**Andrey Chuprygin***,*

*Senior Lecturer, Arabic Section,*

*School of Asian Studies,*

*National Research University Higher School of Economics, 20*

*Myasnitskaya Ulitsa, Moscow 101000, Russia*

[*achuprygin@hse.ru*](mailto:achuprygin@hse.ru)

[*a.chuprygin@gmail.com*](mailto:a.chuprygin@gmail.com)

*+7(916) 680-92-59*

**Reassessing the obvious: Political Islam and the Future of the Faithful.**

Author Keywords: Middle East unrest; political Islam; un-secularization; Salafi movements, Muslim Brotherhood; Dar Al-Harb; Dar Al-Islam;

The events of the past several years in the Middle East and Northern Africa have brought out a lot of speculation as to the underlying factors of social unrest, which resulted in toppling long-standing state orders in several key Arab countries. A number of researchers, myself included, proclaimed the coming of fundamentalist traditionalist Islam to power in this region, thus confirming Wiegel’s theory of un-secularization of the world. At least the part of it practicing Islam.

Recent events in Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Yemen became the turning point for the reassessment of the social and political realities in the region.

In this article I will use statistics data provided by ILO, Pew Research Center, The Carter Center and latest available reports issued by respective national statistics organizations of Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Morocco, Tunisia as well as political observations of several NGOs and independent observers to argue that traditionalist Islam as represented by such entities as Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi movements has much less grip on the social and political life in the “countries of origin” than it has in the “countries of destination” in Western Europe (Norris & Inglehart, 2012).

I will further discuss the gap between adherence to strict Muslim values in Mother Countries (Dar Al-Islam) and inside transnational Islamic communities in Western Europe (Dar Al-Harb) and will maintain that the role of political Islam in immigrant societies in “Dar Al-Harb” is rising versus its apparent failure to achieve political and social goals in the countries of “Dar Al-Islam”.

Ключевые слова: Ближний Восток; социальные взрывы; политический ислам; десекуляризация; салафиты; братья-мусульмане; Дар Аль-Харб; Дар Аль-Ислам;

События последних лет на Ближнем Востоке и в странах Северной Африки вызвали бурные дискуссии по поводу факторов, лежащих в основе социальных взрывов, приведших к свержению традиционных режимов в нескольких ключевых арабских странах. Ряд исследователей, и автор в том числе, провозгласили приход к власти в регионе традиционалистского фундаменталистского ислама в подтверждение теории Вигеля о десекуляризации мира. По крайне мере той его части, которая исповедует ислам.

Недавние события в Египте, Сирии, Турции и Йемене стали точкой отсчета процесса переосмысления социальных и политических реалий в регионе.

В статье, на основе статистических данных МОТ, Pew Research Center, Центра Картера, соответствующих статистических агентств Египта, Сирии, Йемена, Марокко и Туниса, а также отчетов НПО и наблюдений независимых источников, автор показывает, что влияние таких исламистских объединений, как братья-мусульмане и салафиты, на социальные и политические процессы в «странах исхода» намного слабее, чем в «странах диаспоры» (Норрис, Инглхард, 2012).

Далее автор рассматривает разрыв между степенью приверженности населения исламским религиозным ценностям в материнских странах (Дар Аль-Ислам) и в среде транснациональных исламских общин в странах западной Европы (Дар Аль-Харб) и делает вывод о возрастании роли политического ислама в иммигрантских сообществах в Дар Аль-Харб на фоне явного провала политических кампаний в Дар Аль-Ислам.

The aftermath of the “Arab Spring” has fueled passionate debate as to the reasons and driving forces of the so called revolutions as well as what lies in the nearest future and how recent developments in the Middle East (read Muslim world) will affect the countries in question and the rest of the world. I hereby analyze several aspects pertaining to the unrest in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria and study several arguments which in my opinion not only give a comprehensive understanding of the processes current in the region but also point to the possible course of further developments in the ME countries and the impact they will and already have on Europe.

During past several years we have been witnesses to general unrest in the MENA region, which resulted in toppling of several dictatorships which were seen by the international community as never-ending political entities. What was more or less unexpected was the coming of Islamist organizations and parties to power in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and to some extent in Libya. The same Islamist organizations, which has been stamped by the powers that be in the West as terrorist. The important fact is that in every country mentioned the process of power change was clearly done on the principle of division of labor: first the uprisings lead to dismissal of the dictator and his “puppets”, then through democratic elections new legislative and executive bodies were elected. The result was amazing. While during the unrest there hardly been any significant indication of the Islamist strife, during the elections Islamist movements such as Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi An-Nur stood tall and victorious through every stage of the process. No surprise there at all. For the last 40 odd years main social groups in the Arab Muslim countries have been subjected to continuous oppression from the ruling dictatorial dynasties. The only really organized and vocal opposition was represented by fundamentalist Islamist movements, of which Muslim Brotherhood is the strongest and most famous element. Having earned, after decades of opposing the state, the fame of unwavering enemies of corrupt regimes, it was relatively easy for them to quickly reorganize and adjust to the fast moving developments and to mobilize quite a number of there supporters who in turn brought in the vast majority of the discontented population to the polls. As a result we have seen the most active voting process in these countries for decades with the Voter Turnout of 62.04% in Egypt [12], 89.40% in Tunisia [8], 61.58% in Libya (first elections ever) [11] and 74.98% in Yemen [14] which enabled Islamist total victory. It looked as though the survey accomplished by Pew Research Center immediately after the said developments confirmed the second coming of Islamic rule in the area. According to the survey the vast majority of the population of the affected countries were willing to embrace Sharia as a governing law of the state, namely 91% of the population of Iraq, 74% of the population of Egypt, 83% of the population of Morocco, 71% of the population of Jordan, 56% of the population of Tunisia and an amazing 89% of the population of Palestinian territories! [20]. This result is explainable on one hand. After gaining independence in the 20th century MENA has endured numerous experiments on the path to democratization namely Arab nationalism, Pan-Arabism, Socialism and several other -isms all of which failed to put end to authoritarian rule, with the exception of several hereditary monarchies who manage to maintain fine balance of civil forces by implementing the “enlightened” policies, as is the case of Jordan, Morocco and Kuwait. Whilst in the majority of other countries of the region “discourse of Islamization” has been the dominating political discourse. "...even if incoherent, ‘Islamization’ is perhaps the only originally indigenous ‘narrative’ that has thus far been invented by the opponents of Westernization."[23]. To paraphrase what Larbi Sadiki said: on the eve of the “Arab Spring” the ideas of ‘Islamization’ have become a single unifying factor weaving it’s web through different and sometimes opposing groups of modern Muslim societies.

After acquiring political power though Islamists found it difficult bordering on impossible to implement comprehensive social and economic policies. Without sound economical and social programme with the exception of attempts to implement Sharia law as the law of the state, the Islamist powers that be found themselves facing new wave of discontent, which quickly transformed into civil dissent. In Egypt we have witnessed the army coming back to power and successfully preventing a civil war and in Tunisia there are expectations of a political standoff, which will inevitably lead to the Islamists loosing leading positions in the state administration. The same phenomenon is observed in Yemen and Libya where Islamists are effectively loosing their grip on political situation. It is absolutely clear now that Political Islam (PI), which is the main manifestation of Islamism, having arrived to power on the shoulders of the “Arab Spring” has spectacularly lost leverage in the “home countries” as a result of arrogant practices of it’s leaders and complete indifference and incompetence in all matters of state. It could be seen from Egypt stats as published in 2011 by International Labor Organization where inflation was quoted at 8.5% and unemployment ratio at 8.9% with youth unemployment at 24% [16], whereas in 2013 under Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood colleagues inflation jumped to 10.5% and unemployment reached 40% according to monthly Bloomberg survey.

We can safely assume that as a result of a failure at power in post “Arab Spring” era PI has effectively lost the current stage of political battle in the “home countries”. But not so in the European countries of diaspora, where the emissaries of political Islamist movements have been active for the last 10-15 years and we should expect sharp rise to their activity now as an attempt to compensate for the loss of initiative in MENA. And the lay of the land is quite favorable for their efforts. First and foremost there is a dramatic increase in Muslim population in Britain, France and Germany. Islam is becoming the dominating religious factor in these countries. Suffice to say that “there are now more practicing Muslims than practicing Christians .... not only in large urban centers, but also in smaller towns and cities...” [17]. In France alone the number of mosques has already doubled to more than 2,000 during just the past ten years, according to Marcel Maussen and his research “Constructing Mosques. The Governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands” and the number is expected to double in the nearest future [17]. While 1.9 million French Catholics consider themselves practicing church-goers, 2.5 million of the total of 6 million Muslims in France visit mosques on a regular basis [15]. On the wave of drastic increase of Muslim population in Britain which is expected to reach 5.5 million, or 8% of the country’s population by 2030 [20], the elders of the Muslim community are calling the government to grant to Britain’s Muslims same privileges as those enjoyed by the Church of England [17]. In Copenhagen the construction of the biggest mosque in Scandinavia is under way made possible by 26 million US dollars donation from Qatar. These developments bring tension into respective societies. BBC “Young people and prejudice survey” published on the 25th of September 2013 states that more than 25% of young Britons “distrust Muslims and feel that Britain would be better off if there were fewer of them in the country”.

This and increasing unemployment results in that the vast number of Muslims, especially youth, in Europe suffer from uncomfortable economic and social conditions and communal friction, so they form an ideal environment for the missionaries from the extremist left of Islamic movements, which are in reality the vanguard of Political Islam, to recruit and coerce. And the audience is receptive, as European Muslims have not gone through unfortunate experience of fundamentalist governance and are ready to embrace passionate rhetoric and calls to implement Sharia as the governing law, which they are being taught will bring total and uncompromising justice. Which at the end of the day is the ultimate goal of PI. After all to paraphrase Daniel Pipes: the ultimate goal of Political Islam may not be simply "to help Muslims be the best citizens they can be," but rather to extend Islamic law throughout Europe and the United States [The Chicago Tribune, Sept. 19, 2004].

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