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MODERN RUSSIA: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, CULTURE AND RELIGION

IGOR DOBAYEV. ETHNIC AND CONFESSIONAL IN ISLAM:
IS “TRUE ISLAM” SO RELIGIOUSLY PURE? // *The article was
written for the bulletin “Russia and the Moslem World.”*

*Keywords: Wahhabism, Islam,
Islamism, Pan-Turkism, traditional Islam,
Turkism, “pure Islam”, ethnos.*

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*Abstract. Since the 1980s of the 20 century ideology, and then the
practice of the so-called “Pure Islam” began, under external influence,
to sneak actively to the territory of Russia. Its adherents entered into
irreconcilable confrontation with the supporters of traditional Islam and
it resulted in the emergence and development of religious and political
extremism and terrorism under the guise of Moslem beliefs. In this
regard, it seems relevant to find out whether the so-called “pure Islam,”
free from the influence of ethnicity and traditional values really exists.*

Since the end of the 1980s of the 20 century in the course of the revival processes in the religious sphere, which were rapidly proceeding on the territory of the Soviet Union, the question of the “purity” of those forms of Islam that had formed in this space over the centuries became acute. Throwing such concepts as “pure Islam” (or “true Islam”) into the information gave rise to reconcilable struggle with adherents of traditional versions of Islam. As a result, the accelerated politicization and radicalization of this religion, the emergence of religious and political extremism and even terrorism, which began to hide behind the Moslem faith, were recorded. This was facilitated by the opening of information centers at the embassies of some Moslem countries, the influx of numerous missionaries to the territory of our country, as well as the almost uncontrolled departure of young people abroad to receive Islamic education. In this regard, it seems very important in a theoretical and practical terms to find out whether the so-called “pure Islam,” free from the influence of ethnicity, pre-Islamic and other later values exists really. It is quite obvious that the religious and ethno-national factors in Islam, as well as in other religious beliefs, are in a state of complex interaction. They can act independently, parallel to each other, or oppose or interact with each other. The latter processes are recorded most often, and our perception depends on the balance of strength and depth of the mutual influence of ethnic and confessional factors. As practice shows, religion in real life almost never appears in its “pure” form, but almost always in ethno-national, politicized and other forms. Russian publicist Y. Amelina, touching upon the topic of correlation between religious and ethno-national factors, notes that although they seem to organically complement each other, in reality there is a conflict in this area. Excessive emphasis solely on the religious component leads to religious and political extremism, and on the ethnic one to ethno-nationalism [1, p. 147]. A number of arguments can be made in favor of this thesis. For example, after the end of the Caucasian War in the North-Eastern Caucasus,

where the process of artificial accelerated re-Islamization of society was recorded, the tsarist authorities focused on the prevalence of the customary law of the North Caucasian highlanders (adats) over Sharia. However, since 1905, the principle of “Sharia against adat” had received official support from the Russian authorities, which was due to the fact that adats even more sharply contradicted the existing legislation and legal norms of the empire [2, p. 41]. Another example: in the 1880s there emerged and was developing a movement of “Jadids” in the Moslem regions of the Russian Empire, designed to combat the backwardness of the Moslem masses of the empire by carrying out reforms of religious education through the introduction of new teaching methods, teaching, in addition to theological, secular sciences. In the course of this activity, Russian Moslem Turks, primarily the Crimean Tatar reformer of the traditional way of life of Russian Moslems, Ismail Bey Gasprinsky (1851–1914), introduced not only the term “Russian Islam” into circulation, but also developed the ideological doctrine of Pan-Turkism. In the future, Pan-Turkism will be employed by the Young Turks, and the Turkish social scientist Ziya Gek Alp (Mohammed Ziya) (1876–1924) will become its main ideologist. At the same time, as already noted, the ratio of religious and ethnic factors in Islam is not exclusively of a conflict nature. We emphasize once again: these two components can interact, feeding each other, or they can be in a state of parallel development, without intersecting. In any case, their interconnection and influence on evolutionary processes in the development of various forms of Islam’s existence are certainly of scientific and practical interest, including in the sphere of politics. When studying this reality, scientists distinguish at least three approaches [3, p. 18–23]. According to the first one, from the point of view of Islam, ethnicity is an insignificant construct, since theoretically Islam stands above ethnicity, racial and other differences. The main point is as follows: a person's belonging to the Islamic ummah. The second, the Arabian view of the problem

Nevertheless, despite the modern mosaicism of Islam, among Moslems there is a deep conviction that they belong to a single community of people professing a common faith, united by common traditions, historical roots and the unity of interests in the modern world: to the Islamic Ummah of the world, regardless of racial, ethnic, social, property and other differences. Islam in the eyes of its adherents is not only a faith, but also a way of life, everyday rules and customs, a mentality conditioned by Sharia law. Islam, more than other world religions, is included in the system of social and political regulation. Practically all aspects of a Moslem's life are declared religiously significant, since the Quranic worldview does not know the opposition of the sacred and the ordinary, religion and politics, sexuality and piety. All the fullness of life is sacred. The goal is tawhid (monotheism, postulating the assertion of the unity of believers), the integration of all life in a single community, which gives a Moslem the sense of closeness to the highest unity: God [5, p. 12–13].

After its emergence, Islam rather quickly lost the purity of the initial period and became inextricably merged with political doctrine. Indeed, Islam brought people not only the Word of God (Quran), but also gave them a state, which at first was able to provide members of society with relatively equal conditions and some semblance of “social justice.” However, initially there was a contradiction in Islam: the hierarchical structure of society was sanctified by the doctrine, but at the same time it also claimed that all people are equal before God. This contradiction, undoubtedly, predetermined the subsequent history of Islam, the appearance in it of various directions, interpretations, trends and sects. The issue of the continuity of power, both spiritual and purely secular, turned out to be closely related to the same problem.

Let us emphasize that Islam originated on the Arabian Peninsula at the beginning of the 7th century, in Mecca, where the Arab tribe of the Quraysh lived, as a result of the prophetic activities of Muhammad, a representative of the Hashim clan.

The Quraysh at that time were pagans (polytheists), and therefore they extremely negatively perceived the Prophet's sermons regarding the principle of monotheism of the new religion. As a result, in 622, the Prophet with his small community was forced to move to Medina, but the armed struggle against the Meccan polytheists only intensified. It ended only in 630, when the Meccans capitulated and converted to Islam en masse. However, inter-clan contradictions have not disappeared anywhere, causing civil wars in the emerging Moslem state - the Caliphate. These contradictions grew during the reign of the third righteous caliph Osman from the Quraysh Umayyad clan, especially after his assassination in 656. Even then, inter-clan conflicts (Umayyads against Hashemites) prevailed over the religious unity of Moslems, already mythical by that historical period, which gave rise to deep contradictions in Islamic community. At the same time, let us emphasize once again that inter-clan contradictions and conflicts in Arab tribes and clans were recorded even in ancient times, when hostile relations between tribes were common. Due to the interdependence of the confessional and ethno-national principles, the term "Islamic nationalism" has become firmly established in journalism, and then in science. In relation to it, two polar opinions were formed. The first is to consider the Ummah of the Islamic world as a single "Islamic nation" (or "Moslem nation"), regardless of ethnicity, racial and other differences of Moslems. This point of view was shared, for example, by the founder of the Egyptian Moslem Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna. His ideological followers, among them the ideologue of Ichkerian separatism Movladi Udugov, who founded the Islamic Nation organization in 1997, develop in theory and practice the ideological views of al-Banna. However, in our opinion, this approach is overly idealistic and refuted by real political practice. At the same time, we would like to emphasize that the overwhelming majority of secular Islamic scholars currently understand "Islamic nationalism" as this or that nationalist movement acting on a part

of the general Islamic field. For example, Pan-Turkism, that is discussed below. So, the concept of “Islamic nation” is more metaphysical than real.

The other two approaches to the relationship between religious and ethnic factors in Islam seem to be more realistic, since they are implemented in modern practice, but oppose each other, and therefore reconciliation between them is impossible due to incompatibility of goals. As for the Arab influence on the emergence and development of Islam, it is undoubted and unconditional. As already noted, Islam originated on the Arabian Peninsula, having received its initial development among representatives of a number of clans of the tribe of Quraysh, living in Mecca. It received a further impetus for development in Medina, where in 622 the Prophet and his community performed hijra (resettlement). Later, this religion spread among the Arab tribes of the entire Arabian Peninsula, and then, during the great Arab conquests and missionary activities of Moslem Sufi preachers, its area expanded from the Maghreb to the Philippine Islands. There is no doubt that not only the new religion influenced the minds of different peoples and ethnic groups, but they also influenced the further development of Islam, turning it from the religion of the Arabs into the world one.

The adoption of Islam during the period of the birth, expansion and strengthening of the Caliphate, the strengthening of its centralization was rather positively perceived by other peoples, since it gave a powerful impetus to their socio-economic and political development. However, later, upon reaching the phase of breakdown and subsequent stagnation, the negative aspects of adopting a religion, new for them, began to appear, since along with the oblivion of the religion of their ancestors, the old values, traditions and customs began to disappear. National sentiments weakened as ethnic ideology was replaced by religious. People said prayers in a foreign, Arabic language, not understanding their essence and meaning. The adoption of Islam entailed not only the change of previous religions to another one,

but had more significant consequences. Former traditions, customs, worldview, laws began to be replaced by Arabic ones. With the adoption of Islam, non-Arab peoples switched to the Arabic alphabet, abandoning their own writing. New generations of Islamized peoples began to lose their historical and national roots of ancient culture, traditions of their ancestors, their connection with the past was broken. Thus, the change of religions and transition to the Arabic alphabet led to a change in life values, a change in the worldview of the majority of Islamized and Arabized peoples. At the same time, the “center of gravity” in Islam was gradually shifting not in favor of the Arabs. More and more weight was gained by other peoples, first of all, the Turks, who created in the bosom of Islam a number of powerful states and empires, among which the states of the Ghaznavids and Seljuks, the empire of Timur, the Great Mughals and, of course, the Ottoman Empire, whose territory during the period of its highest prosperity was approaching 6 million sq. km should be mentioned.

The great Arab conquests mainly took place during the reign of the “righteous” caliphs (632–661), as well as in the era of the caliphate of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), who founded the capital in Damascus. The Abbasids, who formed a new dynasty, ruled from Baghdad, which became their capital. During the years of their reign, the expansion of the caliphate was practically not recorded. Moreover, having reached its heyday, the state began to lose its integrity, and the Abbasids no longer conquered the lands, but lost them. So, already in 756, the surviving representative of the Umayyad clan, Abdurahman, created his own caliphate on the Iberian Peninsula, the last fragment of which, the Granada Caliphate, was won by Christians from the Moors during the Reconquista in 1492. Subsequently, the following states fell away from the Abbasid caliphate: Algeria in 777, Morocco in 789, Ifriquia (Tunisia) in 800, Khorasan in 821, Sistan in 867, Central Asia in 900. A similar collapse took place in Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Persia [6,

p. 172]. The Abbasid Caliphate was finally destroyed in the 13 century by Chingizids, who founded on most of its territory a new state of the Mongol dynasty of the Hulaguids. The last Abbasid caliph – Mutawakkil – in 1517 was forced to transfer the prerogatives of the “ruler of the faithful” (the title of the caliph is “Amer al-Muminin”) to the Turkish Sultan Selim I, who defeated in the battle of Aleppo the troops of the Egyptian Mamluks who sheltered the last Abbasid caliph. The caliphate was finally abolished in 1923 during the reforms begun by the founder of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Pasha Atatürk.

Islam is a world universal religion due to the fact that the area of its influence includes many peoples with various ethnic, racial, cultural and other characteristics. Therefore, although faith, doctrine, worship in Arabic are common to all Moslems, but religious customs, traditions, rituals have clearly expressed features of regional and national cultures, which makes it possible to distinguish, say, Turkish Islam from Arabian. As noted above, in the Arab environment it self, including among the Quraysh, inter-clan contradictions and conflicts were noted. Facts of apostasy from Islam and hypocrisy were recorded, even the return of the state of “jahiliyyah” (pre-Islamic ignorance), as a result of which the process of re-Islamization had to be carried out by force in the Arabian Peninsula. For example, after the death of the prophet, the first righteous caliph, Abu Bakr, had to use military means to return to the fold of Islam those representatives of the Arab tribes who followed the path of apostasy. It is for the same reason, in order to build their own state, “purify” and re-Arabize Islam, in the middle of the 18th century in Arabia, a powerful religious and political movement developed, which became known as “Wahhabism.” However, despite the fact that Islam appeared on Arab soil, absorbing many of the Arab values, including ethnic and even tribal, it is hardly appropriate to say that the Arab Islam is “pure Islam.” However, in the 20 century, the efforts of individual countries and organizations set up by them to create conditions

for the restoration of the dominant positions of the Arabs in the world Islamic Ummah are recorded. In the wake of this process, of course, is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on whose territory there are two main shrines of Islam – in Mecca and Medina, where millions of Moslems from various countries and regions make pilgrimages (hajj) every year. It should be emphasized that the current kingdom of the Saudis was created only on the third attempt, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first Saudi state was given life by the so-called “Wahhabite movement,” which arose in the middle of the 18 century, as a result of the alliance between the tribal sheikh Al-Saud and the religious teacher Mohammad Abd al-Wahhab of the Arabian Najd. By the beginning of the 19th century it covered all of Arabia, which at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire, but in 1818 it was defeated by the Egyptian army of Ibrahim Pasha. The second Riyadh Emirate existed for a little more than two decades (1843–1865) and collapsed due to the weakening of the central government and the separatism of local rulers. The third stage of the emirate's revival, associated with the name of the head and still ruling branch of the Al-Saud clan – Abd al-Aziz Ibn Abd al-Rahman – originates from 1902. In 1932, Abd al-Aziz, having united into a single state of Nejd, Hijaz and Hasa, proclaimed the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The king's sons became his heirs, including the current ruler of the KSA – Salman Ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Saud. Huge reserves and revenues from the sale of oil and petroleum products, as well as the ideology of Wahhabism that binds Saudi society together, allowed the KSA, this largest monarchy of the Persian Gulf, to become a leader among other monarchies in the region (Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman), to create on May 25, 1981 the Cooperation Council of the Gulf States (GCC), which includes all six monarchies of the region, organize and become the leader of many international political Moslem institutions (among them – the Organization of Islamic Cooperation - OIC, the League of the Islamic World – LIM – with numerous branches in many

countries of the world and many others), as well as a huge number of non-governmental religious and political organizations (NRPO), through which the export of the version of Sunni Islam that dominates in the KSA – neo-Wahhabism, based on the Hanbali madhhab, the toughest in Sunni Islam is carried out. It is the Saudi version of “Arab” Islam – neo-Wahhabism – that is presented today as “pure Islam”, with demands for the “purification” of other traditionalist interpretations of this religion. The third approach to the relationship between religious and ethnic factors in Islam is associated with traditionalist Islam, the phenomenon of which was predetermined, firstly, with the inclusion in the 7th – 11th centuries. into the Arab Caliphate of many peoples, and secondly, with its subsequent disintegration into more ethno-culturally homogeneous states, in each of which Islam acquired a specific shade characteristic of the lifestyle of a particular Moslem ethnic group. Peoples with other cultural traditions, having joined the spiritual life of the Moslem world, brought their religious and ethical ideas, legal norms, and customs to Islam. As the well-known Russian orientalist and Islamic scholar S.M. Prozorov correctly emphasizes, there was a dialectical process of mutual influence of “theoretical” and “everyday” Islam, “official” and “popular” Islam. However, this process did not take place simultaneously in different regions of the Moslem world and led to the fact that in large historical and cultural regions (Maverannahr, Persia, North Africa, India, Indonesia, etc.), Islam acquired specific features. Therefore, the solution of the problem of correlation between Islam and the single Islam regional is of great scientific and methodological importance. This decision is based on the recognition of the objective fact that, along with the general Islamic principles that unite the entire Moslem world, there are various regional forms of the existence of Islam, in one way or another related to ethnicity. In this case, the problem of attributing certain ideas, norms, customs to Islamic or “foreign” passes into the plane of only a retrospective analysis, and the main criterion for belonging

to the spiritual world of Islam is the self-consciousness of a person or a whole people who consider themselves Moslems [7, p. 7–8].

Based on this, it can be argued that “it is with traditionalist, and not theological, Islam that the inseparability of ethnic and confessional principles is associated.

...It is through traditionalist rather than dogmatic Islam that stereotypes of behavior of each specific Moslem are first formed, a Moslem, who at the everyday level is a member of his ethno-confessional community and only at the macro level is the bearer of the values and attributes of the world ummah” [8, p. 64–65]. Today, supporters of traditionalism advocate the preservation of the version of Islam that has historically developed in this or that country, region, in a particular territory, and oppose any changes, both in the religious sphere and in public life [9, p.30].

Religious and national (ethnic) factors in Islam are in a state of complex interaction. As noted above, nationalism as a political ideology and religion, Islam in particular, as a socio-cultural complex, each can act independently, either promoting or opposing each other. As practice shows, especially in the last century and a half, nationalism and Islam have converged and diverged more than once. They were united and separated by the realities of social and political history. The possibility of their effective interaction, despite fundamental differences, seems to be due to functional similarities. In epistemological terms, both nationalism and religion are based on absolutization, respectively, of a nation (nation-state) and a religious community, which are perceived as socially undifferentiated social structures. For them, evil is equally embodied in “outsiders,” and in the Moslem East, it most often is the hostile expansionist West, and then local collaborators [10, p. 102].

Islam, due to the inseparability of the secular and confessional factors in this religion, has always had a noticeable impact on the course of socio-political processes in Moslem

countries and regions. Before the emergence of nationalism in its modern sense, the liberation movements that took place in the Islamic world often used religious slogans in defense of the traditional way of life. In the self-consciousness of peoples and ethnic groups, especially in critical periods of their history, religion was identified with ethno-national ideas and feelings, influenced interethnic relations, often feeding ethno-egoistic and nationalistic attitudes of representatives of certain strata of society. At the same time, as practice shows, religion in real life practically never appears in its “pure” form, but always in ethno-national, politicized, aestheticized and other forms.

In contrast to religion, nationalism aims to create a modern state and society. The history of Islam testifies that it was not ethno-national relations that adapted to the religious system, on the contrary, the latter adapted to them. An example is the centuries-old history of the Ottoman Empire, and now the Turkish Republic. For four centuries, Turkish sultans were simultaneously caliphs, spiritual and secular leaders of the Sunni Moslems. After the collapse of the empire at the beginning of the twentieth century the course was taken to build a nation-state based on the ideological doctrine of Turkism. However, already in the last decades of the last century, a process of re-Islamization has been observed in Turkey, and Erdogan's Islamist Justice and Development Party has been the ruling party since 2002. At the same time, already in the 90s at the parliamentary level, the closeness of the nationalists of the Nationalist Movement Party (PNM) and the Islamists was recorded. This complex process of interaction between religious and nationalist factors was formalized as a theory of Turkish national-religious synthesis. The concept of “Islamic nationalism” that we have already mentioned is more often understood today not as an idealistic “Islamic nation,” but as one or another nationalist movement acting on a part of the general Islamic field. For example, the Turks in the ideological concepts of radical Islamists and ethno-nationalists are presented as “the best of Moslems.” An active

supporter of the spread of the ideas of Islamism and Pan-Turkism in the spirit of the Turkic-Islamist synthesis is the Turkish billionaire, the head of the religious community “Nurcular” (“Bright Path”) Muhammad Fethullah Gulen [11, p. 64].

The prevalence of the ethnic factor over the confessional one can also be traced on the example of the ideological doctrine of the Afghan Taliban, who, first of all, are Pashtuns with their customary right (Pashtunwalai), and only then are Moslems. This circumstance enables them to confront other ethnic groups of Afghan Moslems – Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens, etc.

The interaction of Islam with the norms of customary law (adat) and traditional rituals can also be found among the peoples of the North Caucasus, however, here, too, the ethnic factor always prevails over the confessional one [12, p. 70]. In other words, in real life the balance between nationalism and religion has almost always been in favor of the former. This is especially noticeable in a situation when the interests of ethno-national groups of the same confession collide. In this case, religious-communal solidarity is inferior to ethno-national one. This was the case, for example, in the first half of the 1990s of the 20th century in Dagestan, when the united spiritual administration of the Moslems of this republic was literally torn apart along ethnic lines into the spiritual administrations of Dargins, Laks, Kumyks, etc. Similar trends were recorded in the course of Doku Umarov's implementation of the separatist project Imarat Kavkaz. Thus, despite the fact that the ideology of radical Islamism, on which the political project Caucasus Emirate was built, excludes the issue of ethnicity, when appointing the heads of the Valayats, the informal leader of the North Caucasian underground adhered to the principle of ethnic parity. According to him, an Ingush or an Ossetian could not become the emir of the Chechen valayat, just as the Ingush could not become the emir of the Ossetian valayat. A Chechen or a representative of another ethnic group could not become the amir of the united valayat of Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay. Although formally

the ideologues of the Caucasus Emirate demonstrated the insignificance of the ethno-national idea in the system of relations of the Caucasus Emirate, in reality they followed the administrative principle of ethnic parity in the hierarchical management of the Caucasian territories. In the same way, the primary units in the network - jamaats (bandit groups) – were united into autochthonous cells with a pronounced ethnic color. Similar principles are practiced in the modern terrorist underground in the North Caucasus at the present time.

Thus, it seems that the synthesis of the religious and the ethnic is an undoubted factor underlying the traditional forms of existence of Islam. At the same time, those who advocate “pure” Islam demand the cleansing of religion from later accretions that go beyond the “golden age” (the period of receiving divine revelations by Muhammad and the activities of the first four “righteous” caliphs, i.e. 610–661) , in fact, advocate the re-Arabization of Islam. However, the statement that the so-called “pure Islam” is free of ethnic Arab influence is fundamentally wrong. Despite the fact that the above-mentioned sacred sources of Islam are compiled in the Arabic language, which had a colossal impact on the development of the cultures of many non-Arab peoples converted to Islam, it seems to confirm that Arab ethnicity, culture, traditions, and worldviews dominate in the modern “Islamic world” would be wrong. Moreover, many peoples during the period of the great Arab conquests and the adoption of Islam were culturally at a higher stage of development, for example, the Persians, Syrians, and some other peoples. In this regard, equating “pure” and “Arab” Islam is not only wrong, but also dangerous, since the desire to “purify” religion in practice leads to the emergence of religious fanatics, radicals, religious and political extremists and even terrorists who hide behind “good” intentions to “cleanse” Islam from “sinful innovations,” “heresies.” Such political practice almost always leads to the bloodshed, to wars, of which there are many examples in the modern world. The foregoing allows us to draw

a fundamental conclusion: there is no “pure Islam” free from the influence of the ethnic factor, but there is an Arabized Islam (Arabian, neo-Wahhabi), which is presented as “pure”, “true”. The desire to bring it to the North Caucasus and other Russian regions is, in fact, an attempt to replace local ethnic, cultural and other identities with Arab-Wahhabi ones. In principle, such a process cannot be conflict-free.

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2021.01.001. KSENIA ATAMALI. RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: MULTIPOLARITY AND PIVOT TO THE EAST // *Condensed abstract.*

Keywords: Russia, the North Caucasus, the Far East, political elites, political process, political leadership, turn to the East, de-Westernisation, geopolitics, integration, Asia-Pacific region.

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INION RAN

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2. Savchenko A.E., Zuenko I.Yu. The Driving Forces of Russia's Pivot to East // *Sravnitel'naya politika*, 2020, № 1. P. 111–125.

Leonid Savin, the chief editor of the “Geopolitics” journal at Moscow State University, discusses the theory of multipolarity, which has recently become a topic of debate among political scientists and journalists from all over the world. Such interest is stirred by the fact that the role of the US in global politics is declining that makes a number of states strive to fill the emerging geopolitical vacuum. As the analysis of doctrinal documents and strategies shows, multipolarity is one of the key trends of the foreign policy of Russia. Multipolarity is a kind of discursive framework that has expanded and adjusted over the years, with a focus on criticism of the foreign policy of the US.

The author notes that Russia participated in the drafting of the Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order (1997), one of the first international documents on multipolarity. It particularly states that the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China will contribute to the development of a multipolar world and the establishment of a new international order. The

Declaration defended the rights of states to choose their own path of development independently and without interference from outside. The developing countries and the Non-Aligned Movement were named the driving force contributing to the formation of a multipolar world.

The Declaration also noted several profound changes in international relations at the end of the 20th century:

- Establishment of the political, economic and cultural diversity of all countries.

- Enhanced role of the forces advocating for peace and international cooperation.

- Increased understanding by many countries of the need for mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit.

- Creation of a peaceful and stable international political and economic order is on the international agenda.

The author points out that the 2005 Declaration signed by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China was intended to strengthen efforts to organize a new international order in the 21st century. In the new Declaration the diversity of cultures and civilizations are named the basis for mutual enrichment, not for conflict; it also advocates the need for global cooperation, denouncing the clash of civilizations. Speaking about the transformation of the foreign policy priorities of Russia, the author draws attention to the 2000 concept, which is that Russia will seek the formation of a multipolar system of international relations that reflects the diversity of the modern world and its interests. The 2008 concept associates multipolarity with global security and states that addressing the issues of strategic stability cannot remain the exclusive responsibility of Russia and the United States. The 2013 Russian Foreign Policy Concept deals with the transitional period in international relations, which involves the formation of a polycentric international system. The paper notes the increasing complexity of international relations, the strengthening of newly emerged centres of economic growth and political influence, and the

important role of regional integration. In the next 2016 concept the intention to promote constructive dialogue and partnership reaffirms the policy based on multipolarity. The paper also mentions a considerable reduction of the ability of Western countries to dominate the world economy and politics.

The concepts of polycentricity and multipolarity are reflected in multiple national security strategies of the Russian Federation. The policy to promote the formation of a multipolar world and the development of equal and mutually beneficial relations with all countries and integration associations was established by Presidential Decree in the early 2000s. The paper noted the attempts by a number of states to hinder Russia to become one of the centres of influence in a multipolar world and to weaken its position in Europe, the Middle East, Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. In the 2009 strategy the policy to defend national interests was seen as a key factor in the emerging multipolar international relations. Strategic stability and equal strategic partnership strengthened by Russia's active participation in the development of a multipolar world order were deemed as a top priority for the Russian Federation. In 2015, the next document discussed creating a stable basis for further strengthening economic, political, military and spiritual potential of the Russian Federation, promoting its role in the polycentric world, the establishment of which is accompanied by greater global and regional instability.

It should be noted that Russia understood the need to develop a theory of multipolarity following a series of crisis situations: the collapse of the Soviet Union that entailed ethnic conflicts; the collapse of Yugoslavia; the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia; and the self-proclamation of independence by the territory of Kosovo. Attempts to redefine the place and role of Russia in the world political system were made.

In 2003, Yevgeny Primakov, one of the Russian advocates for multipolarity, argued that after 11 September two opposing trends became clearly apparent: the UN based mechanism of

multilateral action, on the one hand, and unilateralism, i.e. the belief that major decisions can be made by one country, the US, on the other. He pointed out that the EU was turning into a centre of power, comparable in its capabilities to the US, and stressed the need for the UN to contribute to the development of multipolarity. He also noted that China, Russia, India and Japan were not going to be one step behind the events determined by Washington. It is important to note that even back then Y. Primakov denied the leadership of the US, drawing attention to the rapidly growing capabilities of other states and alliances. He observed that the collapse of the USSR did not mean that the world should be unipolar with Washington as its centre. The GDP of China and India is larger than that of the US. As of 2011 the US is not the only driving force of scientific progress: the US accounts for 31 per cent of world R&D expenditures (measured at purchasing power parity), the EU accounts for 24 per cent, China accounts for 14 per cent, and Japan accounts for 11 per cent.

According to Y. Primakov, the multipolar world order in the context of globalisation does not lead to conflict situations or military clashes, but at the same time does not rule out a gradual and extremely difficult transition process towards such an order. As a supporter of the Russia-India-China triangle, which could counterbalance the US and along with other challenges, Primakov is rightfully considered to be one of the first Russian advocates for multipolarity.

On February 10, 2007 Vladimir Putin gave a speech at the Munich Security Conference, which went down in history as the Munich speech and a milestone in the process of development of multipolarity. In his speech, the President noted that “the unipolar world proposed after the Cold War” failed to materialize. One centre of power, one sovereign is destructive not only for everyone within this system, but also for the sovereign himself because it destroys him from the inside. For the modern world, unipolar system is not only unacceptable, but virtually impossible, since the potential of the new centres of global

economic growth bolsters multipolarity. Putin questioned the legitimacy of military operations conducted by a number of states, implying the US and NATO, since only the UN has legitimate power to approve use of force. The speech also covered the issues of disarmament, militarization of outer space, imbalance within the OSCE and economic security. The President finished the speech with a call for cooperation among states in order to build a democratic world order and ensure security and prosperity for all.

The author notes that the concept of multipolarity is based on the Alexander Dugin's idea of Neo-Eurasianism, among others. Eurasianism in terms of global trends is a revolutionary civilizational concept, which is intended to become a new ideological platform for cooperation of a conglomerate of various forces, states and peoples rejecting Atlantic-centred globalisation. It is the combination of all the obstacles in the path of unipolar globalisation, which developed from simple negation to a creative alternative. Although classical Eurasianism is associated exclusively with Russia, described as Eurasia due to its uniqueness, vast territory and location between Europe and Asia, Dugin complemented the ideology with new methodologies and scientific concepts. In this new understanding, Eurasianism is a philosophy of multipolar globalisation, designed to join together all societies and nations of the Earth in building a new world.

This opinion is shared by another Russian scientist Boris Martynov, who noted that the new emerging multipolarity cannot be anything other than civilizational. According to the scholar, intercivilizational communication is the political reality of the modern world. States along with various economic and financial institutions, non-governmental associations and even individuals as representatives of their civilizational archetypes engage in permanent multidisciplinary and multi-level international dialogue. In addition, multipolar world order system is based on law, since it is essential to provide a

reasonable *modus vivendi* between several major players on the international scene.

The deterioration of relations with the West prompted Russia to actively develop the principles of multipolarity, since the multilateralism of the EU and the US implies joining existing international institutions, whose agenda is mainly set by the West. Russia views such approach as a form of collective unilateralism, which raises a number of alternative ideas about a multipolar world. Some authors tend to believe that the multipolar world order is not a concept, but a historical reality in the process of development.

The author concludes that today there is still no clear vision of the future poles of power, but nevertheless, a vague shape of the future world order is already visible. Theoretical foundations of multipolarity should be further developed, especially from the perspective of non-Western international relations theories. It is also necessary to define ontological factors, ethical and legal aspects, and to analyse cultural, identification and civilizational elements. Once it is done, it will be possible to introduce this concept into international rule-making and incorporate it into practical interaction with other centres of power both on the Eurasian continent and beyond.

Anatolii Savchenko and Ivan Zuenko, researchers at Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnology of the Peoples of the Far-East, study the prerequisites for the phenomenon of Russia's "pivot to the East". The phrase "pivot to Asia" first appeared in the foreign policy of the US in 2011. The Russian pivot the East comprises global, national and regional interests, strategic considerations and priorities for territorial development, which generates a social and political resonance. This topic has been discussed in numerous Western media outlets and is a permanent item on the agenda of various conferences on international relations. Talking about the essay on Russian Asia by Fyodor Dostoevsky, the authors raise the question of what the turn to the East really is and how to assess it. With the reference

to the well-known debate between Igor Shuvalov and Alexei Kudrin at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in 2015, the researchers conclude that politicians do not have an answer to these questions. They question concerns about real purposes of the pivot to the East and allegations that this is only a diversification of foreign economic relations. Today, there is no consensus yet on what exactly constitutes the turn to the East, its starting point or purposes. Also, there is no analytical framework for systematizing the transformations in the foreign policy and foreign economic priorities of Russia. The authors seek to identify the driving forces of Russia's pivot to the East and to understand its relationship with the major global, national and regional priorities of the country.

The pivot to the East is viewed in terms of three global processes:

- Russia's part in the global competition for the reshaping of the world order.
- Russia's strategy for the reintegration of the post-Soviet space.
- Russia's endeavours to establish political and economic ties alternative to those of the West.

The revitalization process of the Asia-Pacific policy direction could be defined as a ratio of “structure” and “motion”. A stable world order, subdivided into those in dominant or subordinate positions, leaves little room for major geopolitical manoeuvres of individual states. However, so-called “rising powers” shake the foundations of the established world order and are capable of affecting the status quo. The motivations and objectives of Russia in the international scene are subject to various readings and interpretations. The pivot to the East should be analysed primarily through the prism of geopolitics, since its role in political decision-making of Russia is growing steadily.

At the turn of the 17th century Russia was one of the first states committed to a policy of Westernisation. At the time of the global expansion of the West, this policy direction turned Russia

into one of the key players in world politics. Through a policy of Westernisation Russia implemented its own geopolitical integration project along its borders in the West, South and East. Today Russia adopts a reversed policy of “de-Westernisation” or “pivot to Asia”. Russian top officials underline the significance of global changes. In 2012 Vladimir Putin spoke about the time of profound transformation; and in 2015 Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia, pointed to the current transition period from unipolar and bipolar systems of international relations to a polycentric one. In the 1990s and 2000s, during the global redistribution of economic and military power, the strengthening of large non-Western countries reduced the ability of the West to impose its power on the rest of the world. This became particularly visible during the “commodities super cycle” from 2001 to 2008. The global reconfiguration is acquiring a dynamic of its own, as the largest developing countries, mainly Asian, managed to geopolitically capitalise on their economic successes. This results in the emergence of international associations like the BRICS and G20, which promote a multilateral format for major economic decision-making.

The authors note a new struggle to reshape the world, a competition of a number of large-scale integration projects: the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (the “Belt”) serve as an alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in the Asia-Pacific region. In the post-Soviet space, there is a clash of the Eastern Partnership (European joint initiative), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) integration projects and the “Belt” (Chinese initiative). The shape of the new world order remains unclear, but East Asia is set to play a fundamental role in it, since China and India have enough potential to change global politics and economy. In 2016, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation declared a shift of the potential power and development centres to the Asia-Pacific region.

Russia has been using its high-tech military-industrial complex to gradually erode the strength of the West for the past thirty years. The purchase of Russian weapons helped China and India form armies they have today. Thus, the largest Asian countries acquired significant economic power due to their relations with the US and Europe, and Russia helped them geopolitically capitalise on their economic success. In the early 2000s, the English historian J. Hosking referred to these developments while discussing the key role (negative, in his opinion) of Russia in shaping the world.

At present, modernisation, as well as globalisation, is less and less associated with Westernisation. China combines authoritarian regime with state capitalism, which reduces the dependence of the regime's legitimacy on its recognition in Western countries. For the political elites of developing countries, it becomes an alternative to the Western political model. Thus, a significant number of the post-Soviet states are moving forward towards the China model. Since late 1980s and until recently Russia was economically, ideologically and institutionally tied to the Western world. Participation in the G8 and the Russia-EU and Russia-NATO summits was the usual format for international communication, leading to Eurocentrism in the foreign policy of Russia. The economic system of Russia implied sterilization of oil export revenues, ensuring macroeconomic stability. Strong macroeconomic performance enabled Russian companies to access Western financial market.

Since the beginning of the 2010s the things has changed for a number of reasons:

- The domestic political development deviated from the Western ideology of the rule of international law, while the ideology of national sovereignty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of states has gained momentum.

- Economically, Russia was a mere supplier of raw materials to the Western world; however, the subsequent crash in energy prices, difficulties to reach Western capital markets and

revision of Russian economic stance in a negative light have cast doubt on the system of economic relations with the West.

– Since 2014, the usual channels of interaction with the US and EU have been blocked.

According to the authors, it is practically impossible to measure de-Westernization, since it cannot be distinguished from economic diversification, a “multi-vector” foreign policy, or integration into the Asia-Pacific region. The change in Moscow’s foreign policy priorities, readiness to sever ties with the West, values other than those of the West and growing importance of Asia are the hallmarks of de-Westernisation. In geopolitical and economic terms, Russia has few incentives to uphold a Western-centric world order, because the competition with the West led only to a gradual loss of its long-standing interests in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. Thus, Moscow has become one of the main supporters of the shift of geopolitical power to the “non-Western” countries.

The main catalyst for the pivot to the East, in the authors’ view, was the difficulty of reintegration of the post-Soviet space, caused both by the discourse for decolonization and strengthening of sovereignty, and the geopolitical pressure of the West in two waves. The 2003–2005 “colour revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan were the first wave. The second wave is associated with the EU “Eastern Partnership” joint indicative (2009) aimed at strengthening integration ties with the six former Western republics of the USSR, namely Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. At the same time, since the early 2000s, the post-Soviet space has been a foreign policy priority for Moscow.

The authors note the transformation of the project for the reintegration of the post-Soviet space from a regional into a global one, as well as a change of the geopolitical vector of reintegration. Initially, the project involved Russia’s emergence as a regional power; and now the neighbouring countries start to view it as an alternative to integration under the auspices of

Europe or China. The “European element” of the project virtually disappeared, and the focus shifted to the “Eurasian” one. After the Georgian and Ukrainian crises, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) focused on post-Soviet Central Asia, which is also an area of interest for China. In 2015, Moscow and Beijing managed to find an optimal format for interaction of their integration initiatives by signing the Joint Declaration on coordinating cooperation between the EAEU and the “Belt”.

The authors point to a similar metamorphosis with the integration policy into the Asia-Pacific region, which in the early 2010s was not as important as the European direction of foreign policy. The Asia-Pacific region was fairly far down on the list of the foreign policy priorities of Russia than the post-Soviet space, the EU, NATO, the US and even Canada and the Arctic. However, following the Crimean crisis in 2014, the Asia-Pacific region became a priority of Russian foreign policy, putting an end to Moscow’s strategic plans to pursue a balanced and multi-vector foreign and economic policy. With the current political stance of the West, there are virtually no alternatives to the development of integration ties with Asia, including the post-Soviet space.

The development of the Eastern regions of Russia, on the one hand, was supposed to enable the access to the Asia-Pacific markets; on the other hand, the benefits from the deepening of ties with the Asia-Pacific region and post-Soviet Central Asia should first become apparent in the Eastern region. This linkage is set forth in Russian strategic documents, in which the Far East is regarded not only as an instrument, but also as a beneficiary of the “turn to the East”. The process of intensifying ties with the Asia-Pacific region comprises the development of the transit transport system and export infrastructure in the Far East, financial flows from Asian states and the establishment of a legal framework that facilitates foreign investment.

Nevertheless, the achievements to date are relatively modest, since Asian development institutions are reluctant to

invest in the Russian economy. In 2018, there were zero Russian projects, approved or pending by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The New Development Bank (NDB) is financing three Russian projects (total of \$628.8 million), but these investments have nothing to do with the turn to the East. At the annual Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, created to encourage investment in the Russian Far East, agreements with Russian companies are not binding.

Projects on the development of the Far East are funded by the state or state-related corporations. Even the international transport corridors (ITR) Primorye-1 and Primorye-2, which give the north-eastern provinces of China, as well as Mongolia, direct access to the Sea of Japan, have not yet been able to attract foreign investors. The only tangible evidence of the turn to the East is the construction of a powerful energy complex, designed for the transportation, processing and export of hydrocarbons to the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. However, this is connected more with the diversification of sales area and geographical shift of the raw material base rather than with geopolitical manoeuvres.

The authors conclude that the pivot to the East has not yet produced tangible results, but nevertheless it exists. After a thorough analysis of the pivot to the East, the researchers name the driving forces of this process:

- Rapprochement between Russia and China allows us to view the Asia-Pacific region as a means for successful manoeuvring in a changing world.

- A change in geopolitical priorities would have been impossible without an inclusive preparation, namely the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC). The implementation of the Eurasian integration project (EAEU-based) would also have been impossible without preparatory work within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community

(EAEC) and the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU), facilitated by the constructive stance of Kazakhstan.

- During the 2000s Russia rid itself of the monopoly of Europe on consumption of Russian energy resources and shifted exports to the developing countries in Asia. This shift in the geography of the oil trade is one of the most significant prerequisites for Russia's pivot to the East, as it creates room for geo-economic manoeuvre.

As a result of the Crimean crisis, the existing institutions of interaction with the West collapsed, the foreign policy priorities of Moscow shifted, and after the imposition of sanctions the old model of economic growth of Russia ceased to work. All the aforementioned developments turned Russia to the East. The growing importance of the Asia-Pacific region for Russia is primarily associated with the geopolitical priorities of Moscow and the convergence of the political systems of the EAEU Member States, coupled with the simultaneous divergence of these systems from the West. The problem is that the pivot to the East does not mean the establishment of a new model of economic growth and successful development of the country's eastern territories. Its solution will be the final indicator of whether Russia's pivot to the East proves to be successful.

PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, THE CAUCASSUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

2021.01.002. ELENA DMITRIEVA. THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ELITES IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS REGION // *Condensed abstract.*

Keywords: Russia, the North Caucasus, political elites, political process, political structure, conflicts, tension, protest, political leadership, political threats, challenges.

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1. A. Salgiriev, A. Baranov, Yu. Kostenko. The emergence of new flashpoints of ethno-political tension in the North Caucasus as a consequence of the crisis of the elites // *“Evrazijskoe Nauchnoe ob’edinenie.”* 2019. No. 7–2 (53). P. 145–147.

2. Yu. Rudkov. Political Elites of the Northern Caucasus: Features of the Modern Development Stage // *“Kaspijskij region: politika, ekonomika, kul’ tura.”* 2019. No. 1 (58). P. 175–181.

In their study [1], Ali Salgiriev, Andrej Baranov, Yuliya Kostenko consider the role of elites in the North Caucasus, discuss the process of their formation, structuring and behavioral patterns. The North Caucasus, a complex and deprived region of Russia, is mostly inhabited by indigenous peoples professing

Islam and Christianity. Extremely high degree of politicization, ethnicity, clannish signs and tribalization provide fertile ground for conflicts. Regional ethno-political elites comprise a complex system of teips and family ties and are formed on a closed, guild-based model. New members are allowed in this elite circle only with the approval of proxies and through informal connections.

Political elites in the North Caucasus wield real power and have covert leverage in decision-making. The authors point out that the poor quality of the elite results in the eruption of new conflicts or the escalation of old ones. For its own financial interests ethnocracy use the historic memory of peoples, unresolved territorial disputes, injustice, social differentiation, etc. The researchers also name imposing archaic views, poorly developed civil society institutions and economic backwardness among factors behind permanent tension and conflicts in the region.

The Federal Government adopted a policy of decentralization and began to delegate certain powers to the regions during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. This resulted in a series of intrastate and regional conflicts, particularly in the North Caucasus. Today, the lack of capable political elite in the region and inability of some leaders to adequately analyse the situation on the ground lead to the emergence of new hotbeds of ethno-political tension and conflicts. For example, in early October, 2018, in Ingushetia there were demonstrations, rallies and protest marches marked by insults to the regional authorities, with calls for a change of government, etc. The protests were sparked by the agreement signed on September 26, 2018, between the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia on the delimitation of the territory; as a result of this agreement Ingushetia lost a significant part of its lands. Such developments have shown that the situation could be further exacerbated by inconsistent and hasty steps by the ethno-elites along with the spread of false information by political opponents, who use this sensitive issue for their own purposes.

These social protests, therefore, show that political elites are not always able to articulate the interests of citizens; indicate low civilian confidence in the decisions of political and administrative elites; and also denote that the population is strongly influenced by the opposition. It is noted that the counter-elites play an active role in the political process. For example, oppositional Western Diasporas hustled to lead this process for their own promotion.

The neighboring Chechen Republic took a diametrically opposite stance on the border problem. A survey conducted in 2017 shows that the majority of respondents (55%) believe that the situation in the North Caucasus will remain the same, 11% believe that it will worsen, 15% answer that it will improve and only 19% find it difficult to answer the question. These figures show that the population of the North Caucasus is skeptical about the recent changes.

The Russian society strongly believes that the Government injects billions of dollars in the Caucasus region, where these enormous sums of money are stolen. Such attitudes are fostered by biased mass media and gain momentum during the election period. In fact, according to available statistical data, three out of top five subjects of the Russian Federation receiving subsidies are not in the North Caucasian Federal District.

The authors define the structure of the North Caucasian elites as one based on patron-client relationship with a strong predominance of political and administrative factors. Such an elite structure suggests a leader (a head or “patron”) and a body of assistants, advisers, deputies, etc. which make up “clientele”. Once the patron is transferred to another position, he is joined by his clientele. If the patron is removed from office, his “court” is dissolved and ex-clientele may lose reputation. This elite organization can exist only with a vertical patronage structure, under the wing of a more influential official. Such a closed system structure and authoritarian distribution of political and economic power result in rather strong conflict potential and intense internal contradictions among the elites. Without the

approval of the “patron” and his patronage, ordinary people cannot be appointed to leadership positions.

The authors point out once again that the major source of conflict is the mechanisms of the formation of ethno-political elites and their low quality. In this regard, major shortcomings are still the same: widespread corruption, lack of professionalism and underground activities. In the North Caucasus, corruption is the main source of public frustration, provoking protests, especially among young people.

Further the authors pass to consideration of the present situation in the region. They note the beginning of the centralization process of the “vertical of power” and the expanding role of the federal authorities, including the appointment of plenipotentiary representatives of the President in the federal districts and the establishment of territorial ministries. The authors attribute these administrative changes to the gradual weakening of the central authority in the localities and the growing role of ethnocracy because of weak governance.

In conclusion, the authors note that the political elites in the Caucasian republics are able to influence and determine ethnic mobilization potential, which leads to a certain bargain with local ethno-elites. The solution to the problem, as the authors see it, is to gradually reduce the role of the elites; to introduce new recruiting methods and ways of incorporating the elites; to further integrate the peoples of the North Caucasus into civilizational and cultural space of Russia; and to fight against social differentiation by defeating corruption and introducing fair courts.

Considering the current stage of development of the elites of the North Caucasus, Yuri Rudkov [2] emphasises profound inequality of the RF regions and considerable political and economic disproportions in their potential, determined by national character and historical background of these territories.

Given these historical circumstances, the author believes the local elites have different socio-economic opportunities and

therefore are forced to use various management strategies, which sometimes result in confrontation or even conflict among the elites. As the author sees it, the objective of the federal authorities is to prevent the escalation of these conflicts or even nip them in the bud. The efficiency of this policy can be evaluated by the quality the local political and administrative elites.

In the 1990s Russian political elites developed at a time of democratization process and the dominance of the Western liberal concept of power. Then, in the 2000s and especially in 2010s they faced new internal development challenges in the wake of strengthening State hierarchy, conflict with Western values, levelling of some democratic institutions against the backdrop of increasing bureaucratization, and establishment of a “soft authoritarian” regime. After Vladimir Putin’s Munich speech (February 10, 2007), the Russian leadership took a course for strengthening sovereignty and curtailing the open partnership with Western countries. It was the problem of sovereignty that became the subject of tension between Moscow and Western countries, which by that time had been habitually using Russia’s sovereignty in their own geopolitical interests.

If one looks into the basics of the Russian elite, they have the same features and elements, characteristic of the entire Russian society, such as traditionalism, statism, principle of one-man management, red tape, etc.

The latter is particularly relevant to the issue of corruption and patron-client relationship. The author asserts that the problem is not hushed up, but is actively discussed at all levels, although it cannot be solved once and for all due to sociocultural volatility and imperfection of political system itself.

In 2008, Vladislav Surkov, the author of the concept of sovereign democracy and personal assistant of the President, stated that the lack of open competitive selection is the major shortcoming of the Russian political elite.

The modern Russian administrative and political elite still worship Western authorities, believing that Russia has no moral

right for a dissenting opinion. The vestiges of Westernization are especially strong in those who came to power in the 1990s. The so-called comprador elite (most commonly referred to as the “fifth column”) considered themselves as an integral element of the globalist project of the West, since they shared its fundamental values and practically began to integrate into its socio-economic systems.

As experts note, a significant part of the Russian elite have vested interest outside the country. The political elite, which was formed mainly during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, now is virtually stagnant, having artificially halted upward mobility. The Russian elite reproduces itself and increasingly acquires hereditary traits: the heirs receive good education and get “cushy jobs” to start their careers. Government officials are concerned neither with the development nor with raising the prestige of Russian universities. They do not send their children to study at the local universities, but send them abroad instead, where they receive Western education and absorb Western ideology. Some children of Russian highest-level officials have already acquired foreign citizenships. As a result, the next generation of the Russian elite, which is gradually coming to power, is not going to promote national interests of their homeland. Thus, the elite becomes extremely vulnerable to external pressure, which puts the state interests at risk and, in particular, limits Russia’s sovereignty.

Moreover, the author identifies another threat in the very federal structure of the Russian state, namely problems associated with asymmetric federalism. A federal structure ideally implies free competition between regional elites and setting up of a regional government on the basis of open and alternative democratic procedures. However, in Russia, it is the central Government that appoints the head of the subject and thus forms the regional elite which is a feature of the unitary nature of the administrative-territorial structure. Thus, one can speak of Russian federalism as mixed and asymmetric, since

national republics, as well as regions and territories, are also subjects of the Russian Federation. This is especially evident in the case of the national republics of the North Caucasus. It has always been a complex region and therefore constantly monitored by the Government.

In the author's opinion, there are more socio-economic problems in the North Caucasus than in other regions of Russia, which is exactly why it receives such close attention. But at the same time, the local elite communities should be given a great deal more attention since the security of the South of Russia depends on the consensus with them.

Speaking about the peculiarities of the political and administrative elites of the republics of the North Caucasus, the author notes their striving for ethnocracy based on the traditional (conservative) way of political thinking. Ethnocracy is a type of political system in which political power is distributed on the basis of entirely ethnic goal-setting and therefore is mainly facilitated by ethnic traditions.

After the end of the Second Chechen Campaign, the region is going through a period of relative socio-economic and political tranquility and stabilization. However, it does not mean that all the problems in the region have vanished. The problems may be not pressing at the time, and although they are off agenda now, they still exist. In the multi-ethnic regions of the North Caucasus, as is well known, ethno-political stratification is the driving factor of the political and administrative elite, determining its relations and ties with the Federal Government. The challenges of ethnocracy are still to be addressed through the integration of the local elites into the cultural and political structures of Russia. The author refers to the expert opinion that at the present stage the local political elites of the North Caucasus have yet to realign their activities in conditions of strong central authority and closer control over financial subsidies to the regions.

In the 2000–2010s the North Caucasus developed a regional one-party political system. In the republics of the North

Caucasus, United Russia consistently received over 90% of the votes. United Russia's sky-high result in the North Caucasus may be explained by lack of other political parties in the region.

The author cites Arushan Vartumyan, the Doctor of Political science, who argues that "the political elites at the regional level are not a homogeneous group in terms of social status and functions. <...> The "teams" of officials at the service of the heads of the regions provide legal formalization and legitimization of political decisions. These "teams" with power act as intermediaries between the federal elites and business groups in the regions, increasingly becoming dependent partners of corporate structures. Large business groups provide the economic resources for the entire elite community, support its stability, and often determine the regional Government's composition (presidents or governors). Political parties, social movements, and the media serve the interests of the elite's administrative and economic groups. Organized crime, which is the most "mobile powerful institution" of elite politics, determines zones of political influence and influences the distribution of power."

The prerequisite to the successful development of the regions is the high-quality education of the professional elite, who are well aware of their political status and multidimensional nature and complexity of the tasks to be solved. However, most of the political and administrative elites prefer to receive higher education at federal universities or abroad. The local university communities are not yet qualified and experienced enough to offer quality professional education. Therefore, in the author's view, in order to solve the personnel problem of regional elites, the authorities should address the development of the regional system of professional education in the first place. It should be remembered that the North Caucasus region requires constant rather than partial attention from the central authorities.

Analysing the peculiarities of ethno-political conflicts, the author singles out clan disputes and corruption activities of local

officials, which seriously undermine the authority of the supreme power in the region. Back during the Soviet era, the North Caucasus was not characterized by exceptionally tranquil atmosphere. In the chaotic 1990s, corruption, crime and terrorism originated here and subsequently spread all over Russia. In the 2000s, the spread was finally reversed, but it's impossible for the Government to eliminate these phenomena due to a number of political and economic reasons. Regional elites find themselves unable to tackle acute socio-economic problems, particularly unemployment (especially among young people), corruption (especially that of officialdom) and crime (especially in the underground economy). Some corrupt high-ranking officials' activities significantly undermine Russia's authority in the region. In addition, local authorities sometimes discredit themselves with ill-considered actions. Experts point out that local problems, particularly in the judiciary, are due not to family ties and relations, but to the fight of clans' patrons for the control of power and resources. The problem of non-observance of legal rights of citizens may be not only in sometimes too traditional court proceedings, but also in behind-the-scenes control over "independent courts" which substitute for appropriate judicial control.

The author notes steadily increasing role of the North Caucasus's counter-elites, which lead intra-ethnic clans, territorial economic groups and numerous religious communities. According to experts, the ethno-political elites of the North Caucasus region represent an ethnically homogeneous social community, which has the key role in decision-making process and necessary resource potential to lobby the interests of the ethnic group. The formation of the region's ethno-political elites stems from the historical and cultural context, that determines traditionalization, ethnicization and development of the shadow economy. The ethno-political elites of the North Caucasus retain the authoritarian ways and values of political governance. The basic recruitment channels for elites, which define the specifics of elitogenesis,

remain traditional: clan affiliation, ethnic origin, protectionism, clientelism and paternalism.

Russian political scientists have come to the conclusion that conflicts in the republics of the North Caucasus are usually compound and complex in nature. There can also be multilateral and long-term conflicts rooted not only in the specific group interests, but also in fundamental ideological values.

The author identifies the reasons that give rise to conflicts in the republics of the North Caucasus as follows: economics; politics; social stratification; ethno-politic, historical and cultural background; religious differences; and search of identity. The potential of ethno-political elites in stabilizing the political situation in the North Caucasus is not used to its fullest extent. This is largely due to the lack of a sound regulatory strategy of the federal elites vis-à-vis the regional political elites.

The author comes to the conclusion that an effective governing of the region requires not only a clear understanding of its current socio-economic and political state, but also a detailed knowledge of its history, culture and traditions.

VALENTINA SCHENSNOVICH. COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA, KYRGYZSTAN, KAZAKHSTAN, TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN WITHIN THE SCO AND THE EAEU // *The analytical review was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: SCO, Central Asia, EAEU, Eurasian integration, Bishkek Declaration (2019), Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, India, Pakistan, scientific and educational cooperation between universities.

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Abstract. The review deals with prominent aspects of the interaction between the SCO Member States in the field of politics, economics, science and education. Special importance is attached to digitalization, youth projects, scientific and educational cooperation of universities and the activities of international information and scientific centres that have an impact on the integration processes in the Eurasian area.

Introduction

The world is changing, and changing fast. There is a shift in global balance of power, primarily due to the emergence of new centres of development in Asia. The interrelatedness and interdependence between states is growing. At the same time, the global political and economic situation remains tumultuous and tense. The process of economic globalization is facing the increase in unilateral protectionist measures along with other challenges of international trade.

The SCO acts as a reliable platform for fruitful cooperation in order to create a polycentric world order that ensures the rule of international law, primarily the UN Charter; implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and respect for the independent choice of the peoples of their political and socio-economic path.

Bishkek Declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Heads of State Council (2019)

The SCO Member States emphasise the importance of initiatives to promote cooperation in building international relations of a new type, based on the principles and standards of

international law and mutually beneficial cooperation. The Member States, relying on the SCO Development Strategy until 2025, intend to develop cooperation in politics, security, trade and the economy, finance and investment, and their cultural and humanitarian ties.

The Declaration stresses that the increasing challenges and security threats that are becoming cross-border in their nature such as terrorism, the spread of terrorist and extremist ideology, including on the Internet, require special attention, close coordination and constructive cooperation of the entire international community. The Member States call on the international community to promote global cooperation in combating terrorism with the central role of the UN in compliance with the UN Charter and the principles of international law without politicisation and double standards and with respect for the sovereignty and independence of all countries. They condemn all forms of propaganda of the ideology of terrorism, extremism and religious intolerance, as well as manifestations of discrimination based on religion or convictions.

The Member States state the importance of keeping outer space free from all types of weapons of any kind as well as the crucial importance of compliance with the current legal system, which provides for peaceful uses of outer space. They also stand for strict compliance with the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons. One of the key factors of preserving and enhancing security and stability in the SCO space is a prompt settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. The Member States support the efforts of the government and people of Afghanistan aimed at restoring peace, economic development of the country, countering terrorism, extremism and drug crime. They stress that there is no alternative to settling the conflict in Afghanistan through political dialogue and an inclusive peace process conducted by Afghans themselves, and urge to step up cooperation of all the concerned nations and international organisations, with the central coordinating role of the UN.

In this context vital importance is given to further interaction in different multilateral formats.

The Member States reaffirm their common stance on the lack of alternatives to Syria settlement through dialogue on the basis of ensuring sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the country. They stress the significance of continued international efforts to assist Syria in the post-conflict restoration of the country.

The SCO Member States speak in favour of improving the architecture of global economic governance, deepening cooperation to build a predictable and stable environment for the development of trade, economic and investment cooperation, and strengthening of the multilateral trading system based on the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). They stress the importance of further deepening cooperation in order to bring forth an open world economy, strengthen an open, transparent and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system, and to prevent any protectionist actions in international and regional trade.

The SCO Member States support China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and note the ongoing work to jointly implement this initiative, including the efforts to align the Eurasian Economic Union projects with those under the BRI. The Member States consider it a priority to improve the well-being and living standards of the population by further strengthening cooperation in trade, production, transport, energy, financial, investment, agricultural, telecommunications, innovation and other areas of mutual interest. In this regard, they aim to promote favourable conditions for the development of trade, economic and investment activities within the SCO. In this respect, the development of the draft Road Map to increase the share of national currencies in mutual settlements between the SCO Member States will be continued.

Cooperation in the field of science and education

M. Kazakov, a post-graduate student at Pacific National University, examines the mechanisms for international scientific cooperation and synergies in the SCO space. The article offers possible ways of increasing communication between young scientists of the SCO countries. In the 21st century, the emerging international environment demonstrates the increasing role of regional international organizations in addressing the challenges of politics, economy and regional security. Such developments are linked to the expanding international relations in the era of globalization and the complementarity of the economies of the Member States. The SCO unites the largest developing countries with the highest rates of economic growth, which account for approximately half of the world's population. Following the admission of the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the SCO at the summit held in Astana in 2017, the economic potential of the organization and its political authority in the international arena has increased noticeably. Also, the organization's geographical area of cooperation was expanded to South Asia.

Currently, there are eight full members of the SCO: the Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Four states have observer status in the SCO and six states are dialogue partners. The territory of the SCO including the observer states reaches 37.53 million square km, which is about 61 per cent of the Eurasian continent.

As the legal successor of the Shanghai Five, the SCO has retained its main objectives and areas of cooperation. The SCO has never positioned itself as a military organization or alliance similar to NATO. The Member States uphold the objective of developing the SCO as a multi-purpose regional organization that does not imply the formation of a military-political union or an economic

integration grouping with supranational governance institutions. While addressing political and economic issues and security challenges, the SCO members are working to create favourable conditions for developing ties in the fields of science, technology, education and culture. Currently, the mechanisms of cooperation between the states are upgrading within the framework of SCO University, which unites more than 70 leading universities of the SCO States. Since network universities have proven to be effective, the establishment of a similar structure within the framework of a regional organization in Central and South Asia is a natural way to develop educational ties. In 2016, the Agreement on the Establishment of the University of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization set out essential guidelines for the functioning and administration of SCO University. The network university trains specialists in the following areas: Regional Studies, Ecology, Energy, IT-technologies, Nanotechnology, Pedagogy and Economics.

The author notes that graduates are expected to advocate the SCO core values and the “Shanghai spirit”, which in the long term will contribute to effective interaction between the states and the establishment of intercultural communication.

The potential for scientific cooperation between the SCO Member States deserves special attention. The author points out that China and Russia are leading in research and development investment. The number of researchers as a percentage of the total staff of every Scientific Research Institute vividly demonstrates the potential for cooperation between the SCO States; this large number of researchers can be involved in international scientific activities throughout the SCO region. The leaders of the states recognize that in the 21st century the leading positions in the field of research, development and deployment of new technologies allow not only to maintain the growth rates of national economies, but also to promote competitiveness in the world market. In this regard, the Governments consistently pursue a policy of comprehensive support of scientists and scientific researches.

Nevertheless, the author notes that the mechanisms of scientific cooperation in the SCO space provide no regular scientific framework for young scientists. In this regard, the author welcomes the initiative to establish the Youth Forum of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Cooperation with international organizations

Speaking about the civilizational purposes of the Greater Eurasia project, N. Stupakov, Director of the CIS Security Problems Institute, notes the peculiarities of economic and political conditions for the establishment of inter-State institutions. The EAEU, SCO and BRICS are becoming engines of the historical development process of non-Western civilizations, offering an alternative path of Eurasian globalization without the Anglo-Saxon world at the helm. The emergence of a multipolar world has triggered current integration processes and the formation of institutional framework of cooperation in Eurasia. At the Summit in Astana in 2016, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin put forward the idea of establishing the Greater Eurasian Partnership with the participation of the EAEU, China, India, Pakistan, Iran and the CIS countries; by the beginning of 2019 it became a key political union of Eurasian state. The Northern Sea Route and the New Silk Road, which are the Eurasian economic projects assessed as historical international factors of the “great migration of peoples”, are especially relevant for the Greater Eurasia project. Such mega-projects, which cover the territories of a significant number of European and Asian states, are becoming the ideological foundation for modern strategic planning of infrastructure investments. This is accompanied by the establishment of international financial institutions, designed to enable lending for such projects, and foreign exchange reserves. These include the SCO Interbank Consortium and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which finances the New Silk Road project.

Political cooperation within Greater Eurasia is driven by the need to counter external military threats posed by NATO. The United States and Great Britain deem the Eurasian space as an area of their global political and economic influence; therefore, Greater Eurasia, as a comprehensive partnership between Eurasian states, is viewed as a new political mechanism to address the threats of the modern world. In his Munich speech in 2019, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov announced that a common Eurasian economic space was being created within the framework of cooperation between the EAEU and BRICS, as well as through increasing contacts between the EAEU, SCO and ASEAN.

At the same time, under pressure from the United States, the European Union distances from the Eurasian mechanisms of mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia and other states. Comprehensive understanding of the history of relations between the Russian Federation and the EU shows that the development of mutually beneficial cooperation remains the most important objective of strategic partnership. After all, a reliable and stable system that guarantees increased competitiveness of the economies of Russia and the EU is closely connected with the Greater Eurasia project, with the EU as one of possible strategic investors.

In the researcher's opinion, Russia aims to create the Greater Eurasian Partnership, a single space in which the Russian Federation and the EAEU states will have a key role. Nevertheless, stages of establishment of such architecture, which is now viewed more as a political paradigm, are extremely complex.

In addition, there are certain integration parameters for cooperation that might limit the potential benefit of a particular member state. Thus, a number of various integration communities within Greater Eurasia can complicate negotiations on mutually beneficial and forward-looking terms of partnership between the states.

V. Anikin, Doctor of Economics and Professor at the Diplomatic Academy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, writing about the development of integration processes in the post-Soviet space assesses the role of Russia in the multilateral cooperation within the CIS. The author puts forward proposals for the conceptual framework of establishing a single economic, financial and information space of the CIS and the EAEU, as well as strategic directions of interaction among countries in the world community.

A large-scale impact on the processes of the world economy is a contemporary threat that affects international security and is accompanied by major political risks at global level. The researcher points out, that it is essential for Russia to find the optimal format for interstate cooperation.

The Greater Eurasia concept, which was put forward by Russia in 2016, implies a number of bridges in the Eurasian area, namely, between the EAEU and the EU; between the EAEU and the largest countries in Eurasia (China and India); and between the EAEU and ASEAN. According to the author, this project can be viewed as a way for Russia to create its own platform for integration into the world economy. Thus, an initiative for interaction between all regional integration groupings of the BRICS countries could become one of the platforms. Regarding the use of positive experience in integration groupings, the endeavours of Russia within APEC also deserve attention.

Conclusion

The Bishkek Declaration (2019) stipulates the basic principles for cooperation between the SCO Member States and supported the initiatives to promote regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian region. The Declaration stresses that the challenges and security threats, which are becoming cross-border in their nature such as terrorism, the

spread of terrorist and extremist ideology, including on the Internet, required special attention, close coordination and constructive cooperation of the entire international community. In connection with the growing security challenges, the Declaration emphasises the need to continue work on building within the SCO a system for monitoring possible threats in the global information space and countering them.

While condemning all forms of propaganda of the ideology of terrorism, extremism and religious intolerance, as well as manifestations of discrimination based on religion or convictions, the SCO Member States welcome the adoption of the resolution on Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance by UN General Assembly. The Member States consider it a priority to step up the international community's joint efforts to counter the attempts to involve young people in the activities of terrorist, separatist and extremist groups.

The Member States support further deepening cooperation in order to build a predictable and stable environment for the development of trade, economic and investment cooperation through the consistent strengthening of the multilateral trading system based on the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). They stress the importance of creating an open world economy and preventing any protectionist actions in international and regional trade.

The Member States recognise the importance of innovation and the digital economy. Based on the adopted Concept of Cooperation of the SCO Members States in the Field of Digitalisation and Information Technology, they intend to join efforts to implement innovative programmes and projects, as well as to promote effective cooperation in science, technology and innovation. The Member States consider it necessary to maintain ties in the scientific, technical, cultural and humanitarian areas, which will contribute to the further strengthening of cooperation. The importance of deepening cooperation in the field of education is underscored. Modernization of mechanisms and

expansion of the areas for cooperation are currently underway within the framework of the SCO University that unites more than 70 leading universities in the SCO States.

Nowadays, prompted by the formation of a multipolar world, integration and institutional foundations for Eurasian cooperation are being created. International organizations like EAEU, SCO and BRICS put forward mega-projects, which cover the territories of a significant number of countries in Europe and Asia (the Greater Eurasia initiative) and become the foundation for modern strategic planning of infrastructure investments. This is accompanied by the establishment of international financial institutions to lend to such projects. In conclusion, it is important to emphasise the necessity to ensure coordination of actions within the framework of APEC, WTO, SCO and G20 using their positive experience.

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SHAVKAT IKROMOV. REISLAMIZATION OF MUSLIM LIFE IN CENTRAL ASIA AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: Islam, Muslim countries of the Soviet Union, Central Asia, delegations of OIC.

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Abstract. The author describes changes in the religious life of Muslims of the former Soviet republics that took place during the period 1989–91. At this particular time a delegation of representatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference headed by Sheikh Muhammad Nasir Al-Abudi visited the republic. The text was prepared on the basis of the sheikh's diary entries, which were subsequently published in Arabic and aroused great interest in Muslim countries.

Introduction

The policy of perestroika in the USSR influenced the religious situation in the country. Thus, religious confessions received a wide path to freedom of worship. This especially affected lives of Muslims of Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Dagestan and Chechnya. The number of mosques has increased, the opportunities for religious education have increased, the conditions for implementation of the main postulates of Islam have improved, as well as cooperation with foreign Muslim countries.

Such processes intensified even more after the collapse of the USSR. This was a natural process, as Central Asia has historically been an integral part of the Islamic world. Soon, these newly independent states were recognized leading Muslim countries and Islamic traditions began to revive in them, which for many years were in the sidelines.

In Arabic literature, processes related to Islam in the region are perceived as “reislamization.” These processes in the region were monitored with great interest by the Arab States, in particular the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Just before the collapse of the Soviet regime and in the first years after it, the Saudis sent dozens of missionaries and special delegations to Central Asia and Azerbaijan. The purpose of these missions was to create a sphere of influence in the Central Asian region. Among the delegations and missionaries who came from KSA, a special place is occupied by the trips of Sheikh Muhammad Nasir al-Abudi, a government leader and public figure, one of the leading scientists of the Kingdom.

Sheikh Muhammad Nasir al-Abudi

Sheikh Muhammad Nasir al-Abudi is a famous scientist. He is especially respected among the Arab scientific community and the royal family of Saudi Arabia. The scientist wrote more than 220 works on history, geography, language, literature, genealogy and politics. One of the classic genres of Al-Abudi is especially popular: travel notes, there are 125 published works in this genre.¹

Sheikh Al-Abudi worked for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for 11 years. As assistant secretary general, he traveled to Muslim communities around the world. His visits took place both in countries with the largest Muslim communities and in countries with a small number of Muslim population.² The mission of Al-Abudi was not only to accomplish the tasks set by the OIC, but also by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In OIC, Al-Abudi was responsible for analysing the general situation in countries with a predominant Muslim population, including the conditions created to respect the principles of Islam by Muslims, the preservation of Islamic cultural heritage, education in Islamic knowledge, and the attitude of the authorities towards Muslims. He was also charged with promoting the idea of Arab and Islamic unity. Al-Abudi wrote down everything in his diary that he witnessed during his trips. Thanks to a good literary style, extensive knowledge of the history and geography of the visited countries, as well as information received from local Muslims, he managed to prepare a vivid description of the ongoing processes.³

Traveling around Soviet Muslim republics

While working in the OIC Secretariat, Al-Abudi received a task to familiarize himself with the lives of Muslims of East and West Turkestan (China and the Soviet Union). In April 1989, Al-Abudi, at the head of a six-member delegation, went to the USSR to visit Muslim republics.

The trip began in Moscow and then the delegation visited the republics where Muslims were represented by the majority of the population: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, as well as the cities of Dagestan, Chechnya, Astrakhan and Samara regions. Subsequently, the impressions of the trip were published in several book versions. The most valuable of them are the books "Country of Dagestan," "Journey to Russia," "Azerbaijan Republic," "Diary of Central Asia." Moreover, the impressions of the trip to the Soviet Union provided the basis for books: "The Situation in Kazakhstan," "Kyrgyzstan," "Lazistan," "Country of Circassian," "Forgotten Muslim Population," "Journey to the Caucasus," "Astrakhan and Samara Region," "Belarus" and many others. Using the style close to the genre of classical travelogue, which today is rare in world literature, the author

was eager to provide information about the lifestyle and social status of Muslims. These works can be considered more like anthropological and field studies.

Sheikh Al-Abudi's first trip to the USSR took place at a time when the Muslim world was experiencing hard times, and the Soviet Union itself was in a crisis situation, on the brink of collapse. Moreover, this was a period of civil war in Afghanistan and the aggravation of the situation on the borders of Central Asia. His later visits took place at a time when the countries of the region gained independence, were going through a difficult transition period and had a stormy debate about Islamic and secular education in the state, and Islamic missionaries and radical groups, using the situation, began to be active. The contradictions of that period are not fully contained in the author's diaries, but the process of emancipation of public consciousness and re-Islamization of the population of Soviet republics with a Muslim population are described in detail.

“Lands of forgotten Muslims in Bukhara and Mawarannahr”

The first trip took place in 1989. Sheikh Al-Abudi describes the impressions of this trip in the book “Lands of Forgotten Muslims in Bukhara and Mawarannahr” (1991).⁴ He notes that religion in the USSR did not matter in political life, and was mainly preserved as a specific feature of culture of the local population. However, at the turn of the 1970s – 1980s the religious situation in the Union began to change, and by the end of the 1980s it had acquired a completely new format. In the Central Asian region, the process of re-Islamization became a serious political problem.

Babikar Darwish, author of the preface to the book, points to the difficulties faced by Sheikh Al-Abudi. Firstly, the USSR during this period was a “closed” country. Secondly, Muslims spoke different languages – more than 15 Turkic, 13 Caucasian,

Farsi, and in some regions Mongolian. Arabic, widespread in the Muslim world, was poorly used, and Russian was used as a language of interethnic communication. Another difficulty was the socio-cultural diversity of Muslims of the USSR. For example, Tajiks were mainly settled people, and Kazakhs largely preserved the traditions of vagrancy. On the other hand, Muslims in the Caucasus have a special identity and are represented by 43 tribes. Fourth, all publications in the Soviet Union, including on Islam in Muslim countries, were censored and distributed exclusively with the knowledge of Moscow.

Statistics obtained by Sheikh Al-Abudi in Moscow indicated that in the described period Muslims made up a fifth part of the total population of the USSR. Sheikh Al-Abudi emphasized the uniqueness of the role of Central Asia in the history of Islam. The inhabitants of this region made a significant contribution to the creation of Islamic civilization and its fundamental principals. Among them, Muhammad Musa al-Khorezmi (783–857) is the founder of algebra. Ahmad al-Ferghani. (died in 861) – astronomer, mathematician, geographer, author of the works “Book of celestial movements” and “Code of Stars Science.” Abu Nasser al-Farabi (872–950) is a great encyclopedist of the Middle Ages. Abu Ali ibn Sina (980–1037) is a scientist who wrote more than 450 works. 40 of them are on medicine, 30 on natural science, 185 on philosophy, logic, psychology, geology, ethics, etc. Abu Reyhan Beruni (973–1048) is an outstanding encyclopedic scientist, author of more than 150 works on history, astronomy, mineralogy. Rudaki Abdullah Jafar (858–941) – the author of poems: “Kamila and Dimna,” “Sinbad-name,” and others. Abdulkasim Firdousi (940–1030) – author of the poem “Shahnameh” (Book of Kings) – a poetic set of history of the peoples of Iran and Central Asia. Imam Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (810–870) collected 600 thousand hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad life. Ahmad Yassavi (died in 1166/67) – founder of the Order of Yassavia and Turkic poet. Ulugbek (Mhammad Taragai) (1394–1449) created an

astronomical academy in Samarkand, which brought him world fame. His main work, *Gurgan Astronomical Tables* (1437), which describes the position of 1018 stars, distinguished by a high scale of accuracy. Alisher Navoi (1441–1501) - the founder of Uzbek poetry. Nuriddin Abdurrahman Jami (1414–1492) – representative of Persian-Tajik literature. Kamaliddin Behzad (1455–1536) is an artist who is called Raphael of the East.

Before the establishment of Soviet power, state and public life in the region was regulated by sharia law. During the years of Soviet power, religion was displaced not only from the political life of the state, but also from the daily life of the population, and the Muslims of the region were isolated from the worldwide Muslim community – the Ummah. This circumstance forced Sheikh Al-Abudi to call the Muslims of the Central Asian republics, the heirs of Islamic civilization, “forgotten Muslims.”

Al-Abudi took part in a meeting of the Department of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. In 1989, more than 300 mosques functioned in the USSR, 82 of which were in Uzbekistan, which was one of the leaders of the region.⁵ The author also describes the system of governance of Muslim communities in the Soviet Union. The delegation also visited 15 major mosques in Tashkent. When visiting mosques, Al-Abudi was always interested in the number of parishioners, the level of their education, the general condition and history of mosques. He saw that many mosques were in dilapidated state and those visiting the mosque were mostly elderly and had very little religion knowledge. So, Al-Abudi, notes that weddings and funerals were not held according to Sunna, and that almost all ceremonies had long since gained a secular character.

After a trip to Tashkent, the delegation also visited Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Urgench, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, as well as a number of cities of the Ferghana Valley. Tellingly that, as a result of this visit, Al-Abudi, despite of found downsides, noted that in the Muslim republics of the USSR there were no obstacles to perform Islamic rituals and that work to

build mosques and religious educational institutions was underway.

“Travel diary around Central Asia”

Another book, based on the impressions of Al-Abudi's second trip to Central Asia, which took place in 1990, “Travel diary to Central Asia” was published in 1995 in Riyadh. This book was also presented in the genre of travel, where the author describes life of Muslims of the Union republics – Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The author focused on the activities of mosques, madrassa and religious media.

Interest in life of Muslims of the USSR during this period increased significantly. In the early 1990s foreign scientists published a number of works on the religious situation in Central Asia. In particular, the works of S. Akiner,⁶ Adib Khalid⁷ and Johan Rasanayagam⁸ appeared. They refer to Islam and secularism in the region, relations between the state and society on religious issues, as well as specifics, contradictions and potential future threats. In particular, Johan Rasanayagam, basing on anthropological methods, studied life of Muslims in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan, was interested in the degree of reflection of Islam in the minds of local population. The work of Al-Abudi should certainly be considered an anthropological study, since the author focuses more on the material heritage of Muslims. However, the works of other authors also provide interesting information. Thus, J. Rasanayagam since 1998 lived in the Andijan region and for several years he was able to study deeply the level of religiosity of the population. On the example of the Andijans, he describes the changes that occurred in the minds of the inhabitants of Central Asia in Soviet and post-Soviet times.

Al-Abudi monitored worshippers in mosques, madrassa and mausoleum in cities, as well as places related to religious cults and education.

In his book *Diary of Central Asia*, estimating the region's place in the Islamic world, he noted the following: "first of all, this region is a place where the fundamental principles of Islam were laid for Muslims..." thereby recognizing it as one of the leading components in the Islamic world. Al-Abudi commended the work of the Muslim Department. He mentions a publication of the newspaper *Islom Nuri*, books used for religious education, in particular, the manuals *Muallimi Soni*, *Religion Islam*, *Myftah Al-Nahv* and *Islamic Prayer*. Al-Abudi noted the great merit of the head of spiritual administration, Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf, in translating the meanings of the Koran and publishing many other religious books.

In order to promote religious education in Central Asia, the delegation visited some Muslim higher schools, in particular the Imam Termezi Islamic Institute in Dushanbe (Tajikistan). The delegation was informed about the construction of a new Islamic institute in Ferghana, in Khorezm, about the project of the Islamic center in Tashkent, with the Tashkent Islamic Institute named after Imam Bukhari, the Miri Arab madrassa in Bukhara.⁹ The delegation got to know the activities of the Imam Buhari Islamic Institute. About the visit to the Tashkent Islamic Institute named after Imam Buhari Al-Abudi wrote the following: "About 100 students who are fluent in Arabic study at the institute. They come here to study from different republics. They are taught by more than fifteen teachers, most of whom are graduates of Miri Arab Madrassa."¹⁰ After spiritual administration, he visited the mosques of Tashkent and regretted that the mosques were in a weakened state and there were very few of them, and the existing mosques were very old. But at the same time, Al-Abudi admits that in recent years work has begun on the construction of new and renovation of old mosques. Thus, as a result of familiarization with the diary, it is possible to learn about the religious landscape of Tashkent in the early 1990s, about the relationship between society, religion and the state. Al-Abudi noted that many imams did not know the Arabic language, as

well as the small number of Muslims with a religious education and the lack of religious literature.

After completing the visit to Tashkent, the Al-Abudi delegation continued its visit to Khorezm, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and the Ferghana Valley. Al-Abudi noted that even in the early 1990s Bukhara could potentially become the center of Islam in Central Asia, since the city had many mosques and madrassa. A visit to the Ferghana Valley convinced him that the religious image of this region was high.

“Back to Mawarannahr”

So called the book of Sheikh Al-Abudi, written after his third trip, held in 1991 Mawarannahr – this is the ancient name of the historical region in Central Asia. The name comes from the Arabic expression: “What is behind the river.”

The name appeared during the Arab conquest in the 7th–8th centuries and originally meant the region on the right bank of the Amu Darya. It was in Mawarannahr that there were the most important cities of the Islamic world of that period with high culture and civilization, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khujand, etc. By the time of the trip, the republics of Central Asia had already gained independence, and began to carry out reforms in all spheres of the life of the state and society. The transformation of the social and political spheres, primarily affected the processes related to Islam. We can say that both the political fate and the social and ethnic stability of the countries of the region depended on the solution of this issue. All Muslim countries abroad attentively watched the historical processes in the region and tried to exert as much influence as possible on the events. Especially Saudi Arabia, which considers itself the center of the Muslim community. Therefore, the Kingdom actively sent Islamic missionaries to the republics of Central Asia. Among these missionaries was the Al-Abudi group, which practically repeated the route of the Sheikh's first trip. This time, he notes a

change in the political situation in the region and changes in the social life of the republics.

In particular, he mentions the presence of parties in Uzbekistan, one of which, the “Islamic Revival Party,” was a “religious party.”¹¹ However, he does not write that the party's activities were suspended at that moment due to its propaganda of fundamentalism. Analyzing political and ideological processes in the republics of the region, the author writes: “The ideas of Marxism and Leninism, which dominated for many years, are replaced by Islamic ideas in the region. It can be seen that every day Islam is dynamically developing in the republics of the region, but returning of the region to the Muslim family under the influence of the West is a subject of discussion.”¹² Many Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries, Pakistan, Egypt, as well as Turkey and Iran, supported the process of re-Islamization in the region. The author argues that Iran's capabilities in this regard are small, because Iranians are adherents of the Shia direction, and Turkey's ethnic proximity gives it more opportunities in the Central Asian region.

After a trip to large cities of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the delegation of Al-Abudi was received in the spiritual administration of Muslims in Tashkent. Its head, Sheikh Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf, provided guests with information about changes in the religious sphere in Uzbekistan. In particular, he noted that as a result of the expansion of religious freedom, the number of mosques in Tashkent in a short period of time exceeded 300, while during the first visit of the delegation in 1989, only 15 mosques were recorded in the reports of the trip.

Al-Abudi's diary reports that there are many young people, religious sciences and Arabic are taught freely to everyone, all mosques are equipped with Quran and that women wear religious clothing – hijab.¹³ The difference between these travel notes of 1995 and of the previous ones, in that, visits of 1989 and 1990 were familiarization with the Muslim republics of the USSR

and observation of the lives of Muslims, and the purpose of the last trip was to influence the process of revival of Islam in the region. Besides, the visit gave the delegation an opportunity to conduct research, opened up access to sources on the history of the religions of the region and the opportunity to receive first-hand information. In addition, members of the delegation talked with the local population, got acquainted with everyday life and attitude towards Islam. All these observations are reflected in the third book. In short, the work of Al-Abudi can be considered excellent sources on the history of the complex and ambiguous transition period of the republics of Central Asia.

Afterword

It is possible to regret that Sheikh Al-Abudi did not continue his acquaintance with Central Asia nowadays, where 2042 mosques operate in Uzbekistan, in which imams with a good education work (in 2018, 1 imam per 8 thousand inhabitants). By decree of President S. Mirziyoyev (dated 16.04.2018) No. 466 “On measures of fundamental improvement of the activities of religious and educational sphere,” the previously existing Tashkent Islamic University and the Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan were merged into the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan. This educational institution, funded by the budget, holds classes in the following subjects: Koranistics, Hadith studies, Islamic jurisprudence (Abu Hanifa Law School), Tasawwuf, Islamic economics and financial system, history, original religion, Islamic philosophy, religious studies, international relations, pilgrimage tourism, sociopsychology of religion, classical literature of the countries of the Middle East. The Academy also teaches foreign languages (English, German, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Uzbek, Urdu). In addition, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan has prepared online programs for those wishing to study Islamic sciences on their own.

Sharia. The party was popular among the conservative and marginalized population. The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan had a negative attitude towards the party. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated June 14, 1991 No. 289-XII "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations" does not allow the creation of political parties on a religious basis. This law establishes: equality of citizens regardless of their attitude to religion and separation of religion from the state. (Editorial comment)

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ISLAM IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

FARHOD KARIMOV. THE PROBLEM OF ETHNIC KURDS IN THE MIDDLE EASTERN REGION: THE HISTORY OF ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: Kurds, Kurdish problem, Tribalism, Ashirat, Regional empires, Shafi, Kurdistan, Mosul, Sykes-Picot Treaty, Lausanne Treaty.

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Abstract. This article examines the problem of the Kurds in ensuring regional stability and security in the Middle East, the history of this problem in comparison with the history of the countries of the region in the 14–19 centuries. The analysis of the facts presented in the historical literature about the Kurds is carried out. The attitude of the Middle East countries to these issues, the factor of external power in this matter, the relationship of the problem with other confessional problems in the region are also being studied.

Introduction

The history of the Kurds is rooted in ancient times, but there are different approaches, various hypotheses of the origin of the Kurds are put forward. The version of the origin of modern Kurds from the Kurtians who inhabited Northern Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau is also confirmed by ancient sources. The fact is that the natural state and opinions about the history of all nations differ. The problem lies not in the diversity of opinions related to the origin of peoples, but in the fact that when describing historical events, they are interpreted according to political interests of a nation or a state. The main problem and difficulty in social research is also that scientists in this field act independently (without pursuing political goals) in research. Some scholars also argue that this is not possible.

Main part

Although there is no consensus about the place of historical residence of ethnic Kurds, many sources indicate that the central parts of the Zagros Mountains are their historical homeland [1]. As noted by the American researcher Michael Gunther, “in these regions they lived from the 6th century BC.”¹ Before the spread of Islam in the 7th century, the Kurds, who remained under the rule of several empires such as Persia, Rome and Byzantium, maintained a divided cultural structure throughout all the history based on Ashirat (tribal structure) [2]. In subsequent periods, they were under the Arab Caliphate, Seljuks, Khorezmshahs, Mongols, Timurids.

From 1510 to the First World War, the Ottomans, and then the Safavid dynasty in Iran, even during the rule of the Kojars, failed to create a single Kurdish state. The Russian orientalist M.S. Lazarev writes about it too. It should be noted that the development of the Kurds has always proceeded in extremely unfavorable conditions, constantly escalating and leading to

acute, bloody and long-term conflicts. The state that ensured the domination of the Kurdish ethnos, i.e. Kurdistan never existed [3]. However, the Kurds were tribal states or Emirates that were ruled on the basis of strong tribalism. These emirates, as Michael Eppel writes, ruled the tribes, subjugating less powerful tribes as well as influential Kurdish tribal dynasties. The first dynasties of the Kurdish tribes were the Hasanwahids (Hasanwia) (959–1095), the Annazids (990–1116), the Shaddadids (951–1075) and the Banu Marwan (Marvanid) (948–1083) [4].

Tribalism is a characteristic feature of the Kurds, and the reason why the Kurds have not been able to build any strong state in history is also because they live in this tribal format. The formation of Kurdish political rule in this format has reached such a level that even another tribe of its own people seems to be a more dangerous threat than an external enemy.

Zia Gokalp, a sociologist well acquainted with Kurdish society, wrote that, “In all primitive societies, there is no concept of individual or mass right.” This right belongs only to the tribe. As a result, a feud for the post of a head will arise between his uncle's son and his brothers. The struggle for the post of head of a tribe usually lasts a long time. The defeated side leaves the tribe and seeks refuge from the other tribe. “The Kurds had a developed tribal ideology, not the ideology of the homeland.” [5].

The head of the Idris-i-Bitlis tribe wrote an invitation letter to the Ottoman Sultan Yovuz Sultan Selim, in which he noted that: “... the Kurds live as separate tribes, and not as a single one. We are in a state of union only when we know Allah and are the ummah of Muhammad. Otherwise, our closeness to each other is impossible. This is how the Sunnah was applied to us” [6].

It should be noted that such a division of the Kurds, on the one hand, served to prevent their assimilation into other peoples, to preserve their language, traditions and customs throughout history, and on the other hand, their inability to unite did not allow building a single state. The influence of tribalism helped in the creation of “puppets” under the rule of other nations and

turning them into permanent vassals, fighting with each other. The famous historian Arnold Toynbee wrote in 1934: "The worst enemy of the Kurds is tribal and feudal strife. This factor creates an opportunity for the Iraqi, Turkish and Persian governments to pursue "divide et impera" policy."² The Kurds have historically been in the constant focus of attention of large states, politically, culturally and strategically. They were mainly on the side of the Turks in the wars between the Ottoman Turks and the Iranian Safavids, because most of the Kurds are Sunni Moslems who opposed the Iranians and supported the Ottoman Turks. The security of the eastern borders of the Ottoman Turks has always been preserved thanks to the Kurds.

It should also be noted that as a result of the war between the Ottomans and the Persians, the population growth of Eastern Anatolia changed in favor of the Kurds. The reason is that in these wars the Persians supported the Turkmen tribes, who were Shiites, and the Ottoman Turks helped the Kurdish tribes, who were Shafiites. As a result, many Kurdish Shafiites under Iranian rule moved to Eastern Anatolia, and a minority of Turkmen Shiites migrated from the Ottoman state to Iran. Thus, although the "Turkization" began in the eastern part of Anatolia, the population of Eastern Anatolia after these wars increased mainly at the expense of the Kurds [7]. Evliya Çelebî, who lived in the 17th century and is best known for his travels, left important information about the Kurdish lands. He used the term "Diyar-ı Kürdistan" to refer to the Kurdish region, calling it "a great country."³ He writes: "There are people who speak Kurdish in seventy places, from Erzurum to Van, from Hakkari to Jizra, Imadiyya, Mosul, Shehrisar, Harir, Erdelan, Baghdad, Derna, Derteng and Basra".. For the Ajam people it would be very convenient to invade Ottoman land if there were no strong barrier between 6,000 Kurdish tribes and tribes in these high mountains between the Arabs of Iraq and the Ottoman Turks"⁴ He also mentioned Kurdish resistance to Ajam, saying, "There are fifty armed Muhammad's Shafi Ummah-i in this region."

“... And if it were not for the Great Wall of Kurdistan between Ali Usman and Ajam, Ali Usman would not have had peace. Ajam hasm-i kawi, sheju feta ...” means that Iran, opposing the Ottomans, is a dangerous enemy. For this reason, the Ottomans are focused on the Kurds and the lands of Kurdistan. From the point of view of the stability of the Ottoman state, he admits that “in this sense, the Ottomans are considered the patrons of the Sunni world, and Kurdistan is a very strong wall between the Safavid protectors of the Shiites against it”.⁵

In general, from 1510 until World War I, the Kurdistan Region was the center of the conflict between the Turks and the Persians. In 1638, a year after the complete conquest of Baghdad by the Ottoman Turk Murad IV, the boundaries of the Turkish-Iranian treaty were clearly defined. Although the agreement was in effect until World War I, Kurdistan remained a hotbed of conflict between the two countries and sometimes escalated into hostilities. In particular, there were several attempts by the Ottomans to occupy Kurdish areas during the reign of Nadir Shah in Iran, but they were unable to completely take over Baghdad, the land of the Kurds that was previously owned by the Persians. Nevertheless, Nadirshah managed to capture Tbilisi from the Ottomans.

In addition, during the Zand and Kojar dynasties in Iran, there were several military clashes with the Ottomans in Baghdad and the Kurdish regions. However, the treaty was finally signed in 1639. The border in accordance with this agreement of 1639 is still in force between Turkey-Iran and Iraq-Iran. After the Battle of Haldiran on August 23, 1514, most of the lands inhabited by Kurds were part of the Ottoman-Turkic state. Some areas inhabited by Kurds, such as Kermanshah and Urmia, remained part of Iran. By the 1820s, as the Ottoman Turks began to weaken, there were Kurdish uprisings in several areas. However, after the defeat of the Ottoman Turks by the Egyptians in Nizip (near Gaziantep) in 1839, the Kurds began a major uprising led by Nurulla Bey in Hakkari and Bedir Khan in Jizre

(near Shirnak). In the 1850s, the Middle East region became the largest playing field in the world political games of Russian, British and French politicians. While the Russians helped the Kurds against the Ottoman Turks to take control of the Istanbul Strait and the Dardanelles, the British and French supported various Arab tribes. In short, the colonial policy of the imperialist states was the main reason for the development of the Kurdish-Turkish, Kurdish-Armenian, Arab-Turkish, Arab-Kurdish and Armenian-Turkish and other similar ethnic and religious conflicts. This happened not only in the Ottoman-Turkic state, but also in many other countries and regions such as Iran and India. We see the continuation of this policy today.

Conclusion

From an analysis of the history of ethnic Kurds and the Kurdish problem in the Middle East, as well as their impact on regional security, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1) Kurds live in the form of a confederation of tribes (tribe / clan). Ashirat leaders play an important role in the social and political life of the Kurds. Historically, the Kurds did not lose their tribal way of life, which served to prevent their assimilation with other peoples and preserve their own language and customs.

2) Kurds could never unite. This situation has historically led to the fact that their life depended on one or another state. In addition, the fact that the Kurds lived in mountainous areas also led to their geographical isolation and, consequently, to the preservation of their linguistic and tribal traditions, and the empires and states that established their rule over them did not interfere in the internal affairs of peoples living in mountains (sometimes it was just impossible to do this).

3) Although there is a lot of controversy about who the Kurds are, the initially generally accepted point of view is that they are one of the peoples of Iran. Their language belongs to the

Iranian-Persian language family. The Kurds, mostly Sunni, played an important role in the Islamic world (for example, Salahuddin, the founder of the Ayyubids, who became famous after winning the battle against the Crusaders for Jerusalem, was a Kurd).

4) The Kurdish people, who for a long time lived side by side with different peoples, formed a powerful national-ethnic movement that has survived to this day. While the First World War gave many nations the right to independence or autonomy that determined their fate, the Kurds were deprived of such a right and became the largest nation in the world without a state of their own. This situation today is becoming decisive not only for the Kurds, but also for external forces.

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KAMIL ZIMOV, OLGA BIBIKOVA. SHIITES IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SPACE OF MODERN LEBANON. (Continued in the next issue) // The article was written for the bulletin “Russia and the Moslem World.”

Keywords: Shiites, Musa Sadr, Amal, Lebanon, Iran.

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Abstract. Lebanese Shiites have become the focus of attention of Tehran, which is trying to involve them in the plans to strengthen its influence in Arab countries.

Article I.

The emergence of the Shiite community in Lebanon

Shiism began to penetrate Lebanon in the 7th century. It is believed that the Shiites came to Lebanon with part of the Yemeni tribe Hamadan, which had previously settled in the area of the city of Kufa (Iraq). They supported the claims of Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants, to the Caliphate. But, after the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) came to power and imposed unbearable taxes on the population, part of the tribe moved to Lebanon. First they settled in Mount Lebanon, which several centuries later became a stronghold of Christianity. In Caesruan, up to the beginning of the 14th century, they dominated, until the Maronite Christians fleeing repression from the Sunnis drove them out. Moslem historians claim that during that period Shiites settled in Homs, Damascus, Aleppo, as well as on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. When Syria fell under the rule of the Fatimid dynasty (909–1171), which professed Ismailism,¹ the Shiites, feeling supported, settled throughout Lebanon. In particular, the city of Tripoli, now considered the Sunni capital of Lebanon, in the 11th century possessed a significant Shiite population, as the famous Iranian poet and traveler of the 11th century Nasir Khosrov wrote.

However, the split that occurred in Islam after the death of Imam Hussein (626–680), divided Moslems into Sunnis and Shiites forever. The famous Arab commander Salah ad-Din, who defeated the crusader army at the Battle of Hittin (1187), united the territories of Egypt, Syria (including Lebanon) and Iraq and created the Ayyubid state, where Sunnism was preferred. The

Ayyubid dynasty (including the founder of the dynasty, Salah ad-Din) had a distrust of Shiites.

And later – in the 14th century – after the fiery speeches of Ibn Taymiyyah² (1263–1328), who declared the Shiites “Rafidites” (apostates), i.e. denying the three first “righteous” caliphs who ruled before Ali ibn Abu Talib, who was considered the 1st Shiite Imam, many rulers began to consider Shiites people of “second class.”

When the Mamluk army entered Lebanese territory in 1309, many Shiites fled to the mountains, the Beka'a Valley and southern Lebanon. The persecution of the Shiites by the authorities forced them to resort to the practice of “takiyya,” which involved concealing their true faith³. Later, some, in order to save their loved ones, were forced to accept Sunni Islam

Nevertheless, the Shiite community strove to preserve their faith, maintained contacts with Shiites of other countries, and sent their children to study in Shiite centers. In the 15th century the small settlement of Karak Nuh⁴ (near Baalbek) became the center of Shiite education, where Shiite theologians worked. Among them were Ali ibn Abdullah al-Karaki al-Amili⁵, who developed the theory of “wilayat al-fakih” (the reign of a lawyer replacing the 12th imam during the period of his concealment⁶) and “niyabat al-fakih” (governorship). Later, the sheikh left for Iran at the invitation of Shah Ismail (1487–1524) from the Safavid dynasty, where, having received the title of “Sheikh ul-Islam”, he became one of the largest propagandists of the Shiist ideology. Ismail also invited Moslem jurists from Bahrain and Southern Iraq to Iran. Subsequently, they developed the teaching of Imami Shi'ism and made it available to the population, which contributed to its spread⁷.

In 1516 the territory of Syria (including Lebanon) fell under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The city of Tripoli, which had a significant Shiite population before the Ottoman invasion, was depopulated as the Shiites fled from persecution. In the

homeland of al-Karaki, in Lebanon, the genocide of the Shiites began.

During the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Selim I (1465–1529), 44 thousand Shiites were killed in Jebel Amil and 40 thousand in Aleppo. Ahmed Jazzar (1721–1804)⁸ famous for his cruelty, who was appointed by the Ottomans the ruler of Palestine and a significant parts of Syria in 1775–1804, followed the example of his masters and exterminated tens of thousands of Shiites. It was after the Ottoman occupation of Syria and Lebanon in 1516 that many Shiite theologians, disciples and followers of al-Karaki were forced to move to Iraq and Iran. Due to the fact that the Ottoman sultans were most interested in obtaining taxes from the subordinate Arab population, the jurisdiction in Lebanon was nominal. So, despite the power of the Sultan, the Baalbek area in the 18th century was under the control of the Shiites. In the Ottoman Empire, Shiites were not allowed to serve in military service, did not have the right to serve in the administrative apparatus. Shiite hawza (religious seminaries) in Jebaa, Jizzin, Mashgar, Al-Karka, Maisal Jebel, and Shakra, where young Lebanese Shiites had studied, textbooks had been developed, and discussions on religious topics had been held, were closed. By the beginning of the twentieth century Shiites of Lebanon were concentrated in the Beka'a Valley and Jebel Amil. These were mainly poor peasants and the urban poor who worked in the service of wealthy families. But gradually large Shiite clans that owned the land were formed. After the introduction of the French Mandate (1920), armed Shiites were the first to attack French positions in southern Lebanon. They are also credited with the unsuccessful attempt on the life of the High Commissioner of France, Henri Gouraud.⁹ By that time they already numbered 17% of the population.¹⁰ The French authorities transferred 7 villages in southern Lebanon, inhabited by Shiites, under the control of the British Mandate over Palestine. Later these villages became part of Israel. However, during the war of 1948–49 the villages were depopulated as the

Shiites inhabiting them fled to Syria. Subsequently, these villages were settled by Israelis¹¹.

Socio-economic situation of Shiites after Lebanon obtained independence

Shiites professing the main Shiite trend - Imamism - in Lebanon are called mitawali (from *mitawala*). After gaining independence (1946) during the formation of the Lebanese state, the Shiites failed to get a share in the power structures. The balance of forces was not in their favor, and, in the words of one of their leaders, they only got a "folding seat." According to the National Pact, which was negotiated in 1943 on behalf of Christians by the Maronite Bishara al-Khuri and on behalf of the Moslems by the Sunni Riyad Solh, the Shiites were in third place in the communal hierarchy based on the 1932 census. During the formation of the parliament, the Shiites were given the seat of the speaker of parliament, which was traditionally occupied by representatives of the wealthy Shiite clans al-Asaad, al-USayran, al-Khalil, Hamad. Indeed, "the key positions in the government have always been reserved for the Maronites, the auxiliary ones for the Sunnis. So in 1974, on the eve of the civil war, out of 85 top administrative posts, 43 belonged to Christians, 22 to Sunnis, 14 to Shiites and 6 to Druses."¹² The vast majority of Shiites are the poorest stratum of the country's population. As noted by the Russian orientalist A.I. Aleksandrov: "the domination of the feudal elite blocked protest moods among the Shiites. Oppositional Shiites, as a rule, joined the ranks of the secular left parties, in particular the Lebanese Communist Party."¹³

Of particular note is the role of the Communist Party in awakening the national consciousness of Shiites. Indeed, the communists worked among the poorest sections of the population, where they had great influence. Thanks to the help of the USSR, dozens of young Shiites from Lebanon were able to receive secondary technical and higher education. It is estimated

that about one-third of the leadership of the Lebanese Communist Party consisted of Shiites. René Chamussy, French researcher of the history of modern Lebanon, in his book *Chronicle of a War* wrote in regard of Lebanese Communist Party: “half of the party's personnel were Shiite Moslems, 30% were Christians of various faiths, 20% were Sunnis and Druses.”¹⁴ Later, in 1984, the French orientalist Eric Rouleau cited other data for the mid-1980s: “the party is 50% Moslem, of which about half are Shiites.”¹⁵

The famous philosopher and publicist Husayn Muruwwa (1910–1987) was a communist. Coming from a Lebanese Shiite family, at the age of 14, he was sent by his father to the city of Najaf (Iraq) to study Islamic sciences. However, in Iraq, he read the “Communist Manifesto” written by Hussein Muhammad al-Shabibi, one of the founders of the Iraqi Communist Party, after which he became interested in Marxism. Returning to his homeland, he joined the Communist Party in 1951.¹⁶ H. Muruwwa is considered the founder of the school of criticism of socialist realism in the Arab world. His main work, *Materialistic Tendencies in Arab-Moslem Philosophy*, was a Marxist rethinking of the reading of traditional Arabic texts. From 1966 to February 1987, H. Muruwwa was the editor of the *at-Tariq* magazine and a member of the editorial board of the *al-Nahj* magazine, published by the Center for the Study of Socialism in Arab Countries. On 02/18/1987 H. Muruwwa was killed by Shiite extremists who considered the scientist apostate from Shiism.

The spread of the Marxist atheistic worldview was not to the taste of the eminent Shiites, who came from the middle classes. First of all, this concerns religious leaders who considered it a threat to the cohesion and protective capabilities of their community at a time of aggravation of interfaith tensions.

However, under the influence of socialist ideas, the Shiites, deeply politicized by the very circumstances of their existence, brought up on the egalitarian ideology of the first imams, starting in the 1970s started to join trade unions and left-wing parties.

In the 1980s, due to the concentration of Palestinian units in southern Lebanon and their almost constant attacks against Israel, to which the Israelis responded with artillery shelling, the Shiite population of this area began to move to the suburbs of Beirut, creating a vast area of Dahiya in the southern suburbs. Those who remained suffered greatly from the presence of the Palestinian commandos, who fortified there after they were expelled from Jordan. During the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990), the Shiite community of Lebanon was recognized by the Constitution of the country as one of 18 confessions. In terms of the number Shiites traditionally ranked third, since the first census, conducted during the formation of the state in 1932, found that only 20% of the population in Lebanon professed Shiism (200 thousand out of 791 700)¹⁷. In fact, even at that time there were much more of them.

According to the Taif Agreement (Saudi Arabia, 1989), which marked the end of the civil war in Lebanon, Shiites won two seats (out of 72) in Parliament.

The modern Shiite community in Lebanon is still discriminated against, although there is an opinion that in the 21st century they make up the majority of the Lebanese population. Among them there are representatives of different directions of Shiism: Imamites / Twelvers, Alawites, Ismailis and Druses. The latter split away from traditional Shiism quite a long time ago, but traditionally they are considered Shiites. In addition to the Shiite Imamites, Lebanon is also home to about 40 thousand Alawites. They settled there in the 16th century in the Jebel Mohsen region of Tripoli and 10 villages in the Akkar region. With the outbreak of the war in Syria, the conflict between local Sunnis and Alawites resumed. On the one hand, these are the Sunnis of the Bab al-Tabbani region, who support the Syrian Free Army¹⁸ which is in opposition to the government. On the other hand, these are people from Jebel Mohsen, an area dominated by Alawites who sympathize with their fellow believers in Syria. Characteristically, this is not the only example

of confrontation between the inhabitants of the two districts. A similar conflict took place after the Syrian army invaded Lebanon in 1976.¹⁹

Among Lebanese Shiites, the level of education is lower than that of Christians or Sunnis, and the percentage of large families is high. In the absence of family planning skills, their numbers are constantly increasing. As of 2005, they accounted for 32% of the country's population²⁰, and this despite the fact that some of the Shiites do not have passports and do not participate in population censuses. This can be explained by the state's indifference to their needs, as well as by the desire of the Maronite elite, which has long dominated the power structures, deliberately not to raise the question of the ratio of the number of Moslems and Christians in the country. In 2017, the CIA reported that Shia Moslems make up 25.4% of the Lebanese population²¹. According to other sources, Lebanese Shia Moslems have become the largest religious community in Lebanon, accounting for about 40% of the total population.

The rise of Lebanese Shiite self-awareness in the 1960s – 1970s

In the late 1960s there arose a Shiite movement, led by Musa Sadr, who came from a family of religious leaders well-known in Lebanon, Iran and Iraq²². It is said that his ancestor Saleh Sharaf ad-Din, a Shiite and theologian from South Lebanon, back in the 18th century was sentenced to death by the Ottoman authorities, but managed to escape execution and took refuge in Iran. Since then, strong ties have been established between Jebel Amil's Lebanese Shiites and Iran.²³ Sadreddin, the father of Musa Sadr, was a native of the city of Tire (Lebanon). Musa's mother was the daughter of Ayatollah Hussein Tabatabai Qumi.²⁴ To give his son an education, the father sent him to the city of Qom (Iran). Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Khadr – a distant relative of the family - according to some sources wanted to make

Musa Sadr his successor. In the 1950s M. Sadr returned to Lebanon. In the homeland of his ancestors, he took on the mission to unite his fellow believers, bring them out of poverty and help them take their rightful place in Lebanese society. In the 1960s – 1970s he became an influential figure in the political arena of Lebanon, advocating for equality of communities, for social justice and dialogue between faiths. He contacted the leaders of various parties, spoke at various political forums. In May 1969, he was elected chairman of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, the first representative body of the Shiite community authorized by the authorities. Besides being the central religious body, this Council provided a space for political debate among various actors, including the communists. Now a political and religious framework has been created for the Shiites.

In an effort to improve the situation of Lebanese Shiites, M. Sadr “revived the charitable organization Jamiat al-Birr wal-Ihsan and raised money for the Social Institute (al-Muassasa al-Ijtimaya), a shelter in Tire. In 1963, Sadr founded a sewing school and a kindergarten. In the same year he founded the Institute for Islamic Studies (Mahad al-Dirasat al-Islamiya). In 1964, Sadr founded the Technical Institute (Burj al-Shimali) with funding from Shiite philanthropists, bank loans and the Lebanese Ministry of Education. In 1974, together with Hussein el-Husseini (his deputy – auth.), he founded the Movement of the Disinherited in order to achieve better economic and social conditions for the Shiites. They opened a number of schools and medical clinics throughout South Lebanon, many of which are still in operation.”²⁵

Musa Sadr initiated an Islamic-Christian dialogue in order to get Christians to surrender some of their power to the Shiites, who had been deprived of it for a long time. To do this, he promoted the idea of rapprochement between Christians and Moslems, as a guarantee of strengthening the foundations of the national state. Interestingly, he sought support for his ideas even outside Lebanon. In particular, in 1963 he was the only Shiite

present at the enthronement of Pope Paul VI. As head of the Supreme Shiite Council, he delivered a speech at the Beirut Catholic Cathedral of St. Louis (19.02.1975) at a ceremony marking the beginning of Lent.

At that moment it was an unprecedented act, testifying to M. Sadr's desire to make his community a full-fledged confession. It is also known that he was friends with the Greek Catholic Bishop Gregory Haddad (1924–2015), nicknamed for his views “the red bishop.” The bishop proposed to conduct a social survey of the areas of Lebanon, where the poorest population lived. In particular, during the reign of President F. Shehab (1958–1964), he proposed a project to mobilize volunteers in various regions of the country to collect data necessary to prepare projects of assistance for regional development. Musa Sadr supported the bishop's initiative. Companions and students of M. Sadr took part in the collection of information. Ultimately, this idea formed the basis for the project to create a Ministry to formulate development plans based on quantitative data on the needs and opportunities of various regions of Lebanon.²⁶

He further expanded his participation in Christian and Moslem religious forums, promoting morality as the common goal of religions, while simultaneously informing his audience of injustice against Shiites. In 1973, Musa Sadr (probably at the request of Syrian President H. Assad) issued a fatwa recognizing the Alawites as Shiites.²⁷ Prior to this, the Sunnis considered the Alawites to be heretics, insulting Islam by their very existence.

The bright and charismatic personality of M. Sadr inspired deep respect. He, unlike his fellow Moslem jurists, having a religious education, attended lectures at the Faculty of Law at the University of Tehran.

In February 1974, Musa Sadr created a movement that aimed to fight against the exploiters, against the expansionist aspirations of Israel and for the elimination of confessionalism in the current political system. The movement became known as the “Movement of the Disadvantaged” (Harakat al-Mahrumin, since

1974 – the Amal movement). Soon Amal (abbreviation of Afwaju al-muqawamat al-Lubnaniyya – Lebanese resistance units) became a structure with military units, which are often called the “Shiite militia.”²⁸ They were created to protect the rights and interests of Shiites. But Musa Sadr refused to use force to solve Lebanese problems and did not involve the militia in hostilities. At the beginning of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), Musa Sadr went on a hunger strike to stop the bloodshed in Beirut. He made a statement and closed himself in the al-Safa mosque. The reaction to his actions was amazing. Thousands of people wanted to join him. The government has banned the sale of gasoline, because people from all over Lebanon were driving to the mosque. Besides Moslems, many Armenians went on hunger strike. In the mosque, he was visited by priests, sheikhs and statesmen who expressed their solidarity. After learning that Christians had been killed in several villages in Baalbek, he himself broke off the hunger strike and went there to end the violence. Later it became known that the killings were committed in order to blame Moslems for them.

M. Sadr communicated a lot with Shiites from different countries, including visiting the countries of West Africa, where a large Shiite diaspora lives. He met with J. Chirac, L. Senghor, M.A. Nasser, Y. Arafat and many other statesmen. In August 1978, Musa Sadr went to Libya, at the invitation of M. Gaddafi. This was his last trip. He disappeared.

There were many versions regarding the reasons for his disappearance. Most of the opinions agreed that he was tortured by order of M. Gaddafi. Later, Lebanon even tried to bring Gaddafi to court, and in the 2000s his son Hannibal was brought to Lebanon in order to undergo interrogation about the circumstances of M. Sadr's stay in Libya.²⁹

In our opinion, we are talking about the fact that Musa Sadr was “removed” by supporters of the radical Shiite course. Let me remind you that later the Lebanese philosopher Hussein Mruvwe was killed in the same way, he was shot by two strangers in his

own house. There were also “disgruntled” Sunni sheikhs who did not agree that Sadr issued a fatwa according to which the Alawites despised by the Sunnis were ranked as Shiites. However, the most popular version was that during the meeting with Gaddafi, there was a quarrel between them. Considering all the versions in retrospect, one can come to the conclusion that the latest version (especially after the death of Gaddafi) is “beneficial” to all enemies of M. Sadr. The media wrote that Musa Sadr's luggage was found in an Italian hotel, but later, representatives of the Libyan authorities reported that Sadr had not left Libya.

One of the versions of Sadr's death - his murder by order of the Iranian special services, is confirmed by the further Iranian policy in Lebanon. In our opinion, the policy pursued by Sadr came into conflict with Tehran's point of view on the situation in southern Lebanon, which Khomeini's supporters viewed as a springboard for the fight against Israel.

Musa Sadr understood that Iranian radicalism was leading to undermining the relatively stable situation in Southern Lebanon. According to rumors leaked at that time, there was mentioned a certain plan "Karbala", which, according to the plan of the Iranian strategists, was to radicalize the Lebanese Shiites and send them, under the Iranian revolutionary banners, against Israel.

After the disappearance of Musa Sadr, a political vacuum emerged in Southern Lebanon, was exploited by Iran, which has long watched the Lebanese Shiite community. The new pro-Iranian structure Hezbollah immediately took advantage of the weakening of Amal and began to actively spread its influence among the Lebanese Shiites. One of the reasons for the weakening of Amal after the death of Sadr is that, despite the creation of a military wing, the organization was unable to protect the Shiites of Southern Lebanon from the Israelis who invaded Lebanon in 1978 and 1982. In addition, Musa Sadr took a more tolerant approach to the situation in the region. He did not

want to turn it into a militarized springboard even for the sake of the lofty ideas of the Islamic revolution.

In fact, the rivalry between Amal and Hezbollah is a reflection of the tensions between Syria and Iran over Lebanon. In 1988, the Syrians threatened to send their troops into the southern suburbs of Beirut in order to deprive the Khomeinists of a recruiting base for young Shiites if they undermined stability in Lebanon. In response, Tehran threatened to start riots in the south, under the guise of guerrilla resistance, which could provoke a direct armed intervention by Israel, followed by the involvement of the Syrians in the conflict. After the death of M. Sadr, the Amal organization was headed for some time by Hussein Hussein, at that time a member of the Lebanese parliament. He was then replaced by Nabih Berri,³⁰ who remains the head of Amal to this day.

In 1985 (7 years after the disappearance of M. Sadr) the program document of the Hezbollah party was published, which, in particular, said: "We appeal to all Arabs and Moslems to tell them that the experience of Moslems in Islamic Iran has proved, that people, motivated by faith, with bare breasts can, with the help of Allah, destroy iron and the oppression of tyrannical regimes ... only Islam can lead to the revival of humanity and make progress."³¹

Pro-Iranian elements managed to take root within the Amal Shiite movement. Demands for a more radical course in line with the calls of the Khomeinists split the movement. A heated debate erupted within Amal's leadership. The supporters of the Khomeinist policy have shown considerable persistence. But the leader of the movement, Nabih Berry, got out of the situation by postponing the date of the upcoming congress in order to discuss the current situation.

Note also that the Khomeinists in Amal called their faction the "Correctional Movement" (harakat at-takhassusiyya - by analogy with the "correctional movement" in Syria, which H. Asad proclaimed in November 1970") Through a faction of its

supporters Tehran demanded that the Amal leadership accept the following conditions: 1. Agree with the principle of “vilatat fakikh” (i.e. recognize the leading role of the ayatollahs in politics); 2. Agree with the plans to establish in Lebanon an Islamic republic on the Iranian model; 3. Organize new elections to the Politburo and the Amal Executive Committee taking into account the persons recommended by Tehran. The leadership of Amal rejected these demands.

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1. Ismailism is a Shiite movement. The Ismailis believe in the oneness of God, as well as the completion of divine revelation with Muhammad, whom they regard as “the last Prophet and Messenger of God to all mankind.” Initially, the ideology of Ismailism showed the influence of Neoplatonism. Ismailis and Imamis revere the same imams. In X–XII centuries they created their own state – the Fatimid Caliphate. Later, new trends arose in the bosom of Ismailism. In Lebanon, the Druses are considered followers of Ismailism, actively demonstrating their departure from the original doctrine.
2. Ibn Taymiyyah – (1263–1328) Arab-Moslem theologian, follower of Ahmed ibn Hanbal (780–855) Iraqi jurist and founder of the Hanbali madhhab. He was a fierce critic of “innovations” in religion. Subsequently, his ideas were taken up by M. Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792).
3. The practice of concealing faith was widespread in other ancient religions (“Res rvatio menyalis” – a meaningful slip of the tongue – lat.).
4. Karak Nuh is a small village in the Beka'a valley. It is believed that the tomb of Noah is located here, which is reflected in the name. Nuh is Arabic for Noah.
5. Ali bin Al Hussein bin Ali bin Muhammad bin Abdel Aal, known as “al-Karaki”, was born in the village of Karak Nuh, in 865 or 870 AH (~ 1492), died in 940 (~ 1492) in Najaf (Iraq). Al-Karaki has many titles, among them “Zayn ad-Din” (the treasure of religion), which he received after writing numerous works. As a legal scholar, he supported Islamic law students through the creation of schools and material subsidies using his own funds.
6. In 874, the last, 12th Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi (born 868), is considered a mahdi (messiah). Its disappearance is considered temporary. Shiites are confident that he will return, restore peace, justice, and establish the rule of Islam.
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- 16 From 1948 to 1958 it was the united communist party of Lebanon and Syria. The division into the Syrian KP and the Lebanese KP took place in November 1958 after the unification of Syria and Egypt into the United Arab Republic.
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- 18 They are actually a group of defectors from the government army.
- 19 Syrian violence finds its echo in Lebanon. // <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/> (date of treatment: 10/15/2020).
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- 21 2012 Report on International Religious Freedom - Lebanon "] , United States Department of State, 20 mai 2013 // <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2012/nea/208400.htm> ... (date of treatment: 10/16/2020).
- 22 The Sadr family belongs to the Musavi clan, whose origins date back to the 7th Shiite Imam Musa ibn Jafar, and further through Fatima, the daughter of the prophet, wife of Ali ibn Abu Talib, to the Prophet Muhammad.
- 23 Musa Sadr was married to the daughter of Ayatollah Azizollah Khalili. He was also related to Iranian President Mohammed Khatami, who married M. Sadr's niece. M. Sadr's son is married to the granddaughter of Ayatollah Khomeini.

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VLADIMIR KIRICHENKO. IRAN-SYRIA: FACTORS OF COOPERATION AND RAPPROCHEMENT // *The article was written for the bulletin “Russia and the Moslem World.”*

Keywords: Iran, Syria, cooperation, foreign policy.

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Abstract. The article is about Iran-Syria relations. Bilateral ties between these countries were not friendly under Shah Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980), despite a thaw in relations in the 1970s. Having lost the U.S. support, Iran needed allies immediately after the Islamic revolution (1978-1979), which led to a rapprochement with Syria. The Iranian leadership also shared the Syrian point of view regarding Israel. All these factors have encouraged the bilateral ties strengthening. Iran has supported Bashar al-Assad's regime, providing Syria with both financial and military assistance since the beginning of the Syrian crisis (2011).

Iran and Syria are allies in the Middle East. However, this was not always the case. The successive Syrian regimes, which have been in power since the late 1950s, were wary of Iranian politics, viewing the state as an enemy of the Arab world. Syria accused Iran of occupying the Arab lands of Khuzestan¹, which the Arabs call "Arabistan." The negative stance on this issue was also exacerbated both by the friendly policy towards Israel, pursued by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi² and the fact he was an ally of the U.S.³ Israel and Iran never had diplomatic relations, but were in good-neighborly relations after the formation of Israel for almost 30 years.

Iran opposed the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state in resolving the Palestinian issue, while Shah Pahlavi considered it necessary to create a bi-national federal state.

Proclaimed the State of Israel in 1948, Iran recognized it de facto in March 1950. In the same year, Iran opened a consulate in this country. However, it was closed a year later, the office of the Jewish Agency for Israel⁴ and the trade mission became the official representation in Tehran.

Iran successfully combined close relations with Israel and a pro-Arab position on the Middle East settlement during this period. At the same time, the Shah of Iran Pahlavi recognized the right to exist of Israel.⁵ Political situation in Syria stabilized after Hafez al-Assad⁶ came to power in 1970. The growing influence of

Syria in Lebanon contributed to the fact that Syria became a more significant state for Iran in terms of its ties with Arab countries.⁷

Bilateral ties between Syria and Iran improved during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, as Iran provided logistical, medical and other non-military assistance to Arab countries during the conflict. Iran also provided financial assistance to Syria in the post-war period. As a result, relations between states have warmed to some extent. In 1974 Iran provided \$ 150 million in loans and a \$ 50 million grant to finance a number of industrial and agricultural projects in Syria. In 1975, Iran provided Syria with an additional \$ 300 million in loans.

In December 1975, Haf z al-Assad made a state visit to Iran for the first time. Thereafter, the countries continued to exchange ministerial visits, strengthening cultural, economic and political ties. However, in 1978, Shah Pahlavi supported the decision of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat⁸ to make peace with Israel⁹ that was unacceptable for the Syrian leadership and led to aggravation of relations between Damascus and Tehran. Interstate relations only warmed up after the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979). Syria was one of the first states to recognize the new Iranian government.

Iran-Syria General Interests

Iran lost the U.S. support and needed allies as a result of the Islamic revolution, which brought it closer to Syria. The Iranian leadership shared the concerns of the Syrian leadership regarding Israel. The hostile relationship with Iraq has also contributed to the strengthening of its ties with Syria. It is worth noting, that historically Syria has always had very tense relations with Iraq. Representatives of The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party were in power in both states. Iraq and Syria competed for ideological and political supremacy. There were also territorial conflicts between the countries. In addition, Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein¹⁰ developed hostile relations. Syria supported Iran in the Iran-Iraq

war (1980–1988). Syria also opposed the creation of an Arab coalition against Iran in November 1980. In 1982, Syria blocked the oil pipeline passing through its territory to Iraq. In 1983, Hafez al-Assad rejected the offer of the Saudi king Fahd bin Abdulaziz al-Saud¹¹ to organize a meeting with Saddam Hussein¹².

Cooperation between Iran and Syria continued with the election of Bashar al-Assad as President of Syria in 2000. Another reason for the rapprochement between Syria and Iran is their uneasy relations with Western countries, especially the U.S. These relations became most tense after the events of the early 2000s. Thus, Iran and Syria sharply criticized the invasion of US troops in Iraq in 2003, despite the negative attitude of the leaders of both countries towards the regime of Saddam Hussein.¹³

On June 16, 2006, the defense ministers of Syria and Iran signed an agreement for military cooperation between their two countries against what they called the “common threats,” presented by Israel and the U.S. Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, Iranian Defense Minister, said that Iran considered the security of Syria as the security of Iran.¹⁴ The meeting result was the acquisition of Iranian military equipment by Syria.

In addition to selling equipment, Iran constantly invests billions of dollars in the Syrian economy, participates in the implementation of several industrial projects: the construction of cement plants, automobile assembly lines, and power plants.

On February 17, 2007, the presidents of the two countries, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Bashar al-Assad, met in Tehran and announced the creation of a coalition to fight against the United States.¹⁵ Iran has supported Bashar al-Assad's regime since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011. Tehran believed that the coming of the Syrian opposition to power would lead to the isolation of Iran in the Middle East and loss of influence in Lebanon. It would also reduce the possibility of supporting the Hezbollah organization, which Iran carried out specifically through Syria.

There were internal prerequisites for the events of the “Arab Spring” in Syria (economic, environmental and political), although there was also an external impact. The events of the “Arab Spring” in Syria had internal prerequisites (economic, environmental and political), although external intervention was provided. Saudi Arabia also provided assistance to the opposition forces to Assad. Russian researchers V. Kuzmin and N. Sokolov noted that Saudi Arabia and Iran used the situation in Syria to fight for regional leadership. Moreover, if it was beneficial for Saudi Arabia to weaken and overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad, then it was very important for Iran to strengthen and leave the current president of Syria in power¹⁶. In addition, the Saudi royal family positions itself as a defender of the Sunnis from what, in its opinion, is Iranian interference in the affairs of the Arabs. The Saudis view Iran as their rival in the region. Religious disagreements also leave their mark on relations between two countries. The fact is that the top of Saudi Arabia belongs to the extremely conservative branch of Islam – the Wahhabis. The Wahhabis are hostile to the Shiites and consider them “out of Islam.” The Wahhabis are especially intransigent towards the Alawites, the extreme Shiites who hold leading positions in Syria.

In 2013, the ministers of culture of Syria and Iran agreed to launch a joint TV channel. Then the Minister of Culture of Syria, Mohammad Abdul Sattar al-Sayed, said that their goal was to replace the channels promoting Wahhabi ideology.¹⁷ The situation in Syria was complicated by the activities of the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist groups (banned on the territory of the Russian Federation) and others. Iran is helping Syria along with Russia in the fight against extremists.

Economic cooperation between Syria and Iran

Since 2011, Iran and Syria have signed a number of agreements on military support, which also included provisions

aimed at promoting Iran's interests in the Syrian economy. It is worth noting that Syria and Iran are under economic sanctions from Western countries.

In 2011, even before the start of the Syrian crisis, Iran, Iraq and Syria signed an agreement on laying a gas pipeline from Iran to Syria through Iraq with the prospect of reaching the Mediterranean coast. Thanks to this, Iran would be able to supply gas to Europe. Israel has strongly opposed this project, as it would strengthen the positions of Iran and Hezbollah. The construction of this gas pipeline was also not in the interests of Qatar. In 2009 B. Assad refused to provide his territory for the construction of the Qatar-Turkey gas pipeline.¹⁸ With the outbreak of the war in Syria, the construction of the Iran-Iraq-Syria gas pipeline was postponed.

In 2010, the trade turnover between Iran and Syria amounted to \$ 545 million, 516 million of which were exported from Iran to Syria, and 29 million were imported to Iran. However, due to the war in Syria, trade fell to 100 million in 2014.¹⁹ However, after the defeat of IS, the situation began to improve. In May 2020, the head of the Iranian-Syrian Joint Chamber of Commerce, Keivan Kashefi, said that Iran's trade with Syria was projected to reach \$ 1 billion by the next Iranian calendar year (from March 21, 2021).²⁰

Iran exports to Syria light oils, wheat flour, pharmaceutical additives, active yeast, milk powder, propane, urea and butane. Iran's imports from Syria include olive oil, phosphates, yarn, scrap and used batteries, fatty acids, polyurethanes, textiles and plastic products.²¹

In 2019, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, at a meeting with B. Assad in Tehran, said that his country would assist in the reconstruction of war-torn Syria.²² In June 2020, Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnus met with the Iranian delegation. During the event, the further development of economic cooperation between the two countries, which became the object of US and Western sanctions, was discussed.

Economic cooperation between Iran and Syria continues in accordance with the instructions of the leaders of the two countries, Arnus said. He added that Syria has a comprehensive plan for the development of agriculture and food processing in order to reduce the negative impact of the sanctions.

Hassan Danaifar, head of the headquarters for the development of Iran's economic cooperation with Iraq and Syria, who headed the Iranian delegation, for his part reiterated that his country "stands next to Syria" to resist economic sanctions.²³

Cooperation between Syria and Iran in the field of religious tourism

Iran is helping Syria to reconstruct Shiite shrines. There are several such facilities in Syria. One of them is the mazar of Sayyida Zaynab (Set Zaynab), located south of Damascus. Zaynab bint Ali²⁴, the granddaughter of the Prophet, daughter of Ali ibn Abu Talib²⁵, is buried there. Her burial site is the largest Shiite center in Syria. It hosts lectures, religious celebrations and the dissemination of religious literature. In addition, numerous Iranian tourists visit the shrine. The number of pilgrims, which was 27 thousand in 1978, increased to 202 thousand in 2003²⁶.

In the 1980s Iran and Syria have agreed to fund a pilgrimage from Iran to Syria to visit Set Zaynab, the third most important site in Shiite Islam. Syria has paid for the pilgrims' travel and accommodation, and the Iranian government allocates \$ 100 to each pilgrim to cover their expenses. By 2006, between 700 and 1,000 Iranian pilgrims were leaving for Syria every week. This is a significant drop since the 1980s, when two Boeing 747s flew roughly twice as many pilgrims to Syria each week²⁷. It should be noted that Ali Shariati,²⁸ one of the ideologists of the Islamic revolution, is buried in Set Zaynab.

Sayyida Rukaya is the second most visited Shiite shrine in Syria. This is the burial place of Rukaiya bint al-Hussein²⁹, one of the daughters of Imam Hussein³⁰. Due to the fact that it is located

in Damascus, it attracts many pilgrims. The imam of the shrine, Sheikh Nabil al-Halbawi, is one of the most famous Shiite figures in Syria.

In the early 1990s the Iranians reconstructed the tomb of Sukayna bint al-Hussein³¹, another daughter of Hussein. It is located in the Small Gate Cemetery (al-Bab al-Sagir) in Damascus. During the restoration work, a new tomb was built over the old one. The courtyard was also enlarged to accommodate more pilgrims. In addition, construction of a very large husayniyah (Shiite prayer house) was begun at the burial site³². The cemetery at Bab Sagir is also the burial place of Umm Kulthum³³, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad.

Under the Shah, the participation of Iranians in the reconstruction of religious sites in Syria was mainly an initiative of private individuals, albeit with the mediation of Iranian state institutions (for example, the embassy). An exception was the agreement on the restoration of the Set Zaynab shrine, concluded between the countries in 1973. It assumed that Iran would allocate 10 million tomans for the reconstruction of the tomb. However, the plan was realized only after the Islamic revolution of 1979³⁴.

In the east of Syria, in the city of Raqqa, there are the tombs of Amman bin Yasir³⁵ and Uwais al-Qarani³⁶. In 1988, the Iranian authorities participated in the reconstruction of these shrines³⁷.

In February 2016, the head of the Iranian Endowment and Charity Authority, Khojatoislam Ali Mohammadi, and Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halki stressed the need to expand cooperation in the field of cultural and religious tourism. During the meeting, the officials explored the possibilities for expanding bilateral ties. In particular, they discussed the development of religious tourism and simplification of procedures for Iranian pilgrims to visit holy places in Syria. Al-Halki reiterated that the cultural, intellectual and religious ties linking the two countries and their peoples contribute to the strengthening of relations between Syria and Iran³⁸.

In March 2020, the Iranian government announced a temporary suspension of tourist travel from Tehran to the religious shrines of Damascus in order to limit the spread of the coronavirus³⁹.

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Prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the relations between Syria and Iran were uneasy, even though they slightly warmed in the mid-1970s. The Syrian leadership was concerned about the ties of the Shah's Iran with Western countries and Israel. The rapprochement between Syria and Iran after the fall of the monarchy was facilitated by the common political interests of the two countries. Countries are forced to resist the spread of Wahhabi ideology and the activities of extremist organizations. In modern conditions, Syria's alliance with Iran helps it to solve not only economic, but also military tasks. In particular, Iranian instructors are organizing the training of fighters of non-governmental military units fighting on the side of Assad. For Iran, Syria is still a "corridor" to the Middle East.

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OLGA BIBIKOVA. THE ROLE OF ULAMA¹ IN THE PUBLIC LIFE IN SYRIA (1970–2020) // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

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Abstract. Religion still plays a significant role in Syria, despite the fact that the civil war divided Syrians into supporters of the government and its opponents. Inside a large group of Muslim sheikhs, there is also no agreement.

During Ottoman rule in Syria (1516–1920), Istanbul did not create a hierarchy of Muslim authorities in the subordinated province. The sultans focused on the waqf administration, whose activities were limited to collection of taxes. At the end of the Ottoman period, as a result of the reforms of Tanzimat (1839–1876), Istanbul sent Sharia judges (kadi-kudat) to Syria. As for ministers of religion in Syria, they were usually the most aware and respected Muslims in fiqh². Traditionally, mufties, imams

were local sheikhs, usually born into families of religious figures. They got their education from childhood, memorizing texts of the Quran, first in the kuttab (school at the mosque), then in the madrasahs, in their youth they visited famous sheikhs or participated in the Zikrs of various Sufi communities, which was by no means prohibited and even encouraged.

Thomas Pierre (Th. Pierret), a Belgian Islamic researcher in Syria, notes that with the advent of secular educational institutions, Ulama children, who had traditionally followed in the footsteps of their fathers and often learned the wisdom of Islam at home, wanted to receive a secular education. The result was the emerging in the religious course of representatives of other classes or foreigners. In the XVIII century they (except Syrians) were Kurds, immigrants from the Caucasus, then natives of North Africa, and in the XX century Albanians. Among the latter was the famous theologian Nasiruddin al-Albani (1914-1999), who was called the “icon of Salafism.”³

It is characteristic that the activities of foreign sheikhs in Syria were sometimes accompanied by the emergence of new versions of Islam. For example, Muhammad al-Hashimi (1880-1991), a native of Algeria, popularized the teachings of Shaziliya⁴ among Syrian Muslims. In 1943, Makki al-Kattani (born in 1894, a native of Morocco) headed the Syrian Ulama League, and later became the representative of Syria in the World Islamic League. In support of his homeland – Morocco – he also founded in Syria the organization Jamia al-kaff al-aswad (Black Hand Society), which supported the struggle of North African Arabs against the French colonizers, Palestinians against the British, as well as Libyans against the Italians. He also united the Palestinian youth of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, encouraging them to fight against British colonialism and Zionism, creating the Rabita Shabab Dimashk (Damascus Youth League), together with members of which he engaged in various sports activities (riding and archery), considering these classes a “honourable tradition.”

In the 1940s educational institutions for the training of ulama, i.e. professional experts in Islamic sciences, were created in Syria. It is characteristic that when the law on privatization (including educational institutions) was adopted in 1967, these schools were not involved privatization, although the state even then sought to limit the scope of activities of religious institutions⁵.

In 1944, the “Rabita ulama Suriya” (League of Scholars of Syria) was created in Damascus, which included the most prominent Muslim sheikhs. Its first head was Sheikh Abu al-Khair al-Madani, then he was replaced by Sheikh al-Makki al-Kattani. The authority of these sheikhs was very high, thanks to this they won the elections to the National Assembly.

After Syria gained independence (1946), the Syrian Ulama Association was created, one of the founders of which was Ahmed Kuftaru⁶, the future Supreme Mufti of the country.

In 1947, the Baath Party (Arab Socialist Revival Party) was created, the ideology of which was a synthesis of Arab socialism and pan-Arabism. From the very beginning, the founders of the party advocated a decrease in the role of religion in society. Abdullah al-Ahmar (born 1936), one of H. al-Assad's associates, wrote: “The ideology of Baathism does not accept the use of a confessional factor in the interests of both state power and any of the social groups.”⁷ In 1949, all mosques (even built at private expense) were declared state property⁸.

In 1963, as a result of the “8th March Revolution,” the Baath party came to power. At that time, the ideology of Arab nationalism, professed by the Syrian Baathists, became one of the most significant nationalist ideologies in developing societies. But almost immediately there were disagreements between the Muslim clergy and the Baath party, as a result of which several sheikhs were arrested for criticizing the atheism of the country's leadership.

In 1970, as a result of a coup d'état, power in the country was concentrated in the hands of H. Assad, a member of the

Baath Party leadership, the Alawite community born⁹. Then, in November 1970, the 10th Congress of the Baath Party was held, which launched the beginning of the “correctional movement” and the period of stabilization of the country. The Progressive National Front was created, which, with the leading role of the Baathists, included the Syrian Communist Party, the Arab Socialist Union, the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Organization of Socialist Unionists, etc. As a result of the general referendum of 1973, a constitution was adopted in the country¹⁰, an administrative-command system was created, the model of which was largely borrowed from the socialist countries of that time. Naturally, the ruling circles of Syria took into account the multi-religious composition of Syrian society and did not set out to build a state solely based on Islam, which was typical for most Arab countries that adhered to the socialist orientation at that time.

Nevertheless, H. Assad, the president of Syria, realizing that his membership in the Alawite (Shiite) minority causes discontent among the most religious Sunnis, sought to pursue a pragmatic approach. He communicated with religious figures and regularly appeared in the mosque during significant days for Muslims. Religious programmes were regularly broadcast on radio and television. Retrospectively, we can consider the first decade of H. Assad's reign as relatively stable. Observers noted that the Quran dictates, were perceived by a significant part of the population as part of tradition, and not as a religious belief.

During this period (since 1958), the head of Syrian Muslims was Ahmed Kuftaru, who called for interfaith dialogue. From the very beginning, he showed loyalty to H. Assad, based on the principle of “cooperation with the government for the benefit of the nation¹¹.” He consistently supported the president’s activities in the country and in contacts with religious figures in Muslim countries. However, the period of relative stability was interrupted by the beginning of the “Islamic revolution” in Iran (1979), which had its influence on the Muslims of Arab countries.

On January 8, 1978, the first major anti-government demonstration took place in the city of Qom¹² (Iran). Already on February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini arrived in Tehran from emigration, and on April 1, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic. Events in Iran stirred up the entire Muslim world. The establishment of Islamic power in one of the largest countries in the Middle East revived the hopes of the Sunni clergy to increase the role of Islam in countries where people who came to power focused on socialist ideals. It is characteristic that upheavals began in a number of Arab countries.

In the same 1979, the first anti-government protests under Islamic slogans were noted in northern Syria. The authorities were gradually realizing that it was necessary to respond to attempts to restore the position of Islam in the state by humanitarian institutions. Under the patronage of Mufti Kuftaru, the Abu Nur¹³ Foundation, the Badr Women's Institute and other educational organizations were created. A faculty for the study of sharia was created at Damascus University, where in the second half of the 1990s the number of students was 4 thousand people.

Having faced with an increase in acute craving for Islam, a movement that received support from the masses, the Syrian leadership began to think about measures to prevent the politicization of Islam. However these measures should have been accompanied by relative tolerance to Islamic educational activities.

The Muslim Brotherhood movement was a particular danger to the authorities, which constantly received financial support from the Arabian monarchies. Founded back in 1946, after independence, the Syrian branch of "Brothers" originated in parliamentary democracy. However, the coup d'état (1960) put an end to this phase of democratic experience. Hostile to the Islamists, the new socialist and secular regime forced "Brothers" to go underground. However, in the 1970s "Brothers" took advantage of the growing popularity of the religious reference among young people under the influence of events in Iran, and

began to regain their position. Dissatisfied with the secularism of the Baathists, they began to attack representatives of government agencies. In February 1977, the rector of the University of Damascus, Mohammad Fadel, was killed, in April 1978 Adele Mini, the general prosecutor of Damascus, was killed, and in June 1979 students of the artillery school in Aleppo were shot. In Damascus during this period, detonations of cars rigged with explosives became more frequent. The authorities responded with arrests. In July 1980, Law No. 49 was adopted, according to which membership in the Muslim Brotherhood was punished to death penalty.

In the spring of 1982, after the “Brothers” organized a large-scale uprising in Hama, the relatively peaceful coexistence with power for the “Brothers” ended. The revolt was crushed by an 8,000th army under the command of Rifaat Assad, the president’s brother, with the support of the Air Force and tank units¹⁴. With a total of 20 thousand victims, a significant part of the “Brothers” was destroyed, some managed to escape over the border. Several people surrendered to the authorities.

The Muslim clergy of Syria could not stay away from the events, especially as there were many supporters and even members of the Brotherhood among the sheikhs. Some sheikhs were made to leave the country. Among them there were sheikhs belonging to Jamaat Zaid (“Zaid group”), an influential preaching movement which activities were aimed at religious education of students and students of secular educational institutions.

This group was created by Sheikh Usama Abdul-Karim al-Rifai back in the 1950s and named after the mosque Zayd ibn Sabit al-Ansari¹⁵, where he served. Al-Rifai taught fiqh and Hadith classes for young people who studied in secular educational institutions. He had followers among the sheikhs, who also gathered groups of youth. Thus, religious groups beyond the control of the authorities were created, which included young people from various social strata. Naturally, that

events in the country, including the rebellion in Hama, were also discussed in these groups. And although some of the students of the Zaid group were repressed after 1982, its sheikhs “managed to introduce an Islamic vision of political reality into the minds of a significant part of educated youth¹⁶.”

For its part, the country's leadership, realizing that the events in Hama were negatively perceived by the conservative part of the country's population, lifted restrictions on some cult customs (celebrating the birthday of the Prophet, wearing a niqab¹⁷ at school)¹⁸.

In addition, in an effort to prevent possible political consequences from Islam strengthening, the country's leadership tried to control all the attempts of Islamists' entry into the realm of politics. After the Islamist uprising of 1979-1982 the authorities at first severely limited religious activities, and also delegated the management of religious affairs to those clergy who showed loyalty. In particular, in 1987, the government decided to close all Islamic schools in Syria, including Abu Nur, but Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro declared the Islamic school the “Al-Assad Institute for Studying the Quran¹⁹” the day before the closure. Due to the patronage of Kuftaru, many Syrian madrasas were preserved as branches of the new institute.

Since the mid-1990s there was a relative liberalization, which made it possible to establish politically more independent figures in public space. The authority of Ahmad Kuftaro was generally recognized. Being first the Mufti of Damascus, and then the Supreme Mufti of Syria, he worked for almost 50 years (from 1949 to 2000) with 9 presidents. The Syrian Sunni community was committed to the traditional schools of Islamic law, maintaining tolerance for Sufism. Some famous sheikhs were simultaneously in Sufi brotherhoods. In particular, the mufti of Syria Ahmad Kuftaro was the sheikh of the Naqshbandian tariqa²⁰.

The necrology, published after the death of the Supreme Mufti, tells about his tireless activities. “Best part of his life, he lectured before every Friday praying. Leaders of Islamic and

other religious organizations were often invited to speak with the sheikh at these weekly Majlis. The late Sheikh Ahmed Yasin, the scandalous Louis Farrahan, Sheikh Nazim Al-Kubrusi and Sheikh Habib Ali Jifri²¹ were among the guests over the years there. Often, famous spiritual leaders of other confessions were also invited to speak. These meetings were held in a crowded mosque, with simultaneous translations in English, French and Russian. It was also broadcast on local television. The core of these lectures was the Sheikh's constant commentary on the Quran... Sheikh also did not detest disputes. In his tireless role as an interfaith advocate, he announced in the 60s that the Abu Nur Institute was celebrating the birth of Christ, and invited leaders of Syrian and Lebanese Christian communities. Naturally, there was a noise that left no doubt about who was the strongest supporter of ecumenic dialogue. A later comment on Jesus may have most briefly summed up the views of Sheikh Ahmed: "if a Muslim does not recognize Sayyidna Isa (Jesus), then his Islam is in vain²²." A. Keftaru expressed his attitude to power in the words: "Islam and political power are twins, none of them flourishes without the other. Islam is the basis, and the power is its guardian. Everything that does not have a foundation collapses, and everything that does not have power is on the watch²³."

Naturally, in conditions of tight control by the sheikh's authorities, supporters of radical Islam lost the opportunity to widely promote their views. Nevertheless, despite the almost complete disappearance of the Salafi wing of the Syrian religious elite, Salafism spread in Syrian society (as in the rest of the Arab world) through various channels, including satellite ones. Initially, Syrian Sufism was the subject of criticism of Salafism. Then, a tolerant attitude towards the Syrian Shiites was criticized. Shiites in Syria are represented by Shiite Imamites (twelvers, i.e., honoring 12 Imams) – 0.5%, Ismaelites – 1%, Alawites – 11.5%. In total, 13% of the population belongs to Shiites²⁴. Naturally,

both Saudi Arabia and Turkey are annoyed that Syria is led by a man belonging to Shia (Alawite) Islam.

As it's known, after the death of Hafez al-Assad (2000), his son Bashar led the country. And if in H. Assad lifetime, the inner circle supported the candidacy of Basil, the eldest son, then after his death, the associates of the late president considered the second son, Bashar Assad, not an equivalent alternative. Some of close associates (Abdel Halim Haddam²⁵) even tried to remove Bashar from office, others went on emigration. Thus, Bashar al-Assad was forced to (without the support of his father's associates) make decisions on a number of issues independently.

In particular in the mid-2000s the return of expelled ulama to their homeland was permitted, in addition, Islamic charitable organizations were allowed to work in secondary educational institutions. In response, the Muslim Brotherhood announced the resumption of its activities in Syria. When the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's exiled leadership supported mass anti-government protests in the spring of 2011, Muslim Brotherhood representatives were present a year later in the leadership of opposition forces and military units that fought with the Mujahidins against government forces²⁶.

Since 2008, the authorities have strengthened control over the religious field, while the process of integration of ulama into the bureaucratic apparatus has begun. It is characteristic that the majority of ulama took this process positively, since the concern of ulama is primarily to provide them selves with the space of freedom necessary to carry out their religious activities, and not an access to the political field.

In 2012, there were adopted amendments to the Constitution that were supposed to satisfy Islamists who criticized the authorities for spreading secularism in the country. Article 3 of the Constitution of Syria (Section Basic Principles, Chapter Political Principles) states: "The religion of the President of the Republic is Islam. Islamic jurisprudence (i.e. Sharia) should be the main source of legislation. The State must respect all

religions and ensure the freedom to perform all rituals that do not violate public order. The personal status of religious communities must be protected and respected.”²⁷

The deterioration of relations between the Baathist leadership and ulama was partially offset by the consequences of reforms aimed at liberalizing the economy. These reforms began to be implemented by Bashar al-Assad after he came to power in 2000. It is believed that this was mainly in favor of a handful of businessmen close to the president, the most famous of which is his cousin Rami Makhlouf. In fact, the rejection of socialism also contributed (albeit on a more modest scale) to the enrichment of the wider category of average entrepreneurs. Due to the alliance with the latter the Syrian ulama traditionally drew financial resources for their charitable associations. Thus, these resources increased significantly because of the liberalization of the economy and the consequences of the 2003 oil boom.

In fact, the refusal of socialism also contributed (albeit on a more modest scale) to enrichment of a wider category of average entrepreneurs.

During the same period, Islamic banks were created in Syria, which invited ulama to their supervisory committees. Thus, these economic transformations brought the Syrian religious elite closer to the business community and through them to the military-political establishment. Thus, on the eve of the uprising, Syrian ulama took different positions in regard to the authorities. Some of the ulama affected by liberalization of the economy were loyal to the authorities, and another part, mainly provincial, held anti-government positions.

Just before the 2011 uprising, relations between the government and the religious elite aggravated due to Shia missionary activity in the country. The alliance of Baathists with Imamite Shiism began as early as in 1970. At that time, H. Assad, the first “not Sunni” president in the history of Syria, the new head of state, sought to ensure that his Alawite community was recognized as a branch of Shiism and, therefore, a part of the

Muslim Ummah. He received this fatwa from foreign Shiite leaders: the Iraqi theologian and public figure Hassan al-Shirazi (1937–1980)²⁸ and the Iranian-Lebanese imam Musa al-Sadr (1928–1978)²⁹. After 1979, Damascus created a strategic alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Taking advantage of the favorable attitude of the Baathist elite, foreign Shiite theologians turned the Sayyid Zainab mosque (the burial place of the prophet's granddaughter in the suburbs of Damascus) into a Shiite pilgrimage on the model of Iranian shrines. After that, the number of Iranian Shiites visiting Syria increased.

It should be noted that in Syrian-Iranian relations, not everything was smooth. Especially it included Tehran's attempts to introduce a system of Shia education in Syria, which were negatively met by the Syrian Sunnis, particularly as this happened against the background of the playing out Sunni-Shia civil war in Iraq and strong interfaith tensions in Lebanon.

The first mass uprisings in Syria arose amid a drought that began in 2006. In 2010, according to the UN, up to a million Syrians were on the edge of starvation³⁰. By February 2010, due to rising feed prices, almost all livestock number was destroyed³¹. Refugees from rural areas reached the cities. But the authorities were not ready to support the needy population. Overpopulated suburbs were the center of the protest that arose around large cities. Unorganized anti-government protests began. The authorities reacted slowly and irrationally. Calls for an armed uprising appeared in the media, and then the government decided to use the army. The Qatari channel Al Jazeera, calling for the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad fueled the debate.

With the outbreak of hostilities, ulama – the Muslim clergy – became a direct participant in the uprising. Moreover, most of them were on the side of the opposition. That is why in cities such as Dera'a (in the south), Baniyas (on the coast) Deir ez-Zor (near the eastern border), the rebels were able to take purchase of the ulama and even created caches of weapons in mosques. The

center of the 2011 uprising in Dar'a was the Omari mosque in the old city³². The Jabhat al-Nusra group operated in Baniyas. Deir al-Zor was initially interested in jihadists in connection with the oil fields there, for the control of which various rebel groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra, began to fight with each other. We also note the proximity of these cities to neighboring countries, where weapons came from.

Under these conditions, the government was massively criticized, primarily for using army in the uprising suppression. Not only provincial sheikhs were among them. In Damascus and Aleppo, there were also representatives of the religious class who voiced criticism to the government actions. It is characteristic that some of them were able to increase significantly their authority precisely by anti-government speeches. So, the speeches of Sheikh and Sharia judge Osama Abdul-Karim Al-Rifai³³ aroused great interest on the part of the dissatisfied. No less support was received by Muhammad Karim bin Said bin Karim Raje (born 1926), who has the title "Sheikh of readers of Bilad al-Sham³⁴" During the Syrian protests in May 2011, the sheikh who preached at the al-Hassan mosque in al-Midan district defiantly resigned, thus declaring his disagreement with the government's measures to suppress opposition protests. Although these ulama did not openly call for the overthrow of power, they disputed the version of the country's leadership that the speeches were inspired from the outside.

On August 1, 2011, the first day of the month of Ramadan, about twenty well-known and respected Syrian ulama published a letter accusing the Syrian authorities of the deaths of "victims of violence" in Hama and other cities of the country. "Sharing the desire of all who love this country for stability, security and unification of the nation, we, the ulama of Bilad al-Sham, condemn and reject the use of excessive violence in Hama and other governorates of Syria. This led to bloodshed of hundreds of children of the Syrian people, the strange manner of celebrating the entry into the month of Ramadan, the month of equality,

tolerance and forgiveness. We have nothing to do with these actions and place full responsibility on the Syrian government. We see in these abusive actions an incentive to disorder in the entire space of the Motherland. We reaffirm the need to implement already promulgated decrees, laws and decisions, in particular, urgent release of all detainees³⁵”.

Among the sheikhs who signed this communiqué (20 from Damascus and 11 from Aleppo) there is the already mentioned Sheikh Mohammed Karim Raje. Prominent religious figures such as brothers Osama and Saria are Rifai, Hisham Al-Burhani, Adnan Al-Saka, Jaudet Said, Ahmed Moazz Al-Khatib (former Sheikh of the Omeyyad Grand Mosque in Damascus), Mohammed Fayez Avad and Muhammad Rashed supported this message.

There was another statement signed by the sheikhs and imams of Aleppo. Moreover, the Damascus statement speaks of the “full responsibility of the regime,” while the Aleppo ulama are somewhat more loyal in considering the situation, placing the “greatest share of responsibility³⁶” on the government.

It is characteristic that the document of the Damascus sheikhs was not signed by the Supreme Mufti of Syria Sheikh Ahmed Badreddin Hassun and the Minister for Awqaf Affairs D. Mohammed Abdel-Sattar Al-Sayed.

Declarations of religious leaders in Damascus and Aleppo represented a serious challenge to the government, which continued to justify the suppression of demonstrations with the help of army, considering the incident as a police operation against the “Salafi armed gangs” formed by foreign states against Syria. Indeed, by that time it was known that foreign states – the Arabian monarchies, including Jordan – were intensively supplying the rebels with weapons and instructors.

In February 2012, more than 100 sheikhs from different countries issued a fatwa about the situation in Syria, stating “that the Syrians were not allowed to stay under the regime of Bashar al-Assad and that it was necessary to leave this system. They

called for help to relieve distress of the Free Army of Syria³⁷ – in material and ideological assistance.”³⁸

Said Ramadan al-Buti (1929–2013) was among those who did not sign the fatwa, an irreconcilable opponent of Salafism³⁹, known for his position on the use of violence as a means of achieving political goals. Before the beginning of the marked events, Sheikh Buti repeatedly spoke out against nationalism and socialism, which form the basis of the Baathist ideology. However, after 2011, he began to show support for the ruling regime, on the premise that “tyranny is preferable to the risk of anarchy⁴⁰” In addition, al-Buti believed that the Muslim clergy should establish a dialogue with the authorities, which will make it possible to find mutual understanding and solve controversial problems. On the eve of the signing of the fatwa, al-Buti during Friday’s sermon explained to the audience at the mosque that the West was trying to run up Muslims against each other, stressing that back in the 1990s the US National Security Council developed a plan for a confrontation of Muslim confessions. He was supported by the imam of the Anas ibn Malik mosque, Sheikh Ahmad Sadek Khatyb, who said that Syria’s enemies abroad mobilized all their forces to destroy the country.

Other supporters of the legitimate Syrian government include Muhammad Hassan al-Kurdi, rector of Damascus University, Sheikh Hisamuddin Farfour, rector of Al-Fatah Islamic University. Both sheikhs, accompanied by Muhammad Tawfik Ramazan Buti, who after the death of his father was elected head of the Sham Ulama Union and Adviser to the President of Syria on religious issues, visited Russia in February 2017 at the Public Chamber invitation. A strong supporter of the legitimate government is Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun⁴¹, who took office as the supreme mufti of Syria after the death of Ahmed Kuftaru in 2004. His declarations against the opposition and those who support it caused great irritation in Islamist circles. His son Saria (22 years old) was killed in the autumn of 2011⁴². In his interview with Russia Today, Hassoun (13.22.2015) called

terrorism “a new ideological course that has nothing to do with Islam⁴³.”

The religious opposition in exile also opposed the legitimate government. Opposition sheikhs created several organizations, such as the Islamic Committee of Sham⁴⁴, the Fund of Ulama and Preachers of the Syrian Revolution, the League of Preachers of Sham and the Committee of Free Ulama, etc., patronized by Saudi Prince Bandar ibn Sultan al-Saud (born 1949)⁴⁵.

Adnan Mohammed al-Arur (born 1948), a native of Hama, who regularly appears on Saudi television, also gained notoriety among opposition sheikhs. He traditionally calls for assistance and arming of the Syrian Mujahidins, as well as Kurdish nationalists in favour of self-determination⁴⁶.

Using the opportunities of the new media to appeal to the Syrian people, these outsiders were especially active in the territories occupied by the Mujahidins, where a completely different, including religious, order was established. Having left Syria on the eve or at the beginning of the uprising, the ulama created the opposition “League of Ulama Shama” (Rabit Ulama al-Sham) in Doha (Qatar), the founder of which is Sheikh Muaz al-Khatib⁴⁷. Since its founding, this organization was headed by exiled scholars from Aleppo and Hamaa, close to the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Sheikh Muhammad Ali al-Sabouni⁴⁸ and member of the Syrian National Council Bashir Haddad.

Within the opposition during this period, there were various committees and organizations, which, were almost all, clerical in nature. Among them there is the Islamic Committee of Sham, the Fund of Ulama and Preachers of the Syrian Revolution, the League of Preachers of Sham and the Committee of Free Ulama, in addition to local or ethnic structures such as the Ulama Front of Aleppo, the Jebel Al-Zawiya Ulama Association and the Kurdish Ulama Association. Their importance and representativeness are extremely different, but it is obvious that they were behind more significant players who were able to finance these organizations.

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Assessing the role of ulama in modern Syrian society, Thomas Pierre (Th. Pierret) notes that once the Syrian Sunni ulama benefited from both the rejection of the Baathist ideology of the Syrian government and the reduction of the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country. However, under the current conditions, “there are few figures among the Syrian Sunni ulema who have a true national reputation... The absence of leading ulama was the result of Baathist policy and repressions.”⁴⁹ In the current situation, it is very important for the country's leadership to have associates among religious leaders.

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9. The exact number of Alawites in the world cannot be defined. In Syria in the census (2003), religious affiliation was practically not taken into account (it was indicated: “Christian” or “Muslim”). It is believed that with the total

- population of Syria of 17.56 million people, Alawites make up from 10 to 12%, i.e. 2–2.5 million people. Alawites in Syria are represented by 4 tribes: Hayatya, Kalyabiya, Haddadiya and Mutavira.
10. The Constitution of the Syrian Republic provides for freedom of religion. The first Constitution of the country was adopted in 1973 by a majority vote in the People's Assembly at the end of January 1973. 13.03.1973 it entered into force. The new version of the Constitution was adopted in 2012 after a referendum, which was rejected by the opposition, which considered that the vote was fabricated. Thus, the Islamist opposition tried to put pressure on the state, demanding the repeal of all laws that contradict Islam as the official religion in Syria. In addition, they demanded to harmonize the laws with the sharia.
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 12. Qom is the main religious center of Iran.
 13. Now the Ahmed Kuftaru Islamic Foundation
 14. Le Monde diplomatique. ., 03.05.2006.
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 18. In 2008, it was prohibited to wear a hijab to women teachers at school. In 2010, the ban on the hijab was expanded. This time it was addressed both teachers and schoolgirls and students.
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THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

OLGA MEJEVNIKOVA. PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC VIRTUAL TOURISM // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: Islam, hajj, religious tourism, virtual tour, innovation, information technology, virtual reality, the effect of presence.

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Abstract. The article reveals the peculiarities of the formation of religious (islamic) virtual tourism. The importance of developing a system of tourist religious virtual space is due to the need to comply with innovative processes affecting modern virtual reality technologies, which are especially relevant during a pandemic. The author made an attempt to trace the influence of virtual reality technologies on the creation of virtual religious (islamic) tours and excursions. The comparative analysis made it possible to trace the advantages and disadvantages of traditional and virtual religious tourism.

The tourism industry is one of the most dynamic industries that are rapidly developing in the world economy, its level of development is a kind of indicator of the state of society, its material wealth and spiritual health. Tourism development in general depends on the complex of natural, geographical, historical, political, socio-economic and demographic conditions and the factors that define them. From the point of view of socio-cultural significance tourism development improves the system of social and cultural services to the population, increases resources for modernization appropriate infrastructure, raises the quality of life. A well-thought-out government tourism policy promotes expanding cooperation in the field of international tourism, increases competitiveness of the tourism industry through effective use of innovations and information technologies.

The object of this study was the sphere of virtual Islamic tourism, which is currently undergoing significant changes due to the expansion of information technologies, as well as the political and economic situation in the world, caused by the pandemic.

Everything is changing under the influence of innovations that can be considered as a combination of a process, a service and a product that changes forms, moving from idea to implementation. "Today tourism is global business of IT technologies, in which well-known company cooperate" [1, p. 8]. For example, thanks to the ubiquitous spread of the Internet in the tourism industry the consumer has shifted from the "real" market to the virtual one. Development of information technologies in the tourism industry increases not only efficiency of the industry, but due to a closer integration with other sectors of the economy and technological modernization brings it to a new level of development. New technologies also help the industry recovery program, which is very important in the post-pandemic period. Perhaps the only constraining factors for rapid and high-quality growth of the virtual tourism industry, including religious tourism, remain weak communication, low

awareness of tour operators and high cost of equipment. It should also be remembered that Islamic tourism is to some degree associated with the dogma and practice of Islam, and in a virtual tour it is almost impossible to take certain actions or comply with instructions.

Religious tourism is “a special kind of activity, which is related to the provision of services and satisfaction of needs of the tourists heading to the holy religious centers located outside their usual environment” [2, p. 6]. The history of religious tourism goes back centuries. Religious tourists made travels on your own to visit places of preservation of saints relics. This is perhaps one of the very first tourist destinations all over the world, which appeared over 1000 years ago. The first mention of religious tourism dates back to ancient time when the ancient Greeks visited Delphi.

The following types of religious tourism are distinguished:

1. Pilgrimage, which is the pursuit of believers to worship holy places. Pilgrims have very different goals, for example, the desire to heal from mental and physical ailments, pray to the Almighty and be closer to him, find grace, realize godly work, atone for sins, express gratitude for the blessings sent from above, to find the meaning of life, etc. Modern pilgrims use a lot of amenities of civilization in their travels.

Religious tourism of Moslems has a pronounced pilgrimage component. Every Moslem must at least once in a lifetime make a pilgrimage (hajj) to the holy cities Mecca and Medina. ... Each year before the pandemic, these cities were visited by about 2 million pilgrims. One of the largest mosques in world, Haram beit Ullah, housing the Kaaba sanctuary, is erected here. Important Moslem shrines also include the Blue Mosque in Istanbul (formerly Hagia Sophia), the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Golden Mosque in Baghdad, Mosque of Ibn Tulun and Sultan Hassan in Cairo, the Qutb Minar minaret and the Kuwwat ul Islam mosque in Delhi and others.

2. Religious and educational tourism, representing the general familiarization with the culture and religion of a particular state, which is also of cognitive interest. "Tourists of this directions do not seek to achieve any enlightenment, to pray their sins, they just want to travel and meet new places of our world" [2, p. 62].

Factors influencing the development of tourism, including religious tourism are varied and multifaceted. Islamic tourism is not limited by frameworks of the religious, but, on the contrary, covers all its types, excluding those that are contrary to Islamic norms and values. The presence of favorable factors leads to the leadership of individual regions and countries in world tourism, and vice versa, undesirable factors reduce tourist flow.

In 2020, the tourism industry faces a major challenge in their development associated with the rapid spread of new type of coronavirus across the planet. The tourism industry has suffered colossal losses in all countries of the world.

Therefore, priority attention should be paid to information technologies, which, due to their special catalyst properties actively contribute to technological breakthroughs not only in information sphere, but also in many other equally important directions. Virtual religious tourism is developing rapidly and its ultimate goal is the ability to make people feel, see, travel, study, work and live inside the world, which is nothing more than a perfect imitation and at the same time to enrich and cultivate their religious spirituality. There are now 1.9 billion adherents of Islam in the world, and experts predict that by 2025 the Moslem population of the planet will make 30% [3]. Therefore, the tourism business cannot ignore this group of customers, and tends develop this industry more and more actively.

Virtual reality can offer the consumer the opportunity to visit the place of interest of a prospective tourist or a pilgrim without actually staying there. That is why marketers and scientists are researching virtual reality and virtual reality factors that can affect the purchase of the tour. The total immersion

effect, high image quality, vast possibilities of displaying objects of worship and interest – it all makes virtual reality a powerful marketing tool today. Interactivity of a virtual tour creates an illusion of the client's involvement, a feeling of freedom of action. Virtual tours simulate finding a person at these objects, make it possible to view all expositions at any convenient time and solve accessibility problems, since not all of us are able to visit especially remote objects due to certain reasons.

Before talking about religious (Islamic) virtual tourism, let's figure it out, what is a virtual tour after all? It is viewed as a way of realistic display of three-dimensional multi-element space [4]. It is a “stitched” combination of panoramas with the function of transition from one volumetric photo to another. Such tours can be supplemented with music, voice-overs, videos, captions, video clips and other content. The main difference between a virtual tour and a set of conventional photos is its interactivity: the user himself chooses which fragment is attractive to him at the moment to use full motion control technology. In other words, the viewer independently controls the picture, being able to change his position and examine the details.

By analyzing various sources of travel agencies, one can note that mostly the most popular countries where a decent vacation for Moslems is organized, are Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Malaysia [5]. Such tourism includes in advance the most detailed set of Moslem requirements for rest according to Sharia – new trends in the tourism industry that allow people rest in accordance with their religious beliefs. The same countries offer the most diverse virtual tours of the saint places and attractions. ... In general, we can say that virtual tourism replaces genuine travel and real tourism. Such a “tourist trip” is more comfortable and convenient, safe as it is carried out within the comfort zone of the chair or sofa.

However, there is a large gap between using virtual reality as a trial before purchase real tickets, and treating virtual reality as full-fledged tourism. “From the point of view of the development

of religious (Islamic) tourism is important to understand that Islamic norms are not just religious precepts, but Quranic commandments clothed in a legal shell. They are conventionally divided into five categories: commanded, recommended, legally indifferent, permitted (halal), prohibited (haram) behavior. On their basis Moslem norms regulate not only economic activities, but also how to dress, what to eat, etc. And from the fact how precisely a Moslem adheres to these requirements, the level of his religiosity is determined. The same is reflected in choice of rest: either it is tourism as an entertainment industry, as a pleasant travel, or, on the contrary, abandoning all that in favor of pilgrimage, if we are talking about cult objects” [6, p. 49]. In virtual tourism the problem of religious precepts disappears, but sometimes with its disappearance disappears the meaning of “travel” as well, especially if we are talking about a pilgrimage. After all, pilgrimage is the fruit of Islamic spirituality, its visual embodiment in activity, its addition and support for spiritual life. Therefore, in our opinion, a virtual pilgrimage is absurd. In Islam, the concept of a pilgrim has a completely different meaning than in other religions. A pilgrim, from the point of view of Islam, you can call a person who performed the Hajj to Mecca, to whose name after that, the honorary title of Hajji is added.

But we can talk about virtual Islamic tourism when it is religious and educational tourism, filled with emotions, new knowledge and vivid impressions. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of a virtual religious educational (Islamic) tourism.

First, one of the main advantages of virtual religious tour or travel is its availability for those who for some reason cannot travel in reality. It may be lack of funds and physical disabilities, and the inability to leave just for the purpose of travel, and ignorance of foreign languages required for communication with the indigenous population in the country of stay, and the political situation in the country chosen as the travel purpose. For example, according to UNESCO experts, in the historic center of

Aleppo in Syria as a result of military conflicts almost 30% of the buildings listed as objects of the World Heritage Site were destroyed, and about 60% of the buildings suffered serious damage. Significant damage was done to the Umayyad mosque, the citadel, mosques, museums, traditional Arab markets, caravanserais, madrasahs, hammams [7]. However, to see all the sights of the Islamic Syria, and in particular the Umayyad Mosque, can be done using a virtual tour.

Secondly, it saves money and time. With virtual travel there is no need to waste time for travel arrangements and getting to the place of destination, no need to spend money on visiting and sightseeing, on the way to them, accommodation, meals and etc. All you need to travel is Internet access [8, p. 83]. The cost of virtual reality technologies gradually becomes cheaper, availability increases. Great prospects in this direction opens the development and implementation of mobile applications with augmented reality.

Thanks to the latest technologies, every Moslem in every point of the globe at any time will be able to perform a virtual Hajj thanks to the new Mecca 3D application. "There are thousands of books by famous scholars on how to perform the Hajj, but see with your own eyes how to bypass the Kaaba, standing on Mount Arafat and other stages pilgrimages is something quite different different. We live in the 21st century, and when the world is under our fingers, it would be foolish not to use this for studying Islam" [9]. Virtual reality gives a certain freedom and comfort, because you don't need to negotiate with anyone about the time and program of the excursion, the traveler himself controls the pace of his activity.

Thirdly, the effect of presence and detailing of the visual object. Virtual technologies provide a unique opportunity see with an immersive effect not only landmarks and shrines closed to the public, but also reconstructed historical monuments that have been destroyed by time or circumstances. For example, Mecca and Medina are allowed to visit only for Moslems, which

limits the excursion component, since sightseers – representatives of other religions cannot visit the main shrines of Islam, where rituals of religious worship of Moslem pilgrims from all over the world are enacted. Applications from developers from Saudi Arabia let everyone see these sacred cities in virtual reality.

Fourthly, the virtual religious tour is always successful. The “traveler” will never be affected by the lack of halal food, halal-certified restaurants, prayer rooms, separate for men and women, an unfavorable political environment, strike by air traffic controllers or the collapse of a travel company.

Fifthly, if a virtual religious excursion attracted your attention, you can participate in it an infinite number of times and at any time using the opportunity posted additional information and tips. So, in Uzbekistan, along with others, monument of medieval architecture Shahi Zinda, located in Samarkand is worthy of admiration. According to guests, it is a “time portal” [10]. Living in Tashkent and being a fan of this great architectural heritage, the author of the article may not be there all the time, but the virtual tour provides an opportunity to review, re-listen to the necessary information, clarify the details of interest, because the “traveler” has an unregulated amount of time. At any moment the virtual trip can be interrupted and continued at any other time suitable or desirable for a person.

Sixthly, indisputably the most important constituent element of religious tourism is visiting places that have some either meaning for religion, and obtaining knowledge, which are the most important motivation to travel. Virtual religious tourism is a great additional tool for general intellectual and spiritual development of a person.

As you can see, the merits of religious virtual tours to Islamic shrines are numerous. But they are overshadowed by a very large flaw: this is not real and gives much less sensations, impressions and religious thrill than a real trip. Tourists tend to be less focused on simple terrain exploration and sights. They are more focused on new impressions and “spiritual” discoveries.

The Quran calls on a person to get on the path of searching for sacred knowledge – spiritual search. Islam has many original references to the path as a kind of metaphysical state of the believer, who must constantly be in the spiritual search – search for the Almighty. Such an experience cannot yet be reproduced in virtual reality.

Another disadvantage is dependence on creators of the virtual tour. It is impossible for the client to see what is not included in a virtual tour – he is given as many opportunities, as have already been developed before. It is impossible on such a “journey” to discover for yourself a little-known attraction, of course, if this option has not been programmed already. Also companies that create virtual tours, often hide many things in order to provide the most enjoyable experience to your clients. For example, in a virtual tour you will not be told about the fact that in Saudi Arabia at the site of demolished historical monuments – places sacred to Moslems – luxury hotels, restaurants, shopping centers and spas arte built, Not by chance the creators of virtual travel programs themselves admit that their programs do not replace real tours, but complement them and encourage people to travel even more.

Along with a fairly high consumer interest in virtual religious tourism as a new direction it should be noticed that ordinary users for the most part still do not refer viewing virtual tours to a separate type of religious tourism or pilgrimage. However, it is moving at a steady pace towards further distribution in the conditions of the modern technological world. This is a promising area that definitely is to be developed.

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