
ISLAM IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

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RELIGIOUS FACTOR AND MOSLEM PILGRIMAGE IN
RUSSIAN-SAUDI RELATIONS

*Keywords: Saudi Arabia; Russia;
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Abstract. In the 21st century, the religious factor began to play an increasingly significant role in world politics. This can be seen both in global and regional processes, and at the level of individual countries. The relations between Russia and Saudi Arabia are a confirmation of

this thesis. Despite certain differences on a number of issues, Moscow and Riyadh have maintained close contacts since the early 1990s. The religious factor played an important role in the development of Russian-Saudi relations. After the collapse of the USSR, the Moslem peoples of Russia and the post-Soviet East were given the opportunity to make pilgrimages to the holy places of Islam in Saudi Arabia, which was directly reflected in the state policy of both countries.

At the present stage, Saudi Arabia is among the “heavyweights” of the Middle East and is one of the contenders for regional leadership. At the same time, the kingdom, on the territory of which Mecca and Medina, sacred to Islam, are located, positions itself as the natural center of the “Moslem world”. With an emphasis on economic potential, Riyadh develops its foreign policy, according to these logics, through two vectors: *regional* (striving for the status of the leading state of the Arab East and the hegemon in the Persian Gulf zone) and *general Moslem* (strengthening the image of the “homeland of Islam” and the main defender of Islamic values in the world)¹. In the second direction, special attention is paid to countries where the vast majority or a significant part of the population is represented by Moslem peoples. Russia is among such countries too: according to official data, more than 6 percent of citizens in 2022 consider themselves followers of the Moslem faith², and at the end of 2019 more than 19 percent of registered religious organizations in the Russian Federation belong to Islamic confessions³). And although today Russian-Saudi relations are actively developing in many areas, the religious factor plays a special role in them.

Relations between the Russian Federation and Saudi Arabia, by historical standards, have a short, but very interesting and complicated history. Formally, they began in 1926, when Soviet Russia was the first in the world to recognize the independence of the kingdom of the Al Saud dynasty, which fought for the unification of Arabia. In fact, bilateral relations between Moscow and Riyadh were actively developed after 1991,

since in the period from 1938 to 1990 the USSR and the KSA did not maintain direct and permanent diplomatic contacts. The formation of political interaction took place in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, which were marked by a series of "crises" against the background of conflicts in the North Caucasus and the Balkans. After the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia, the Gulf monarchies were able to interact directly with the Moslem communities of certain regions of the Russian Federation and the new independent republics. Naturally, this interaction took place not only at the official level, along with the construction of mosques and spiritual centers with Saudi money, the penetration of various Islamist structures adhering to extremist ideology began.

Not only the Caucasus, but also the Moslem communities of the Turkic peoples of Russia fell under the blow of those who were dubbed "fundamentalists" courtesy of journalists, as a result of which an increase in anti-Moslem sentiments began to be observed in the country. In his monograph, R.G. Landa states that in 1992-1993, 60 percent of respondents in Moscow considered Islam a greater threat than the expansion of the West⁵. With the beginning of the First Chechen campaign of 1994-1996, the first difficulties began in Russian-Saudi relations due to the opposite positions on the situation. Riyadh was accused of spreading "Wahhabi" ideology and sponsoring separatists in the North Caucasus, which was especially aggravated against the background of the KSA's concern about the "fate of Kosovo Albanian Moslems" during the Yugoslav wars⁶.

Isolated cases of the kingdom's subjects participating in hostilities on the side of extremists and separatists certainly took place. However, by and large, anti-Saudi alarmism was superficial and one-sided. This is evidenced, at least, by the fact that the activities of the Islamist movement of Fethullah Gulen, which had truly impressive scales in the post-Soviet space during the 1990s-2000s, remained practically ignored⁷. Moreover, the influence on the Moslem republics of the Post-Soviet East was

exerted through the official state structures of Turkey. The Department of Religious Affairs “Diyanet”, whose activities are regulated by Article 136 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey⁸, has also actively promoted the popularization of Islam among the Turkic peoples of Russia and Central Asia since the collapse of the USSR.

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For historical reasons, the political course, image and very essence of Saudi Arabia are inextricably linked with Islam, because its very statehood arose thanks to the alliance of the Al Saud clan with the theologian Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (the founder of the Hanbali-Salafi (Wahhabi) trend), which was concluded in 1744/45⁹ after the proclamation of a single kingdom in 1932. Saudis and the family of descendants of M. ibn Abd al-Wahhab created a kind of ruling “tandem”, where political power belongs to the first, and the leading role in religious and theological affairs belongs to the second¹⁰. Islam has had and is having a direct impact on the political course of Saudi Arabia, but it can be accused of sponsoring international terrorism at the state level only for indirect and rather dubious reasons. After the terrorist attack with the seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca in 1979 by a group of radical Salafists, the Saudi leadership began the fight against extremism and proclaimed the course of “moderation”. In the second half of the 1990s there was a split of the main opposition faction of Islamists as-Sahwa al-Islamiyya (“Islamic Awakening”), as a result of which one of the three factions took a Salafist-jihadist position¹¹. However, despite the fight against terrorism inside the country, Riyadh maintained contact with some dubious movements in neighboring regions.

The catalyst for bringing the external course into line with the internal was the tragic events of September 11, 2001. After the publication of the data of the American intelligence services that

out of 19 terrorists who hijacked planes, 15 were subjects of the kingdom¹², the Saudi establishment focused on protecting the reputation of the “Wahhabi kingdom”, and it was for this reason that the KSA initiated an emergency session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)¹³ at the level of foreign ministers on terrorism, which was held in the capital Malaysia Kuala Lumpur April 1–3, 2002¹⁴. In addition to the obvious reasons, the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on International Terrorism, which proclaimed the principle of “Islamic solidarity”¹⁵, was necessary for Saudi Arabia to maintain normal ties within the “Moslem world”, to which the kingdom is directly responsible for the possibility of performing pilgrimage – one of the key cult practices that are among the so-called “pillars of Islam” (Arabic. (مأسالانكرا).

Hajj and umrah (small pilgrimage) are of particular importance not only for the Islamic faith, but also for the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. The organization of pilgrimage plays an important role both in the economy and in the “soft power” of the kingdom. **On the one hand, the annual influx of pilgrims provides an influx of finances.** In 2017, *umrah* alone brought more than \$4 billion to the KSA budget, and *hajj* – about \$8 billion, which, according to some experts and analysts, makes this industry the second largest source of income after the export of hydrocarbons¹⁶. **On the other hand, the “hajj industry” involves building a complex logistics system covering all parts of the “Moslem world”.** Visas for *hajj* and *umrah* are issued by the consulates of Saudi Arabia, and an application for its receipt is submitted through travel agencies licensed by the relevant Ministry of the KSA¹⁷. Thus, Riyadh in interstate relations, in addition to interaction at the level of official departments, has extensive ties in the field of public diplomacy, which are based on religious issues.

Despite the significant liberalization of visa policy within the framework of the Vision 2030 program, visas for pilgrims remain a special category. Based on a number of OIC agreements,

Saudi Arabia sets quotas for visits to Mecca and Medina for each year, assuming one thousand pilgrims per one million of the entire Moslem population of the country, but due to statistical errors and other factors, the Saudi leadership approaches this issue quite flexibly. The Russian Federation, being an observer country of the OIC since 2005, also has its own quota for *hajj* and *umrah*, it is determined through the Hajj Mission of Russia through the embassies and the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah of the KSA. Officially, there are eight licensed operators in the Russian Federation engaged in the organization of pilgrimage¹⁸: AVN TOUR, BULGAR TOUR, DUM RT HAJJ, Marva Tour, Moslem Tour, Safa Tour, Umma Travel and TF KAVKAZ. The official quota for Russian Moslems is twenty and a half thousand people per year, but, as a rule, this number, in agreement with the OIC, changes upwards. For example, before the introduction of coronavirus restrictions in 2019, twenty five thousand believers went on pilgrimage from Russia¹⁹.

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It cannot be said that Russian-Saudi relations are developing exclusively in a positive way. Crises similar to those that arose during the 1990s – 2000s periodically arise at the present stage. Discrepancies between Moscow and Riyadh were observed against the background of the “Arab Spring” of the 2010s, the Syrian conflict in 2015 and the “price wars” for oil quotes on the world market in 2020. However, each such episode was necessarily followed by a process of “détente”, which would have been impossible without maintaining a constant dialogue.

Regardless of the state of bilateral relations between the Russian Federation and Saudi Arabia, issues related to the organization of the pilgrimage of Russian Moslems to Mecca and Medina remained a constant of direct contacts. At the same time, *hajj* is an important element in building Russia’s relations not only with the Saudi Kingdom, but also with the “Moslem world”.

Intercivilizational dialogue is necessary both for the prevention of confessional and ethnic conflicts within the country, and for building a deeper, culturally specific policy of Moscow in the Post-Soviet East, where, since the 1990s, the Islamic factor has been playing an increasingly important role every year.

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KANYBEK KUDAYAROV. INTRODUCTION TO TURKEY'S DEFENSE POLICY. *Analytical Review*.

Keywords: Turkey; defense policy; defense industry; armament; military conflict; security.

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Abstract. The review analyzes the publications of nine Turkish specialists who give an idea of the modern defense policy of Turkey, the main stages of its development and implementation. The authors provide comprehensive theoretical and practical information for a better understanding of the processes taking place in the military sphere.