

# Terrorism in Bulgaria

**George Shanduorkov, MD**

---

Director of Emergency Medical Services,  
Gabrovo, Bulgaria

Correspondence:  
George Shanduorkov, MD  
Director of Emergency Medical Service,  
Gabrovo, Bulgaria  
E-mail: [emerg.gb@nat.bg](mailto:emerg.gb@nat.bg)  
E-mail: [shamy\\_bg@yahoo.com](mailto:shamy_bg@yahoo.com)

**Keywords:** Bulgaria; civil defense;  
EMS; disaster relief system; prepared-  
ness; prevention; terrorism

**Abbreviations:**

ED = Emergency Department  
EMS = Emergency Medical Services  
SACP = State Agency for Civil  
Protection

**Web publication: 06 February 2004**

**Abstract**

The Republic of Bulgaria is one of the smallest countries in southeastern Europe and has little experience with terrorist acts. During the past 20 years, only nine terrorism-related events have been recorded in Bulgaria, and no unconventional weapons have been used. Factors contributing to terrorism in Bulgaria have been: (1) Communist Party domination of the government and political process from 1944 to 1989; (2) ethnic and religious conflicts between the Bulgarian Orthodox Christian majority and the Turkish Muslim minority from 1983 to 1987; and (3) the relatively high level of organized crime after the Communist regime ended in 1990.

The structure and function of the Disaster Relief System in Bulgaria not only are focused on the prevention of terrorism, but also on preparedness for the emergency response to terrorism-related events. Institutional components of the Disaster Relief System structure responsible for the emergency response to terrorism-related events include: (1) the Government of Bulgaria; (2) the State Agency for Civil Protection with 28 regional directorates; (3) the Ministry of Health with five national hospitals, 28 regional hospitals, and 28 EMS systems; (4) the Ministry of Defense with special military units for response to unconventional terrorist events, including nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons; (5) the Ministry of Internal Affairs with 28 police departments, 28 fire departments, and specialized anti-terrorist units; and (6) the Bulgarian Red Cross.

A major future challenge in Bulgaria is the prevention of terrorism through political stability, economic prosperity, ethnic and religious tolerance, and more effective measures against organized criminal activities. A related challenge will be to improve the level of preparedness of all components of Disaster Relief.

Shanduorkov G: Terrorism in Bulgaria. *Prehosp Disast Med* 2003;18(2): 66-70.

---

**Introduction**

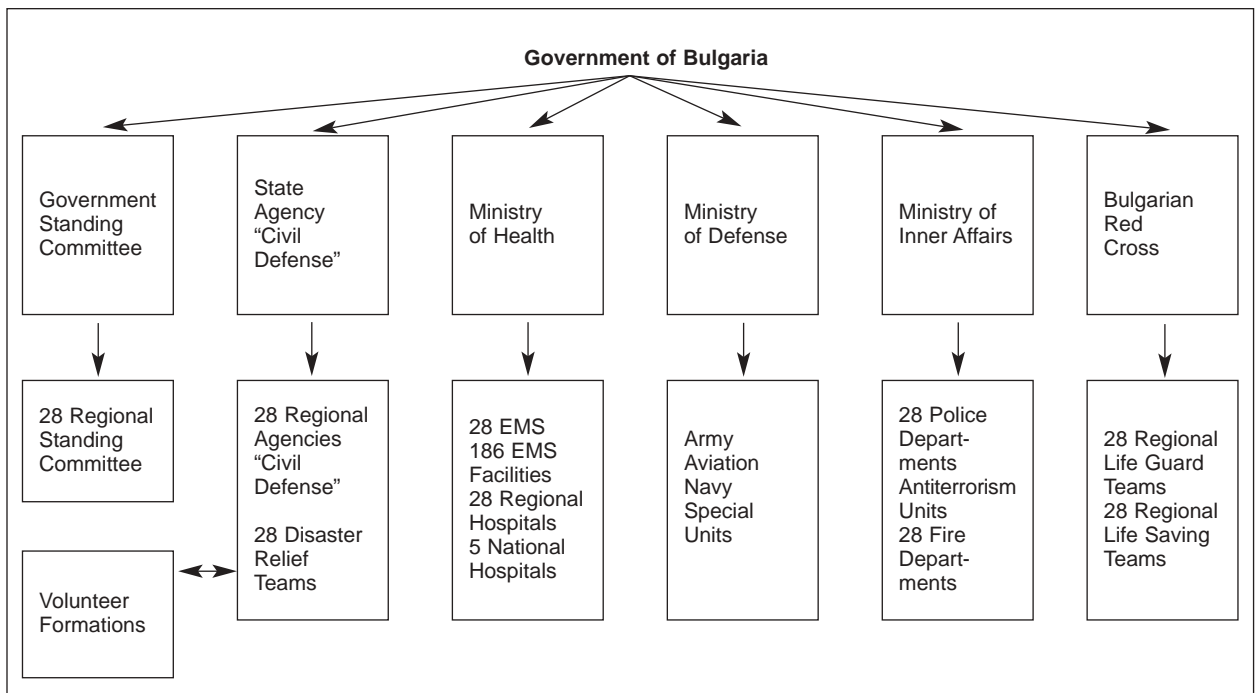
The Republic of Bulgaria is one of the smallest countries in southeastern Europe in a central geographical position on the Balkan Peninsula (Figure 1). Occupying an area of 111,000 km<sup>2</sup> (67,500 mi<sup>2</sup>), it is bordered on the north by the River Danube and Romania, on the east by the Black Sea, on the south by Greece and Turkey, and on the west by Macedonia and Serbia (Figure 1).

Geographically, there are mostly low mountains and plains, and forests cover approximately 30% of the country. The population of Bulgaria is 8 million. The average life expectancy from birth is 71.2 years. The population includes Bulgarian (85%), Turks (8.5%), gypsies (2.6%), and other ethnic groups, such as Macedonians, Armenians, and Tatars (3.9%). Religious groups include Orthodox



Prehospital and Disaster Medicine © 2003 Shanduorkov

Figure 1—Map of Bulgaria (printed with permission)



Prehospital and Disaster Medicine © 2003 Shanduorkov

Figure 2— Organization of disaster relief system in Bulgaria (EMS = Emergency Medical Services)

Year	Type of event	Site	Number injured	Number dead	Comments
1965	Bombing	Hotel Shoumen	4	1	Home-made time bomb
1983	Hijacking	Airport Varna	1	1*	Knives; 4 terrorists
1984	Bombing	Post Office GO	9	3	Home-made parcel bomb
1984	Bombing	Station Plovdiv	26	1	Home-made time bomb
1984	Bombing	Airport Varna	2	0	Home-made time bomb
1985	Bombing	Hotel Sliven	14	0	Home-made time bomb
1985	Bombing	Train-car	9**	7**	Home-made time bomb
1986	Bombing	Varna beach	0	0	Bomb inactivated
1987	Bombing, hostage taking	Varna	2**	3*	Grenade; 3 terrorists

Prehospital and Disaster Medicine © 2003 Shanduorkov

**Table 1**—Terrorism events in Bulgaria since 1965 (\* Terrorists, \*\* 2 victims were children)

Component	Functions
Standing Committees	Legislation International collaboration Planning Coordination and control Intelligence analysis Finance
State Agency for Civil Protection	Operational coordination and control Stockpiles – equipment and medications Special rescue teams
Ministry of Health	EMS – triage, first aid, medical care, safe transportation Hospitals – medical care, specialized medical care Sanitary inspection centers – detection kits, decontamination kits, environmental monitoring
Ministry of Defense*	Detection kits Decontamination kits Stockpiles – equipment and medications Transportation Communication Special rescue teams
Ministry of Internal Affairs	Police departments – scene security, traffic control, public order, crime prevention Fire departments – special rescue teams, extrication, fire control Antiterrorist units – prevention, hostage release, terrorist arrest
Bulgarian Red Cross	Stockpiles – equipment and medications Rescue teams – extrication

Prehospital and Disaster Medicine © 2003 Shanduorkov

**Table 2**—Functions of the Disaster Relief System in terrorism-related events. (\* During war or mass-casualty incidents)

Christians (85.5%), Catholic Christians (2.5%), and Muslims (12.0%). The government is a parliamentary democracy, with a president as the chief of state, and a prime minister as the head of government. The country is divided administratively into 28 districts or provinces. The official language is Bulgarian. The National Holiday is the Day of Liberation (03 March). The economic structure consists of agriculture including cereal, tobacco, and wine (15%); industry including machinery manufacturing and chemicals (29%); and tourism, trade, and services (56%). The unemployment rate in Bulgaria is 15.4%.

**Burden of Terrorism in Bulgaria**

Terrorist attacks in Bulgaria have been rare. Since 1965,

only nine terrorism-related events have occurred: seven bombings, one hijacking, and one hostage-taking (Table 1). No events employed unconventional weapons (e.g., nuclear, chemical, or biological releases).

There are three main underlying factors that contribute to terrorism in Bulgaria:

1. From 1944 to 1990, the Communist Party dominated the government and political process in Bulgaria. At least two terrorist attacks against the Communist regime took place during this period and were in reactions to the loss of political and social independence or inability to travel abroad.
2. In 1983, the Communist government started a wide-scale operation to change the names of the 820,000

Turkish Muslims in the country. From 1983 to 1987, this triggered a wave of terrorist attacks against the government by Turkish Muslim groups, prompting the government to abandon its name change program.

3. In 1990, after the Communist regime was crushed, a democracy was born, and new political and economic forces emerged, including criminal or gangster organizations. These gangster organizations used violent methods, such as bombings, shootings, and hostage-taking as efforts to gain appropriate economic and political power; this marked a new wave of terrorism in Bulgaria.

Factors likely to increase the risk of future terrorism in Bulgaria include political instability, poverty, ethnic or religious conflict, and a high level of criminal activity. In addition, Bulgaria is at risk for terrorism related to the internationalization of terrorist attacks and the possible use of unconventional weapons.

### Emergency Management of Terrorist Events

The organization and functions of the Disaster Relief System in the Republic of Bulgaria are in Figure 2 and Table 2 respectively. This system is managed and coordinated by the government and the local administrative structures, and is regulated by law. To achieve the aims, standing committees associated with the protection of the population against disasters, have been established.

In 2001, the Republic of Bulgaria developed its National Plan of Detection and Prevention of Terrorism in accordance with Resolution 1373 of the United Nations Security Council.<sup>1</sup> As a result, specialized governmental measures aimed at the prevention and suppression of terrorist acts include: (1) preventing and suppressing the financing of terrorist acts; (2) legislative measures for prosecution and punishment of the financing of terrorist acts—freezing accounts and assets in banks and other financial institutions; (3) legislative and other measures to counter the recruitment of members into terrorist groups and the supply of weapons to terrorists; (4) early warning to other states and exchange of information; (5) refusal to grant asylum to terrorists; (6) preventing movements of terrorists through effective border control; (7) increasing the acceleration of distribution of information on the actions and movements of terrorists; and (8) preventing trade in arms, explosives, and dangerous materials.

Operational activities, such as rescue, evacuation, and elimination of the disaster consequences, are performed by regional civil protection directorates. These activities are performed under the direction of the State Agency for Civil Protection (SACP) or state “civil defense”, in cooperation with volunteer organizations comprised of factory workers and clerks and specialized rescue teams of the Bulgarian Red Cross.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) teams perform triage and provide initial first aid, medical care, and safe transportation. They include professionally trained and qualified doctors and medical assistants and ambulances provided with life-saving equipment, medicaments, and medicines. According to the nature of the agents used (e.g., chemical, biological, nuclear, or radiation), medical and other specialists close to the affected area are summoned. It

is their task to specify the nature and the level of damage, to define the boundaries of the affected area, and to specify the ways and the means of restriction and elimination of their harmful effects.

Further medical and specialized medical treatment is rendered not only in the hospitals of the region, but also in neighboring regions. The restoration work begins simultaneously with taking the wounded away and evacuation of those in danger. This is done in order to limit the consequences and to prevent further injuries caused by fires, explosions due to gas leakage, or other toxic effects. The power supply, water supply, and drainage systems also are brought under control. Communication and information exchange in support of coordination and control is achieved through media intentionally kept free for emergency situations, including telephone lines of National Telecom, mobile telephone, high-frequency radio bands, and temporary cable lines established by the SACP and army units.

Specific plans and preparedness for unconventional terrorist events include:

1. *Agent Detection Kits*—for use by SACP, special military units, fire departments, hospitals; includes detection of chemical agents (e.g., sarin, soman, tabun, VX, pesticides, organophosphates, cyanide, ammonia, chlorine, and lewisite), radioactive material (e.g., from nuclear power plants or bombs); and biological agents (including diagnostic laboratory tests);
2. *Decontamination Kits*—for use by SACP, special military units, fire departments, EMS, and emergency departments (EDs) at the scene and at the EDs for contaminated victims, rescue workers, ambulances, and ED facilities;
3. *Personal Protective Equipment*—for use by SACP, special military units, fire departments, and EMS—includes full-face air-purifying respirators with multi-gas filters, chemical and biological resistant garments, gloves, and boots;
4. *Stockpiles of Supplies for Medical Treatment of Victims*—for use by EMS personnel, ED, and hospital staff; includes antidotes and other drugs; and
5. *Communication and Transportation*.

In order to keep the Disaster Relief System prepared, theoretical courses and practical training in simulated situations are organized on a regular basis for all levels of the structure – management; SACP; volunteer groups of workers and clerks; and special rescue teams of the Bulgarian Red Cross. Training aids (manikins and simulation devices) have been developed to help achieve the goals of the training in each group respectively. Emergency Medical Services teams attend specialized courses on chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear injury prevention and defense, and trauma and burn injuries. Doctors of medicine from the hospitals and sanitary inspection centers also attend such training courses.

### Future Challenges

In order to avoid terrorism in the future in Bulgaria, the Disaster Relief System must focus on the prevention of

terrorism-related events.<sup>2</sup> Important preventative measures include the promotion of political stability, economic prosperity, ethnic and religious tolerance, and more effective measures against organized criminal activities.

Preparedness for terrorism-related events also must be improved in all of the components of the Disaster Relief System. Areas of focus include overall emergency management, coordination and control, training of personnel, storage and delivery of equipment and supplies, management of population behaviors, and the adoption of knowledge and experience in the emergency management of terrorism-related events from other countries.

### Conclusion

In order to make the Disaster Relief System more efficient, prepared, and reliable for terrorism-related events, its weaknesses must be eliminated. Ultimately, even rare terrorist attacks should be prevented, and those that do occur, should be handled rapidly with minimal human and material losses. In particular, Bulgaria must study and adopt the lessons learned from the experience with terrorism in other countries in order to prevent terrorist events when possible, and minimize their consequences, when prevention is not an option.

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Jeffrey Arnold.

---

### References

1. Ministry of Internal Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria: National Plan of Terrorist Prevention, 2001.
2. Arnold JL: Disaster medicine in the 21st Century: Future hazards, vulnerabilities, and risks. *Prehosp Disast Med* 2002;17:3-11.