
THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

IGOR DOBAEV. ISLAM AND ISLAMISM: GENERAL AND
SPECIAL. APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING THE TERM
"ISLAMISM"

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Abstract. The article describes the process of emergence and
development of the world, monotheistic religion of Islam, the emergence
of directions in it (Sunnism, Shiism, Kharijism), schools of Moslem law
(in Sunni Islam: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali), ideological currents
(traditionalism, modernism, Salafism), numerous Sufi tarikats, as well
as the so-called "Political Islam". In other words, modern Islam is

complex in its structure, one might say, kaleidoscopic. In the context of "political Islam", Islamism has developed, which today is considered by Islamic scholars in two versions: moderate and radical Islamism. Within the framework of the latter, religious and political extremism and terrorism are distinguished under the guise of Moslem dogma. In this regard, it is relevant to study the nature and evolution of Islamism.

Islam, as a major social institution and at the same time a process, is a complex and contradictory phenomenon, including a number of directions, interpretations, currents, as well as sects. However, despite the modern mosaic nature of Islam, there is a deep conviction among Moslems that they belong to a single community of people professing a common faith, united by common traditions, historical roots and unity of interests in the modern world – to the Islamic ummah of the world. Islam, in the eyes of its adherents, is not only a faith, but also a way of life, household rules and customs, a mentality determined by Sharia. Islam, to a greater extent than other world religions, is included in the system of social and political regulation. Almost all aspects of a Moslem's life are declared to be religiously significant, since the Koranic worldview does not know the opposition of the sacred and the profane, religion and politics, sexuality and piety. All the fullness of life is potentially holy. The goal is tawhid (affirmation of unity), the integration of all life in a single community, which gives a Moslem a sense of closeness to the highest unity – God. After all, as the Quran testifies, a properly organized society should flourish, because it exactly corresponds to the divine institutions. Thus, prerequisites are being created for the comprehensive politicization of Islam, as a result of which calls are made for the political consolidation of Moslems, for the transformation of the religious community of all Moslems into a political unity of one or another level of institutionalization.¹

The politicization and radicalization of Islam is historically conditioned. After the implementation in 622 of the hijra (migration) of the Moslem ummah, headed by the prophet

Muhammad, from pagan Mecca to the oasis of Yathrib (present-day Medina), an Islamic proto-state is gradually being created, life in which becomes impossible without the formation of appropriate social and legal norms. This is how the Charter of the Ummah appeared, now known as the "Medin Constitution", which, apparently, became the first document regulating socio-political, legal and religious relations among the inhabitants of Yathrib.

In the Medina period, characterized by the need to manage the expanding community of Moslems, confront the Jewish tribes who did not want to convert to Islam, and wage war, primarily with the Meccan polytheists (pagans), the prophet receives the appropriate divine revelations regarding the constantly expanding aspects of the life of the Moslem ummah. Later, during the codification of the Quran during the reign of the third "righteous" caliph Osman (Uthman, reigned 644-656), they were reflected in the holy book of Moslems. It should be emphasized that there is a distinction between ahyas (verses, revelations) of the Quran received by the Prophet in the Mecca period (610-622) and the Medina period (622-632). If Islam was developing as a religion in Mecca, and the Quranic ahyas contained mainly ideological value guidelines for the then small cohort of Moslems, then in Medina the content of the Quranic text is already being filled with socio-legal and even political pragmatics. In the same period, there appear and develop, theoretically and practically, two fundamental constructs which currently form the basis of all the ideological doctrines of radical Islamists. We are talking about "takfir" (accusation of disbelief) and "jihad" (holy war for faith)².

The connection between Islam and politics is clearly traced after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (632). It was then that a clearly political question arose before the community of the faithful, namely: who and on what basis should replace the prophet, that is, become the caliph, the ruler of the faithful ("*amer al-muminin*")? On this occasion, the first split occurred in

the Moslem Ummah, initially two directions appeared in it, the adherents of which began to be called "Sunnis" and "Shiites". The first advocated the election of a caliph from among the most authoritative Moslems, representatives of the Arab tribe of the Quraysh; the latter insisted that only his blood relative, a descendant of the Hashim clan, which was part of the same tribe of the Quraysh, could be the successor of the prophet. The first approach was preferred, and as a result, the first split in the Moslem ummah, previously united during the lifetime of the prophet, into Sunnis (adherents of the principle of election) and Shiites (supporters of inheritance by blood) became inevitable. The split was aggravated by the confrontation between the leading Quraish clans, which led to the emergence of a third direction in Islam - Kharijism, and the death of the fourth and last elected (righteous) caliph Ali (r. 656-661) at the hands of the Kharijite as a result of which "usurpers" came to power in the Caliphate - representatives of the Umayyad clan (661-750). Subsequently, within each of the directions, various groups, sects and subjects emerged, some of which differed in very radical political views and actions. The most radical was the Kharijite movement, which for this reason faced social exclusion, and at present only in Oman and Yemen there is a small community of Ibadis, which can be classified with a high degree of conventionality as moderate Kharijites. In this regard, when speaking about trends in modern Islam, they most often mean Sunnism, which is followed by the majority (up to 90 per cent) of all Moslems, and Shiism, the number of supporters of which is close to 10 per cent of the Moslem Ummah of the world.

The period of religious activity of the Prophet Muhammad (610-632) and the first four "righteous" caliphs: Abu Bakr (632-634), Omar (634-644), Osman (644-656) and Ali (656-661), that is, the time period from 610 to 661, received a cliché in Islamic studies literature - "the golden age of Islam"³.

However, the fragmentation of the general Islamic field after the separation of independent trends in Islam is not

completed. Between the 7th and 9th centuries a split of all three Moslem directions into brands, or madhhabs (Moslem legal schools), the number of which varied at different times, is recorded. However, at present, in the prevailing direction – Sunni Islam – there are four madhhabs that are considered equivalent: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali. The first two schools of thought are considered "soft", adaptive to changing conditions and pre-Islamic customary law, the last two are "hard", especially the Hanbali madhhab, which, unlike other legal schools of Sunnism, was nurtured from a religious and political movement headed by a famous medieval Moslem scholar-jurist Ibn Hanbal (780–855).

A significant role in this evolutionary process of the development of Islam was played by private individuals – theologians (ulema) and especially jurists (faqih), specialists in the field of Islamic law, who, in response to the objective and subjective needs of the rulers, developed a system of Islamic law (fiqh), as well as Sharia, which accumulates religious, moral, aesthetic and some legal prescriptions, practically covering all spheres of life of believers. The basis of legal developments in Islamic madhhabs is the procedure of "reasonable inference", or the derivation (istinbat) of general norms, rules, regulations and judgments on certain issues, which is called "ijtihad". In other words, ijtihad is the activity of Moslem scholars (mujtahids) in resolving issues of religious and social life on the basis of the Quran and Sunnah. The main methods of ijtihad are the following: "consensus" (ijma), "analogy" (qiyas), "expert opinion of a single jurist" (rai), "common good" (istislah) and "relatively greater good" (istihsan). However, as far back as in the 11th century, after the aforementioned schools of Islamic law had developed in Sunni Islam, it began to be considered that new madhhabs could not be created. Moreover, it is impossible to add something new to the existing brands, the "gates" of independent judgment, "ijtihad", have closed. The biggest sin for the faithful is "*bida*" (unlawful innovations), which, according to Islamic orthodoxy,

can disintegrate the Moslem ummah, disrupt its peace and smooth flow of life. With the possibility of this kind of disintegration, Islam finds salvation in the struggle against innovations, which the Islamic state and the whole society (ummah) are obliged to wage. At the same time, it should be noted that in another powerful direction of Islam – Shiism – the practice of *ijtihad* is still available to the top of the Shiite clergy (ayatollahs, great ayatollahs with the title “*marja-ye taqlid*” – “model to follow”)⁴. When the Moslems founded their great empire, the Caliphate, the Islamic legislators offered a religious interpretation of the conquests that had been made, dividing the world into *dar al-Islam* (“the territory of Islam”) and *dar al-harb* (“the territory of war”), which can be considered the next step towards further politicization and radicalization of Islam. “*Dar al-Islam*” refers to countries under the rule of Moslems, “*dar al-harb*” – to “infidel” rulers. The “region of Islam” theoretically should always be in a state of eternal war with the “*dar-al-harb*”. In exceptional cases, Islam allows a temporary truce for up to ten years. In addition to these categories of countries, some faqihs distinguish another category of lands – the “region of the world” (“*dar al-sulh*”). These are lands that do not belong to Moslems and are not controlled by them, but their rulers consider themselves vassals of Moslem states and pay a certain tribute for this. In addition to numerous directions, currents and sects in the middle of the 8th – early 9th centuries in Islam (both in Sunnism and in Shiism), a mystical-ascetic direction – Sufism – arises and is being formed. Initially, the ascetic component dominates in it, later – the mystical one. The essence of the latter is as follows: a student (*murid*), under the mentorship of a teacher (*murshid*), goes through a mystical path (Ar.: *tariqa* – path, road), from the initial stage (*sharia*) through the next two (*tarik*, *maarif*) to the last – *haqiqat* (verity), until complete merging with the deity. Thus, we can assume that a believer who has chosen the path of a Sufi is a more “advanced” Moslem compared to an ordinary believer. Gradually, twelve main, uterine Sufi structures took

shape in the Sufi space, and were called “*tarikats*” (Sufi orders in Islam). Subsequently, other orders spun off from them, and at present there are several dozen Sufi *tarikats* in the world.

Characteristic for adherents of Sufism is their faith in the teachings of one or another *tariqat*, as well as unquestioning obedience to their teacher-sheikh. These moments sometimes played an important historical role in the development of religious and political movements, which the famous American scholar of Islam B. Lewis called “Islamic riots”, especially during the colonization of Moslem states by the West.

So, in the 19th century almost simultaneously, the armed resistance of Moslems to an external force was recorded: in Libya (the Sinusite movement), in Sudan (the movement led by the Mahdi) and in the North-Eastern Caucasus (Caucasian Muridism led by the famous Avar imams, among whom the most famous was Shamil). Imam Shamil and his *naibs*, on the ideological and organizational basis of the Sufi *Nakshbandiyya* order, created the embryo of an “Islamic state” in the North Caucasus – the Imamate of Chechnya and Dagestan on part of the territories of modern Dagestan and Chechnya. This proto-Islamic state formation was the first symptom of the penetration of Middle Eastern Islamism into the Caucasus, which goes back to the political and legal doctrine of the well-known medieval Syrian Ulema Ahmed Taqi ad-Din ibn Taymiyyah, his supporters and followers.

Consideration of the process of “splitting of Islam” would be incomplete without mentioning the phenomenon that entered the history of this religion as “Islamic nationalism”. It is well known that classical Islam does not recognize the division of “faithful” according to ethnic, racial and other similar differences. In principle, Islam is a supranational, world religion, in which representatives of all peoples and ethnic groups are equally valuable, in other words, it is an international (world) religion. However, in practice, the national (ethnic), as a rule, takes precedence over religious Islamic internationalism. In this context, the experience of Turkey is interesting from a scientific

point of view. Here in the late 19th – early 20th centuries lived and preached Said Nursi, the author of the well-known multi-volume work “Risala Nur” (“Source of Light”). After his death, the organization he created turned out to be divided into a number of structures, the most famous of which Nurcular (Bright Path) was headed by one of his students, the Turkish billionaire Fetullah Gülen, who in his numerous works prescribed the exceptional role of the Turks in Islam, calling them “the best of Moslems”. Such a separation of one people from the general Moslem environment has received the name “Islamic nationalism” in the scientific literature. The interaction of national and confessional in this case formed a kind of Turkic-Islamic synthesis. For us, this approach is interesting by the fact that not only Turkish pan-Turkists can be attributed to the varieties of “Islamic nationalism”, but also supporters of Afghan “Talibanism”, as well as “North Caucasian Wahhabism”, whose adherents and ideologists are such Caucasian nationalists as, for example, M. Tagaev, M. Udugov, Z. Yandarbiev and others.⁵

In addition to dividing the general Islamic field into directions and opinions (madhhabs), Sufi and Islamic-nationalist organizations and structures, in the 20th century, secular scientists, most likely for analytical purposes, identified three ideological currents in Islam: traditionalism, modernism and fundamentalism.⁶ Traditionalism is associated with the creation of a single Moslem Caliphate, the spread and strengthening of Islam on its territory, and then the disintegration of this state into a number of caliphates, and then completely homogeneous political units – nation states. However, in all these states, Islam continued to develop, but not always along the same trajectories. Gradually, different forms of existence of Islam were established in these territories. It is not surprising, therefore, that Islam in, say, Morocco differs from the Islam practiced in Indonesia. In this regard, gradually the term “traditional Islam” or “Islamic traditionalism” was filled with the following content: it is a form of existence of Islam, which is reproduced from generation to

generation without visible changes in one or another "Islamic" state, as well as in territories where traditionally Moslems live.

Modernism is conditioned by the development of society, the scientific and technological revolution, the deepening of globalist tendencies, the emergence of everything that is not reflected in the Quran and other sacred sources of Islam. Modernism is a reaction in Islam to the challenge of the times. As the authoritative Russian Islamic scholar Z.I. Levin, has precisely noted, the slogan of Islamic modernists is "Forward with the Quran". In other words, modernist thought and the practical activity of its bearers should be aimed at bringing Islam up to date with the realities of modernity, while not rejecting the fundamental dogmas and values of religion. One of the obvious features of Islamic modernism, which distinguishes it from Moslem traditionalism, is the upholding, first of all, of the thesis about the need to open the "gates of ijtihad", which is categorically rejected by conservatives. The third trend - fundamentalism - is associated with the rise and fall of Islamic civilization, the fragmentation of a single Caliphate, the colonization of most Islamic states by European powers, and the loss to the West in almost all areas of social development. In such a situation, there could not but appear people who consider the main reason for the humiliation of Islam the fact that this religion has been littered with "sinful innovations" for centuries, has departed far from the values of its "golden age". This process began with the division of the Ummah into many political "parties" that were at war with each other in the struggle for power. It is obvious that this struggle, which began immediately after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (632), was the result of the deviation of the military-political elite from the primary Sunnah, the principles of communality and voluntariness, determined at one time by the provisions of the Medina Constitution. This was clearly manifested in the emergence of proto-state institutions of autocratic leaderism, first in Medina itself, and then in the main cities in the conquered territories,

which, in turn, already in the 7th–8th centuries, gave rise to a politically conditioned legislative power in the Caliphate, based on Sharia, transformed by means of *ijtihad* into public law, and on the “state Sharia” legitimized in this way, and the apparatus of coercion necessary to keep within the framework of the “Islamic empire” all the lands and peoples conquered in the west and east. Such a state could not stand the test of time, and the Arab-Moslem Caliphate disintegrated, and its fragments turned out to be colonies or semi-colonies of the “infidel” West. However, if state institutions fall short of the Quranic ideal, if political leaders are cruel or exploit the people or the community is humiliated by apparently godless enemies, the Moslem must feel that his faith in the higher purpose and value of life is in jeopardy. And all efforts must be directed towards returning Islamic history to the true path, otherwise the foundations of the religious edifice will be shaken and life will be deprived of meaning. Therefore, according to fundamentalists, Islam must be cleansed of everything superficial, introduced by time, returned to its origins – the foundation of religion, by the time of the life and work of the prophet and the “righteous” caliphs. According to the apt statement of Z.I. Levin, the slogan of the fundamentalists is “Back to the Quran!” At the same time, it should be emphasized that the term “fundamentalism” appeared in the 19th century in the US, in relation to one of the Protestant branches of Christianity, and is not recognized by Moslems themselves. However, there is an Islamic analogue of “fundamentalism” – “Salafism” (derived from the Arabic phrase “as-salaf as-salihun” – “righteous ancestors”), which is quite adequately perceived by the “Salafists”, the bearers of fundamentalist values in Islam.

Until recently, many Islamic scholars, and even more so publicists, put an identity sign between “fundamentalism” (“Salafism”) and “radical Islam” (“Islamism”) and even religious and political extremism and terrorism, which does not correspond to reality. In fact, Islamism (“radical Islam”, “Islamic radicalism”) is an independent phenomenon that should not be identified with

Islam itself or exclusively with any of its directions (Sunnism, Shiism, Kharijism), sects (madhhabs, or Moslem law schools – fiqh) or currents (traditionalism, modernism, fundamentalism).⁷

In our opinion, Islamism most closely correlates with Kharijism and fundamentalism, but in any case, in terms of its parameters, it does not coincide with these phenomena. Islamism is a phenomenon primarily political, but researchers note that almost all religious movements in Islam originate in political views. Kharijites, especially adherents of some of its sects and subsects, for example Azraqites, were extremists, they posed the question: can a member of the ummah and their leader, who made the slightest deviation from the Quranic requirements, remain a Moslem or not, giving an unequivocal negative answer to this. Moreover, they demanded the deprivation of life of “apostates”. Radical fundamentalists not only dream of a return to the “golden age”, but also demand from their supporters of political activity, the struggle for actualization of this ideal⁸.

The founding father of radical Salafism, not without reason, is considered the Baghdad Ulema Ibn Hanbal (780–855), who launched a religious and political movement in the center of the Caliphate to purify Islam from sinful innovations, which later transformed into one of the four schools of Sunni fiqh – the Hanbali madhhab. The ideological successors of the work of Ibn Hanbal were the Syrian ulem Taqi ad-Din ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), as well as his students, among whom Ibn al-Qayyim (1292–1350) was especially distinguished, who, in the conditions of the Islamic Middle Ages, developed the fundamental provisions of the Hanbalite doctrine. Ibn Hanbal and his associates qualified all the changes in Islam that occurred after the end of the “golden age” as “bida” (sinful innovations), and demanded that Islam be cleansed of them. Their works became the basis for the emergence and development of the radical doctrine of Wahhabism, as well as for the ideologists of the modern doctrinal provisions of radical Islamism.

A brief history of Wahhabism is as follows: by the 18th century, the decline of the Ottoman Empire became apparent, especially in peripheral areas. There, local "rectifiers of Islam" tried to restore order through religious reform. So, on the Arabian Peninsula, the teacher Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), having entered into an alliance with the emir from the Saud family from Nejd, managed to break with Istanbul and found a state in central Arabia and the Persian Gulf. He was a typical reformer in the spirit of Ibn Taymiyyah. He believed that the best counter to the current crisis was a fundamentalist return to the Quran and the Sunnah, and a militant rejection of all later additions, including medieval fiqh, mysticism and falsification, which most Moslems then considered the norm. Since the Ottoman sultans did not fit his vision of the caliphs of "true Islam", Ibn Abd al-Wahhab declared that they were apostates and worthy of death. He attempted to create an enclave of pure faith based on his understanding of the original 7th century ummah. Wahhabism, the form of Islam now prevalent in Saudi Arabia, is a puritanical religion based on a strict, literal interpretation of Scripture and early Islamic tradition. Later, his aggressive methods were adopted by some radical fundamentalists. The most famous modern theorists of this wing are Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Abd al-Salam Faraj, Abbud al-Zumr, Tariq al-Zumr, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and others. These and other theorists of radical Islamism relied in their works on the works of authoritative ulemas of the Moslem past, among them - Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Kassir, Al-Kurtubi, an-Nawawi, M. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and others, who advocated the return of Islam to its "golden age" - the time of life and activity Prophet Mohammed and four righteous (elected) caliphs.

At the same time, the doctrine of radical Islamism is constantly filled with new stories, and this fact actualizes the problem of studying Islamic radicalism (Islamism) proper. Today, scientists have studied in detail the provisions that form the basis of Islamism. Most of them believe that radical Islamic

political movements are part of a broader trend of re-Islamization of society and the politicization of Islam. In other words, "Islamism" represents only the extreme part of all currents within the framework of "political Islam", that is, Islamist tendencies can be found in all three ideological currents in Islam. However, from this premise it is simultaneously seen that Islamism is not identical with fundamentalism, traditionalism or modernism, its radical part is present (or may be present) in all three currents to one degree or another.

The author of this article in the monograph "Islamic radicalism: genesis, evolution, practice", in which the phenomenon of Islamism is quite fully studied, presents the following definition of Islamic radicalism - "... this is an ideological doctrine and socio-political practice based on it, which are characterized by normative-value consolidation of the ideological, political-ideological and even armed confrontation of the world of "true Islam" in relation to the world of "infidels" outside and the world of "untrue faith" inside Islam and require absolute social control and mobilization (serving the idea) of their supporters."⁹

At the same time, speaking about Islamism, researchers single out at least two of its wings: moderately radical and ultraradical. The goals of their supporters are the same: building an Islamic state where Sharia norms would prevail. However, the methods and forms of realizing the cherished goal are different. Moderates prefer an evolutionary, bloodless path of development, promoting to the so-called "Islamic call" (daava) and, using democratic procedures, the promotion of their supporters in government and government at all levels. Upon reaching a certain "critical mass" of the number of their supporters, including those in power, the issue of the "Islamic state" and "Sharia rule", in their opinion, will be resolved by itself, automatically. Their like-minded extremists object: the "near enemy" (the state and its institutions, primarily power ones) and the "far-away enemy" (other states) will not allow the

Islamists to seize power peacefully. Therefore, the “Islamic revolutionaries” are not going to wait, and are ready to take power by force, including through the implementation of sabotage and terrorist attacks against the “enemies of Islam”: “infidels”, as well as those Moslems whom radical Islamists consider “apostates” (“murtaddun” – first of all, supporters of law enforcement agencies, opposing radicals) and “hypocrites” (“munafikun” – representatives of the official Moslem clergy).

In practice, when Islamists form their structures, in addition to moderates and extremists, they also distinguish the so-called “mixed organizations”, where the two functions of Islamism – educational and propagandistic (Islamic call) and combat – are tied to the same organization. Some of its members carry out the “Islamic call”, while the other, as a rule, hidden part of the group, carries out forceful attacks on the “enemies of Islam”. There are many such organizations, among them the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Egyptian Moslem Brotherhood, the Palestinian Al-Jihad, and others. The presented material allows us to conclude that the concept of “Islamism” is an independent phenomenon, it should not be identified with Islam itself, or exclusively with any of its directions (Sunnism, Shiism, Kharijism), currents (traditionalism, modernism, fundamentalism) or rumors. At the same time, it should be borne in mind, as the authoritative domestic Islamic scholar A.A. Ignatenko that “every Islamist is a Moslem, but not every Moslem is an Islamist.”¹⁰

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