Russia in the Fight Against Islamist Groups

Revitalization of radical Islamist groups across the world forces Russian leadership to take appropriate measures to counter this threat to both national and international security.

Today, the so-called Islamic State, also known as ISIS, claims the role of the vanguard of the international terrorism. This group, which initially was a cell of al-Qaeda in Iraq, in a relatively short time managed to unite dozens of gangs fighting against central governments in Iraq and Syria. For a long time, the United States and its allies tried not to notice the growth of this new terrorist monster, hoping that it would help them to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

As a result, today IS controls large territories and population (up to 10-12 million) of Syria and Iraq, where it creates its own state structures, calling them Islamic Caliphate. For the first time in modern history, the radical Islamists have got the opportunity to control vast territories, large cities (Mosul, Tikrit), natural resources (oil, gas, water), to have a hundred thousand army, heavy weapons and military equipment, including ballistic missiles and warplanes. IS receives financial, material and military support through Salafi/Wahhabi funds and non-governmental organizations of the Gulf. Taxation of the controlled territories, robberies of banks, museums and individuals, drug and human trafficking, oil and arms smuggling, racketeering on borders, etc. provide IS with additional income. IS annual income has already exceeded $ 10 billion.

IS leaders do not conceal their aggressive views and aspirations, they threaten to further expand the boundaries of the Caliphate to Arab and other countries, including Central Asia and the Caucasus. They have already managed to establish communication with the Islamists in Libya, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey and other countries. All over the world IS emissaries recruit volunteers and mercenaries for jihad. The Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia recently stated that up to 1700 Russian citizens fight on the side of IS. An even greater number (more than ten thousand people, according to estimates) of jihadists flooded the region from Europe, the United States, Asian countries. These militants and their families pose a potential threat not only to Syria and Iraq, but, above all, to the countries from which they arrived. Jihadists, who survived in battles, can return to their countries with developed radical views and combat experience, to carry out attacks and recruit into their ranks more and more partisans. Based on the above-mentioned, Russian leadership is carrying out a series of active and preventive measures to combat this "plague of the 21st century".

As far as foreign policy is concerned, in the beginning of February 2015 Russia managed to initiate the adoption of the UNSC resolution which condemns "any participation in direct or indirect trade, in particular, in oil and refined oil products, modular refineries and related materials with IS or other entities associated with Al-Qaeda."

Russia provides humanitarian aid to Syrian and Iraqi refugees on the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as military-technical assistance to the central Iraqi authorities. Moscow continues to make efforts to organize communication...
between representatives of government of Bashar Al-Assad and the opposition to hold the next round of Geneva-3 talks. It is quite clear that the joint efforts of Damascus, opposition and Kurdish militia against IS terrorists in Syria could become a turning point in the development of the situation in the country and create conditions necessary to end the fratricidal civil war.

Russia calls for more active involvement of Iran in the actions against IS, financial monitoring of IS sponsors, tighter control of Syrian and Iraqi borders by Turkey and the Gulf monarchies. External isolation (blockade) could significantly limit mobilization and combat capacities of IS.

Today it becomes increasingly clear that IS cannot be defeated only by missile and bombing attacks and uncoordinated actions of Kurdish peshmerga and Shia militia. It requires coordinated efforts of all states and international organizations interested in the international stability. Russia supports further international cooperation in the fight against IS under the auspices of the United Nations and within the framework of the international law. At the same time, Moscow does not reject bilateral collaboration in this field. This has been proved by the participation of the Director of FSB of the Russian Federation in the summit against violent extremism, organized by the US State Department.

Russia is realistic about the threat of the spread of ideas of radical Islam and expansion of IS supporters from Afghanistan to countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The fact that Islamists skilfully use the loss of confidence in the authorities of the local population, high levels of corruption, the ideological vacuum, social and economic difficulties such as unemployment, poverty, etc. is taken into account. Russia plans to strengthen Central Asian states with the help of integration within the Eurasian cooperation, to establish closer relations with them in various fields, including the regional security.

As part of preventive steps, Russia has included Jabhat al-Nusra and IS in the list of outlawed organizations considered to be terrorist, it tightens migration and passport control, detects recruiters and potential jihadists, special attention is paid to those returning from Syria and Iraq, to work with their families and relatives. Necessary amendments are made to Russian legislation, mechanisms of their implementation are developed. Russian authorities rely on the help by their traditional religions, above all, orthodox Muslims, in unmasking of extremist ideology of radical Islamists.

Thus, Russia continues to play an important role in the fight against terrorists’ attempts to further spread extremism and terrorism, in particular, radical or politicized Islam. There is a certain degree of confidence that the measures taken by Russian authorities and society will help to locate this "cancer" of our time and prevent its further growth.

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