Religious Factor in the Context of the "East-West" Confrontation

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the role of the religious factor in the development of societies in Afro-Asian countries. Particular attention is paid to the consideration of religion in the context of the "EAST-WEST" dichotomy, the differences between the Western and Eastern pictures of the world, different approaches to the world order. This work aims to show that the modern revitalization of religion, its entry into the foreground of history are taking place against the background of growing crisis trends and exacerbation of contradictions in the political and socio-economic life of Afro-Asian countries. There can be identified several factors that contribute to the increasing influence of Islam on the evolution of traditional communities, as well as on the processes of national-political and cultural integration in modern condition.

Keywords: East, West, Afro-Asian countries, Religious factor, Muslim countries, Islam.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most important aspect of the development of societies of various types is the role of religion. This is an extremely complex, multi-component problem that was either ignored or misinterpreted for a long time. Meanwhile, religion has always occupied an important place in the spiritual life of society, influencing its moral state, social psychology of all strata of the population, and people's behavior. Religion has also influenced the nature of the relationship between society and state since the emergence of statehood.

In the modern era, the influence of the religious factor in the socio-political life of many Asian and African countries has significantly increased. Representatives of the clergy often get involved in the political life and try to gain control over state power. Nowadays a number of countries are experiencing a kind of "religious renaissance".

The role of religion in Afro-Asian countries and its influence on society determine the essence and social orientation of various movements and organizations acting in the name of religion.

The religious factor is especially pronounced in Muslim countries. The actions of various political forces under the slogans of Islam have always been one of the characteristic features of the social development of these countries, but the current rapid increasing role of Islam turned out to be unexpected and incomprehensible, since in the past, there was more than once predicted an imminent end to Islam. Hegel asserted that "Islam has long since left the world historical arena and returned again to eastern peace and immobility" [1].

When analyzing the place of religion in the socio-political life of different countries in the development of culture, one should consider various aspects of religious activity, compare the main religious teachings, identify the reasons for the rise and fall of religious activity; it is also necessary to trace the evolution of forces and movements acting under religious slogans.

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2. COLLISION OF WESTERN AND EASTERN PICTURES OF THE WORLD IN THE COURSE OF INTERCIVILIZATIONAL CONTACTS

In the context of the East-West opposition, it should be noted that nowadays the western picture of the world is fundamentally different from the eastern one in its secularity. At the same time, the eastern world picture still remains religiously oriented; it forms the basis of the political culture of the East, largely determining the ideas of state, ruler and society, their relationship, rights and obligations. For example, in Arab and other Muslim countries, the status of a ruler is determined by the Muslim doctrine, which speaks of the injustice of power division into spiritual and secular. Therefore, a head of state has full powers and is personally responsible for both state and religious problems. State-legal and socio-political relations are built on the foundations of Islam, enshrined in the Koran and Sharia, and to a greater or lesser extent are reflected and enshrined in the constitutions. Let's turn to the Constitution of Saudi Arabia, which is a classic example of a modern theocratic state. Article 23 reads: "The state defends the Islamic faith, implements its establishment, monitors lack of sinfulness, prevents vice, fulfills the duty of spreading Islam" [2]. At the same time, the implementation of this constitutional norm is strictly controlled by the special bodies, namely the Committees for Permission of Good and Prohibition of Evil, which carry out their activities in all parts of the country.

Special bodies for the management of religious affairs are represented in Arab countries by two categories of institutions. The first category includes government bodies, above all the Ministry of Waqf Affairs, and the second one - bodies performing the functions of the Muslim clergy, such as the Islamic Supreme Council in Egypt and a number of other countries.

Islamic civilization as a special cultural and historical type took shape in the 11-13th centuries. Its identity was based on the synthesis of the Arab-Syrian, Iranian-Turkic and Hellenistic traditions. It should be noted that unlike Christianity, Islam could penetrate relatively deeply and survive in the socio-political structure, culture, and everyday life of the local population, and even where there was no complete Arabization of the population. For example, in Morocco, the Berber tribes still retain their identity, although they quickly became Islamized. The secret of the victory of Islam in the areas conquered by the Arabs lies in such attractive ideas as collectivism and social equality of all members of the "ummah", complete denial of private property and extreme anti-individualism, inherent in its doctrine. Outside of the "ummah", which is completely subordinate to the principle of conciliarity ("shura"), the human personality has no value. Being very popular, primarily among the poor, by 1500, Islam had united in its area, according to the most conservative estimates, more than 47.5 million people, which at that time constituted 11.2% of the total population of tglobe [3].

The Arab-Muslim civilization was one of the most prosperous: a large number of agricultural products were produced there, handicraft industry was rapidly developing, there were large densely populated cities, and power was concentrated in the hands of rich and mighty rulers. Great strides were made in the field of military affairs. Against this background, Europe seemed to be a periphery, a backward region, which the East supplied with food, medicines, spices, high-quality fabrics, handicraft products, as well as luxury goods.

The situation changed at the end of the 17th century, when the West began to outstrip the East, not only due to the conquest of significant territories in the era of geographical discoveries, but also due to its dynamism, which radically distinguished it from the East with its rigid traditionalism.

The Europeans' massive invasion of the East completely changed the situation in this part of the world. They represented a new pole of power, which directly interfered in the affairs of the eastern countries, disrupting the balance of power, the existing system of values, and thus forming a new world order.

The traditions of Islam in Afro-Asian countries are the traditions of religion and culture of a synthetic type, combining the borrowed elements with the Afro-Asian traditions proper.

There can be identified several factors that contribute to the increasing influence of Islam on the evolution of traditional communities, as well as on the processes of national-political and cultural integration in modern conditions [4].

It is necessary to note the historical duration and rather high intensity of contacts of the North African centers with the adjacent regions, including

Asia and Europe. These contacts were peaceful and non-peaceful, but the main line - the leading historical trend - is determined by the mutual adaptation of Islam and autochthonous forms of culture and religions.

3. MAIN FACTORS OF RADICALIZATION OF MODERN ISLAM

Certainly, the global conflict between the West and the East exerts influence on other local conflicts. Thus, the activation of radical Islam is not only the reaction of Muslims to the invasion of cultural and moral values of the West, to the violent modernization and "Europeanization" of the way of life of society, but also a consequence of the confrontation between major powers, which, having their interests in a particular region, support one or another conflicting side [5].

It should be noted that the possibilities for this are quite extensive, given the multi-confessional and ethnically diverse structure of the population of the eastern countries. For example, in Arab societies, there coexist representatives of various ethnic groups (Arabs, Berbers, Copts, Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, etc.), confessions (Muslims, Christians, etc.) and kinds, which makes these societies formations with an extremely high conflict potential. This leads to the problem of population consolidation, allowing the West, if necessary, to act according to the "divide and rule" principle.

It is this factor that was used by the West, including the influential NATO member states, which actively supported the Islamists in Iraq and Syria, which ultimately led to the emergence of such a phenomenon as the "Islamic State". In other words, following the postulates of Jahidism, terrorists for the first time achieved their statehood. As analysts rightly point out, "without joining international efforts, without a united front of anti-terrorist forces, the destructive ideology of Jahidism and the challenges posed by Islamists will continue to threaten the world order" [6].

L.L. Fituni notes: "During the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan, Yemeni, Syrian, Zimbabwean ... events, many specific technologies for managing and manipulating protest movements were tested. The color revolution in Egypt required a high concentration of efforts by the external forces supporting it, since they could by no means allow its failure in such an important country. This whole scheme fits into the concept of network warfare". [7]

Nowadays researchers pay serious attention to the East-West problem. In Europe, they tried to comprehend the past of the peoples in the category of European history. The opposition of Europeans to Afro-Asian peoples was most often accompanied by a desire to assert the idea of superiority over them. However, with the mutual enrichment of mankind with knowledge about the life and culture of countries and peoples of the planet, this confrontation became increasingly tough. In the era of colonialism, this problem became one of the most difficult to solve; it still exists, giving rise to heated disputes and discussions. When considering this problem, two extremes are found in its interpretation: some consider the concepts "East", "West", "Europe", "Asia", "Africa" to be purely conditional, related mostly to geography and not reflecting historical reality, which has always acted as a single and a holistic process; in this regard, they consider this problem, to a certain extent, to be far-fetched. Others are convinced of the exact opposite. The East-West confrontation, as they claim, is a reality and is associated with a deep difference in the historical and cultural development of the two worlds. Therefore, one can't speak about their commonality. Mysterious Eastern societies, as they believe, are beyond the Europeans' comprehension.

This divergence became especially irreconcilable when the West took the lead in economic development, and there began division of the world between the leading capitalist powers. After the elimination of the colonial system, the ideas of the originality of the historical path of East development were gradually changing. There is increasingly established the understanding of the interconnectedness of different regions of our planet.

One of the most serious contradictions between the two civilizational centers is the conflict from the point of view of modernized Islam. As S. Huntington notes, "according to authoritative Western authors, regional conflicts on the border lines between the Islamic and Christian worlds are likely to assume a global character" [8].

Since the second half of the 20th century, in addition to the cultural and civilizational potential, Islam has also possessed a powerful economic toolkit, which is opposed to the economic power of Western countries. According to R. Landa, Russian expert in Arab studies, at the turn of the 21 century, one of the main confrontations was the very West-East dichotomy, and the East-West rivalry is taking

place in the context of the class struggle internationalization [9].

The current escalation of the conflict on the basis of Islamic fundamentalism is the reaction of the Muslims of the East to the intervention of the Western values, to the violent modernization of society and the way of life, to economic and social inequality. The catalyst for this in the past was the invasion of the East by colonialism with all its consequences, and at the moment it is the West's advancement of globalization institutions.

The distinctive feature of the social situation in Arab countries is the fact that the pauperized, traditional strata of Arab societies, primarily the marginal strata, are in a state of confrontation with the so-called strata of "modern society." This confrontation manifests itself in all spheres of life: politics, culture, ideology. The traditional strata categorically deny many values imported from the West, such as lack of spirituality, immorality, the cult of individualism and material gain, political, economic and social "mimetism", which in the philosophy of Rene Girard, Franco-American anthropologist, sociologist and writer, is "the basic principle of learning, cultural creation", since "any study is reduced to imitation [10]. They advocate the conservation of the traditions, national identity and the religious character of society. It is in this environment that such a one-line doctrine as Islamism, which does not accept Westernization, accompanied by the emergence of new social structures, flourishes.

Modern strata, such as the entrepreneurial community, intelligentsia, technocracy, on the contrary, easily assimilate Western culture, philosophy, the system of values, and the way of life. According to N.A. Ivanov, "they are burdened by blind devotion to tradition, strict adherence to the medieval customs and norms, "Arabization" and "Islamization" of social life". [11]

Such internal social confrontation is a ticking time bomb, preserving a split in society, and the process of modernization and Westernization exacerbates these contradictions against the background of the lack of consolidation of society and political elites around a certain ideology. This gap is filled by the fundamentalist ideology around which the traditional strata of the population unite. In these conditions, it was the Islamic development project that supplanted the projects of socialist, capitalist development and Arab nationalism, around which various strata of Arab societies consolidated in the 1950-1960s. Thus, currently

Islam is actively used as the ideological basis for the socio-political development of many not only Arab, but also Muslim countries in general, and the "Islamic factor" exerts increasing influence on their policies. There is taking place the strongest politicization of Islam in the form of Islamism.

Many researchers believe that this is already a new Islam, emerging in the form of a societal movement, which should be attributed to one of the manifestations of globalization, that is, to aspects of the postmodern process. Thus, E.F. Kisriev points out: "The current "Islamization" should be diagnosed in the general context of the trends of the traditional states' loss of legitimacy, fragmengration of the political and cultural space, in the motivational structures of the modern personality and the mobilization ideologies of insurgents of a new type of wars. The "new Islam" fills the gaps of the now totally decaying moral order of the civilized world and appears as a catacomb counterculture "[12].

This is reflected in the formation in Arab and other Muslim countries of a large number of Islamist parties, organizations, movements, many of which declare as their goals the overthrow of secular regimes and the expansion of the position of Islam in the power structures.

The strengthening of the positions of such structures was largely facilitated by the rapid spread of modern information technologies, which allows them to widely use the great opportunities of the Internet, above all, social networks, and telecommunications. It is thanks to them that they successfully carry out mass propaganda work, recruiting their supporters, "flooding" of fake information for their own purposes, etc.

4. CONCLUSION

Analysis of the role of the religious factor in the intercivilization interaction between East and West shows that the desire of the West to dominate the world by any means, including actively using the religious factor, leads to the radicalization of religious movements. This desire determines the escalation of tension in the world.

It is obvious that such actions, along with other negative factors, such as stratification of the population due to economic problems, peoples' dissatisfaction with the internal situation in the country as a result of this, export of so-called Western values to the East, destabilize the situation not only in the Arab and other Eastern countries,

but also in the Western countries, where live a lot of representatives of other nations and religions.

Currently, there are several visions of the emerging new world order. Some forces are working on the creation of new models of bipolarity, for example, "West-Islam". Others, in particular S. Huntington, consider that the existence of multipolarity will inevitably be accompanied by the outbreak of many conflicts between civilizations. Mondialists are convinced that the world should become a kind of unified formation, intermediate between capitalism and communism, the so-called "post-industrial world" (F. Fukuyama). Antiglobalists oppose any manifestations of globalization. However, it is obvious that all these approaches are still based on the Western worldview and presuppose some kind of unification, the implementation of which will inevitably lead to the confrontation between the ideologists of this process and those who will be standardized and "adjusted" to the desired model. On the contrary, in order to avoid such dangerous confrontations, it is necessary to admit that all civilizations are developing, but each in its own way, they complement rather than contradict each other. It is this approach that should be at the core of the new world order, since only it will help avoid the escalation of violence, that has swept the modern world, as well as endless conflicts, during which the opposing sides use all means, including the religious factor distorting the doctrinal foundations of a particular religion.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This article is independently completed by Galina Lukyanova.

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