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TRENDS IN THE SPREAD OF RADICAL ISLAM IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The article analyzes the influence of radical Islam and terrorist organizations on security in Africa. As a subject of research we chose tendencies of the spread of radical Islam in one of the Central African countries – the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The issues of increasing Muslim religious buildings in the eastern part of the country, the influence of Muslim communities from other African and Arab countries on the situation in the region are considered. The article focuses on the problem of the penetration of ideas of radical Islam into the country. The aim of the study is to identify causes and consequences of the spread of radical Islam in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The situation in the most vulnerable and jihadist-affected areas of the DRC is analyzed. An assessment and forecast of the development of the situation in DR Congo in connection with the spread of Islam are given and ways to prevent the negative development of the scenario are proposed. The authors concluded that a large length of borders with border states, geological and climatic features (mountainous terrain, a multi-tiered equatorial forest, rainy seasons), coupled with the lack of roads and road infrastructure, makes the border security system ineffective and serve as an open "window" not only for transnational crime, but also for Islamic fundamentalists. Based on analyzed realities, ideas of radicals will be distributed in the coming years. This, in turn, will exacerbate the already complex military-political situation and lead to armed conflicts.

Keywords: Africa, Congo, Islam, radical, terrorists.

1. Introduction

In the modern world, the most acute problem is the problem of opposing the penetration of the ideas of radical Islam and related terrorism into the culture and traditions of peoples. The substitution of traditional religious values for their distorted versions leads to disastrous consequences. As a result, in underdeveloped societies with low socio-economic levels, the false ideas of fundamentalists find fertile ground, are perceived as a common good and a path to well-being. In Africa, the most disadvantaged segments of the population are affected by Islamists. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this is particularly acute against the background of the mass extermination of the civilian population by militants of illegal armed groups and humanitarian disasters.

2. Problem Statement

In today's globalized world inevitably there are processes of interaction of different cultures and civilizations. Against the background of the desire of African peoples to preserve their identity, there is a problem of collision of traditional culture, including religion with the introduced cults and customs of other peoples who moved to their territory. The scientific problem of the study is to identify the sources of contradictions and to develop proposals for their resolution to stabilize the situation.

3. Research Questions

Trends in the spread of radical Islam in Africa by the example of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are the research question.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify the causes and consequences of the spread of radical Islam in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

5. Research Methods

Among the theoretical methods, systemic, institutional and comparative analysis has become a priority. Event analysis was actively used to analyze the events. Field studies, including interviews with prominent figures of various faiths in Kinshasa (DC Congo), have taken priority among empirical methods. Methods of empirical political science have become the main "tools" in the processing of the collected facts on the problem of the spread of radical Islam in Africa. The authors also adhered to general scientific methods-analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction.

6. Findings

In recent years, the penetration and spread of radical Islam have been also traced in Africa, where the problems of national and continental security have not been solved because of the ongoing-armed conflicts. The most common Islamic groups in sub-Saharan Africa are the Wahhabis and the Muslim

Brotherhood. The "Sheikh Balala" sect in Kenya, which has an active branch in Zimbabwe, the "Association of Sunni Muslims" in Côte d'Ivoire, "People against Gangsterism and Drugs" and "Islamic Jihad" in South Africa are also common. The most dangerous extremist organization in Nigeria is "Boko Haaram", which imposes Sharia law and the eradication of the Western way of life, in Senegal – "Al-Fallah movement for Islamic culture Salafiya", in Somalia, "Al-Shabaab" and "Jihad al-Islamia", the radical wing of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (with leader Umar Ould Hamah), "Al-Qaida" in the Islamic Maghreb, which seized control of the northern territories of Mali and took in October 2012, 9 European citizens hostage, 6 of whom were French (Kemal, 2015).

In addition, it should be mentioned that the term "Islamic fundamentalists" is most often associated with terrorism, has not always had this negative meaning. Turning to history, we note that he entered the political lexicon in the late 1970's and early 1980's after the rise of the anti-Shah regime in Iran. Russian orientalist Vavilov (2009) argues that "Islamic fundamentalism does not always justifiably extend to the far broad, vague and in many ways variegated religious and political movement, advocating a return to the "original, core values of Islam" (p. 17) (it is no coincidence that in Arabic "fundamentalists" is translated as "rhizomes")". Another scientist, Africanist Savateev (2006), upholds the position that Islamic fundamentalism is far from nationality, although it "absorbs a spectrum of different views from a spiritual and religious point of view and reflects the interests of various social strata and sentiments of many Muslim categories" (p. 23).

The penetration of fundamentalist ideas into sub-Saharan Africa is well illustrated by the example of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The number of adherents of Islam in this country diverges, on average the Muslim part of the population is about 10%. The largest number of them is concentrated in the east of the country in the provinces of Maniema, in the north of Katanga and in North Kivu. Only in the administrative center of Goma (North Kivu) there are 45 thousand Muslims and there are 27 religious Islamic buildings. In total, the country has 70 mosques belonging to various Muslim communities – Pakistani, Iranian, Lebanese, Indian and others. Studies by the Royal Institute for Security and Defense of Belgium indicate that the Lebanese diaspora in the DRC is fueling radicals from the Shiite Hezbollah movement (Slayton, 2015). The attitude of many Congolese towards these communities is negative. They "point the finger at them, believing that the communities are breeding grounds for extremism and proselytism, hidden radical Islam" (Straus, 2012, p. 11).

The officially recognized Muslim organization in DRC, which unites only a part of the Muslim community, is the Islamic Community in DRC (COMICO). At first glance, it has nothing common with the so-called radical, aggressive Islamists. COMICO carefully monitors manifestations of proselytism with the aim of its "suppression at the root", aims at reconciling warring ethnic groups, settling conflict situations, including in the east of the country, in favor of consolidating the peoples of various religious confessions. In fact, the situation is somewhat different. Mosques often become centers for attracting and training terrorists, while Islamic mosques cannot resist this. Congolese researcher Nykes Kibel'Bel Oka believes that imams turn a blind eye to not being subjected to physical violence (Dowd, 2015).

According to experts, the Muslim influence, although slowly, is approaching the DRC. This is partly due to the presence in the country of Muslim peacekeepers who are part of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC, numerous Pakistani military units that provide financial support to Islamic communities,

including in the construction of mosques. The difficult internal political, economic and social situation in the country contributes to the spread of the radical wing of Islam (Korotayev, Issaev, & Rudenko, 2016).

From the west, the "Muslim wave" comes from Mali and Nigeria, from the east – from Kenya through Rwanda and Uganda, from the south – from Tanzania and Zambia, from the north from the CAR in connection with the coup d'état in March 2013.

As the "center of propagation" of radical Islam, experts most often refer to Mali as the "citadel" of Islamism in Africa. They do not exclude that conflicts between Salafists, who have dogmatic, ideological, political and cultural differences, can be transferred to the Congolese land, as the conflict between Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda in 1994 took place. In this sense, fears are a large Malian community in the DRC, living by its own laws and having its own mosque. Another source of threat is Nigeria, where the ethnic contradictions between the "Christian South" and the "Muslim North" threaten to seriously explode, even to the point of splitting the country into two states. The consequences of the conflict may well have an effect on the central region of Africa, where refugees of various faiths will rush (Slinko, Bilyuga, Zinkina, & Korotayev, 2017). As a result, "alien" problems will be stratified on already existing ethnic and religious contradictions. A serious danger is also the movement of illegal militants from South Sudan across the "loose" border, who have partially "settled" in the DRC. This makes Congolese society extremely vulnerable in the face of a permanent terrorist threat.

The threat of radical Islam in the DRC and other African countries does not come only from the East and the Maghreb. As a result of the investigations into the terrorist attack in Nairobi on September 21, 2013 (67 people died), the Red Cross NGO concluded that the recruitment of militants was carried out, including in Europe. Among them were Germans, Scandinavians, Americans. In the opinion of the European Union's counterterrorism coordinator, Gilles Kershova, "it is necessary to know better how people get there. There is, for example, in Belgium an organization for the recruitment of mercenaries, the so-called "Sharia Organization for Belgium" (L'Organization de la Chariat pour la Belgique). European mercenaries were spotted in Syria and Kenya (Dowd, 2015).

The eastern regions of the DRC are the most vulnerable and prone to jihadist influence. The large length of borders with border states (9 countries), geological and climatic features (mountainous terrain, multi-tiered equatorial forest, rainy seasons), coupled with the lack of roads and road infrastructure, cause the inefficiency of the border security system and serve as an open window for not only transnational crime, but for Islamic fundamentalists.

An additional risk factor for destabilization of the situation is the growing terrorist activity on the African continent as a whole by gangs. For more than a decade, in the east of the DRC (the provinces of North and South Kivu, Eastern and in the north of Katanga), illegal armed groups (IAF), whose representatives profess Islam, have been uncontrolled by the central government. First of all, these are the Ugandan groups "Lord's Resistance Army" (LRA) and the United Democratic Forces (SLM) (Gilles, 2006). In connection with this, hotbeds of conflicts are formed, creating a breeding ground for terrorist manifestations. The criminal activities of the illegal armed groups are usually connected with the illegal exploitation of valuable natural raw materials smuggled abroad and uncontrolled cash flow.

Terrorist activities in the DRC are fueled by national separatists. According to the authorities, in the last decade the Bundu di Congo religious and political movement remained the most active. During the

transition period (2003–2005), this organization controlled most of the province of Lower Congo, advocating its full independence as the historical heir to the Great Kingdom of the Congo. Although after the clashes of supporters of this union with the forces of law and order in spring 2008, the activities of Bundu di Congo were officially banned, it did not lose its "audience" and continues to influence the supporters of this organization. Externally, the slogans "Bundu di Congo" look like quite democratic. An example is an appeal dated October 8, 2012, in which representatives of this organization call for the protection of the people of Bakongo (Pérouse de Montclos, 2013).

One of the ways Islam penetrated into DRC is commerce with neighboring countries. "Trusting relationships in business," said one Congolese diplomat, "create fertile ground for communication and on religious topics". In addition, truckers, for example, from Tanzania and Zambia, carriers of Islamic culture, are also seen here as distributors of Islam in the eastern and southern part of the Congo. As the diplomat stressed, the National Committee for the Coordination of the Struggle against International Terrorism cooperates with regional and international organizations of this kind, and also "uses the analytical potential of the CIA". According to him, according to this organization, a trace of the Somalian Salafi movement Al-Shabaab, created in 2000 (translated from Arabic means youth), is seen in the DRC, which is an integral part of Al-Qaida. In the DRC there are strong links (Maruf, 2018).

In 2011, DRC recorded visits by emissaries Al-Shabaab, who tried to establish contacts with Islamic organizations in the east of the country, primarily in the province of South Kivu, where the MONUSCO Pakistani units are stationed. It was the Islamist group Al-Shabaab that claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack in neighboring Uganda's capital Kampala on July 11, 2010. The Ugandan authorities claimed that the terrorists allegedly entered the country from Congolese territory. The Ugandan military command has put forward public speculations about the association of Al-Shabaab with the Ugandan rebellious anti-government formation of SLM based in the eastern parts of the DRC.

Al-Shabaab numbers from 7 to 9 thousand militants of various illegal armed formations (Dowd, 2015). The prospect of its penetration into the DRC creates an additional serious threat to both the national security of the country and the improvement of the climate in general in the central region of Africa. Valentina Soria, a Congolese scholar of Islam, said in an interview with the newspaper "Le Potentiel" that Al-Shabaab aims to adapt to local African cultures, thereby conquering the political and economic space and building sustainable ties.

The subject of radical Islam and terrorism is constantly in the focus of attention of the Congolese authorities. The basis for the prohibition of terrorist activities in the country is Article 52 of the Constitution. It says, "Neither a person nor a group of persons can use national territory as a base for subversive or terrorist actions against the Congolese or any other state". Issues of anti-terrorism and anti-crime activities, as well as the spread of fundamentalism, occupy a special place in the work of the DRC security forces, since hotbeds of military conflicts arise permanently in the eastern regions of the country, creating a breeding ground for serious terrorist manifestations (Korotayev et al., 2016). These problems are studied by the National Committee for the Coordination of Combating International Terrorism, approved in 2001. This regulatory legal act is actually the only internal document regulating interdepartmental cooperation in this area.

The activities of the committee are controlled directly by the head of state, and the coordination is carried out by a special adviser to the president on security issues. In accordance with the decree, the tasks of the Committee include making executive decisions on all issues in the field of combating terrorism, coordinating the application of relevant international conventions, developing and implementing national activities, and implementing appropriate cooperation with foreign states and international organizations. Members of the authority are the ministers of foreign affairs and international cooperation (currently the post is divided into two), national security (post abolished), national defense, internal affairs, justice, military and political-diplomatic advisers to the president, as well as his special security adviser. The latter serves as the permanent secretary of the Committee and manages the work of its technical secretariat.

Kinshasa is a party to a set of international and regional conventions, including the African Union, in the field of counter-terrorism, and supports consonant initiatives within subregional organizations. In 2008, with the assistance of the African Terrorism Research Center, a decision was made to build cooperation in this area within the Central African Economic Community (ECCA) reanimated by the efforts of the DRC.

Thus, the prospect of the spread of radical Islam in the DRC poses a certain threat to both national security and the improvement of the climate in general on the African continent. Today, the Congo has not yet reached the so-called "red mark", where terrorists completely dominate. However, it is possible that "tomorrow the hegemonic ambitions of terrorists will spread to this Central African country" (Pérouse de Montclos, 2013, p. 80). The favorable condition for the spread of terrorist manifestations is the "vacuum" of state power in the provinces of the country. The security forces, due to their weakness, cannot yet ensure security in these areas. Congolese experts argue that if the authorities, the army, do not control the territory of the country and the republican police (given the geostrategic position of the DRC on the African continent), nothing will deter the onslaught of terrorists. In this regard, new hotbeds of conflicts on a religious basis will appear, which, in combination with the "traditional" ones, will further complicate the military-political situation in a number of African states and lead to armed conflicts.

7. Conclusion

The authors concluded that the ideas of jihadism would spread to the most vulnerable and affected regions. This, in turn, can lead to an aggravation of the already difficult military-political situation and the emergence of new local conflicts. The problem of the long and loose borders remains unsolvable, which serves as an open "window" for the penetration of various negative elements into the territory of a sovereign state. In this situation, it is necessary to mobilize the efforts of the Central government in improving the country's defense, as well as international and regional organizations in stabilizing the situation in the conflict-prone regions.

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