Aleksandar GAJIĆ (1)
Institute of European Studies, Belgrade
Ljubiša DESPOTOVIĆ (2)
Institute of Political Studies, Belgrade

DIGITAL CALIPHATE: ISLAMIC STATE, MODERNITY AND TECHNOLOGY

Abstract:	*This paper observes some of the most distinguished characteristics of the Islamic State related to the use of modern technology and tries to drawn some important conclusions between the terrorist's quasi state, modernity and technology. After the examination of the functioning of IS at the peak of its powers between 2014 and 2017, the analysis turns to terrorists' various online activities. All of them are showing the Islamic State's reliance on modern technology, especially IT, as one of the most important aspects of its terrorist activities that greatly contributed not only to the effectiveness, but to the essential definition of first modern terrorist quasi-state.*
	The second part of the paper deals with the Islamic State`s fully reliance on technology in its own legitimization (both among Islamist rivals and "infidels").
	The celebration and the fascination with modern technology as main IS characteristics make it different from other Islamist terrorist groups, and trying to establish relations between modernity and terrorism based on religious fundamentalism. The paper also tries to find answers to the question whether IS's ultra-modern techno approach is responsible for its transformation from a classical fundamentalist terrorist group into some kind of modern political ideology and a social movement with totalitarian and murderous characteristics.
Keywords:	**Islamic State; terrorism; technology; modernity; Internet**
Contact details of the authors:	E-mail: (1) romero@eunet.rs (2) despotlj@stcable.net
Institutional affiliation of the authors:	**(1) Institute of European Studies, Belgrade, Serbia** **(2) Institute of Political Studies, Belgrade, Serbia**
Institutions address:	(1) Trg Nikole Pašica 11, 11 000 Belgrade, Serbia Phone: 381 11 339 8891, e-mail: office@ies.rs (2) Svetozara Markovića 36, 11 000 Belgrade Serbia, Phone: 381 11 3349 204, e-mail: ipsbgd@eunet.rs

Islamic State (IS)/Daesh (الدولة الاسلامية في العراق والشام / ad-Dawlat al-Islāmiyya fī'l-'Irāq wa'sh-Shām), also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has suffered a series of heavy defeats in last three years. After the loss of control of its most populated cities, Mosul in July 2017 and Raqqa (IS capital) in October 2017, strongest and worst Islamist terrorist movement in modern history continue to lose territory it gained since 2013 to its various military rivals in both Iraq and Syria. At the end of 2019, terrorist controlled less than two percent of territory they had only three years ago[1]. Their so called provinces elsewhere have also been annihilated or in constant decline: western sponsored militia groups drove IS forces in Libya from Sirte south to the desert; other IS affiliates (like in Sinai) kept with low level insurgency that shows little dynamism and success against government forces. While some of IS groups survived and even might relocate and restart their activities, today's situation represent stark contrast to 2014 or 2015 when Islamic State expanded not only in Iraq and Syria but throughout the whole Near East region, attracting many foreign fighters and marketing itself as a winner that successfully established real Islamic state with complete Islamic governance. Today, Islamic Caliphate again exists only as idea while its representatives seem to be pathetic proponents of a lost cause.

The terrorists are well aware of their own pitiful position. Hence, their leaders are trying to keep fighting rather than surrender, seeking every opportunity to establish any new territorial control beyond Iraq and Syria while preserving some of its previous position in region they once controlled. Some of their positions are still unharmed: IS group still maintains its underground network in Turkey and a numerous terrorist cells in Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. IS headquarters will probe this countries for weakness, trying to use its own survived militants to conduct new attack and prove that it`s alive and operative. At the same time, the IS's leaders rhetoric has significantly changed and adapted to the new realities in last period: therefore, they dismiss the importance of territorial control in compare with preserving their extremist ideas, most of all concept of a Caliphate as ideal state of Muslim believers. It all shows that terrorist headquarter sees their ideas, not their territory as the main source of strength of their movement[2].

In other words - Islamic State is in ropes, yet it may make a comeback similar to its predecessors who survived the breakup of Islamist's uprising in Iraq in late 2000's. After losing control of almost all territory, terrorist might go underground, disrupt politics and foster sectarianism and - when they estimate that the opportunities are favorable - start a new, more successful insurgency. Their

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[1] Timeline, *The Rise, Spread and Fall of Islamic State*, Wilson Center, October, No. 28, 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state, (13.01.2021)

[2] Jorge Lasmar, Guilherme Damasceno Fonseca, *Adapting for Survival: Islamic State Shifting Strategies*, "Carta Inter.", Belo Horizonte, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2019, pp. 103-126

current activities of regional and international terrorism, already maintained at a high level, will certainly continue an even grow in the near future. Despite military defeat, one must be clear that many ideas and methods that Islamic State propagated and conducted are very dangerous and may be copied and exploited in near future either by its surviving members or successor Islamist organizations. Therefore, some of most distinguished characteristics of Islamic State at height of its powers in period between 2014 and 2016 must be reconsidered once again and important conclusions must be drawn.

Islamic State – terrorism organized as a state

Crucial difference between Islamic State and all other terrorist groups and entities of present times is quite obvious: however barbaric and brutal, Islamic State/Daesh at its peak of power and territorial expansion was the state in the full sense of that word. Formally looking, it had all the necessary attributes of any state: territory (slightly larger than UK, covering large parts of modern Iraq and Syria), population (between 6 and 8 million inhabitants) and its own governance with all institutional and organizational capacities to effectively rule the territory[1].

Islamic state had its *de facto* capital in Raqqa from 2013 to late 2017. It had government headed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, self proclaimed Caliph Ibrahim. Baghdadi had two deputies, Abu Muslim al-Turkmani (for Iraq) and Abu Ali al-Anbari (for Syria), both ethnic Turkmen, who died in combats[2]. The government consisted of cabinet of senior leaders, beneath which existed numerous councils on finance, military, legal matters, security, leadership, foreign fighter's assistance, information and so on. On the local level, IS governance relied on local governors[3]. *Shura* council was formed with aim to ensure that all decisions of state representatives, both central and local, are complied with the Islamic State's interpretation of Sharia Law. Islamic state also had its own secret service named Emni ("trust", "security" in Arabic), some kind of combination of internal police force, classic intelligence agency and external operations coordinator[4].

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[1] George Fawaz, *ISIS: A History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2016; Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of Islamic State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2008, https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Understanding-Islamism.pdf, (27.12.2021)

[2] Richard Barrett, *The Islamic State,* Soufan Group, November 2014, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf, (27.12.2020)

[3] *Ibidem*

[4] Anne Speckhard, Ahmet Yayla, *The ISIS Emni: Origins and Inner Workings of ISIS's Intelligence Apparatus*, *"*Perspectives on Terrorism*"*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Center for Terrorism and Security Studies, Leiden Univesity, Leiden, 2017, https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2017/issue-1/0220171-the-isis-emni-the-origins-and-inner-workings-of-isis's-intelligence-apparatus.pdf, (28.12.2020)

It was established in 2014 under the command of Abu Mohammad at-Adnani, second most senior commander of IS after its leader Baghdadi. Emni`s main activities included: collecting intelligence for battles in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere; gathering intelligence about everyone who lives inside the "Islamic State"; gathering detailed intelligence about areas that ISIS intends to conquer; studying new recruits to the group, especially those that appear without "referrals"; gathering and analyzing intelligence about possible attacks against IS; spreading ISIS propaganda and fear inside IS and globally, beyond its own borders; recruiting and deploying foreign fighters for intelligence gathering and attacks in their home countries; feeding ISIS media centers about ISIS-inspired and ISIS-directed external attacks; sending and deploying spies and recruiters in Turkey and in other countries, including spying upon the Syrian refugees who are fleeing the violence; monitoring ISIS's logistical support operations inside Turkey to ensure that there are no leaks or interruptions and interacting with agents from other rival terrorist groups and states, including those from Assad's intelligence[1].

Islamic State had its own budged financed from different sources and by different activities. Their five primary sources of revenue were: proceeds from the occupation of parts of Syrian and Iraq territory (including control of their banks, petroleum production in captured oilfields, taxation, sales of antiques and artifacts, extortion and robbery of occupied economic assets), kidnapping for ransom, drug trade, agriculture, fundraising and donations of friendly Muslim states (mostly from Golf) and other material aid provided by their foreign supporters. Majority of IS budget came from oil trade. When it controlled about 300 oil fields in Iraq and about the 60% of Syrian oil productivity, IS was able to earn about 2.5 million of dollars per day by selling around 50-60 barrels of oil through its secret smugglers network in neighbor countries, mostly through Turkey. Almost 20% of revenue was gained through kidnapping and extortion, while only 5% came from foreign sponsors. Islamic state leaders even tried to create and promote their own modern gold dinar by minting gold, silver and copper coins, but without much success[2]. They modeled their dinars by coping coinage used in Umayyad Caliphate during the earliest days of Islam in Mesopotamia, in mid and late 7th Century.

Islamic state had significant military forces. Their estimated size were between few tens of thousands up to 200 000, including at least 25 000 foreign

[1] *Ibidem*

[2] Atwan Bari Adbdel, *Islamic State: Digital Caliphate*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, p. 132; Bassem Mroue, *Breakdown Of the Oil Assets ISIS Now Controls*, Bussines Insider, 25.09.2014 https://www.businessinsider.com/breakdown-of-the-oil-assets-ISIS-controls-2014-9#ixzz3HSuNAb7C (27.12.2020); Howard Russel, *How ISIS funds Terrror through Black Market Antiquities Trade*, Usni News, https://news.usni.org/2014/10/27/ISIS-funds-terror-black-market-antiquities-trade, (27.12.2020); Martin Chulov, *ISIS to mint own Islamic dinar coins in gold, silver and copper*, "The Guardian", 14.11.2014 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/14/isis-gold-silver-copper-islamic-dinar-coins, (27.12.2020)

fighters from all around the world[1]. All combatants received food, housing and petrol from their superiors, but only those who were natives from either Syria or Iraq received salaries, mostly in US dollars. IS`s fighters monthly salary was around 400 US dollars with an addition of 50 dollars for each of terrorist's wives[2]. Higher ranks of IS military consisted mostly of former officers of Saddam's Hussein Republican Guard. IS troops were mostly armed with captured weapons from both Iraq military arsenal and weapons from regime and opposition forces involved in Syrian civil war. Beside conventional weapons, IS army also used non-conventional weapons such as car bombs, improvised explosive devices, commercial available drones, suicide bombers and even chemical weapons.

Islamic State/Daesh has become famous for extensive and very effective propaganda activites by using both traditonal and social media. At the peak of its powers, IS established media department with its branches otside the territory it controlled. In mid 2014 it established IS main digital magazine named *Dabiq* and many of other similar magazines, such as *Konstantinyye* (in Turkish) and *Dar al Islam* (in French). Same department also created radio network named *Al Bayan* that promoted IS activites in Near East on multiple languages, including English and Russian[3].

Terrorists skilfully used socal media for spreading their propaganda, particularly Twitter, Youtube and Facebook[4]. Their propagandist became well known for posting disturbing contents such as pubic executions (mostly beheading or burning alive) of prisoners or realising proffesional High Definition (HD) quality video materials that propagated the Islamic State`s main acheivements. IS has initiated a new kind of terrorism, using marketing and digital communication not only for spreading the terror and making it viral in world`s public opinion as earlier terrorists organization did, but for popularizing the terror itself and making

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[1] Patrick Cockburn, *Middle East war with ISIS islamic militants hav army have army of 200000 claims Kurdish leader*, "The Independent", 16 November 2014, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/war-with-isis-islamic-militants-have-army-of-200000-claims-kurdish-leader-9863418.html, (27.12.2020)

[2] Jessica Hartogs, *ISIS cut fighters sallaries due to „exceptional circumstances",* CNBC, Jaunary 20, 2016, https://www.cnbc.com/2016/01/20/isis-cuts-fighters-salaries-due-to-exceptional-circumstances.html, (28.12.2020)

[3] Tim Jacoby, *Islam and the Islamic State`s Magazine Dabiq,* in "Cambride Core", Cambridge University Press, p. 32-54; *Islam and the Islamic State's Magazine, Dabiq*; *Jihadists Release First Issue of pro-IS French Magazine "Dar al-Islam",* "Intelligence Group", 22 December 2014, https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Periodicals/jihadists-release-first-issue-of-pro-is-french-magazine-dar-al-islam.html, (28.12.2020); Harleen Gambhir, *The Virtual Caliphate: ISIS`s Information Warfare,* Institute for the Study of War, Washington DC, December 2016, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20The%20Virtual%20Caliphate%20Gambhir%202016.pdf, (28.12.2020)

[4] Karen Greenberg, *Counter-radicalization via Internet*, "Annals of the American Academy", AAPSS, 668, University of Pennsylvania, November 2016, pp. 166

it desirable and imitable. Islamic State can be considered as founder of „ad-terrorism" (advertising terrorism)[1].

With its cruelty and extremism, Islamic State can hardly be compared with subtlety of any medieval Muslim states. In its devastating march in which it neither saves Muslim sanctuaries but leaves dust and ash behind, Islamic State can be compared with modern totalitarian regimes of 20th Century. Actually, as a John Gray observes in his own analysis[2]. Islamic State as an organizational form more resembles to a modern company or postmodern state than any medieval creation. Islamic State has almost reached highest standards in organizational sense of word that cannot be compared with any other Islamist fundamentalist movement or group. It is terrorism embodied in organizational form of the state. IS/Daesh was successful in what many previous fundamentalist movements failed to achieve – in the institutionalization of the Caliphate, creating such a close connection between territoriality and identity not in traditional, pre-modern but in a typically modern and even postmodern way. Islamic State belongs to a new type of Islamic fundamentalism which, unlike its precursors, completely grows out of modern tensions and modernization itself and only later turns against it while ideologically, formally propagating return to the original, earliest Islam with which it has almost no true connections. It is oriented to completely conquer public and political sphere by choosing no means for achievement of proclaimed goals.

This fundamentalism is new, revolutionary and even modern in both its methods and ends: therefore, it rejects most of previous traditions and established orthodoxy from the position of self-chosen Puritanism and takes on active social and political stand. If in its earlier forms Islamic fundamentalism took religion as a final goal, the new one used it as a mean of mobilization and homogenization, all for the sake of taking the power and changing the historical course of politically and ideologically controlled societies. Nothing shows Islamic State's true nature better than its relation to modern technologies.

Digital Caliphate and its online activities

Today, both academic and intelligence experts recognized IS reliance on modern technology, especially IT, as one of the most important aspects of its terrorist activities that greatly contributed not only to the effectiveness, but to the essential definition of first modern terrorist quasi-state. From recruitment of new volunteers, spreading their horrible propaganda that branded fear and death as its marketing product to direction of simultaneous terrorist activities at great distances

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[1] Nicoleta Annemarie Munteanu, *2017 – Emergence/Decline of Ad-terrorism Phenomenon*, "Studia Securitatis" No. 2/2018, pp. 48-49: advertising terrorism – actual and final message of advertizing process and activity defined by the notion of terror over the civilian population and state organizations that facilitates the relationship between the advertiser and the consumer

[2] John Gray, *A point of view: ISIS and what it means to be modern*, BBC News, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-28246732, (28.12.2020)

apart and consolidating connections with other radical Islamist groups and individual, Islamic State's cyber jihadists have skillfully used Internet and all other digital communications showing great cunningness and inventiveness. "Terrorist's use of social media and the Internet to pursue their ideological aims is well documented. This includes terrorist groups such as IS who are using the Internet and social media sites, as a tool for propaganda via websites, sharing information, data mining, fundraising, communication, and recruitment[1], however it means terrorists, using the Internet for psychological warfare, publicity, propaganda, fundraising, recruitment, networking, sharing information and planning[2]. Recruiters therefore may use more interactive Internet technology[3] to go through and use online chat rooms and cyber cafes[4], therefore looking possibly for enlisting support from vulnerable people. Marc Sageman states that this form of interaction and chat rooms helps build ideological relationships and are a key tool in radicalizing young people[5]."[6] In most situations they have showed ability to competently avoid all threats from Russian, Iranian and Western intelligence agencies and their military forces. For instance, in early 2015 cyber terrorist hacked Pentagon`s Central Command (Cent Com) data, took over its Twitter and YouTube accounts, and disseminated confidential information, including the names and addresses of US military personal in Near East[7].

Of course, Islamic State is not the first terrorist organization that used modern technology to spread fear and its propaganda. Non-Islamic terrorist precursors, such as 19th Century anarchists promoted so called "propaganda of the deed" (which, in fact, means violence as symbolic action to make their point and to inspire followers). In late 1960`s and early 1970`s modern terrorist conducted their operation by greatly taking in consideration that they are broadcasted by media. Some examples of early attacks specifically intended as made-for-television events include the September 1972 kidnapping and murder of Israeli athletes at the

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[1] Maura Conway, *What is cyberterrorism? The story so far,* "Journal of Information Warfare", 2(2), 2003, pp.33–42; Gabriel Weimann, *Special Report 119*, US Institute of peace, http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr119.htm, (28.12.2020)

[2] Irwing Lachow, Cortney Richardson, *Terrorist use of the internet: the real story*, "JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly", No. 45, 2007, pp. 100 –103

[3] Evan Kohlmann, *Al Qaida's MySpace: terrorists recruitment on the internet*, „CTC Sentinel", No. 1-2, 2008; Evan Kohlmann, *The real online terrorist threat*, "Foreign Affairs", 85(5), 2006, pp. 115–124

[4] Steven Furnel, Matthew Warren, *Computer hacking and cyber terrorism: the real threats in the new millennium*, "Computers and Security", No. 18(1), 1999, pp. 28–34

[5] Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008

[6] Imran Awan, *Cyber Extremism: ISIS and the Power of Social Media*, "Social Science and Public Policy", No. 54, Springer, 2017, pp. 140-141

[7] David Usborne, *US Central Command Hacked by Islamic State Supporters: US military Twitter feed publishes personal information of senior officers*, in "Independent", January 12, 2015, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-central-command-hacked-by-islamic-state-supporters-9973615.html, (29.12. 2020)

Munich Olympics and the December 1975 raid on OPEC headquarters in Vienna[1]. Soon, transformation of terrorist attack into media spectacle became a common goal of most modern terrorist organizations. Among them, Al Qaeda was first among terrorist Islamist network that sensed the potential of Internet to spread it ideology, share information and plans among its cells and to make correspondence between its followers. Their operatives were first to launch early cyber attack on websites of their enemies and to make online videos that have promoted terrorist violence. On contrary to their allies Talibans who smashed televisions in the 1990`s, Al Qaeda was first to use email to spread information; their operatives also used encripted communications to conduct major attacks like embassy bombings in Nairobi (1998) and were first to use websites to promote their goals (2000)[2]. Al Quaeda also started its own news service, „The Voice of Caliphate" in 2005, attempting to free itself from dependence of mainstream media[3].

At that time there was no easy way to dissemenata its content, so Al Quada cyber experts were forced to rely on mainstrem media such as *Al Jazeera* in their tryings to reach wider audience[4]. Lider of their Iraqi branch, Abu Musabal Zarkawi, pioneered tactics of recording succesfull attacks on US tropp in Iraq and public execution of Al Qaeda`s prisoners. "Think back to when terrorists made their first beheading video, in 2004. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), this grainy and gruesome piece of media likely shows Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (the leader of al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq, which later morphed into ISIS's predecessor) slaughtering Nick Berg, a radio entrepreneur from Pennsylvania. It was a laborious task to upload this file onto a jihadist Web forum. There was no YouTube or Twitter to allow instant sharing of videos or links to them. Facebook was still a dorm-room plaything. Few people had smart phones. Al-Qaeda used news organizations such as *Al Jazeera* to release its videos and statements. Today, however, affordable devices, fast networks, and abundant social-media accounts directly feed a spectacularly large potential audience of young people"[5].

Islamic State perfected the usage of modern informational technology. Their commander and fighters are both tech-savvy, versed in coding and conducting their actions online, from spreading propaganda and recruiting followers to planning battlefield strategy and sharing instructions with other terrorist units and cells. Most of their business in conducted online. Seeking new recruits for war in Syria and Iraq, IS has most likely developed its social media

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[1] Stewart Scott, *Keeping Terrorism in Perspective*, Stratford, March 22, 2012, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/keeping-terrorism-perspective, (29.12.2020)

[2] Bari Adbdel Atwan, *Islamic State: Digital Caliphate*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, pp. 21

[3] *Ibidem*

[4] Bari Adbdel Atwan, *Op.cit,* p. 22

[5] David Talbot, *Fighting ISIS online*, "MIT Technology Review", Vol. 118, No. 6, Cambridge MA, 2015, p. 75; Lucas Tomlinson, *ISIS has lost 98 percent of its territory*, *officials say*, Fox 32 Chicago, http://www.fox32chicago.com/news/dont-miss/isis-has-lost-98-percent-of-its-territory-officials-say, (28.12.2020)

strategy from Twitter messages that al-Sahabaab used for recruiting followers in Somalia few years before IS became significant force among terrorist groups[1]. They turned their efforts to the West both in Twitter[2], Facebook[3] and other platforms (Telegram, Tic Toc, Justpaste.it etc.)[4], on both open and dark web[5]. Soon, they realized that Internet has become central to Islamic State`s identity and recruitment strategy and went further to build a digital Caliphate. "Internally, they refer to themselves as the Islamic State's Electronic Army, a group whose efforts are dedicated to social media messaging on one hand and to hacking and security on the other[6]. Toward this end, in January 2014, ISIS announced the creation of the the the al-Battar Media battalion, a Twitter-based team designated to push ISIS propaganda and castigate ISIS opponents[7]. Its use of the Internet has given ISIS an an "outsized impact," one that dwarfs the usefulness the Internet had for al-Qaeda[8].

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[1] Ken Menkhaus, *Al-Shabaab and Social Media: A Double-Edged Sword*, "The Brown Journal of World Affairs", Vol. 20, No. 2 (spring/summer 2014), pp. 309-327

[2] In 2014 there were between 46,000 and 90,000 Twitter accounts that advocated for ISIS or were run by supporters of the group. In 2015, Twitter reported that it banned 125,000 and in 2016 it deleted 325 000 ISIS sympathetic accounts. Morgan Berger, *Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter*, The Brookings Institution, 03.05.2015; Twitter Inc., An *Update on Our Efforts to Combat Violent Extremism*, 18 Aug. 2016, blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/a/2016/an-update-on-our-efforts-to-combat-violent-extremism.html., (29.12.2020)

[3] Facebook profiles were mostly used to cyberstalk and to identify and locate both sympahtisers and enemies. IS cyber-experts developed their own closely guarded version of Facebook – Muslimbook. Bari Adbdel Atwan, *Islamic State: Digital Caliphate*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, p. 22

[4] "In Islamic countries, initial approaches were more often made via an intermediary or recruiter, but in the West, most said they had either direct messaged someone (via Twitter or Facebook) or had been contacted by a friend, relative, or acquaintance already inside IS's structures. After the initial contact has been made, anonymous smart phone instant messaging platforms such as Kik and Whats App are used to deepen the contact". Bari Adbdel Atwan, *Islamic State: Digital Caliphate*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, p. 31

[5] Dark Web is www content that use Intenet but requires specific sofware, configuration or acces authorisation to connect, communicate and conduct business anonymously without divulging identifying information, such as a user's location. It includes bot peer-to-peer networks and large networks such as Thor, Freenet and Rifle. Banished from suface web, IS cyber experts have constructed their own platform on dark web to increase ability to spread their message. Brendan Koerner, *Why ISIS is winning the social media war?* in Wired", Conde Nast, May 1st, 2017; Bari Adbdel Atwan, *Islamic State: Digital Caliphate*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, p. 34

[6] Jessica Stern, J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The state of terror*, NY: Ecco, New York, 2015, p. 173

[7] Alberto Fernandez, *Here to stay and growing combating ISIS propaganda networks,* Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 2015, p. 25

Qaeda[1]. As Federal bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Jim Comey explains, "Your grandfather's al-Qaeda, if you wanted to get propaganda, you had to go find it (…) Now all that's in your pocket"[2].

Cyber jihadists are directly communicating through social media with youth targeting those who are unsatisfied, vulnerable and isolated. They are skillfully pointing at anxieties and anger of their late adolescence angst and turning them into wannabe jihadists. That`s how they got most of their followers and recruits: large numbers of total foreign recruits (which are estimated between 27 and 31 thousands) were radicalized and recruited online[3]. "Today, Islamic State and its supporters use the Internet and social networking platforms in a brazen, overt way, marketing their 'brand' and disseminating their material via mainstream networks such as the Twitter. For those already in the territories of Islamic State, as much as for potential recruits on their laptops in a thousand bedrooms across the globe, concealing identity and location remains a priority. But there are myriad ways this can be done. Advice on the wide range of 'anonymity products' available online is freely available for those who seek it—much of this advice is produced by Islamic State recruiters for the would-be jihadist.

Those who fail to ensure their online anonymity were those we see detained and prosecuted (…). What the jihadists lack in the way of sophisticated weaponry they more than make up for with their online expertise. The range, quality, and availability of today's digital equipment, such as HD cameras, editing software, special effects libraries, and soon, enable Islamic State's professional media teams to produce the slick and gruesome high-definition videos and glossy magazines for which they have become infamous"[4]. Hence, IS cyber jihadists has taken their online propaganda one step further: in the past, production of propaganda material and its realize was centralized, under full control of terrorist leadership; today every jihadist or their follower is media outlet, reporting with tweets either from frontline or producing propaganda videos and images and posting it on social networks. Their output, with systematic efforts, can easily go viral and reach wider audience. "Islamic State has made a point of recruiting IT specialists and those with online marketing experience. As a result, its social media activists are well versed in the most effective brand-sharing strategies— except its brand is death. One very effective method is to hijack Twitter storms: the activists include high-trending hash tags in their own tweets, which then include a link to

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[1] J.M. Berger, Morgan Jonathon, *The ISIS Twitter census: Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter,* "Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with Islamic World", The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 5 March 2015, p. 4

[2] Karen Greenberg, *Counter-radicalization via Internet*, "Annals of the American Academy", AAPSS, 668, University of Pennsylvania, November 2016, p. 166

[3] The Soufan Group, *Foreign fighters: An updated assessment of the flow of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq*, New York, 2015, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015 /12/TSG_ForeignFighters Update3.pdf., (29.12.2020)

[4] Bari Adbdel Atwan, *Islamic State: Digital Caliphate*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, p. 12

Islamic State material hosted on an anonymous, un-policed platform such as Just-Paste it"[1]. Islamic State`s social media headquarters was placed in Al Hayat Media Centre that has produced many of terrorists propaganda material and tools. Their videos form part of wider series of so called "Mujatweets" that are HD produced and have powerful imagery. A lot of IS propaganda used motivational powerful themes which aim is to appeal to the youth and to recruit it for their propaganda machinery. "Furthermore, IS had released a free to download app which kept users updated with the latest news from the organization.

The app entitled "The Dawn of Glad Tidings" was promoted online and was available on the Google android system, before it was detected and suspended. The app once downloaded allowed users to see and monitor tweets, links, hash tags, images, videos and comments posted on their specific accounts. Most of the content was regulated by IS's social media arm[2,3]. IS`s cyber jihadists also used another powerful marketing tool to reach the global audience: segmentation. They have formed a net of 29 audiovisual producers: three of them are producing for global audience (*Al Furqan*, *Al Ittissam*, and *Al Hayat*), while others are creating regional cultural products adjusted to specific circumstances. "Islamic State realizes that it has to keep pace with the Internet generation in order to remain relevant. Thousands of Twitter accounts, RSS feeds (a form of automatic digital distribution) and messaging networks provide a constant stream of battle reports and news about life in Islamic State.

Thus they keep potential recruits and supporters engaged, counteract the propaganda efforts of the enemy, and share news (…)The relentless stream of information from the extremists is also used to build up the image of Islamic State as an emotionally attractive place where people belong, where everyone is a "brother" or "sister." A kind of slang— melding adaptations or shortenings of Islamic terms with street language—is evolving among the English-language fraternity on social media platforms in an attempt to create a "jihad cool". A jolly home life is portrayed via Instagram images, where fighters play with fluffy kittens, and jihadist poster girls proudly display the dishes they have created"[4].

Islamic State`s propaganda spoke the language of youth by referring to global popular culture and its various products such as movies, video games, advertizing commercials etc. For instance, they used references of popular video games such as "Call of Duty" for recruitment of radicalized followers, comparing real jihad combat with "first person shooters" video games. Western analysis of

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[1] *Ibidem*, pp. 14

[2] Jessica Chasmar, *ISIL using twitter app "Dawn" to keep Jjihadists updated,* Washington Times, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jun/18/isil-using-twitter-app-dawn-keep-jihadists-updated/, (29.12.2020)

[3] Imran Awan, *Cyber Extremism: ISIS and the Power of Social Media*, "Social Science and Public Policy", No. 54, Springer, 2017, p. 139

[4] Bari Adbdel Atwan, *Islamic State: Digital Caliphate*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, p. 20

IS`s propaganda products show that more than 15 percent of it was directly inspired by contemporary movies (The Matrix, Saw, American Sniper), videogames (Call of Duty, Mortal Combat, Gran Theft Auto) and music videos[1]. All this show that IS`s terrorists are using modern and postmodern cultural products for promotion of their non-modern values and goals.

Islamic State`s fascination with technology understood within relation between modernity and Islam

The main difference between Islamic State/Daesh and previous Islamist terrorist organizations is not just in using advanced 21st Century technology and mixing it with Salafist-jihadist interpretation of Islam that celebrates values of pre-modern way of life in the seventh century Near East. Clash between pre-modern religious worldview and highly sophisticated modern technology ceased to be a topic for debate among Islamists long time ago, when the full potentials of usage of modern technology for spreading their ideas was fully realized. Main difference lies in Islamic State`s fully reliance on technology in its own legitimization (both among Islamist rivals and "infidels"), even celebration and fascination with modern technology and some aspects of postmodern way of urban living in which usage of technology has become its own end and not just a mean to achieve other ends.

Many Muslim observers of IS/Daesh phenomena pointed at this difference: some of them, like the Beirut-based *Al Akhbar* newspaper even described IS as "cinematic caliphate" in order to emphasize its reliance on the modern cults of irrational violence and fascination with technology instead on real Islam tradition. The difference between IS and other Islamists propaganda primarily lies in IS celebration of modern technology and its use on a regular basis even for auto-tuning of ubiquitous traditional *nasheed* hymns with advanced computer software. "Like for futurists, the motorcar seems to have become a classic Freudian fetish"[2]. "Long rows of identical cars (preferably pickups and SUV's) occur in most footage and have become the trademark of the ISIS imagology. ISIS has looted tanks and hi-tech weapons from the Iraqi army and bought more material from the West. These machines are constantly paraded through the cities they have conquered (…)The high concentration of technology in videos is partly due to the fact that half of all jihadist films document battles and attacks"[3].

All of that is reason why some of researcher clearly distinguished IS's propaganda and approach to Islam from other Islamist groups: they have

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[1] Magdalena El Ghamari, *Pro-Daesh jihadist propaganda: A study of social media and video games*, "Security and Defence Quarterly", Vol.14 (1)/2017, pp.74-75

[2] Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: the Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism.*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008, p. 167

[3] Thorsten Botz Bottstein, *The "futuristic" Estethic of ISIS*, "Journal of Aesthetics&Culture", Vol. 9, Routledge, London, 2017, pp. 5-6

recognized many of IS's similarities with some other western progressive (avant-garde) modern political and esthetic movements that were popular at the beginning on the 20th century when the modernization was at its peak and the battle between modern ideologies began. These researchers have convincingly demonstrated the similarities between the worldviews of the members of the Islamic State and these avant-garde modern movements, most of all with modern; futurism and its esthetics of modern technologies. Reason for this similarities lies not just in the facts that Islamist radicals that were joining Islamic State are young people that are growing up with modern technological gadgets, exposed to global popular culture just as their coevals, but in much deeper sphere`s that shows that IS`s version of Islamism has transformed into some kind of destructive, retro-revolutionary modern ideology with potentials of urban social movement.

Like the followers of modern ideologies at the beginning of 20th century, contemporary IS`s terrorists are "primitives of new sensibilities". They are dissatisfied and disappointed with the effects of modernity on their traditional cultural background and its social consequences (so they tried to change them with some kind of utopian realization), but still fascinated with modern technological progress which they intend to use to achieve their own final goals. "A profound sense of crisis produces in both Futurism and ISIS Jihadism a nihilistic attitude toward the present state of society, a state that is supposed to be overcome through an exaltation of technology. As "primitives of a new sensibility", Futurists and ISIS decide to transform horror into elation, but elation so extreme that it suggests horror"[1]. At the same time, both ISIS and Futurism have moralistic concerns regarding the "danger of corruption by the materialism, mechanization, and hedonism" inherent in "Americanism and its degraded popular culture"[2]; both also share a disdain for the ruling class (…) Both ISIS and Futurism decide to exalt civilization by acclaiming urbanity and technology. Modern urban technology is not seen as the source of decadence but supposed to overcome decadent civilization. The environments in which ISIS operates are little urban, and views of nature and natural landscapes would have been a more logical option for jihad videos. In spite of this, ISIS makes big efforts to endow itself with urban connotations by putting forward pictures of modern weapons, speeding cars and tanks, mobile phones, and computers. It seems that nature is the least interesting element for ISIS ideologists: urban life is found most energizing"[3].

Islamic State`s propaganda aesthetic shows no resemblance with both pre-modern religious nostalgic position and post-ideological, New Age approach. It does not follow the Islam color aesthetic with nostalgic and romantic visual

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[1] Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009, p. 6

[2] Stanley George Payne, *"Foreword" to E. Gentile, the Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism*, Praeger, Westport, 2003, p. XVI

[3] Thorsten Botz Bottstein, *The "futuristic" Estethic of ISIS*, "Journal of Aesthetics&Culture", Vol. 9, Routledge, London, 2017, p. 4

language, like other radical Islamist movements. Their approach to nature, history, modernity and technology are total opposites. Other Islamist, including Al Quaeda, in their visual self-legitimization more resemble on other postmodern religion fundamentalists (even New Age ones) and other post-ideological retro approaches like those of neo-fascist. All of them are using authoritative key symbols connected with constitutional myths of religion, community and salvation in a romantic, even nostalgic way. Their visual activities are pure kitsch, and their propaganda looks more like brochures of Jehovah Witnesses than hi tech modern visual expression. On contrary, IS/Daesh propaganda is visually ultra-modern and urban.

In many of aspects it even looks sub-cultural: it avoids, even scornfully rejects nature; it has no nostalgic look toward past and it stands self-confidently, even proudly, in the sad present and strives for ideal future from fully realized, even ideal itself, with technological help in whereby no distinction is made between what means and what ends are. IS's jihad fighter reenacts the modernistic, futurist myth of techno man that is religiously rightful and visually attractive at the same time. Islamic State's technological aesthetics morphs into sacred process, while giving techno-sphere quasi-religious dimension. "In the case of ISIS the overcoming of symbolist rhetoric signifies a clear shift towards Futurism. In Symbolism, poetical speech attempts to present a refined and infinite mental world. Such symbolist ambitions do exist in ISIS propaganda but they remain restricted to religious apocalyptic symbolism. ISIS replaces sunsets and hazes with whirring engines and explosions; further, the aim of ISIS propaganda is not merely to evoke a metaphysical world for its own sake, but rather to establish the forces of a new futurist ideology in everyday life as a utilitarian force. Also this overlaps perfectly with futurist strategies of overcoming symbolism"[1].

In both IS`s and Futurists` cases, violence is placed in the center of the movement. Therefore, IS videos cultivate a new, extremely aesthetics "art of violence" for its shock value, that can be seen and understood as a clear example of "aesthetics of politics" that was theoretically explained in Walter Benjamin's work ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936)[2]. All of it shows us complex nature of relations between Islam and modernization, and also modernization of Islam itself.

Islamic fundamentalist position towards modernity cannot be understood just as total refusal of all of its aspects, but rather as a more complex relation. All Muslim societies and peoples that were conquered and turned into colonies or dependant states by modern Western colonial powers have negative resentment toward modernity. Muslims perceived modernity as foreign force that has subjugated their own culture which was, in their own eyes, older and truer than the worldview of foreign invaders and colonizers. History of all contemporary Islam

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 9
[2] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Schocken Books, New York, 1968, p. 121

societies is marked by two basic efforts: anti-colonial struggle for regaining independence (dominant in the early and mid 20th Century) from European rule and integrity endangered (or altered) by Western secular modernism[1].

During few last centuries, Muslims all over the world understood the decline of their civilization's power as a result of both internal (domestic) and external (foreign) threats. Therefore, they have tried to organize numerous renewal movements to overcome these threats and weaknesses. Just few among the fundamentalist renewal movements advocated complete refusal of western modernity and all of its technological inventions (which were seen as main reason of their superiority) and return to the previous, pre-modern and pre-colonial state. As one among the ways of renewing the Muslim community and re-establishing its independence, some Islamic modernist reformers tried to apply an approach of copying scientific and technical achievements from the West[2]. For the Muslim rulers, the power of the West rested on superior technology and weapons. That is why they set themselves the goals of acquiring these characteristics of power. Their priorities were military and bureaucracy. After that, they started with opening of printing shops, modernization of education, legal system and economy.

The process of modernization, however, was not directed towards western-alike political liberalization but to Islamic, Oriental understanding of politics and power that is strengthening the regime by means of a centralized and modernized military and security apparatus. During the reform process, the modernists among Muslims also tried to revive the glorious past of Islam and to remind Muslims that, although they were weak today, they were once strong when they created vast empires and Islamic civilization itself, which achieved significant achievements in science, medicine and philosophy. Thus, they emphasized that Islam is both religion and civilization whose main goal is to empower both individuals and society and to give them reason for existence. Frustrations from failures created as a results of acceptance of some western models of development has lead to the conclusion that contemporary Muslim societies need their own self-made identity and authentic way of development that relies completely on its own tradition or, in other words - on complete return to Islam and its ways of living.

Contemporary Islamic terrorist movements and groups were influenced by both approaches. They manly took position of accepting modern technologies but refusing most other achievements of Western modernism that contradict the Islam, most of all its secular, progressive worldview. What they failed to perceive is that Islam societies with their population have gone through significant changes during colonial and post-colonial period, that they were also partially modernized and that they both lost previous sense of community and connection with their own cultural

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[1] John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat Myth or Reality?*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 78

[2] Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore, Martin van Bruinessen (eds.), *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2009, p. 96

and religious traditions. The return of religion is one the most important ways of trying to fill gap that separates individuals from their local identities and tradition that was caused by modernization and social and cultural changes that it has brought. Return of religion often comes in form of movements that are labeled as "fundamentalist", because they intend to return to fundamentals of the religion that they believe in. Such movement can be found in Western Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, as well in Islam. What is most specific in Islam (due to Islam's nature that completely permeates religious and political spheres) that it has - in some of its personifications - militant fundamentalist form that even reaches for terrorist methods of combat with military superior enemies.

Contemporary radical branches of militant, jihad Islam are more modern that they can confess to itself and have little if any connection with ancient, traditional Islam. Their fundamentalism is not traditionalism because they have no true and complete connections with their own tradition and that's why they try to recreate and regain it. They draw on tradition but clearly within modern context and with a non-traditional, modern mindset. Many conservative Islamic activist groups have based their vision of an ideal Islamic State not on a retrospective or nostalgic model but on a utopian model and scholars have noted that the recent wave of Islamization does not signify the return to traditional Islam and its scriptures but that it is possible to perceive it as a modern, populist project to redefine modernity with Islamic values.

Some conclusions on the relations between religious fundamentalism, technology and modernity

Large percent of contemporary Islamic fundamentalists (and, among them, IS's terrorist) failed to understand a deep connection between advanced technologies and modernity itself. On one hand, they are very prone to easy condemn western modernity because of its tendency to weaken traditional morality and all it communal ties based on religion and to replace it with secularist, rational worldview that, as a long term consequence, increases egocentric behavior, alienation and a wide range of social distortions. On the other hand, they all accept (and even idealize) modern technology with naive conviction that it can be used to achieve opposite, moralistic, pious and communitarian goals marked by religious, even eschatological and apocalyptic orientation of those who use it. But, the logic of technology, its functioning and development is identical to the logic of modernity. It could be said that modernity has taken a technical approach for its model and applied it at first to the very person as the center of its activity, and then to the whole world[1]. Modernity in the western societies started in the late middle ages in full sense not just when early modern individuals broke with their religious traditions, but when technological approach was adopted as a central and comprehensive one, with whose help secular humanism understood itself and the

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[1] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1964, p. 63

whole world in all its material and spiritual complexity and intimacy[1]. Then, a modern man has "unraveled" pre-modern religious ideals and eschatological goals into the framework of the material world and gave them a completely different, horizontal direction – from himself and for himself, and further, through society, from quantitative changes to qualitative ones.

IS jihadist fundamentalists have commited both mistakes: their autoperception of true Muslims, uncorrupted by western modernist influence and even perfect, is obviously self-delusion, while their relation toward technology as a culturaly neutral tool that can be used to acheive traditional, both political and spiritual goals, is clearly seems naive. It lacks understanding of deeper impact of technology on their users. Taken together, both mistakes led IS fundamentalists to factination with technology that has significantly influenced transformation of their "quest for regaining fudamentals of faith" into a violent political and social movement. We have seen that it, in many of its elements, it resembles of ruthless modern ideology, much more rationally self-confident in its complete righteousness then other modern worldviews that they rise against.

This phenomenae is not happening in history for the first time: weakened and subjugated cultures and religions, in their attempts to liberate themselves from foreign, dominant political and cultural influlences, often try to copy or even conciously take some "imported" cultural and ideological products as an effective means to achieve liberation (for instance, many non-western colonies adopted western socialist and even communist ideology in their anti-colonial struggle) and regain their authentic identity. New forms of Islamist fundamentalism show a different example: in attempts to completely liberate Muslims from modern western influences (by rejecting its cultural and normative sides, but adopting its technology) it became more and more modernized and partially turned (in a clearly primitive way) into what it rebels against: into a populist, brutal modern political ideology.

Quasi-religious goal (or ideological utopia) that IS followers try to (re)create, represents the mixture of their modernist fascination with technology and sub-cultural urban life with their vague notions of Caliphate from the seventh Century. Strict, formal implementation of religious rules and customs serves mainly as self-justifying rationalization through which they tend to convince

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[1] It all led to quantification of nature, its explication with mathematical structures and separation of all visible reality form its deeper, inherent inclination. Modern technological approach generalizes and reduces all natural complexities into basic qualities and places them into schemes with rationally fixed values, given patterns of developments and their goals. Herbert Markuze, *Jednodimenzionalni čovek*, Veselin Masleša i Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1990; Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2010, p. 94

themselves and their followers that they are on the right, authentic path of God, while their utopian Caliphate in reality turns into complete horror.

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