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**ISLAMIC FACTOR IN ARAB COUNTRIES AND ITS ROLE IN**  
**MOROCCO AND JORDAN**

Nadezhda Morozova (a)\*  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 6, Miklukho-Maklaya Str., Moscow, Russia, morozova-nn@rudn.ru

**Abstract**

Nowadays the role and place of Islam in both social and political life of the Near East and Middle East countries and the Islamization of society as a whole have become particularly acute. The article is devoted to the peculiarities of the Islamic factor in the Kingdom of Morocco and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, its influence on the social and political life of the two countries. The author reveals the problems caused by the spread of extremist ideology within the Moroccan and Jordanian societies, shows the ways to resolve and prevent conflict situations within the country in order to preserve domestic security. The author examines the influence and role of Islam on all spheres of society and politics. The article reveals the royal policy in the context of conducting a dialogue with radical political parties of the Islamist persuasion, suppressing their illegal activities and possible demonstrations. The analysis of the current policy of the Moroccan King Mohammed VI and the Jordanian King Abdullah II in relation to the entire Muslim community, in particular around the current events in Syria, Libya, as well as in relation to the issue of the status of Jerusalem is performed. The article also reflects the current position of the Moroccan and Jordanian monarchs in relation to Islamist groups and political parties within the countries. The role of the Islamic factor for the Muslim states of the Middle East seems to be an urgent topic for a comprehensive study.

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*Keywords:* Islamic factor, Morocco, Jordan, policy, Middle East, North Africa



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## **1. Introduction**

In the modern world, the question of the influence of the Islamic factor on the domestic and foreign policy interests of certain states acquires special relevance. It is important to note that the influence of the religious aspect on political and social life differs depending on the political system of the state, the characteristics of public space and a number of other aspects. First, the degree of influence depends on the internal political structure of the country, its regime and legislation, as well as on the degree of influence of other internal and external factors.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The international security situation has become more acute not only in the region of the Middle East and North Africa, but throughout the world. The issue of interaction of political structures with the growth of radical extremist movements and Islamist groups, as well as control over the activities of Islamist parties within the states of the region is becoming especially urgent. Currently, there is an increasing interest in the problem of interaction between Islam and politics by Russian researchers and foreign historiography. In the modern world, the ideas of the politicization of Islam and, in many cases, its radicalization, have begun to spread, which increases the relevance of the research topic.

## **3. Research Questions**

### **3.1. Background of Islamic Factor Development**

The manifestation of the influence of religion on politics has always been present in all countries of the world. It is important to mention ancient societies, when the religious component was an important part of state policy. This is evidenced by the history of not only the Arab-Muslim society, but also the Western Christian one.

The emergence of religious doctrine, which over time has developed into the basis of religion, relates to the political needs of society. Islam is no exception. Prophet Muhammad was the ideological and political leader of the community capable of leading the people, and after his death, an acute question arose about the further unity of the Ummah. Undoubtedly, Muhammad was the leader of his followers and enjoyed great authority and respect, but the question of his successors was not raised, which gave rise to fierce political disputes. Thus, speaking about the Islamic factor in politics it is necessary to look at the origins of Islam as a religion and the time of the rule of four guided caliphs. It was in the situation with the decision on the succession of leadership that the politicization of Islam began to manifest itself. However, Islam became most closely associated with politics already during the time of the Arab Caliphate, when the basic concepts of social equality of all Muslims were corrected by the presence of the ruler of the Caliphate and the emergence of a clear social and political difference between the ruling dynasty and the people.

The manifestation of Islamic factor in politics is nothing more than the politicization of Islam, which gave rise to the term political Islam. Political Islam became known in all countries of the Middle East and North Africa. First, this indicates the presence of political parties based on the Islamic doctrine of the development of the state and society.

It is important to distinguish between the concepts of Islamism, political Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. Due to the variety of currents and ideologies, these concepts are often merged into one group of synonymous terms. However, each of them represents specific things and manifestations. Thus, political Islam is the use of religious traditions for political purposes, on the basis of which many religious parties were able to achieve the status of political parties, and in some cases, to take seat in parliament.

Fundamentalism is a manifestation of extreme conservatism in religion, that is, fundamentalism can arise and manifest itself in any denomination. Thus, Islamic fundamentalism is nothing more than a manifestation of a conservative view of the religious laws of Islam. However, this concept is often associated with Islamic extremists. Such parallels arise for several reasons. The first and most important relates to Muslim fundamentalist thinkers who sought to urge Muslims to enforce the rules of Islam more strictly. Such thinkers undoubtedly include Muhammad Abdo, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Rashid Rida, Ibn Taymiyyah and others. M. Abdo was one of the main ideologists of pan-Islamism - an idea that was never implemented. Over time, fundamentalism in Islam began to undergo various changes and interpretations. Thus, the ideas of Islamic fundamentalism began to be used by political parties, and subsequently by many radical-minded groups.

Thus, the concept of Islamic fundamentalism has developed into the more widespread concept Islamism, and then into Islamic extremism, which led to the final confusion in the use of all three terms. However, Islamism has nothing to do with extremism, moreover, extremism cannot be Islamic, representatives of different confessions can become extremists, but extremism itself does not acquire a religious feature.

In the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, in most of which the population predominantly professes Islam, religion has always played a special role. Moreover, for Muslims, religion has become a part of life, which is skillfully manipulated by many Islamist radical groups, as well as the Islamic opposition intending to gain power in that country or another country in the region. Religious organizations as well as political parties based on Islamist ideology use religion as a weapon in the framework of their social and political activities (Telhami, 2004).

Islam in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa is not only a historically widespread, but also a consistently strengthening religion. In the colonial period, the spread of Islam was facilitated by the recognition of Islamic law by the colonial administration as an independent source of legal norms along with the legal norms of the mother country.

A special role in the popularization of political Islam was played by the judgment that Islam and politics, secular and spiritual, Islam and the life of Muslims are all inseparable concepts (Polonskaya, 1986). Universities, institutes and high schools in the Middle East have become centers for the development of ideas of political Islam among young people. At the end of the 20th century, the emergence of radicalization of Islam and manifestations of terrorism led to disunity within the masses, division into radicals and moderates, as well as the development of ideas about creating an ideal Islamic state, the creation of which is problematic in the realities of the modern world. Islamic doctrine was originally based on a set of political, social and economic principles towards the creation of a cohesive society (Esposito, 1984). The Islamic state was presented to Muslim thinkers and theorists as a state based

on clear laws, regulations and rules, providing citizens with rights and freedoms on equal terms, regardless of class and estate. Thus, the Islamic state was presented as a kind of social state, an ideal form of uniting peoples.

Noting the ongoing politicization of Islam, one should mention the important role of the ruling elite of the countries. At the same time, the Islam was addressed to as a means of legitimizing power.

The Islamic boom was stretched out over time. Today, Islamic extremists have managed to take control of significant social masses in various countries of the Middle East. In this regard, the late King of Morocco Hassan II, in his interview to France-2 TV channel, when asked how he can explain such a rapid growth of fundamentalism in many Muslim countries at the same time, replied

*I believe that this phenomenon has become a kind of response to a too rapidly changing rhythm life. Civilization, society, lifestyle - we were forced to learn all this. Either we found out or we lost. That how the West came to us. We had to accept it all. However, there are still things that we have not learned, that we have not been able to pass through ourselves. (Discours et interviews, 1997, p. 43)*

After the active dissemination of the ideas of Islamic fundamentalism in the 19th century, in a situation of changing world, radical people began to actively use the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism for their own purposes guided by a call for the return of true values and the creation of an ideal Islamic state. Groups of radicals began to influence the population not only ideologically, but also physically. From time to time, new sects appear, sometimes very intolerant of dissidents, belligerent towards the ruling elites who adhere to Western cultural values and standards. On this basis, armed clashes, prolonged riots and even protracted wars occur, which have been observed in recent years in Syria and Iraq.

However, even the most pro-Western authorities in Arab countries from time to time returned to Islam, because they perceived it as the support and preservation of the legitimacy of their rule. In this regard, the strengthening of the position of Islam was especially facilitated by deterioration of social and economic situation of the masses in most countries of the region, the growing gap between the rich and the poor. In the modern world, the civilizational and political development of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa and the specific political and cultural situation emerging in them, regardless of the presence or absence of the western orientation of country's authorities, can no longer be considered separately from the influence of the Islamic factor.

As for the Islamic factor in politics, it is worth turning to the primary role of Islam for society. Namely, the unity of people professing the same faith, provision of rights and freedoms, development a just state based on Sharia law.

The statehood that has emerged in the Muslim world has some typical features. It is necessary to highlight the complementarity of Islam and politics, which is part of the concept of Islamic factor that emerged later. A feature of many Arab countries, both in history and in modern times, is the social and political order, which also reinforces the Islamic doctrine, since during the establishment of the statehood in the Muslim world, the state was founded in accordance with the prescriptions of the Koran, according

to which all Muslims are equal before the Almighty. This fact shows that the social and political order is not alien to the countries of the Muslim world just like other forms of the intra-state order.

The analysis of historical sources shows that the most active role of the Islamic religion and culture is manifested during the period of acute crises in society. Against the background of crises and conflicts, the role of Islam is integrating, where Islam is presented as a universal social institution operating at various levels of society. In each area, Islam acts as an element of traditional society, contributing to the consolidation and, if necessary, reintegration of the main structures.

In this regard, it is necessary to mention the special conflict potential of the Middle East region, which is also associated with the high geopolitical significance of the region as a whole (Grinin et al., 2018).

Thus, the mass appeal to Islamic values and institutions is acting as a social and psychological reaction to the crisis of traditional culture and at the same time it is a reaction to the process of globalization and the active penetration of Western culture not only into the traditions and life of peoples, but also an influence on the spiritual sphere of society.

It is important to note that the influence of Islam not only on the social, but also on the political life of the Arab-Muslim society is noticeable especially in the following manifestations. We are talking about the ideas of pan-Islamism. Pan-Islamism is an attempt at political unification of Muslim countries. Despite the fact that the idea of pan-Islamism arose mainly in the 19th century thanks to the activities of Muslim ideologues of Islamic fundamentalism, its subsequent spread manifested itself in different forms. As a consequence of the pan-Islamist theory, it is important to note the creation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on 25 September 1969 – now the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The organization was founded during the conference in the Moroccan capital, Rabat.

The purpose of this organization is to unite Muslims around the world, support countries and peoples in need of help and assistance, attempts to resolve conflicts both on religious and national grounds, through general consolidation and assistance.

### **3.2. Islamic Factor in Morocco and Jordan: Comparative Analysis**

The role of Morocco and Jordan in the work of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is important and significant, especially Moroccan participation. In the history of the Arab-Muslim unification, it is important to note the Palestinian problem and, mainly, the question of the status of Jerusalem as the holy city of the Muslim world. In search of a solution to the conflict over the status of Jerusalem, and in order to control the situation, the establishment of the Committee on Jerusalem within the OIC became significant, headed in 1972 by King Hassan II of Morocco.

A distinctive feature of the two kingdoms is the fact that, despite the certain secularity of the two monarchies, both states preserve and support Muslim values both in the social and political life of Morocco and Jordan. It is important to note that Islam is an integral part of the politics of two countries.

The question of the state vector of religion and intrastate religious differences is very clear. Despite the active policy of the Moroccan and Jordanian kings to balance the state religion with the domestic and foreign policy pursued both in Jordan and in Morocco, ideas of radical trends within various currents of Islam are widely spread. Against the backdrop of emerging tensions in the Middle East and

North Africa, since independence, the question of the formation of groups based on ideas that have transformed Islamic fundamentalism, which, in some cases, are even extremist, has begun to arise.

In this context, it is important to highlight the main radical-minded movements, which subsequently grew into political parties and even organizations, many of which represented threat to the security of not only two states, but also neighboring territories.

Talking about the political situation in Morocco it is necessary to note the strictness of state structures in relation to the activities of extremist groups (Ponomarenko & Chikrizova, 2013). The main vector of Islam in Morocco is Sufism. This Muslim trend has historically rooted in Moroccan lands back in the Middle Ages when philosophers from all over the Muslim world roamed, spreading their teachings and philosophy of Islam.

Sufism is an important aspect when characterizing the internal structure of the state. It is known that Morocco is a multi-confessional kingdom and there is no religious oppression within the state. At the same time, the Moroccan authorities carefully monitor the activity of religious associations in order to prevent the spread of extremist and Islamist ideas within the society.

In the 2000s, Morocco actively promoted a return to the historical trend of Islam in the country, in order to prevent youth from being attracted by the wrong ideology. The imams conducted sermons, while closely watching the believers in the mosques. The royal authorities have chosen a course to promote Sufism as traditional Moroccan Islam, which would help to reduce the growth of Islamist ideas and trends among both young people and the elderly (Daadaoui, 2016).

An important component when talking about the Islamic factor in Morocco is the statement of the clear course of the Moroccan ruling dynasty. According to the Moroccan constitution, the motto of the state is “Allah, Motherland, King” (Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco, 2011). In addition to the motto, the constitution of the state prescribes the status of the king as “the ruler of the faithful,” which also represents a clear vector of royal politics.

In the political space of Morocco, the Justice and Development Party is the main Islamic opposition to the authorities, as well as the organization that has achieved recognition of the political status of the party (Hissouf, 2016). However, unlike Morocco, where Islamist and radical parties and movements have never had a large number of seats in parliament, the internal political situation in Jordan is different. The uniqueness of Jordan’s policy is that the government enters into a dialogue with Islamist parties in order to prevent the spread of extremist ideology among the population. By exercising control over the action of all parties and movements, the king is able to control their attacks and ideas.

Banned on the territory of the Russian Federation and in a number of other countries, the Muslim Brotherhood organization was one of the most influential in the region of the Middle East and North Africa. Created by Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb the movement quickly spread among the Arab-Muslim population of the region.

As you know, the organization is not considered terrorist everywhere. Moreover, the parties and movements created under its auspices are actively functioning in the political life of various countries. This organization has the greatest influence on politics in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood was formed.

The Brothers' ideas began to spread throughout the Middle East, with a particularly large wing formed in Syria. Since in the Sham countries all borders are very close to each other and the mentality and ethnos are similar, this wing grew and went beyond the borders of Syria alone. Thus, the "Brothers" wing was formed in Jordan.

It should be noted that despite the initial commitment of the Jordanian wing of organization to the Egyptian center Brotherhood, the representatives of the Jordanian front tried to improve relations with the authorities, since they had ambitions to be in power. In turn, the representatives of the monarchy were loyal to the Jordanian brotherhood, which, in the future, allowed the political party Islamic Action Front, created by the organization itself to participate in parliamentary elections, to win and gain a significant number of seats in the Jordanian parliament. For the first time, Islamist forces took part in the parliamentary elections in 2007, when the Islamic Action Front won 16 seats in parliament out of 130. In 2016, before the parliamentary elections, the Front was reformed, after which political and social strategies were separated (Curtis, 2018).

The Front is a more independent unit with a seat in Parliament, sponsorship of the Egyptian branch was stopped, as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood itself lost their former positions in Egypt after A.F. al-Sisi came to power. However, initially this association was not independent.

When the Front was created, it was decided to consolidate various Islamist forces in order to create a strong opposition bloc to the present government. However, over time, the number of members of the Front who did not belong to the Brotherhood had rapidly dwindled. The changes took place quite quickly. At first, the Front consisted exclusively of supporters and adherents of the Muslim Brotherhood organization, now a banned terrorist organization on the territory of the Russian Federation and a number of other countries, then gradually the Jordanian Front began to move away from the Brotherhood center, namely from the Egyptian central wing of the organization.

After the events of the Arab Spring, the need for reforms arose. Domestic reform efforts were helping the movement define its role in Jordan, participate more effectively as an opposition force, and repel Islamic-minded supporters from extremist groups operating in the region. If the Brotherhood is unable to carry out such reform efforts, the organization risks being weakened by internal departments and may lose political influence (Bondokji, 2015).

Over the years, the usual slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood organization "Islam is the solution" has ceased to be paramount, the leaders of the brotherhood began to agitate the transition to a secular state, supporting the theory that religion is not a hostile force for the secular development of the country (Zaki, 2017).

A feature of the Islamic factor in Morocco and Jordan is the fact that, despite the clash of interests between the monarchy and Islamist movements in the countries, neither in Morocco nor in Jordan, these associations do not put forward sharp demands to overthrow the regime, although, in many ways, they are politically oppositional.

It is important to note that King Abdullah II decisively promotes the idea of peaceful coexistence of different religions and nationalities, for which he was awarded the Templeton Prize in 2018. He became the first Muslim to receive this award. In 2019, Abdullah II was awarded the Peace Prize, he was presented with the Lamp of Saint Francis (Morozova, 2019).

The active spread of the ideas of politicizing Islam, turning it into a form of Islamic radicalism, poses a threat to the stability of the ruling regime and the security of the Kingdom, as well as to the religious power of the monarchy. In the 2000s, the rise of radical extremism was observed in almost all Arab countries, this was due to the heating situation in the world. One of the reasons was the protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict, because of which the world faced the manifestation of international terrorism with renewed vigor. The current situation in the world has not become better than it was in the early 2000s. The formation of a new terrorist force, banned on the territory of the Russian Federation and a number of other countries of the Islamic State organization, has become a new threat to violate the security of not only neighboring countries, but also the entire Middle East and even the global international security system.

It is important to note the role of Morocco and Jordan in the Middle East and North Africa region. In addition to membership in numerous organizations, both regional and international, the dynasties of the two monarchies have an important common feature - the Moroccan and Jordanian dynasties have a direct branch to the Prophet Muhammad. Today these are the only monarchies whose rulers not only have a relationship with the Prophet, but also to this day have retained a monarchical form of government. The fact that the Moroccan and Jordanian kings are related to the Prophet Muhammad is also a kind of protection for the two countries from threats from the outside world. Such protection lies in the fact that, despite the threat of radical Islamism and the overthrow of monarchies in the Middle East, both King Mohammed VI and King Abdullah II are respected personalities not only within Morocco and Jordan, but also outside the two states.

### **3.3. Position of Morocco and Jordan regarding Jerusalem**

The Jordanian monarch is the protector of Muslim shrines in Jerusalem. King Hussein paid attention to the fact that Jerusalem was of great importance not only for the Jewish, but also for the Christian and Muslim society. In one of his speeches, the Jordanian monarch emphasized that it is our religious duty to turn Jerusalem into the embodiment of peace, into a symbol of unity between a believer and almighty. In this sacred city the rights of all must be accepted and respected (Naumkin & Popov, 2018).

As a defender of Muslim shrines in Jerusalem, King Abdullah II repeatedly spoke at meetings of the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council with an appeal not to ignore the rights of Muslims to Jerusalem and its holy places, referring to the Resolution No. 181 of 1947. King Abdullah II has harshly criticized the situation with Jerusalem when the United States announced the transfer of the American embassy to Jerusalem and the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The King has also clarified this issue personally to the President of the United States and, subsequently, repeated his fears when meeting with the Vice President USA in Amman (Golosameriki, 2018). The Moroccan leader, King Mohammed VI, in turn, wrote to former US President Donald Trump a letter clarifying the status of Jerusalem after his announcements about the transfer of the American embassy to the holy city. King Mohammed VI stressed that Jerusalem cannot be anyone's capital, except as the capital of tolerance and peace of three heavenly religions. The monarch also recalled that the status of Jerusalem is one of the



main and the most important aspects in achieving peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict (HM the King ..., 2017).

Severe criticism of the actions of the American president followed from the entire Arab-Muslim community, in particular, in an official statement following an emergency meeting of the League of Arab States, it was said about the illegal decision of D. Trump to move the embassy to Jerusalem. The representatives of the League also demanded that the American authorities cancel this decision since such actions do not only contribute to the resolution of the Middle East conflict, but even aggravate it and discard the possibility of a peaceful settlement for an even longer indefinite time (RT, 2017).

The main position of the two kingdoms is to maintain the status of an autonomous territory for Jerusalem. One of the common positions is the preservation of the rights of Muslims in the holy city, as well as control over the Muslim shrines of Jerusalem, primarily the al-Aqsa mosque. In March 2019, King Abdullah II made a speech in the city of Zarqa stating “Jerusalem is the red line for me, and all my people are with me ... No one can put pressure on Jordan in this matter, and the answer will be “No”. All Jordanians stand with me in Jerusalem” (Sharp, 2019, p. 10).

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

In the course of the study, the author set the goal of identifying the features of the manifestation of the Islamic factor in the politics of Arab countries. The Kingdom of Morocco and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan were selected for the study.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The author resorted to general scientific research methods such as analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, and logic. Among the methods of historical science, the historical-descriptive, historical-genetic and hermeneutic methods should be noted.

#### **6. Findings**

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Kingdom of Morocco are states that have a balanced system of interaction with Islamist groups within the state, while reinforcing and supporting the doctrine of official Islam, exercising control over the activities of imams, religious leaders and leaders of Islamist organizations. The kingdoms are active in the framework of religious diplomacy, which in recent years has become a promising form of foreign policy.

The result of the analysis is the identification of similar features of the influence of the Islamic factor on the foreign policy of two kingdoms, taking into account the historical characteristics of the region of the Middle East and North Africa.

#### **7. Conclusion**

Over the past twenty years, the topic of the Islamic factor has acquired great urgency. The analysis of the role of Islam and the role of the individual in two countries showed that despite the globalizing

world and the inevitable transformations within Morocco and Jordan, associated with the growing role of Western education and the influence of Western values on the internal structure of countries, politics remains traditional, since the countries of the Middle East have been known for their tradition of a strong ruler. This tradition is preserved by the ruling dynasties of the Moroccan Kingdom and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The role of the Islamic factor in the social and political life of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is quite high, but it is not paramount in making foreign and domestic political decisions. Despite the sufficient secularity of Moroccan and Jordanian society, traditional society plays an important role, which retains the importance of tribalism, respect for the opinion of the elders and adherence to the rules of religion.

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