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INFORMATION TERRORISM IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES IN RADICALIZATION

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The article is devoted to the study of the phenomenon of information terrorism, taking into account the role of the religious factor in the manipulation of consciousness. In the modern conditions of the rapid development of information and communication technologies, the information space is becoming not only a means of knowledge exchange and cultural interaction, but also an instrument of destructive influence on society. Particular attention is paid to the mechanisms of using religious rhetoric by extremist organizations to legitimize violence and form radical attitudes in individuals. The key features of information terrorism are considered, including global coverage, the use of social networks to mobilize supporters, creating the illusion of mass support for radical ideas and a combination of psychological pressure with manipulative technologies. Specific aspects of the religious factor are analyzed: manipulation of sacred texts, formation of the image of a "sacred mission," the "friends - foes" dichotomy and the use of charismatic leaders. Separately, the need for a comprehensive counteraction is emphasized, including international cooperation, the development of media education, support for traditional religious institutions and scientific and analytical activities. The article emphasizes that religion as such is not a source of terrorism; extremists only use it as a tool to justify violence. The material may be useful to specialists in the field of information security, sociology of religion, media education and intercultural studies.

Keywords: information terrorism, religious factor, manipulation of consciousness, radicalization, media education, extremism, cybersecurity.

Introduction. The modern era is characterized by the rapid development of information and communication technologies, which are becoming not only a tool for globalization and cultural exchange, but also a powerful means of influencing public consciousness. On the one hand, digitalizetion opens up new horizons for education, science, economics and international cooperation, and on the other hand, it creates new risks associated with the spread of destructive ideologies and manipulative practices. The information space has become a strategic field for the struggle for people's minds and worldviews, where the traditional boundaries between internal and external threats are erased.

One of the most dangerous phenomena in this area is information terrorism, which can be considered a special form of ideological and psychological violence. Its goal is the targeted use of information flows and digital platforms to destabilize society, undermine national security, weaken trust in government institutions and spread radical ideas. Unlike classical forms of terrorism, information terrorism rarely requires the use of physical force: it acts by creating an atmosphere of fear, chaos and mistrust, changing cognitive attitudes and emotional perception of reality. Thus, information terrorism is becoming a kind of "weapon of the 21st century", where the main target of attack is not infrastructure or material values, but human consciousness.

The religious factor occupies a special place in this process. Religion, having a deep emotional and value basis, has served as a spiritual guide and source of cultural identity for centuries. That is why it becomes a convenient object for manipulation. Radical groups and extremist movements actively use religious rhetoric to justify their actions, constructing the illusion of a "sacred mission" and appealing to the feelings of believers. By distorting sacred texts, taking quotes out of context and replacing

true spiritual values with false doctrines, mass consciousness is manipulated, which allows extremists to attract new supporters, primarily among socially vulnerable groups and young people.

Thus, the combination of information terrorism and the religious factor represents a special threat to modern states and societies, as it combines the power of technological influence and the deep influence of sacred symbols. This turns the religious factor into a powerful tool of psychological pressure and mobilization, making it one of the key areas of research in the field of information security and intercultural communications.

Information terrorism: essence and features. At the beginning of the 21st century, terrorism has become not only one of the most dangerous and difficult to predict phenomena, but has also penetrated into various spheres of society and acquired many different types. Although the most dangerous types of terrorism for humanity are considered to be chemical, biological, nuclear, but such "sphere" types as political, economic, ideological, ethnic or national terrorism are also one of the pressing problems for states. Undoubtedly, due to the demands of modern times, one of the priorities of any state's policy today is to counter information terrorism, which can occur both in wartime and in peacetime.

Today, information plays a very important role: this is due to the fact that we live in an information society. Using information, you can do a lot of good and bad. Such expressions as: "Who owns the information, owns the world", "In an information war, as a rule, the winner is the one who attacks and constantly increases the pressure", "Today, an information war is a war of civilizations", "An information war is a confrontation of knowledge and theories", etc. are widely known [1, 252].

It should be noted that information terrorism arose as a result of the rapid development of modern technologies. Information terrorism can be considered as psychological pressure and influence without the use of physical means. To influence the enemy with the main goal of sowing fear and keeping the population in fear. The famous English statesman Edmund Burke said this about fear: "There is no emotion that so deprives the human mind of all action and thought as fear" [2, 88].

Information terrorism is carried out in the moral sphere, which combines political, philosophical, legal, religious and other components, where the struggle of ideas takes place. The availability and free use of information technologies significantly increases the risk of such terrorism. Thus, the more informed society is, the more sensitive it is to the consequences of mass psychological terror.

Information terrorism can be differentiated into two types. First, it is cyberterrorism. The main goal of cyberterrorism is to use computer networks as a means of disrupting important national infrastructures: energy, transportation, management, and intimidation of the government and civilians.

One of the leading experts in the field of computer crimes and information security, Georgetown University professor Dorothy E. Denning in her book "Activism, Hacktivism, and Cyberterrorism: The Internet as a Tool for Influencing Foreign Policy" writes: "Cyberterrorism is an attempt to illegally attack computers and networks in order to force government agencies to change their political or social goals" [3, 187].

Another type of information terrorism involves the use of the Internet by terrorist groups not for directly committing terrorist acts, but for property, financial, informational and other support of their activities. The well-known American terrorist expert Gabriel Weiman identifies eight ways in which terrorists use the Internet: 1) conducting psychological warfare; 2) searching for information; 3) training terrorists; 4) collecting funds; 5) propaganda; 6) recruitment; 7) organizing networks; 8) planning and coordinating terrorist actions [4].

The peculiarity of information terrorism is that it combines the properties of classic terrorist practices and the latest information and communication technologies, which makes it a particularly flexible and difficult to control phenomenon. Let's take a closer look at the key characteristics:

Global reach and cross-border impact. Unlike traditional terrorism, which was limited to a certain territory and depended on the physical presence of participants, information terrorism goes beyond national borders. Using the global Internet, radical structures are able to influence audiences in different regions of the world simultaneously. Information attacks can be directed both at individual groups of the population and at entire states, which significantly increases the level of threat. Moreover, the cross-border nature makes it extremely difficult to identify and suppress such actions, since they are often committed from abroad, outside the direct control of national security agencies.

Use of social networks and digital platforms to quickly mobilize supporters. Social networks, instant messengers and online platforms have become the main channels for disseminating radical information. Thanks to algorithms that can amplify the most emotionally charged content, extremists are able to quickly convey their ideas to a wide audience. Online communications allow not only to distribute propaganda materials, but also to organize covert mobilization of supporters, coordinate actions and create virtual communities where an atmosphere of belonging to a "select group" is formed.

Creating the illusion of mass support for radical ideas. One of the most effective tools of information terrorism is the manipulation of public perception by simulating the popularity and scale of an extremist ideology. For this, such methods as fabricating comments, using bots, and repeatedly replicating the same content on different platforms are used. As a result, the impression is created that radical ideas find support among a significant part of society, which contributes to their legitimization in the eyes of vulnerable groups of the population and increases the likelihood of attracting new supporters.

A combination of psychological pressure and manipulative technologies. Information terrorism is built not only on the distribution of content, but also on a deep understanding of the psychology of perception. The systematic use of fear, a sense of threat, religious or cultural symbols allows destabilizing the emotional state of the audience. Manipulative technologies include distortion of facts, dissemination of fake news, creation of conspiracy narratives and use of visual content, which has a stronger emotional impact than textual information. All this enhances the effect of psychological pressure, turning individual messages into a powerful tool for influencing consciousness.

The religious factor in information terrorism. Religion has traditionally been one of the most significant ideological institutions influencing the value system of individuals and communities. For centuries, religious norms and doctrines have shaped social foundations, moral guidelines and collective identity. It is for this reason that religion has enormous mobilization potential and becomes the object of attention of terrorist and extremist movements. As O. Roy notes, radical movements "use religion not as a source of spirituality, but as a political and mobilization tool" [5, 65].

Terrorist organizations actively use religious rhetoric as a means of legitimizing their own actions. The use of religious symbols and sacred texts allows them to give their ideas a "divine" status, which facilitates the process of manipulating consciousness and helps attract new supporters. Research by UN experts indicates that extremists systematically resort to "distorting religious teachings to justify violence and terror".

The religious factor in information terrorism manifests itself in several key aspects:

Manipulation of sacred texts. One of the most common techniques is the selective retelling or quoting of sacred texts with a distortion of their true content. Extremists take fragments out of context, giving them a new, radical interpretation that justifies violent actions.

Creation of the image of a "sacred mission". Terrorist movements often appeal to the idea of a special mission assigned to their supporters. The idea is formed that members of extremist organizations are fulfilling a "divine destiny" and therefore their actions are morally justified.

The dichotomy of "us - them". An important mechanism is the artificial opposition of "faithful" and "infidels", "us" and "them". Such a binary scheme allows us to simplify the perception of the world and push people towards intolerance and violence against "others". The UNESCO report (Terrorism and the Internet, 2019) emphasizes that the creation of such dichotomies is one of the central strategies of extremist propaganda in the online space.

Use of charismatic leaders. A special place is occupied by the role of religious or quasi-religious leaders who possess charisma and the ability to influence the audience. Their authority becomes the basis for legitimizing radical ideology. They often act as "moral authorities", although their interpretations are far from traditional theology.

Thus, the religious factor in information terrorism acts as a powerful tool for manipulating consciousness. Its effectiveness is explained by the fact that religion appeals not only to the rational, but also to the emotional sphere of the individual, and the use of sacred symbols enhances the feeling of involvement and justification of violence.

What terrorist organizations do is distort and instrumentalize religion to achieve political, ideological or military goals. Extremists use selective quotes from the Quran or Hadith, taken out of

context, to legitimize violence. But this does not reflect the true Islamic teachings, which are based on the principles of peace, mercy and justice. The Quran repeatedly emphasizes the value of human life. For example, in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:32) it says: "...whoever kills a single person, except for murder or corruption on earth, it is as if he had killed all mankind; and whoever saves a single life, it is as if he had saved all mankind".

Prominent Islamic theologians and scholars have consistently rejected radical interpretations, noting that terrorism contradicts the foundations of Islam. Thus, to say that Islam is the cause of terrorism is wrong and even dangerous, because it promotes Islamophobia and discrimination. Terrorists only use a religious veneer to justify actions that are in fact deeply at odds with the Islamic worldview.

Counteracting information terrorism and religious manipulation. To neutralize the threats of information terrorism, a comprehensive approach is needed that should take into account both technological and socio-cultural factors. An effective fight against this phenomenon is impossible only by force or legal means - it requires systemic interaction at the international level, the involvement of educational and religious institutions, as well as the active participation of the scientific community.

International cooperation. Information terrorism is transnational in nature, and therefore countering it should be based on cooperation between states, international organizations and non-governmental structures. The most important areas are the creation of uniform cybersecurity standards, the exchange of experience and technologies for monitoring the digital space, joint operations to block extremist sites and accounts. In this context, the activities of such organizations as the UN, Europol, Interpol, which form the international legal basis for cybersecurity and countering radicalization, are important. According to the UN, "the fight against digital terrorism requires collective efforts based on the principles of mutual trust and information exchange" [6].

Information hygiene and media education. One of the key areas of prevention is the development of critical thinking among the population, especially among young people, who are most susceptible to the influence of radical propaganda on social networks. Information hygiene is understood as a person's ability to verify the reliability of information, identify manipulation, and resist fake messages. Media education programs should become part of national education strategies, since it is the information literate population that is able to resist the cognitive influence of extremists. UNESCO reports emphasize that "media education plays a fundamental role in the formation of resilient societies capable of critically perceiving and analyzing information".

Support for traditional religious institutions. In conditions where extremists use religion as a tool of manipulation, strengthening the authority of traditional religious organizations is of particular importance. Their task is to spread humanistic and peaceful values, to form an alternative ideology based on spiritual traditions and interfaith dialogue. Support from theologians, religious leaders and communities helps to reduce the appeal of radical rhetoric and return religion to its true function - serving peace and morality. According to researchers, "it is religious institutions that are able to offer convincing theological arguments against radical interpretation".

Scientific and analytical activities. The fight against information terrorism is impossible without a deep understanding of its nature as a social and cultural phenomenon. This requires the active participation of research centers, researchers in the fields of sociology, psychology, political science and information security. Scientific research allows us to identify the mechanisms of mind manipulation, predict risks and develop adaptive response strategies. In this context, interdisciplinary research that combines technological, sociocultural and legal approaches is important. As RAND Corporation notes, "only a comprehensive understanding of radicalization and its media forms will allow us to develop effective countermeasures".

Conclusion. Information terrorism using the religious factor is one of the most dangerous forms of threats to modern society. Manipulation of consciousness through sacred values makes it especially effective and destructive. Counteracting this threat requires a synthesis of efforts by the state, religious organizations, civil society and the scientific community. Only through the development of media literacy, strengthening intercultural and interreligious dialogue is it possible to minimize the impact of destructive information flows and maintain the stability of society.

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RƏQƏMSAL ERA DÖVRÜNDƏ İNFORMASİYA TERRORİZMİ: DİNİ NARRATİVLƏRİN RADİKALLAŞMADA ROLU

Bu məqalədə informasiya terrorizmi fenomeni araşdırılır və dini amillərin şüurun manipulyasiyasındakı rolu nəzərə alınır. Bugünkü sürətlə inkişaf edən informasiya və kommunikasiya texnologiyalarında informasiya məkanı təkcə bilik mübadiləsi və mədəni qarşılıqlı əlaqə vasitəsinə deyil, həm də cəmiyyətə dağıdıcı təsir vasitəsinə çevrilir. Ekstremist təşkilatların zorakılığı qanuniləşdirmək və fərdlərdə radikal münasibətləri inkişaf etdirmək üçün dini ritorikadan istifadə mexanizmlərinə xüsusi diqqət yetirilir. İnformasiya terrorizminin əsas xüsusiyyətləri, o cümlədən qlobal əhatə dairəsi, tərəfdarları səfərbər etmək üçün sosial mediadan istifadə, radikal ideyalara kütləvi dəstək illüziyasının yaradılması və psixoloji təzyiq və manipulyativ texnologiyaların birləşməsi araşdırılır. Dini amilin spesifik aspektləri təhlil edilir: müqəddəs mətnlərin manipulyasiya edilməsi, "müqəddəs missiya" imicinin formalaşdırılması, "dost və ya düşmən" dixotomiyası və xarizmatik liderlərin istifadəsi. Beynəlxalq əməkdaşlıq, media təhsilinin inkişafı, ənənəvi dini institutlara dəstək və elmi və analitik iş daxil olmaqla hərtərəfli əks tədbirə ehtiyac vurğulanır. Məqalədə vurğulanır ki, dinin özü terrorizmin mənbəyi deyil; ekstremistlər ondan sadəcə zorakılığı haqlı çıxarmaq üçün bir vasitə kimi istifadə edirlər. Bu material informasiya təhlükəsizliyi, din sosiologiyası, media təhsili və mədəniyyətlərarası tədqiqatlar üzrə mütəxəssislər üçün faydalı ola bilər.

Açar sözlər: informasiya terrorizmi, dini amillər, zehn manipulyasiyası, radikallaşma, media təhsili, ekstremizm, kibertəhlükəsizlik.

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ИНФОРМАЦИОННЫЙ ТЕРРОРИЗМ В ЦИФРОВУЮ ЭПОХУ: РОЛЬ РЕЛИГИОЗНЫХ НАРРАТИВОВ В РАДИКАЛИЗАЦИИ

Статья посвящена исследованию феномена информационного терроризма с учетом роли религиозного фактора в манипулировании сознанием. В современных условиях стремительного развития информационно-коммуникационных технологий информационное пространство ста-

новится не только средством обмена знаниями и культурного взаимодействия, но и инструментом деструктивного воздействия на общество. Особое внимание уделяется механизмам использования религиозной риторики экстремистскими организациями для легитимации насилия и формирования радикальных установок у отдельных лиц. Рассматриваются ключевые особенности информационного терроризма, включая глобальный охват, использование социальных сетей для мобилизации сторонников, создание иллюзии массовой поддержки радикальных идей и сочетание психологического давления с манипулятивными технологиями. Анализируются отдельные аспекты религиозного фактора: манипулирование священными текстами, формирование образа «священной миссии», дихотомия «свой - чужой» и использование харизматичных лидеров. Отдельно подчеркивается необходимость комплексного противодействия, включающего международное сотрудничество, развитие медиаобразования, поддержку традиционных религиозных институтов и научно-аналитическую деятельность. В статье подчёркивается, что религия как таковая не является источником терроризма; экстремисты используют её лишь как инструмент для оправдания насилия. Материал может быть полезен специалистам в области информационной безопасности, социологии религии, медиаобразования и межкультурных исследований.

Ключевые слова: информационный терроризм, религиозный фактор, манипуляция сознанием, радикализация, медиаобразование, экстремизм, кибербезопасность.

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