Caliph is Dead, What's Next?

It has repeatedly been reported earlier that the leader of the Islamic State Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was wounded and even killed. But this information was subsequently denied and the caliph appeared to be "very much alive". At this time a number of Iraqi and world media again reported that al-Baghdadi died from wounds sustained a result of the US Air Force air strike on a column of Islamist vehicles near the Iraqi-Syrian border. The seriously wounded al-Baghdadi was allegedly taken to the capital of the Islamist caliphate, Ar-Raqqah, where he died shortly thereafter. Three of his comrades-in-arms were also seriously injured. Although the credibility of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi death of is not officially confirmed at this time, it is possible to say with some confidence that such an event quite possibly could have happened. An indirect confirmation of this news is the report that al-Baghdadi supporters gathered in the Iraqi city of Mosul on April 23, 2015, which is under the control of the Islamists, and took an oath of loyalty to the new caliph Abu Ala al-Afri (his real name is Abdul Rahman Mustafa al-Qardashi).

It is reported that the new leader was a former physics teacher, at one time he worked as a driver and in addition is very fond of theology. Starting in the 90s of the last century he led active propaganda activities aimed at inciting extremist, radical Islamist sentiment in Iraqi society; he is a prominent representative of Takfiri, a radical trend in Islam, whose supporters feel entitled to inflict capital punishment to everyone who is deemed unfaithful or to be a poor believer. They kill atheists, Christians, Yazidis, Shia Muslims and even sometimes Sunnis become their victims because they are suspected of having "deviated from the true faith". It is a well-known fact that al-Afri, like the previous Caliph, was in the Iraqi cell of "al-Qaeda" and was also arrested by the US administration but released.

Western politicians and media regard the killing of al-Afri as a great accomplishment of the military operations that are carried out by the US and its allies against the radical Islamist group the Islamic State (ISIS) and carried out on the Syrian and Iraqi territories of the Islamic caliphate. Islamist themselves and many experts do not agree. The death of one man, even if he was the leader of the Islamic State, will not bring any major changes in the strategy and tactics of the Islamists and the political and military balance of forces in Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, seeing as he was killed in the line of duty, the vast majority of al-Baghdadi's supporters believe that he was a victim of the "infidels" and they will "avenge" his death. As for finding an equal ranking replacement for al-Baghdadi, the Islamic caliphate does not lack a reserve of personnel. Judging by the brief milestones of the biography of the new Caliph, al-Afri, he is not inferior to al-Baghdadi. Hundreds of other radical Islamists with higher education, experience in the underground of "al-Qaeda" and participation of militant operations in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan and other "hot spots" are ready to proceed with the work of their caliph and to head it, if necessary.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that air strikes by the Air Force coalition, Kurdish militia forces "Peshmerga" and the Iraqi Shiite militia against the backdrop of the loss of combat capability of the Iraqi regular army alone cannot defeat the Islamic State. Created by Riyadh and Doha with the tacit approval of Washington and its allies, the new terrorist monster as represented by the Islamic State (IS) was intended to fight against the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and to curb Iran's influence in the region. The founders of ISIS, seemingly, didn't think of the possible negative consequences of encouraging forces of radical Islam that soon turned into the vanguard of international terrorism. Even now when Islamists carry out brutal demonstrative executions, including citizens of Western countries, organise new terrorist attacks around the world, destroying historical and cultural monuments and performing acts akin to medieval obscurantism, serious and coordinated action against them is not taken. The
international coalition’s actions that are hastily hammered together by Washington are ineffective and are more similar to pretending of fighting against ISIS than to really fighting. Allegedly, as a result of aerial strikes of the Air Force coalition several thousands of Islamists fighters were killed but at the same time tens of thousands of jihadists arrive to the area of military operations, including from the countries that are bombing the Islamic State. The drawbacks of an “air war” is obvious: air raids killed hundreds of civilians, thousands are maimed, infrastructure and residential quarters are destroyed. The command of the coalition reports from time to time on the destruction of oil and gas facilities which are under the control of the Islamic caliphate, but at the same time forgets to report that engineers, technicians and civilians work at these facilities and that militants only carry out security functions. The population of the Arab-Sunni provinces of Iraq and Syria that are under the control of the Islamic caliphate sees only murderers and aggressors with bombs and rockets instead of “liberators”.

Even Western experts admit that waging war against the Islamic state this way can be maintained for several years but its result is unpredictable. Would it be possible to drive this terrorist "genie" in the bottle from which it was let out by sponsors of jihad?

Fighting against ISIS should be conducted in a coordinated manner, with the entire international community, preferably under the auspices of the UN at full-scale: ideological, political, advocacy, socio-economic, trade, economic, cultural, theological, military, etc. Today it is possible to ascertain that ISIS is winning the ideological struggle, they are supported by not only the population of the occupied territories of Iraq and Syria but also millions of supporters around the world. The director of the FBI acknowledges that ISIS emissary recruiters successfully operate in 50 states of the USA, no less intensively and successfully ISIS hires citizens in the ranks of the Middle East, Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, the CIS, Russia. Thus, mobilised resources of the Islamic caliphate are almost inexhaustible today.

It is difficult to beat the Islamists, without depriving them also of material, financial, military and other support from abroad. Despite the UN Security Council resolution, the caliphate continues illegal trade in oil, oil products, museum artefacts, carries out other trade and economic activity in the region and in the world market, receives significant financial contributions from various non-governmental organizations and foundations of the Gulf States, buys new weapons and ammunition.

In addition to the direct support and assistance from their sponsors and ideological allies, ISIS uses captured arms and military equipment supplied earlier by foreign states to Iraq and Syria, and also arms from the US trained opposition Free Syrian Army units in Jordan and Turkey that are moving from time to time in an organized manner to the side of ISIS. Just recently the new Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al-Abadi, once again turned to Washington for urgent military assistance but there is no guarantee that the new and massive supply of arms and military equipment will not fall into the hands of the Islamists.

Of course involving Iran and Bashar al-Assad's government in the international coalition for fight against ISIS could strengthen the general anti-Islamist front considerably. But the US administration, its Western partners, the rulers of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf monarchies, Jordan and Turkey are categorically against such an option. For many of them ISIS is still a much lesser evil than the powers to be in Damascus and Tehran.

Assessing the situation today around the Islamic caliphate we can say that even the death of the caliph in no way weakens this politico-military group. It is also important to mention that along with the continuing process of Islamification of a number of the states because of objective demographic and migratory processes, radical or politicised Islam, which purpose is seizing power in separate countries and regions, propagates. As in the time of fascism in Europe, radical Islam as a political movement, a military force and as a new global threat to mankind has been underestimated. This is especially noticeable now on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the victory over Nazism. Because as you know the threat of fascism for the civilised world was as if in the background at the time. The West flirted for a long time with Hitler and attempted to send fascist hordes to the East by force of the Munich Agreement. For some Western politicians the USSR was more evil than fascism in Germany, Italy, Spain and some other European countries. Only the threat of world domination of fascism made London and Washington join the anti-Hitler coalition with the Soviet Union.

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