

## THE ISLAMIC FACTOR AND THE POLITICAL PROCESSES IN TAJIKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he confessional factor, as part of the political process, can act as a powerful catalyst to either stabilize a political region or destroy it. This subject has acquired special importance since social and state security depends, among other things, on the correct identification of the mechanisms and technologies of politicization of religion.<sup>1</sup> In the present geopolitical context, the problem and role of the Islamic factor in international relations has acquired global importance. It affects not only the relationships between individual states and political processes unfolding in the world but also domestic policies of many states.<sup>2</sup> The Islamic factor plays a fairly contradictory role in interstate relationships for the simple reason that in the Islamic world, the economically developed countries exist in close proximity to their poor and dependent neighbors. In fact, the ways the Islamic factor is revealed in the political space of the latter depend, to

a great extent, on the policies pursued by the former.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, assistance, extended to poorer countries, may consolidate the Islamic factor and its role in the relationships between these states; it may also negatively affect domestic modernization and the extent to which these countries are involved in globalization.

A greater religious impact on the legal norms and social institutions affects the state's international contacts. By the impact of the Islamic factor on international relations, we mean the varied impact on bilateral and multilateral international relations. Political Islam that plays an important role in the political processes unfolding in Islamic countries adds vigor to the Islamic factor: the transnational Islamic projects are based on and realized through the ideology of political Islam.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the studies of the historical aspects of the Islamic factor have become signally relevant.

<sup>1</sup> See: I. Karabulatova, B. Akhmetova, K. Shagbanova, E. Loskutova, F. Sayfulina, L. Zamalieva, I. Dyukov, M. Vykhristyuk, "Shaping Positive Identity in the Context of Ethnocultural Information Security in the Struggle against the Islamic State," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 84-92.

<sup>2</sup> See: A.V. Tonkonogov, "Soznanie, dukh, razum: gomogennost i geterogennost fenomenov," *Sotsialno-gumanitarnye znania*, No. 2, 2012, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> See: I. Himelfarb, N. Esipova, "Exploring the Patterns of Religious Observance in Post-Soviet Central Asia and Azerbaijan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, 2015, pp. 37-57.

<sup>4</sup> See: G.V. Osipov, A.S. Karabulatova, I.S. Karabulatova, "Mezhdunarodnye korporatsii s ispolzovaniem islamskogo bankinga kak otlichitelnaia cherta sovremennoy globalizatsii," *Nauchnoe obozrenie*, Seria 2: Gumanitarnye nauki, No. 5, 2015, pp. 5-12.

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## *Introduction*

Today, religious expansion in the world of politics is developing into an important factor of social and political life. It has added religious dimension to the political processes in many countries and plays a destructive role by stirring up political-religious conflicts and even terrorism. These realities have added importance to the studies of individual aspects of religious impacts on international relations. On the whole, an analysis of the influences of the Islamic factor on international relations of any country is a very complicated and multisided task.

Today, the Islamic factor is moving to the fore in the relationships between Muslim countries. In their studies of the Islamic factor, the Central Asian academic community mainly relies on the concepts, elaborated abroad and, therefore, ill-suited to the Central Asian context.<sup>5</sup> So far, the region's religious situation and religious problems have not acquired an adequate interpretation.

## **Methods and Materials**

There are three concepts that fully reveal the political context of the methodological construct of the studies of Islam and the related political processes. The dualistic concept concentrates on different natural and institutional-functional essence of politics and religion. The religiously oriented concept points to the common basis of religion and politics:

- (1) politics and Islam, as social institutions, share the function of management and regulation of social relationships;
- (2) there are common phylogenetic prerequisites, clearly demonstrated by their universality, inclusion and functional usefulness.

Ideology serves as a connecting link between Islam and politics. The compromising concept points to the primacy of the state in the sphere of interaction between politics and religion. There is an opinion that Islam can be involved in politics only in an open, democratic, multicultural society, founded on constitutionalized principles of international law.

Our study is based on interstate acts, laws and normative documents, provisions and doctrines of religious books, public speeches of the leaders of Tajikistan and the neighboring states, as well as international treaties and materials from ministerial and departmental archives and materials, supplied by the press, related to various aspects of influence of the Islamic factor on the relationships of the

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<sup>5</sup> See: L. Garusova, "America's Counterterrorist Struggle: The Islamic Factor and the Regional Context," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 7-17; V. Abdukhamitov, U. Mansurov, H. Nasirov, A. Chorshanbiev, "Liability for Religious Extremism in the Criminal Legislation of the Republic of Tajikistan and in the Modern Law of Foreign States: A Comparative Study," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 46-54; I. Bobokulov, "The Islamic State in Afghanistan and Regional Security in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 56-66.

Republic of Tajikistan with other states. The materials of the current archives of the Executive Structure of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan proved to be especially useful.<sup>6</sup>

We relied on the methods of systemic, comparative, logical and historical analysis and political studies to examine religious ideas and analyze their impact on social and political life, and the political processes unfolding in Tajikistan as a Muslim Central Asian country. The Islamic factor, as a set of elements and social institutions that affect the relationships both inside and outside the country, can be investigated in a narrow or a broad context. This means that the methods of studies may vary.

## Discussion

So far, the academic community has failed to pay adequate attention to the role played by the Islamic factor, its importance and impact on the political processes unfolding in Tajikistan and its relationships with other Muslim countries.

As a term, the “Islamic factor” has not yet received a uniform interpretation: it is seen as a threat, a sign of instability for some and as a cornerstone of social, political and cultural life of Muslim societies for others. Alexey Malashenko has offered the following: “Normally, the Islamic factor is interpreted as Islamic impact on public consciousness and ideology. This is first. Second, various political forces, including those in power, never hesitate to use Islam. Finally, it is used by the forces that look at themselves as Islamic; they are determined to attain power in order to establish the kind of governmental authority, which conforms to their idea of Islam, that is, the ‘Islamic state’ and, ideally, the Caliphate.”<sup>7</sup> In his article “On the Benefits of Confidence-Building between Islamists and Secularists,” Arne C. Seifert has written: “In this study, the concept of the ‘Islamic factor’ will be used as a ‘terminus technicus.’ The concept refers to Islam, political Islam, the Muslim population, as well as Islamic organizations, parties, movements, etc.”<sup>8</sup>

The above suggests that the Islamic factor is not only represented by Islamic organizations and movements but also by structures, connected to Islam. From this it follows that the Islamic factor is:

- (1) a wide concept that covers Islamic law, Islamic tradition, Islamic education, etc.;
- (2) a political-religious category used to describe the impacts of Islam on the objects important, to different degrees, for its functioning in the political processes in contemporary Muslim society;
- (3) elements, symbols and subjects of religion, rather than the religion as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> See: T.N. Nazarov, *Tadjikistan: ekonomicheskij rost, integratsia i regionalnoe sotrudnichestvo*, UI MID RT, Dushanbe, 2004; L.Yu. Gusev, “Sovremennye napravlenia sotrudnichestva mezhdur Iranom i Tadjikistanom,” *Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, 21 November, 2012; V.V. Dubovitskiy, “Natsionalnye interesy Tadjikistana v ramkakh persoiazychnogo mira,” *Tadjikistan i sovremenny mir*, No. 2, 2003, pp. 65-67; A. Sattorzoda, *Aktualnye problemy vneshnei politiki Tadjikistana (Mnogovektornost v deystvii)*, Devastich, Dushanbe, 2014; Z.Sh. Saidov, *Vneshniaia politika Respubliki Tadjikistan na sovremennom etape*, Devastich, Dushanbe, 2006; F. Umarov, “Tadjikistan: sotrudnichestvo s vedushchimi mezhdunarodnymi islamskimi organizatsiami,” *Rossia i musulmanskij mir. Nauchno-informatsionny buleten*, No. 10, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> See: A. Malashenko, “Islamskiy faktor v Tsentralnoy Azii,” available at [<http://www.cainfo.ru/article/actual-interview/544/>], 1 December, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> A. Seifert, “On the Benefits of Confidence-Building between Islamists and Secularists,” in: *From Confidence-Building Towards Co-operative Co-existence im Nahen Osten*, Hrsg. von Jean-Nicolas Bitter, Frédérique Guérin, Delia Rahmanova-Schwarz und Arne C. Seifert, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2005, pp. 13-32.

We believe that the Islamic factor, as a social and political phenomenon, appeared over one thousand years ago with the creation of Islamic civilization, with multiple periods of its dissemination across the world.<sup>9</sup> Much has been already written in Russia and abroad about the Islamic factor as a multidimensional phenomenon that actively affects the ways many problems are dealt with, including the relationship between Tajikistan and other countries, the domestic and international relationships as a whole.<sup>10</sup> Russian scientists and foreign researchers (Vladimir Dontsov, Nikolay Zhdanov, Alexander Ignatenko, Alexey Malashenko, Dmitri Malyshev, Vitali Naumkin, Tursun Sultanov and others) have written about the characteristics and impacts of the Islamic factor on the relationships between the countries of the West and East.<sup>11</sup>

The works of these and other authors pay particular attention to the definition of the Islamic factor, the content of this concept, specifics of its manifestations in relationships between different countries and their social, economic, cultural and political life.<sup>12</sup> Different authors define the Islamic factor differently. Naumkin and Dontsov, for example, offer fairly broad interpretations and include the entire system of management, policy and international relations.

Other authors are more interested in the impacts of a country's religious institutions and the international Islamic organizations on current political, social and economic processes. Both approaches are present in Muslim countries as well. The Islamic factor, however, functions differently in Muslim countries and the secular Islamic countries, each of them having its own specifics. This makes the positions of Zhdanov, Ignatenko and Dontsov<sup>13</sup> much more justified. The researchers consider the connections of Tajikistan with the Islamic world, including the role of the Islamic factor in addressing the problems of interstate relations.<sup>14</sup>

Abdullo Rakhnamo, in turn, has assessed the correlation between Islam and national security, and looked at the constructive and destructive impacts of the religious factor on the national security of Tajikistan, a secular state.<sup>15</sup> Special attention was paid to the studying of the approaches of the Sunni and Shi'a theology to the character of statehood and forms of power. Today, when the Sunni-

<sup>9</sup> See: I.S. Karabulatova, F.S. Sayfulina, "Mytholinguistic Interpretation of Sacral Toponym Astana in Sociocultural Practice of the Siberian Tatars," *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 2015, pp. 303-310.

<sup>10</sup> See: N.S. Esenamanova, *Islam v Tsentralnoy Azii v usloviakh globalizatsii*, Author's synopsis of Ph.D. Thesis, Bishkek, 2004; A.M. Dairova, *Islamskiy faktor v politicheskikh protsessakh Kazakhstana*, Author's synopsis of Ph.D. Thesis, Moscow, 2006; V.N. Ushakov, *Politicheskii Islam v Tsentralnoy Azii: osnovnye faktory i perspektivy*, Author's synopsis of Ph.D. Thesis, Moscow, 2009; Z. Khukmishoev, *Rol islama v politicheskikh protsessakh obshchestva (na materialakh Tadjikistana)*, Ph.D. Thesis, Dushanbe, 2007; A. Nanaeva, *Dvizhenie islamskikh fundamentalistov v iuzhnom regione Tsentralnoy Azii (Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan)*, Author's synopsis of Ph.D. Thesis, Moscow, 2009; D. Usmon, *Islamskiy faktor v politicheskoy protsesse Rossii i Tadjikistana (sravnitelny analiz)*, Author's synopsis of Ph.D. Thesis, Moscow, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> See: V.V. Naumkin, *Islam i musulmane: kultura i politika*, Articles, essays and scholarly papers of different years, Moscow, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> See: I.M. Gabdrifkov, I.S. Karabulatova, L.G. Khusnutdinova, Kh.S. Vildanov, "Ethnoconfessional Factor in Social Adaptation of Migrant Workers in the Muslim Regions of Russia," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (S4), 2015, pp. 213-223; Sh.Iu. Akramov, S.V. Ryazantsev, I.S. Karabulatova, F.Sh. Akramov, "Sotsialno-ekonomicheskoe sostoianie sovremennykh tadjikskikh semey: effekt sotsialno-demograficheskikh posledstviy trudovoy migratsii iz Tadjikistana v Rossii," in: *Sotsialno-ekonomicheskie i gumanitarno-filosofskie problemy sovremennoy nauki*, Vol. 2, Nauchny mir, Moscow, Ufa, Rostov on Don, 2015, pp. 44-49.

<sup>13</sup> See: N.V. Zhdanov, A.A. Ignatenko, *Islam na poroge XXI veka*, Politizdat, Moscow, 1989; A.A. Ignatenko, *Islam i politika*, Collection of articles, Institute of Religion and Politics, Moscow, 2004; V.E. Dontsov, *Islam v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniakh*, Diplomatic Yearbook, Nauchnaia kniga, Moscow, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> See: L.V. Shkvarya, V.I. Rusakovich, D.V. Lebedeva, "Vneshneekonomicheskie svyazi Respubliki Tadjikistan s gosudarstvami Azii: sovremennye tendentsii," *Upravlenie ekonomicheskimi sistemami: elektronny nauchny zhurnal*, No. 6 (78), 2015, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> See: A. Rakhnamo, *Religioznaia partia i svetskoe gosudarstvo (Problemy deiatelnosti politicheskikh partiy religioznogo kharaktera v usloviakh svetskogo gosudarstva)*, Irfon, Dushanbe, 2008; idem, *Islam i natsionalnaia bezopasnost v Tadjikistane*, Irfon, Dushanbe, 2011.

Shi'a contradictions have reached their peak, this aspect of our studies seems to have become especially and thoroughly pertinent. What was written by Khomeini and what his followers write today, demonstrates that the Velayat-e faqih (supreme power) concept is a new interpretation of the Shi'a concept of state power and the place of the Muslim clergy in it.<sup>16</sup>

Russian researchers from other countries of the region have written a lot on the subject. The works by Malashenko, Naumkin, Ignatenko, Landa, Zhdanov, Sjukijainen, Polonskaia and others deserve special mention.<sup>17</sup> In one of her recent books, the former Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, has offered an interesting observation of the place the religious factor occupies in foreign policy and diplomacy and pointed out that religion and politics are inseparable: "Religion is a powerful force, but its impact depends entirely on what it inspires people to do. The challenge for policy-makers is to harness the unifying potential of faith, while containing its capacity to divide."<sup>18</sup> In plain words, this means that Islam can be either a constructive or a destructive factor.

## Results

Between the first year of independence and the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan and later, while the National Reconciliation Commission was functioning, the impact of the Islamic factor became one of the active elements of political processes of Tajik society, including the emergence of a religious party in a secular state.

A massive youth movement has developed in Tajikistan, very much like other public movements were developing in other post-Soviet countries.<sup>19</sup> In Tajikistan, young people are more or less indifferent to politics; the majority of youth organizations function in Dushanbe. In the years of independence, there has been no powerful youth movement aspiring to political significance for several reasons.

- First, as could be expected, the low level of political self-organization, alienation from power, typical of Tajik society in general, affected the political behavior of the younger generation.
- Second, there were no unifying and viable ideas, capable of attracting youth.

Today, the unfavorable social milieu has made religion highly attractive for a large, and steadily increasing, number of young people: in Tajikistan, there are more than eight mosques per 1,000 people, while religious preachers from Afghanistan, helped by the umma's extreme poverty, make Islamic radicals out of the local young men.<sup>20</sup> While many, primarily developed countries, are struggling with

<sup>16</sup> See: Ruhollah Mūsavi Khomeini, *Hokumat-e Islami: Velayat-e faqih* (Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist), Amire Qabir, Tehran, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> See: A. Malashenko, *Islamskaia alternativa i islamskiy projekt*, Moscow Carnegie Center, Ves mir, Moscow, 2006; V.V. Naumkin, op. cit.; L.R. Polonskaia, A.Kh. Vafa, *Vostok: idei i ideologii*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1983; A. Ignatenko, op. cit.; R.G. Landa, *Politicheskiy islam: predvaritelnye itogi*, Institute of the Middle East, Moscow, 2005; N.V. Zhdanov, *Islamskaia kontseptsiia miroportadka*, Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia, Moscow, 2003; L.R. Sjukijainen, "Islamskaia pravovaia mysl o globalizatsii i perspektivakh politicheskogo reformirovaniia musulmanskogo mira," *Politia*, No. 4 (47), 2007; L.R. Polonskaia, "Sovremennye musulmanskie ideynye techeniia," in: *Islam: problemy ideologii, prava, politiki i ekonomiki*, Collection of articles, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> M. Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, Harper/Collins Publishers, 2006, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> See: I. Karabulatova, I. Mkrumova, Z. Polivara, B. Akhmetova, S. Galiullina, E. Loskutova, E. Abylkasymov, "Protest Behavior of Present-Day Russian Youth as Ethnosocial Deviation in an Ethnopolitical Conflict-Prone Situation," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 94-103.

<sup>20</sup> See: "Islam v Tadjikistane: traditsionny ili radikalny?" available at [<https://avestec.wordpress.com/2009/08/16/>], 4 December, 2016.

the problem of a rapidly aging population, 70 percent of the population of Tajikistan is under 30, the average age being 25 years, while 35 percent (2.7 million) are between 14 and 30 years of age.

According to the National Program of Social Development of the Youth in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2013-2015, 55 percent of the country's youth are unemployed, the figure radically different from the officially declared 2.5 percent. The country badly needs new jobs to prevent further radicalization of its younger generation. Most of the households are badly hit by the nationwide social and economic problems that make labor migration the only option available.<sup>21</sup>

Today, according to official information, about half a million of the republic's citizens work abroad; independent sources quote a figure of over 1 million. This means that every year a quarter or even half of the able-bodied males stay away from their country for several months or even do not come home for several years. Tajik labor migrants prefer Russia, even though the social context there leaves much to be desired, with local authorities' refusal to help and the presence of violence and xenophobia.

Today, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, which operates legally in the republic, is one of the obvious signs of the presence of the Islamic factor that distinguishes Tajikistan from the other post-Soviet states. Hizb ut-Tahrir, the organization, banned in the Russian Federation, and the highly ambiguous Salafia movement figure prominently on the republic's political arena. The religious party, legally operating in the secular country, can be described as a unique experience of the realization of the government project of peace and national accord in the country that is called Vahdati milli—National Unity. It should be noted that the international terrorist organizations, determined to set up a worldwide caliphate, proceed from the ideology of al-Qa'eda and radical Islam, an alternative to globalization. This means that, clad in ideological garbs and based on the traditional ideological stereotypes, the alternative is designed to set up a society, ruled by the Shari'a. It has lost the remnants of tolerance and became absolutely uncompromising, especially when dealing with the West.<sup>22</sup> The reality is even more frightening: the radically-minded part of the Islamic world has chosen terror as its most efficient instrument.

## Conclusion

Experts treat the "Islamic factor" as a non-traditional scholarly term and one of the most topical issues in political science, international relations and religious studies. No recent academic work, related to the problem of the Islamic factor, have offered an explicit conceptual definition: they stopped at the border of Tajikistan, one of the Central Asian states.

It should be noted that in each case, the term "Islamic factor" demonstrates certain specifics, caused by the political and economic development level of each particular country, its history, culture and the ethnopsychological characteristics of its people.

In the context of the new geopolitical realities, we should pay particular attention to the rivalry between the Islamic countries, each wishing to promote its own values and ideologies. This means that the democratic institutions should double their efforts to prevent infiltration of the most extremist trends that exploit the Islamic factor in their political and geopolitical interests.

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<sup>21</sup> See: S.V. Ryazantsev, E.E. Pismennaya, I.S. Karabulatova, Sh.Y. Akramov, "Transformation of Sexual and Matrimonial Behavior of Tajik Labor Migrants in Russia," *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 10, No. 20, 2014, pp. 174-183.

<sup>22</sup> See: E. Ermakova, M. Jilkisheva, G. Fayzullina, I. Karabulatova, Kh. Shagbanova, "The Media and Fiction: Postmodernist Discourse of Contemporary Terrorism in the Context of Apocalyptic Rhetoric," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 61-69.