In 2014 radical Islamists in the Middle East announced creation of the structure which they called “the Islamic State” (ISIS). This meant the formation of a self-proclaimed caliphate. In fact, it has been perceived by the international opinion as a quasi-state, which is governed by norms and rules derived from the Koran. For the modern world, it soon became clear that radical Islamic terrorism entered a new and unprecedented phase.

At present, the threat of ISIS affects not only the territory of Iraq and Syria, but also the international order and security as well. It is evidenced by ISIS-inspired attacks conducted in Europe and Australia. The Islamic State is a challenge for the international community, which regardless of its divisions and obvious political differences should lead to the formation of a coalition that could effectively counteract this peril.

ISIS is a widely discussed topic in the press, both Polish and foreign. There have already been expert assessments carried out by non-governmental organizations and first research studies.

One of the first studies on ISIS that appeared on the publishing market in Poland in 2015 was Benjamin Hall’s monograph.

The author of the reviewed monograph has been reporting and examining the conflicts in the Middle East for six years now. He has focused his observations on the revolutionary processes that occur in this part of the world, which are intended to bring about the desired freedom. Nevertheless, in many cases they lead to the power seizure by individuals or organizations implementing draconian methods of governing.
The Benjamin Hall’s work consists of 29 chapters analyzing the creation, development and activity of ISIS structures organized in a chronological-thematic layout. The applied narration language is accessible to any prospective reader, even to one who is not passionate about politics and military.

The author reasonably argues that the ISIS brief history is not only a picture of the jihadist activities in Syria, Iraq and in the Middle East, but it is also a depiction of a whole generation of communities living in the course of constant revolutionary transformations; a description of the whole region, which is saturated with armed conflicts; a warning to the entire world, which is currently facing the biggest challenge of terrorism. In the words of the author of the monograph, ISIS is “an unwanted child” of the so-called “Arab Spring”.

In his monograph, Hall examines the multifaceted reasons that enabled the ISIS creation. He rightly notes that the genesis of its development was influenced by the wrong policy of the international community, mainly of the United States. According to the writer, the Obama administration’s policy after the US Army withdrawal from Iraq and pushing the Al-Qaeda into defense in the Middle East led to the creation of space for ISIS. Analogously, Hall also points to the US President Barack Obama administration’s unstable policies against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, which in a long-term perspective may aggravate the Middle East crisis. Furthermore, the author emphasizes emerging differences between the Obama’s and his high-ranking administration functionaries` policies towards ISIS. Moreover, the presented US policy towards ISIS is based on the Obama administration’s relations with the governments of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Iran and Qatar.

In the monograph, Hall a lot of space devotes to the role and influence of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who has created himself the number one in the ISIS structures – he proclaimed himself “the leader of all Muslims” and "the successor to the prophet Muhammad". In this respect, the ISIS ideology became helpful because it is rooted in the traditional Islam. Nevertheless, the actions carried out by the ISIS militants have often nothing in common with their faith. ISIS radicals postulate a return to the original sources of Islam; the Wahhabism movement is especially close for them. Due to popularity of slogans proclaimed by the ISIS terrorists, the radical Islam has entered a new path in the XXI century and still attracts numerous followers.

Benjamin Hall performs an in-depth analysis of the ISIS military structure paying attention to the methods and solutions that have not been applied by any other Islamic groups. The author points to: the high mobility of ISIS armed troops, their tactics, the way of command and the national structure. At the same time, he does not hide that the attitude of the radical militants under the black flag stems from their beliefs in the Islamic revolution and from the confidence that the jihad will soon embrace the entire world. According to the author of this monograph, the ISIS military power is the result of its substantial financial resources that distinguish it from other terrorist organizations, e.g. Al-Qaeda.
While reading the monograph, a prospective reader can learn about appalling atrocities committed by the ISIS terrorists against civilians living in areas under their provisional jurisdiction. Hall shows, on one hand, support for ISIS from several social classes in Syria and Iraq that are engulfed in the ideology of radical Islam, and on the other hand, he describes the population, which is in opposition to ISIS. As evidenced by the examples presented in the monograph, the Islamic State has no mercy for its opponents.

Hall depicts horrifying fate of Christians due to the deep hatred of the ISIS terrorists. By doing so, the writer simultaneously illustrates that the ISIS` activities have also the characteristics of a clash with Western civilization, as well as a conflict with different values and lifestyles; it might be described as “a clash of civilizations”.

The ISIS terrorists are merciless towards women as well – females are treated as an object, thanks to which there will be the world’s new generation of jihadists.

While analyzing the ISIS` activity from the 2015 perspective, Hall estimates that its military power will begin to wane in the future. It will be possible only in the case of an effective international policy against ISIS, which should consist in: hitting its financial background, conducting military campaigns, stopping a foreign fighter influx, providing humanitarian aid and fighting against the radical Islamic ideology. As stated by Hall, other pivotal factors that determine whether the situation in the region is stable, are overthrowing President Bashar al-Assad and close cooperation with Arab countries in the Middle East.

From the perspective of the past year the assessments made by Hall in 2015 seem to be legitimate. Since 2014, the Iraqi army has changed, it has not been defeated for a long time now. A gradual process of recovering previously occupied by ISIS areas is still in progress. There are reasons for the creation of a broader coalition against ISIS.

The battle with ISIS is not only acting against Islamic extremism by fighting with its ideology and political visions. In the case of fighting with ISIS, it is a fight with a standard enemy operating in the military sense that has thousands of militants and adequate logistic support.

The Hall main thesis, which is fully legitimate, appearing in his monograph is as follows: currently, ISIS is not a regional problem – it is a threat on a global scale.

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BIOGRAFICAL NOTE

Arkadiusz MACHNIAK, PhD, Military Counterintelligence Service, the author of nearly thirty scientific publications in the form of articles and reviews concerning the history of intelligence and counter-intelligence. Those publications pertain to civilian and military security services during the Polish People’s Republic period as well. Additionally,
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