



ICT
International Institute
for Counter-Terrorism
With the Support of Keren Daniel

ICT Jihadi Monitoring Group

INSIGHTS

The Islamic State speaks Russian – a new market for ISIS propaganda

Dr. Alisa Fainberg

Introduction

Tracking the Islamic State (ISIS) propaganda activities clearly shows that 2014 and 2015 have become turning years in ISIS' attention towards Russia - both government, officials, as well as potential fighters. Russians fight for ISIS at least since 2011, but it were these 2014 and 2015 years when ISIS propaganda machine has started active spreading both reading, audio, and video materials targeting various audience groups in Russia. Thus, in September 2014 (three month after declaring a new Islamic Caliphate) ISIS have released a message threatening Russian and personally president Putin to conquer (or to "liberate" according the message) Caucasus, and Chechnya in particular in retaliation to Russian military planes supplies to Syrian government army.¹ This propaganda turn chronologically was followed by intervention of Russian troops in Syria which began on 30 September 2015. Officially this intervention became a response for formal request by the Syrian government for military help against rebel and jihadist groups.² According to Sergei Ivanov, a chief of the Presidential Administration of Russia, the intervention is aimed at fighting ISIS among other reasons because of a number of Russians joined ISIS is growing "in leaps and bounds", and it is better to act proactively on "distant frontiers" rather than wait while these guerillas who fight for ISIS will return to Russia.³ Shortly before the intervention Russian media have notably switched their attention from Ukrainian news to Syria and started to provide extensive coverage of selected cases of Russians left for ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Despite this coverage exact numbers of Russian fighters and followers of ISIS are unknown, because of contradictory statements made by Russian officials on this topic - thus, in June 2015 Alexander Bortnikov, director of the FSB stated that about 1,700 Russians have joined ISIS in Syria, and few days later, Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia, has reported about 1,000 fighters.⁴ In the same vein, in September 2015 Vladimir Kolokoltsev, a minister of Internal Affairs, reported about 1,800 Russians who fight for ISIS⁵, while few days before Marianna Kochubey, an expert of Anti-Terrorism Center of CIS, estimated a number of Russian fighters between 800 and 1,500⁶, and next day after Kolokoltsev's statement, Sergey Smirnov, a deputy director of FSB asserted an approximate number of 2,400

¹ <https://www.rt.com/news/184836-isis-putin-kadyrov-syria/>

² <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/russian-carries-air-strikes-syria-150930133155190.html>

³ http://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/09/150930_syria_russia_airstrikes_wrap

⁴ http://www.bbc.com/russian/news/2015/10/151016_putin_cis_isis

⁵ <http://www.kp.ru/online/news/2167085/>

⁶ <http://www.ridus.ru/news/197818>

Russian fighters.⁷ The last figures - 2,400 fighters - are accepted as official for now by Russian government⁸ and cited by Soufyan Group researchers in recent report on ISIS foreign fighters.⁹ It is important to note that Russian Islam is highly diverse and even disunite, so there is no unity in Russian Muslim world. The vast majority of Russian Muslims are Sunni, but there are a lot of differences among them. First of all, two legal school historically coexist in Russian Islam: the Hanafi (North-West Caucasus and Volga-Ural region) and Shafi'i (Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan). Another criterion of demarcation is ethnic one: Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, each republic of North Caucasus have their specifics and historical features of Islam. Besides, there are isolated groups of native Russian Muslims, and growing number of immigrant Muslims from Central Asia who also form on Russian territories close communities and also subjected to radicalization, as well as other communities and groups.

Radicalization of North Caucasus and Syrian conflict

It is not surprising that the majority of fighters come from the North Caucasus, particularly from Chechnya and Dagestan, since the North Caucasus have a long history of radicalization. Thus, the First Chechen War (1994-1996), which was initially of nationalistic nature, had acquired traits and characteristics of religious Islamic radicalism, largely because of help of foreign fighters from Arabic countries: as reported by Operations Directorate of North Caucasian Federal District, during named period an independent unit of about 200 Arabic fighters (mostly from Al-Qaeda) led by Ibn al-Khattab (Thamir Saleh Abdullah), had operated in Chechen Republic.¹⁰ In culture this period was marked by debut and broadcasting of songs written and performed in Russian by controversial Chechen artist Timur Mutsuraev, who participated and had suffer a wound during some battles of First Chechen War. His songs not just encouraged Chechens for liberation struggle, but also pictured future Muslim (and particularly Chechen) conquests all over the world, including Jerusalem and other valued Islamic places, and by that presenting Chechen war as a part of global jihad. Performing in Russian has significantly enlarged an audience of Mutsuraev's propagandist songs including in it even Russian soldiers fighting against Chechens. For date most of his songs are

⁷ <http://telegraf.by/2015/09/300832-v-ryadah-igil-voyuyut-pochti-2-5-tisyachi-rossiyan>

⁸ http://www.bbc.com/russian/news/2015/10/151016_putin_cis_isis

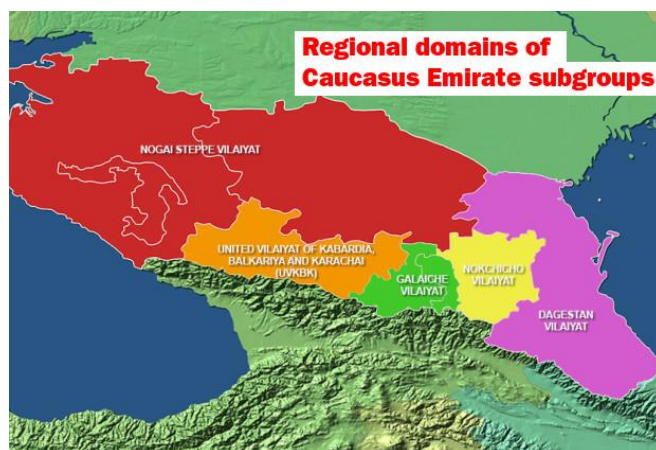
⁹ http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate1.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1604045>

enlisted as extremist by Russian government and forbidden to distribution.¹¹

This perception of Chechen conflict as a part of global jihad had deepened during the interwar period and by the time of Second Chechen War (1999-2000), when more fighters from Arabic and other countries had joined in the conflict, and brought with them a significant financial support provided by various Islamic foundations from both Middle East and Western Europe countries.¹² It may be claimed that since that period Chechen (and broadly all North Caucasian) conflicts with Russian troops were interpreted by Muslim worldwide radical groups (like Al Qaeda) as an invasion of Muslim territory, which necessitates jihad.

A shift from nationalism and separatism towards global Islamic ideology in North Caucasian conflicts had resulted in creating of self-declared Caucasus Emirate in 2007 by Doku Umarov who announced an establishment of Islamic state throughout the entire territory of North Caucasus composed of the provinces (vilayats) and covered Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Adygea, Krasnodar krai and Stavropol krai.



Credit: www.vocativ.com

Caucasus Emirate, ideologically based on Salafism and global Jihadism, had succeeded (from unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria) and developed strong ties with Al Qaeda (primarily) and other radical Islamic groups.¹³ Despite its guerilla nature, members of Caucasus Emirate carried out a number of prominent terror

¹¹ <http://minjust.ru/ru/extremist-materials>

¹² <http://izrus.co.il/dvuhstoronka/article/2010-04-01/9250.html>

¹³ See more on Caucasus Emirate – Al Qaeda relations: http://csis.org/files/publication/110930_Hahn_GettingCaucasusEmirateRt_Web.pdf

attacks in Russia and North Caucasus (metro, train, and airport bombings, assassinations, etc.) in between 2009-2013, and simultaneously with it have started to conduct activities abroad, particularly in Syria and Iraq, confirming the global jihadist orientation of Caucasus Emirate. Thus, as was mentioned above, first fighters from North Caucasus left for Syria back in 2011.¹⁴ Also that year from 50 to 60 inhabitants from Pankisi Gorge (Georgia) had left for Syria, followed in 2012 by their countryman Chechen Tarkhan Batirashvili who is most familiar by his *nom de guerre* Abu Omar al-Shishani.¹⁵ According to his own words, he was sent to Syria by Doku Umarov and received from Umarov financial support for first time. Batirashvili in his interview notes that his goal in Syria is same to Umarov's – establishment of Islamic state,¹⁶ which again highlights the global jihadist nature of Caucasus Emirate. While in Syria Batirashvili became a leader of the Katibat al-Muhajireen group (Emigrants Brigade), also known as the Muhajireen Brigade, and its successor, Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (Army of Emigrants and Supporters), and later, in 2013 joined ISIS and quickly became one of key commanders of the group, being in charge of Caucasian fighters (and Chechen in particular).¹⁷ It is interesting to note that Chechen fighters are reputed for one of most effective foreign warriors in Syria thanks to both their cohesion and vast experience in struggle against Russia. Besides ISIS Chechens fight for Jabhat al-Nusra, affiliates of Al Qaeda: most prominent groups here are Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (has been splitted after Batirashvili pledged his allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi) and Junud al-Sham (Soldiers of Levant) – a mixed Chechen and Lebanese group under the command of another ethnic Chechen from Pankisi Gorge, Murad Margoshvili (*nom de guerre* - Muslim Abu Walid al-Shishani).¹⁸ Given the long history of cooperation between North Caucasian rebel groups and Al Qaeda coming over to Jabhat al-Nusra's side seems logical for Chechens. And indeed pledge of Batirashvili to al-Baghdadi sowed discord between Chechen (and broadly Caucasian) units, which was deepened by specific of very structure of Caucasian societies - thus, Chechens traditionally are very close to their families and teips (clans), even distant ones, so the rivalry and conflicts with other teips for them is a frequent phenomenon on both homeland and abroad.

Cases of Batirashvili and Margoshvili reveal a number of notable features of Caucasian fighters' phenomenon in Syria. First of all, Caucasian fighters come to Syria not only from North Caucasus, but often from diasporas all over the world. Thus, mentioned above Pankisi Gorge hosts a significant Chechen diaspora and essentially is one of bulwark for Islamic radicalism. Some of fighters came to Syria from Europe: about 200000 refugees from

¹⁴ <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/69364.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.newsru.com/world/11jul2014/nechechen.html#>

¹⁶ <https://meduza.io/feature/2014/11/24/byl-by-zal-dlya-regbi-ne-nuzhen-by-dzhihad>

¹⁷ https://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/tarkhan_batirashvili.html

¹⁸ <http://www.ekhhokavkaza.com/content/article/27293694.html>

Chechnya for today live in Austria, Germany, Belgium, France, Czech Republic, etc.¹⁹ Members of European diasporas often provide for fighters a financial support. That factor of geographic dispersion complicates definition of causes and reasons for Caucasian fighters to leave for Syria. Another complicating factor is social dispersion of fighters. Among fighters from North Caucasus territories there are a significant number of children of high-ranking officers and public officials. A prominent example here is the second wife of Tarkhan Batirashvili is Seda Dudarkaeva who is a daughter of Asu Dudarkaev, a former head of Chechen Federal Migration Service. She joined ISIS and left for Syria in 2013, and few month later her father was fired by Ramzan Kadyrov.²⁰ Therefore it does not seem correct to reduce causes of leaving to lack of social elevators, or economic woes, as it often presented in Russian media,²¹ since among Caucasian fighters (like ones other parts of the world) there are drastic differences in geographical origin; social stratum; level of welfare, and, as a result, education; personal motives, etc.

Meanwhile in North Caucasus after death of charismatic Doku Umarov in 2013 a weakening of Caucasus Emirate can be observed: just in two years (2014-2015) three leaders had alternated. Weakening was also caused by outflow of radical Muslims to Syria with the notable deliberate assistance of FSB. A head of Novosaitli village in Dagestan states that "In our village there is a person, a negotiator, and he, along with FSB brought out of hiding and sent to jihad abroad several militant guerilla leaders. So our underground was weakened, and we are happy with that. They want to fight, so let them fight, but not here".²² The weakening of Caucasus Emirate had a logical effect. In 2015 successive pledges of allegiance to al-Baghdadi of all almost key commanders of Caucasus Emirate have marked a turning point in history of radicalization in North Caucasus and converted Caucasus Emirate to Caucasus Province of ISIS. Interesting to note that since that period new ISIS province' fighters did not manifest themselves in any militant activity, except a number of video messages with introducing and greeting new commanders.²³ According to updated messages from Caucasian commanders, there is a deep crisis and polarization among groups and fighters regarding their allegiance. Thus, in December 2015 Zalim Shebzuhov, amir of "united vilayat" of Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay in his video message called to all North Caucasian Muslims who pledged the allegiance to al-Baghdadi, to return to Caucasus Emirate,²⁴ which means that adhering to ISIS of Caucasian provinces was not so much concordant.

¹⁹ <https://ayyamru.wordpress.com/2014/10/24/%D0%BE-%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%85-%D0%B1%D0%BE%D0%B9%D1%86%D0%B0%D1%85-%D0%B2-%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%BB/>

²⁰ http://mignews.com/news/disasters/world/211114_142507_59479.html

²¹ <https://meduza.io/feature/2014/11/24/byl-by-zal-dlya-regbi-ne-nuzhen-by-dzhihad>

²² <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/69364.html>

²³ <http://jihadology.net/category/the-islamic-state/wilayat-al-qawqaz/>

²⁴ <http://grani.ru/Politics/Russia/Regions/m.247521.html>



Credit: al-amriki.tumblr.com



Credit: www.chechensyria.com

ISIS propaganda and Istok Magazine

As was mentioned above, in 2014-2015 ISIS' propaganda machine (in a wake of late changes) has turned its close attention to North Caucasian audience. As a result, and considering the above factors and specifics of history, al-Hayat Media Center of ISIS started to produce Istok (a source, origin) - a Russian-language internet propaganda magazine published since May 2015. So far total three issues of the magazine were released. According to title, the magazine is devoted to news and analytics. All pieces of magazine are anonymous.



Comparative analysis of Istok and Dabiq (English-language sleek magazine also produced by al-Hayat Media Center) magazines design features reveals both similarities and differences. On the one hand a lot of images (almost all images of magazine are militant) are not original and taken from other ISIS media sources, including Dabiq. On the other, unlike Dabiq, Istok magazine adheres to austere, almost minimalistic design, giving most space for text accompanied with almost monochrome patterns and simple lines.

Language analysis of content shows that articles are written by Caucasian authors with typical speech patterns and grammar mistakes. Russian language is seems to be second native for authors

(since it serves as a bridge language for different Caucasian ethnic groups), but it was partly arabized due to long term stay in Syria.

It is also interesting to note that Quran quotations in Russian follow that of Quran translation by Elmir Kuliev, an Azerbaijan Islamic scholar. In 2013 his Russian semantic translation of Quran was amount to extremist one by one of the local Russian courts. That decision sowed discord within Russian Muslim communities (part of them were agree with the decision, claiming that Kuliev's translation reflects pro wahhabist conviction of Kuliev),²⁵ and as a result the court decision was abolished few month later.

Content analysis of Istok magazine also reveals interesting facts for better understanding of ISIS Russian propaganda.

A first issue, "Until you will come back to your religion", released on May 2015 could be defined as testing: it is relatively (comparing to next two issues) short and contain twenty four pages. The issue starts with story ("We are from you, and you are from us" piece) of group of Caucasian (probably Chechen) fighters who have travelled to Syria in order to join military activities against Bashar Asad regime and formed Muhajireen jamaat (was renamed later to Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar) under commandment of Omar ash-Shishani (mentioned above Tarkhan Batirashvili). The author gives a detailed description of group's attempts to choose the ideologically right jamaat. As stressed in the piece, one of the main reason for the group to join the ISIS was high level of concernment of the ISIS' leaders in strengthening of relations and extension a dominance over Caucasian region. Story of joining is followed by description of engagement with other militant Islamist groups (and persons) in Deir ez-Zor, Al-Bab, Raqqa, and other Syrian cities, as well as accusing these groups and persons fighting in Syria and Iraq (Ahrar ash-Sham, Jabhat al- Nusra, Jaysh al-Sham, al-Tawhid brigade, Abu Khalid al-Suri, etc.) of betrayal. A priority of fighting against these group before fighting against Bashar Asad army and foreign enemies is particularly emphasized.

Next piece, "Ahlul Hal Wal Aqd" retells history of the ISIS and justifies a legitimacy of the ISIS caliphate by applying theological arguments and historical examples. A main idea of the piece is that a caliphate should (and even must) be established at the earliest possible opportunity. Final piece of the first issue - "Caliphs" turns to legitimacy of Imamate, pointing that there can be several

²⁵ <http://www.rg.ru/2013/09/21/reg-ufo/koran.html>

Imams at the same time, since authority in Islam is decentralized by its very nature, and especially stresses the necessity of forceful establishment of Caliphate.

A second issue was released on July 2015, contains forty four pages and has no title. It starts with translated message of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on necessity of immediate joining a fight for the ISIS, since the current war in Middle East is war against all Muslim world. The message includes following points: jihad is obligatory for every Muslim; “Jews” and “Christians” will never be able to live in peace with Muslims; governments of Islamic countries show their support to hostile western regimes, and special emphasis is made on Saudi Arabia government which named in the article “Salul family” or “Salul people” (referred to Abd-Allah ibn Ubayy). A special appeal of the message is addressed to Muslims of Al Anbar Governorate in Iraq, who, according to al-Baghdadi, left their homes and joined the enemies of the ISIS (Kurds, in particular). They are calling to repent and come back to their home places. Finally the message chants the praises to the ISIS’ fighters from different parts of the world and encourages them to carry on their struggle. The issue continues with “A plot of Sahawats against the IS” piece which consists of scathing criticism on Abu Basir al-Tartusi (a cleric and jihadist theoretician, is accused in making fitna), Abdullah al-Muhaysini (leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, is accused in cowardice, since no one had saw him in battle), and other persons and groups of the conflict - Ahmed Afash, commander of Free Syria Brigade; Jamal Maruf, head of the Syrian Revolutionaries' Front; Khaled al-Hayani; Jaish al-Mujahideen group; Islamic Front; Ahrar ash-Sham, etc. Despite his anonymity the author of the piece mentions that he had served as deputy governor of Idlib (Syria), and also touches on some vague conflict between Iraqi fighters of the ISIS and other (unclear) groups. A third piece of the issue “A Law of Creator or a law of Creatures?” criticizes Islamist militant groups (Ahrar ash-Sham, Jaysh al-Islam, The Sham Legion, Muslim Brotherhood, Jabhat al-Nusra, etc., sometimes using humiliating nicknames for these groups) for postponing on sharia law initiation immediately after the win. It also calls to potential fighters to perform lone wolf attacks in their homeland, and to immigrate to the ISIS only if they cannot carry out these attacks. The piece “Who are we, where are we from, and where are we going?” emphasizes that one of the main motives of the ISIS fight and attacks is revenge for worldwide Muslim community were oppressed by enemies for a long time. This piece is followed by one translated from Dabiq magazine (issue nine) “Slave-Girls or Prostitutes?” by Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah. The issue also contains description of sharia police operating and structure, and ended with “From Biographies

of Shaheeds” - a story of Usama al-Maghribi, a fighter who had carried out a suicide attack and killed fifty people.

A third issue was released on November 2015 and contains seventy pages. Its title “Die in your rage, it were us who have blown it up” sets the tone for the issue and resonates with twelfth issue of Dabiq magazine. However unlike Dabiq the Istok’s issue pays more attention to Russian plane rather than Paris’ attacks. It specifies a few victims of crash, saying that one of the pilot in past had served as military aviator in Chechnya, deputy mayor of Pskov also was involved in Chechen war, and, finally, the supermodel had brought sins into the world. In parallel the issue names a number of jihadists who recently had carried out lone wolf attacks in different parts of the world: Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar (Australia, October 2015), Faisal Mohammad (US, November 2015), Isaac Badran (Israel, October 2015), Muhammad Khalil Al-Ukbi (Israel, October 2015), Anwar Abu Zaid (Jordan, November 2015). A translated message of al-Adnani follows the cover theme of the issue. The message express an idea of military fighting as a only way to establish an Islamic state, while peace talks lead to “Christian” and “Jew” predominance over Muslims. The message continuously criticizes governments, parties and groups of Muslim countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Muslim Brotherhood, al-Nour Party, etc.) claiming them as taghuts and betrayals. The message is followed by translated article of Osama bin Laden “A Way to Destruction of Plots”, commented and alternating with quotations from the ISIS leaders’ speeches, and, as the title implies, backtracks to critics of Islamic countries governments as well as local Syrian and Iraqis militant groups in collaboration with western regimes. This idea continues in the next piece of the issue “A Plot against the Islamic State”.

A piece “A Reminder to Mujahedin” particularly encourages fighters to abide by the rules, and features the advantages of guard service over battles, which may be caused by contemptuous attitude of fighters to guard service.

The same as the second issue it contains a translation of article by Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah from Dabiq magazine (eighth issue) “The twin halves of the Muhajirin”, followed by description of Hisba department which embraces governance of various spheres of everyday life. The issue includes another translated message of al-Adnani to the ISIS’ foreign enemies, full of threats and promises of soon victory of the ISIS over enemies, and continuous the life stories of martyrs with biography of converted Russian fighter who had carried out a suicide attack.

A provocative badly photoshopped image of Putin and Obama wearing orange prison robes introduce the last article of the issue “Say to those who did not believe ‘you will be defeated’”, which as it follows from both image and title, contains emotional prophetic-style threats to US (primarily) and other enemies of ISIS.



Besides Istok magazine in June 2015 ISIS launched alternative Russian-language propaganda channel – Furat Media Foundation,²⁶ which operates independent from Al-Hayat Media Center. Furat Media embodies a number of desks in Syria, Iraq, and other countries and issues video speeches of ISIS’ leaders with Russian subtitles, DVDs, motivational messages, listicles, and original Russian-language propaganda, like interviews with Russian-speaking militants in Iraq and Syria. Thus, Furat Media released pledges of allegiances to al-Baghdadi of commanders of Chechnya and Ingushetia. An interesting fact is that alongside with Russian (primarily Caucasian) audience, Furat Media is also oriented toward Central Asian potential fighters: besides issuing video calls for joining, in July 2015 one of Kazakstan fighters who calls himself Artiom had uploaded a self-picture from “ISIS media center”, which is spotted by analytics as Furat Media. A prominent Tajiki fighter Abu Dawud (Parviz Saidrakhmonov) also was pictured while working at Furat Media office.²⁷ This allows to suggest that ISIS seek to expand its propaganda to Central Asia region, incorporating this course to Russian focus area.

Furat Media is also engaged in producing of alternative to Istok Russian-language magazine –

²⁶ A personal webpage of Tarkhan Batirashvili *FiSyria.com* had redirected to Furat Media website *Furat.info* until it was suspected.

²⁷ <http://kloop.kg/blog/2015/07/13/svoboda-islamskoe-gosudarstvo-zapustilo-propagandistskij-kanal-na-russkom-yazyke/>

Furat.Press.



For date total two issues of Furat.Press were released: the first one titled “One Row, One Flag, One Leader. The Caliphate based on prophets methodology”, and the second one – “No, They Are Alive”. Both issues are short, thirteen and seven pages respectively, and consist of standard ISIS propaganda materials translated from Arabic, as calls to join ISIS, inspiring stories of converted and martyrs, etc. Comparing to Istok magazine, Furat.Press could be described as less impressive, mostly because of its almost impersonal nature, shortness, and inelaborate design.

Summary

Based on the foregoing history of radicalization of North Caucasian fighters and comprehensive analysis of Istok magazine, the following conclusions could be made:

- Most of the content of Istok magazine is authentic with a small part of translated articles from Dabiq, as well as statements and messages of ISIS leaders. In design broadly distributed images are used, but comparing to Dabiq' here it is more severe and prefers text over pictures. Moreover, unlike other magazines the Istok pays a lot of attention to relationships and conflicts between different islamist militant local groups in Syria and Iraq (less), and much less - to general propaganda of worldwide Muslims, which may lead to conclusion that the magazine is more oriented toward Caucasian fighters who already arrived to Syria and Iraq. Also much attention is given to various plots (both foreign and home) against the Islamic State, and methods to overcome them.
- Targeting audience of the magazine are potential and actual Caucasian fighters, and

moreover ones who already in the know of ISIS and broadly, balance of power in Syria. Therefore, unlike Dabiq magazine, Istok is not designed for wide audience. It is documented for instance by “A Reminder to Mujahedin” article in third issue, which is worth mostly for internal use.

- Choice of target audience, deliberately narrowed, which actually exclude almost all ethnic Muslim groups except North Caucasian (despite the equivocal call in Istok to all Muslims), clearly shows a target for ISIS in Russia – influential and militant expansion to North Caucasian territories. The target is not new, considering relatively (since 1995-1996) longstanding interest to the North Caucasus of Al-Qaeda (primarily) and other radical Islamic groups.
- Tactics of such expansion is also generally defined in the ISIS propaganda. Unlike broadly distributed and repeated in Dabiq magazine (not exclusively) call to every Muslim to immigrate to “lands of Caliphate” immediately, the Istok makes opposite point and on repeated occasions encourages potential recruits to join local groups of fighters or carry out lone wolf attacks in their homeland(s), while sending their families to Syria. It would allow ISIS to create a strong network of followers in Caucasus and strengthen its positions on the territories, which coheres with weakening of Caucasus Emirate.
- Unlike other propaganda reading materials released by ISIS (like Dabiq) the Istok magazine is not published on regular basis. Between second and third issue there is a break of four month (while between first and second is two months). Publishing the third issue is obviously connected to increasing attacks of Russian military forces to Syria (that also is proved true by content of Twitter activity of the ISIS’ followers and supporters), as well as ISIS’ attacks carried out in September-November 2015 in Sinai and France. For now it is unclear if propaganda will increase or decrease in future, since it is depends also on Russia activity in Syria, and moreover, after announcement of North Caucasus as an ISIS province there were no signs of militant activity, except video messages with greetings new commanders, which is probably connected with continuous discord among Caucasian fighters regarding allegiance to ISIS instead Al-Qaeda (or vice versa).
- It is also unclear if ISIS will broad its propaganda targeting other ethnic (and converted)

Muslim Russian groups. For now a number of threatening videos involving Russians (including native) were released, and FSB revealed radicalized groups and even whole inhabited localities in Russia, but there is no sign of propaganda materials designed for Tatars, Bashkirs, or Russian.

ABOUT THE ICT

Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism. ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy. ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel which relies exclusively on private donations and revenue from events, projects and programs.

ABOUT THE JIHADI MONITORING GROUP

The Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group (JWMG) is a specialized research and analysis team at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Composed of researchers fluent in Arabic, the JWMG monitors websites that support and serve the Global Jihad organizations. The unique characteristic of JWMG publications is the team's integration of diverse materials from a wide variety of Arabic sources. JWMG connects each source to larger trends, providing a complete understanding of events on both a local and a global scale.

[Click here for a list of online JWMG publications](#)

For tailored research please contact us at JWMG@ict.org.il.