

Review of: "Willingness to sacrifice among convicted Islamist terrorists versus violent gang members and other criminals"

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The article is of particular interest since despite its undoubted relevance only a small contingent of specialists is engaged in the study of the true motives of Islamist movements' representatives for committing terrorist acts and other illegal acts. Significant forces and means are used all over the world to prevent terrorist acts at all stages as well as to prevent the development of armed conflicts, which are explained by adherence to radical forms of Islam. But the main problem is that the original reason that determines the intentional implementation of terrorist acts and participation in hostilities with the maximum possible victims and, moreover, with the sacrifice of one's life and / or one's loved ones in classical science is studied by a small number of specialists.

The authors of the article used the correct principle of direct contact with criminals imprisoned in places of deprivation of liberty, based on consent and privacy. Worth mentioning is an interesting comparison method of dividing convicts into two groups – members of Latin American gangs and "jihadists", as the authors call the group of terrorists who identify themselves with Islam.

Nevertheless it follows from the article that the authors of the project may not have sufficient experience in dealing with this category of people. It seems that the study was methodologically based on disparate literature data – the approach is justified, but, unfortunately, not effective in this project. To deal with such subtle topics, you need to have experience of immersion in the Muslim environment and, moreover, in the one that is prone to a radical variant of religion. The results of the surveys on which the conclusions of the work were based may not be valid due to the peculiarities of the mentality of Muslims when the question concerns the frankness of their religious feelings, thinking and behavior. Interviewers may seem to be sincere but, as a rule, men do not consider it necessary to fully reveal the true motives of what happened, especially to non-Muslim. These are the features of their mentality (they can be sincere with imam), and this also applies to the internal environment.

The paper presents an approach in which it is assumed that all the surveyed "jihadists" committed acts of self-sacrifice for the sake of certain values, with a stronger perception of injustice and discrimination. However, this is not true, because various factors and events can serve as leading motives. It should be clarified that the perpetrators of terrorist acts are divided into those who consciously sacrifice their lives (sometimes together with their loved ones), those who want to survive, but are ready, if necessary, to sacrifice themselves and loved ones, and finally those who try to avoid their own death by committing illegal acts. Some are forced by its own military group to commit terrorist acts under the influence of psychological pressure and psychotropic exposure or by blackmail and in some cases due to financial problems in the family, and so on. The very ability to commit a terrorist act, including the awareness of a high probability of imminent death, may be due to an initial predisposition that means that the neurobiological factor plays a significant role. It can be

confirmed by the fact that in a single environment of growing up and upbringing, only some representatives are capable of radical actions including suicide. Only when communicating with an interviewer an adherent of "jihad" will unambiguously reduce everything to the lofty goals of Islam in their misinterpretation, however, it is known that true Islam does not justify such behavior. The Quran says: "Fight in the way of Allah with those who fight against you, but do not transgress the boundaries of what is permitted" (Quran, 2:190).

The authors write that they «... understand that willingness to die and kill is the overriding sacrifice that extremist rehabilitation programs hope to prevent. However, asking directly about these intentions can lead, and did lead (in our preliminary study), to difficulties in carrying out the study (the participant could feel uneasy during the interview, he could prefer to abandon the interview, or he could even be aggressive with the interviewer)...». Instead of it, they try to use other leading, in their opinion, questions. But this is the most important question in the study, and if someone expresses concern or gives out an aggressive reaction, this is also a topic for research. Inadequate tolerance is shown here, especially because the convicts have committed serious crimes themselves.

The authors of the article use the term "jihadists", but this is incorrect term, unacceptable in academic literature. It can be used by journalists of the popular press without going into the details of religious meanings, but not in scientific research. The term «jihad» usually translated as "holy war" for religious purposes, in Arabic does not mean exactly war. The verb "jahada" (جاهد) whose cognate word ("masdar") is "jihad" (جهاد), literally means "give all one's strength", "strain one's efforts". Therefore, the term "jihad" is more correctly translated as "striving", "zeal" and since that, actions of completely non-military nature can also be called jihad.

In the discussion of the article, a rather bold statement is presented: «Another substantive contribution of this study is that it is one of only a handful of studies that analyzes the factors underlying cognitive radicalization in a sample of terrorists under real-world conditions and, to our knowledge, the first such study of convicted terrorists in a prison environment ...». At some points it is controversial, but the idea of the project is very relevant, and as the authors correctly write: «A theory-based understanding of these differences in terms of prisoners' willingness to make costly sacrifices, validated by our direct observational and comparative study, has important policy implications for prisoner management (e.g., interventions programs for preventing radicalization and de-radicalization), but also significantly for societies-at-large: in particular, for lessening risks of recidivism, given the release of many hundreds of returning foreign ISIS fighters, and more generally for suggesting possibilities for lessening the impact and growth of terrorism». We are looking forward to further research.