

THE WEAKENING OF THE ISLAMIC RADICAL MOVEMENT IN ALGERIA IN THE 2000'S. THE MAIN REASONS AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

Algeria was in dire economic and social straits in the late 20th century. The authorities' inaction and inability to solve the numerous problems had a negative impact on their reputation. A large percentage of the state and governance systems had lost credibility in the eyes of many Algerians. Under these circumstances, Islamic movements became more active in Algeria and quickly gained unprecedented popularity and influence across the country. They proposed their vision of solving the existing problems, putting forward the idea of creating an Islamic state in Algeria, based on the supremacy of Islamic laws.

The purpose of the article is to present the reasons for the decline and weakening of the Islamic movement, particularly its most radical forces, and its turning consequences on the development of events in Algeria.

The radical Islamic movement played a significant role in fomenting the Algerian civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2000. The government has taken a number of steps to counter the threat of radical Islam, using both forceful and political methods. The Algerian crisis was resolved only a decade later, due to a number of factors.

The purpose of the article is to present the reasons due to which the Islamic movement, particularly its radical wing, lost its strength and weakened, recording the fact that Islamic radicalism could not be completely eradicated. The most extremist groups still exist in Algeria and continue their activities.

This article describes the steps taken by the authorities towards the resolution of the "Algerian crisis" and the factors that made the political solution of the Algerian conflict possible. In this context particular attention is given to the disagreements and the divisions between the radical Islamic organizations, which had the most serious impact on the Islamic movement.

Keywords and phrases: Algerian crisis, Islamic extremism, Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika, "Civil Concord" law, organizations.

**ԱՐՄԱՏԱԿԱՆ ԻՍԼԱՄԱԿԱՆ ՇԱՐԺՄԱՆ ԹՈՒԼԱՑՈՒՄՆ ԱԼԺԻՐՈՒՄ
2000-ԱԿԱՆ ԹԹ.. ՀԻՄՆԱԿԱՆ ՊԱՏՃԱՌՆԵՐԸ ԵՎ ՀԵՏԵՎԱՆՔՆԵՐԸ**

ԱՐԱՄ ԳԱՍՊԱՐՅԱՆ

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Համառոտագիր

XX դ. վերջում Ալժիրը հայտնվել էր տնտեսական և սոցիալական ծանր դրության մեջ: Իշխանությունների անգործությունն ու ծագած բազմաթիվ խնդիրները լուծելու անկարողությունը բացասական ազդեցություն ունեցան իշխանությունների հեղինակության վրա: Ալժիրցիների զգալի հատվածը կորցրել էր վստահությունը ոչ միայն պետական կառույցների, այլ նաև հաստատված իշխանական համակարգի հանդեպ:

Եվ ահա այսպիսի պայմաններում Ալժիրում աննախադեպ ակտիվացան իսլամական շարժումները, որոնք շատ կարճ ժամանակահատվածում ձեռք բերեցին մեծ հեղինակություն և տարածեցին իրենց ազդեցությունը երկրի գրեթե ողջ տարածքում: Վերջիններս առաջարկեցին առկա խնդիրների լուծման իրենց տեսլականը՝ առաջ քաշելով Ալժիրում իսլամական օրենքների գերակայության վրա հիմնված իսլամական պետության ստեղծման գաղափարը:

Արմատական իսլամական շարժումը նշանակալի դեր խաղաց Ալժիրում քաղաքացիական պատերազմի բռնկման գործում, որը տևեց 1991-2000 թթ.: Այդ ժամանակից ի վեր կառավարությունը մի շարք քայլեր է ձեռնարկել արմատական իսլամի սպառնալիքներին դիմակայելու համար՝ կիրառելով ինչպես ուժային, այնպես էլ քաղաքական մեթոդներ: Ալժիրյան ճգնաժամը հնարավոր եղավ կարգավորել միայն մեկ տասնամյակ անց, ինչը պայմանավորված էր մի շարք գործոններով:

Հոդվածի նպատակն է ներկայացնել այն պատճառները, որոնց հետևանքով իսլամական շարժումը, մասնավորապես դրա արմատական թևը կորցրեց իր ուժը և թուլացավ՝ արձանագրելով փաստը, որ իսլամական արմատականությունը հնարավոր չեղավ ամբողջովին վերացնել: Ալժիրում մինչ օրս պահպանվում են առավել ծայրահեղական խմբավորումներ, որոնք շարունակում են իրենց պառակտիչ գործունեությունը:

Ուսումնասիրվում է ոչ միայն իշխանությունների կողմից «Ալժիրյան ճգնաժամի» կարգավորման ուղղությամբ ձեռնարկած քայլերը, այլ նաև այն գործոնները, որոնք հնարավոր դարձրին հակամարտության քաղաքական լուծումը: Այս համատեքստում առանձնակի կարևորվում է ծայրահեղ իսլամական կազմակերպությունների միջև առկա տարաձայնությունները և խնդիրները, որոնք լրջագույն ազդեցություն ունեցան իսլամական շարժման կենսունկության վրա:

Բանալի բռներ և բառակապակցություններ. Ալժիրի ճգնաժամ, իսլամական ծայրահեղականություն, Աբդ ալ-Ազիզ Բուտեֆլիկա, «Քաղաքացիական համերաշխության» օրենք, կազմակերպություններ:

ОСЛАБЛЕНИЕ ИСЛАМСКОГО РАДИКАЛЬНОГО ДВИЖЕНИЯ В АЛЖИРЕ В 2000-ЫЕ Г. ОСНОВНЫЕ ПРИЧИНЫ И ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ

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Аннотация

К концу XX века Алжир оказался в тяжелом экономическом и социальном положении. Бездействие и неспособность властей решать возникшие многочисленные проблемы негативно сказались на репутации властей. Значительная часть алжирцев потеряла доверие не только к государственному устройству, но и к сложившейся системе управления.

И в таких условиях в Алжире беспрецедентно активизировались исламские движения, которые в очень короткий срок завоевали большой авторитет и распространили свое влияние практически на всю территорию страны. Эти движения предложили свое видение решения существующих проблем, выдвинув идею создания в Алжире исламского государства, основанного на верховенстве исламских законов.

Радикальное исламское движение сыграло значительную роль в разжигании гражданской войны в Алжире, длившейся с 1991 по 2000 год. С тех пор правительство предприняло ряд шагов по противодействию угрозе радикального исламизма, используя как силовые, так и политические методы. Алжирский кризис разрешился лишь спустя десятилетие благодаря ряду факторов.

Цель статьи - представить причины, из-за которых исламское движение, особенно радикальное крыло, потеряло свою силу и ослабло, зафиксировав тот факт, что исламский радикализм не удалось полностью искоренить. В Алжире все еще существуют и действуют наиболее экстремистские группировки, которые продолжают свою раскольническую деятельность.

Изучаются не только шаги, предпринятые властями для решения «алжирского кризиса», но и факторы, сделавшие возможным политическое регулирование конфликта. В этом контексте особое внимание уделяется разногласиям и конфронтациям между радикальными исламскими организациями, что и оказало наиболее серьезное влияние на стойкость исламского движения.

Ключевые слова и словосочетания: алжирский кризис, исламский экстремизм, Абд аль-Азиз Бутефлика, закон «О гражданском согласии», организации.

Introduction

Radical Islamism has been a major concern in Algeria for several decades. The country has a long history of Islamist extremism, dating back to the 1990s when the government fought against a violent Islamist insurgency known as the "Black Decade." The conflict led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people and was characterized by widespread human rights abuses on both sides.

The Algerian government has sought to solve the root causes of radicalization, including poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and basic services. Efforts have been made to improve living standards and provide social and economic opportunities, but these challenges remain significant and ongoing.

While Algeria has made some progress in countering the threat of radical Islamism, the issue remains a significant challenge for the country and the region as a whole. Addressing the root causes of extremism and promoting stability and economic development will be key to preventing the spread of radical ideology and reducing the risk of terrorism.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria

The formation of modern Islamic fundamentalism in its most radical forms was associated with the "Muslim Brotherhood" – an organization created by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt – who preferred jihad (holy war) to all other possible tools to achieve its main goal - the establishment of laws based on "true Islam". This well-organized and branched movement had a significant impact on the socio-political life of Muslim countries for decades. Islamic public thought in Algeria did not escape the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood's radical Islamist ideas either.

In the 1980s Islamist ideas and tendencies to politicize Islam were spreading rapidly in Algeria. In a very short time, the widespread Islamic movement was united around the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) [1, p. 68]³, which was headed by a well-known leader of radical Islamism in Algeria, Abassi Madani, a professor of psychology at the University of Algiers. At that time, the significant part of the Algerian population supported the slogan of the creation of an Islamic state in Algeria purposed by the ISF. The reasons for this should be sought in the 1980s, a period when there was a systemic crisis in the country. The inability of state structures to solve the social problems that had matured in the country, such as the decline of the economy and the unstable political situation, put the Algerians, particularly the most vulnerable classes, in a difficult condition. In this context, the broad segments of Algerian society saw the only way to solve the difficult social problems in the creation of an Islamic state based on the foundations of "real Islam."

The spread of radicalism in Algeria received a boost when important changes took place in the political system. In February 1989, a new Algerian constitution was adopted, which guaranteed the right to form political entities. Thus, a multi-party

³ The Islamic Salvation Front was founded in 1989.

system was effectively introduced in Algeria. This objectively necessary and natural democratic process led to a sharp strengthening of the Islamist movement. A number of Islamist parties were created, the most influential and prestigious of which was the Islamic Salvation Front, mentioned above.

All this made possible the crushing victory of ISF over the National Liberation Front (FLN)⁴ in the elections took place in 1990. ISF gained 54 % [2, p.314, 3, p.205] of the vote, moreover, in 1991 during the first round of the parliamentary elections held on December 26, ISF won more than half of the seats⁵ [4, p. 52], which marked the beginning of the events that significantly changed the entire future course of the country's historical development.

After the publication of the results of the first round of the elections, it became obvious that in the second round of the upcoming elections, the Islamists will form a majority in the parliament, getting the chance to change the Constitution and declare Algeria an Islamic state.

The threat of Islamization of the country prompted the army to proactivity. Algerian president Shadli Benjedid dissolved the National Assembly at the request of the military, but a few days later the president was overthrown as well [5, p.53]. At the same time the state of emergency was restored in the country⁶, the activity of the ISF was banned, its leaders were imprisoned as well. As a result, Algeria entered a period of bloody civil war between the Islamists and the authorities, which continued from 1991-1999 and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

These developments in Algeria clearly showed that Islamism and its radical manifestations not only enjoyed the support of a wide section of the Algerian society, but also had a large number of supporters. In addition, the creation of Islamic armed groups after 1991 clearly demonstrated that extremism is not just an ideology, but a real force capable of waging an uncompromising armed struggle against the authorities.

From the beginning of the crisis, the Algerian authorities sought to end the conflict by force, widely using both the capabilities of the army and the special police services, at the same time, realizing that it is not possible to achieve peace with the use of force only, the authorities took certain steps to find political solutions, but they did not yield any significant results.

It was finally possible to start a process for a peaceful resolution of the crisis only in 1999, the implementation of which would be possible only through the disarmament (neutralization) of Islamic radical groups.

⁴ The National Liberation Front was created on November 1, 1954 as a result of the merger of several small political groups as a nationwide organization that led the armed struggle for Algerian independence from France.

⁵ The Islamic Liberation Front won 188 seats out of 430 in the parliamentary elections, the Socialist Parties Front won 25, and the National Liberation Front won 15 seats.

⁶ The state of emergency was cancelled in 1991 for holding parliamentary elections.

In 1999, on the initiative of the newly elected president of Algeria Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika [5, p.24], The Civil Concord Law was adopted, which would grant amnesty to those members of armed groups who would voluntarily stop their schismatic activities and surrender to the authorities [6, N46]. The law was approved by the majority of voters through a referendum on September 16 [7, p.47].

The adoption of the law and the measures aimed at its implementation caused a certain division in the ranks of the Algerian radicals. The leader of ISF Abbasi Madani who was under house arrest approved the law and called on his supporters to do the same. The commander of ISF's military wing Madani Mezrag also expressed support for the law and called on all militants to join the Islamic Salvation Army's decision. ISF stopped fighting and announced its dissolution on January 12, 2000.

The Civil Concord Law and the amnesty must have become a stable basis for the establishment of peace in Algeria. However, only the "Islamic Salvation Front" benefited from the amnesty, which, incidentally, had stopped fighting in October of 1997 [4, p.77-78].

It should be noted that the adoption of the Civil Concord Law did not have the expected results. At the beginning of the 2000s, it became clear that Bouteflika's plan did not resonate with radical Islamist groups such as Salafi Propaganda and Jihad Group (GSPC) and the "Islamic Armed Group" (IAG). The latter were not only not going to lay down their arms and surrender, but also expressed their willingness to continue the fight. These two groups, numbering about 650, continued to carry out terrorist activities, the most major of which was the killing of 23 Bedouins in the Chlef region (southern Algeria) on May 20, 2002, whose only "sin" was participation in the elections [8, p.223]. As Benjamin Stora notes, referring to the the Algerian press, just in October of 2000 more than 250 people were killed as a result of terrorist activities of armed groups operating in Algeria [7, p. 48].

However, about 5,500 militants had surrendered by the deadline for implementation of the law (January 13, 2000). Later, about 5,000 prisoners convicted of "divisive and terrorist activities" were released [3, p. 277, 9, p. 80].

The Civil Concord Law undeniably had a positive effect on the weakening of the radical Islamic movement in Algeria, as a result of which military operations in the country decreased. Relative peace was established in the country. It should also be noted that there were a number of factors that also had a great impact on the vitality of radical Islamist movements. One of the reasons for the cessation of the armed struggle against the Algerian regime was the disagreements between the various Islamic groups over the direction, methods and forms of the struggle, which broke up the Islamic movement for obvious reasons. The emergence of the "Islamic Armed Group" created both strategic and ideological tension with the "Islamic Salvation Front," and led to armed clashes between these two groups in the mid of 1990's. In 1996 one of the IAG commanders, Emir Hassan Khattab, founded the more extreme Salafi Propaganda and Jihad Group, which sharply criticized the IAG's decision to lay down arms and continued an uncompromising armed struggle against the authorities

[9, p. 144]. Later, on September 14, 2006, the GSPC announced an alliance with al-Qaeda and henceforth operated under the name "al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb"[10, p. 175, 11, p. 114-131].

In addition to the above-mentioned circumstance, it is necessary to mention the fact that the long-lasting civil war required huge resources from the conflicting parties, and taking into the crisis situation in the country's economy and the reduction of financial sources had its effect on maintaining the intensity of the conflict.

At the same time, the position of foreign powers should not be ignored, which in turn exerted pressure on the regime, expressing concern about the danger of Algerian terrorism spreading beyond the borders of the country.

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, it can be concluded that the full-scale civil war in Algeria is over. Unlike the middle of the 1990s, Algerian radical Islamism is no longer a well-organized anti-establishment force that can oppose the established system in the country.

The largest centers of Islamic extremism had been suppressed, and the number of militants was gradually decreasing. According to generalized data based on official information and Algerian media reports, 400 people died in the confrontation in 2006. In 2005, this number was 480 people, and in 2004 - more than 500 people [12].

In the Islamist movement, which continues to play a significant role in the social and political life of Algeria, several main directions can be conventionally distinguished. The first one is moderate Islamic political parties, which operate and are represented in the Algerian parliament, acting from the positions of Islamism (that is aiming to preserve "Islamic values" as an indispensable condition and basis for the further development of Algerian society). Despite the fact that the Algerian constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion, Islamist parties have managed to circumvent this ban by changing their names, excluding clauses about the establishment of an "Islamic Republic" from their programs. The "National Reform Movement", the Movement of Society for Peace, or " Hamas" [13], and the Islamic Renaissance Movement, or "Nahda" [14, p.124-125], are among the moderate Islamic organizations currently operating in Algeria.

The second direction includes the parties banned by the authorities, which, however, try to achieve the abolition of the ban and act within legal bounds, nominating their candidates in the elections as "independent candidates." Among such parties are Wafa (Allegiance) [15, p. 214] and ISF. "Wafa" is headed by Ahmed Taleb Ibrahim, a well-known figure of the National Assembly, who was the foreign minister under President Shadli Benjedid and condemned the military intervention in the political process. The Ministry of the Interior of Algeria refused to register Wafa as a political party due to the presence of many activists of the banned ISF in its leadership. On the other hand, the leaders of the ISF, which was officially dissolved in 1992, continue to actively influence the political life of Algeria.

The third direction is the radical Islamic groups, the most prominent representatives of which are the aforementioned "Islamic Armed Group" and the "Salafi Group of Propaganda and Jihad."

Conclusion

The civil war that began between Islamic armed groups and the authorities in Algeria in 1991 ended in 2000 which was directly related to the weakening of the Islamic radical movement.

Turning to the reasons why Islamic radicalism declined at the end of the 20th century, several antecedents can be distinguished. The first one was the Civil Concord Law accepted by Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika in 1999 which granted amnesty to surrendered Islamists. This initiative of the Algerian president had an undeniable effect on the weakening of the radical movement as it pulled back not only the ordinary Islamist militants from the ranks of the anti-government struggle, but also one of the most influential forces of the Islamic movement, the "Islamic Salvation Front" and its militarized wing, the "Islamic Salvation Army".

The fact that ISF stopped active military operations in 1997 also played an important role which facilitated and greatly enabled the application of the Civil Concord Law. There was another important factor. The civil war clearly showed that both the authorities and the Islamists could not achieve their goals only by force of arms, which in turn required not only human but also financial resources. The Algerian society and the Algerian economy were not ready for a long civil war, the negative impact of which was felt both on public sentiment and on the country's economic and political life. However, the efforts of the Algerian authorities to restore the country's position and reputation in the international arena should not be underestimated.

Thus, it should be noted that there had been a unique situation in Algeria by the end of 1990s which created a positive atmosphere and made it possible for the weakening of Islamic radicalism. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the above-mentioned factors could have only had an effect on the weakening of radical movements through their combination, not individually.

Despite the fact that the radical Islamic movement in Algeria weakened and it became possible to establish relative peace in the country, Islamic terrorist armed groups continue to operate in the country. It should be emphasized that along with a certain weakening of radical Islamism in Algeria, the deep reasons for the emergence of Islamic extremism continue to be preserved here. There are many unsolved vital problems in the socio-economic life of Algerians, which affects a significant part of the population. The situation of growing social tension in society can certainly be used by radical Islamist forces to increase their influence, which will bring the country to a new crisis. It is clear that radical reforms are necessary to solve the problems facing Algeria, for the implementation of which the relations and activities of both the authorities and the opposition (especially Islamic organizations and parties) must be built on compromise.

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