

POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: A HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the political, social, and economic development paths of Arab countries in the 20th and early 21st centuries, focusing on national liberation movements and the interaction between socialist-oriented development and democratic reforms. It also examines the role of oil in international politics, the politicization of Islam, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The study evaluates democratic transformations in Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, as well as the phenomenon known as the “Arab Spring” from a historical and political perspective. Furthermore, it highlights the specificity of democratic models in Eastern societies and their differences from Western democratic paradigms.

Keywords: Arab countries, national liberation movements, socialist orientation, political Islam, oil factor, democracy, Arab Spring, modernization, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia.

ANNOTATSIYA

Mazkur maqolada XX asr va XXI asr boshlarida arab davlatlarining siyosiy, ijtimoiy va iqtisodiy taraqqiyot yo‘llari, milliy-ozodlik harakatlari hamda “sotsialistik yo‘nalish” va demokratik islohotlar o‘rtasidagi o‘zaro bog‘liqlik tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, neft omilining xalqaro siyosatdagi o‘rni, islom dinining siyosiylashuvi va islom fundamentalizmining rivojlanish tendensiyalari yoritiladi. Arab mamlakatlarida kechgan demokratik jarayonlar (Jazoir, Tunis, Misr misolida) hamda “Arab bahori” hodisasi tarixiy va siyosiy nuqtai nazardan baholanadi. Tadqiqotda Sharq jamiyatlariga xos demokratik modelning o‘ziga xosligi va G‘arb demokratiya konsepsiyasidan farqli jihatlari ilmiy asosda tahlil etiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: arab davlatlari, milliy-ozodlik harakati, sotsialistik yo‘nalish, islom siyosati, neft omili, demokratiya, Arab bahori, modernizatsiya, Jazoir, Misr, Tunis.

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье анализируются пути политического, социального и экономического развития арабских стран в XX – начале XXI века, а также взаимосвязь национально-освободительных движений с концепциями «социалистической ориентации» и демократических реформ. Особое внимание уделяется роли нефтяного фактора в международной политике, политизации ислама и развитию исламского фундаментализма. Рассматриваются процессы демократических преобразований в Алжире, Тунисе и Египте, а также явление «Арабской весны» в историко-политическом контексте. Подчеркивается специфика демократических моделей в восточных обществах и их отличие от западных концепций демократии.

Ключевые слова: *арабские страны, национально-освободительное движение, социалистическая ориентация, политический ислам, нефтяной фактор, демократия, Арабская весна, модернизация, Алжир, Египет, Тунис.*

INTRODUCTION

The socio-political development processes of Arab states during the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century emerged as one of the most complex and multidimensional phenomena within the international relations system. In the post-colonial period, newly established nation-states were confronted with urgent tasks such as selecting an optimal model of development, consolidating political independence, and implementing economic modernisation. From this perspective, national liberation movements in Arab countries represented not only a struggle for political independence but also a crucial historical stage in determining the subsequent trajectory of societal development.

During this period, a complex interrelationship emerged within the Arab world between the “socialist orientation”, national-democratic transformations, and later reforms based on liberal market economy principles and political pluralism. These processes unfolded in various forms across different states, including Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria, and others, thereby giving rise to diverse models of regional development shaped by specific political and socio-economic contexts [1].

Furthermore, the oil factor acquired decisive economic and geopolitical significance in the development of Arab states. Organisations of oil-exporting countries and regional integration structures significantly strengthened the position of Arab countries within the international economic system. At the same time, the increasing role of Islam in socio-political life, along with the development of Islamic

fundamentalism and political Islam, exerted a direct influence on both regional stability and global political processes.

In recent decades, democratic transformations in the Arab world, particularly the events known as the “Arab Spring”, have accelerated the process of restructuring political systems in the region. These developments, on the one hand, reflected aspirations towards political modernisation and reform, while on the other hand, they also gave rise to social instability, radicalism, and political crises. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary development trajectories of Arab states, their historical experience, and political transformations constitutes an urgent scholarly issue. This article seeks to examine the interconnections between these processes and to explore the formation and evolution of development models in the Arab world from a historical and political perspective.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The question of selecting an appropriate development model became one of the most pressing political and ideological issues faced by Arab national liberation movements in the second half of the twentieth century. National-democratic forces in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and later South Yemen adopted a path of radical reforms in implementing socio-economic and political transformations. These political actors advanced the view that the capitalist development model was unlikely to produce rapid or effective outcomes for developing countries and therefore adopted the concept of a “socialist orientation” as a comparatively more viable development strategy [4]. The dissemination of this model was significantly facilitated by the economic, political, and military support provided by states that identified themselves as socialist. Accordingly, countries that adopted a “socialist orientation” strengthened their cooperative relations with these states. By the 1960s, ideological differentiation among the political elites of the aforementioned countries intensified, leading to their division into “left-wing” and “right-wing” factions.

From the early 1970s onwards, a new phase of development began in Arab countries. In some states, socio-economic restructuring deepened – particularly in South Yemen and Syria – while in others, a return to capitalist development models was observed. Such transformations were often accompanied by repressive measures against national-democratic forces and a foreign policy orientation towards closer alignment with Western states. Political changes during the presidency of Anwar Sadat in Egypt, developments following the dissolution of the National Front in Iraq, and the post-coup political orientation in Somalia exemplify these trends [6].

The role of the oil factor in the political and economic life of the Arab world also increased significantly. In the 1960s, the Organisation of the Petroleum

Exporting Countries (OPEC) was established to protect the interests of oil-producing states. Arab countries also developed regional cooperation mechanisms within this framework. By the 1970s and 1980s, twelve oil-producing Arab states had acquired substantial geopolitical influence within the international economic and political system.

The position of Islam in the socio-political life of Muslim states, including Arab-Islamic countries, also strengthened considerably. Islam emphasises monotheism, Sharia norms, and the unity of the Muslim Ummah as core principles. The shared religious and cultural heritage, traditions, and moral values of Muslim peoples became a unifying factor reinforcing political and cultural cohesion [3]. The Islamic revival process, which began in the late 1960s, intensified significantly by the late 1970s. It spread across much of the Muslim world, leading in some cases to serious political upheavals and armed conflicts.

In the contemporary period, Islam has increasingly manifested as a highly politicised and ideologised phenomenon. This development is associated with the concept of Muslim maximalism, which advocates organising not only personal life but also societal and state structures in accordance with Sharia principles [1]. In 1969, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, uniting Muslim states and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, was established. This organisation aimed to strengthen Muslim solidarity and enhance cooperation among member states.

In subsequent decades, Islamic fundamentalism also gained significant momentum. This movement emphasised the in-depth study of Islamic sources and the search for solutions to contemporary problems within the Qur'an and religious texts. On the one hand, this process reflected social discontent and economic hardship; on the other hand, in certain cases, it contributed to the rise of political extremism and radicalism.

In the mid-1980s, a shift in attitudes towards Islamic fundamentalism was observed in several Arab states. In countries such as Egypt, Kuwait, and Tunisia, the influence of radical religious-political movements declined to some extent. However, by the late 1980s, the significance of Islamic factors in political life once again increased in countries such as Algeria and Lebanon.

Internal political processes in Arab states of the Middle East and North Africa remain a focal point of international expert analysis. In particular, the events known as the "Arab Spring" have intensified the need for a deeper historical and political examination of democratic transformations in the region. At the same time, the thesis advanced by some Western states – that the absence of democracy leads to societal radicalization – has generated extensive academic and political debate. However,

political developments in Arab countries during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries demonstrate that historical experience, cultural context, and social structure play a decisive role in shaping democratic reforms.

The Algerian experience is particularly noteworthy in this regard. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Algeria implemented political liberalisation, introduced a multi-party system, and held free elections. Extraordinary courts were abolished, a new constitution was adopted, and a bicameral parliament was established. Media freedom was significantly expanded. However, the expansion of political freedoms, combined with unresolved socio-economic challenges, led to increased social tension. Consequently, radical groups such as the Islamic Salvation Front gained influence, ultimately plunging the country into civil war.

Tunisia also experienced significant democratic and economic reforms. The adoption of the Civil Status Code under President Habib Bourguiba fundamentally transformed traditional social relations. Political reforms, the expansion of internet and media freedoms, and greater tolerance towards opposition activity constituted key features of Tunisia's democratic transformation. In addition, policies aimed at combating illiteracy and reforming the education system played an important role in the country's modernisation process [5].

Egypt has a long-standing tradition of democratic processes compared to other Arab states. Representative institutions emerged as early as the second half of the nineteenth century, and various political parties and movements operated throughout the twentieth century. The presidential and parliamentary elections of 2005 revealed the complex and contradictory nature of Egypt's political system [2]. On the one hand, the leadership sought to continue democratic reforms; on the other hand, the influence of religious-political movements significantly increased.

The experience of Arab states demonstrates that the rapid and unprepared implementation of democratic reforms may lead to complex and unforeseen consequences. Furthermore, historical practice confirms that there is no universal model of democracy applicable to all societies. The democratic model developed within Western civilisation may not be fully compatible with Eastern societies. Therefore, democracy in Eastern countries should be shaped with due consideration of national mentality, religious values, historical traditions, and local socio-cultural characteristics.

In general, democracy is not merely a form of state governance but a complex social phenomenon closely linked to historical development, political culture, and civic institutions. Accordingly, the development of democratic values should be based not on external pressure, but on internal societal needs and the logic of

historical evolution, which constitutes a key condition for the establishment of a stable political system.

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