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**RUSSIAN MUSLIMS: CALL FOR
CONCEPTUALIZATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION
(Conclusion)**

3. Islam and Ethnicity

What are Russian Muslims? Does this ethnocultural and ethnoconfessional reality exist? And if it does, what are its specific features?

I think we have to start with the question of the correlation of Islam as universal religious teaching, on the one hand, and on the other, to ethnicity and the existing forms of everyday life, thinking and world outlook typical of a concrete people.

From the point of view of Islam, ethnicity does not play a positive role. Islam is outside ethnicity, this is why it is not important what people a person belongs to, the main thing is his or her affiliation with the ummah. Historically, it can be said that Islam has adapted to the local conditions of everyday life.

Another possible solution to the problem of the correlation of Islam to ethnicity is the assertion that there is only one dominant and authentic ethnicity with which Islam is connected, that is, the ethnicity of the Prophet and his closest companions – Arab ethnicity. It follows from this premise that the norms of Arab culture are correct and adequate to Islamic teaching, and all others are erroneous.

Of course, one should not deny Islam's connections with Arab ethnicity, suffice it to say that the Koran has been bestowed in Arabic and its linguistic origin and affiliation is very important for all Muslims; besides, during the first centuries the Islamic tradition had developed precisely in Arab society, and the legal schools so important to us had been formed in it, and bear the imprint of that historical period and that society. Taking into account the above-said we cannot but see that beginning from the seventh century and up to the present time Arab culture (or Arab cultures) had passed through a long evolution. Islam had become widespread on territories which had not been occupied or controlled by the Arabs; for many centuries it has existed on these territories more or less independently, under the influence of different cultures, not only Arab. In my view, the thesis that Islam has been preserved in the Arab world in a “more pure form” is not quite evident. There are no grounds to believe that the Tatar, Bashkir or Chechen practice of Islam is worse or less authentic than the Arab. This is a subjective assessment, which depends, first and foremost, on a concrete tradition. It seems to me that one of the major tasks facing Russian Muslims is to show, with the help of historical and religious analysis, that Russian Muslims represent an original practice of Islam, which has its cultural, philosophical, social and daily specific features.

Historically speaking, beginning from the seventh century Islam has not existed in isolation from concrete culture, and getting on to

a new soil it gives original sprouts, forming local ways and means of Islamic practice. I think that one of the reasons why the question about “Russian Muslims” is now put to the fore lies in the conceptual crisis of the Russian Muslim ummah. And this crisis can partly be explained by the difficult “socialist past,” pressure on the part of geopolitical rivals, shortage of enlightened Muslim intellectuals, etc.

I do not place ethnicity higher than Islam, as it might seem from first glance. Islam is above ethnicity, and the main thing, as I have said, is affiliation to the ummah, which is confirmed by the Koran.

A question arises of the significance of the Muslim ummah. It is known that at the early stages the ummah had been polyethnic. The Koran says that the ummah is the best of all communities. The real ummah does not overcome ethnicity, ethnicity can be overcome at spiritual level. There is no contradiction between affiliation to the real ummah and recognition of one’s own ethnicity. The road to spiritual unity lies only in ethnicity. The Koran does not teach that one should be ashamed of one’s own ethnicity or refuse from it.

4. Russian Muslims: Social Reality

Russian Muslims can be perceived in two ways. On the one hand, they are a group of citizens believing in Islam and observing traditional practices of Islam. On the other hand, Russian Muslims can be viewed as a concept, a result of perception of the social, cultural and spiritual reality, which has been formed in Russia under the influence of Islam; such perception also takes into account geopolitical, civilizational and ideological tendencies with which this reality is closely connected. In other words, Russian Muslims should be viewed as a social reality, on the one hand, and on the other, as a concept. This article is centered on the second interpretation of Russian Muslims, and at the same time, being a result of perception and conceptualization it

can assume different conceptual forms in the minds of different thinkers. I admit that there can be alternative ways of perceiving Russian Muslims, and this is why I would like to regard my attempt as just one of several variants.

In order to discuss a concept seriously, it is necessary to recognize traditional Russian Muslims as a social reality. I think there can be no other opinion. Islam came to the Eurasian area in the seventh century and since then it has been embraced in this region by many peoples in the most diverse cultural conditions. For a long time Russian Muslims have combined traditions of local people, influence of other Islamic cultures (above all, Arab, Turkish and Persian), mutual exchange with Slav and Finno-Ugric peoples, influence of European education (as a rule, through Russian education). No other area inhabited by Muslims can boast such broad and fruitful cultural exchanges. As a result, in the latter half of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century we had a unique social reality and a unique type of Muslim education and enlightenment, which differed from Arab, Turkish or Persian, playing one of the leading roles in the world agenda. Critics may claim that such eclecticism can muddy the Message of the Prophet. I think that such puritan criticism does not take into account the specific features of traditional society and the place of religion in it. In traditional society Islam penetrates all spheres of life – architecture, music, the language, beliefs, clothes, everyday life, etc., as a result of which old customs and habits which had non-Muslim meaning are redefined and filled with a new meaning connected with the Message of the Prophet. Traditional culture which is centered on Islam becomes purely Muslim culture at all levels. It is not accidental that experts speak of “Tatar-Muslim culture,” “Tatar-Muslim identity,” etc. In the consciousness of a representative of traditional society any sphere of life is inseparable from the dominant type

of spirituality, from religion. It would be appropriate to cite the words of the outstanding Tatar enlightener of the 19th century Husain Fazkhan: “The Muslim places religion above all else, and there is nothing which he would not sacrifice to it.”

Thus, Russian Muslims as a social reality cannot be disregarded, and they require the most thorough analysis. Such reflection is closely connected with the study of national cultures of certain Muslim peoples, inasmuch as the main sources of vital meanings in traditional society is the dominant spiritual tradition.

Russian Muslim culture includes a number of ecumenes (North Caucasian, Volga area, Crimean, and others), which have considerable original features. Along with Islamization of traditional society all its spheres acquire new Muslim meanings and therefore become part of Islam. Tatar Muslim culture is a case in point. There are the following typological specific features of Tatar practice of Islam:

The Message of the Prophet has been adopted by the Tatars voluntarily, which reflects their striving for Truth; this striving permeates the spiritual life of the Tatars throughout centuries.

There are no deviations and heresies in the spiritual life of the Tatars and they are inclined to moderation.

Women enjoy a higher social status in Tatarstan.

The Tatars are distinguished by high literacy.

Their religious views are stable even in emigration.

The Muslim clergy are elected, and there are traditions of collective self-government.

Tatar Muslims priests and believers are tolerant and able to coexist with representatives of other faiths.

Tatars are stable emotionally and reserved in behavior.

There are two main threats to traditional Tatar Muslims: European evolutionist theories and reformist trends within Islam.

Evolutionism and progressism were overcome at the philosophical level in Europe already at the beginning of the 20th century. Tatar intellectuals appealing to the “development” of society and the inevitable dying away of religiousness are late by at least one hundred years. There is a trend toward desecularization of society in the present situation. Another force aimed at uprooting traditional Islam is reformist trends.

Examining the specific features of the Tatar practice of Islam and threats to it at present, one can make a conclusion that Tatar spirituality is original and interesting and has outgrown the framework of provincialism. The potential of Tatar Islam is quite great.

There is a vast material about Tatar Muslim practice in specialized research works.

Tatar Muslim culture has been formed over many centuries, and it has a number of specific features. They should not be viewed as something alien to Islam, which integrates them in itself. We now need to reflect over our own tradition in order to prevent the erosion of Muslim practice. It should be admitted with profound regret that propaganda of certain forms of Islam alien to us sponges on the ignorance of Russian Muslims themselves concerning their own tradition.

Russian Muslims in a broad sense include the North Caucasian, Bashkir and Crimean Tatar ecumenes. Each one of them needs examination and comprehension, and in that case only shall we be able to find a point of contact between them and determine their inter-Eurasian civilizational ties, which would contribute to the formation of an image of Russian Muslims.

5. Russian Muslims: Concept

As I have said, it is evident that Russian Muslims are a conglomerate of interconnected traditional cultures and religious practices, and it exists, first and foremost, as a social reality. In this sense Russian Muslims differ from Arab, Iranian and African Muslims, and also from American and European Muslims, who are growing stronger.

The concept of Russian Muslims is an answer to the question about how these Muslims can survive in the present conditions without losing their identity.

In order to create a full-fledged concept of Russian Muslims it is necessary to solve three tasks. First, there should be a profound reflection and understanding concerning individual cultural ecumenes existing on the territory of the Russian Federation. (I touched on this subject in the previous section, while speaking of Tatar culture). Secondly, it is necessary to determine the civilizational unity of these cultural formations and see where the forms of their spirituality intersect. Thirdly, we should see the strategic unity of Russian Muslims, bring their civilizational unity to an intercivilizational level, and tie it to a more general global context. The latter may be determined as the conceptualization of Russian Muslims, and this step is the most important, in my view, inasmuch as it deals with the preservation of Russian Muslim traditions. This is a strategic glance into the future, and an attempt to anticipate the situation on which our future largely depends.

The formation of a new civilizational alignment is the most crucial aspect geopolitically and ideologically. The Eurasian orientation of the Kremlin elite shows that Russia has taken the course aimed at taking the place of an independent pole with a unique value paradigm. Russian Muslims face three variants of their existence at the

present stage: to move along the general ideological trend and develop their own traditions on this basis; to orient themselves to Islamic civilization and accept its influence; to orient themselves to European civilization, “European values,” atheism, non-religiousness, in short, to renounce their own spiritual heritage.

As a patriotically-minded citizen of the Russian Federation I think that the first variant is the most adequate. Naturally, Russian Muslims should not break away from traditional Muslim traditions. However, it would be a grave mistake to borrow reformist trends, ignoring one’s own many-century religiousness. I think, the optimal variant would be to preserve one’s own tradition, adapt it to the modern way of life, develop education, and use the achievements of Europe and Middle Eastern countries. Such cautious position toward our own tradition is only possible within the framework of Eurasian civilization and those trends, which have been formulated by world religions.

It is interesting that the Russian political elite, President Putin, above all, in explaining the reasons for dissociation with the ultraliberal European values often refer to Muslim peoples. Many Russian citizens think within the framework of a conservative paradigm, but it is quite evident for me that Russian Muslims are the nucleus of Russian conservatism.

Secondly, Russian Muslims have a many-century experience of peaceful coexistence with representatives of other religions. Although the history of relations between the Russian state and Muslim nations is not too serene, as it is often described, yet, comparing it to the experience of other civilizations, it can be asserted that the model of coexistence evolved in the Russian Empire was one of the most pluralistic and it gave broad opportunities to the practice of Islam (I don’t take the Soviet period, inasmuch as during that totally atheistic epoch all religions suffered a great deal). As I have mentioned, Tatar

Muslims have always been distinguished by a desire for peaceful coexistence. During the present period of the global crisis of identity and spirituality, coexistence and interaction with other religions acquire a new meaning – it is a struggle for moral conservatism and for the preservation of legitimate religiousness as such.

Thirdly, Russian Muslim are characterized by moderation, they are able to combine the modern way of life and thinking with Islamic principles. Russian Muslims are not “hyper-ascetic,” they do not call for seclusion and they do not curse technical achievements of civilization and European education. Due to their flexibility and temperance they are able to imbibe everything best, which modern civilization can give. However, they firmly adhere to the ethical principles given us by the Prophet, and in contrast to many cases registered among European Muslims, never compromise. The moderate traditionalism of Russian Muslims serves as an example of harmonious combination of spirituality, adherence to tradition and conservatism, on the one hand, and on the other, ability to accept innovations, education and technical progress, if they do not contradict general spiritual foundations.

In these three spheres Russian Muslims correspond to the Eurasian model, and our task is to tie Muslim strategy more tightly with general civilizational strategy, and to include the former in the latter. We have to give a profound substantiation to these ties so that the thesis of Russian traditional Muslims become an element of Eurasian strategy. In any other instance there is a danger of marginalization and confrontation.

I would like to touch another problem, one of spiritual unity. An important element of the concept of Russian Muslims is the idea about the interconnection of spiritual practices in different Muslim ecumenes (Tatar, Bashkir, Chechen, and others), as well as between Islam and

other religious traditions (Orthodox Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism). I think that Orthodox Christians, Jews and Buddhists within the framework of Eurasian civilization are connected not only by their belonging to one state, but also by their centuries-long living close to one another, and mutual penetration at an everyday-life and cultural level. In other words, there is a unique area of spirituality characterizing Eurasian civilization.

In one of his speeches President Putin said: “You know, we have Eastern, or Orthodox, Christianity. Certain theorists of Christianity assert that it is closer to Islam than, say, to Catholicism. I shall not say whether this assertion is just, but on the whole, coexistence of these basic religions has been going on for many centuries. And we have evolved a definite culture and pattern of interaction over these centuries. We have to remember these roots.”

Russian Muslim culture could unite pre-Muslim customs, elements of Arab, Persian and Turkish education and enlightenment, and in a later period European education and enlightenment. There are no examples of such all-round synthesis among other Muslim cultures. The boundless Eurasian area had given birth to a rich Eurasian soul, which feels capable to contain almost all humanity. This was a subject for profound thinking of outstanding Russian philosophers (V. Solovyov), historians (I. Kireyevsky), and writers (F. Dostoyevsky).

6. Challenges to Russian Muslims

There are several global challenges to Russian Muslims as a social reality: radicalization (under the influence of geopolitical rivals), Islamophobia, attempts to suppress Islam by force, and the problem of integration of immigrants. All these challenges are rooted in definite ideologies.

7. Russian Identity – Shift of Emphases?

I am sure that we now face the need to perceive the concept of Russian Muslims. On the one hand, they are a socio-cultural reality taking shape over many centuries, and on the other, a result of reflection over this reality, and a concept. In a socio-cultural light, Russian Muslims have a considerable specificity: Tatar Muslim culture is distinguished with tolerance, peaceableness, high status of woman, drive for education, democratism, special forms of Sufi practice, and unique literary tradition. Similar specific features can be found among other peoples living in Russia.

The concept of Russian Muslims should unite different socio-cultural realities on a uniform civilizational basis. With due account of the existing neo-Eurasian trend such basis includes anti-globalism, protection of traditional values, traditional multiculturalism, and moderate conservatism. Russian Muslims as the most conservative section of society can make a weighty contribution to all these three fields. Interaction with other major religions on the territory of the Russian Federation is of special importance. Apart from strategic unity in the struggle against Euro-Atlantism, there is special unity in world outlook.

There is a global challenge not only to Russian Muslims, but to the civilizational identity of Russia. The point is the so-called European values, actually, ultraliberalism. Modern ultraliberalism brings the thesis of emancipation of the human *ego* to the logical end. Marginalization of religiousness and spirituality, dictatorship of minorities, erosion of gender identity, destruction of the traditional family, virtualization of reality and all and sundry post-humanistic projects are the greatest evil for all religious people as a whole, and for Muslims, in particular. Neo-Eurasianism has a worthy answer to this evil in the form of the concept of traditional values and support of

traditional religions. However, it's going to be a prolonged struggle, and its outcome cannot be forejudged as yet.

I think that Russian Muslims are ready to take an active social position and participate in creating the image of Eurasian civilization of a conservative type. With due account of demographic tendencies, this means the inclusion of Islam in the sphere of legitimate discourse and its ideological legitimization. Unfortunately, for centuries Russian Muslims had not played any major role in the formation of the ideological agenda in Russia. Prior to 1917 Orthodox Christian identity ruled the roost. Then came the domination of Soviet identity, which at first had been sort of international, but later it began to resemble the prerevolutionary model. Since the 1990s Russia has been living through a crisis of identity.

What Russian (or Eurasian) identity should be to enable Muslims to feel comfortable as part of it? The answer to this question has already been given in the neo-Eurasian proto-ideology of the Kremlin elite. The emerging Russian identity combines adherence to multipolarity, traditional values, traditional multiculturalism, and moderate conservatism. In such situation the Russian Muslims could feel and regard themselves active participants in the process of creating Russian (Eurasian) identity. This will mean for them devotion to patriotism, democratism, traditional values, national and all-Russian culture, etc., which will reduce the danger of radicalization sponsored and fanned by our geopolitical rivals from the outside.

In conclusion, I would like to turn to the idea expressed by Ismail Bei Gasprinsky in his well-known article written in 1881. Writing about the specific nature of relations between Rus and the Golden Horde, he expressed the following view: "As to Tatar domination we should consider the fact that it could, perhaps, preserve Rus from stronger alien influence and contributed to the elaboration of the idea of the unity

of Rus, which was first materialized on the Kulikovo Field.” He also emphasized that Tatars helped “preserve” Russian spiritual culture, which could not be expected from the Catholic crusaders coming from the West.

There is another advantage of the presence of Russian Muslims within the framework of Russian (Eurasian) civilization. Apart from the unique historical combination among Russian Muslims of European, Russian, national and Arab-Persian-Turkish education, there is the preservation of one’s own traditions which have not been subjected to dogmatic reforms. Observing the present-day processes in the Middle East, one involuntarily stops and ponders over what would have happened to Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens and other Muslim peoples if they had not been part of the Russian Federation. What would have happened to our Muslim traditions?

We have lived through difficult periods of mutual relations with the Russian state and succeeded to preserve pure Islam of the Prophet. And now, in the conditions of modern ideological trends we have broad vistas for the development of our own traditions and joint work with representatives of other religions for the benefit of our Motherland and the whole of mankind. And who knows, perhaps, the dream of Ismail Bei Gasprinsky about Russian Muslims standing at the head of the intellectual development and culture of other Muslims in the world will come true.

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TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL ELITE AND THE INFLUENCE OF THIS PROCESS ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF A STATE

Sovereignty is a fundamental attribute of a state. Its firmness depends, to a certain extent, on the place of national interests in the system of priorities of the elite of this state. When the position of the elite in this state is firm and it is interested in its welfare and might, its sovereignty is a very precious resource for the elite, which cannot be exchanged for anything else.

However the development of events in the world shows that for a considerable part of the modern political elites the movement toward transnationalization and formation of international, or to be more exact, the global circle of the elites becomes more attractive than the preservation of the sovereignty of their states. The elitist circles bending to transnationalization demonstrate a much higher level of solidarity, resolution and strategic thinking than the elites preserving national and state sovereignty.

Distinguished by high mobility, waging a cosmopolitan way of life, having great incomes and well-developed class consciousness, the international elite is best of all prepared to breaking relations with its states and transferring to global management. The resources which these people possess grant them practically unlimited opportunities for carrying out their policy and removing obstacles on their way. The interests of this class of people are much less connected with state

sovereignty, and their readiness to act disregarding limitations is much higher than that of the preceding generations of elites.

The beginning of the process of the transnationalization of the political elite has begun a long time ago. Along with the development of the system of international relations and the strengthening of trade and other ties between states, along with wars, peaceful forms of the interaction of states become more stable in foreign policy.

The transnationalization of the elite did not mean exclusion of wars from the arsenal of instruments to reach political aims of states. Moreover, this transnationalization did not mean the elimination of elite conflicts, both international and internal. However, it denoted a tendency toward the erosion of the political subjectness of states. The point is that in evolving domestic and foreign policy of a state, the specific interests of its ruling elite have always been superimposed on the objective geopolitical interests of a country and its people.

A new feature of the situation was that now these were the specific interests of the transnationalized elite and its local segment, and these interests could well lead a state far away from what was dictated to it by objective factors.

It should be noted that the transnationalization processes of the elite proceeded unevenly in different regions of the world. These processes were most developed in the medium of western civilization, both by virtue of prolonged family connections of European aristocracy, and by force of objective reasons connected with the development of capitalism. It was in the West that the transnationalized elite could acquire its own inner cohesion in its own development process, which made it possible to speak of its movement toward supra-state management.

Speaking of the global elite, it should not be regarded as the exclusively political elite, inasmuch as the transnationalization

processes have gripped the business elite, first and foremost, representatives of such branches as finances, telecommunications, energy, etc.

Transnationalization has also gripped the intellectual and cultural elites, those of special services, organized crime, as well as a number of other functional segments.

Special mention should be made of the structure of the global elite and specific features of the way of its adopting some or other political decisions. This structure combines the elements of both hierarchy and networks. The dominant element of the management of the global elite is ideology, and its organizational element is much weaker.

The well-known Russian philosopher, historian and sociologist Alexander Zinovyev characterized the global elite as follows: "There is no world government like governments of individual countries, but world super-society. It consists of from 50 to 80 million people, tens of thousands of world economic empires, non-commercial enterprises, the mass media, etc. It has its own structure, its pyramid, its hierarchy. And it rules the entire planet. The United States is the metropolitan country in this super-society and has its representatives all over the world. Thousands of experts deal with Russia. On top there is, of course, a small circle of people who know one another personally and determine a common strategy. It does not mean that they constantly sit together and think over problems. They may not sit and think at all. Their means of management is a well developed and tested system of manipulating the masses, peoples and governments."

The very fact of the economic and social success of the global political elite in the conditions of exceptionally acute rivalry contributes to the formation of their self-consciousness based on the idea of its chosenness and special mission in the world.

At the same time, a characteristic feature of the global elite is its weak institutional development, that is, the absence of structures in its composition which could be likened to something resembling a “world government.” In reality, the global elite has created several dozen political institutions, most of which are non-governmental non-commercial organizations. The most popular of them in conspiratorial literature, apart from the Council on International Relations of the United States and Chatham-House, are the Bilderberg Club and the Roman Club. However, not one of them can claim the role of the world government.

An analysis of the correlation of the ideological and organizational foundations of the global elite shows its weak institutionalization which is not a consequence of its immaturity, but a result of its conscious policy.

In other words, at present the global elite itself retards its own institutionalization and is confined to weakly structured communications in a club format, without trying to build hierarchic structures.

The conscious refusal of the global elite to increase its institutional quality is aimed at concealing its transnationalization from public opinion.

The transnationalization of the political elite does not mean the automatic withering away of state sovereignty, because the absence of subjectness of a political institution does not mean its ultimate disappearance. Nevertheless, this process shows that the loyalty of the global elite to sovereign states grows when the latter are ready to grant the elite concessions in the form of tax privileges, liberalization of the labor laws, lowering of ecological standards, construction of the elite infrastructure, and other measures aimed at making the life and business of representatives of the global elite in these states more

comfortable and pleasant. Operating with the financial, intellectual, information and other resources, which surpass in volume those used by most states, the global elite finds itself in a privileged position in a dialogue format. We shall note the main modern tendencies of the transnationalization of the political elite.

First, despite the fact that the interests of the global elite are at variance with the interests of sovereign states and their peoples, representatives of these elites have firm positions, and quite often wield state power itself in many countries, and this is why they have all opportunities to evolve and pursue such state policy which is advantageous and convenient for them, that is, will serve the interests of the global elite.

Moreover, some countries in their development quite consciously rely on turning their territories into suitable places for comfortable life, good rest, beneficial investments, high-quality education, etc. for representatives of the elitist circles from the entire world. As an example we can cite Britain, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Monaco, as well as Hong Kong, which is a special administrative district of the People's Republic of China and tackles all problems independently, except defense and foreign policy.

The United States of America holds a special place for the global elite among the sovereign countries of the modern world. Taking into account the fact that the U.S.A. is the world's most powerful state technologically and militarily, and the cosmopolitan segment of the American elite is the core of the global elite, the United States is objectively the main outpost of this global elite and its chief link with the world of sovereign states and their associations. The American human rights standards are recognized universal by the global elite and as such are propagandized on a global scale as obligatory, thus facilitating American interference in the internal affairs of sovereign

states. The United States is the only country whose courts accept cases of crimes or other violations of law committed by foreigners against foreigners outside the boundaries of the U.S. territory, which makes it possible to persecute political opponents of representatives of the global elite from different countries. Finally, the American armed forces are used each time when the interests of the global elite are threatened in one or another region.

However, it would be wrong to assert that the global elite fully identifies its interests with the national interests of the United States, or that its non-American representatives are American puppets.

In actual fact, the global elite has its own systemic quality and its own interests, which largely coincide with those of the U.S., but are not completely similar.

Secondly, the global elite has such a powerful instrument of bringing pressure to bear on sovereign states as a threat of repatriation of capital. This threat is regularly made when one or another state adopts a decision on stricter government control over the economy, additional taxes on high incomes, or criminal proceedings against one or another member of the global elite. Any actions of a state which the elite regards as an encroachment upon its corporative interests are interpreted by the mass media under its control as ones aimed at worsening the investment climate, as a result of which investments to a given country may cease.

Taking into account the fact that many states in our time are firmly integrated in the global economy, particularly in its financial system with its currency and stock markets, the one-time withdrawal of large sums from a country may bring down the national stock indices and, as a result, provoke a financial crisis, turning into a general economic crisis. To avert such developments states are often ready to make serious concessions to international financial corporations and

banks. Although this does not undermine state sovereignty as an international principle, nevertheless, the vulnerability of states to actions of the transnational elitist groups demonstrates a definite weakness of this political-legal construction.

Thirdly, the global elite also possesses broad opportunities for organizing a change of political power in a country where its interests are at variance with those of the given country, and the latter does not show its willingness to make concessions. In doing this each country may rely on support of its actions on the part of a small, but well-knit cosmopolitan segment of the population possessing rich resources and closely connected with the West. Relying on this segment the global elite can actively interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, bringing pressure to bear on its leadership.

The arsenal of means of the change of a regime is vast enough and includes such methods as “velvet revolution,” that is, the overthrow of the existing regime by soft, non-violent methods, for example, street protests, or organization of an armed revolt or civil war with all-round assistance to the rebels, or foreign intervention.

In our view, at a certain stage the broadening and deepening of the transnationalization process of the political elite should lead to the formation of a global political subject, and the global elite is not such subject so far. At present the rudiments of national affiliation prevent the formation of such subject. Irrespective of the degree of detachment of their states and people from national elites, the presence of at least formal mechanisms of democratic representation makes them to take into account the interests of a majority of the population in their policy, restrain the increase of the organizational pattern, and pursue their policy disguising it under political forms of sovereign states.

It should also be noted that the formation of a global political subject is not a single option in the development way of mankind. Taking into account the fact that the global elite represents the interests of only the absolute minority of mankind, which is openly opposed to all the rest, the system this elite is creating is extremely unstable and to keep it in a functional state will only be possible in the conditions of the absolute consolidation of the world's minority and the absolute disunity of the world's majority. However, even in a disunited condition, the majority will remain a favorable ground for the formation of one or another global alternative. Having put forward an alternative political project and created a subject which will begin to realize it, mankind will have all chances to change the vector of its historical development.

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**ISLAM IN THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL
PROCESSES IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS**

The North Caucasus is characterized by the largest ethno-cultural diversity and a very high religiousness of the population in comparison with other Russian regions. The revival of Islam in the region was reflected in the quantitative growth of practicing Muslims, in the restoration of the old and construction of new places of worship, in the expansion of the system of religious education and enlightenment, and in growing approval of Islamic rituals in everyday life of the North Caucasian people. An indicator of the increasing role of Islam is its growing influence on economic, political, and socio-cultural processes in the North Caucasus, besides spiritual and moral ones.

However, the rapid Islamization of life of the peoples of the North Caucasus has a number of features in its consequences, the main one being a split of the Muslim ummah into two opposing, even hostile, camps: supporters of traditional Islam and fundamentalist Islam. Ideological competition and struggle for the minds and souls of believers underlie this conflict. And so, there is a question about the possibility of resolving differences between the rival trends of Islam: how to neutralize or overcome the conflict, hostility and confrontation with the existence of various fundamental doctrines and ideological competition. One side should agree to resolve these conflicts and confrontations, but nothing like this is expected in the North Caucasus in the near future. The place and role of Islam, split into two opposite trends, are problematic in the socio-cultural processes in the North Caucasus. The main issue there is the evaluation of the integration of both Islamic religion in general and the two major trends of Islam. Which Islam, and to what extent, is able to ensure internal unity and

consolidation of diverse social and ethnoconfessional formations around its values in the North Caucasus today?

This issue is discussed in the local expert community. Directly opposite views are voiced in debates going on in theological circles. The ethnic and cultural diversity is a specific feature of the region, which should be taken into consideration in order to adapt Islam to local realities, and to analyze the place and role of Islam in the political and socio-cultural processes. Researchers should not ignore syncretism of Islam and ethnographic specificities of tribal communities, historically developed in the North Caucasus. Islamic faith had entrenched itself among the North Caucasian peoples, having undergone a great impact of pre-Islamic beliefs, customs and traditions of the local inhabitants. Their distinctive features can be found in the Islamic practice of every nation in the North Caucasus. This diversity of local variations of Islam (and not just confrontation between the two basic trends) promotes the formation of parochial ethnic identity.

A variety of views about the role of Islam as a factor of integration of society does not mean the denial of the potential of Muslim religion to unite North Caucasian society. On the contrary, today the problem of integrating the growing role of Islam is updated in search for a new identity. However, the claims of Islam to the role of the unifier of diverse ethnoconfessional formations in the North Caucasus run into the problem of division or split of Islam into traditional Islam and unconventional Islam for the region.

Nowadays, traditional Islam is a system of values which is the most adapted to the local conditions, if we analyze the possibilities of traditional Islam and fundamentalist Islam. On the one hand, the former exerts the dominant influence on the broad strata of the population of the North Caucasus, and on the other, it provides support from the

republican authorities and ethnic elites, which are either associated with the government or opposed to them.

It is traditional Islam today that offers a social program, which covers the current socio-economic and political situation. In other words, traditional Islam in the region approves and supports the existing socio-political order, the republican and regional governments, and the political orientation of officials of the local government. It claims to be the official ideological value and the dominant role in the educational and cultural subsystems of society in terms of spiritual orientation.

Orientation of traditional Islam to socio-cultural autonomy and diversity of local cultures is an important point in these integration processes for the peaceful coexistence of the ethnic entities living in the North Caucasus, and, to some extent, on peaceful coexistence of religious trends in Islam. It also stands for friendly, good-neighborly relations between the Russian people and other peoples that surround the North Caucasus. Geopolitically, traditional Islam is oriented to the integration of the North Caucasus republics in Russian civilization on the grounds of a broader political and cultural autonomy than it was during the Soviet period.

Thus, traditional Islam can be a factor of stabilization of the political situation in the North Caucasus as a whole, and a stabilizing system of values for the North Caucasian population. But the question arises: why has not traditional Islam become such a factor earlier?

First, to date, traditional Islam has not won ideological, social and cultural domination in the region because of the permanent crisis of the system in the entire North Caucasus society, which is also part of the crisis of Russian society. This crisis is still the breeding ground for the growing popularity of fundamentalist Islam. That is, the economic,

social and political crisis has not only given birth to, but continues to support the split of Islam into these warring or opposing trends.

However, traditional Islam also reveals the destabilizing potential in an effort to become the leading system of ideological values and spiritual and moral guidance, which is evident in the politicization of traditional Islam and in its aspiration to Islamize the whole of society. Paradoxically, the strengthening of the position of traditional Islam does not diminish, but intensifies the tension and conflict potential in North Caucasus society.

Traditional Islam has never become a consolidating factor for all Muslims, not to mention North Caucasian society, despite an increase in the number of believers, mosques, religious organizations, promotion of religious values, and distribution of religious literature. On the contrary, disagreements have increased among the Muslim clergy and among the secular population. The split in religious denomination has been added to the split along ethnic lines.

Many analysts, who previously welcomed the Islamic revival, now admit that the Islamic renaissance has not become a factor of political stability and socio-cultural integration of North Caucasus society, but, on the contrary, turned into a factor of growing tension and conflict.

Fundamentalist Islam is opposed to the ideological integration of Muslims, declaring some Muslims misguided, others apostate, still others hypocrites, and proclaims itself as the only true religion, pure and free from all historical stratifications, which should be the religion of all Muslims, including, of course, the entire population of the North Caucasus.

In terms of social orientation fundamentalist Islam is based on the egalitarian social ideals of early Islam that had attracted many supporters, especially among the poor. The political objective of

fundamentalist Islam is the formation of the clerical state in which political power is combined with the religious authority in the hands of Muslim leaders.

In the sphere of cultural life it is oriented to the dominance of Islamic religion and cultural stereotypes of Islam. Such predominance of religious values concerns not only secular culture, but also the traditional ethnic culture and national art of the peoples of the North Caucasus as a whole. Naturally, these claims apply to the field of upbringing and education.

The extremes of fundamentalism provoke social conflicts and contradictions even more, which are the results of market reforms. To a certain extent, they are also a result of unwise actions of the central government and national authorities in the North Caucasus. Today, the political influence of fundamentalism is incomparable with the number of its adherents because of its ideological and financial capacity. It is clear that fundamentalism is growing in the region, while traditional Islam is gradually losing ground. Polls conducted by many researchers in recent years attest to this.

The popularity of fundamentalism is rooted in social protest within a significant part of the local population (mostly the poor segments of society living in the extremist environment), and also in the prolonged socio-economic and moral crisis of North Caucasian society. A certain part of believers accepts Salafism and Wahhabism as a form of expression of social protest against the difficult financial situation, rampant corruption, crime, unemployment and other negative phenomena. But the question arises: is the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism an acceptable alternative to traditional Islam in the region? Obviously not, because this ideology does not provide any satisfactory solutions to acute social, economic, political, spiritual and moral problems, but only aggravates tension and conflicts in society.

Moreover, this ideology is practically incompatible with ethnic and cultural identity of the peoples of the North Caucasus, which has been and remains serious obstacle to the integration of the region into a unified Islamic socio-political entity. There is no need to say more about the inhumane, destructive methods and tools, which are chosen by the supporters of fundamentalist Islam for the implementation of their ideas.

Thus, to the question whether Islam unites North Caucasus society today we can give a negative rather than positive answer. It only formally unites our peoples, framing ethnic pluralism in the region externally. Islam is often used as a political factor in the hands of the national authorities, as well as in the hands of the legal and illegal opposition in the region. It is played out as a political card between the central and local authorities, a political card of separatism, and used as an ideological cover for political terrorism.

Why cannot Islam realize its cultural integrating function in the region today? The main reason lies in the features of modern society to which Islam is adapted. Islam is split into trends, competing or conflicting with one another, adapting to the environment in terms of reforms and generating conflicts and contradictions, which are superimposed on ethnic pluralism and mosaic, combined with religious pluralism of North Caucasian society. And it is practically impossible to combine these tendencies in order to find common ground in the region. As a result, Islam is presented as a factor of conservation of multi-ethnic disunity rather than the cultural cohesion of ethnic groups at a higher ideological level.

Islam has both an integrative-constructive and destructive-disintegration potential. Which of them will be implemented in reality? It depends on the specific historical situation, the social environment, the policy of the national authorities, the policy pursued by the Muslim

clergy, by their interaction, as well as the policy of the federal government, local authorities, and their relationships. There are many reasons to use the Islamic factor one way or another.

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THE AFGHAN KNOT: CONCEPTUAL FEATURES OF U.S. STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN AND EURASIA

For many decades Afghanistan has been one of the most crucial vectors of the U.S. analytical course on the Eurasian continent. It has become the center of attraction of Washington's military-political efforts by virtue of its geographical proximity to the Soviet Union, and now Russia, and the Central Asian region. Apart from that, Afghanistan is an important link in the "arc of instability around the U.S.S.R. / Russia, including the so-called green (Islamic) belts of tension.

The well-known Russian expert on the Middle East and Central Asia D. Ryurikov, who has been working in this field many years and held the post of the Russian Ambassador in Uzbekistan, has proposed to introduce in parlance the category of "American scheme towards Afghanistan." Its realization began with the drawing of the U.S.S.R. in the armed conflict in that country (1979), continued with the operation "Enduring Freedom" (2001), and will continue after 2014, that is, after its completion. This approach may contribute to a more profound conceptual and chronological analysis of U.S. Afghan policy.

In the 1980s the United States rendered an intensive military and financial aid to the Afghan mujahiddins. It was combined with tangible assistance to them from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. This ultimately created real threats to the security of the U.S.S.R., inasmuch as military tension came quite close to its borders. In 1988 on the initiative of the CIA the "Islamic alliance of Northern peoples of Afghanistan" was

formed with its headquarters in Peshawar. One of its tasks was to undermine the situation in the Muslim enclaves of the U.S.S.R.

It should be noted that both the Afghan mujahiddins and the Taliban movement, which subsequently overthrew the former, had practically similar sponsors and inspirers – the CIA, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan's intelligence service and Ministry for the Interior, as well as the right-wing Islamic party "Jamaateislami." It is indicative that in February 1995 'The Wall Street Journal' wrote that the Taliban was, perhaps, the best group which had emerged in Afghanistan during the past few years.

In 1999 the NATO strategic concept was evolved. It was viewed by the expert community as an attempt to justify NATO intervention in Yugoslavia. But its premises also reflected certain aspects of the preparation for the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The concept envisaged the right of the alliance to organize military operations outside the boundaries of its territory with due account of such risks as terrorism, sabotage, organized crime, etc. This contradicted Article 53 of the UN Charter, which said that no coercive actions could be undertaken by regional bodies without authorization by the Security Council. Thus, the concept of 1999 actually took NATO out of the bounds of the international legal sphere.

As is known, the pretext for the operation "Enduring Freedom," which began with the invasion of the American and NATO forces in Afghanistan, was the acts of terror on September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington. There are several interpretations of these tragic events, including those which disproved the official version of the White House. It is important that the invasion of Afghanistan based on the principles of the Strategic Concept of 1999, had been planned long before September 11, 2001. It is known that already on September 14 American representatives began negotiations with the leadership

of Uzbekistan on creating a military base there to support the U.S. operations in Afghanistan, which showed a high degree of preliminary preparations to the occupation of that country.

The consecutive chain of American special and military operations – assistance to Afghan mujahiddins, the creation of Taliban in opposition to mujahiddins, invasion of Afghanistan in order “to curb” the Talib – are part of Washington’s strategy to create an unstable situation in Eurasia. This course was continued by the U.S. invasion of Iraq under the artificial pretext of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in that country, the creation of a turbulent atmosphere in the vast region of North Africa and the Middle East, or the so-called Arab spring. The consequences of these and other operations of Washington which were part of this course, gave quite predicted results many years later. Evidently, the United States would not have to deal blows at the Muslims militants in Iraq in 2014, if it had not created a permanently acting seat of terrorism there by its invasion in 2002.

The chain of armed and unarmed conflicts raging on our continent requires their analysis in the context of Eurasian policy of Washington.

In 2002, the U.S. Department of State evolved a project of the initiative of supporting partnership in the Middle East, whose aim was to implement democratic transformations in a number of countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Its implementation caused the abolition of undesirable regimes and an expansion of the region of instability by including in it a whole number of Arab states mentioned in that project.

On the eve of the 2011 events in Tunisia which triggered off the “Arab spring” the U.S. Strategy of national security was made public in 2010. It presupposed assistance in democratization to Third World countries right up to the use of “preventive measures against

authoritarian regimes.” Among the examples of its realization was the NATO invasion of Libya and help to Islamic extremists, including al-Qaeda militants in Syria. The growth of Islamic extremism in the Wahhabi form provoked by the “Arab spring” has been reflected not only in Libya, Syria and Iraq, but also in the situation in the Russian North Caucasus.

Characteristically, during the mass unrest in Kiev (Ukraine) the supporters of the opposition in Maidan Square along with the national flag of Ukraine hoisted the flag of Syrian extremists – the fighters of the “Syrian army of liberation” supported by the United States.

As to Washington’s course toward Russia, it has remained unchanged during a prolonged historical period. Coincidence is quite evident between the Afghan events of the 1980s and the developments in Ukraine in 2014. The assistance rendered by Washington and its allies to extremist groupings has led to the emergence and conservation of the state of a civil war in Afghanistan for many decades. A permanently dangerous seat of instability has emerged near the borders of the U.S.S.R. Moscow has found itself opposed virtually to the entire international community, suffered great human and economic losses, and was confronted with serious, if fatal, internal political problems.

The American operation in Ukraine has hurled the country in the abyss of civil war. The anti-Russian component of this operation boils down to the destabilization of the situation in Russia’s close neighbor and the creation of foreign-policy problems and unprecedented economic difficulties for it. Apart from this, under the pretext of the “Russian threat” the NATO plans to deploy five new military bases in East Europe.

In both Afghanistan and Ukraine the United States set parts of their populations against one another on the ethno-linguistic

principle. In Afghanistan, after the emergence of the Taliban movement, a confrontation has begun between Pashtun-speaking southerners and Tajik- and Uzbek-speaking northerners. In Ukraine conflicts have flared up between the Ukrainian-speaking West and Russian-speaking East. The American locomotive is moving forward relying on the extremist and inhuman forces. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan was distinguished by medieval barbarity and man-hating. These features are common to it now, too.

According to the expert of the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies V. Kholodkov, the struggle against Russia at the oil front is waged with the help of the same methods as during the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. The United States and Saudi Arabia took joint actions to lower prices of oil at the time, which dealt a serious blow at the economy of the U.S.S.R. Similarly, during a visit of President Obama to Saudi Arabia in March 2014 joint actions were agreed to bring down the prices of oil and gas, which had an adverse effect on the Russian economy.

The promotion of American interests to the region of the Middle East by organizing armed conflicts has a purely economic background. Any local conflicts raise the demand for the dollar, inasmuch as investors use it as the “currency-asylum.” A fresh example confirming this thesis is the conflict in Ukraine. Besides, the shares of U.S. military-industry companies soar to the sky.

The U.S.A., Islamic Extremists and Drugs

In the 1990s Washington' positions toward al-Qaeda and the Taliban movement operating in Afghanistan were of a dual nature. The United States granted asylum to Osama bin Laden who had been accused of committing terrorist acts against the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, where 224 people had lost their life. This would

have been difficult to explain had not the Bush family and bin Laden's clan had the common oil business in Texas. Besides, George Bush, Sr. was the head of the CIA at the time, which had worked with the Taliban movement quite actively.

In October 1999 the United States initiated preparation of the resolution No 1267 of the UN Security Council, which introduced sanctions against the Taliban movement. But this took place already when the democrat Bill Clinton came to the White House. When the republican George Bush, Jr. and the democrat Barack Obama became U.S. presidents even more questions emerged concerning relations between the United States, the Taliban movement and al-Qaeda than at the time of the George Bush Sr. presidency.

For two decades that had passed since the Taliban movement had come to the fore and developed its activity quite seriously, relations between the American special agencies and the movement had been rather complicated. The Taliban and the U.S. special forces had been in a permanent armed confrontation and interdependence.

The military operations and anti-terrorist actions in Afghanistan carried on by the occupation contingent headed by the United States, whose numerical strength reached up to 150,000 men and almost 300,000 Afghan men and officers, policemen, and other servicemen have failed to reach a decisive success in the fight against the Taliban units.

With a view to drawing the Taliban to the political process and creating an illusion of a positive development of the situation in Afghanistan, Washington and Kabul have agreed to set up a mission of the Taliban movement in Doha. But it has ended in a diplomatic embarrassment, and the mission was closed temporarily.

During the NATO stay in Afghanistan narcotic drug production has increased dozens of times there. In all, 90 percent of heroin

production in the world are concentrated in that country, of them some 25 percent of the stuff is shipped to Russia along the “northern route” passing through Central Asian countries. According to UN estimates, up to 10,000 people die of Afghan heroin in our country annually. More than 10,000 die of this in NATO countries every year, which is five times more than the number of men and officers of the alliance killed in Afghanistan during the period between 2001 and 2009.

The volumes of narcotic drug production directly depend on the sown area, which has considerably increased during the NATO troops stay in Afghanistan. In 2013, this area was about 154,000 hectares. In Colombia Americans use defoliants in fighting the “cocaine threat.” However, in Afghanistan the NATO troops do not even try to suppress drug production, preferring not to quarrel with the local drug barons and cartels. They put the main emphasis on fighting drug trafficking, but not its production. The essence of the problem lies in the fact that Afghan drugs do not threaten the United States. They are shipped there from Mexico and Colombia. Strange as it may seem, Europeans adhere to the same course as Americans, despite the fact that they suffer from Afghan narcotic drugs.

Of course, it can be assumed that if the Talibs come to power in Afghanistan, they may announce a stop to narcotic drug production in order to win sympathy of the world community. But this situation will not last long. Afghanistan’s economy has an absolutely drug-dependent character. To stop drug production would be tantamount for the Talibs to lose all means of existence. In any case, the flow of narcotic drugs from Afghanistan, before or after the reduction or withdrawal of the NATO contingents, will remain one of the main threats to Russia’s security.

Military and Political Results of the Operation “Enduring Freedom”

Under the impact of unconvincing achievements of Washington in the struggle against the Afghan extremists certain members of the international expert community express the view that the United States has suffered defeat in Afghanistan.

Speaking at the Senate Committee on defense in March 2011 the commander of the NATO forces in Afghanistan during that period, General D. Petreus, said that it was extremely important for the United States to stay in the region, where it had vital interests, and the instrument for its presence should be “joint Afghan-American bases.” On September 30, 2014, a bilateral agreement was signed on cooperation in the field of defense and security, which listed nine military bases on the territory of Afghanistan.

Another aspect of U.S. – Afghan relations has been one of Afghanistan’s President. It has always had an American dominant. The latest presidential elections in that country were accompanied with the deterioration of the domestic situation. During the first half of 2014 the Talib made 691 attacks at populated centers and army and police headquarters. The police lost 1,523 men killed. The number of casualties among the peaceful population increased by 24 percent, as compared with the similar period of 2013. The Taliban militants stepped up their activity on the territories controlled by the national Afghan special forces and special police units.

In May 2014 President Obama presented a plan of the withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan. After the termination of combat operations in December 2014, about 10,000 American servicemen will have to stay in the country for another year. During 2015 their number will be reduced by half. The remaining military contingent will carry on consultation and training duties.

In 2016 their number will be halved. Then the American servicemen will become an ordinary army group of aid working under the supervision of the U.S. Ambassador and dealing with arms supplies. The American NATO allies have reaffirmed the stay of up to five thousand military instructors in Afghanistan after 2014.

The Afghan people have reacted to the developments in their country differently. Those who support the central power are concerned over the consequences of the latest decisions and believe that the withdrawal of the U.S. troops will hurl their country into a crisis. The leaders of the Taliban movement are sure that jihad is necessary until the last American soldier leaves Afghan soil.

During the 14 years of the operations in Afghanistan 2,340 American servicemen lost their life there. President Obama has declared that the termination of the Afghan war will make it possible to redirect resources to tackling more tasks of global dimension. Evidently, the curtailment of the American contingents in Afghanistan has been influenced by the decision to augment the U.S. forces in East Europe. Another direction of U.S. strategic efforts is the Asia-Pacific region. By 2020 about 60 percent of the naval and air forces of the United States will be deployed there.

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Since 1979 the United States has carried on intelligence, information and military operations in the Middle East, where a permanent seat of tension has emerged, destabilizing the situation in North Africa and Eurasia. The growing chaos in international affairs is directly connected with the intentional process of retarding the formation of another world center of force.

The invasion of Afghanistan, support of the “Arab spring,” assistance to the fundamentalists in Libya and Syria, events in Ukraine

are all components of the drive to thwart Russia's advancement to world leadership. If Washington succeeds in achieving this task, it will concentrate its main efforts on China.

One of the threats to Russia's security is the creation of permanent American military bases in Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, and later, in the Caucasus, if possible, under the pretext of fighting terrorism. There are signs of linking the NATO bases in Afghanistan in one system. Close to the base in Afghan Mazar-i-Sharif is a German military base in the Turkmen city of Termez. Apart from that, the United States creates a network of strong posts in Central Asian countries, which can also serve as transit and logistics centers, as well as training centers for fighting terrorism. To tackle this task the NATO has opened a Central Asian office of communications in Tashkent. There are rumors that the United States may redeploy a military base in Uzbekistan which was closed soon after the events in Andizhan in 2005.

Rivaling with Russia, Americans cooperate with Tajikistan in the military sphere and in training personnel for special services. Nevertheless, in October 2013 the lower chamber of Tajik parliament ratified a new agreement with Russia on the Russian 201st military base on the territory of the republic, which prolonged its deployment until 2042.

In Afghanistan and the region of Central Asia there are about ten various terrorist organizations connected with Afghanistan's Taliban movement. In most cases units of the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic movement of Tajikistan, and others operate as structural subdivisions of the Taliban movement. These radical groupings are armed, trained, replenished and acquire combat experience in Afghanistan. Russian Islamists from the Volga Area and the North Caucasus are also trained at these militants' camps.

Any development of the situation in Afghanistan after 2014 preserves that country as a system-forming element of destabilization in the Middle East. Connected with the situation in the region, Afghanistan will become one of the two main poles of instability in Eurasia as a whole. The Afghan Talibs have already offered the Islamic state militants operating in Syria and Iraq “all possible assistance and support.”

In this connection the role of regional international organizations, such as SCO and CSTO, first and foremost, is considerably increasing. The military component of CSTO makes it an important element of opposing regional threats coming from Afghanistan.

Against the background of risks coming from Afghanistan and the new massive offensive of the United States in Eurasia, the expansion and strengthening of SCO (especially its forcible element) looks hopeful. This was shown by spectacular joint military exercises “Peaceful mission 2014” held on the territory of China last year. The official pretext for the exercises was the expected reduction of the NATO military contingents in Afghanistan. It is planned to accept India and Pakistan in SCO as full-fledged members. As a result, it turns out that pursuing its aggressive strategic course in Eurasia aimed at preventing the formation of another world center of force, the United States itself helps its formation.

A no less important aspect is to define the role of Russia in the Afghan affairs in connection with the inevitable regionalization of a solution of the Afghan problem. The question of the resumption of the Russian presence in Afghanistan becomes quite timely. For example, Americans, Indians and Chinese have opened universities in Afghanistan thanks to which they not only train national personnel, but also increase the number of their supporters in that country. At the same time, Russia, which has a rich experience and tradition of cooperation

with Afghanistan in the sphere of higher and secondary special education, has completely abandoned this sphere of public life in that country. The same is true of the mass media sphere of Afghanistan, which is now completely controlled by the United States and its allies, as well as India, Iran and Pakistan.

The regionalization of the Afghan problem opens fresh opportunities for Russia to bolster up its political positions in Afghanistan, the Middle East and in Central Asia. Moscow's prestige and experience accumulated during negotiations aimed at solving the Syrian problem, the ability of Russian diplomats to persuade the conflicting parties to sit at a negotiation table can be a good basis and largely contribute to solution of the intra-Afghan conflict. Moscow, Beijing and New-Delhi could be the "regulators" of the situation in Afghanistan and around it, despite certain contradictions within the triad. Participation of Iran and Pakistan in this process could also be quite valuable.

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**FUNDAMENTALISM AT THE CROSSROADS
OF WESTERN AND ISLAMIC VALUES**

One of the notable development tendencies of the modern world is the growing influence of radical movements, organizations and parties whose programmatic documents and activities are based on a wide range of ideological, socio-cultural, confessional and other values, ideas and principles, which can be united under the common

title of “fundamentalism.” This term can rightly be applied to the way of thinking, both secular and religious, advocating the “purity” of their ideologies and ideological-political programs by cleansing them from harmful superpositions and deviations, which have emerged in the course of social and historical development and, consequently, return to the initial basic or fundamental sources.

Fundamentalism is characteristic of all societies throughout history, especially in the periods of profound economic, social, socio-cultural and political transformations. Conformably to the modern world it is possible to speak not only of Islamic, Christian, Protestant, or Orthodox fundamentalism, but also liberal, democratic, conservative, communist, market, human-rights fundamentalism, etc.

Fundamentalists are distinguished by their simplified approach to religious dogmas. It is close to orthodoxy, which is based on radicalism, religious or social fanaticism, xenophobia, politicized ethnicity and religious faith, racism, etc. in their extreme manifestations. The ideas of fundamentalism are propagated more frequently by the marginal strata of the population ousted to the periphery of social and political life. However, all and sundry ideas and projects of reorganization of society, which seemed utopian, marginal and unrealizable some time ago, gradually acquire respectability and the status of necessary requisites for the transformation of society, that is, which are really feasible. Such ideas and projects are put forward during the periods of a deep crisis.

During the past two or three decades this phenomenon has been connected in mass consciousness, as a rule, with Islamic fundamentalism, above all. However, the developments connected with the act of terror against the French publication “Charlie Hebdo” in Paris in January 2015 emphasize another, no less important aspect, namely, manifestations of outright radicalism and extremism in the ideological,

information, socio-cultural and political-cultural spheres of the entire modern world. From this point of view it is interesting to analyze the western and eastern variants of fundamentalism on the example of “Charlie Hebdo” and political Islamism.

These phenomena cannot be understood properly in isolation from the major shifts taking place in the deep infrastructural layers of socio-political life and views of the modern world. Conformably to the West, we mean a whole range of tendencies and processes, which have begun to ripen and develop during the past one-and-a-half centuries and reached the peak in our days. Here the process of “databooism,” which gripped the various spheres of public life – socio-cultural, political-cultural, ideological-political, etc., draws much attention.

The significance of tabooism is most closely connected with the basics of human history. Taboos are rooted in the very nature of human persons as social beings. The origin of man and his emergence from the gregarious state are most closely connected with the need to submit the inborn egoistic-individualistic and aggressive disposition and instincts of the separate individual to the imperatives of social life and the interests of community, team, family or tribe. Without taboos it is impossible to imagine transfer of human beings from the state of anarchy and all-permissiveness to the state in which they are prohibited to do some or other things under threat of punishment, including physical coercion. The imperatives of hominization dictated the need to form outward mechanisms of submission of human beings to the norms of communal social life. In this sense, anthropogeny and sociogenesis are most closely connected and form the two sides of the single process of anthroposociogenesis.

In other words, when there are no inner restraining mechanisms there should be taboos imposed from the outside, “external censorship,”

so to say, which cannot be ensured without the subject endowed with the right and means of coercion. As a rule, the state comes out as such subject. The essence of the problem is in that any human community, all the more so, a state claiming fitness and usefulness at present and in the future cannot be viable without certain supra-personal ideals for the sake of which each individual is ready to sacrifice his or her life. Otherwise, humanity would not have had its great heroes. As follows from the entire written history of mankind, almost always when the state and society were faced with the dilemma of choosing between its self-preservation, on the one hand, and the life of a separately taken individual, his rights and freedoms, on the other, priority was always given to the imperative of the self-preservation of the state.

This was why the states have always manifested unconditional readiness to sacrifice the life not only of the citizens of their enemy, but also their own citizens. The weakening of power is connected with the intentional or contravolitional lifting of some or other taboos. The various forms of anarchy, nihilism, all-permissiveness, and other antisocial phenomena are also connected with it.

These processes and tendencies are especially pronounced and clearly manifested in the religious sphere.

The number of new churches, mosques, synagogues, etc. is constantly growing all over the world. However, it would be premature and wrong to assert that the level of the spiritual health of society is growing proportionally. There is hardly any reason to remind the reader of numerous scandals connected with the cases of pedophilia in the Catholic Church. The campaign of a special form of theomachy within the various trends of Christianity is growing, assuming an aggressive character. A cardinal revision of a number of key postulates of the Bible is sometimes suggested.

In other words, one can speak of the beginning of the de-Christianization process of the western world. It seems that Europe is moving far away from its roots, and the aberration process of values and institutions sacred for the peoples during the greater part of their written history is beginning. Manifestations of this process are distribution of promiscuity, Swedish marriages, boy- and girl-friendism, various types of non-traditional sexual orientation, etc, which undermine the basic dominants of Judeo-Christian civilization as bisexual exogamous marriages and the family in its traditional meaning.

The phenomena of this category included feminization of men and masculinization of women, which are not only open and officially recognized, but also propagandized, thus having an influence on the crucial spheres of human life, including state policy and geopolitics. Naturally, these phenomena and trends lead to the deformity of male and female roles in society. This is shown, among other things, by the broad campaign aimed at changing the age-old terms and notions into allegedly “politically correct” analogues. In a number of countries in official documents the words “husband” and “wife” are replaced with neutral terms like “partners,” and the words “mother and father” with the words “No 1 parent and No 2 parent.” In 2009 Europarliament banned the use of words “Miss” and “Missis,” because, in the view of certain ‘human rights champions,’ they may insult the dignity of a woman.

On this ground all and sundry utopian ideas spring up like the well-known concept of the “end of history,” which was devised to persuade everyone and their brother that western liberal democracy has ultimately conquered everything and is now established as “the highest form of organization of human society.” A phenomenon has come into

being which is called “western complex” and is popular among the more advanced part of the population on the Euro-Atlantic world.

Then key role is played by the fact that the same ideas can be used for both creative and destructive aims. A vivid idea about the substantiation of this thesis can be gained from the transformations of liberalism during the past several decades. The main values and institutions of political democracy are based on liberalism. Of course, the liberalism of the traditions of F.D. Roosevelt, D. Lloyd-George, G. Giolitti retains its leading role and significance as the basis of economic and social reforms.

At the same time certain ideas of this trend taken from the context, misinterpreted, distorted and over-emphasized are used for substantiating some or others radical and even extremist ideologies, be they anarchism, libertarianism, or market, democratic or other forms of fundamentalism. Such mutations have ultimately led to emasculation or even loss of the very spirit and essence of liberalism of J. Locke, C. Montesquieu, I. Kant, T. Jefferson, and other founding fathers.

As a result, democracy, and human rights and freedoms have acquired features and outlines of an ideology or a system of religious cult. Something like “perverted” totalitarianism is formed. In is in this vein should we take the attempts to use the idea of democracy as a missionary slogan used in place or out of place for substantiating all and sundry sanctions, conflicts, wars, “color revolutions,” and for export of democracy and human rights and freedoms.

In order to understand this reasoning correctly, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the concept of “freedom of choice” and “inner freedom” should not be regarded as synonyms. Freedom of choice is not and cannot necessarily be a reflection of inner freedom. If the former can destroy all taboos, traditions, myths, legends, and illusions tying human communities, the latter restricts freedom

of choice in order to preserve it within the limits of the “golden rule,” or what is permitted. Otherwise, culture and tradition as such may become victims of coercion on the part of unbridled freedom.

In modern society characterized by interaction and clashes of many wills, values, arrangements, requirements, interests, etc. there is no, and cannot be, uniform interpretation and understanding of freedom. All the more so, there can be no abstract, absolute freedom. As a rule, when someone wishes to defend freedom of speech, he or she cites the well-known words of Voltaire: “I disagree with your view, but I’d do everything to be able to hear it.” These words correlate with the no less well-known words of Lord Acton: “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Naturally, one cannot but fully agree with both these thinkers. But recognition of their correctness does not mean permissibility of absolutization of freedom, and its fundamentalist interpretation. As has justly been noted by the American historian G. Himmelfarb, “freedom also corrupts, and absolute freedom corrupts absolutely.” Such freedom can serve as the foundation for the formation of culture of all-permissiveness.

The correctness of this thesis is confirmed by the “Charlie Hebdo” case, which has clearly demonstrated that excesses of freedom jeopardize the personal freedom of an individual. Consequently, freedom should not be identified with self-will. It should be limited, primarily by the state. Perhaps, under certain conditions the world may find itself in a situation when democracy would have to be protected from too zealous democrats, and human rights and freedoms – from too zealous protectors.

In the name of wrongly interpreted human rights and freedoms the policy of eliminating all and sundry taboos, cultivating boundless tolerance, often expressed by the term “political correctness,” which is the key component of democratic messiahship, is being promoted.

Paradoxically, tolerance, which is understood by many people as an integral part of the mythology of human rights and freedoms, undergoes an original inversion.

It is important to have in mind that violence and terror can be not only physical, but also moral and ethical, information-propagandist, ideological, etc. A word, even a gesture can insult, just as physical violence. This is not surprising, for as the Oriental proverb goes, a wound inflicted by sword heals, but a wound caused by word does not.

Islam is not a monolithic stagnant faith. It is represented by dozens of different schools and trends and is characterized by the absence of any central body speaking on behalf of the entire ummah. Islam is a democratic religion and it allows existence of various trends and assessments. Persons who have received religious education have the right to interpret and comment the Koran and Sunnah. They can argue against any view expressed by generally recognized religious authority or body. This can explain, apart from other things, the stepping up of the activity of fundamentalist movements united under the term “Salaphism,” “political Islam,” or “Islamic fundamentalism.” It was these trends that have become factors during the past two – three decades, exerting an ever growing influence at the national and global levels.

Islamic fundamentalists base themselves exclusively on the Koran and Sunnah, regarding them as eternal and absolutely true sources fit for all times and peoples. For them the Koran and Sunnah are the wellspring of all human values, laws, rules of life, etc.

Islamic fundamentalism is based on works of ibn Taimiya (1263–1328) and M. ibn Abdal-Wahhab (1703–1787), and theologists of the 20th century – Hasan al-Banna, Seyid Kutba, Abu al-Alia Maududi, and others.

The fundamentalists adhere to the idea of the world's dichotomy, and polarity of good and evil. They see the world as an arena of constant struggle between the forces of good headed by Allah and the forces of evil headed by Iblis. There can be no neutrality in this struggle, for in their view, "whoever is not with us is against us," inasmuch as belief in Allah is the criterion of the good.

The period when the outstanding Muslim theologian, lawyer and political writer ibn Taimiya lived Muslim religion ceased to be a monolithic theory and became divided into many sects and trends. This was why he saw the way out from the situation in return to the unified and monolithic religion, which, in his view, had existed in the first ages of the history of Islam. Having scrupulously analyzed the entire Islamic heritage in his numerous political, legal and philosophical works, he found a way out of the situation in returning to the sources close to the Prophet himself and the first caliphs. He was one of the first to declare war on Shi'ism and Sufism, he was against pilgrimage to the Prophet's grave and celebration of His birthday.

Following ibn Taimiya, the founder of Wahhabism Abdal-Wahhab asserted that if a believer did not accept such interpretation of Islam he should be deprived of inviolability of his property and life. The key element in the teaching of ibn Taimiya and al-Wahhab was the idea of "taqfir," according to which man could be considered infidel if he did not acknowledge legitimacy of the absolute power of the king. Both ibn Taimiya and al-Wahhab denounced all Muslims for reverence of the dead, saints or angels, pilgrimage to graves and special mosques, observance of religious holidays, and veneration of saints. They prohibited to erect tombs at burials of the dead. They maintained that believers, including Sufis, Shi'ites and representatives of other trends of Islam, who did not recognize these values and tenets, should

be killed, and their wives and daughters should be nailed to the barndoors.

All these values and tenets have been accepted by the present Islamic fundamentalists. They are coming out for the restoration of initial Islam by turning to the experience of as-salaf as salihun, from which Islamic fundamentalism received the name “salafiya” (salafism). It should be noted that the term “political Islam,” or Islamism, is neutral by itself. It combines radical and moderate, traditional and modern ideas, principles and rules. The Islamists-Salafites are both modernizers and preservers of Islam.

This is why it is not correct to equal Islamism, extremism and terrorism. An Islamist can be extremist and terrorist, but not all Islamists are such. An analysis of the real state of affairs shows that in modern Islamist fundamentalism there are moderate and radical trends of left and right deviations. In some Islamist organizations we may find sections using peaceful, legal methods, and those working underground and using violent methods and terror. It is true that in one of the most widely known trends of Salafism – Wahhabism – jihad is interpreted as “sacred war” against the infidels, including those Muslims who are branded as apostates from true faith. Besides, Wahhabism should not be interpreted exclusively in a negative vein in terms of its aggressiveness or non-aggressiveness, for it is state religion of Saudi Arabia, which is known as an active fighter against terrorism.

One can single out the following tenets shared by most adherents of Islamic fundamentalism: the idea of the universal character of Islam, presupposing unity of religion, society and power; call for return to initial “true” Islam, its cleansing from various harmful historical elements; pan-Islamism; establishment of the Islamic world order by revival of caliphate, etc. They come out against veneration of sacred

places and more modest and shorter burial ritual. In their view, there should be only one approach to the essence of Islam and the interpretation of the Koran and Sunnah. It should be noted that Caucasian Islam had borrowed many norms and principles of the mountain adats which are ardently defended by most believers and the leaders of Traditional Islam in the region. Naturally, fundamentalists demand that they should be discarded.

Although the fundamental Salafia thesis about return to the sources of Islam has undergone an essential transformation over the centuries, its specific feature in our days lies in the premise that its adherents act in the context of double confrontation – true Islam against bad Islam, and Muslim East against infidel West, which in the view of the Salafists, is striving to destroy the world of Islam. The most radical part of fundamentalists bases the need for armed struggle not only against representatives of other confessions, but also against the Muslims who do not share their views. The radical fundamentalists are quite hostile to the authorities, government bodies and law-enforcement agencies, as well as the official Muslim clergy and traditional Muslims, and call for refusal to serve in the army and work in government offices. They often implement their ideas through committing crimes (embezzlement and robbery), and a considerable part of the money gained goes to waging “jihad against the infidels.”

It is not accidental that Islam in the North Caucasus is waging struggle not so much with western influence, as the rapid and forced penetration of unorthodoxy Islam from the East. The word “unorthodox” is not used by chance. The local clergy and a greater part of society regard salafia (Wahhabism) as apostasy. True, such position is shared by the leaders of most Muslim countries adhering to traditional Islam.

Just as any radical ideology, political Islam intends to gain force and supporters on the road of foreign expansion. In this vein, Islamism expresses the ideas and premises of pan-Islamism formulated in the 19th century by Jamal ad-Din al Afghani who advocated the formation of “religious-political alliance of Muslim peoples,” “unity of the world of Islam” (Dar al-Islam) in a single powerful grouping on the basis of the Koran.

On this premise certain leaders of fundamentalist groups have evolved and try to implement their version of export of Islamic revolution with a view to realizing the idea of international Islamic state far beyond the boundaries of the Islamic world itself. Here I would like to cite the words of the Saudi sheikh M.A. al-Karig, who said in one of his sermons: “The Prophet said that the Muslims would conquer India, as well as Constantinople and Rome where Vatican was. Muslims have conquered Persia and Byzantium, reached the borders of India and China. Soon Islam will conquer Rome, too.”

As to the Islamic state, its leaders have declared their aim to restore caliphate within the bounds of the entire Islamic world, and the most extremist grouping – world caliphate. Of course, these projects are nothing but pipe dream. Nevertheless, the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism in the post-Soviet area can be regarded as a sort of a rehearsal of the export of Islamic revolution.

The leader of the Islamic state Abu Umar al-Bagdadi uses the language and ideas of the founder of Wahhabism Abd al-Wahhab who asserted that belief in the one and only God was not enough to regard man Muslim. In his view, man cannot be devout Muslim if he does not reject and destroy all other objects of worship. After the Saudi regime has declared the Islamic state of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) a terrorist organization, its leaders called for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy and liberation of the sacred places of Islam. They announced their

intention to destroy Kaaba, claiming that veneration of the black stone is nothing but idolatry interfering with true faith in Allah.

If one follows this interpretation of “true Islam,” it will turn out that almost all Muslims believing in traditional Islam may be regarded “infidels” and hence enemies.

In other words, supporters of the “Charlie Hebdo” and Islamic radicals are quite close to each other in spirit. Both sides distort the essence of liberalism, on the one hand, and Islam, on the other. There is a war between absolutism of religious character and another absolutism – our absolutism, that is, political culture of extreme millennial nationalism.

The conflict between liberal all-permissiveness and fundamentalism is a false conflict, it is a vicious circle, two poles which give birth to each other and presuppose the existence of each other.

Naturally, in interpretation of these phenomena there should be no assessments or abstract moralizing, each person is the master of his or her destiny and has the right to choose a path he or she thinks fit.

The experience of world civilizations and empires show that such phenomena are companions of definite socio-historical development stages.

As to the present state of affairs, perhaps, twilight of the present order of the world has set in. We are now living through an epoch characterized by tectonic shifts in the foundations of life on a global scale and re-evaluation of basic values.

From time to time under certain conditions, especially during transition periods, these phenomena reveal themselves in the most intricate forms, including in the form of new barbarity within the depth of ruling civilization.

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