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ISLAM IN THE 20th – 21st CENTURIES: BOTH CRISIS AND RENEWAL

Problem statement

Tectonic changes are taking place in the world. Postcolonial societies are looking for their own path of social development, which would meet the challenges of modernity, as well as the aspirations of both the “upper classes” and the masses. In these circumstances, Islam provides its own vision of future social structures.

The pro-Western Shah’s regime in Iran collapsed as the result of the Islamist Shiite revolution, and the Islamist Shiite regime is holding on despite sanctions and pressure. In Afghanistan, the victory of the Taliban Islamists over the pro-communist and then pro-Western regimes of governance is unlikely to be considered accidental. In Russia, the Taliban has just been removed from the list of terrorist organizations. The Islamists of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an affiliate of Al-Qaeda, has recently swept away the secular Baathist governance in Syria, which degenerated into a corrupt dictatorship, but Russia is negotiating with them about the future of its bases.

If they are not immersed in daily worries about their daily bread, most Muslims think about the fate of their countries and their society. They interpret current events from the standpoint of both the past and the future, and the past affects their consciousness and feelings more than in the case of the majority of Russians, Western Europeans or Americans.

In this sense, they perceive the situation extremely tragically. From their point of view, for many centuries, Islamic society has been the greatest civilization on the planet, the most developed, the richest, the most powerful, and the most creative in all spheres of human life. Muslims have given the world the greatest

discoveries in mathematics, physics, medicine, geography, astronomy, social sciences, and philosophy. Muslim armies, preachers, and merchants advanced everywhere in Asia, Africa, and Europe, bringing their supreme civilization and highest religion to the “infidel barbarians” or the “people of the Scriptures” – Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, who had “distorted” and “forgotten” their prophets’ doctrines.

Islam certainly had creative principle in the first three or four centuries after the Hijrah*, absorbing elements of Christianity, Greek-Roman antiquity, Zoroastrianism, and Indian civilization. Over the centuries, it has transformed not only into the developed system of religious dogmas, but also into the system of law, statehood, ethics, aesthetics, household and family regulation, philosophy, culture, and art. The few Arabian Arabs turned out to be the yeast for the dough, the spark to ignited the brushwood and fire the flame of the qualitatively new civilization.

And now, more than two hundred years have passed, as the situation, in the opinion of many Muslims, especially Arabs, has changed dramatically. Instead of dominating the world and demonstrating the highest achievements in science, economy, and culture, the Islamic world found itself dependent on Christian powers that surpass it in military matters, technology, organization, and wealth. This results in despair due to the fact that, according to Muslims, both natural and divine laws have been violated. Despite formally getting rid of colonial or semi-colonial dependence, the humiliating situation of the Islamic world has reached its peak at the present time, when most Muslim countries have turned out to be pariahs of globalization. (Now there may appear exceptions, such as Indonesia or Turkey, at least.) None of the Muslim countries has been able to get ahead, get closer to the West, as have the countries belonging to the civilization of East Asia with their peculiar mentality, psychology, and organization of society.

* The Hijrah is the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622, from which the Islamic chronology begins.

The West watched the “degrading” East with the contemptuous arrogance of superior military, economic and technical might and social organization. For the West, full of strength and energy, the East was the object of colonial expansion, military and economic plunder, and, apart from the formal political independence gained by Muslim countries, many of them retain the same position at the present time. The worsening crisis of the West has changed nothing yet.

The situation is inconsistent because, despite the obvious failure of economic, technical and material development, Islam is currently experiencing a period of powerful expansion and expanding its sphere of influence – from South Africa to the shores of the Volga, Rhine, and Thames, from the western tip of Africa to the Philippines, and from the east to the west coast of the United States. By the number of its adherents, Islam is the fastest growing religion of our days.

Many in the West perceive the Muslim world both as an object of expansion and as a threat.

The mass public consciousness and indeed many media outlets are still far from the balanced, respectful attitude towards Islam and Muslims developed by the university community in the USA. University intellectuals engaged in studying the Near and Middle East and the entire Muslim world could swear allegiance to the ideas expressed by Edward Said in his book “Orientalism”. At that time he accused Western Orientalists of bias and racism, and after his work was published in 1980, among researchers, it has become indecent to apply exclusively Western standards to Muslim societies. But these intellectual delights are difficult to reach by the media and many politicians. And in the globalized world, via television and the Internet, even individual manifestations of hostility to Islam, such as cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, become widely known in Muslim countries and reinforce anti-Western sentiments among Muslims.

If Islam really was the caricature to be painted by its enemies, how can we explain why it has become the fastest-growing religion at present? What attracts new adherents? Is it the lack of hierarchy and the widely pervasive egalitarianism

that gives followers of this religion the sense of dignity and self-respect? Is it the institutionalized charity system to support the poor? The desire and ability to find protection and support in a group or a collective (large family, clan, Sufi order, etc.)? Although, like any other religion, Islam preaches unattainable ideals; and they still exist, even if not in practice. Quoting certain passages from the Quran, as from the Gospel or the Bible, taken out of their context, can explain anything. But isn't the often hidden or overt anti-Islamic propaganda in the Russian media, which equates Islam with terror and backwardness, acting in the same vein?

Let's go back to the history again.

For many centuries, the Muslim world has lived adamantly convinced of its complete, undoubted and absolute superiority over the "infidel" Europe. After the divine mission of Muhammad, "the seal of prophets", Christianity seemed to Muslims to be a civilization of lost people, at best worthy of regret or guardianship. Up to the 16th century, trading or otherwise communicating with Europeans, Muslims got convinced that Europeans were not superior to them either in scientific and technical achievements, or in the level of development of crafts or agriculture. It is true, the Muslims knew defeats from the "infidels" during the Crusades in the 11th – 13th centuries, which ended in collapse for the conquerors, and lost, during the Reconquista, al-Andalus that again became Spain and Portugal. The victory of the Ottoman (Muslim) weapons over the "infidels" made it ridiculous for them to think that they could learn anything from a weaker opponent. All their own was perfect, wise, and virtuous; everything strange was miserable, ridiculous, disgusting, and sinful. The new Western civilization's powerful viable shoots, the beginning of the Renaissance and then the Reformation were not noticed in the East.

The Turks' military defeats in the 17th and 18th centuries at the hands of the Austrians and the Russians, the defeat of the Mughal Empire in India at the hands of the British, the invasion of Bonaparte's grenadiers in Egypt and the general

economic decline of the Muslim world forced Muslims to reflect on their social structure and the ways of developing their society.

The superiority of European scientific and technical thought was so obvious even 200 years ago that honest, thinking Muslims could draw only one conclusion: it was necessary to learn from Europe mathematics, physics, chemistry, engineering, medicine, industry, construction, in one word, the whole range of scientific and technical knowledge. Even many Ulemas-theologians recognized that.

But the question arose: what about social organization, political structure, law, ideology, a person's place and role in society, the status of women, literature, art, and customs? Do military and scientific-technological achievements exist by themselves and can they be taken in isolation without violating the purity of one's faith, the foundations of the Muslim civilization, or are they flesh of flesh, blood of blood of the Western civilization in the broadest sense? But in case of recognizing the West's superiority in social and spiritual life and beginning to imitate it, won't copying undermine the pillars of faith and the old social order? In the Muslim world, opinions on these issues have been divided for more than two hundred years. The dispute between supporters of "Westernization", Europeanization, modernization, and currently Americanization, globalization and the zealots of national, religious identity and the special "Islamic" path of development has not stopped even until today.

The advent of European colonialism on Muslim countries resulted in the complete or partial loss of their independence at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries. As a response to this historical challenge, three main trends emerged in Muslim society, which recognized the need for changes, for overcoming socio-economic backwardness, as well as restoring or maintaining national independence.

Modernists – the "extreme Westerners" – demanded the decisive transformation of the socio-political structure, economic, military and legal

systems, bringing them into line with Western European society. They called for abandoning the legacy of Islam, believing that it was the reason for their countries' backwardness, their military and economic fragility. They called on the population to become "Europeans" by joining the Western European civilization. The "extreme Westerners" called for taking the entire European civilization with its roses and thorns and, having shaken off the dust of centuries from their feet, having rejected the entire Islamic legacy as the obsolete past, following the path of complete and unconditional copying of the West in all spheres – from socio-political and legal ones to culture, literature, and art. A representative of this trend was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of republican Turkey. In other countries, there were his supporters too, but nowhere did their voice sound sufficiently weighty and authoritative.

Meanwhile, in Muslim countries, the calls of traditionalists, which in Anglo-Saxon literature and media in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century began to be called fundamentalists, in French – integrists, and now increasingly often – Islamists, were heard more and more powerfully and confidently. In Arabic literature, they are often referred to as Salafists. This trend consisted of moderate reformers who were joined by moderate Islamists. Their program was to take technical achievements of the Western, that is, capitalist, civilization, slightly reform Islamic institutions, agencies and traditions, and thereby open the way for progress without abandoning their legacy.

But for traditionalists, the Quran and the Sunnah are Alpha and Omega. In their opinion, the Muslim world fell into decline not because it was too late to enter the Western path of development, but because it forgot the "true faith", the doctrines of the Prophet and the righteous caliphs, fell into sins, and morally degraded. Returning the "Golden Age" should be caused not by monkey copying of the West, not by the attempts of getting modernized, but by the appeal to the primary sources, to true Islam, to the Quran and the "intact Sunnah". The revived faith, combined with Western technology, should restore the Islamic world's

military power, dignity, self-respect, and prosperity.

The extreme traditionalists, the Muslim Orthodox, rejected all spiritual and social values of the West, all achievements of the Western civilization, “agreeing” to accept only its technology and military organization. For them, the task was not reforming Islam, but returning to its “original purity”, restoring it to the way it existed for the first three centuries after its appearance (7th – 10th centuries A.D.). For example, in the 20s of the 20th century, due to one of the schools of this kind (Wahhabism), in the most backward region of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia arose.

Between the extreme trends – from unconditional acceptance of the Western civilization to its complete rejection, there were many schools of socio-political thought and practice, which were by no means separated by a blank wall. Some believed that, while preserving foundations of the faith intact, they must modernize it, adapt it to the demands of the era, consciously or unconsciously creating a socio-economic, political and ideological framework for possible capitalist development. Herewith, they used a well-known method of reinterpreting old provisions of the Quran and the Sunnah, proving that all the latest ideas had long ago been invented by the Muslims themselves.

The most significant figures of this school at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries were Jamal ed-Din al-Afghani, who influenced the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, Iran and Muslim India, and his Egyptian follower, the original religious thinker Mohammed Abdo. Al-Afghani was the father of pan-Islamism, the idea of uniting Muslim peoples under the all-Muslim government headed by the Ottoman Sultan Caliph. Al-Afghani supported borrowing from Europe not only scientific and technical, but also some secular knowledge and advocated early stages of the parliament and the constitution. The religious teacher defended the right of every Muslim to freely interpret the Quran.

But while his religious and social ideas were imbued with the reformation spirit, his political slogans proved suitable for the violent reaction, and the Ottoman

government began waving them like a banner, seeking to preserve or even expand the crumbling Ottoman Empire.

However, belonging to any of these three schools, borders between which are very arbitrary, did not determine an explicit political credo. Atatürk actually cleared the way for Turkey's development along the capitalist path. But in parallel, he acted as a major leader of the national liberation movement of his period and as a supporter of collaborating with the Soviet Union. In Egypt, in the 50s and 60s, the President Nasser chose socialism as a guideline, started fruitful collaboration with the USSR, and carried out significant transformations of the society, although he affected many traditional institutions to a much lesser extent than Atatürk did. In contrast to them, in Iran, Reza Shah, like his son Mohammad Reza, who both considered themselves modernists, pursued Europeanization with a single goal – strengthening their despotic power.

Changing ideologies accompanies only the greatest upheavals in the history of humanity and individual nations. Less significant social movements tend to use old, proven ideological clothes, reshaping them, adapting them to their needs, emphasizing some provisions and ignoring others. The ideology of Islam itself provides the rich ground for its use by various social movements. Its peculiarity was the fusion of the spiritual and secular principles with the theoretical priority of religious authority.

Islam, which since its onset has been, in particular, the ideology of a class society, has always had a strong egalitarian (equalizing) chord. Both in the Quran and in religious traditions, there are many calls for creating a more just society, mitigating exploitation and class oppression, and alleviating the position of the poor. It is the side of Islam that leftist Muslim organizations could and still do use.

Other reformers, who usually received a Western education and comprised the liberal trend, believed that, while preserving religion in the sphere of worship, morality, perhaps family law, it was necessary to follow the Western model in the socio-political field, meaning to make it the property of the upper classes, the elite,

and leave religion for keeping the tight rein on the masses.

The development of Muslim social thought took place in the countries that were by no means isolated from the outside world. The West is not a peaceful, benevolent neighbor behind the fence. It was not suitable for just watching, studying, calmly figuring out what was appropriate from its experience and what wasn't. The West unceremoniously broke into Muslim countries with its loans, goods, the system of economic capitulations, and direct military occupation in the 18th, 19th, and first half of the 20th centuries. The West appeared neither as a philanthropist, nor as an elder brother who extended its helping hand to the backward peoples for raising them to the level of its civilization, but as a cynical exploiter and robber ensuring progress only if it was beneficial to the metropolis, and hindering progress if it was disadvantageous to it.

Muslim liberals' sensitive illusions were shattered when confronted with the naked predation of the West. Therefore, since the 19th century to the present day, Muslims view the image of the West as contradictory and ambivalent: The West is both a seductive model and a hateful oppressor, exploiter, and aggressor. The bifurcation of assessing themselves and the outside world have resulted in the contradictory combination of the inferiority complex in relation to the West with the superiority complex of a Muslim over any Christian.

Bourgeois modernization was rejected by the absolute majority of Islamic countries' population, because it meant increased exploitation and outright robbery to be associated in the eyes of the masses with foreign domination. Westerners' cultural and political ideals remained alien and hostile to the masses and the anti-Western-minded part of the elite.

The capitalist development to take place in Muslim countries in the 20s – 40s of the 20th century was distorted, painful, ugly, and anti-national. This situation led in a number of these countries to anti-Western revolutions primarily based on the new ideology of nationalism. Meanwhile, it stimulated the powerful revival of religious and political movements.

In Muslim countries, the revolutionary part of the intelligentsia, the middle strata and the workers get acquainted with the socialist ideas of our era and adopted them, having transformed them in compliance with specific conditions. In a number of countries, Communist and revolutionary democratic parties have emerged. They advocated cooperation with Muslim organizations and with the masses of believers, based on demands for liberating workers from the exploiters' oppression, moving along the path of socio-economic progress, strengthening their independence and combating colonialism.

In different countries revolutionary-authoritarian experiments varied in their duration: for example, in Egypt they lasted a decade and a half, in Algeria – three decades, in Syria or Iraq – several decades. Many of the experiments had socialist overtones.

The very concept “nationalism” belongs to the Modern Times, and it has been imported into the Muslim world from Europe. It is a by-product of the French Revolution, although the word “nation” is much older.

The Muslims had neither one nor the other concept. The word “ummah”, which has become the Arabic equivalent of “nation”, bears the stamp of ambiguity. This word both before and now denotes a community of believers. The very word “nationalism” has been derived by the Arabs from the word “kaum”, which designates a group of tribes, a people and, at best, can be translated by the modern concept “ethnos”. In Arabic, the concept “asabiya” is the closest to “nationalism”. It was enshrined by Ibn Khaldun, the great Maghreb, the father of Arab political science and sociology, who lived in the 14th – 15th centuries. But now this word designates tribal solidarity, loyalty to the tribe, clan, extended family, their interests, customs, traditions, as well as the appropriate code of conduct.

The birthplace of Arab nationalism is Syria, Lebanon, and to some extent Iraq. In Egypt, during the first half of the 20th century, Egyptian rather than Arab nationalism prevailed, which was returned to at the time of Anwar Sadat.

In Turkey, the rise to power of Islamists in these days has clearly demonstrated how deep Muslim feelings are in this country divided into supporters of secular and religious society. Following the results of the political practice by the Justice and Development Party, moderate Turkish Islamists generally managed to combine their views with the country's course towards its modernization in the economy, domestic and foreign politics.

After World War II, the era of old colonialism and colonial empires was becoming a thing of the past. Billions of Asians and Africans have begun moving. In pain and agony, sometimes with blood and sacrifices, with successes and failures, the new world was born. Populist leaders hurled at the masses slogans for returning national and human dignity, political independence, economic development, and social and racial equality.

...Decades have passed. Political colonialism in its previous form has disappeared, but new chains of economic, technological, and informational dependence have bound the former third world. The greatest successes were achieved by only a few of those who followed the path of the market rather than the Soviet economic model. But there were almost no Muslim countries among those who had got a head start. For many, the dawn turned out to be false. The Soviet Union collapsed and disintegrated. Nevertheless, the dream of human and national dignity, a better future, and social justice remained, symbolized by the era of Nasser, Sukarno, Nkrumah, and Nyerere. Except for a small number of followers of these leaders, it has transformed into the intensification of Muslim political movements.

The events in Iran, the victory of the national Muslim revolution over the Shah and his American patrons, naturally could not but cause a response in the souls of followers of Islam in other countries, although further development of

events brought disappointment and even hatred for the situation created in Iran. Meanwhile, it should be borne in mind that the religious situation in Sunni countries does not coincide with the Iranian one, since the Shiite clergy there have historically opposed to the secular government, considering it illegal.

However, in Iranian, Turkish and Egyptian societies, there is a clearly expressed cultural dualism, or dualism of civilizations, which implies elements of instability. They are more obvious when traditional, or rather neo-traditional, and modern (or pseudo-modern) structures exist in society simultaneously, when a modern, market-focused and profit-making structure functions next to a large family, religious or rural community. The situation becomes unbearable when the latter exist at the expense of the former.

If the bearers of traditional culture, religious beliefs and values hate those who have stopped being themselves and are trying to get into Westerners' shoes, the masses, sharing these feelings, are more concerned about their daily bread. Many of them are alien and hostile to the market economy, the slogan "profit above all", and capitalist modernization (pseudo-modernization). Both the former and the latter turn to "the imperishable values of Islam" as a way of life, ideology, and the banner of political struggle.

The revival and influence of traditional, or rather neo-traditional, social structures and their ideologies are of very pragmatic importance for any politician. The broad masses, who had previously been somewhere outside the social struggle, began entering the political arena. They brought their own language, their own system of symbols, beliefs, prejudices, and their own political culture. Folk culture as a whole turned out to be more stable than modernists of a wide variety of colors and shades, from communists to pro-Western liberals, could have imagined. The idea of Islam as simply "the dead hand of the past" proved to be ideologically naive and politically short-sighted.

In the specific historical conditions of our era, the bourgeoisie of Muslim countries does not always strive for spreading secular ideology and secularization

of public life, as the Western European bourgeoisie did during its rise. Often the opposite is true. It sees Islam, especially in its provisions aimed at sanctifying the relations of exploitation and class society, as a barrier against the spread of leftist ideas.

The economic situation and social status of the broader strata of the population are often deteriorated due to developing capitalism, which takes an ugly, especially painful form in the young states. Western intervention and the introduction of capitalist relations also mean an attack on the workers' moral and ethical standards developed within the framework of their religious traditions. Under these conditions, people at large in many developing countries find in Islam a form of protest against the lifestyle imposed on them from the outside, with its worship to the golden calf, with further deepening the gap between wealth and poverty, establishing and strengthening the corrupt "elite", with its suppression of national culture, preaching violence and immorality. Religiously minded fighters against imperialism and neocolonialism inspire their followers with the ideas of diligence and abstinence, dressing them in the Muslim form and using just the egalitarian aspect of Islam.

The political coloring of modern Muslim movements is complex and subject to permanent changes, Muslim countries' social structures are amorphous, class boundaries are blurred, and society is of mixed nature. The peasantry, the city's petty bourgeoisie, and the semi-proletarian strata make up the majority of the population and serve as the social environment for strong religious feelings. The political regimes of the countries, in which their population professes Islam, are represented by a wide range – from revolutionary-authoritarian to feudal-theocratic. The green banner of Islam (green is the favorite color of Muhammad, the founder of Islam) can overshadow both fighters against the West and "local" feudalism, as well as conservatives, double-dyed reactionaries.

In Muslim countries, the leftists – communists, Nasserists, and "the new ones" – have found themselves to be relegated to the margins of the ideological and

political struggle. The circles of a few radical leftists have died out, and not even a handful of ashes remains. The “new leftists” has also become out of date in the West. The Soviet Union and its allies have disappeared, and there is no one left or right to avoid. There is no Maoism, while formerly revolutionary China stands as a block of pragmatism, the market, and cold-blooded economic premeditation, preserving its state-party structures and ideological slogans of “Sinicized socialism”.

But the main thing is something else: quarreling and reconciling, hating and loving each other, putting one another in prison or releasing them from prison, Marxists and liberals, nationalists and chauvinists, leftists and moderates gradually began realizing that they are, at least temporarily, in the same boat.

However, their feluccas – secular states – have already leaked and may be overturned by a wave of Islamism. The representatives of this new-old wave have everything different: the logic of their behavior, slogans, symbols, and the value system. In general, this is a different world. There is no room for secular figures of any coloring.

The phenomenon of re-Islamization has spread to all countries of traditional Islam, from Morocco to Pakistan and Indonesia, and to countries of new Islam, such as the northern part of Nigeria.

Their leaders, the rulers of their thoughts, are not illiterate people, but intellectuals or semi-intellectuals who have picked up knowledge or half-knowledge, deeply hurt by the humiliated position of their society, full of religious zeal, ready for political actions. They are willing to sacrifice themselves, but even more willing to sacrifice other persons. With the age-old Muslim belief in their own superiority over “infidels” and the desire to build a society in the image and likeness of the Golden Age of Islam, feelings of inferiority towards the West, envy of the Western way of life and its “consumption society” are intertwined in them even more acutely than before. They do not doubt about the answer to the old question that Islamic thinkers have been agonizing over since the 19th century:

what to take from the West – technical achievements or social structure, mores, culture, art? Only equipment, only military organization, only computers, information technology – anything else of Western origins is of no need. Their society – political and social organization, culture, morality, aesthetics, art, law – must be different.