

SCTCMG 2022
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of
Modern Globalism»**

**EMERGENCE OF ISLAMISM IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS:
CAUSES AND COUNTERMEASURES**

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Abstract

The article analyzes the main concepts of Islamism and the features of its generation in the North Caucasus, forms of manifestation, and specific ways of counteraction. Islamism is considered a religious and political form of extremism obscured by Islamic slogans, directed against the historically established spiritual traditions and existing government, directing its followers towards the creation of global Islamist power structures. This project has acquired its own characteristics in the North Caucasus, where such regional forms of Islamism as Salafism and Wahhabism became noticeably widespread in Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia. These forms of Islamism were directed against traditional Islam, which had historically established itself in the region in the form of Sufism. The conflict that arose between Islamists and Wahhabis in the region contributed to the political and spiritual destabilization of Muslims in the republics, and ultimately to the wars in the Chechen Republic. The difference between Islam as a religious system and Islamism as a political ideology is revealed.

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Keywords: Extremism, ideology, Islam, Islamism, religion, Wahhabism



1. Introduction

The term “Islamism” was borrowed by Russian researchers from Western researchers during the period of Gorbachev’s perestroika. It was actively used by political scientists, journalists, and individual politicians in the course of analyzing the process of Islamic revival in Russia in the late 80s and early 90s of the 20th century. During this period, the activity of Muslims as individuals and their associations that arose in the internal political processes in the country, intensified. Russian researchers, in particular Ignatenko (2000), reduces “Islamism” to political Islam characterized as religious and political ideology and practice aimed to create conditions under which any contradictions within society and a state populated by Muslim, as well as interstate relations with their participation will be reconciled based on Sharia norms. This term has also been widely used by another Russian political scientist Malashenko. At the same time, it is important to note that this term fails to express the complex, contradictory process of the Islamic revival that took place earlier and is taking place in modern Russia.

Bashirov (2008) expressed an interesting viewpoint concerning the similarity of Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism but not their identity. In his opinion, Islamism is an independent political trend using Islamic argumentation, rather than one of the directions of fundamentalism.

2. Problem Statement

The publication aims to reveal the content of the concept “Islamism”, the regional features of its manifestation in Russia. In our country, Islamism is characterized as a political and social trend and ideology that is widespread in the Muslim world. It is believed that Islamism is based on the ideas of the high value and superiority of Islam, its rules and traditions, on the need to live according to the principles of Islam understood in a certain way, and also on the purpose to politically unite Muslims with regard to modern realities by putting certain Islamic ideas and principles at the forefront in political and social reality (Grinin, 2019).

3. Research Questions

Overcoming communist ideology among Muslims, especially among Islamic-oriented youth promoted the dominance of the non-traditional Muslim ideas of Salafism, Wahhabism being the manifestations of Islamism. The Salafism and Wahhabism supporters were considerably active in the North Caucasus (the Republic of Dagestan, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the Republic of Ingushetia, the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic). The very emergence of these movements was largely due to the fact that the preachers of these movements and their supporters condemned the corrupt government, immoral pluralism, the immeasurable disunity of society based on violence, cruelty, inhumanity. They opposed the absolute values of Islam against the liberal-democratic values affirmed in society by forcing their supporters and the state and society as a whole to approve fundamental, extremist values under the guise of Islamic ideology.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to analyze the features of the manifestation of religious and political extremism and Islamism in the North Caucasus, as well as its various forms of existence, specifically, Salafism and Wahhabism, which opposed Islamic traditions historically established in the region, the values of Sufism in particular. It aims to develop appropriate measures to resist these religious extremist manifestations based on the mobilization of legal norms and characteristics of ethno-cultural values.

5. Research Methods

The ongoing research widely uses a systematic analysis enabling to consider the emergence and development of Islamism as religious and political extremism hiding behind Islamic slogans and having an anti-traditional religious and anti-state character in the North Caucasus. At the same time, general and specific aspects of counteraction are revealed based on state legal measures and ethno-cultural values.

6. Findings

Political Islam is the result of a tough and uncompromising political struggle among Muslims for ideological leadership in the national and social liberation struggle of their peoples. The first Islamist organization was the Association of Muslim Brotherhood, which strongly criticized the ineffectiveness of the political activities of Muslim nationalists in the 1950s and 1970s. Sadiq Al-Azm (2004), a professor at the University of Damascus, gives the following definition:

Islamism is an extremely militant and mobilizing ideology developed on the basis of selected Scriptures, texts, legends of Islam, historical precedents, organizational experience and modern grievances and sadness. All this represents a defensive reaction against the long-term erosion of the dominant role of Islam in the public, institutional, economic, social and cultural life of Muslim societies in the 20th century". In his opinion, the Islamism ideology is introduced into practice through the revival of the concept of "jihad" being a holy war against the surrounding world of paganism, polytheism, idolatry, godlessness, atheism, betrayal and unbelief considered as apostasy ... (p. 119)

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the United States, the US President Bush Jr. described the participants in these crimes as Islamo-fascists. And Daniel Pipes, an American neoconservative reasoned about "militant Islam" in his interview in the Izvestia newspaper. In his opinion, it is a terrorist form of Islam combining the elements of terrorism and the elements of religion, and all this has turned into a new ideology (Pipes, 2001). This is a religious faith rendered into a totalitarian ideology, and it is similar to fascism and Marxism-Leninism, and dangerous to the same extent. He considers it a terrorist form of Islam, for which the main enemies are America and Russia. This neoconservative proposed to put all the mosques and university professors criticizing Israel under surveillance.

In Russia Islamism is characterized as a political and social trend and ideology that is widespread in the Muslim world. It is believed that Islamism is based on the ideas of the high value and superiority of Islam, its rules and traditions, on the need to base the life on the principles of Islam understood in a certain way, and also on the fact that, Muslims should be politically united in accordance with modern realities, and with the idea to put certain Islamic ideas and principles at the forefront of political and social reality.

An active process of the Islam revival began during the Gorbachev's perestroika in the North Caucasus, in particular in Dagestan and Checheno-Ingushetia. This revival was associated with the emergence of Islamic educational institutions, from elementary to higher ones, Islamic literature, the publication of the Koran, the construction of mosques, the emergence of Islamic funds and organizations often having a political focus.

According to Khanbabaev (2001), illegal groups of the religious and political fundamentalist movement of Islam, later called "Wahhabism appeared in the late 80s of the 20th century in Dagestan and Checheno-Ingushetia. The supporters of this movement became active when the "Islamic Renaissance Party" was founded in 1990 in Astrakhan with the participation of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Tatars, Dagestanis, Chechens, Ingush representatives. Its supporters were called Wahhabis in the vernacular.

According to Malashenko (2007), the Islamists were increasingly operational even before the Chechen conflict. They considered the main opponents to be the local administration, law enforcement agencies, traditional religious structures. In his opinion, "radical Islam was provoked by the Chechen conflict, which fueled militant groups in the region. "Islamic impulses" came from Chechnya and stimulated Islamic activity in Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and other republics. We consider Malashenko's statements to be not fully correct. Before the conflict in Chechnya, the Islamists were not really noticeable. We believe that "Islamic impulses" came not from Chechnya as there was no appropriate base for this, but from Islamic organizations whose headquarters were located abroad, in Moscow as well. Dobaev (2017), who claims that all the ideological postulates of radical Islamism have been introduced into the territory of Russia, draws attention to this.

During the Islamic revival in Russia, Muslims began to actively participate in political processes, create political parties to be the part of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, strive for the construction of mosques, and open Islamic educational institutions including universities. Islam in Russia, as well as in the world as a whole, is the second largest religion after Christianity.

Islam radicalization as well as Islamic organizations in the North Caucasus was manifested in conflicts between Wahhabis and traditionalists often followed by clashes, bloodshed harming the believers and splitting them. All this had a negative impact on the Islamic community, the political region and Russia as a whole. In order to counter the Islamists in the republics of the North Caucasus, anti-Wahhabi laws limiting the Islamists activities were adopted. For these purposes, the traditional Islamic clergy was supported while it was the ideological opponent of the Wahhabis endorsing religious and political extremism.

The mobilization of the ethno-religious resource of traditional Islam (being Sufism in the North Caucasus) helped the Muslims of the region resist the manifestations of Islamism. Based on this, effective preventive measures and countermeasures were developed in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Sufism is the most important component of the Islamic factor in Chechnya. This trend of Islam, which has spread in Chechnya since the end of the 20th century, has become a deep tradition in the spiritual culture of the Chechens. Therefore, its study was not only of scientific but also of strategic importance. Thus, a detailed analysis of the Sufism ideology and its role in the spiritual culture of the Chechen society (widely covered by Akayev) is of great importance (Akaev, 2011, 2020).

Currently, the Islamic world differs from other world cultures. Islamists hate that the state in Western societies should ensure religious tolerance and pluralism rather than serve religious truth. As Fukuyama points out that, therefore, one can clarify the issue by saying that today's conflict is not just a fight against terrorism and not a fight against Islam as a religion or civilization but rather a fight against Islamo-fascism being a radically intolerant and anti-modern doctrine, which has recently become widespread in many parts of the Islamic world.

Islamism is a concept whose meaning is imperative to discuss in both public and academic contexts. At the same time, it is necessary to reveal its negative aspects, thus preventing their manifestation and activation in Muslim society, especially among Muslim youth. The term can refer to various forms of social and political activism advocating the idea of guiding public and political life by Islamic principles, or more specifically, to movements that call for the full observance of Sharia (Islamic order or law).

Islamists may emphasize the need to comply with Sharia, pan-Islamic political unity, including the creation of an Islamic state or selectively eliminating non-Muslims, in particular Western military, economic, political, social or cultural influences in the Muslim world that they consider to be inconsistent with Islam.

All these provisions are often reproduced by Muslim youth of various regions including the North Caucasus. It is important to study these processes, develop countermeasures, and direct them at constructiveness.

7. Conclusion

The object of analysis in the publication is the scientific potential accumulated by social scientists to study the phenomenon of Islamism, as well as theoretically and practically related categories being fundamentalism, radicalism, extremism, terrorism, Wahhabism, Sufism, Salafism, etc.

Based on the relevance and insufficient knowledge of the problem, the authors have summarized the scientific development of the problem of the Islamism (political Islam) spread, its manifestations in the North Caucasus including Chechnya, and identified new trends for their research.

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