

THE PROBLEM OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN ISLAM (CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS)

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The aim of the article is to identify the root causes of fundamentalism in Islam. The role of individual, Assassins in producing violence, jihad in Afghanistan and US support for the Mujahideen, despotism in the radicalization of Islamic society, and the connection between Wahhabism and the Islamic movements are analyzed. Also, in the article, the author comes up with a bunch of solutions that may help resolve the problem. The object of the article is the problem of fundamentalism in Islam. The practical significance lies in the fact that the content of the article can be used in teaching disciplines related to conflictology and international relations. It should be pointed out that this problem in question is of interest as one of the few studies on fundamentalism in Islam in Belarusian historiography. In addition, several sources in Arabic and English are included in bibliographic references.

Keywords: Islam; fundamentalism; Wahhabism; jihad; Assassins; despotism.

Islamic fundamentalism is an ideology that includes the teachings of Sharia (Religious Law) that Islamic fundamentalists seek to impose and apply literally without validating them and even understanding the correct context of the sources of Islamic law, i.e., the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the consensus of Muslim jurists. Islam from fundamentalists' perspective is the solution to all the problems of political, social, cultural and social life. However, not every Muslim is on board with this vision. The words of the Islamic preacher Sheikh Osama Ibrahim are quite telling. He emphasizes that the statement that the Quran is valid for any time and place is not entirely accurate, since the Holy Quran is valid only in certain conditions and times [1]. In this regard, it should be emphasized that the content of the Qur'an is multi-meaning. Based on this, the misinterpretation of certain verses of the Qur'an can lead the Muslim reader to fundamentalism.

Multiple causes have taken its toll on the emergence of fundamentalism. *The first one is the role of the individual.* There is a countless number of religious figures who played a considerable role in distorting the correct meaning of the Qur'an, such as Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780–855) and Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111), Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1791), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) and Muhammad Abdu (1849–1905), Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), Abul A'la Maududi (1903–1979), Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966). All of them made clear that every Muslim should completely revert to the text of the Qur'an, build the Islamic society in Medina – the first capital of the Islamic state – and follow “al-salaf al-salih” – the pious predecessors – that is, the first three generations of Muslims. The first generation of Muslims is considered to be the companions of Muhammad (Sahabah). The second generation of Muslims are called the Tabi'un (the successors of Sahabah). The third generation of Muslims are called The Tabi'al-Tabi'in, the successors of the Tabi'un. Also, all these

religious figures attached great importance to jihad. For example, Ahmad ibn Hanbal maintained: be aware of the fact that jihad contains the best of this world and the hereafter, so abandoning jihad means losing this world and the hereafter. And whoever has committed sins, jihad is the greatest atonement [2]. In this connection, it is relevant to note that the meaning of jihad in the Arabic language signifies diligence or making great effort, and a mujahid is a person who does his best.

Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 Iranian revolution, also had a great influence on fundamentalist movements. In his book “the Islamic Government”, he touches on the necessity of a political revolution to eliminate all kinds of injustice and deviations that led the Islamic nation to collapse and destruction. In this respect, he refers to the fact that Sharia and reason obligate us not to leave governments alone. The government’s continuation in making missteps destroys the Islamic system and its basic principles [3, p. 33].

It is worth mentioning that there is a plethora of individuals who have spearheaded efforts to radicalize the Islamic world, however, in author’s opinion, the Islamic figures mentioned above remain the most prominent ones who paved the way for the emergence of leaders of fundamentalist and jihadist Islamic movements in the Islamic world.

The second cause of the emergence of fundamentalism is attributed to the connection between Wahhabism and the Islamic organizations. Wahhabism is a Sunni Islamic movement that was founded in the Najd region in the center of the Arabian Peninsula at the hands of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792). Abd al-Wahhab allied with the House of Saud to spread the Salafist call, which led to the establishment of the first Saudi state. Al-Wahhab made the focal point of his reform movement the principle that every idea added to Islam after the third century of the Islamic era (around 950 CE) was wrong and should be eliminated. Muslims, to be true Muslims, must adhere only and strictly to the original beliefs set forth by the Prophet Muhammad.

With the purpose of challenging Ottoman hegemony over Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Britain sought to appeal to the traditional-minded masses and dictators rather than the enlightened Muslim elite. From the standpoint of R. Dreyfus, an American journalist, the creation of Saudi Arabia with the help of Great Britain served the activation of Islamic extremism by creating a base on which extremists could operate for decades [4, p. 57].

But, despite the seizure of power in Saudi Arabia by the House of Saud and the transformation of Wahhabism into the creed of the state, Wahhabism was still a religious movement rather than political. At that time, political Islam did not crystallize because there was no mass base that could confront the attractive anti-colonial ideologies such as communism and nationalism. However, in 1928, an Islamic movement, represented by the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, was founded in the city of Ismailia in Egypt, which focused mainly on the islamization of society and institutions in the face of waves of modernization of society [4, p. 59].

It is remarkable that the prestige of Arab regimes was tented after Arab losses in the 1948 and 1967 wars. The aftermath of that, the Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of it to portray itself as an alternative. They asserted that only by holding

tightly all together, by the rope that Allah extends to us, we could turn defeats into victories [5].

It goes without saying that Saudi Arabia, as the center of Islam and a counterweight to Gamal Abdel Nasser and Arab nationalism, played a prominent role in supporting the Islamic right forces throughout the Islamic world [4, p. 87]. With the increase in Saudi capabilities thanks to the oil revenues, Faisal bin Abdulaziz, King Saudi Arabia (1964–1975), saw “the Islamic call” as a way to combat pan-Arabism and Nasserism. From point of view of Faisal, Islam would be a successful means of countering Nasser.

In that spirit, the 1973 war between Arabs and Israelis was crucial to political Islam. With spike in oil prices, Saudi Arabia was able to pour money into Wahhabism and fundamentalist movements in the Islamic world and beyond.

Thus, in the 1970s, the Saudis used billions of dollars in oil revenues to establish dozens of Islamic banks and institutions in Islamic countries that allowed them to spread their Wahhabi beliefs.

The third cause of fundamentalism ascribes to jihad in Afghanistan and US involvement in the mobilization of Islamists. The war in Afghanistan was conducive to transforming the political Islam into a sword hanging over the necks of the Soviets. This was in line with National Security Adviser Brzezinski’s theory of “Arc of Crisis” stretching from northeast Africa to Central Asia, R. Dreyfus accentuates that the “Islamic Green Belt” theory is one of the brainchild of the American politician, Zbigniew Brzezinski. As per this theory, the emergence of Islamic regimes in the Middle East, backed by the United States and the Muslim masses, could create a real alternative to authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, on the one hand, and curb the left– movements that supported the Soviet Union, on the other [6].

In the same context, N. Chomsky notes that the Soviet invaders encountered a resistance that received massive support from the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia [7, p. 74].

US assistance went beyond financial aid. As of 1980, under the watch of Brzezinski, Afghan Mujahedeen were trained at various bases on the East Coast of the United States, where they received lessons on more than 60 secret methods of assassination including modern devices, timers and explosives, automatic weapons, remote control devices for detonating mines and bombs. The Mujahedeen were trained in the methods of strategic sabotage, destruction and arson as well [4, p. 308].

Furthermore, the USA allocated more than \$60 million in federal grants for study programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan during and after the Islamic Jihad in Afghanistan. These educational programs were full of Islamic propaganda, such as the printing of children’s books, in which Afghans were learning arithmetic by counting the numbers of dead Soviet soldiers and Kalashnikovs. This is consistent, as Dreyfus points out, with the hardline Islamic rhetoric [4, p. 362–363].

It should be stressed that Maktab al-Khidamat (Services Bureau), which was established by Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam in 1984, played a crucial role in raising funds and recruiting foreign mujahedeen for the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Subsequently, the Services Bureau became the core of al-Qaeda, which was founded in 1988 [4, p. 310].

With the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989, the jihad in Afghanistan came to end, but the legacy of that war, including well-trained terrorists, would continue to be a thorn in the side of Western countries and the Muslim states.

The fourth cause of fundamentalism can be to some extent related to the role of Assassins in producing violence. The Assassins were a revolutionary sect of Ismaili Islam that split from Shia. They were viewed by the Ismailis as an elite force in the war against the Imam's foes. The Assassins were so loyal and obedient to their leaders that they would do whatever work they were asked to do as soon as their leader commanded them to do so.

Bernard Lewis mentions: After the Turks managed to consolidate their power and replace the Arab and Persian aristocracy and nobility, and the return to the Salafi schools of thought, the need for a "new call" came from the leader of the Assassins, Hasan al-Sabah (1050–1124). It started in Iran in 1081 [8, p. 65]. Since then, al-Sabah began to dispatch missionaries to the Seljuk Empire (1037–1194). In 1092, the Assassins achieved their first major victory in the "art" of assassination, which manifested itself in the murder of one of the most famous Seljuk ministers, Nizam al-Mulk. With this action, Hasan al-Sabah gained fame and laid the foundations of the commando.

It is important to highlight that the Assassins called themselves "Fedayeen" – sacrificers. And it is the same name, which was used by the Palestinian fighters. For this reason, the actions of the Palestinian guerrillas were linked to the Ismaili phenomenon [9, p. 163]. B. Lewis underlines that the Ismailis were the first terrorists. In addition, it was the Assassins who were the first to use organized terrorism as a weapon [8, p. 191–192].

The fifth cause of fundamentalism is associated with despotism. Since the Islamic countries gained independence, they have been at the mercy of tyranny. As a result, the political and social environment in the Islamic world, which has long suffered from the concentration of power, the monopolization of decisions by one person, the restriction of people's freedom and the absence of any opportunity for peaceful transfer of power or political pluralism, has paved the ground for the emergence of religious extremism in the Islamic region. In this regard, Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of the Tunisian Ennahda movement, gave a speech in Berlin in December 2014 in which he underscored that whoever sows tyranny will reap ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) [10].

Also, some researchers, such as the Jordanian writer Muhammad Abu Rumman, believe that the violence emanating from these fundamentalist movements is due to the conditions of reality, and it is a direct or indirect result of the structural violence practiced by the Arab authorities and the political or economic marginalization of large segments of Arab societies [11].

Needless to say, that owing to constant fear of the repercussions of freedom, Islamic governments invoke security and stability considerations to use them as an excuse to hold up the process of political and economic reforms in their own countries. A good example of that is the Greater Middle East Project proposed by Washington at the G8 Summit in Virginia in 2004. It was presented as a vision for a better future for the region. However, a number of Islamic governments including Egypt, Sudan, Saudi

Arabia and Syria rejected it and articulated that they would not permit any country to interfere in the affairs of the region [12].

The difficult living reality of Muslims has been exploited by fundamentalist groups. Samuel Huntington has a point in describing how Islamic organizations had been functioning within certain Islamic states. As Egypt by the early 1990s Islamic organizations had developed an extensive network of organizations which, filling a vacuum left by the government, provided health, welfare, educational, and other services to a large number of Egypt's poor [13, p. 112].

Broadly speaking, it is an indisputable fact that despotism in the Islamic world is one of the main causes that have made Islamic countries politically paralyzed and socially and economically poor. As a result, the Islamic states have become reminiscent of the Thirty Years' War in Europe from 1618 to 1648, in which the struggle for power and religion overlapped.

Having said that, the question arises as to what needs to be done to eradicate this endemic fundamentalism. In fact, this problem in question requires multidirectional solutions, both at the external and internal levels. Thus, in order to address external factors, it is necessary to involve Islamic countries in the international decision-making process, especially when it comes to their own issues. More importantly, the West should get rid of its conscious and unconscious hatred of Islam resulting from the distorted image of Islam in some books or in the media.

Also, to wipe out fundamentalism, Western countries, at the helm of the United States of America, should stop the policy of double standards. The most prominent example of this is Palestine. Indeed, injustice and disregard for the rights of the Palestinians greatly fuel the hatred of Muslims towards the West. Therefore, the international community ought to find an acceptable solution and a peaceful settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions that provide for the creation of a state for the Palestinians and the right of Israel to exist in the region. Moreover, Western states should refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of Islamic countries and using their shortcomings to impose Western values and principles that are incompatible with Islamic values, otherwise that will lead to the weakening of national states and turning them into a breeding ground for extremist fundamentalists.

Moreover, superpowers must abandon the policy of military intervention under the pretext of the right of humanitarian intervention and the fight against terrorism, let alone the policy of ignoring the actions of tyrannical rulers when it is in the interest of the West. It is worth noting that the policy of non-interference in the affairs of the Islamic region should not be limited only to the great powers, but it should also be applied to the regional players, namely Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. They must pull their forces out of Islamic countries and not turn them into a battleground to achieve their goals by exploiting religious differences between Shiites and Sunnis.

As for how to deal with the internal causes of fundamentalism, that should be done primarily through devising modern constitutions for the benefit of the state and the people, and not for the ruler and his clientele. Secondly, Islamic governments should critically and constructively review the foundations of Islamic culture with a view to introducing new laws compatible with modernity and the spirit of the times.

This is delivered by verifying and scrutinizing all the inherited rules of Islamic law that are deemed out of place in our time and reinterpreting them in a clear and rational understanding of the historical context in which the verses were revealed or hadiths were written, especially those that call for violence or jihad. Thirdly, Muslim countries are in dire need of reconsidering their educational policies to get rid of materials that encourage extremism and fundamentalism, as well as contradict the foundations of modern-day values. Furthermore, Muslims should abandon the conspiracy theories in which Muslims attribute their backwardness and misfortunes to the West. Muslims must realize that the West is the complement to the East, not the opposite. Another important point that must be taken into consideration is the introduction of books of Muslim philosophers into the educational curricula that call for reconciling religion and philosophy, and the separation of religion from the state.

In conclusion, the author argues that the role of the clergy and their books, the spread of Wahhabi thought, the repercussions of Islamic mobilization against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan with the help of the United States and the internal factors in Islamic societies are the main causes of fundamentalism in Islam.

Regarding Assassins' role in producing violence, it should be mentioned that in the context of a struggle for power, the Assassins phenomenon contributed to the re-use of violence as a political weapon, and religion as a tool of incitement against the ruler. However, caution must be exercised in attributing the actions of current terrorists to the Assassins, because there is a deep difference between the ideology of the Ismailis and the ideology of today's extremists.

In terms of solutions to address fundamentalism, the author asserts that they are elusive because of the interference of super and regional powers in the internal affairs of the region, Western support for Israel and its non-compliance with international law that provide for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Arab territories, and because of the absence of real democracy in the Islamic region, as well as the rulers' attempts to cozy up with the clerics to legitimize their power or to use them against the opposition. Such policies put in danger national unity within Islamic societies by merging religion with politics, as happens in most Islamic countries.

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