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E-JIHAD OR THE WAY ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS UTILIZE DIGITAL AND ICT PROGRESS

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Abstract: This paper aims to verify the research thesis stating that the combination of Islam and the digital, information and communications, and technological progress has both a bright (positive) and, unfortunately, a dominant, dark (negative) side. Islam and digital or ICT progress are not contradictory, and the proper use of digital tools, without resorting to violence, expansion or war, serves the development and strengthening of Islam. Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century digital progress has proven to be the phenomenon which most noticeably influenced the expansion of terrorist (jihadist) attitudes and has become a catalyst for the emergence and rapid development of cyber jihad within the cyber ummah. For Islamic fundamentalists, tradition remains crucial, but radical scholars in Islamic law argue that to defend that tradition against Western influences, one must embrace the latest and most advanced digital technologies. E-jihad has thus become one of the most effective forms of both offensive and defensive jihad, and it can be presumed that its development will continue in the coming decades. The popularity, consolidation, and development of e-jihad are directly proportional to digital progress.

Key words
Islam, jihad, e-jihad, terrorism, cyber ummah, digital progress, the Internet, social media

1. Introduction

Jihadist activities carried out by radical terrorist organizations are unequivocally linked to religion – Islam. In the twenty-first century the so-called lesser jihad (*qital*) poses one of the most important challenges and threats to international security. Not only does this threat not diminish over time but it intensifies, to which digital and technological progress as well as advancements in information and communications technology have made a significant contribution. The flexibility of the concept of jihad, along with its continuous evolution, means that in the twenty-first century, in the course of adapting to the challenges of the digital, ICT and technological revolution, this phenomenon has taken on a new form – of cyber jihad or e-jihad. E-jihad is thus understood as activities involving the use of new media and information technologies based on the digital world to conduct both defensive and offensive jihad, ultimately leading to the establishment of the cyber ummah.

This paper aims to verify the research thesis stating that there is a close and strong correlation between the development, expansion, and success of e-jihad and digital and ICT progress. Digital tools, including new media, constitute highly effective instruments utilized by e-jihadists for the radicalization of Muslims living in their countries of origin, as well as Muslims residing in the West. Additionally, these tools are employed for the conversion to Islam of those seeking their own religious identity. The analysis undertaken in this paper aims to identify the origin and evolution of the concept of jihad, especially e-jihad. It also seeks to present the doctrinal foundations and positions of selected Muslim scholars regarding digital progress. Furthermore, the paper aims to verify and determine the digital tools most commonly used by jihadist organizations, and to find and provide examples of both positive and negative impact of digital progress on the development of Islam.

The questions posed in order to verify the research thesis will be focused on the following research problems: what types of jihad can be distinguished, and how does digital progress influence their perception?; what is the attitude of Islamic scholars towards the digital revolution and the infiltration of its elements into the world of Islam?; do e-jihad and cyber ummah present an effective alternative for individuals seeking religious identity (including Islamic identity)?; what digital tools are most commonly used by jihadist organizations?; can the combination of Islam and digital progress be unequivocally and categorically viewed as a negative phenomenon?

To verify the formulated thesis, solve the research problems, and provide answers to the questions posed above, the author will employ the following research methods: cause and effect analysis, historical method,

comparative method, and source analysis.

2. From jihad to e-jihad – the origin and evolution of the phenomenon

When considering the relatively new concept of e-jihad, reference should be made to its core, which is jihad itself. The term jihad, which etymologically means effort, striving or even struggle, is inseparably linked to the Quran, the Prophet Muhammad, and Islamic law (sharia) (Taner 2016, 127-131). It is a complex and multifaceted notion, which is approached by the Muslims themselves from various perspectives and on different levels (various schools of Islamic law). Basically, however, two fundamental types of jihad can be distinguished in Islamic tradition.

The first type of jihad is called the greater (inner) jihad. It holds a moral and spiritual significance for the entire Muslim community (ummah) as well as individual believers. It is understood as a struggle against one's own weaknesses and temptations. For a Muslim, inner jihad is a daily struggle against evil, Satan (Iblis) and his temptations to sin. It also involves effort to overcome one's negative character traits and to engage in positive actions for the benefit of one's community (Ashkar 2017, 125-127). The greater jihad is a permanent struggle towards self-improvement. Devout Muslims engage in the greater jihad throughout their lives, striving to become better Muslims. This type of jihad, which should be perceived as a more important and positive or even desirable and inherent element of Islam, is conducted by Muslims with the use of tools such as the heart, hands, and tongue (Martin 1991, 92-102).

The other type of jihad, termed lesser jihad (external jihad), has for centuries been the driving force behind Muslim territorial expansion and served as justification for successive wars and territorial conquests. The lesser jihad is essentially a war against unbelievers (kafirun), polytheists, heretics, and hypocrites. It constitutes armed defense of Islamic ideas, way of life, religious values, the ummah, and the God-given territory (dar al-islam). The lesser jihad also serves as a political act, providing Muslims with security and legitimizing engagement in armed activities (Donner 1991, 46-52). Armed jihad can be both of a defensive kind (jihad al-daf') – when Muslims are attacked, and an offensive kind (jihad talab) – when Muslims are the attacker. Surah 2 of the Quran commands Muslims to fight those who attack them but they should not be aggressors themselves. However, according to sunnah (another source of Muslim law – tradition), jihad is perceived as an aggressive war against those living outside the house or abode of Islam (it is called dar al-islam) in areas defined as the house or abode of war (it is called dar al-harb). The house of war is explained as the lands associated with evil. The areas are not under Islamic law, or are engaged in war against Muslims, and where Islamic law does not apply, and Muslims are subjected to repression (Ramadan 2017,

200-202). It should be emphasized that only one small faction of Islam, the Kharijites, advocated the concept of the lesser jihad. They pointed out that the key is an uncompromising armed struggle against non-believers. It obligates every Muslim and calls for treating the lesser jihad as the sixth pillar of Islam. However, what is important in the broader context of the lesser jihad, is the belief that warriors, or rather martyrs (shahids), who die in battle against the broadly defined unbelievers, do not have to wait for the Judgment Day but go straight to the promised paradise (jannah) and can enjoy all its abundance (Kolocotronis 1990, 107-122).

In this context, it is worth adding that in the Arabic language, there is an equivalent for the lesser jihad – called qital – directly referring to armed combat. Qital is carried out by the effort of the entire ummah, so it is not an individual obligation but a collective one. In the Western world, this particular type of jihad is – which must be strongly emphasized – incorrectly referred to as a holy war. The lesser jihad cannot be waged to convert Christians or Jews. However, since the time of the Crusades, the term jihad (in general) has been used to refer to a war against Christians who invaded Muslim territories, the struggle against colonial powers, as well as when Muslims call for jihad against other Muslims (like during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988) (Tarock 1998, 90-101).

Summarizing the theoretical considerations regarding traditional forms of jihad, it must be stated that in the Quran and Muslim tradition, jihad – both in a positive and negative context – denotes all efforts undertaken in the name of spreading and strengthening Islam. This encompasses internal struggle of individual Muslims against their weaknesses, as well as peaceful, individual and collective efforts to promote Islam, and also communal, armed conversion of unbelievers. The definition of jihad itself, however, was not established during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, but it was formulated in subsequent stages of Islam's development as a religion (Ramadan 2017, 127-134). This fact unquestionably implies the ambiguity of the concept of jihad and the proliferation of its forms, allowing radical, Islamic fundamentalist groups to almost freely interpret and manipulate selected content to justify terrorist activities. The ambiguity and flexibility of the concept of jihad, as well as its continuous evolution, have also caused that in the course of adapting to the challenges of the ICT and technological revolution of the twenty-first century, it has taken on a new form – of cyber jihad or e-jihad.

3. E-jihad in theory and practice

Referring to the formula of e-jihad, it should be underlined that it involves the use of new media and information technologies based on the digital and online world, including social media, to conduct both defensive and offensive jihad. The Internet, within the realm of e-jihad, has become a straightforward yet incredibly effective tool for spreading propaganda

and radicalization online (Davis 2006, 119-186).

However, it is worth noting that the call by scholars in Islamic law and Muslim ideologists to encourage the Muslim community (including fundamentalist/jihadist groups) to utilize the emerging modern technological solutions and exploit the digital instruments commonly used by Western civilization is not a new phenomenon (Choueiri 2003, 28-31). The only difference lies in the fact that, with technological and digital progress in the Western world, Islamic fundamentalists are also increasingly employing newer and more advanced digital tools for conducting their warfare.

Sayyid Qutb, one of the ideological leaders of the Egyptian fundamentalist organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, emphasized that in order to take leadership of mankind, Muslims must offer more than merely material development (Kolocotronis 1990, 118-120). This new quality should be faith and lifestyle. Muslims should benefit from modern science and technology to meet their spiritual and material needs. Qutb stressed, therefore, that one should act in a way that preserves religious values while simultaneously taking advantage of the benefits related to modern science and technology from the West. He believed this duality was supposed to be one of the ways for the Muslim community to emerge from the catastrophic state it found itself in, partly due to the colonization and influences of the West (Osman 2017, 58-72).

Similar views were held by the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna. He claimed that the fundamental problem of the development of the Islamic world amounts to the question of preserving the cultural identity of the Muslim community in the face of the broad and profound influence of European civilization (Ramadan 1993, 152-157). He argued that, on the one hand, adopting anything from the West led to a gradual loss of that identity. On the other hand, an awareness of the necessity for change meant that one could not completely turn away from the West and distance oneself from its civilizational achievements. Therefore, the only way out of this difficult situation was to maintain certain priorities. Al-Banna argued that all changes (including those within the technological revolution) should take place within the framework of tradition, conform to the principles and spirit of Islam, and in particular comply with the Islamic law. Therefore, it was necessary to modernize life without succumbing to westernization. Hassan al-Banna claimed that the preservation of cultural identity was dependent on society's knowledge of what could be adopted from the West and what should be rejected (TengkuErwinsyahbana & Nurul 2016, 35-42).

A moderate Egyptian Islamic scholar, Muhammad al-Ghazali, also presented interesting views on relations with the West. He referred to the examples of al-Afghani and Abduh, great reformers of Islam, who did not turn away from Western civilization but recognized not only its flaws but also qualities beneficial for Islam.

Therefore, his attitude was pro-Western but not unconditionally (Ramadan 1993, 167-168).

One of the most well-known Egyptian liberal Muslim activists and television preachers, Amr Khaled, argued that the Islamic world is in a state of destruction, which is the consequence of both the colonial era and the low engagement of Muslims themselves in changing and improving the poor state of their country. In his television appearances and on websites, Khaled provided interesting examples supporting his thesis: in the USA, there are 4,000 engineers per 1 million inhabitants, while in Arab countries, there are only 300. A similar pattern applies to the number of doctors, newspapers, and computers (Khaled 2008). Therefore, Muslims themselves should engage in reform and modernization. Civilizational progress, including technological and digital advancements, should take place as soon as possible, and its success depends on the attitudes of Muslim societies and the governments of individual states (Zdanowski 2009, 140-154). Amr Khaled does not belong to the circle of Islamic fundamentalists, but it is worth presenting him as someone who adeptly utilized the digital achievements of the civilization to promote Islam and also to increase his own capital. In 2007, Amr Khaled was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by the *Time* magazine. Moreover, Amr Khaled claimed the top spot in the list of the Muslim world's richest preachers published by *Forbes Arabia* in 2008. His income in 2007 amounted to an impressive 2.5 million dollars. Second on the list was the modernist Kuwaiti preacher Tareq al-Suwaidan with 1 million dollars in his account. Following him were Aaidh al-Qarni, the Saudi author of the popular self-help book *La Tahzan*, and the Egyptian preacher residing in the United Arab Emirates, Omar Abdel-Kafi. The magazine stated that these preachers' primary income sources were TV programs, religious CDs, and books. As *Forbes Arabia* indicated, the ability to preach religion using digital tools in the Islamic world has become the primary source of income for many individuals, but this has not diminished the impact of the religious word proclaimed and the religious values (Khaled 2008). Undoubtedly, his religious message conveyed by means of the Internet reaches a wide audience and has been successful since 2007. In mid-October 2023, his Amr Khaled YouTube channel had 2.01 million subscribers and featured 10,000 videos (Khaled 2023).

Therefore, it can be stated that the exploitation of the latest digital and ICT technologies in the Islamic world proceeds in a two-way manner. On the one hand, there is a positive aspect of the

combination of Islam and digitization. Technology, like in the case of other religions, helps spread the word of God, attracting new followers, or persuading those who have doubts. Technology and digitization make the religious message much more attractive, accessible and adjusted to the new challenges and perceptions of the globalized world in the twenty-first century. Such an approach to the combination of Islam and digitization is exemplified by Muslim "digital" preachers who have achieved immense success online (Bunt 2000, 104-131). On the other hand, there is also a negative aspect of the fusion of Islam and digitization. In this case, information and communications progress is exploited for radicalization and terrorist activities. Jihadist groups provide an excellent illustration of this approach to combining Islam and digitization.

Importantly, the invariable fact is that for Islamic fundamentalists tradition constitutes the core of their activities. However, according to the interpretation provided by the leaders of Islamic fundamentalist organizations, to defend and strengthen Muslim tradition, it is not only possible but, what is more, it is necessary to embrace the latest, best and most sophisticated technological and digital solutions widely exploited by the broadly defined West. Thus, tools such as social media platforms (especially Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Skype, and Telegram) (Terrorists 2017), websites, niche platforms disseminating graphic content (such as Canadian Best Gore), or the popular LiveLeak service, as well as films, computer games (e.g. Grand Theft Auto V), blogs, music and other streaming services (commonly accessible like YouTube, but also existing in the dark web), should be utilized for gaining new followers of Islam, their conversion to Islam, and even radicalization and jihadization (including the institution of lone wolves) (Antinori 2017). Even though many websites have been taken offline, new sites and publications keep on emerging and extremism and terrorists groups continue an even more sophisticated use of technology, Internet and social media to keep in touch with their members and sympathizers, especially through the use of encrypted applications and sites, including Telegram, Rocket chat, Rayot, Viber and BCM (Laytouss 2021, 2-6). The latest digital technology – colorful, eye-catching, free or very inexpensive, understandable, and widely available – used by the Western world, should and has become, as demonstrated first by al-Qaeda and subsequently by the Islamic State, a double-edged sword.

Referring to the relationship between the digital world and jihad, it should be noted that within the division of jihad outlined above, two primary forms of the so-called e-jihad can be distinguished.

The first one is greater jihad – an apostolic mission aimed at seeking God. This type of jihad exploits the Internet as a preaching implement, a space for spiritual support and dissemination of religious publications, as

well as a platform for sharing religious experiences (Bunt 2003, 25-34).

The other form is lesser jihad, which is divided into two types. The first type is *qital*, which involves conducting harmful activities against non-believers and the Western world using information technology tools. The other type is supportive jihad, which focuses primarily on cyberattacks (active tactics) or providing auxiliary tools to assist jihadists (passive tactics). In the case of passive tactics, the main instruments utilized by e-jihadists include: extensive propaganda activities, ideological legitimization of the struggle, as well as radicalization and recruitment of new members through calling for active participation in jihad (Choueiri 2010, 227-228). Analyzing the above differentiation within e-jihad, Przemysław Mazur refers to this type of jihad as jihad of the tongue, while the term jihad of the pen encompasses such activities as providing instruments necessary for armed activities, and thus supplying training materials, the use of open-source research, and ensuring secure communication. Mazur points out that obtaining financial resources for the operations and logistical support for the jihadists' activities in cyberspace is a crucial element of any form of e-jihad (Mazur 2020).

4. E-jihad as an effective form of warfare – case analysis

In the middle of the third decade of the twenty-first century, conducting e-jihad has become an almost universal practice for terrorist (jihadist) organizations. A critical moment for entering the stage of ubiquity and subsequent success in exploiting digital technologies by jihadist groups was undoubtedly the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 on the WTC in New York and the Pentagon carried out by al-Qaeda (Hipp 2015, 29-39). At that time mass media, especially the Internet, became the space where religion (Islam) and the digital world converged. It was the combination of these two different worlds that led to the emergence of a new phenomenon known as cyber ummah. New media started to abound in content filled with Quranic references, which were not presented directly but packaged in the latest and best trends in popular culture, while the virtual space became a tangible tool used by jihadists to wage a religious, cultural, and psychological war against Western civilization (Ghamari 2017, 76-88).

Therefore, one should question the reason for this shift in the jihadists' approach towards exploiting the increasingly sophisticated developments in digital technology, so prevalent in the Western world. The answer is remarkably straightforward. According to e-jihadists, without the use of the digital world, victory over the unbelievers would not be possible. In the twenty-first century, promoting selected Quranic verses, Islamic values, Sharia norms, and lifestyle, while simultaneously comparing them to the decadent, satanic, liberalized, and morally devoid West, has proved to be the key to success for the popularity of e-jihadists,

as well as for their strategy of intimidating Western societies on the one hand and radicalization and conversion to Islam on the other (Antinori 2017).

In the twenty-first century, al-Qaeda was a forerunner in digital activities, but it was the Islamic State that perfected the model of e-jihad (Wright, et al. 2016/2017, 5-39), while the Somali Al-Shabab was one of the first terrorist groups to utilize instant messengers (Twitter) for their activities. Obviously, this does not mean that other terrorist organizations, such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Afghan Taliban, Syrian Jabhat al-Nusra, Nigerian Boko Haram, and others, are not present online (Gerbaudo 2012, 48-75). On the contrary, each of these groups increasingly exploits the information and communications technology and digital achievements of Western civilization for conducting e-jihad. To achieve the greatest success in the field of jihad (*qital*), each of them adopts the latest technological solutions and maintains a permanent online presence (Malik 2018, 17-23).

Jihadist groups not only use the most popular streaming channel, YouTube, to promote violent content, including short videos made by their fighters showing the beheading of kidnapped civilians (including Western journalists, businesspeople, or kidnapped tourists, such as American journalists David Pearl and James Foley (Kennon 2017, 78-84), Israeli journalist Steven Sotloff, British humanitarian aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning, American humanitarian aid worker Peter Kassig, or American businessman Nicholas Evan Berg) (Rollins, Rosen 2015), but they also create professional television channels and publish magazines propagating radical content.

Importantly, the new media in the hands of jihadists are in no way inferior to Western media culture in terms of the quality and professionalism of their production or the transmission of images and sound. New jihadist media are no longer based primarily on the Arabic language. Jihadists soon realized that the success of e-jihad depends not only on the promoted religious content (the "product" they sell or share – in this case, lesser jihad/*qital*), but above all on the quality of the packaging in which this "product" will be sold (Bunt 2003, 91-109). The better the packaging – the closer to what the West expects and more saturated with pop culture – the easier its reception, and the greater its propaganda success will be. It will also be easier to radicalize its potential recipients. To achieve maximum success and reach a wide audience worldwide, magazines published by jihadists (such as al-Qaeda's *Inspire* or ISIS's *Rumiyah* and *Dabiq*) (Manne 2017, 133-146) were translated into the most popular Western languages, such as English (in the case of *Inspire*) or French, but also into Russian and Turkish. They were colorful, easy to understand, and readily available on the Internet (Cohen and Kaati 2018, 53-66). This phenomenon was perfectly exemplified by an article featured in *Inspire* entitled "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom," which was

used by the Tsarnaev brothers who carried out a bombing attack during the 2013 Boston Marathon based on the aforementioned content (Świątkowska and Szwiec and Llacayo 2016).

Thus, the content presented in new jihadist media, had to serve as an appropriate tool not only for the radicalized Muslims to reinforce their sense of jihadist mission but also (and perhaps primarily) for those who constituted the next generation of Muslims living in Western Europe and the USA. This target group of European and American Muslims, primarily consisting of young people disillusioned with the West, unassimilated into the societies of the countries they inhabited but subjected to ghettoization and seeking religious identity, became an incredibly easy target for e-jihadists (Soriano 2019, 26-42). Therefore, the global reception of e-jihad required that the presented religious content be adjusted to the audience in order to create a new kind of cyber ummah not only in the Middle East but wherever Muslims lived. The search for and finding religious identity, a return to the roots of Islam (strengthening fundamentalist attitudes), and the opportunity to access religious/Islamic content conveyed by scholars of Islamic law (*ulema*) by means of the latest information technology became a new form that connected Islam and modernity (Roy 2017, 41-56).

Taking into consideration also other cyber tools used to promote radical religious (Islamic) content by jihadist groups, it is crucial to emphasize the significant contribution of The Al-Hayat Media Center. Its leading role was to disseminate online audiovisual materials from the battlefield, broadcast executions, create propaganda videos where the Islamic world was always depicted as the victor, and also air nasheeds – choral religious (Islamic) songs that made reference to victorious battles in the light of Islam and the cult of martyrdom. The creation and dissemination of nasheeds aimed to encourage audiences (both Muslims and unbelievers converting to Islam) to become e-jihadists. The Al-Hayat Media Center carried out more professional work than home recordings al-Qaeda used to intimidate the western societies. They used unique sound and audio-visual effects inspired by Hollywood's well-known productions. Moreover, a radio station and the 24-hour television channel called Khilafalive was launched in Mosul in Iraq. The jihadists also managed a blog: khilafahtoday.blogspot.com. The United States government estimated that IS's media could publish up to 90,000 online comments. The Al Hayat Media Center published three magazines: *Islamic State Reports*; *Islamic State News*, and *Dabiq*. The last mentioned magazine has increased as one of the essential tools of the Islamic State media campaign. (Aragó 2017, 109-122).

In the heyday of the Islamic State, a significant role in promoting e-jihad was played by Jihadi John, who spoke fluent English with a distinctive British accent, deliberately targeting the undecided individuals considering joining the ranks of the Islamic State. IS recruited supporters

primarily on Twitter and social networking sites. One of the most important was Telegram which maintained contacts between IS envoys, recruiters, and potentially new jihadists. Telegram was used as a platform to arrange, for example, travel details into territory controlled by jihadist cells. Moreover, IS has created public channels on Telegram. Their task was to provide up-to-date information on IS activities and the expansion of various propaganda materials through the Amaq Agency news service. (Terrorists 2017).

As a recent example, one can point to Hamas's strategy following the attack it carried out on October 7, 2023, on Israeli territory. In a manner reminiscent of the Islamic State's activities in cyberspace, the spokesperson for Hamas's military wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, announced that the executions of the kidnapped hostages would be live-streamed on the Internet. Interestingly, Hamas utilizes Telegram (Dahiru 2023), a largely unmoderated platform with over 800 million active users, to send messages and share videos presenting the kidnappings and killings during the attack on Israel. Graham Brookie, the director of the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, rightly observed that Hamas's current digital strategy aims to cause maximum damage while simultaneously drawing as much international attention as possible by disseminating recorded materials through the media (Overly 2023). Such actions are aimed at instilling a sense of fear and common threat among the public and gaining maximum political benefits, but with the use of the digital religious factor (e-jihad).

5. Conclusions – the bright and dark sides of the combination of Islam and ICT progress

In summary, considering the increasingly widespread utilization of digital and ICT progress for conducting e-jihad by jihadist groups, it is worth mentioning the typology of seven applications of the Internet by terrorist groups (including jihadist ones) devised by Gabriel Weimann. He indicated that the fundamental elements of using the Internet include: 1. Data mining – Jihadists use the Internet to search for essential information connected with functioning strategic targets, including aspects of critical infrastructure, such as nuclear power plants or airports, and details about counterterrorism measures. Interestingly, by legally utilizing the Internet, terrorists can obtain up to 80% of the necessary information; 2. Networking – the Internet enables various terrorist groups to communicate with each other and coordinate actions in an easy and nearly cost-free manner; 3. Recruitment and mobilization – recruiters primarily utilize interactive Internet technology to seek new supporters and followers of the sward jihad; 4. Online manuals – the Internet serves as a source of knowledge for potential terrorists. On the Internet, one can easily find websites offering instructions and manuals that illustrate how

to build a bomb or carry out an effective terrorist attack; 5. Planning and coordination – the Internet constitutes a straightforward tool for terrorists, which they use for planning attacks and coordinating terrorist activities. Jihadists use chat platforms and publicly available email addresses to plan terrorist attacks; 6. Fundraising – Terrorists use the Internet to identify potential sympathizers, and thus donors, of the terrorist organization; 7. The Internet is a battlefield between terrorist groups – social media and other online platforms have become places to attack and struggle with other terrorist organizations.. Ideological and practical competition between groups such as Hamas and al-Qaeda, or al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, takes place not only in the real world but also on the Internet (Weimann 2010).

Referring to the typology of Internet usage by terrorist groups outlined by Gabriel Weimann in the practical activities of Islamic jihadist organizations, it is essential to emphasize that the common factor among Islamic fundamentalists is Islam. It is the religious factor that is exploited by Islamic terrorists, starting from disseminating information about Islam online, to recruiting new followers, their conversion to Islam and religious radicalization, to turning them into individual or group suicide bombers convinced that by killing non-believers they are guaranteed entry into paradise (*Jannah*).

The connection between Islam and digital progress cannot be unequivocally and categorically viewed as something bad. The combination of Islam and digitization has both its bright (positive) and, unfortunately, dominant, dark (negative) side.

On one hand, the combination of Islam and digital progress is an undoubtedly natural and even positive phenomenon, as exemplified by television preachers mentioned above, such as Amr Khaled or Tareq al-Suwaidan. Digital technologies can be used for preaching and explaining the intricacies of Islam (especially Sharia) in a modern and accessible manner without resorting to radical content. Islam and digital or ICT progress are not inherently contradictory, and the appropriate use of digital tools serves only to promote the development and strengthening of Islam without advocating violence, expansion, or war.

On the other hand, however, the combination of Islam and digital progress, as highlighted in this text, creates broad operational opportunities for radical jihadist groups that exploit technological advancements for conducting e-jihad. This phenomenon has been one of the most significant threats to the national security of individual states (as demonstrated by attacks in Western Europe) and international security for over three decades. Importantly, it can be anticipated that e-jihad will not diminish in the near future, but rather its scale will continue to grow. The escalation of e-jihad is directly proportional to technological and digital progress, and this cannot be halted.

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