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TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE ISLAMIC EXTREMISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE “ISLAMIC STATE” (FROM THE END OF 20TH CENTURY TILL 2014)*

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Abstract

The Islamic extremism has deep roots in the Middle East. They were especially active towards the end of the 20th century and in the first and second decades of the 21st century. They took on a new nature with the terrorist acts against the US on September 11 in 2001. In the mid-2000s new and dangerous trends of the Islamic extremism became evident in the Middle East, which became visible in Syria with the declaration of the “Islamic State” (IS) in 2014.

Keywords: *Islamic extremism, al-Qaeda, Abdallah Azzam, Usama bin Laden, “Islamic State”.*

Transnational dynamics of Islamic extremism in the 20th century

The origins of the Islamic radical ideas date back to the early stage of the Muslim faith. These ideas were manifested in the holy books of the Muslims – in Quran and Sunni that played a considerable role in the expansion of the Muslim territories and in the formation of the Islamic caliphate. The medieval crusades launched against the Muslim world and, in this respect, the new geopolitical situation created favorable conditions for the formation of a new wave of interpretations of the Islamic radical ideas in the Muslim environment.

After the Crusade, the West gradually started to play a dominant role in the world. The spread of the Western values, the enhancement of the military power of Europe and the weakening of the Ottoman Empire contributed to the dissemination of reformist ideas among the Muslims. The Pan-Islamic movement which originated in the Muslim world in the 70s of the 19th century activated the Islamic ideas. Wide social layers got together around these ideas in Muslim states.

The future of the Arab lands in the Ottoman Empire was decided by the Treaty of Sykes-Picot signed between the Great Britain and France during World War I. This instigated anti-colonial struggle and national-liberation movements which resulted in the formation of independent Arab states already in the 40s of the 20th century. All these processes, as well as the annulment of the Caliphate and the structure of Sultanate by Mustafa Kemal in 1924 resulted in the activation of the

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Islamic extremism ideas in Muslim world and the establishment of structures led by the Islamic extremism ideology.

There appeared organizations led by the ideologies and radical ideas developed by some of the ideologists of the Islamic radicalism. The failures of the secular Muslim regimes in social-political and economic spheres contributed to the promotion of the Islamic radical ideas and the establishment of institutions inspired by them which were ready to launch an open and secret fight against the local Muslim regimes, as well as to organize the struggle in other places as a response to the Islamic call.

Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Al-Iḥwān al-Muslimūn) in 1928. It had a considerable influence on various social layers, particularly on backward circles of Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood was quite a well-planned organization whose fervent members were ready for any action, including terrorist acts.

The radical wing of the organization became more active in the 1950s, when the organization was left out of the active participation in the political developments of Egypt. The key target of the criticism of the radicals was the authorities, corruption embedded in the Egyptian society and the violence exercised by the ruling regime. The actions of the radicals were mainly aimed at the state-owned institutions aiming to achieve an overthrow of the governments by means of military coups in Muslim countries.

With the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt it was decided to take the discussion of the Islamic radical ideas, which was then being held in intellectual circles, to larger circles of the society¹. Towards the mid-20th century many renowned (radical and moderate) leaders of Islamic groups, inspired by the ideas of Islam, Islamic revolution and jihad, called for going back to the Islamic traditions to resist the challenges of the West. The Islamic extremism movements could not stand aside from the developments which unfolded in another region of the Islamic World towards the end of the 70s of the 20th century - in Afghanistan, especially taking into consideration the fact that Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet forces in 1979.

The Afghan War as a watershed. New trends within the Islamic extremism: the contradictions between generations

To organize a proper fight against the Soviet forces, to ensure a targeted delivery of military assistance and the relevant use of the financial means, the Anti-Soviet camp needed reliable figures who would take on the responsibility of organizing the fight in certain places². Palestinian Abdallah Yusuf Azzam and Saudi Usama bin Laden, who were distinguished during the Afghani war, took the

¹ Pargeter 2008: 22.

² Kohlman 2004: 4.

charge. In 1988 Abdallah Azzam and Usama bin Laden founded the Islamic organization “Qaedat al-Jihad” (The Basis of Sacred War). The organization was responsible for enrolling mujahids in military camps, organizing their military training and involving them in the Sacred war¹.

After 9/11 words of criticism were addressed to the leadership of the organization even inside al-Qaeda concerning its fruitless and ineffective actions against the USA on September 11, 2001, which really affected the Islamic extremism and the Sacred war they had launched². In this context, controversies arose between the older and younger generations inside the organization over various issues³. In the context of these events al-Qaeda turned into a network structure which implied changes in the Jihad struggle strategy introduced by Abdullah Azzam and Usama bin Laden back in the 1980s. If the addresses of Usama bin Laden were mostly dedicated to the struggle against the “Far Enemy”, i.e. the USA and its allies and if only a small number of his addresses were about the struggle against the “Near Enemy”, many of the contemporary authors of the Islamic extremism ideology (Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Sayf Al-Adl, Abu Musab Al-Suri and others), under current circumstances, attached more importance to the fight against the “Near Enemy” since only due to such tactics, Islamic extremism would be able to preserve the remaining potential.

These ideas found their influence not only inside al-Qaeda, but in other Islamic circles, as well. Soon conflicts sprang up between the representatives of the old and the new generations among the Islamists concerning this or that issue including the choice of the tactics of the targets mentioned above. This led to the creation of a layer of Islamic extremists, a generation guided by Islamic extremism ideas which put forward its own unique options concerning the abovementioned concepts even accusing the leadership of al-Qaeda of organizing the unpromising operations of 9/11 against the USA.

The situation following the 9/11 led to the introduction of new ideas among Islamic extremists in the mid-2000s which favored the priority of the Struggle against the “Near Enemy” and their theoretical grounds. Particularly, these ideas were noticed in the works of Abu Musab Al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji both of whom were quite popular among Islamic extremists. It should be mentioned, that in its practical operations the al-Qaeda-led Islamic movement never forgot the struggle against the “Far Enemy”, either. The brightest proof of the idea stated was the series of terrorist acts organized in Europe in the mid-2000s, but this was organized by al-Qaeda, now a network structure, with an aim to preserve the fighting capacity of its own sub-structures acting beyond the Islamic world.

In the course of the first decade of the 21st century the conflict between the older and younger generations over the extremists led to the formation of new

¹ **Kepel** 2002: 135-148.

² **Lia, Hegghammer** 2004: 355-375.

³ **Alshech** 2004: 436-449.

theoretical and practical approaches which became more apparent during the developments over Iraq. Before the collapse of the regime of Sadaam Hussein, there were all the preconditions for the expansion of the extremist ideas and for the activity of the Sunni extremist structures. The first steps in this direction were taken after the first war in the Persian Gulf (1991), when Saddam Hussein initiated the so called “Religious campaign” - policy of enhancing and expanding Islam. It aimed to achieve the stabilization of the situation in Iraq, already under international sanctions, with the help of the united Ba’ath Party and Salafi agenda.

Before the second war in the Persian Gulf (2003), the US government had taken measures to prove that the regime of Saddam Hussein is a threat to the world peace. Iraq was accused of producing weapons of mass destruction and of cooperation with al-Qaeda. The military actions against Iraq started in the morning of March 20, 2003. At the beginning of April, the coalition forces, with no resistance from the Iraqi army, appeared near Baghdad. The capital surrendered to the coalition forces nearly without any resistance on April 9. Among several Islamic extremist groups an idea was circulated which claimed that after the collapse of the regime of Saddam Hussein by the coalition forces, Iraq would turn into an arena of fights between Islamists where the whole potential would be concentrated to conduct the Sacred war against the “infidels” (coalition forces, Shiites, etc.). After the appearance of the coalition forces in Iraq in 2003, the collapse of the regime of Saddam Hussein and the change of powers (now ruled by Shiites) the marginalized Sunni groups continued fighting actively against the Shiite authorities and the coalition forces that supported them. Extremist groups acting within and beyond the borders of Iraq joined the fight.

The active involvement of Islamists in the fight in Iraq forced al-Qaeda leadership to pay attention to Abu Musab al-Zarkawi and the organization he led which had been acting in Iraq since 2006 as an official affiliate of al-Qaeda under the name of “Islamic State in Iraq” (ISI). Abu Musab al-Zarkawi was distinguished in the jihad fight that was unleashed in the post-Saddam Iraq. He had managed to create a military camp in Afghanistan Herat City. Herat, as a place of the concentration and dislocation of the military camp, was not chosen accidentally since the geographic location of the city (in the west of Afghanistan, near the border of Iran) gave a chance to avoid active military actions. It gave Abu Musab al-Zarkawi and the structure he led an opportunity to leave Afghanistan without any losses. In the context of the military operations unfolding in Afghanistan in 2001 and the fight against al-Qaeda, al-Zarkawi decided to move the center of the fight he had launched, to Iraq⁴.

Different approaches and controversies have been traced between Abu Musab al-Zarkawi and the leadership of al-Qaeda concerning the choice of the objectives of jihad and other tactical steps. The organization of the ISI aimed at fighting

⁴ Stern, Berger 2015: 20-24.

against the “Near Enemy” that is the Iraqi government, the structure of Shiites, the supporters of Shiism and the opponents of the Sunnis and those who do not share their approaches. Such tactics underwent serious criticism from the part of the leadership of al-Qaeda which believed that such position of Abu Musab al-Zarkawi undermined the fight of the supporters of jihad in Iraq which have a considerable Shiite population. In the course of 2006-2010 the positions of the organization ISI were weakening. In fact, it happened because of the assassination of Abu Musab al-Zarkawi (June 7, 2006) and “Sahwa” (Awakening), an Iraqi movement in the regions populated by Sunnis. Sunni tribes were in the first lines. Al-Sahwa was directed against the Islamists in Iraq. The new US policy in Iraq, the expansion of the military presence in this context and the support to the Shiite government were added to these factors. During this period, the ISI was forced to withdraw mostly into the desert regions of al-Anbar, where its soldiers regrouped, planned, and trained. Moreover, in 2010 the organization ISI was deprived of its leaders that had come to replace Abu Musab al-Zarkawi, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu-Hamza al-Muhajir. The organization was headed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (who was proclaimed caliph of the “Islamic State” on June 29, 2014) and Haji Bakr⁵.

The activity of the ISI under the auspices of al-Baghdadi was proved by the existence of far-fetching plans to settle in the country which is predominantly populated by Shiites and the concentration of the fight of the jihadists in the regions of Iraq with Sunni population. Moreover, in 2011, in the conditions of further deepening of the Syrian crisis, Iraq remained the target of the ISI, trying to retain the Iraqi Islamists from moving to Syria which would certainly weaken the potential of the Islamists in Iraq.

The birth of Islamic State

It was the further escalation of the Syrian conflict and the favorable conditions for the fight of the jihadists, that made the ISI review Syria as an expanding area suitable for the fight of the jihadists that would allow the ISI to settle in Syria, as from early 2012 there has seen an increased inflow of Islamists from all over the world to Syria. In the mid 2012 a regiment made up of non-Iraqi was sent to Syria from the ISI which later turned into an influential Islamic extremist group under the name of “Jabhat al-Nusra”⁶. This was supplemented with the financial and military support offered to the Syrian opposition camp and the Islamists for the fight against Bashar al-Assad. Besides, Syrian regions rich with energy resources attracted ISI. There were contradictions not only in the opposition camp as a whole, but also among various Islamic extremist groups in the Syrian conflict. These contradictions developed into a war between the ISI and “Jabhat al-Nusra”

⁵ Dabiq, 1435, online version: 35-40, <https://www.ieproject.org/projects/dabiq1.pdf>.

⁶ Abouzeid 2014, online version: http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/06/al-qaeda-iraq-syria108214_Page2.html#.VSwMztyUeSo.

as well⁷. This forced the leaders of the ISI Aby Bakr al-Baghdadi and Haji Bakr to come to Syria in April 2013 and announce that “Jabhat al-Nusra” was a group within the composition of the ISI and that henceforth the two groups were joined in an organization under the name of the “Islamic State in Iraq and Sham” (ISIS)⁸.

Later, ISIS left al-Qaeda and had blatant clashes not only with al-Qaeda, but also with other groups engaged in the resistance in Syria. Starting from June 29, 2014, ISIS which announced itself an “Islamic State” (IS), presented its objectives: the establishment of a state for all Muslims in certain regions of Syria and Iraq⁹. The announcement of establishing a state (Caliphate), in fact, recorded the reality of the de facto existence of the Islamic state which is built or is being built in the very heart of the Arab world. In modern times no state has ever existed in the Muslim world.

The IS created structures in certain territories of Syria and Iraq that were under its control, conducts fiscal programs, social programs and judgment in accordance with the Sharia laws, etc¹⁰. The declaration of the leader – Caliph of the IS in the center of the Arab world and the fact that in the titles of the new caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi one can trace his kinship with prophet Muhammad, enhances the authority of the newly proclaimed caliphate and the caliph in the Islamic world. The IS possesses a certain amount of weapon and military potential which is further replenished by the Islamists from various parts of the world. The latter are engaged in the active military operations in Syria and Iraq attempting to enlarge the territory of the IS. They are ready to use their abilities and military experience with the help of the extremist Islamic nets existing in different areas. The IS is expanding its influence in cooperation with the Islamic extremist groups in various regions of the Muslim world taking their vows of loyalty to the IS Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. This was followed by the proclamation of the “wilayah” on the territories of the Muslim countries where the Islamists are quite active and where there is an influential Islamic potential which can ensure the effective expansion of influence of the IS over these territories. Since the proclamation of the “Islamic State” the Islamists have applied the strategy “Baqiya wa Tatamaddad” (Remaining and Expanding). Hence, they lay the bases of the practical activities of the IS which implied the further enhancement of the jihadi war on the territories of Syria and Iraq under their control, as well as directing the accumulated religious, ideological and military potential to the neighboring Muslim countries¹¹. The IS possesses financial resources and according to various expert assessments the co-efficient of the self-finance of the IS is quite high.

⁷ **Dabiq**, 1435, 20-30, online version: <https://clarionproject.org/docs/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-2-the-flood.pdf>.

⁸ **Caillet** 2013, online version: <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=54017>.

⁹ **Abu Mohammed al-Adnani made the announcement in an audio statement**, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTiqYjulJik&feature=youtu.be>.

¹⁰ **Dabiq**, 1435, 27-30, online version: <http://www.ieproject.org/projects/dabiq4.pdf>.

¹¹ **Dabiq**, 1436, 22-33, online version: <http://www.ieproject.org/projects/dabiq5.pdf>.

Therefore, cutting the financial support provided by the external donors cannot ruin the organization financially¹². The IS attaches much importance to ideological and propaganda activities. To disseminate its ideas and to make them more attractive it applies modern technologies - namely it uses high-quality advertising and informative video materials, engages IT specialists, uses the Internet, etc., which were never used at this scale before by any Islamic extremist structures¹³.

Conclusion

Originated still in the early Islamic period, Islamic radicalism found its proper place among the social and political developments of the Muslim countries of the 20th century and reached a new level in the 1970s. In the late 20th century the Islamic extremism seemed to have exhausted itself. However, the violent acts on September 11, 2001, and the current geo-political processes prove the opposite.

The mass protests and demonstrations which started towards the end of 2010 shook not only the Muslim world but the entire world, as well. The so-called Arab Spring and the changes in the Muslim countries along with their peculiarities, were, in fact, the outcome of internal and external influence. The Islamic extremism took quite an active role in the mass protests which came to follow the outpouring of grievances.

The developments in Syria starting from March, 2011 enabled al-Qaeda and its partner organizations, which underwent serious pressures and sustained considerable losses within the context of the fight against international terrorism declared at the start of the century, to find their role in the new regional developments. The Arab Spring and the Syrian conflict that entailed gave al-Qaeda this opportunity. In December 2011 Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda announced that the organization was to take an active participation in the Syrian conflict fighting against Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Al-Qaeda’s leaders address did not go unanswered and jihadists, guided by the Islamic extremism ideologies from various parts of the world, flocked to the Middle East. The “Islamic State of Iraq”, a branch of al-Qaeda in Iraq, also responded to Ayman al-Zawahiri’s address. The former later managed to become the leader of Islamic Extremism leaving al-Qaeda in the shade.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the Islamic extremists kept Iraq in the center of attention. The Sunni-inhabited areas of Iraq turned into a shia regime and resistance centers against western coalition forces. It was in this country that the organization led by al-Qaeda partner Abu Musab al-Zarqawi from Jordan got actively engaged in the Jihadi struggle. The organization’s behavior contained deviations from the Jihad tactics adopted by the ruling group of al-Qaeda. Such

¹² **Bronstein, Griffin**, 2014, online version: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/10/06/world/meast/isis-funding/>.

¹³ **Hegghammer** 2004: 11-17.

behavior already hinted at the far-reaching aims of al-Zarqawi, i.e. to separate, to organize their own Jihad struggle, in short, act independently.

In the middle of the year 2013 the “Islamic State of Iraq” was actively involved in the Syrian conflict and at the beginning of 2014 initiated large-scale military operations in the Sunni-inhabited areas of Iraq. Due to the active operations of the “Islamic State of Iraq” in the Jihad struggle in the Middle East the “Islamic State” was declared on June 29, 2014 in a considerable part of Iraq and Syria controlled by Islamists. This was a new page in the history of the Islamic extremism.

The military actions unfolding in the Middle East and North Africa, terror attack in the West, the ethnic and religious conflicts, grow into a challenge not only for MENA regions, but also for the other regions. Hence, the study of the “Islamic State” proclaimed on June 29, 2014 in certain areas of Syria and Iraq becomes important and actual not only for the social and political, social and religious movements and processes in the region, but also for the evaluation of the security risks all over the World. The IS turned into a dangerous reality and young extremists, influenced by the new ideology and propaganda, organized terrorist acts in various countries of the world.

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**ԻՍԼԱՄԱԿԱՆ ԾԱՅՐԱՀԵՂԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՓՈԽԱԿԵՐՊՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ ԵՎ
«ԻՍԼԱՄԱԿԱՆ ՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ» ԱՌԱՋԱՑՈՒՄԸ
(20-ՐԴ ԴԱՐԻ ՎԵՐՋԻՑ ՄԻՆՉԵՎ 2014 ԹՎԱԿԱՆԸ)**

Սարգիս Գրիգորյան

Բանալի բառեր՝ *Իսլամական ծայրահեղականություն, Ալ-Կաիդա, Արդալլահ Ազզամ, Ուսամա բին Լադեն, «Իսլամական պետություն»:*

Իսլամական ծայրահեղականությունը խոր արմատներ ունի Մերձավոր Արևելքում: Ծայրահեղական տրամադրությունները հատկապես ակտիվ էին 20-րդ դարի վերջում և 21-րդ դարի առաջին տասնամյակում: Դրանք նոր բնույթ ստացան 2001 թ. սեպտեմբերի 11-ին ԱՄՆ-ի դեմ իրականացված ահաբեկչական գործողություններով: 2000-ականների կեսերին Մերձավոր Արևելքում ակնհայտ դարձան իսլամական ծայրահեղականության նոր և վտանգավոր միտումները, որոնք տեսանելի դարձան Սիրիայում՝ 2014 թվականին «Իսլամական պետության» (ԻՊ) հռչակմամբ: Մերձավորարևելյան տարածաշրջանում ի հայտ եկավ մի ուժ՝ իսլամական ծայրահեղ արմատական մի կառույց, որը արձանագրեց իրողությունը, այն է՝ արդեն փաստացի իսլամական պետության գոյությունը: «Բակիա ուա Թաթամադդաթ» կարգախոսի ներքո ԻՊ-ն պայքարի առարկայական դրսևորումների ուղղվածությունը դարձրեց Մերձավորարևելյան տարածաշրջանն ու այն բնակեցնող անցանկալի տարրերը՝ այնտեղից տարածվելու նպատակ հետապնդելով դեպի մուսուլմանական այլ երկրներ: ԻՊ-ն հանդես եկավ որպես նոր պետական միավոր, ասել է թե՛ այսպես կոչված «իսլամական խալիֆայություն», որը հիմնվել կամ հիմնվում էր արաբական աշխարհի սրտում: 2014 թ. ԻՊ-ն ուներ որոշակի ռազմական ներուժ, որը գործնականում ընդլայնում էր ԻՊ-ի տարածքները: Կառույցն ուներ նաև ֆինանսական ռեսուրսներ, և նրա ինքնաֆինանսավորման գործակիցը բավական բարձր էր: Այդ

ինքնուրույնությունն ու ֆինանսական ինքնաբավությունը հիմք են տալիս պնդելու, որ ԻՊ-ն կախված չի եղել որևէ ուժային կենտրոնից (համենայն դեպս 2014 թ. դրությամբ): Այս ամենի հանրագումարը ԻՊ-ն վերածեց նոր իրողության ոչ միայն մերձավորարևելյան, այլև համաշխարհային աշխարհաքաղաքական ու աշխարհատնտեսական զարգացումներում: