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IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

ИДЕОЛОГИЯ И ПРАКТИКА ИСЛАМСКОГО ГОСУДАРСТВА

Summary. The ideology and practice of radical Islamism on the example of the Islamic State of Iraqi and Levant activity are under consideration in the article. The paper describes the evolution of its organizational structure from a salafi group to the militant organization that has aspired to a creation of not simply the Islamic statehood but the world caliphate, based on the example of the early Muslim ummah. The main components of its ideology include adaptation of the Islamic eschatology to the political needs of the organization, substantiation of its geographical borders, determination of its main enemies and others. The author pays a special attention to the different interpretations of ISIS ideology like Salafi jihadism, Militant Sunnism, and Wahhabism.

The author comes to the conclusion that the organization, which destabilized the political situation in the Middle East and North Africa, has a strong influence among the Muslims of the region, and with the help of just militant operations it is impossible to solve the problem of the Islamic State.

Key words. The Islamic State of Iraqi, ISIS, Islamism, Middle East, Salafi jihadism, Militant Sunnism, Wahhabism, Al-Qaida.
The Islamic state (IS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraqi and Levant (ISIL), or The Islamic State of Iraqi and Syria (ISIS) is not only a terrorist group, but also a political and military organization, adhering to the radical interpretation of Islam as a political philosophy and seeking to impose its worldview by force both on Muslims and non-Muslims. Its self-proclaimed “state” over the vast territory of Syria and Iraq declared itself as the legitimate ruler of Sunni Muslims throughout the world. It represents a vivid example of the threat to national security not only for the states of the Middle East region, but also for global security for the whole world.

To substantiate its claims, IS refers to the theological interpretation of the dogmas and principles of the Muslim religion. Supporters of this radical Islamist organization believe that only they fulfill the instructions of Islam in the most complete and perfect form. Anyone who disagrees with them is declared unfaithful as heretics. This provision is used for the religious justification of violence and the physical elimination of all dissenters.

The Islamic State participated in the Iraqi war against the US military after the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. Since 2013 it participated in the civil war in Syria on the side of the opposition. However, at the same time its main goal was not so much the overthrow of the Syrian government as the creation of an Islamic state. In June 2014, the organization announced the creation of an Islamic caliphate. Such an unexpected transformation of a radical Islamist organization, if not into a state in the generally accepted sense of the word, then at least in a quasi-state entity, raises the question of its emergence, the main stages of its development, its ideology and practice.

**Evolution of the organization**

The origin of the Islamic State dates back to the Islamist Salafi group, *Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (JTJ), which emerged in 1999. Its founder is considered to be Abu Musab Az-Zarqawi (1966 – 2006), an international terrorist from Jordanian refugee family. He took part in the Afghan war, where he established contacts with the head of *al-Qaeda*, Bin Laden. After the occupation of Iraq by the United States, al-Zarqawi gained fame during the operations against the Americans, especially “famous” for his cruelty against foreigners, Iraqis, who collaborating with the American occupation forces and the new Iraqi administration, and Iraqi Shiites. His hatred of Shiites, whom he called “a sect of treason and betrayal ... a hidden serpent, a treacherous and spiteful scorpion” [24, p. 38], became an integral part of the IS ideology.

In 2004, after az-Zarqawi took the oath of allegiance to Bin Laden, JTJ became an al-Qaeda branch [41, p. 2-3]. The organization changed its name to *Al Qaeda in the land of the two rivers*, better known as *Al Qaeda in Iraq* (AQI).

During the fighting in Iraq, AQI created its own network of jihadist militants and sympathizers. And although it formally submitted to central *Al-Qaeda*, practically AQI was autonomous and capable to implement ultra-Islamist jihad.
As a result, including differences in generations, contradictions arose between jihadists, who actively participated in the Afghan war and focused on Bin Laden’s al-Qaida, and Iraqi jihadists from al-Zarqawi surroundings, as it is the current leader of the IG Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

In early 2006, al-Zarqawi incorporated several small Iraqi jihadist groups into AQI, and after that the new entity was renamed Majlis shura al-mujahadin (Mujahideen Shura Council, MSC). Under the leadership of the central al-Qaida, al-Zarqawi focused its efforts on developing the infrastructure, necessary for the establishment of an Islamic state [41, p. four]. His death in June 2006 as a result of a military operation carried out by American aviation have not changed the accepted direction.

In October 2006, the MSC was renamed the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), declaring the organization’s most important goals – the conquest of territory for the creation of a state based on shari’a. The ISI has stepped up its activities among the Sunni population of Anbar province, dissatisfied with the Shiite leadership of Iraq. However, attempts to force sharia laws roused the Sunnis to oppose the ISI. Supported by US troops, the Sakhvat al-Anbar tribal militia (Anbar Awakening) expelled the ISI militants from Fallujah, and then the rest of the province. After this victory, the Sunni militia was not integrated into the common Iraqi people’s militia, since Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki viewed them as a potential threat to the Shiite ruling majority. As a result of this short-sighted policy, many of the Sunni militia joined the ISI [22, p. 8].

After the death of az-Zarqawi, AQI was headed first by Abu Ayyub al-Masri, then by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. Both were killed in 2010, and the ISI was led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who strengthened the organization and partially restored its authority in the eyes of the Sunni population [26]. Then the preparations for intervention in the Syria civil war on the side of anti-government forces had started. In April 2013, the ISI was renamed the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL). Al-Baghdadi’s decision to transfer the activities of his group to Syria provoked disagreements with the official al-Qaeda branch in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusrah (Victory Front), and was condemned not only by its leadership, which considered ISIL as a rival, but also by central al-Qaida. In this regard, it should be noted that both organizations, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, adhered to different tactics. Jabhat al-Nusra advocated cooperation with other jihadist groups and gradual creation of the “Islamic state”. ISIL, on the other hand, acted more straightforwardly in order to seize territory for the immediate creation of the “Islamic state” and enforce the introduction of shari’a law [10, p. 6–8].

During the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, ISIL established its base in the north of Syria, with its center in the city of Rakka. Here, it ousted or subjected all other Islamist rebel groups. ISIS established effective control over the occupied territories, following the “divide and rule” policy. [10, p. 9–11].

At the same time, ISIS did not forget about Iraq. In January 2014, its militants seized Fallujah and Ramadi (Anbar province). In early June 2014, ISIL
struck everyone with the fact that, after passing through northern Iraq, it captured Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq. In many ways, the victory of ISIL was provided by an alliance with former Ba’athists, including the military, tribesmen and other Sunni rebel forces [21].

On June 29, 2014, on the first day of Ramadan, ISIS proclaimed itself a caliphate, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was proclaimed “Caliph Ibrahim”, calling on all Muslims in the world to express loyalty [23].

Organization’s ideology

Starting considering the problem of the “Islamic State” ideology, formerly the ISIL, it is necessary to keep in mind its goals and methods of struggle, including:

1. Elimination of the borders established as a result of the Ottoman Empire partition after the First World War.
2. Creation of an Islamic state in the territory of Iraq and Sham (Levant), including Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, and in the future – in all the territories where Muslim rulers ever ruled. Ultimately, the group declares its goal to establish world supremacy over the Muslim community [22, p. 14–15].
3. The destruction of the Hamas group.
4. The destruction of Israel.
5. Destabilization in Central Asia [3; 5; 6].

It is also necessary to distinguish the differences between the officially declared goals and objectives of ISIL, on the one hand, and the hidden goals and objectives of the US, which, using Islamist radicals, created ISIL as a tool of geopolitical struggle in the Middle East and beyond, on the other hand.

From the point of view of Western intelligence services, the creation of ISIL and the “caliphate”, according to Russian analysts, was necessary to solve at least three geopolitical tasks:

First, for delivering a secondary strike on Russia, as on the main military rival.
Secondly, for delivering strike on China, as the main economic rival.
Thirdly, for the destruction of the European Union, in which the predominant position is occupied by the Franco-German alliance, not the Anglo-Saxon alliance”[7].

It is generally accepted that the ideological basis of the IS as a whole consists of the following doctrinal regulations:

- the conviction that the so-called “Islamic State” is a restored caliphate of the early Islam era and that all Muslims are obliged to swear allegiance to it;
- purification of the “defiled” Islam from apostasy, and, if necessary, through the physical destruction of apostate sectarians;
- approximation of the Day of Judgement, which comes after the victory of the “Islamic State” over the army of “Rome”, that is, the West;
rigorous adherence to the testament, “established by the Prophet Muhammad and his early followers,” moreover, in the form of more strict than those of other Salafi groups.

Analysts and experts debate the question of how important the ideology is within the Islamic State itself. According to the American researcher C. Bunzel, far from all members of the organization are generally aware of its existence [13]. Meanwhile, B. Heikel, an IG specialist (Princeton University) notes that Western experts underestimate the organization’s adherence to religious doctrine, including its ordinary members: “Even ordinary soldiers constantly recite Koranic verses”, demonstrating their skills and abilities in front of cameras [37].

Below the most common definitions and approaches, that are used by analysts to describe the ideology of the IS and its sources, will be considered.

**Salafi jihadism.** The ideology of the Islamic State is based on “Salafi jihadism” (al-Jihadiyya as-Salafiyya). The latter, in the opinion of the aforementioned authors, is “a special ideological movement in Sunni Islam.” True, H. Hassan from the *Guardian*, agreeing that the organization’s ideology is close to the ideas of *al-Qaeda* and the Saudi version of Salafism, does not see in this proximity anything that would interest researchers [20].

Salafi jihadists, including the IS members, believe that only legitimate authorities can lead the jihad movement. At the same time, the most important goal of jihad is not the struggle against non-Muslim countries, but the purification of Muslim society from heresy and nasty. In this regard, it is quite noteworthy that the teachings of radical Salafis allow the accusation of unbelief (takfir) of those Muslims who deviate from the Salafi interpretation of Islam, and death penalty of accused. In the spirit of takfirism, for example, the IS views the Palestinian Islamist organization *Hamas* as an apostatic one, that does not have the legal right to lead a jihad. Therefore, the fight against *Hamas*, and not with Israel, is considered a priority. Such an approach to determining priorities is supported by references to Islamic history, which, according to Salafists, confirms the validity of their position. An important role in their arguments is played by the first Caliph Abu Bakr, whose ultimate priority was the fight against apostates inside Islam and only then the expansion of Muslim conquests, which followed during the reign of Caliph Usman. Similarly, Salah al-Din, the sultan of Egypt and Syria, first dealt with the Shiites before proceeding with the expulsion of the Crusaders from the Holy Land [28].

**Militant Sunnism.** “The Islamic state is a group of Sunni militants” who “believe in the need for strict observance of Sharia law” [27]. According to some observers, the IS goes back to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. In one of the interviews, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud, commented on the message sent by the IS to all Arab Muslims: “The West is trying to impose its agenda on you. The Saudi government helps in this. Iran seeks to colonize the Arab world. Therefore, only we, the members of ISIL, defend Islam” [18, p. A31].
Many analysts identify the roots of the IS in Wahhabism. In 2014, immediately after the Islamists proclaimed the so-called “caliphate,” the Middle East correspondent of the “New York Times” D. Kirkpatrick unequivocally stressed: “The leaders of the Islamic state, speaking of their leading principles, ... do not hide their exclusive commitment to the Wahhabi direction of Sunni Islam”. In the schools controlled by the organization, Wahhabi scholarly literature from Saudi Arabia is distributed, Wahhabi texts are shown on television [25, p. A14].

Eschatological expectations. One of the differences between the Islamic State and other Islamist and jihadist movements, including al-Qaeda, is the organization’s emphasis on eschatology or apocalyptic expectations, that is, faith in the Day of Judgment, in the near coming of Imam Mahdi. In accordance with the prophecy, the army of “Rome” will be defeated under the walls of the city of Dabiq. Following its interpretation of the Hadith “12 caliphs”, the IS preachers believe that after the current “Caliph of the Islamic State” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi there will be only four legitimate Caliphs. “The Islamic state is not just a bunch of psychopaths. This is a religious group with well thought-out beliefs, including the belief that it is a key agent of the coming apocalypse,”[37] summarizes the American analyst G. Wood.

An expert of militant Islamism, American Islamic studies researcher W. McCants writes: “The propaganda of the Islamic state is filled with references to recent times. This circumstance attracts foreign fighters who aspire to the lands where the last battles of the apocalypse are to take place. The civil wars raging in these countries [Iraq and Syria] lend a believable character to such prophecies. [...] For the generation of Bin Laden, the idea of an apocalypse could not be a tool for recruiting mercenaries. Two decades ago, the regimes in the Middle East were more stable, and sectarianism was in a more depressed state. Recruitment of mercenaries was easier to carry out by phone, calling more for the fight against corruption and tyranny than against the Antichrist. Today, however, using apocalyptic ideas for recruiting makes more sense ”[29, p. 147].

The cult of violence and death. An important IS ideological component is “meaningful” violence. It is supposed “in the form of infinite cruelty, which will be shown by the force building the world caliphate” [4, p. 23]. The book “Idarat at-Tawahhush” (Control of Cruelty: the most dangerous period through which the ummah will pass), written in 2004 by Samir al-Khlifavi, the intelligence colonel of the Iraqi army of the time of Saddam Hussein, serves as a specific instructional source of IS activities.

Violence and cruelty run through the periodicals of the IS “Dabiq” and “Rumiyya”. Dabiq is characterized by exceptional aestheticization of tragedies and death. The magazine proudly informs the reader that the “Islamic state” was created following the example of the Prophet by “red with blood swords, and not voting or tweeting” [14, p. 47]. In the English version of the newest magazine “Rumiyya” it is proposed to engage in terrorism in any manifestations, to fight against “apostates ... with a pen and a word, with a sword and a spear” [34, p. 6].
“The blood of the infidels is halal (that is, what is allowed by Islam), killing them is nothing but a form of worshiping Allah,” the publication emphasizes [39, p. 36].

The exceptionally sharp assessment of the ISIL ideology belongs to the well-known Russian Islamic studies scholar V.V. Naumkin: “If to look at the ideology spreading by ISIL (a terrorist organization whose activity is prohibited in the Russian Federation), then this is pure fascism, there is not even a small fraction of Islamic dogma, the value of sacred texts in it. This is pure fascism, which floats around the world and serves the interests of those forces that are actually acting against the interests of Muslims and multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies” [2].

In this regard, we note that in Western historiography, for a long time there has been a tougher approach to assessing the historical role of Islam itself. The characteristics of political Islam as ideology are often unreasonably transferred to Islam as a religion. This most clearly shows itself in the tendency of identifying Islam with fascism. The book of Hamed Abdel-Samad, published by the publishing house “Dremer” in German under the eloquent title “Islamic Fascism” (2014) [9] is especially indicative in this respect. It is not by chance that this author, originally from Egypt, was called the “Egyptian Salman Rushdie.”

Existing publications on the history of “the Islamic State” pay not enough attention to the ideology of this organization, and in the case of investigating it, then, as a rule, such studies are fragmentary and contradictory [12; 19; 32; 36]. Nevertheless, it should be noted the idea expressed by some researchers, regarding the fact that, ideologically, the IS is the result of a long-term hybridization of doctrinal salafism and other Islamist movements [8; 17].

Thus, even the general overview of the ideological constructs of the IS shows the absence of a common approach to the studding problem, different interpretations of sources and prerequisites of the IS ideology. Careful research is required for the conceptions, the correct identification of the used terminology, the interpretation of classical Islamic texts by the ideologists of the IS.

**Organizational structure of “the Islamic state”**

A characteristic feature of “the Islamic state” is that it created its own state institutions [22, p. 16-17], [33]. [35, p. 5-6], [23]. The supreme power in the IS belonged to the “caliph Ibrahim”, that is, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who had two deputies. The authority of one of them extended to the territory of Iraq, the other was responsible for the territory of Syria. The “caliph” had at its disposal a government consisting of ministers with certain powers and salaries. The ministers controled the main spheres of government – finances, transportation, security, etc. One of the ministries supervised jihadists arriving from abroad. A special military department managed logistics and technical support for combat operations. The government sended governors to each province. Researchers note al-Baghdadi’s tendency to delegate his functions to subordinates and rely on their professionalism.
Many senior officials and military of “the Islamic State” served in the army of Saddam Hussein. The armed forces of the IS had about 1,000 middle and high-ranking warlords, whose salaries ranged from 300 to 2,000 US dollars. IS was making efforts to create state institutions and related infrastructure, trying to organize the provision of social services for the population. After the conquest of northeastern Syria, the city of Raqqah had become the actual capital till October, 2017, when it was freed from the IS military. That year “the Islamic State” lost most of its territory in Syria and Iraq.

In the territory controlled by the IS, shari’a courts were established, sexual segregation was introduced, and women were obliged to wear a hijab in public places. The moral police, hizba, patrolled the streets and monitored the observance of sharia regulations. Alcohol, tobacco and drugs were prohibited. Punishments for violating shari’a included whipping, cutting off extremities, capital punishment. During the IS’s control of Raqqah, criminals were killed in the town square [38], [22, p. 18-19].

Violence was an important part of the IS frightening strategy, the goal of which was to maintain control over the conquered territories. Demonstrating extreme cruelty against their opponents, jihadists exploited it in their propaganda. This strategy, among other things, included professional video recordings that capture scenes of mass and individual executions. Such videos often appeared on the Internet, such as scenes of the brutal execution of Western journalists. In the propaganda arsenal of jihadists, the glossy magazine Dabiq, published in English, played an important role. The title of the magazine is borrowed from Islamic eschatology, which emphasizes the millinar orientation of the IS ideology [22, p. 18].

The IS activities demanded large financial costs. Note that, until recent years, it had been the richest terrorist organization in the world. Its revenues consisted primarily of oil revenues (at least $ 1 million per day), supplemented by extortion, kidnapping and taxes from a controlled area. The share of donations was insignificant. Essentially, the IS functions as a self-financing organization. Sunni Muslims living in Fallujah told reporters that whatever the shortcomings and evils of the IS, it provided social services, such as free medicine, so it was a better alternative than the Iraqi government [22].

The Islamic State, proclaimed by a group of Islamist jihadists, is the first and the only attempt to revive an Islamic theocratic state in the contemporary times. The caliphate is considered by the majority of believers as a religious monarchy sanctioned by divine will, led by a caliph that unites unlimited supreme spiritual and secular power. The abolishing of Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 put an end to the unbroken chain of caliphs in the history of Islam.

Caliph (governor, successor of Mohammed) is an important symbolic figure in Islamist terminology, and the restoration of the caliphate has been a long-standing goal of Islamist jihadist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan India (Pakistan). The word “caliphate” they associate, first of all, with the era of the expansion of Islamic rule and
the transformation of the Arab caliphate into one of the largest empires of the world. The early Islamic theocratic form of government, especially the period of the four righteous caliphs, is a subject of exceptional idealization, worship and imitation for the Salafist jihadists. In theory, the caliphate has exclusive religious and political jurisdiction over the entire Muslim community. In order to strengthen its legitimacy, the leader of the IS Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared his origin from Muhammad, having adopted the additional name, derived from Prophet Muhammad’s tribe, “Al-Qurayshi”.

However, the religious leaders and authorities of Islamic states not only did not recognize al-Baghdadi as a “caliph”, but also condemned his actions as contradicted to Islam.

Even the most general consideration of the history of the terrorist organization and the quasi-state formation “the Islamic State” allows to conclude that the IS is not an irrational or crazy organization. Its violence and cruelty is not an accident, but a way of weakening its enemies and subjugating the people living in the territories under its control. By committing crimes, killing members of other religions, Sunnis and Shiites, the organization deliberately adheres to a certain strategic plan.

Note also that the IS got rid of the influence of Al-Qaeda and is its rival for influence in the Arab world. There is no reason to believe that the IS will self-destruct sooner or later. In contrast to al-Qaeda, the militants of the IS act differently. By imposing their radical vision of Islam on the population, at the same time they create institutions of state power in the territory under their control, which gives the IS greater efficiency than Al-Qaeda. It seems doubtful that with the help of just militant operations it is possible to solve the problem of the Islamic State, which destabilized the political situation in the Middle East and North Africa.

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