1989 to BBC, Ion Iliescu, who seized power after the overthrow of Ceaușescu, thus becoming the new political leader, described terrorists as

certain groups of terrorists specially trained to fight against the people and to protect the dictator... fanatical individuals acting with unprecedented cruelty, firing shots at buildings and citizens, and making victims among militaries... (Siani-Davies 2006: 210).

In an official statement that NSF released to the press on 28th December 1989, the new authorities defined the so-called terrorists as

persons wearing fire arms and other weapons of attack, ammunition, explosives, as well as any other kind of destruction weapons or radio transmitters, and who fight against the National Salvation Front and the victors of free Romania.

Furthermore, the label of “terrorists” was also abusively applied to

persons spreading or publishing rumors, as well as confected or tendentious information concerning the exceptional situation [of the country at the time], in order to mislead the population and create panic (Siani-Davies 2006: 211).

It is important to mention from the outset that the term *terrorists* was incorrectly used with reference to the identity of those persons who in December 1989 had murdered both civilians and militaries, and spread panic among the population.

Ivan Evseev, in his anthology *Timișoara, 16-22 decembrie 1989*¹, provides an apt definition of the term in circulation in December 1989. In his opinion, a “terrorist” was

a word that was not employed in its original sense or with the purpose to depict reality; rather, it was used to allude to a moral trait. (Evseev 1990: 35)

A “terrorist” is typically defined as someone who places bombs at strategic locations, e.g. inside political institutions, takes hostages from among the politicians, and murders politicians or public figures known to have masterminded a social or political movement. However, bombs are not always placed in key political institutions. They will occasionally be planted in public locations with a view to kill as many civilians as possible. The alleged terrorists of December 1989 utterly failed to fit the profile of a terrorist, as defined above, hence the relative nature of the term and, consequently, the reason why it should not be employed with reference to the Romanian Revolution. This very incongruity prompted several analysts and historians of the Romanian Revolution to use the term *counter-revolutionaries* instead, while others



preferred the term *diversionists*, which we consider to be the most appropriate. Brought before the Commission of Inquiry into the Events of December 1989, Nicu Ceaușescu, the dictator's favourite son, detained after the downfall of the Ceaușescu regime, sardonically called the so-called terrorists "aliens."

Whatever their origin and identity, the so-called terrorists were depicted as some sort of "angels of death" or nocturnal creatures who, from a symbolic point of view, had acquired vampire-like attributes. They were believed to train in bunkers, to move from one place to another by means of intricate underground passageways, and to possess sophisticated gruesome weapons. In what concerns the identity of the alleged terrorists of December 1989, we hereby provide a rundown of the most relevant theories advanced by analysts of the phenomenon. In turn, terrorists may have been:

- members of the *Securitate*, loyal to Ceaușescu, i.e. representatives of certain nationalist factions;
- mainly, yet not exclusively, Romanian orphans raised by the *Securitate* and trained to serve in Ceaușescu's personal guard; known by the nickname of "janissaries", these orphans were supposedly trained to become kamikaze fighters;
- terrorists of Arab or Persian origin, e.g. Libians, Palestinians, Iranians, etc.;
- foreign agents, mainly Soviets and Hungarians;
- Soviet militaries recruited from among the people of Bessarabia, native speakers of Romanian;
- independent snipers;
- petty offenders from Romanian prisons, used either by the factions loyal to Ceaușescu, or, on the contrary, by the new political forces who

seized power on 22nd December 1989;

- army officers, or of the Ministry of the Interior, USLA troops (the counter-terrorism units), including officers of the *Securitate* or officers belonging to the factions that supported and approved of the Revolution. Presumably, the officers in question acted on the orders of the NSF, with General Nicolae Militaru, the new leader of MAPN, in command;
- members of the Army Intelligence Directorate (Romanian acronym DIA), acting on the orders of the new political authorities that assumed power following the overthrow of the Ceaușescu regime;
- the final theory claims that the terrorists never existed in the first place and that the psychosis created around them was purposely fueled in order to instill fear and psychological terror in the population. In this line of line of argument, the casualties of December 1989 were accounted for as tactical errors, military negligence, or ricocheting bullets. Indeed it was regrettable, it has to be said, that many civilians had been given weapons they did not know how to use, which led to deadly accidents.

In the accounts of some analysts, several of the theories outlined above were collapsed, precisely as a result of the ambiguous and elusive identity of the would-be terrorists. Constantin Lucescu, for instance, Counsel for the Defense in the Ceaușescu's trial, believed that the *Securitate* officers and young orphan mercenaries trained to act as Ceaușescu's personal guard formed commando units and disguised themselves as officers of the Ministry of National Defense in order to create confusion. In an attempt to



shed light on the mystery surrounding the alleged terrorists, Sergiu Nicolaescu, president of one of the two Commissions of Inquiry into the Events of December 1989, argued that the entire terrorist scenario actually started as a diversion orchestrated by the *Securitate*, whose purpose was aimed at maintaining authority and preventing the bloodshed. However, since the Army and the revolutionaries acted on it, the initial diversion eventually turned into chaos. General Iulian Vlad reportedly tried to dispel the chaos, but the phenomenon went out of control. Nicolaescu classified the alleged terrorists into several mixed categories: foreign nationals (Soviets from Bessarabia, Hungarians, etc.) who did not play an active part in the Revolution; Romanians (officers of the *Securitate*, the Army and the Militia), and, finally, Arab terrorists (Stoenescu 2004: 148-151). Later on, Nicolaescu reiterated his previous statements (Nicolaescu 2005: 189, 539), opining that in December 1989 the leading roles were played by native Romanians, who were members of the *Securitate*, the Militia and the USLA, i.e. the elite counter-terrorist force, while the actual protagonists were Arab terrorists. According to Gelu Voican-Voiculescu, who played a dubious part in the events of December 1989 events, the Army itself appeared to have been responsible for the terrorist phenomenon. Voican-Voiculescu went on to claim that the Army had in fact been involved in a *coup d'état* attempt which failed:

The Army created the terrorist phenomenon as a diversion designed to maintain a state of tension that would give this institution the possibility to serve the new political power (Stoenescu 2004: 210, 192).

When questioned by the Commission of Inquiry into the Events of December 1989, General Iulian Vlad, former head of the *Securitate*, argued that the alleged terrorists of the Romanian Revolution “were not terrorists in the standard acceptance of the term.” Rather, they were “professional killers” and few in number. According to Vlad, most of the people who died after 22nd December were not killed by the so-called terrorists; rather, they died “by pure accident” because “shots were fired randomly” and civilians were given weapons which they used irresponsibly. On the other hand, Vlad went on to call attention to the fact that incorrect orders led to the death of several officers, later to be deliberately labeled “terrorists”; what is more, their bodies were subject to physical abuse: cigarettes were stubbed out in their eyes, they were decapitated or urinated on. In other words, the bodies of several officers murdered by mistake in the tumult of the Revolution served as a convenient pretext to justify the so-called war started by the so-called terrorists (Săndulescu 1997: 203, 390). Under these circumstances, Vlad’s opinion contrasts sharply with all the ten theories destined to explain the identity of the alleged terrorists. To begin with, Vlad contented to state that they “were not terrorists in the standard acceptance of the term,” suggesting that the term in question should be more likely interpreted as a metaphor, and, secondly, he would not even hint at the possible identity of those whom he called “professional killers.”

During and immediately after the Revolution, Major-General Ștefan Gușă, first deputy defense minister and chief of staff, did believe in the existence of the terrorists, whom he referred to as “gangs of hooligans,” and considered to be involved in a “diversion war” (Gușă de Drăgan 2006: 86, 138). Nevertheless, he would not go so far as to arguing that the supposed terrorists



were members of the *Securitate*. Several years later, in 1993, Ștefan Gușă contributed to the dubious radio-electronic war theory, which was believed to have been coordinated by the Soviets, who, according to him, had access to:

two corner reflectors attached to weather balloons; the reflectors in question were placed between the balloon and the radiosonde, and some of those installations even had a light bulb. These corner reflectors, if sent into the atmosphere, create images of targets. Air currents may push the installations in various directions, thus creating the perfect illusion of a helicopter (Gușă de Drăgan 2006: 494).

General Gușă suggested that those who possessed devices capable of creating such elaborate diversions could have easily masterminded the terrorist scenario.

In what follows, we reformulate the ten opinions concerning the identity of the terrorists in light of the argument refinements presented above:

1. Official data indicate that many people were arrested, some of whom at random, under the suspicion of having been involved in terrorist acts: 1425 people were detained, of whom 820 were militaries, 580 were civilians and 25 were foreign nationals. The partisans of the theory which held that the terrorists were members of the *Securitate*, belonging to various units loyal to Ceaușescu, argue that those persons were released precisely because, in the end, both the *Securitate* and other related forces had sided with the Revolution, and the new political authorities were interested in destroying the traces of the so-called rebels who had acted either independently or on orders, as anti- or counter-revolutionaries. These cases were covered up and those who had

been arrested under the suspicion of terrorism were subsequently reintegrated into the *Securitate*, at this point absorbed by the Army, and, later on, perhaps even into the Romanian Information Service. Some voices claim that there was a counter-revolution lead by the *Securitate* defeated by the Revolution.

Although Silviu Brucan (*Generația irosită*²... 1992: 230, 232) was among those who identified the alleged terrorists as being part of the *Securitate* units, his theory was more nuanced. He believed that the so-called terrorists were members of the USLA troops, which totaled 800 registered members, having been created in 1988 with the purpose of preventing lethal attacks on Ceaușescu's life. These units had been trained and equipped for a guerrilla-type of urban warfare, like the one that took place between 22nd and 25th December 1989. Brucan argued that the supposed terrorists could have been recruited from among other troops as well, such as the Military Academy for officers of the *Securitate* at Băneasa, that numbered 2000 officers, the 450-strong V Directorate, responsible for Ceaușescu's protection, and the Bucharest *Securitate* forces, comprising 600 officers. Brucan held that, even though some of the terrorists were arrested, they were later on released by their colleagues, who became legal employees of the Army, once the *Securitate* surrendered and came under its authority.

A paper signed by Costache Codrescu, which dwelled upon the role that the Army played in December 1989 (*Armata română în revoluția din decembrie 1989*³..., 1994), offers a detailed account of the way in which the Army was virtually bombarded with misleading information about the so-called terrorists. Such false information claimed that there existed training camps for foreigners in Romania and that foreign terrorists had been parachuted into the country



in order to hit strategic targets. Furthermore, the terrorists in question allegedly planned to infect drinking water supplies, to mine certain buildings, trigger epidemics, etc., none of which ever happened. However, such deceptive intel did cause an operational chaos among the Army. As a result, columns of armored vehicles had to move from one location to another, depending on where the terrorists were believed to be (Codrescu 1994: 116). The Romanian Television channel was the place where most of the false information was collected. Thus, this institution fabricated an overblown image of the forces that opposed the Revolution, misled the Army, and spread confusion among the population (Codrescu 1994: 121). The Army did not believe most of the false information, otherwise military units would have probably ended up fighting one other or, as was, tragically the case of the Otopeni incident, when 49 people died, of whom 34 were national servicemen. The victims were shot without prior warning, although they had been sent there precisely to defend the airport. It is likely that the mastermind behind this operation, as suggested by Codrescu, was the *Securitate* (even though the institution was not named as such). It is possible that the alleged terrorists were diversionists, predominantly young people without an ID, dressed in civilian clothes and armed, who attacked both civilians and militaries; their number amounted to a few hundreds; they were physically fit and seemed to possess commando combat skills, as they were probably members of a certain *Securitate* unit. This type of diversionists acted mostly in the capital city, either individually or in small groups, firing shots from rooftops, attics, vehicles, basements, drains, etc. Although held in custody as suspects, following superficial inquiries, many of them were released for lack of evidence.

The main target of the diversionists appears to have been the Television station because it was the only means by which Romanians throughout the country were kept up to date with the Revolution and with the entire situation at the time.

Marian Oprea in *Conspirația Securității*⁴, 2004, put together the accounts of various persons involved in the events of December 1989; some of them spoke about a complex electronically simulated air operation designed to mislead the Romanian Army in order to create a diversion; the air operation was allegedly coordinated with one on the ground. The use of the term “diversionists” instead of “terrorists” was deemed valid as a result.

The manipulation and the psychosis surrounding the alleged terrorists, identified with members of the Militia and the *Securitate*, played a major part in a particular instance in an incident which occurred in Sibiu. In his book titled *Moartea pândește sub epoleți. Sibiu '89* (1993)⁵, Ion Țârlea argues that psychological pressure, chaos and widespread suspicion led various police forces to open fire against one another and that the illusion of the so-called terrorist threat was intentionally fueled by the new political authorities. Thus, it was claimed that, in Sibiu, the Revolution had been targeted at the Militia, which is the reason why there were attempts to deliberately incriminate this institution and to fabricate so-called terrorists from among Militia officers. As a result, several hundred Militia officers were ill-treated and humiliated for almost a month, during which they had been held prisoners in a deserted swimming pool. According to Ion Țârlea, in this particular case, the ones that engineered this exploited the existing confusion, manipulating the common misconception that Militia and the *Securitate* members were one and the same, the latter in turn, being believed to be one and the same with the so-called terrorists.



Teodor Filip in *Secretele USLA*⁶, 1999, holds that placing the equality mark between members of the *Securitate* and the so-called terrorists was in fact *the* diversion. Filip makes reference to the confusing incident of the USLA members murdered outside the Ministry of National Defense, whose bodies were left in the street and abused; the victims in question were later to be declared national heroes. The survivors among the wounded were in turn arrested, ill-treated and humiliated. In this instance, those who staged the terrorist plot were accused of using the death – or assassination, as the case may be – of several officers to their own advantage only for the victims' bodies to be later identified by the new political authorities as those belonging to the so-called terrorists.

Disappointed in the Revolution of December 1989, international journalists initially wrote about the alleged terrorists, whom they identified with members of the *Securitate* only to later denounce a massive manipulation campaign specially designed to prove that the alleged terrorists were members of a *Securitate* unit which served as Ceaușescu's Praetorian Guard and which mercilessly opened fire on the civilians.

2. Dumitru Mazilu believed that the so-called terrorists came from the units in charge of the presidential couple's protection. The theory enjoyed several other adepts, who portrayed the alleged terrorists as extremely skilled, fanatical individuals, equipped with highly efficient and sophisticated weapons. The supposed terrorists were cast in an ominous light so as to stir a general hysteria and to provoke a psychosis not only among the population, but also among the commentators of the so-called terrorist phenomenon.

3. Several analysts argued that the alleged terrorists may have been Arab citizens. In his memoirs, Silviu Brucan spoke about the involvement of a group of 30

Arab students and officers who had been training at the Military Academy for officers of the *Securitate* at Băneasa; one of them was allegedly murdered and the rest flown back to Libya. Brucan considered the supposed Arab terrorists as part of the *Securitate* troops because they had trained at the Băneasa Academy. In her paper, *Revoluția neterminată* (1999)⁷, Anneli Ute Gabanyi contributes an even more intriguing aspect concerning the presumed Arab terrorists. According to her, it was possible that they were not Libyans, Palestinians or Iranians after all, but Soviet soldiers from the Muslim republics of the former USSR (p. 200). Michel Castex (1990:81) pointed an accusatory finger at the media hype created around the Arab mercenaries paid by Ceaușescu. The new political authorities used this potential identity to their own profit, that is, to demolish the myth of Ceaușescu as a nationalist dictator because, by hiring Arab mercenaries to fight against Romanians, he had, in fact, betrayed his own people.

4. The supporters of the theory according to which the alleged terrorists were agents of the foreign secret intelligence services argued that those so-called terrorists were used in order to cause a civil war that would result in the intervention of foreign troops in Romania, such as the member states of the Warsaw Pact or NATO.

5. Anneli Ute Gabanyi was the only analyst of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989 to put forward a new hypothesis concerning the identity of the so-called terrorists (*Revoluția neterminată*, 1999: 200). They were allegedly Soviet soldiers who came from the Republic of Moldova, which in 1989 was known as the *Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova*, and whose mother tongue was Romanian.

6. The supporters of the theory according to which the alleged terrorists were



independent snipers, argued that the role of these so-called terrorists was to maintain a state of panic and tension until Ceaușescu's situation would have improved and various forces would have regrouped around him. However, others believed that they were

elite snipers, either Romanians or foreign nationals, who acted on a given scenario, firing shots in key locations in Bucharest. The rest was panic and lack of training for such street fighting and urban guerrilla warfare: everybody shot at everybody, militaries shot at militaries, militia members shot at militia members and vice versa. (Ursu Gheorghiu 1994: 23).

7. We previously listed the hypothesis according to which the so-called terrorists were imprisoned petty offenders. This hypothesis is rarely invoked, being the less plausible of all. Valentin Raiha, for instance, makes reference to it in his book *În decembrie '89, KGB a aruncat în aer România cu complicitatea unui grup de militari*⁸, 1995.

8. Some analysts assert that the supposed terrorists were officers of the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Interior, of the *Securitate* even, obeying orders issued by the new political power and acting under the command of General Nicolae Militaru. Proponents of this theory claimed that there may have been an operation called "Terrorists," designed to suggest the danger of a civil war. Thus it appears that the mission of those militaries, whether they acted individually or in small groups, was to stage a counter-revolution.

9. In the series about the events of December 1989, published in 1990 in the newspaper *Baricada*⁹, Liviu Vălenaș paid special attention to the terrorist issue,

pointing out from the very beginning the fact that, had the alleged terrorists been members of the *Securitate* or of Ceaușescu's personal guard, they would have taken action as early as 21st December 1989 or on the morning of 22nd December at the latest, covering Ceaușescu's flight. It therefore seemed obvious that the 'terrorists' were invented in order to create the illusion of a war, and were definitely not loyalists of the dictator. In *Baricada*, no. 26, 1990, Vălenaș notes that

It is strange why Iliescu's regime adopted such a vehement attitude towards the *Securitate*, that between 22nd and 30th December the words "terrorist" and "member of the *Securitate*" became synonymous. It appears that the role of the *Securitate* was to conceal the identity of the real terrorists, and when the so-called terrorists disappeared, Iliescu's regime had to restore the image of the *Securitate* as an institution that was capable to secure the increasingly unstable position of the newly established regime. The appointment of Virgil Măgureanu in March 1989 as head of the Romanian Information Service clearly demonstrates the intentions of the new regime.

Liviu Vălenaș thus concludes that the Ion Iliescu – Virgil Măgureanu team skillfully devised a plan according to which the so-called terrorists were fabricated from among militaries that had shot militaries. Later on, the Romanian Information Service took on at least half of the former members of the *Securitate*; once the new political authorities had official dead bodies at their disposal, they manipulated the public opinion by presenting the victims as terrorists, which is why those bodies were left in the street at the mercy of the population, and abused. To illustrate this, Vălenaș cited the iconic case of the Sibiu militia members, taken prisoners in December 1989 and held in a deserted an empty pool for almost a month during which they were humiliated and ill-treated on account of being terrorists.



Șerban Orăscu in *Ceaușismul*¹⁰ (2006: 213-214), analyzed the way in which the new political authorities employed the term *terrorists*:

as from December 22nd 1989 onwards, the population and the new political leaders used the term 'terrorists' to designate armed men whose identity was obscure and who were known to have acted intermittently as independent snipers, firing shots systematically, from December 22nd until the end of the month, at the people of Bucharest but not at the members of the new political regime; On the basis of the existing data, the so-called terrorists were elite officers of the *Securitate*, snipers who acted according to an urban guerrilla warfare plan contrived by the *Securitate* and adapted to the new circumstances.

It therefore appears that the aim of the so-called terrorists was to consolidate the position of the Perestroikists led by Ion Iliescu, even though these characters were members of the former Political Police. Victor Loupan, author of *La Révolution n'a pas eu lieu...*¹¹, 1990, embraces the theory according to which in December 1989 Romania witnessed a *coup d'état*. He believes that the terrorist affair was a manipulation orchestrated by the new political authorities with the help of the "Revolutionary *Securitate*", as he ironically termed it, that is, the factions of the *Securitate* which had backed and catalyzed the *coup d'état*, and which were subsequently coordinated by the neo-communist group that had seized power.

Victor Frunză (1994) argues that the so-called terrorists were members of assault troops, i.e. *Securitate* assassins, trained to shoot the population; they were employed by the new regime to liquidate particularly

young people, because the youth strongly opposed communism in general, not only Ceaușescu's dictatorship. Although a few hundred members of the respective assault troops were arrested, they were later on released precisely because they had acted at the orders of the newly established regime. Pavel Coruț on the other hand holds that the terrorists were exclusively officers of the Ministry of National Defense, who had made a special deal with Iliescu's putchists concerning

the military targets to be attacked so that the Army would then rise against the *Securitate*, [...] the persons to be murdered in order to cause terror, the rumors to be spread so as to stir panic among population, and the persons who under no circumstances were to be shot, not even by mistake. (Coruț 1993: 196).

Călin Cernăianu, author of *Diplomația lupilor...*¹², 1997, supported in his book the theory of the internal conspiracy, arguing that the so-called terrorists were puppets operated by the new political authorities, grouped around Iliescu; if the alleged terrorists had been forces loyal to Ceaușescu, they would have attempted to free the dictator from the Târgoviște garrison, to prevent the Revolution from being broadcast on television and murder the new leaders; under no circumstances would they have randomly fired shots at people. This is the reason why Cernăianu asserts that the identity of the so-called terrorists was patterned on militaries and members of the *Securitate* under the orders of Iliescu's group, a subordination which was made possible through the intermediary of various Generals. The so-called terrorists were invented so as to create the false impression that the Army and the revolutionaries were fighting



a powerful enemy they could only defeat by working together. The mission of the alleged terrorists was explicit: to murder civilians, militaries even at random and in small numbers.

10. The most fervent supporter of the theory which claims that the purported terrorists were members of the Army Intelligence Directorate or DIA, is Valentin Raiha, author of *În decembrie '89, KGB a aruncat în aer România cu complicitatea unui grup de militari*, 1995. He argued that they were elite diversionists, trained as such; moreover, the Army Intelligence Directorate was the only one equipped with air target simulators and the only one able to suggest the idea of a radioelectronic war, to instill the possibility of a like war in the mind of the Romanians or wage a war of this kind.

11. The advocates of the theory according to which the so-called terrorists never existed in flesh and blood, being a mere psychosis fueled by the new political leaders, rely on hard core facts to support their hypothesis, such as the tension and tumult of the December 1989 events, or the panic reactions that led to fatal errors, stray bullets and tactical errors. They also point to possible small vendettas between various factions, a hypothesis put forward by historian Dennis Deletant in *România sub regimul comunist*¹³, 1997; however, the same historian claimed, in *Ceașescu și Securitatea*¹⁴..., 1995, that the terrorists did exist after all and they were members of the USLA troops or officers of the V Directorate of the *Securitate*. Other authors, like John Simpson, 1990, for instance, used terms such as “revolutionary madness” and “paranoia” to explain the psychosis which, as some believe, was purposely created and fueled in order to divert the attention of the population from the radical anticommunist attitudes displayed by the street protesters,

attitudes that unsettled Ion Iliescu’s team. Ion Cristoiu, author of *De la o lovitură de stat la alta*¹⁵, 2006, believes that the terrorist affair was a “show of sounds and lights,” whose climax was the trial of the Ceaușescu couple and their execution. Vladimir Tismăneanu in *Revoluția română văzută de ziaristi americani și englezi*¹⁶, 1991, makes a case for the purpose of the NSF being that of attenuating the anticommunist reaction of the population. By amplifying the panic caused by the so-called terrorists, Iliescu’s team could seize power much more easily. In his interpretive model, National Television played an instrumental role in building the terrorist psychosis as it broadcasted a series of misleading information and diversions. In a book by Teodor Brateș, published in 1992, the author argued that from a certain point onward, a group of militaries was charged to investigate the vital items of information, so as to prevent false news from being broadcast; it is possible that these militaries reduced indeed the quantity of diversionary information, but it is just as possible that they deliberately disseminated this type of information.

Radu Portocală (1991) argued that the alleged terrorists had to be invented in order to feed the mass psychosis surrounding the live-broadcast Revolution, and were demonized and portrayed as dreadful superman-like individuals so that the new authorities could feign a civil war. However, Portocală does acknowledge that the so-called “terrorists stage” of the Revolution was dominated by diversions. A typical example invoked as evidence to support this concerned the shooting simulators that only the *Securitate* had in its arsenal.

While the terrorist phenomenon may have been a purposely implanted psychosis, several real, flesh-and-blood people were arrested, nonetheless. The advocates of the “inexistent terrorists” theory argue that the persons arrested were innocent people who



had probably died in the tumult of the Revolution, but who seemed dubious to those who had arrested them; it is possible that, in some cases, the dead bodies of the so-called terrorists were actually bodies of people who had died in battle; however, for one reason or another, the victims in question were labeled as terrorists, which led to their bodies being abused.

Doina Cornea (1990) claimed that the terrorist affair was a manipulation orchestrated by the National Salvation Front, which had played on the population's fear of the *Securitate*. Vartan Arachelian, author of *Revoluția și personajele sale*¹⁷ (1998: 112), cited the opinion of Gheorhe Rațiu, a former colonel of the *Securitate*, who claimed that the alleged terrorists never existed; rather, they were fabricated by Nicolae Militaru, who had wished to make it seem as though there was a counter-revolution going on. He apparently did so in order to consolidate his position within the new regime, as there were multiple power centers and factions disputing leadership. Rațiu did not state clearly whether the so-called terrorists were a mere psychosis or, on the contrary, real officers of the Ministry of National Defense, obeying General Militaru's orders, but he did seem to suggest the first variant. Filip Teodorescu (1992), a former officer of the Counterintelligence Directorate of the *Securitate* tried in the Timișoara trial, asserted, in his turn, that the identification of the alleged terrorists with members of the *Securitate* was a complex diversion. Even though Teodorescu did not state it clearly, he insinuated that the diversion had been engineered by the new political authorities.

To these are added other interpreters who believe that the rumors concerning the so-called terrorists were started and circulated by groups of diversionists, yet there is no mention as to whom these were affiliated. The rumors were meant to generate

an open conflict between the Army and the *Securitate* so as to either feign a civil war or to make the request for foreign military intervention appear imminent. The armed revolutionary civilians contributed, even while unawares, to legitimating the rumors, by firing shots at random, and being often mistaken for the alleged terrorists.

In *Istoria loviturilor de stat. Revoluția din decembrie 1989 – o tragedie românească*¹⁸ (2005: 660), Alex Mihai Stoenescu examines the diversionist-terrorist phenomenon, focusing on three main hypotheses that he deems problematic: 1. the terrorist phenomenon did not exist; 2. the terrorist phenomenon was orchestrated by an obscure political eminence which had been Ceaușescu's brainchild and whose members (albeit not necessarily *Securitate* members) were fanatics; and 3. the terrorist phenomenon was engineered by an Army unit, probably the Army Intelligence Directorate. Stoenescu considered Nicolae Militaru to play the lead in this diversionary phenomenon; Stoenescu also believed that, alongside Ceaușescu, Militaru was the second major assassin in the events of December 1989, the manipulative decisions he had made leading up to genocide. Militaru allegedly triggered the diversionary operation under the control of the Soviets, who wanted Romania to remain under Russian influence. It was General Ștefan Gușă who opposed the potential Soviet intervention which the diversionary phenomenon triggered by Militaru was meant to accelerate.

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Between December 22-31, 1989, 942 people died. It is obvious that such a large number of deaths could not have been caused by tactical errors, ricocheting bullets, etc., although such incidents did occur. The



fact that some of the people who were killed starting from 22nd December had been shot in the head, clearly indicates that the shots had been fired by snipers who were under specific orders. There occurred indeed major tactical errors as well, among which counts the incident at the Otopeni airport, when 49 people died, of whom 34 were national servicemen who had not been trained for combat. Therefore, the victims could not have been terrorists, counter-revolutionaries or diversionists. There were probably many other similar situations; however, the death of the 942 people between December 22-31 cannot be blamed solely on the accidents and the chaos of the Revolution, on tactical errors, etc. It is significant to note that in some instances the identity of the so-called terrorists has indeed been proven to have been confected, yet the identity of those who confected it remains uncertain. We have already mentioned the case of several officers who died in the Revolution as a result of the tactical errors committed: their bodies were used afterwards to support the terrorist diversion, as some of these bodies bore notices with the word *terrorist* written on them. The corpses were left in the street where they were abused and mutilated. In some instances, the victims were USLA members who had been called to support the Revolution only to be murdered either by mistake or intentionally, whereas in other instances they were revolutionaries whose identities remained unknown for a while. Cristian Lupu was a revolutionary who, according to eyewitnesses, had fought to protect the Romanian Television headquarters. After being lightly wounded and taken to hospital, he was turned into a terrorist for reasons which are yet to be discovered; while in hospital, he failed to receive medical care on grounds of being a suspected terrorist, which meant it was all right to be left to die. Lack of medical care

led indeed to his death and later on his family found him at the city morgue under a John Doe identity, although his identity was definitely known because he had a hospitalization certificate on his chest, written in indelible ink and reading: *terrorist*. (Tatulici 1990: 157-162)

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¹ *Timișoara 16-22 decembrie 1989* (n.t.)

² *The Lost Generation...* (n.t.)

³ *The Romanian Army in the Revolution of December 1989* (n.t.)

⁴ *The Conspiracy of the Securitate* (n.t.)

⁵ *Death Spies from under the Epaulets. Sibiu '89* (n.t.)

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⁷ *The Unfinished Revolution* (n.t.)

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⁹ *The Barricade* (n.t.)

¹⁰ *Ceaușescu's regime* (n.t.)

¹¹ *The Revolution Never Happened* (n.t.)

¹² *The Diplomacy of Wolves...* (n.t.)

¹³ *Romania under the Communist Regime* (n.t.)

¹⁴ *Ceaușescu and the Securitate* (n.t.)

¹⁵ *From One Coup d'Etat to Another* (n.t.)

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