# ISLAMIC EXTREMISM STRATEGY OF "NEAR AND FAR ENEMY" (FROM THE 1980s TILL NOW)

## Abstract

In the 1980s, the "Al-Qaeda" launched the tactics of the struggle against the "Near and Far Enemy". It found its ideological grounds in the Islamic extremism in the 1980-90s with practical implications, affecting the current geopolitical and global economic trends in the Muslim world and well beyond it. In the Islamic extremism ideology, this strategy also received textual-substantive justifications of symbolic perceptions, which, of course, influenced the behaviour of extremists. The present research attempts to investigate the peculiarities of the tactics mentioned, which were masterminded and enriched by the ideologists of Islamic extremism, becoming one of the motives of the activities of Islamic extremists starting from the 1980s up to the current developments and one of the grounds for targets of Jihad.

*Keywords:* Islamic extremism, "Near and Far Enemy", Abdullah Azzam, Usama bin Ladin, "Al-Qaeda", ISIS.

Towards the end of the 20th century, Islamic extremism was enriched with new ideas, one of them being the Struggle against the "Near and Far Enemy" (Gohel, 2017, pp. 54-67)[1]. The "Near and Far Enemy" strategy was also substantiated in fatwas, which were actively spread by theologians guided by Islamic extremism ideas during the period considered in the article. Fatwa is a formal ruling or interpretation on the point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar, applying, in Islam, to all civil or religious matters (The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1991, pp. 866-867)[2].

In this context, it is obvious that fatwa has a serious impact on Muslims, and that's why the fatwas are often circulated by Islamic extremist ideologues. The introduction of the phenomenon of alienation, familiar to Western socio-philosophical thought, can be observed in these texts too. These fatwas contain references to well-known sources (al-Qur'an, Sunnah), historical events, heroic episodes of the past, symbolic quotations and comparisons, which attract Muslims and force them to take action. It was actively spread by the Islamic extremism ideologists during the war in Afghanistan in 1979-1989, finding wider practical expressions in the Mus-

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[1] These ideas were put forward by the leaders of "al-Qaeda", particularly by Ayman al-Zawahiri to ground the choice of the targets for Jihad by the Islamic extremists. The Islamic extremists considered the West (the western states or the western institutions in Muslim countries) to be the "Far Enemy". The "Near Enemy" comprised the faithless regimes and the circles, which fought against the ideas of the Islamic extremism in Muslim countries or in areas with a large Muslim population.

[2] Fatwa: opinion on a point of law, applying, in Islam, to all civil or religious matters. The conditions required by the classical doctrine for the exercise of the profession, or even for the delivery of a fatwa, are: Islam, integrity

and legal knowledge, or the ability to reach, by personal reasoning, the solution of a problem. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad and in the first centuries of the formation of the Islamic Caliphate the need for legal advice was soon felt in Islam. The ever-increasing number of the adheients of the new religion, which governed, through its totalitarian character, the temporal as well as the spiritual aspects of daily life, and the survival of the laws and customs of the conquered territories, which had to be harmonized, in some way or another, with novel piecepts and integrated within the nascent Muslim corpus juris, necessitated a continual recourse to the opinions of competent persons.

lim world and beyond it. There was a need for reliable people to organize the fight against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan properly, to reach the military aid to the addressee and to use the financial means appropriately. They were to carry out organizational functions on the spot, as well. In this regard, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam and Osama bin Ladin distinguished themselves in the Afghan war. Azzam and Bin Ladin later founded "al-Qaeda" in 1988, which was responsible for centralizing Muslim fighters in military camps, providing them with military training and involving them in Jihad (Kepel, 2006, pp. 130-143).

The ideas of Abdullah Azzam deeply influenced the Islamic world. As a result, there was a rapid increase in the number of Arab fighters who were involved in the Afghani war. Moreover, the military, financial and other assistance which was provided by the USA, Pakistan, Arab countries of the Gulf to the mujahideen fighting against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan forced the Soviet authorities to reconsider the appropriateness of the decision to keep their troops in that country in the late 1980s. The withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989 was viewed as a victory over the "Red Satan" (the USSR) through the God-blessed Jihad (Marranci, 2006, pp. 76-78).

Azzam and Bin Ladin were quite active not only in the fight against the Soviet troops, but they also introduced new concepts to the Islamic extremism ideas, including that of the Struggle against the "Near and Far Enemy". Bin Ladin was keen on the centralization, coordination and secrecy of the Jihad movement wishing to use the opportunities provided by the Afghani war and to unite the mujahideen involved in Jihad. At the start of the 1990s, a number of Islamic extremists who had participated in the Afghani war made up a group. Soon under the leadership of Usama bin Ladin and bearing the influence of his ideas, it developed into an influential Islamic movement which was directed by Bin Ladin masterfully (Kohlman, 2004, pp. 10-11).

In August 1996, the "al-Qaeda" led by Usama bin Ladin issued the "Jihad Declaration", which called to launch a guerilla war against the US troops deployed in Saudi Arabia (Declaration of War, 1996). In February 1998, Usama bin Ladin created "The International Islamic Front against Jews and Americans" (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2004, pp. 47-59). With this regard, a statement was adopted which proclaimed the personal duty of each capable Muslim to kill Americans and their allies, the military and civilians in any country possible (Al Qaeda's Second Fatwa, 1998).

The very Usama bin Ladin gave a universal nature to Jihad war ("Global Jihad") carried out by Islamic extremists putting forward the idea of the "Global Jihad" and thus prioritizing the struggle against the "Far Enemy".

In the time period from 1996 to 2001, the idea of the "Global Jihad" became real, taking a practical expression in many parts of the world through various terrorist acts organized by "al-Qaeda" and its adjacent structures. Nevertheless, among them, one should single out the unprecedented terrorist acts against the USA on September 11, 2001.

The first target for the allied forces which had joined the US fight against global terrorism following the events of September 11, 2001, was Taliban Afghanistan which had provided shelter to the al-Qaeda leaders. As a result of the fight against Afghanistan, the Taliban movement was removed from power in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda, its structures, its leadership and financial resources sustained great losses as a result of the persecutions launched against the organization throughout the world (Bonney, 2007, pp. 359-364).

The above mentioned terrorist attack confirmed that the "Far Enemy" was targeted by "al-Qaeda" and was carried out within the framework of the "Global Jihad" outlined by Bin Ladin. Masterminding these terrorist acts "al-Qaeda" challenged the existing regimes, directly threatening the USA and the West meanwhile sending a message to the world that Islamic ex-

tremism is capable of affecting the world's developments.

In the context of these events, "al-Qaeda" transformed into a network structure. This implied certain changes in the Jihad strategy of Abdullah Azzam and Usama bin Ladin back in the 1980s. To some extent, it diverted the attention from "al-Qaeda" leadership since it implied the existence of self-regulating multi-centred branches which aimed to solve certain issues and were made up of independent groups (often temporary) and individuals. This also affected the tactics of realization of the Jihad struggle by Islamic extremists against the "Near and Far Enemy". Conflicts arose with Usama bin Ladin inside "al-Qaeda" over the issue of launching a struggle against the "Near and Far Enemy" (e.g. the differences between Usama bin Ladin and Abu Muhammad al-Masri over the issue of targets after September 11, 2001. If Usama bin Ladin's addressed were mainly devoted to the fight against the "Far Enemy", i.e. the USA and its allies and if only a small part of his addresses concerned the fight against the "Near Enemy", (Al-Shishani, 2011, pp. 7-8). Many of the contemporary authors of the Islamic extremist ideology (Sayf al-Adl, Abu Musab al-Suri and others), under current circumstances, paid more attention to the fight against the "Near Enemy" since only with the help of such tactics, Islamic extremism would be able to save the potential left (Al-Suri, 2004, pp. 56-97).

The state of affairs after 9/11 gave birth to new ideas about Islamic extremism. The latter gave preference to the Struggle against the "Near Enemy" and their theoretical grounds. These ideas were mostly observed in the works of Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji, who were both quite popular among Islamic extremists.

Abu Musab al-Suri further developed the objectives of the practical application of the ideology of Jihad under the current circumstance, analyzed the Jihad struggle in different stages of history and illustrated its strengths and weaknesses. The 113-page work by Abu Bakr Naji,

"Idārat al-Tawaḥush" (Management of Savagery), proved to be one of the ideological bases of the activities of Islamic extremism. It attempted to illustrate the setbacks of the Jihad fight. The author highlighted that the Islamic extremists needed to live through a period of cruelty that a number of Muslim states had already experienced as a result of the Jihadi war. The final goal of this sacrifice would be the proclamation of an Islamic state (Stern & Berger, 2015, pp. 20-24).

As mentioned previously, the concept of alienation also can be observed in the ideology of Islamic extremism. The concept of alienation identifies a distinct kind of psychological or social ill; namely, one involving a problematic separation between a self and other. The common philosophical basis of the various forms of alienation is that the subject, by his actions, brings to life something which becomes an opposite and hostile force to him (Harutyunyan, 2010, p 71). Interpretation generates alienation, and alienation generates violence. This is one of the reasons behind the brutal images that we frequently see these days, coming from Islamic extremists. They consider a stranger as an element that should be eliminated because he is outside their own world of meaning. The sense of purpose in the form of a sacred heart and mind of the individuals applied to the other due to founding a legitimate ground and justifying violence has become a routine for the individual actions (Aydin, Cicek, Artunay, & Certel, 2016, pp. 402-407).

It is worth mentioning that in its practical operations, the "al-Qaeda"-led Islamic movement never forgot the struggle against the "Far Enemy", either. This can be proved by the series of terrorist acts launched in Europe in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s. However, this was organized by "al-Qaeda", now a network structure that aimed to preserve the fighting capacity of its own sub-structures that acted outside the Islamic world.

The active engagement of Islamic extremists in the fight in Iraq made "al-Qaeda" leadership

pay attention to al-Zarkawi and the organization he led, which had been operating in Iraq since 2006 as an official branch of "al-Qaeda" named Islamic State in Iraq (ISI).

Different approaches and controversies have risen between Abu Musab al-Zarkawi and the leadership of "al-Qaeda" over the choice of the goals of Jihad and other tactical steps. ISI aim to fight against the "Near Enemy", i.e.the Iraqi government, Shiites and the opponents of the Sunnis and those who do not agree to their approaches. These tactics faced harsh criticism from the part of the leadership of "al-Qaeda". The latter held the belief that such a stance of Abu Musab al-Zarkawi threatened the fight of the supporters of Jihad in Iraq, which had a majority Shiite population (Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi, 2005).

The mass disturbances and demonstrations which broke out in Arabic countries toward the end of 2010 brought about the decline of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya. Anti-government demonstrations were held in Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Sudan, Lebanon. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia experienced hard times, and Syria and Iraq plunged into crisis. Islamic extremist organizations, especially extremist groups, played an active part in these processes in the Middle-Asia, North Africa, Central Asia and other regions.

Realizing the fact that they were far from the conflicts unfolding in the Middle Eastern and North African regions and understanding the importance of their active involvement in these actions, the leadership of "al-Qaeda" sheltering somewhere on the borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan issued addresses to its structures (particularly to the Islamic groups in the Middle East) trying to define the guidelines of their Jihad. This was observed in the developments in the Muslim world in the second decade of the 21st century where involving its branches, "al-Qaeda" tried to keep abreast with the changes in the Muslim world, once again stressing the importance of the struggle against the "Near Enemy".

True, singular cases of terrorist acts out of the Muslim world were recorded later; however, broadly speaking, at this stage, "al-Qaeda" gave preference to the struggle against the "Near Enemy" in its tactics which was most evident in the Middle East from 2011-2015.

Due to the further escalation of the Syrian conflict and the favourable conditions for the fight of the jihadists, the ISI was forced to review Syria as an expanding area suitable for the fight of the jihadists. Later, the leaders of the ISI Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Haji Bakr came to Syria and announced the creation of the new organization named the "Islamic State in Iraq and Sham" (ISIS) in April 2013 (Caillet, 2013). On June 29, 2014, ISIS announced itself an "Islamic State" (IS) (Withnall, 2014), engaged in the active military operations in Syria and Iraq, attempting to enlarge the territories and focusing on the struggle against the "Near Enemy". The IS founded its branches 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, etc. There was an unprecedented influx of Islamic extremists into Syria from all over the world. The activism of Islamic extremists has caused tensions and clashes between the two main Islamic extremist camps, "Al-Qaeda" and the IS.

Ideological and propaganda activities were priorities for the IS. It turned to modern technologies in order to spread its ideas and to make them more attractive. The IS used high-quality advertising and informative video materials, engaged IT specialists, used the Internet, etc., which were never used at this scale before by any Islamic extremist organizations. The IS implied the further enhancement of the Jihadi war in Syria and Iraq, as well as directing the accumulated religious, ideological and military potential to the neighbouring Muslim countries (Al-Tamimi, 2014). Later, the organization managed to carry out the struggle against the "Far Enemy", organizing terrorist attacks in the western

## Conclusion

Toward the end of the 20th century, the Islamic extremism ideas were enriched with new concepts, including that of the struggle against the "Near and Far Enemy", which found theoretical and practical implications by Islamic extremism ideologists Abdullah Yusuf Azzam and Usama bin Ladin during the war in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989.

Abdullah Azzam attached importance to the fight against the "Near Enemy" in Muslim countries, particularly in Afghanistan, which was to pave the way to the establishment of an Islamic State, whereas Usama bin Ladin prioritized the struggle against the "Far Enemy" and later introduced the idea of the "Global Jihad". Bin Ladin believed that Jihad out of the Muslim world would provide an opportunity to achieve rapid victory in the Muslim world, as well. The image of the opposite-hostile force is created by the Islamic extremists' ideologues in their fatwas, statements and comments, substantiating the necessity and effectiveness of the "Near and Far Enemy" strategy.

In the 1990s, Islamic extremists gave preference to the ideas of Bin Ladin, which resulted in the terrorist acts against the USA on September 11, 2001.

The global fight against terrorism which was launched following the mentioned violent acts and pressures against "al-Qaeda", further escalated the conflicts among Islamic extremists. The representatives of the new generation of Islamic extremists came up with criticism of the "al-Qaeda" leadership for taking such rash actions against the USA. While, "al-Qaeda", which had turned into a network structure after the events of the 9/11 and the Islamic structures that functioned under its auspices, felt it necessary, at that stage, to preserve what they had and concentrate on Jihad in the Muslim world giving priority to the struggle against the "Near Enemy".

These tactics found their ideological grounds in the works of certain popular ideologists of Islamic extremism in the first decade of the 21st century. The Struggle against the "Near Enemy" was retained in the future tactic priorities of the "al-Qaeda", as well. Revolutionary processes related to the Arab Spring, which affected the Muslim world at the start of the second decade of the 21st century, offered favourable grounds for its realization.

In the current developments in the Middle East, the fight tactics against both the "Near and Far Enemies" can be traced in the strategic and tactical operations of "al-Qaeda" and other Islamic extremist organizations, like "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) that has separated from "al-Qaeda" in 2013.

Starting from June 29, 2014, when ISIS announced itself an "Islamic State" presented its objectives openly: the establishment of a state for all Muslims in certain regions of Syria and Iraq, the enhancement of the Jihad war on the territories of Syria and Iraq under their control, as well as channelling the accumulated religious, ideological and military potential to the neighbouring Muslim, and non-Muslim countries, equally applying fight tactics against the "Near and Far Enemies" both in Muslim countries and in the West (terrorist attacks in western countries).

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