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## THE CONCEPT OF THE “ISLAMIC CALIPHATE” SINCE THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD TILL “THE ISLAMIC STATE”

### Abstract

The concept of the Islamic Caliphate is tightly connected to Islam and the activity of the Prophet Muhammad. The formation of the ruling system became the most important part of the history of Islam. The legitimacy of the institution of the Prophet's successor or Caliph became a subject of debate and political controversy, giving rise to Sunnism and Shiism in Islam.

Over the centuries, the form of the Caliphate as a state institution based on Islam has changed, but the turning point was in 1924 when the Kemalists' Conference announced the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Muslim fundamentalists met this Conference with great concern because, in their view, the history of the Islamic Caliphate ended with the abolition of the institution of the Caliphate.

In modern times, the idea of an Islamic Caliphate has been seized by the leaders of radical Islamist groups and is often used for their own political purposes.

The article analyzes the concept of the Islamic Caliphate, its formation, and its history of development. Unlike the classical Islamic Caliphate, the institution of the Caliphate of Islamist radicals was based on the Sayyed Qutb statehood, which differs from the classical concept. The analysis of these similarities and differences is presented in the article.

**Keywords:** Islamic Caliphate, IS, Sayyed Qutb, Caliph, Jihad.

In the modern world, Islamic radicalism has gained a wide foothold and poses a significant threat to the civilian population as well as democratic values and state institutions. Islamic radicalism emerged especially after the Cold War and spread rapidly in politically unstable regions where the population lived in difficult social or economic conditions. Leaders of radical groups emphasized that Muslim society turned from the right path and missed the correct way of development. Instead of the Muslim society based on equality in the Islamic States, corrupted immoral elites came to the power, and inequality and lawlessness were spread. Radical Islamists blamed Western colonizers and Zionists for these processes.

Leaders of the radical Islamic organizations use historic narratives very actively and make parallels between modern times and the middle ages. These parallels were widespread among the population to incite anti-Western feelings. A good example of it is a *fatwa*<sup>1</sup> issued by Al-Qaeda leader Usama Bin Laden titled “World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders” (Lewis 1998). It should be mentioned that Bin Laden called Westerners/Christians Crusaders to remind Muslims about the Crusades' invasions in the Middle East.

To compare Christians with the Crusades is not connected to Bin Laden only. After the 9/11 of 2001 terrorist attacks, US president George W. Bush called the war on terrorism and the invasion of Iraq, a Crusade (The White House 2001).

It should be mentioned that the Islamic State is based on a system, legitimacy of which is given by the God and Caliph, as the ruler, is obliged to guarantee the defense of Islamic values and let all Muslims live according to the Islamic rules. So, by abolishing the institution of the Caliphate, which was

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<sup>1</sup> According to Islamic laws, a *fatwa* or religious order must be issued by a cleric or a Muslim who got an education in Islamic theology. As Usama bin Laden was neither cleric nor a theologian, his *fatwa* is not legal.

declared in the 1924 Conference by the Turkish government, the social and political structure of Muslim society, based on God’s laws, was destroyed (Ali 2019). Muslim fundamentalists believe that Muslims were strong when they believed in Islam. When they lost their faith, then Muslims became weak. Therefore, if they return to the true faith or roots of Islam, then they will be able to return to power. Jihad is considered to be the only successful way to achieve this goal.

In 1926, in response to the Kemalists’ Conference, in Cairo was held the “Conference of Caliphate” attended by 38 delegates from different countries and chaired by Sheikh of Al-Azhar. The participants discussed the essence of the Caliphate, the necessity of its existence in Islam, the principle of choosing a Caliph, and the possibility of restoring the Caliphate (Sekaly 1926, 133-134).

The idea of the global Jihad<sup>2</sup> became popular in the 1950s. Usama Bin Laden connected this idea to his own fight when he founded the global Jihad network and called all Muslims to fight. According to him, “To kill Americans – civilian or military – in each country is the obligation for every Muslim to free Al-Aqsa Mosque (Jerusalem) and Saint Mosque (Mecca) and to push their armies from Islamic land” (Tierney 2016).

The idea of Jihad is also based on the views of Egyptian thinker Sayyed Qutb,<sup>3</sup> who declared that Jihad is the main sign of Islam mentioned in the Quran. It should be mentioned that he did not share the concept of “Defensive Jihad” and called the people who advocate this position to be misled.

In 2014 the new development of the concept of Global Jihad began, which was connected to IS – Islamic State. This group offered all Muslims to live in the State based on Islamic Shariah ruled by the Caliph who would be elected by *Ummah*. Muslims were offered to migrate with their families to the ideal Islamic State, which would use their knowledge to build new state institutions. Also, IS offered compensation for fighting against infidels.

To analyze the concept of the Islamic Caliphate, the article discusses the classical concept and its developments during the history of Islam.

### **The Classical Concept of the Islamic Caliphate**

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the question of his successor arose among his followers. Questions arose: what should be the life of Muslims after the apostle? How should Mecca and Medina be governed? The messenger left no decree or law as to who should be his successor or how the *Ummah* should be governed.

The Prophet Muhammad left the germs of Islamic Caliphate management to the people of Medina, which was reflected in the Constitution of Medina. The Constitution of Medina refers to the Prophet Muhammad as a mediator who was responsible for settling disputes between the people living in Medina. The document does not describe the city management system or legislation. After the death of the Prophet, his followers formed the institution of the Caliphate or successor. In the history of Islam, during 632-661, the Caliphate as the institution of the Islamic State was formed based on Quran.

As for the Caliph as the ruler of the Islamic State, the term appears for the first time during the Prophet period. When the Prophet was leaving Medina due to the military expeditions, he was leaving his deputy or Caliph as a temporary ruler. It should be noted that those Caliphs to whom Muhammad temporarily transferred the government of the city did not play any important role. Among the right-guided Caliphs, only Usman Ibn Affan was to whom Muhammad transferred the government temporarily during his absence (Cook 2015, 3; Kennedy 2016, 1-2). Probably, the appointment of a successor or Caliph after the death of the Prophet was, therefore, natural for the Muslim community, who had already been familiar with this institution in Medina. It is hard to discuss which events were ahead of the election of the Caliph after the Prophet’s death, but it may be confirmed that the Caliph should be from the Quraysh tribe.<sup>4</sup>

According to some scholars (Crone, Hinds), the Caliphs were named *Khalifatu l-Lah fi ardihi* – “Caliph of the God on the earth”, which pointed to the divine status of Caliphs (Crone 1986, 12-23). But there is another view that in this title, the word Prophet is often missed, and it means *Khalifatu rasul al-Lah* – “Caliph of the Prophet of God” (Kennedy 2016, 25). The first four Caliphs also were called *Amir*

<sup>2</sup> The concept of Global Jihad was adopted by German-Jewish scholar and diplomat Max Von Oppenheim at the beginning of the XX century, who called the German government to use the idea of Global Jihad to encourage the local population of the Middle East and North Africa to fight against British and French colonizers. But this concept did not work (Gossman 2013, 47-80).

<sup>3</sup> Sayyed Qutb (1906-1966) - Egyptian thinker and writer, Islamist scholar, and leader of the “Muslim Brotherhood”. Among his writings, the most important were Quran commentaries “In the shadow of Quran” and “Milestones”.

<sup>4</sup> This position was acceptable for Sunnis and Shiites, but later, Kharijites opposed this view.

*al-Mu'minin* or “rulers of the righteous people”. Today this title is used by some military leaders or rulers in the Arab world (for example, Kuwait and Qatar are ruled by Emirs) (Levy 2010, 56).

Over time other institutions were added to the Caliph institute. According to the initiative of Caliph Umar, the council of advisers or *Shura* was formed, which should elect the Caliph later. The council formed by Umar consisted of six men, and all of them were from the Quraysh tribe. Medinans did not participate in the formation of *Shura*. It should be mentioned that the formation of *Shura* gave some legitimation to the Caliph's election process, but its vast meaning gave way to many interpretations. The term means to advise (Arab. *shaawara* – “he gave an advice”) and does not connect to the elections. It was never defined how many people should consist of *Shura*, and what the rules are to elect *Shura*. However, throughout the history of Islam, *Shura* was used to present the more open nature of the process. For Shiites, it was not acceptable to elect the Caliph as it contradicted the will of God.

The Caliph institution was changed several times during the Umayyad ruling period. Especially during Abd al-Malik's time, who was called a king. He created the vertical autocratic system of the Caliphate still used by some Islamic States. He brought the *Mawali*, under the conduct of his right-hand Hajjaj, into the office of the Caliph. As Kennedy mentions, among *Mawali* were those Greeks who had the Byzantine experience of statehood. But Abd al-Malik's system was strictly Islamic (Kennedy 2016, 42).

During the Abbasid Caliphate, Caliphs were called by nicknames more often than by their real names. For example, Caliph Al-Mansur was better known by his nickname, meaning the winner, than his real name Abd al-Lah. This trend was adopted by other dynasties too in the history of Islam.

### **The Concept of Islamic Caliphate and IS**

The concept of the Islamic Caliphate, which was taken by radical Islamist groups and added to almost all organizations' programs, is based on the ideology of several Muslim thinkers. The most important among them is the Egyptian Sayyed Qutb.

Qutb developed the views of the “Muslim Brotherhood” founder Hasan Al-Banna about the state system, who called his followers to the creation of the Islamic State by Jihad. For Qutb, Jihad is the obligation for all Muslims and the characteristic sign of Islam. He attacked the people who called Jihad a “defensive fight” and called them misled.

Hasan al-Banna and Sayyed Qutb supported the idea of the Caliphate restoration. In 1938 Al-Banna declared: “The Brotherhood believes that the Caliphate is the symbol of Muslim unity and the connection between peoples. The Caliphate is the religious office, which should be cared by all Muslims... Muslim Brothers prioritize the restoration of the Caliphate” (Sekaly 1926, 161; Bunzel 2015, 8; Cole 2015, 7).

The idea of the Islamic Caliphate was later declared by IS speaker Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, who in 2014 declared the foundation of the Islamic Caliphate and called all Muslims to pledge an oath to the new Caliph Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi (Zelin 2014; Cole 2015, 31-35; Orton 2014). One of the most important postulates was to declare all previously existing borders, states, groups, and organizations as illegitimate and to name the Caliph as the only true ruler on the earth. This concept became one of the main cores of the ideology of the IS and gave rise to the so-called post-Islamic State policy.

IS offered all Muslims a new life, based in the State on the Islamic Shariah, which was ruled by the legally elected Caliph. The election of the Caliph was of great ideological importance because a true Islamic State is inconceivable without a Caliph or a ruler of the righteous. Unlike Al-Qaeda, IS offered Muslims to migrate with their families and use their knowledge to build new state institutions and fight against the infidels by giving them compensation. Many Muslims from the whole world responded to this call. So, active propaganda began, which aimed to romanticize the IS. IS members used modern technologies and the internet to widespread their propaganda. Calls were actively spread so that the Muslims could live according to true Islam in IS.

In the IS doctrine, the main place has Holy War or Jihad, which by IS ideology means the confrontation with the enemy, and it also includes the elements of a “Hybrid War”. The calls were spread since the IS foundation that all Muslims should join the fight against the infidels. The most important part of it was the so-called *Jihad al-Qalam* (“Jihad of the pen”), which means to propagate the IS ideology, *Jihad al-Mal* (“Jihad of the money”), which means to finance, and *Jihad as-Sayf* (“Jihad of the sword”) which means to engage in the military operations. According to the concept, “Jihad of the sword” did not mean to fight in the region but to wage a war in any place on the earth by any means including knives, poisons, or cars. Because of this position, a lot of “loneliness wolves” arose who got the training online

and organized the terrorist attacks in the countries they lived in. It should be mentioned that Muslims killed in Jihad will go to heaven – *Jannat Firdaus* (Quran, 23:11). Because of this propaganda, a lot of Muslims from different countries joined IS. In addition to it, several networks arose in different countries, which were managed online by the Caliphate control centers.

At the same time, the IS pursued the strictest policy toward those who did not take an oath before the Caliph or did not join the ranks of IS. In addition to local and coalition forces, the target of IS were civilians, especially those who did not recognize Sunni Islam such as local Christians, Shiites, and other religious minorities (IS used the most severe measures towards Yezidi people) (Human Rights Council 2016). Also, IS blamed other Islamist terrorist organizations for infidelity, such as Al-Qaeda, “Muslim Brothers”, Hamas, etc., because they refused to join the ranks of IS.

The popularity of the Caliphate is based on IS global policy. Contrary to Al-Qaeda, IS refused local and regional attitudes and went beyond the existing borders, which reflects the Caliphate policy during the Prophet Muhammad and the righteous Caliphs. Al-Adnani emphasized in his speech that as a result of the establishment of Islam, origin, nationality, skin color, or social status were rejected, and the *Ummah* or Muslim community is above all these commandments, which gave Muslims justice and superiority over other peoples. According to him, by announcing the Caliphate, God fulfilled his promise to his chosen people and restored the true Islamic State and legitimate leader – the Caliph.

Despite an important success, IS got many opponents among Islamists as well as moderate Muslims. Scholars of other terrorist organizations and theologians of Islamic centers criticized IS and accused it of apostasy from Islam and the so-called putting down *Fitna* – strife.

Because of Iraqi militants and the International coalition forces, IS left some positions by the end of 2016, and, in the spring of 2019, after the so-called Baghuzi fight, it finally lost control of territories in the Middle East. Despite this fact, IS managed to regroup itself and change its tactics which still makes it a challenge for the world.

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