



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "ARAB SPRING" AND RADICAL ISLAMISM

Xalqaro Islom Akademiyasi  
Xalqaro munosabatlar va jahon siyosati yo'nalishi

Minovvarova Malikaxon Ulug'bek qizi  
1-kurs magistranti

### Annotation

The article analyzes Islamism as a socio-political trend, considers its numerous social functions, wide public support, deep folk roots, explains the reasons for its diversity. It is shown that moderate Islamism, unlike radical Islamism, seeks to integrate into the legal political space, and therefore can be an ally in the fight against radical Islamism, as well as strong secular political regimes. The history of the emergence of Islamism is considered.

**Keywords:** "Arab spring", Islam, political reforms, Islamic law, Sharia, demonstrations, innovation, "fiqh of the revolution".

Since the end of 2010, many Arab countries have been experiencing an acute political crisis. The so-called Arab Spring was expressed in the change of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, in the unleashing of a civil war in Libya, which ended in the fall of the previous system of government. The rise of a mass movement against the official government in Yemen led to the resignation of the president and the election of a new head of state. The anti-government demonstrations that began in Syria in the spring of 2011 grew in 2012 into an open armed clash between the opposition and the ruling regime. If we add to this the serious unrest that required external intervention in Bahrain, the street demonstrations in Kuwait and even Saudi Arabia, the increase in political tension in Morocco, Algeria and Jordan, then the general characterization of what is happening as a revolution (at least in relation to some countries) doesn't seem like an exaggeration.

Given the special place of Islam in all political processes in the Arab world, it seems very relevant to assess the role that it played as a factor that prepared the "Arab Spring", as well as to trace the attitude of modern Islamic legal thought towards it. Arab and Western authors agree that the Islamic factor was not among the main reasons that provoked the political upheavals observed since the beginning of 2011 in many Arab countries. There can hardly be any doubt that the main challenge for the





authorities here was not radical Islamic political movements and organizations, but unresolved political and socio-economic problems accumulated over decades. The mass movements against the regimes that had lasted for decades did not unfold under religious slogans. Their main demand was to carry out profound social changes. Limited political reforms, which since 2004–2005 carried out in a number of Arab countries, as a whole, were insufficient to prevent crisis phenomena. Probably, these measures, to a certain extent, helped to survive the monarchical regimes of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, where the authorities regularly resort to Islamic justification for extremely cautious political shifts that do not change the foundations of the existing order.

At the same time, superficial reforms failed to save the tenth regime . Mubarak in Egypt from the fall, and Abdullah Saleh in Yemen - from forced resignation. True, in contrast to the aforementioned monarchies, here political Islam was not a direct ally of official power. Rather, on the contrary, it was almost exclusively used by the opposition represented by radical Islamic forces. However, in these two countries, as well as in Libya and Syria, where the crisis took on the most acute forms, the Islamic factor opposing the authorities did not make a decisive contribution to the preparation of the political upheavals of 2011–2012.

At the same time, it would be wrong not to notice at all that Islam in one form or another nevertheless influenced the maturation of the crisis, which led, for example, to a change of power in Tunisia and Egypt. In particular, in the years preceding the fall, the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia pursued a policy of establishing strict control over Islam, narrowing the limits of its influence on the country's public life to the maximum. Local conflicts have repeatedly arisen here, caused by the restriction of the rights of Muslim women (in particular, the possibility of getting a job because they wear a hijab ). In addition, the authorities directly interfered in the private religious life. For example, she actually forced Muslims to pray in certain mosques loyal to her, thereby encroaching on the religious freedom of her own citizens.

Tunisia went further and further along the path of secularization, turning, in fact, into a secular state, which, moreover, sought to completely subordinate Islam to its interests. Such a line, of course, caused dissatisfaction not only with Islamic organizations, but also with wide sections of ordinary citizens, which aggravated tension in the country. It is no coincidence that, long before the crisis, social movements, associations, and clubs, albeit not very influential ones, arose here that raised the question of democratic reform of the country. It is interesting that individual Islamic organizations took part in their activities, for example, the



Movement of Islamic Rise ( Harakat al -Nahda al - Islamiya ), which, after the change of power, became the leading political force in Tunisia.

In Egypt under X Mubarak also accumulated many hotbeds of tension associated with Islam. The central problem was the participation of Islamic organizations in the political life of Egypt, their conflict relations with the regime. Moreover, both sides contributed to the aggravation of this confrontation.

So, for a long time (especially in the last three decades), Islamic radical forces have emphasized that the Egyptian authorities fell into disbelief, betrayed Islam, and therefore violent methods of combating it are not only the only possible ones, but are also directly dictated by Sharia. This position was clearly manifested in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat , as well as in terrorist attacks that targeted foreign tourists, which, obviously, should have set the international community against the Egyptian regime.

However, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the deployment of the anti-Islamic campaign in the West, the Islamic radical opposition in Egypt completely lost faith in the practical feasibility of American plans for democratic reform of the Middle East, the possibility of a change of power with the help of external forces, and did not see any other way to overthrow the regime, except for armed uprisings and terror. True, this did not apply to the entire spectrum of Islamic organizations. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood by this time had made significant adjustments to the methods of political struggle they used and acquired the character of a fairly moderate, although not officially recognized, organization that sought, sometimes not unsuccessfully, under the guise of legal parties to practice parliamentary forms of pressure on the government. However, such changes did not fundamentally affect the overall picture, which boiled down to a tough confrontation between the regime and the Islamic opposition, which finally tied the power of President X Mubarak with the West, considering them their common enemy.

In turn, the Egyptian regime did everything to exclude Islamic forces from the legal political process, to deprive them of the opportunity to openly take part in elections independently under their own name. This applied to almost all opposition Islamic forces, from the Muslim Brotherhood to jihadist and Salafi groups. At the same time, the Egyptian authorities deliberately or unwittingly increased the degree of tension by frightening the citizens of their country and, mainly, the West with the threat of Islamic radical forces coming to power in the event of qualitative changes in the political system. As a result, with reference to this rather controversial argument, democratic reforms were postponed for an indefinite period. It turns out that in this



respect, too, the Islamic factor, albeit indirectly, contributed to the maturation of the crisis that ended the regime.

In addition, some other problems turned out to be connected with Islam, which were ignored by the authorities and caused public discontent in Egypt. So, for a long time, many mosques in the country remained closed due to lack of funds for their repair. At the same time, the authorities set rather strict conditions for the construction of new mosques. Undoubtedly, this situation also contributed to the strengthening of internal contradictions in the country, setting many against the regime.

His ambiguous line regarding the inclusion of Islam in public policy was clearly manifested in legislative activity at the constitutional level. Let us note in this connection that in May 1980 Art. 2 of the Egyptian Constitution was amended, according to which the principles of Shariah were declared not just the main, but the leading, main source of legislation. According to the interpretation of the Supreme Constitutional Court of the country, this requirement of the constitution refers to future laws and is addressed to the legislator, who was obliged to bring into line with the Sharia the previously adopted acts that contradict its prescriptions<sup>3</sup>. However, many laws that are in direct conflict with Sharia are still in force in Egypt. The only step that the government formally decided to take on the path to implementing this constitutional provision was the adoption at the beginning of the third millennium of a new commercial code to replace the previous one that had been in force since 1883. Such a dual legal policy, formally proclaiming the supremacy of Sharia, but in fact ignoring the priority of Islamic prescriptions, strengthened the perception of Egypt as an essentially secular state in which Islam was assigned the role of a purely religious phenomenon. The authorities practically did not want and could not make Islam their political ally. Even such authoritative Islamic centers and state institutions as Al-Azhar, as well as the Office of Fatwas (Dar al- Ifta), headed by the Mufti of the country, were placed in a narrow framework that did not allow them to actively engage in political issues. The regime itself, when making limited changes to the political system, did not pay serious attention to their Islamic political and legal justification. Under these conditions, the Sharia argument has become almost a monopoly political tool of Islamic radical forces. And the government, in addition to the pile of socio-economic problems that have fallen on it, has found itself in the face of another challenge in the person of the Islamic opposition, which has included relevant Islamic political and legal arguments in its ideological arsenal. Thus, the Islamists, who adopted the concept of "takfir", openly accused the authorities in almost all Arab countries of disbelief. Following this logic, some Muslim jurists and political scientists, already after the fall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, at the height of







the riots in Yemen and Libya, focused on the fact that it was the secular regimes that could not cope with the accumulated hardships. In the opinion of a considerable number of Muslim thinkers, the rulers of a number of Arab countries actually ignored Sharia and, as a result, lost the trust of citizens. Therefore, they had to leave.

However, all the noted circumstances related to Islam did not have a decisive impact on the political explosion latently brewing in Egypt. It turned out that mass dissatisfaction with the order in the country and the determination of broad sections of citizens to overthrow the regime went far beyond the claims of Islamic forces and the expectations of global political players. These popular uprisings rendered irrelevant not only the American plans for the democratization of the region (which, by the way, albeit belatedly, allowed the inclusion of Islamic forces in the legal political process), but also the political program of the Islamists, aimed at forceful regime change. In addition, the noticeable discrediting of such a one-sided project, which put the overthrow of the existing government at the forefront, was largely due to the fact that instead of the orders they rejected, Islamic political movements and organizations did not offer any detailed and positive plan for democratic reforms, limiting themselves to general slogans like "Islam and there is a solution".

At the same time, it was clear that Islamic factors would not remain in the background for long. Especially when you consider that scientists from Al- Azhar and many well-known Muslim figures took a personal part in mass demonstrations. Perhaps the most striking example of the direct inclusion of Islam in these events was the appearance on at-Tahrir Square in Cairo of the largest Muslim preacher, Yusuf al- Qaradawi . At the peak of the anti-government protests, he took the side of the demonstrators and delivered several sermons, putting forward the Sharia rationale for regime change. Admittedly, such a move to a large extent predetermined the victory of the protesters and the resignation of President Mubarak .

Immediately after this, fears began to sound in Egypt that it was the Brotherhood and other Islamic forces that could become the first to win at the stage of the formation of new authorities. Compared to many of their competitors, they looked much more organized and mobilized, accumulated a solid experience in political struggle and had a real opportunity to fairly easily enter power legally. Such predictions were fully justified.

It is striking that, having become political leaders with real powers of authority, the Islamic forces did not discard the Islamic slogans they had previously defended, did not stop turning to Islamic legal arguments to substantiate their political course. On the contrary, the role of Islamic ideology in political competition has even increased. A variety of forces are actively resorting to its conclusions and assessments as their



ideological allies. Moreover, many of the most heated debates about the political future are turning, in fact, into discussions around Islamic political and legal principles, concepts and institutions. It turns out that the differences in views on this future are largely determined by how certain forces see the role of Islam and Sharia in the political and legal life of their country and the entire Arab world.

It should be noted that, in general, several main currents of modern Islamic political and legal thought can be distinguished on the issue of political reform in the Arab countries. They quite noticeably differ from each other in their strategic orientation, attitude to power and, consequently, the choice of Sharia argumentation for their conclusions and assessments.

One of these currents is conservative and focuses on the prevention of radical political changes. This line manifests itself most noticeably, for example, in the countries of the Persian Gulf, where the authorities, although they encounter opposition actions, generally keep the political situation under control. Here, the indicated direction of Islamic doctrine is an extremely weighty ally of the regime.

Another line of the current Islamic ideology is a direct opponent of the noted movement, since it is represented by the views of Islamic radicals. They often form the core of a non-systemic opposition that opposes the existing government of any kind, including conservative regimes.

Another Islamic ideological movement on the problems of politics and law also has an oppositional character in relation to the legal authorities. It focuses on sharp criticism of the existing order in some countries, substantiating with Sharia arguments the admissibility and even the necessity of speaking out against the regime. For example, this direction of Islamic thought played a significant role in the change of power in Egypt and Yemen, and in encouraging the opposition to act in Syria. It does not directly identify with Islamic radicals, although it can find a common language with them on certain issues.

Sometimes this opposition movement enters into a dialogue and even uses the arguments characteristic of moderate, “middle” Islam, which has become in recent years a fairly noticeable independent movement of modern Islamic political and legal thought. Its distinguishing feature is not an obedient adherence to specific private prescriptions of medieval Islamic doctrine, but an orientation towards the initial principles, general principles and values of Sharia as priority criteria for finding answers to the problems of the modern world on the basis of dialogue, tolerance, interaction of cultures and civilizations.

It is important to keep in mind that if the first two of the above-mentioned trends of Islamic thought take a very definite position on the side of the authorities or against





it, then the other two currents do not differ in such an obvious orientation. Although in the conditions of specific countries their tendency to support the regime or, conversely, strongly condemn it, can be traced quite clearly.

In any case, the positions of these currents of Islamic ideology on specific issues in terms of content differ from each other, primarily by Sharia criteria that underlie the general direction of each of them. At the same time, the choice of such fundamental methodological guidelines is largely due to the nature of the relationship of individual Muslim figures or centers of Islamic legal thought with the authorities. Such political dependence is striking when official Islamic structures representing the state or Muslim jurists loyal to it express their opinion about this phenomenon. It is clear that their opinion fundamentally diverges from the conclusions reached by the Muslim ideologists of the opposition, who support speeches against the regime or simply criticize it. At the same time, each noted direction of modern Islamic political and legal thought, in its conclusions on individual specific issues, proceeds from its own general assessment of the political situation in a particular country.

Closely interconnected conceptual, theoretical and political guidelines are clearly visible in the approach of modern Islamic legal thought to the problems that are at the center of the political events of the "Arab spring" and the ideological disputes around them using Islamic legal argumentation. There are many such questions, but the central place among them is perhaps occupied by two - the Sharia view of the demonstrations and the Islamic assessment of the possibility of speaking out against the government in general.

The politicization of Islam in the form of Islamism is the result of the following reasons. The events of the "Arab spring" have again shown that the region does not have a proper security system. Mass protests and new civil wars have only exacerbated the humanitarian situation and exacerbated traditional problems that already existed (interstate and interfaith conflicts, dwindling resources and growth-restricting uncontrolled births, high levels of impoverishment and unemployment, water and food shortages). The marginalization of the Muslim population in most countries was accompanied by growing dissatisfaction with the corrupt authorities and state officials, which, of course, contributed to the spread of the ideas of radical Islam, especially among young people.

Another reason was that the once popular idea of Arab unity is now in crisis. The Palestinian problem, which united the Arabs several decades ago, has clearly lost its former relevance against the backdrop of ongoing events. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Middle East settlement in the system of the most significant regional problems were relegated to the background. The crisis of "secular ideologies" (first of





all, Western liberalism and communism), which prompted the broad Muslim masses to turn to purely religious values that are closer to them in spirit and mentality, to a large extent contributed to the flourishing of radical Islam in our days. As a result, Islamist parties, movements and organizations gradually began to crystallize in the Muslim world, many of which declared their goal to overthrow secularist regimes and strengthen the position of Islam in the power-political structures. It is noteworthy that in the program documents of various Islamist organizations, supporters of non-Islamic movements are equated with apostates. Thus, in particular, the program of the Iraqi branch of Al-Qaeda notes the following: “We believe that secularism under any of its banners and in all the diversity of its schools, such as nationalism, patriotism, communism and Baathism , is an open disbelief, contrary to Islam and excommunicating her from religion ... The disbelief of apostasy, according to the opinion, is heavier than the disbelief of the original. Therefore, we consider the battle with the apostates to be more important than the battle with the bearer of the original unbelief.”

In our days, new negative phenomena have been added. First of all, these are the global financial and food crises, global warming, which has led to a reduction in the area of fertile lands and a deterioration in the quality of food. The political leaders who replace the overthrown elites face an extremely difficult task: to pacify a rebellious society by solving urgent social problems. At the same time, they are aware that in the current conditions, food supply and labor markets are not conducive to optimism. Aid from the West and international humanitarian organizations will be reduced, and modern agricultural technology will continue to be difficult to access or not available at all. WTO protectionist measures will weaken, and competition with neighboring countries will gain momentum. The negative economic situation and the growth of financial and economic dependence on the West give an additional impetus to the development and popularization of a radical Islamic alternative with its simple appeals to building a state based on Sharia law or a prosperous caliphate, which is supposedly capable of eradicating corruption and social inequality, resisting and successfully coping with all external challenges and threats.

Strengthening the position of fundamentalist Communities both in the Muslim environment and in non-Muslim countries have largely contributed to the widespread use of new information technologies and the expansion of international transport infrastructure. Islamists widely use the possibilities of modern telecommunications and the Internet, including social networks , to conduct information and propaganda work, recruit and train new like-minded people, including potential terrorists.







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