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THE WEST AND THE ISLAMISTS: COOPERATION

IN THE LATE 20th CENTURY AND EARLY 21st CENTURY

Introduction

The very topic of cooperation of the collective West and the Islamists was thought to be referring to “the conspiracy theory” and consequently not serious, unscientific and unworthy of study.

The glossy politicians from the United State and the European Union with their university diplomas looked very incompatible with illiterate fanatics from the anti-Soviet mujahedeen or the Taliban movement (prohibited in Russia).

However, the facts of the United States and West European countries cooperation with the Islamist monarchies of the Persian Gulf have been known for a long time as well as cooperation with the Saddam Hussein’s regime at the time of fighting against Shiite Iran in the 1980s, relying on the slogans of radical Arab nationalism. But such a cooperation was listed as Realpolitik in the West (and later by many Russian authors as well). Well, what can you do? Savage people living in monarchies, making their women hide their faces but at least they do not kill and they also have a lot of oil... And Saddam is better than “bad Islamists” — Iranian Shiite fanatics under Ayatollah Khomeini. So, the West is cooperating with these “unsavory characters.”

Many people both in Russia and all over the world “bought” this story.

But already by the end of the 1990s, such “holes” appeared in this narrative that it became impossible to accept it. The US and EU went on financing the Islamists in Afghanistan openly and shamelessly even after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in 1989, bringing the matter to the overthrow of a fairly humane Najibullah in 1992 and replacement of his power by endless mutual civil wars between various Sunni groups of the Afghan Islamists. In

former Yugoslav Bosnia and neighbouring Kosovo, the US and EU unconditionally supported Alija Izetbegović's Islamic combatants first and the Kosovo Liberation Army later.

During the Syrian civil war in 2011–2019, the US and EU again openly played the Islamists game. Only they had real chances to come to power in Syria in case of overthrow of Bashar al-Assad, and people in Washington and Brussels could not fail to understand it. (If they are not fully detached from reality “hostages of ideology” of ultraliberalism there, believing in victory of “liberals” everywhere — such people in the West are also very influential.) But the fact remains: during the whole war, the West hit the Assad's troops first of all, thus objectively working for the Islamists.

And what is more, numerous independent mass media and observers noticed that Israel neighbouring Syria directly or indirectly helped the Islamists. They were cases of treating Syrian combatants in the Israeli hospitals. And the main thing is that the Israeli Air Force that periodically bombed Syria in 2011–2019, never hit the Islamists' bases. But the Israeli many times put out of action Assad's army aerodromes, again objectively working for the Islamists. The aircrafts of Assad's Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) that hit the Islamists from numerous extremist Islamic groups that fought against SAR in 2011–2019, took off exactly from the said aerodromes.

What pushes the West to cooperate with the Islamists?

Afghanistan: the tactical anti-Soviet Union of the West and the Islamists

Military actions with the participation of the Soviet troops on the territory of Afghanistan in 1979–1989 were the first big proxy war of the West and Russia. A number of books and reminiscences including Brzezinski's^[1] interview certify that the Americans started in-feeding the mujahedeen (i.e. Afghan Islamists) already in summer 1979 before the Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in December 1979.

American historian Conor Tobin and a number of his colleagues prove that the United States as if lured, drawn in the USSR in the conflict in summer-autumn 1979 by their military and financial assistance.^[2] This became a typical feature of many following operations of the United States in favor of the Islamists. For example, they hoped very much that “Syria will become the second Afghanistan” for Moscow in 2015, when Russia sent its aerospace defense forces to Syria.

In September 2015, *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Le Monde* — practically all Western newspapers — wrote about that after the Russian aerospace defense forces appeared in Syria.

In 2015, the West did not manage to make Russia a hostage of the civil war in Syria — Russia mostly used aircrafts and military police in Syria, and the role of “infantry” in fighting the Islamists was played by the SAR army and to a lesser extent the legally invited to the country by President Assad Iranian armed forces and fighters from the Lebanese Hezbollah.

But in Afghanistan the United States and Western Europe did manage to make the USSR a hostage of the internal struggle between the forces of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and the Islamists. Andrei Mikhailovich Alexandrov-Agentov, the assistant for foreign political issues of four Soviet leaders (Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and Gorbachev), called

Brezhnev (and the majority of the Political Bureau in 1979) exactly the hostage of ideology^[3] because of his decision to send troops to Afghanistan.

It would seem that the difference of our today's approach from the approach in the time of the Afghan war is exactly the absence of the ideological bias in our actions today. We are not trying to build socialism or any other socio-political system in the countries where we are fighting the Islamists. First of all, we are helping the secular, legal authorities in Syria or Cyrenaica to deal with illegal Islamist rebellions — at the local government's request, according to the UN Charter.^[4]

Life punished the United States for their helping the Islamists in Afghanistan. Saudi Osama bin Laden and other Islamists supported by them in Afghanistan were not grateful in any way and in 2001 they took part in the biggest in the United States history terrorist act on September 11, attacking New York and Washington by hijacked airplanes.

The Islamists turn their weapons against sponsors: Libya and Syria

In the two following conflicts, when the US helped Islamists — the war in Libya in 2011 and the war in Syria in 2011–2019 — the United States did not manage to attain their aims. The Islamists lost their power over the biggest part of Libya, and in Syria their influence is limited by the Idlib province, and the US did not succeed in dragging Russia into the conflict with significant human losses for the country.

Abraham Abrams, a representative of the non-systemic American journalism, pays attention in his book *The War in Syria* to the difference in the West's approach to the Afghan Islamists in the 1980s and the Islamists in Libya and Syria. Abrams writes that if in the 1980s the Islamists (including Afghan) could be openly glorified in the US media as heroes fighting for freedom against communist conquerors, in the 2000s and the 2010s, after the 9/11 attacks and other crimes in the name of Allah, glorifying the Islamists became indecent. As a result, Western media started describing the Islamist enemies of Assad and

Gaddafi as abstract rebels, without providing details of their speeches and political platforms.^[5]

Making an alliance with the Islamists in Libya and Syria, the West hoped to deceive them: to use them for the overthrow of the undesirable for Washington secular regimes (both Gaddafi and Assad) and after that to write them off to the dustbin of history. But the Islamists quickly guessed what the tactic was and in their turn easily deceived (and go on deceiving) their Western curators.

The acts of terrorism are often carried out in France and the United States by Islamist veterans of wars in Libya and Syria.

Incompetence of Western officials led to them “backing the wrong horse” in a number of key countries. Staking on the Muslim Brothers (prohibited in the Russian Federation terrorist organization) in Egypt did not justify itself. On the contrary, the old US loyalist Mubarak handed over to the Islamists turned out to be an example of the Americans betraying their allies. The today’s authorities in Egypt are much more loyal to Russia than Mubarak, and the trust between Washington and the Egyptian Army elite has been broken for a long time.

The same may be said about the regime that formed in Iraq after the American occupation and numerous Islamic terrorist acts that took place there as a result of the American intervention. The today’s Iraqi authorities let Russian military and civil aircrafts flying to Syria pass over their territory.

The attempt to finance the Muslim Brothers together with oil “sponsors” from the Persian Gulf led to the United States conflict with the Saudi authorities as well. Nevertheless, the United States and the EU staking on Islamists will still go on. They are used against demonized in the US Russia and China. There was an attempt to use them against Burma government, provocative acts against Serbia in Kosovo are going on.

The recipe for victory

Experience shows that Russia and the moderate Muslim regimes are fairly capable to oppose the Islamists, even if the latter form the coalition with the West. It is possible taking into account mistakes made by the USSR in Afghanistan.

Russia need not send its infantry or feed the whole countries. Russia should support viable sovereign moderate secular regimes with Muslims at the head. And it is required to fight back against Islamophobes and racists in Russia. The worst anti-advertizing for us in the third world is the skinheads and Islamophobes-Navalnists on a “Russian March.”

^[1] Le Nouvel Observateur, 1998

^[2] Conor Tobin, *The United States and the Soviet-Afghan War, 1979–1989*, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 80–81

^[3] Andrei Mikhailovich Alexandrov-Agentov, *From Kollontai to Gorbachev*, 1994, Moscow, International Relations, p. 167

^[4] Igor Lvavrov, speech at the UN General Assembly in 2017

^[5] Abraham Abrams, *War in Syria*, New York, 2021