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AMERICAN STRATEGY TO FIGHT THE ISLAMIC STATE

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic State is an insurgent and terrorist group that till the middle of 2017 controlled large areas of Iraq and Syria, where it proclaimed a new Islamic caliphate. The U.S.-led global coalition to combat ISIS was created in 2014 with its military component called Operation Inherent Resolve. Through the last years, the Obama and Trump administration officials implemented some changes in strategy and tactics that have significantly reduced the area controlled by the group and made it operate in the underground or leave the region. The following paper addresses the main pillars of the Global Coalition, Operation Inherent Resolve and the U.S. strategy under both presidents. Moreover, it discusses the reasons of changing the strategy from the attrition one to that of annihilation. Finally, it gives a theoretical background concerning the theories of asymmetric warfare, war strategy and land operations.

Introduction

ISIL (Islamic State of the Iraq and the Levant), also known as Daesh, was designated by the United Nations Security Council as a terrorist organization that “constitutes a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security”². Its history goes back to 2003, when the Bush administration declared

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² United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2249 (2015), http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2249.pdf [dostęp: 11.04.2018].

the so called War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq began. The abrupt removal of a dictator Saddam Hussein, dismantling of the national military forces, banning thousands of Baathist party members from political and social life – all this led to the total chaos, religious conflicts, law violations and finally civil war. The social frustrations and completely dysfunctional state turned out to be a perfect ground for various insurgent and terrorist groups to come into existence. At the beginning, most of those Sunni extremist groups were affiliated with Al-Qaeda. When the Americans withdraw their forces from Iraq in 2011, jihadists gained even more steam. What is more, the repression of the Sunni by the Shia government with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki as a head, led to many arrests and persecutions of Sunni leaders. It caused many people to go underground and join terrorist groups such as ISIL. After the war in Syria broke out in 2011, it was the next theatre for them to grow, gain new territory, train its warriors and fight under the cover of rebels against the Assad regime. In 2013 the organization changed its name into the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and in 2014 under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi it proclaimed itself a caliphate calling to all Muslims to unite and come to the Middle East to pledge allegiance. The name was shortened then to the Islamic State³.

This article will analyse the U.S. military strategy to combat the above mentioned terrorist organization which has posed a great danger not only to people of Iraq and Syria, but to every citizen around the world. Taking into consideration the number and atrocity of terrorists attacks perpetrated by ISIS supporters in all parts of the world, no one would deny that ISIS, and Islamic terror in general, has been the greatest threat to the international safety nowadays. It was important to show the differences in handling the problem of combating terrorism by two subsequent presidents of the United States – Barack Obama and Donald Trump. What is more, while discussing the motivation for the shift of strategies from the attrition one to that of annihilation, the author has included the opinion of an experienced ex-soldier from the Polish Special Forces who participated in combat missions combating Islamic fighters in Iraq.

³ A. Withnall, Iraq crisis: Isis declares its territories a new Islamic state with restoration of caliphate in Middle East, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-declares-new-islamic-state-in-middle-east-with-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-as-emir-removing-iraq-and-9571374.html> [dostęp: 11.04.2018].

Global coalition

On September 11, 2014 President Barack Obama officially informed the world about the creation of the global coalition to, as he said, “degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy so that it’s no longer a threat to Iraq, the region, the United States, and our partners”⁴. Over 60 countries joined the coalition then: Afghanistan, Albania, the Arab League, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kosovo, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malaysia, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States. And now there have been even 75 partners contributing in different ways to the coalition efforts⁵. As for the legal basis for such a coalition, there are several UN Security Council Resolutions, in particular the Resolution 2170 which calls on Member States to stop the flow of foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria, to suppress the flow of finances and weapons to Islamic terrorists⁶.

It must be mentioned that only some of the above mentioned states have ever been directly involved in air combat operations, for example United States, France, Australia, Jordan, United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates. By March, 2017, in total 29 nations had contributed 3,800 troops to the counter-ISIS operation. Some other countries, notably Canada, Germany and Poland, have been providing air-to-air refuelling, surveillance and reconnaissance in support of coalition air operations.

Apart of combat operations, there has been the next element of the coalition strategy to fight ISIS. Namely, the train, assist and advice mission which has been fulfilled by a number of member countries, such as the USA, the UK and Poland. Some military personnel has been deployed in Iraq with a goal of training and

⁴ The Obama White House, Office of the Press Secretary, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/fact-sheet-strategy-counter-islamic-state-iraq-and-levant-isil> [dostęp: 14.04.2018].

⁵ Global Coalition, <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/> [dostęp: 14.04.2018].

⁶ United Nations, Security Council Adopts Resolution 2170 (2014) Condemning Gross, Widespread Abuse of Human Rights by Extremist Groups in Iraq, Syria, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11520.doc.htm> [dostęp: 14.04.2018].

advising the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. By March 2017, over 70,000⁷ Iraqi personnel have been trained, including Iraqi troops, Peshmerga, police, border forces and tribal fighters. As for the Polish special forces taking part in that mission, since June, 2016 there has been about 150 Polish soldiers (from PKW Iraq and PKW OIR Kuwait) supporting the Global Coalition to combat ISIS⁸. Moreover, the Iraqi and Kurdish forces were provided with logistic help and resources, such as provision of arms, ammunition and military equipment. In Syria particularly, the United States launched a training programme for moderate opposition which concentrated on their equipping and enabling just to prepare that forces for the future operations against ISIS controlling their land. The US provided the opposition with equipment, weapon and assured air support if necessary⁹.

U.S. contributions to aid Iraq are made in part through the Iraq Train and Equip fund originally authorized in late 2014 with the goal of providing training, equipment, logistics support, supplies, stipends, infrastructure repair, renovation, and sustainment to military and other security forces of or associated with the Government of Iraq, including Kurdish and tribal security forces. So far, the Congress has authorized and provided \$2.33 billion in funding¹⁰. As for as the assistance to the Kurdish peshmerga, the United States government offered more than \$400 million in defense funding and in kind of support to the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq¹¹.

Operation Inherent Resolve – a military aspect of the U.S. strategy to counter ISIS

June 2014 was the time when the military situation in Iraq considerably deteriorated as the key Iraqi cities of Mosul and Tikrit had got taken over by ISIS. After the official request of the Iraqi government, President Obama decided to

⁷ Parliament UK, Research briefings, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06995#fullreport> [dostęp: 13.04.2018].

⁸ Dowództwo Operacyjne Sił Zbrojnych, Misje, <http://www.do.wp.mil.pl/> [dostęp: 13.04.2018].

⁹ Parliament UK, Research briefings, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06995#fullreport> [dostęp: 13.04.2018].

¹⁰ Iraq Train and Equip Fund, <https://securityassistance.org/content/iraq%20train%20and%20equip%20fund?year=> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

¹¹ C.M. Blanchard, C.E. Humud, *The Islamic State and U.S. Policy* (2017), Congressional Research Service, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5885d7434.pdf> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

authorize the military operation based on air strikes to fight ISIS in Iraq in August, 2014. To formalize ongoing military actions on 17 October, 2014 the Department of Defence established Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR). The objectives were to support the Iraqi forces, but also humanitarian assistance with water and food supplies being dropped. Primarily, however, dynamic and precise strikes were directed at the ISIS leadership and infrastructure: strongholds, training camps, oil rigs, hiding spots, ammunition and weapons depots¹². The official OIR website says its mission is to “militarily defeat DA’ESH in the Combined Joint Operations Area by, with, and through regional partners in order to enable whole-of-governmental actions to increase regional stability – by conducting a campaign against Daesh in Iraq and Syria in four phases”¹³. The first phase called Degrade focuses on limiting the expansion and combat capacity of ISIS by providing training, equipping, advice and assistance to the Iraqi Security Forces. The second phase called Counterattack is directed at attacking to liberate territory and people under the control of Daesh in Iraq and Syria. The third phase called Defeat concentrates on decisive battles such as liberating two key cities of Mosul and Raqqa and reducing to minimum ISIS physical means and psychological will to fight. Last but not least, the fourth phase named Support and Stabilization provides security, planning, and support to the Iraqi government and Syrian authorities¹⁴.

Shortly after the September announcement about the airstrikes, the air campaign was also extended to Syria, but in this case there was no approval on the side of the Syrian government which called the American intervention illegal. Nonetheless, the Obama administration in the letters to the UN¹⁵¹⁶ justified the campaign by alleging a principle enclosed in the Charter of the United Nations

¹² Inherent Resolve, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve, http://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/Documents/Mission/HISTORY_17OCT2014-JUL2017.pdf?ver=2017-07-22-095806-793 [dostęp: 11.04.2018].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Security Council. (2014b). Letter dated 20 September 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council. The United Nations Security Council, www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/s2014691.php [dostęp: 14.04.2018].

¹⁶ Security Council. (2014c), Letter dated 23 September 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General. The United Nations Security Council, www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2014_695.pdf [dostęp: 14.04.2018].

that gives each state a right to defend themselves, including using force in the other country which does want to or is unable to stop a threat:

“ISIL and other terrorist groups in Syria are a threat not only to Iraq, but also to many other countries, including the United States and our partners in the region and beyond. States must be able to defend themselves, in accordance with the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence, as reflected in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, when, as is the case here, the government of the State where the threat is located is unwilling or unable to prevent the use of its territory for such attacks. The Syrian regime has shown that it cannot and will not confront these safe havens effectively itself. Accordingly, the United States has initiated necessary and proportionate military actions in Syria in order to eliminate the ongoing ISIL threat to Iraq, including by protecting Iraqi citizens from further attacks and by enabling Iraqi forces to regain control of Iraq’s borders. In addition, the United States has initiated military actions in Syria against al-Qaida elements in Syria known as the Khorasan Group to address terrorist threats that they pose to the United States and our partners and allies”¹⁷.

As far as the figures concerning OIR, according to the U.S. Department of Defence, as of August 9, 2017, the Coalition has conducted 13,331 strikes in Iraq, and 11,235 strikes in Syria. The total cost of all counter ISIS operation is \$14.3 billion and the average daily cost is \$13.6 million¹⁸. Most of the airstrikes were conducted by Americans, and the countries who took part in the air campaign in Iraq were: Australia, The United Kingdom, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Jordan, and the Netherlands. In Syria it was: Australia, Bahrain, France, Jordan, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates. By the beginning of 2016, the coalition had destroyed more than 6,000 jihadists targets, 5,000 buildings, 1,000 oil rigs, nearly 1,000 checkpoints and nearly 500 armoured vehicles and tanks¹⁹.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, Operation Inherent Resolve, <https://www.defense.gov/OIR/> [dostep: 14.04.2018].

¹⁹ Department of Defense, Operation Inherent Resolve, www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve [dostep: 14.04.2018].

Obama's strategy to fight ISIL

In September 2014, Barack Obama also outlined a comprehensive strategy to defeat ISIL consisting of the following elements: “Supporting Effective Governance in Iraq, Denying ISIL Safe-Haven, Building Partner Capacity, Enhancing Intelligence Collection on ISIL, Disrupting ISIL’s Finances, Exposing ISIL’s True Nature, Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Fighters, Humanitarian Support, Protecting the Homeland”²⁰. In more detail, this counterterrorism strategy focused on continuing airstrikes on the terrorists’ targets in Iraq and Syria, with the cooperation of the Iraqi forces acting on the ground. Next, Obama decided about deploying several hundreds of American special forces soldiers to support Iraqi and Kurdish forces with training, intelligence and equipment, and to strengthen the Syrian opposition as the best counterweight to extremists like ISIL. The strategy also addresses the issues of the strengthening of international cooperation in counter-terrorism operations, strengthening intelligence cooperation, stopping the influx of foreign volunteers, some of whom come to the Middle East to fight within the organization and then return to Western countries to carry out terrorist attacks. Finally, the president vocalised the humanitarian assistance to innocent Shia Muslims, Christians and other religious minorities²¹.

Through 2015 the Global Coalition experienced several problems in the campaign against ISIS, meaning IS troops gaining more and more territory and the series of bloody terrorists attacks in western Europe, the Obama administration decided to change its so far ineffective strategy from the “Iraq first” approach to more intensified simultaneous anti-ISIS operations both in Iraq and Syria. In practice, it meant “more key U.S. support troops on the ground to back friendly local forces who will wage the fight to retake ISIS-held territory”²². Thus, in the middle of 2016 the total number of US soldiers in Iraq raised to 4,647, not to be used. The new plan “called for fighting the terror group like a conventional enemy, relying on traditional military tactics such as maneuver-style warfare and

²⁰ The Obama White House, Office of the Press Secretary, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/fact-sheet-strategy-counter-islamic-state-iraq-and-levant-isil> [dostęp: 14.04.2018].

²¹ The Obama White House, Office of the Press Secretary, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1> [dostęp: 14.04.2018].

²² A. Tighman, This is the Pentagon’s New strategy to Defeat ISIS, *Military Times*, www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2016/01/15/this-is-the-pentagon-s-new-strategy-to-defeat-isis/ [dostęp: 12.04.2018].

attrition”²³. It limited the size of the U.S. force on the ground and shifted the responsibility to local ground formations (the Iraqi forces, Kurdish peshmerga and Syrian oppositions) which finally were to invade and retake two key cities of Mosul and Raqqa. In consequence, ISIS would break into smaller groups that would be easier to isolate and defeat, and eliminate the main transport routes for fighters, weapons and supplies²⁴. In other words, Pentagon officials found out that airstrikes alone were not going to defeat the terrorists and invested rather in training, equipping and advising local armies. Obama new strategy did also underline an urgent need to suppress the influx of fresh manpower of jihadi extremists by pressuring Turkey to seal its border with Syria. All in all, citing the experts from the Congressional Research Service: “The Obama Administration’s strategy was predicated on the principle of working “by, with, and through” U.S.-supported local partners as an alternative to large and direct applications of U.S. military force and/or large investments of U.S. personnel and resources”²⁵.

However, defeating ISIS is not only connected with destroying its military capabilities, but also, or even most of all, it should be directed at eradicating from people’s minds its distorted ideology. President Obama seemed to bear that factor in mind as he stated in one of his speeches: “our campaign to prevent people around the world from being radicalized to violence is ultimately a battle for hearts and minds” and that “ideologies are not defeated by guns – they’re defeated with better ideas”²⁶. Thus, the U.S. anti-IS strategy has not omitted such crucial point as stopping spreading hostile terrorists propaganda, information warfare and exposing its true nature – all to prevent the group’s radicalization efforts that between 2011 and 2015 resulted in additional 20,000 fighters²⁷.

Although President Obama seemed to be sure about the effectiveness of his policy to fight terrorists in Iraq and Syria, American citizens and many politicians seemed the other way round. As the CNN poll carried out by the end of 2015

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ C.M. Blanchard, C.E. Humud, *The Islamic State and U.S. Policy* (2017), Congressional Research Service, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5885d7434.pdf> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

²⁶ S. Crabtree, *Washington Examiner*, Obama: Fighting extremism is a battle of hearts and minds, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/obama-fighting-extremism-is-a-battle-of-hearts-and-minds> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

²⁷ A.M. Fernandez, *The Brookings Institution*, Four ways to counter ISIS propaganda more effectively, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2015/11/16/four-ways-to-counter-isis-propaganda-more-effectively/> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

showed the majority of American society (64% of respondents) did not approve president's way of handling that issue. As for critical voices among politicians, they pointed to the fact that there was a need for more aggressive use of the military to degrade IS potential, including American troops to be sent to fight in the theatre. But, Obama resisted the idea of introduction of large-scale ground forces for combat operations and, as I mentioned before, he rather leaned toward continued airstrikes and special operations missions with expanded efforts to advise and strengthen local Iraqi and Syrian partner forces²⁸.

Trump's administration strategy

Already in his inauguration speech Donald Trump – the new president – addressed the issue of defeating the Islamic State, assuring at the same time, it would be a core element of his foreign policy. He stated that “defeating ISIS and other radical Islamic terror groups will be our highest priority” and that “to defeat and destroy these groups, we will pursue aggressive joint and coalition military operations when necessary”²⁹. After the words came the action, and on January 28, 2017 Trump “signed a Presidential Memorandum directing the US administration to develop, within 30 days, a comprehensive plan to defeat ISIS. The Pentagon presented its plan to the US National Security Council's Principals Committee on 27 February 2017. The plan was as a “preliminary framework” that extended both beyond the military and beyond the immediate theatre of conflict in Iraq and Syria”³⁰.

What is more, in his nomination hearing, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson described defeating the Islamic State as “the most urgent step in thwarting radical Islam” and said, “defeating ISIS must be our foremost priority in the Middle East”³¹. All in all, one can see that the change of administration meant a substantial change in strategy against IS.

²⁸ C.M. Blanchard, C.E. Humud, *The Islamic State and U.S. Policy* (2017), Congressional Research Service, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5885d7434.pdf> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

²⁹ U.S. Department of State, *America first foreign policy*, <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2017/01/20/en/america-first-foreign-policy> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

³⁰ Parliament UK, *Research briefings*, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06995#fullreport> [dostęp: 13.04.2018].

³¹ R. Tillerson, *Testimony before Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, January 11, 2017.

As far as the military aspects are concerned, there was a prime shift in the strategy used to combat ISIS. The world was officially informed about that change of tactic by the Secretary of Defence gen. Jim Mattis in his press briefing in May, 2017. It might be said that the President decided to meet the expectations of those critical of Obama's anti-ISIS policy and ordered a more accelerated operation against ISIS³². In practice it meant two significant changes to the strategy. Firstly, he called on more aggressive and timely action against the enemy's weak point. Secondly, he directed a tactical shift from the warfare of attrition (favoured Barack Obama) to that of annihilation – to kill the foreign fighters on the battlefield and prevent them from returning to their home countries. The new tactical solution was already being used in the operations of retaking Mosul and Tal Afar, that had started several months before. According to Mattis, an attrition warfare – pushing enemies out of their locations rather than destroying them completely – failed to produce the desired outcome. In the Mosul case, where this tactic was used, “forces on the ground, some with U.S. help, have surrounded IS targets to try to prevent Islamic State militants from retreating and foreign fighters from leaving the battlefield to return home. The forces then advance and clear these cities block by block, a hard task that takes time”. The terrorists' great strength was an ability to retreat and regroup quite quickly and the annihilation tactic was meant to eliminate that advantage³³. The annihilation and humiliation tactic, according to Mattis, was a blueprint for destroying the IS caliphate and was later applied in the decisive battle of Raqqa.

As for a humiliation element of the strategy, in the interview the Secretary of Defence stated that the fight against the Islamic terror is not just a military conflict; it is “a fight about ideas”. He added that “we have got to dry up their recruiting. We have got to dry up their fundraising. The way we intend to do it is to humiliate them, to divorce them from any nation giving them protection, and humiliating their message of hatred, of violence. Anyone who kills women and children is not devout. They have – they cannot dress themselves up in false religious garb and say that somehow this message has dignity. We're going to strip them of any kind of legitimacy. And that is why you see the international community acting in concert”³⁴.

³² Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis, News transcript, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1188225/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-secretary-mattis-general-dunford-and-sp/> [dostę: 1.04.2018].

³³ J.L. Shapiro, Geopolitical features, The U.S. strategy of annihilation and humiliation, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/us-strategy-annihilation-humiliation/> [dostę: 1.04.2018].

³⁴ Interview with Jim Mattis, Face nation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GR8TcsXcrMc> [dostę: 1.04.2018].

Considering the motivation for using the annihilation tactic in that particular moment of the campaign, the author of the following paper has made an unanimous interview and asked about the opinion of an ex-soldier serving in the Polish special force unit Grom³⁵. As the soldier explained, Mattis's decision only confirmed the military significance and substantial numbers of foreign fighters in the ranks of ISIS. This tactic gave the Coalition forces more chances to destroy the enemy more quickly. After ISIS had lost significant amount of capabilities to wage war, its fighters started to go underground and blend with the local civilians. And that was a good moment to accelerate strikes on them, because "While the local fighters being the Iraqis, had an easier situation and they could join the underground or count on help/shelter from their relatives, neighbours, that was not the case with foreign fighters". They, contrarily, could not count on such support. They would be the first to be betrayed by different snouts, that is why Mattis said about the intelligence operations to be intensified as well. In other words, they would be an easy target to destroy there, on the territory of Iraq and Syria not in Europe or Africa. Preventing them from coming back to their countries of origin was so important for Mattis, because the elimination of those extremists here in Europe or in Africa would be more difficult and even impossible in many cases, considering the international law regulations and so on. The soldier also underlined that General's decision was good, however, cannot be treated as an antidote for a complete victory since there are still thousands of local ISIS fighters hidden somewhere on their land or crossing the Afghan border to join the jihadi movement there.

General Mattis emphasised also that there would be no change to the so far rules of engagement and cooperation under the Global Coalition. Still "twenty-six of our coalition nations contribute militarily, including more than 4,000 non-U.S. troops on the ground and in the air. Our recent coalition meetings in Brussels, Copenhagen and elsewhere reflect an energized campaign among contributing nations partnering with, of course, the Iraqi security forces in Iraq and the counter-ISIS forces in Syria"³⁶. – Mattis said.

Talking about the effectiveness of the Trump's strategic shift, in February, 2018 the Global Coalition members met in Kuwait to vocalize the latest victories and assure the world about their sustained effort in fighting ISIS in the Middle East. After several years of military campaign the Coalition has achieved substantial advantage over the terrorists and as they stated: "ISIS/Da'esh stands undeniably

³⁵ A soldier took part in several missions in Iraq and Afghanistan in years 2003–2011.

³⁶ Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis, News transcript, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1188225/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-secretary-mattis-general-dunford-and-sp/> [dostep: 1.04.2018].

degraded – it has lost its territorial hold in Iraq and only a few pockets of land remain under its control in Syria. Its leadership, on-line presence and global networks are under pressure³⁷. To be more precise, as the latest Operation Inherent Resolve Quarterly Report from December, 2017 states, the multinational forces united in the Global Coalition has liberated 98% of the territories claimed by the Islamic State. Moreover, the participants' forces managed to liberate many cities like Mosul, Hawijah, al-Qaim, Tal Afar, Raqqah and Tabqah. Altogether, it meant around 7 million people having been freed from the occupied land³⁸.

As for the future strategy³⁹, the Coalition emphasized that the above mentioned military achievements did not mean the end of campaign, and that its ultimate goal was to fully defeat ISIS and eliminate its presence on the territories of Iraq and Syria. The key pillar mentioned during the meeting concerned the asymmetric and non-standard nature of approaches to defeat ISIS. Namely, the Coalition underlined that there was no single approach and in each case it has been and would be adjusted to the specific situation and threat in a given country or region⁴⁰.

Theoretical background

Since the following paper uses several specific notions characteristic for military and combat theory, it is worth taking a bit more scientific look at them. To start with – an annihilation and attrition tactic. Gen. Mattis, for instance, compares both tactics in such a way: “attrition is where you keep pushing them out of the areas that they’re in, shoving from one position to another. And what we intend to do by surrounding them is to not allow them to fall back, thus, reinforcing themselves as they get smaller and smaller, making the fight tougher and tougher”.

³⁷ Global Coalition, Guiding principles from the Global Coalition to defeat Daesh, <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/guiding-principles-global-coalition-defeat-daesh/> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

³⁸ Operation Inherent Resolve Quarterly Report, https://oig.state.gov/system/files/lig_oco_oir1_dec_2017_gold.pdf [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

³⁹ Global Coalition, Guiding principles from the Global Coalition to defeat Daesh, <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/guiding-principles-global-coalition-defeat-daesh/> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

⁴⁰ Global Coalition, Guiding principles from the Global Coalition to defeat Daesh, <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/guiding-principles-global-coalition-defeat-daesh/> [dostęp: 1.04.2018].

Thus, annihilation for him is “moving in an accelerated manner and throwing enemy on its back foot”⁴¹.

According to an American historian, author and strategic thinker, attrition warfare is “waged by industrial methods. The enemy is treated as nothing more than an array of targets and the aim is to win by their cumulative destruction achieved with superior firepower and material strength in general. Eventually, the full inventory of enemy targets could be destroyed, unless the retreat or surrender terminates the process”⁴². However, the author made a crucial point suggesting that this kind of warfare might be ineffective if on one side of a conflict are insurgents or guerrilla forces, as it is in the case of ISIS. Since the strong suit of ISIS, considering its rather loose and flexible organization, was an ability to regroup and retreat quite quickly, the attrition warfare was probably to take too much time that the Coalition forces did not want to devote.

As for annihilation strategy, according to Lt. Gen. James M. Dubik⁴³, it concentrates on “seeking victory in a war by attaining one’s strategic aims through defeating enemy forces *and* preventing their ability to reconstitute. In a strategy of annihilation, one seeks to force or impose a decision on the enemy, rather than attrit the enemy to a point where it is willing to negotiate – that is a strategy of exhaustion. Thus, using a strategy of annihilation, one must take territory, force capability away from the enemy and prevent it from regaining either”⁴⁴. In case of ISIS, it appeared to be more effective as the number of human targets killed rose, those remained did not manage to face the accelerated coalition forces. What is more, a humiliation effect connected to this strategy seemed to work, since we can observe many fighters retreating and joining underground or fleeing to Afghanistan.

Even though the word asymmetry was not used when the Global Coalition was justifying its course of action on the Kuwait summit in February this year, one may recognize the element of asymmetric operations in the guiding principles outlined there: “We agree there is no single approach to the defeat of ISIS/Da’esh – each one

⁴¹ Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis, News transcript, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1188225/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-secretary-mattis-general-dunford-and-sp/> [dostę: 1.04.2018].

⁴² E. Luttwak, *Strategy: the logic of war and peace*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1987, s. 113.

⁴³ Ph.D., a former commander of Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq and a senior fellow of AUSA’s Institute of Land Warfare.

⁴⁴ J.M. Dubik, *Strategy of annihilation not yet apparent*, <https://www.ausa.org/articles/strategy-annihilation-not-yet-apparent> [dostę: 1.04.2018].

is tailored to address the unique nature of the threat in a given country or region – importantly, most approaches to ISIS/Da’esh globally will not mirror our efforts in Iraq and Syria, where Coalition-led military action has been central”. According to the textbook “Land forces tactic” published by the Academy of National Defence⁴⁵, asymmetric operations are conducted when an opposing party of a conflict is not defined or its defining is not enough to use conventional methods of fighting. They are met when the one side differs significantly in technology, culture, and power capabilities and means and methods used in a conflict are disproportionate to the scope of action. These disproportions are mostly visible in the manpower, equipment, quality and quantity potential. As the textbook says, asymmetric actions include special and irregular actions that are realized through antiterrorist and anti-diversionary operations. As a principal objective of asymmetric actions, the author gives: (1) keeping the continuity of fight, (2) weakening adversary’s military potential, (3) enabling enemy to use its resources fully⁴⁶.

It might be observed that the American military strategy to combat ISIS and its land and air operations met the characteristics of asymmetric warfare. The first and the most important premise justifying that choice of operations was of course the nature of the enemy itself. Namely, ISIS is a terrorist group that does not constitute any legal subject according to the International law of Armed Conflict.

Summary

At this date, as we know from the official reports listed above, the majority of land in Iraq and Syria has been retaken from ISIS and the humanitarian and stabilization operations have been in process. Some might say that the Trump decision to deploy more ground troops and accelerate the actions against ISIS have proved to be fully effective and a complete victory is just on the horizon, but, on the other hand, what will happen after such a victory? What is the U.S. plan for the incoming months? Will they again decide on the long term military presence in the region, risking at the same time growing dissatisfaction of local people? It seems to me that ultimate peace in the Middle East is a point on its historical timeline that is not going to be reached as long as the world powers start treating the Syrian war as a proxy war and the region as the theatre to show their military strength and trade their geopolitical interests.

⁴⁵ Taktyka wojsk lądowych, Podręcznik, Akademia Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa 2010, s. 219–220.

⁴⁶ Regulamin działań wojsk lądowych, sygn. DWLąd wewn. 115/2008, Warszawa 2008.

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Słowa kluczowe: *militarna strategia USA, ISIS, globalna koalicja, Operacja Inherent Resolve*

STRESZCZENIE

Państwo Islamskie to grupa terrorystyczna składająca się z bojowników islamskich zorganizowanych i działających jak siły partyzanckie. Do połowy 2017 roku, PI kontrolowało większość terytorium Iraku oraz dużą część Syrii, gdzie ogłosiło powstanie samozwańczego kalifatu. W 2014 roku ponad 60 państw pod przewodnictwem USA utworzyło Globalną Koalicję do Walki z ISIS. Za militarny aspekt tejże koalicji odpowiadała Operacja Inherent Resolve. Strategia USA ewoluowała wraz z postępami na polu walki, lub ich brakiem, ze strategii na tzw. wyczerpanie wroga attrition warfare (realizowanej przez Baracka Obamę) do strategii na jego zniszczenie annihila-

tion warfare, którą rozpoczęła administracja Prezydenta Trumpa. Powyższy artykuł nawiązuje do głównych założeń Globalnej Koalicji, OIR oraz dwóch kolejnych strategii realizowanych przez dwóch wspomnianych prezydentów. Ponadto, autor pisze o przyczynach zmiany taktyki walki z ISIS oraz przedstawia teoretyczne podejście do użytych strategii i form walki.