Ibn Khaldun's Concepts in the Mirror of Arab Political and Economic Identity

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Abstract---The topic of the asymmetry of the processes of globalization, regionalization, localization of international life, for all its fame, does not negate the relevance of deep analysis, especially in the case of traditional societies. Therefore, we set ourselves the task of exploring the ethnohistorical, spiritual, cultural, economic and political spheres of the life of the peoples of the Arab region in retrospection and dynamics using historical-logical, comparative methods and a systematic approach. We also put forward hypotheses that: 1) the key subjective factor influencing the political decision-making markets are the interests of the elite, political leaders in the context of resolving conflicts in the tradition of Muslim diplomacy; 2) the economic, political, legal and philosophical-religious thought of the Arab countries developed under the influence of Islam set forth in the Koran - the holy book of Muslims; 3) the origins of these concepts were laid by Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Khaldun and other thinkers of the XI-XV centuries; 4) by analogy with Western political economists, starting with Thomas Aquinas, one can carry out analysis in the paradigm of the so-called “moral economists”.

Keywords---Arab elite, diplomacy, economy, Khaldun’s law, political spheres.

Introduction

The problems of the instability of the political systems of modern Arab countries, the crisis of state institutions, the weakness of integration processes are given considerable attention by representatives of various theoretical schools and paradigms. However, the complexity and diversity of topics of mutual overflow of domestic and foreign policy in the interests of various actors of international and world politics in this region requires an adequate explanation and use of a
number of classical and non-standard approaches (Novikovas et al., 2017; Yaroshenko et al., 2018). Among these approaches, our attention has been drawn to attempts to discover the roots of these processes in the eventful history of the Arabs. It must be admitted that in the course of analyzing the available theoretical reflection, it became necessary to test a number of concepts:

- a number of political and economic processes in the modern political life of Arab states have their origins in spiritual and cultural traditions from the depths of the centuries;
- the process of political systems’ forming here under the influence of Western models and examples ended with more or less acceptable models of a nation state;
- the process of forming a foreign policy identity has a diverse and incomplete character due to both objective and subjective factors.

The historiography of this problem is quite extensive. It includes works on the classical history of the Arab-Muslim world (Amri, 1997; Crone & Hinds, 2003; Crone, 2003; Lassner, 1980; Lewis, 1968), and the works of political scientists who analyze the current relations in the region (Hopkins & Ibrahim, 1997; Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2002), state-building issues (Triki, 1991; Shama, 2013). These authors focus on the problems of: 1) the national development of the Arab countries; 2) studying the measure of the leader’s influence on the formation of foreign policy decisions; 3) typologies of political leadership (Hermann, 1980; Dyson & Preston, 2006; Galbraith, 2012); 4) the problems of self-identification of Egypt (Karawan, 1994; Karawan, 2005; Grimm & Roll, 2012); 5) procedures for making strategic decisions (Shalaby, 1992; Khawaja, 2013; DUMAN, 2020); 6) concepts of successful the country’s positioning in the international arena (Mellor, 2015; Korany, 2012; Telhamy & Barnett, 2002; Sabet, 2017; Ahmadian, 2014). For generalization, it should be noted that the main conclusions of the above specialists are mainly related to the ideas about: 1) the continuity of the country’s foreign policy since 1952; 2) each leader demonstrated his own vision of Egypt’s foreign policy self-identification.

The above-listed authors conducted their research in the following paradigms: 1) theological and ideological, 2) positivist; 3) civilizational. But at the same time, it is necessary to take into account the fact that instability and rapid volatility of the political process have become characteristic features of the socio-political development of the Middle East and North Africa region (Al-Kandari & Gaither, 2011; Schaefer, 1996). These dynamics require an integrated approach. As mentioned above, we set ourselves the task to investigate, the ethnohistorical, spiritual, cultural, economic and political spheres of the life of the peoples of the Arab region in retrospect and dynamics using a systematic approach. At the same time, the analysis of this theoretical discourse testifies to the fact that little research has been done based on the traditions of the historical-logical method and the systems approach; a comprehensive examination of the role of traditional concepts in regulation of modern Arab political systems (Mohamed & Rosman, 2021; Schelkunov et al., 2021).

Therefore, it was extremely important for our research to turn to the ideas of the thinker of the Arab East, Khaldun (2015). Ibn Khaldun went down in history as
one of the famous Arab diplomats and scholars. He was born in 1332 in Tunisia into a family of high-ranking officials and scholars from Andalusia, descendants of the ancient Yemeni Arabs. Ibn Khaldun received an excellent religious, literary and scientific education. His teachers were prominent scholars of the Maghreb. In 1352, Ibn Khaldun went to Fez, where he spent ten years, becoming chancellor at the court of Sultan Abu Salim. He visited Granada in 1362, Boogie and Tlemcen. From travels and diplomatic missions, Al Khaldun learned about the life of the court and the work of government officials, the customs of the Arab and Berber tribes. It was this experience that helped Ibn Khaldun, during his stay at the court of Ibn Salam, prepare the first version of the “Introduction” (“Mukaddim”). In Tunisia, Ibn Khaldun began teaching and at the same time finished the first version of Kitab al-Ibar ... (“Book of instructive examples ...”). It was a monumental work on world history (Boulakia, 1971).

It must also be recognized that the period when Ibn Khaldun from 1354 served as secretary and ambassador to many rulers of the Maghreb and Spain and was the supreme judge in Egypt, a long time passed. Several aspects and factors of medieval Egyptian society are radically different from the modern political process (Nirwandy & Awang, 2014; Buigut & Kapar, 2020). However, the very view of the medieval Egyptian turns out to be very insightful, and the approach to taking into account multiple causal relationships and cyclical patterns are quite modern and useful. It is not surprising that Ibn Khaldun’s ideas are now being developed and refined in mathematical modelling by foreign and domestic authors. Politicians even now seek advice from the main intellectual achievement of Ibn Khaldun - the book “Al-Mukaddim” (Introduction to “Big History”). It provides a completely scientific sociodynamic explanation of the cycles of the succession of dynasties, which is based on an analysis of the complex interaction of political, military, moral-psychological, economic, geographical, climatic and other factors. It is also necessary to add that even now we are witnessing in the Arab world the facts of frequent displacement of leaders, the emergence of new, sometimes unexpected figures at the head of state. These changes, as a rule, are based on the violence that accompanied the dissolution of representative bodies of power and the removal of legally elected presidents (Anike et al., 2017; Chinyere, 2021; Arnawa et al., 2019).

**Correlation between the concepts of “asabiya” and “social physics”**

The key idea in Ibn Khaldun’s concept is asabiya. Considering the list of connotations of this concept as courage, inspiration, fortitude, justice, honour, a sense of one's own righteousness, we understand asabiya rather as a militant solidarity and then use the term without translation. Ibn Khaldun’s notion of asabiya is not identical, but quite comparable with such concepts of classical and modern sociology as “moral strength” by Emil Durkheim, “charisma” by Max Weber, “passionarity” by Lev Gumilyov and “high emotional energy” by Randall Collins (Kolumbeta et al., 2019; Kozlovskyi et al., 2019). Ibn Khaldun finds the highest level of asabiya among the Bedouins living in harsh conditions. For a group that comes to power, asabiya is lost within 4-5 generations. As a result, the kingdom collapses, and a new dynasty with a high level of asabiya comes to power. According to Khaldun’s (2015), concept, the reasons for the decline of asabiya are as follows:
The leader of the group that seized power seeks to monopolize the glory of victory and, accordingly, the right to rule. He is waging a tough fight with those with whom he was just an ally. Mercenaries are recruited from the lower classes to avoid increased unnecessary ambition. The system of power is hierarchical. The place of the former commonwealth with high asabiya is taken by mercenary activity, which is by no means characterized by selflessness and solidarity;

- Natural desire of rulers for luxury to assert status and power;
- Since the rulers are the highest role model for lower-ranking officials, and the rulers themselves cannot allow any of their subordinates to surpass them in luxury, the craving for prestigious consumption is quickly transmitted from top to bottom and from bottom to top;
- The logic of granting privileges, especially when changing generations, generates a shift in motivation to preserve and maintain the achieved level and quality of life, which reduces the level of asabiya. Not only the interests of the population, but even the stability of society and the state itself are subject to these motives.

The Ibn Khaldun shows a proxiological approach to the spheres of human life and their collective organization and activities. In support of our thesis, it is possible to refer to his concept of “social physics.” Khaldun (2015), arguing the priority of spirituality, insists on recognizing the legitimate progress of human society due to economic factors and the need to unite people to meet needs. Noting that the living conditions of generations differ depending on how people earn a living, Ibn Khaldun put forward his own periodization of social progress, characteristic of the initial period of human society and the state of primitiveness, associated with agriculture and livestock to the state of civilization, due to the development of crafts, trade and science, and the formation and growth of urban power. According to the thinker, agriculture produces only the necessary product, because agriculture and livestock produce goods sufficient to meet priority needs. The creation of a surplus product that exceeds the means necessary for human existence is possible only in cities where there is a surplus of labour, the division of labour is widely used, and industry and trade are developing (Khaldun, 2015).

Thus, Ibn Khaldun associated civilization and the production of an additional product with the existence of the market and the intensive exchange of products of labour. He proclaimed private property as the basis of public order as an eternal and unchangeable gift of nature. According to the Arab thinker, even with the increase of individual wealth, the class division of society based on property and the principle of "supremacy" will never disappear. He expressed interesting ideas about the product, its properties, pricing and market role. Analyzing simple commodity production, Ibn Khaldun depended on prices of supply and demand: the number of goods offered on the market, the demographic situation in the country, natural factors, the size of state taxes and fees, and so on (Lagodiienko, 2019). According to the Arab thinker, the economic rise of the country contributes to the growth of the urban population and causes lower prices for basic necessities and rising prices for luxury items; in the period of deterioration of the economic situation in the state there are reverse processes (Khaldun, 2015; Yaroshenko et al., 2018). The researcher was a supporter of moderate taxes and fees as an important factor in the economic prosperity of the country.
Al-Khaldun played an important role in money, arguing that gold and silver are a measure of the value of everything that people create through their labour, storage, income, savings and treasures. According to Ibn Khaldun, precious metals do not create wealth. For example, the land of Sudan has a lot of gold, but the country remains poor, because the welfare of the people does not depend on the availability of precious metals, but on the development of public life based on the diligence of the population. At the same time, the thinker drew attention to the fact that gold and silver have a stable value and are therefore a convenient form of wealth storage (Malik & Awadallah, 2013; Relly & Cuillier, 2010). Ibn Khaldun was a supporter of full-fledged money and categorically condemned the damage of coins by rulers, which became more widespread in the middle Ages. He wrote that people who “turn copper into silver and gold are thieves, the worst of thieves, because they appropriate this gold.”

Source of prestige, it becomes the object of human desires and aspirations, constantly pushing him to action. Power is not strong by nature; it constantly passes from one group to another, from one nation to another. As a means of redistributing surpluses and ordering society, it plays a crucial role in changing phases. It is on this principle that Ibn Khaldun builds his work on the history of society (Petrov & Serdyuk, 2008; Tatsyi et al., 2010). He traces the path of peoples, mainly Arabs and Berbers, who one after another won power: from nomadic to domination over other peoples and, finally, the fall. The basic concepts include many small ones. In social terms it is cohesion, kinship, patronage, honour; in the political - coercion, violence, domination, power; in economic - means of subsistence, or earnings, value, labour. Ibn Khaldun's concepts, the laws of life of the Arab-Berber society, his synthetic approach to the history of the Islamic world remain to this day an inexhaustible source of knowledge for historians and ethnographers.

The theory of switching ties: from inviolability of sovereignty to foreign policy identity

In the approaches to modern trends in economic, political life and the role of elites, it is necessary to take into account the experience of al-Khaldun's praxiology. Arab states, monarchies on the path of formation of elites, ruling dynasties, and the individuality of the monarch himself has passed its own historical path of development (Nagel, 2005; Aziz, 2018; Chapra, 2008). An important role in shaping the development of business groups in the system of economic power and public administration in the institution of power played the relationship between various political and traditional institutions, ruling families, clans, clans, families and subjects in addition to a significant role in Arab monarchies. In the process of functioning of the state mechanism still play special institutions of dynastic rule, which are not constitutionally established, but have a significant impact on the practice of decision-making monarchs:

- “family council", which includes close relatives of the ruler by male status branches of the ruling clan;
- advisory council - participates in the activities of all three spheres of power: legislative, executive and judicial;
"informal meetings" - informal gatherings attended by representatives of the ruling family, tribal nobles, intellectuals, the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie and religious circles.

In this regard, members of the ruling families occupy the most important positions in the governments and state apparatuses of monarchies. In some Arab countries, the ruling clans have held power for centuries (in Bahrain - since 1782, Qatar - since 1822) (Galbraith, 2012). Of course, such specifics of political markets for decision-making on economic issues sometimes give rise to arguments “against” integration by national elites (business groups). Here we turned to the analysis of the business group of the League of Arab States and especially the “oil monarchies.” Here, business groups have contributed to the organization of the diversity of a number of institutions of the economic model:

- they are based on close personal ties of clan or ethnic nature;
- in its development to some extent lobbies for state support in the choice of export-oriented or import substitution;
- internalization of transactions through political instruments to influence the vectors of networks of contracts between local guarantors in the form of state institutions and owners of financial resources given the closed, in contrast to Western countries, political markets (Raišienė et al., 2019).

The fact is that the notion of sovereignty in the region is considered inviolable for the countries of the League of Arab States and under no circumstances are they willing to give it up, even if integration provides significant economic benefits. As a result, the role of national government institutions is growing. That is, preference is given to bilateral trade agreements, rather than the creation of multilateral intergovernmental institutions (Vystavna et al., 2018). As a result, the seemingly tempting version of “integration individualism,” the cost of free-riding (unilateral “exit from the game”) for the country will be too high both in terms of economic component and overall reputation for the international community.

Ibn Khaldun in his reasoning about power, about elites comes to a number of conclusions. The ruling class, upon achieving authoritarian power and increasing needs, reduces the ability to adequately respond to the depletion of public resources, decline in economic activity, degradation of the population, and loss of power. In these conditions, attempts to demonstrate power and prosperity in front of external rivals and their own population, bribery of henchmen can postpone, but cannot prevent the collapse of the regime and the change of power. It should be noted that such a model is applicable to many historical eras, in which periods of relative stability are replaced by periods of conflicts, crises, recessions and ups. Arnold Toynbee (challenge-response), Charles Tilly (mobilization mechanisms), Graham Snoooks (dynamic strategies), Kenneth Boulding and Erwin Laszlo (transsystem transitions) and some others (factors historical dynamics, social resonance, “lift” and “well megatrends”, “the switching of connections”) (Khomutenko et al., 2019).

At one time, the theory of switching ties was demonstrated in the practice of introducing the pan-Arab concept into political life by Nasser (1959). These were actions to position the confrontation with Israel as Egypt’s foreign policy identity.
These intentions became almost a personal affair of Nasser as compensation for humiliation and defeat in the Palestinian war of 1948. Nasser tried to unite the Arab countries under his rule during the fight against Zionism. The Egyptian elite continued to build up military strength as an important measure to strengthen the country's power and security. The army was seen as an effective tool for realizing the foreign policy goals of the state and confronting the “Zionist enemy” (Khawaja, 2013). Nasser counted on the opportunity to create the potential for manoeuvre to get out of the confrontation between the great powers, which would allow his country to attract additional resources and obtain economic benefits (DUMAN, 2020).

On the other hand, the pan-Arab identity imposed restrictions on the choice of vectors for the formation of an adequate foreign policy for Egypt. Nasser has certainly achieved certain political and moral successes. But these were not military victories (Dajani, 2015; Plyth & Craham, 2020). Thus, the hasty actions of the country’s leadership led to erroneous conclusions and decisions. The Pan-Arab policy required significant material and spiritual investments and expenses. In this context, it became obvious to all the actors of those events that such a policy does not correspond to the capabilities and intentions of the Egyptian elite. In the 1950s, the ideology of pan-Arabism in Egypt reached its peak, and in the next decade, with the collapse of the alliance with Syria, it was replaced by an era of rejection of such an identity and related policies. Because it was Nasser who brought Egypt and the Arabs in general to the world arena, he became the most influential leader in the Arab East in the twentieth century. At the same time, Nasser’s (1959), adherence to the idea of uniting the Arab states in the context of deep contradictions between the elites in their struggle for primacy in relations with the industrialized countries of Europe and America created significant obstacles to the implementation of the pro-Arab goals of the Egyptian president. In addition, Nasser’s pan-Arabism was radical and allowed the use of force in the name of the triumph of ideas, which alarmed the Arab elites. In particular, the long-term participation of Egypt in the civil war in Yemen had a very negative impact on the image of Cairo in the Arab world.

**The spirit of the Muslim brotherhood: the transformation of identity-oriented foreign policy**

Thus, the removal of Nasser from power was associated with the issue of the regime of power and the consistency and vectors of the implementation of the domestic and foreign policy of Egypt. In this political context, the new President Anwar Sadat eliminated the Nasserites who demanded collective leadership, which was unacceptable for him, and continued the line on monopolizing foreign policy and consolidating political decisions. At the same time, he changed Egypt’s foreign policy guidelines, abandoning a pan-Arab identity. Sadat positioned patriotism as a political goal of his rule in the name of ensuring favorable conditions for economic liberalization to attract foreign capital. At the same time, Sadat’s leadership style was called by his advisers the rule of the “lonely pharaoh” (Karawan, 1994). This definition stemmed from Sadat's unwillingness to read reports and analysts and his penchant for unexpected decisions, which made his foreign policy behaviour unpredictable.
In the process of the end of the October War of 1973, Egypt’s foreign policy vector was determined for rapprochement with the United States and in favour of reconciliation with Israel. Thus, a choice was made in favour of a political settlement with an emphasis only on the interests of Egypt, without taking into account the interests of other countries of the Arab world (Telhamy & Barnett, 2002). Sadat’s regime exploited growing war-weariness to find a balance between state and social preferences (Telhamy & Barnett, 2002). But Sadat did not take into account the fact that Egyptian society was not yet ready for reconciliation and did not seek to develop relations with the former adversary. This political logic led to a weakening of the role and influence of Egypt in the Arab world and the removal of the president himself. Mubarak has already sought to create a state identity that would include elements of the vision of the two former presidents. Sadat and Nasser define identity.

The above analysis indicates that the Egyptian elite, in the course of the implementation of two extreme vectors of identity, led the Egyptian society to a dead end. The new President of Egypt, Mubarak, faced the difficult task of eliminating the accumulated contradictions. The society felt a desire to achieve political balance. Mubarak tried to restore Egypt’s reputation by supporting Arab countries, especially the Palestinians, even at the expense of reducing the level of cooperation with the United States and Israel. The emphasis was on “Egypt's inherent belonging to the Arab world” (Shalaby, 1992). At the same time, it was argued that “the Arab-Egyptian rapprochement will not prevent Egypt from maintaining peace” (Ahmadian, 2014). These slogans and wishes did not correct the situation. In addition, one of the consequences of Mabarak’s policy was the increased influence in the region of other regional powers - Turkey, Iran and the monarchies of the Persian Gulf. In the context of growing contradictions in the relations of elites in the context of the deteriorating foreign policy conditions and the falling status of the country, Mubarak was accused of incompetence aggravated by his advanced age (Sabet, 2017). Most Egyptians shared the opinion that Mubarak’s regime serves not the national interests of his country, but the interests of Tel Aviv, Riyadh and Washington (Droz-Vincent, 2012). Accordingly, the new ruling elites were expected to revise their foreign policy, opting for a more independent and assertive foreign policy.

The transformational processes of the "Arab Spring" led to the adjustment of the domestic and foreign policy of Egypt. Before coming to power, the Muslim Brotherhood announced that they would undertake major changes in foreign policy: they would stop the course towards normalizing relations with Israel, revise the Camp David Agreement, and reduce their dependence on the United States. They expressed dissatisfaction with Egypt’s declining influence both regionally and globally (Selim, 2020). Although one year of Mohammed Morsi’s rule is not enough to assess the results of his foreign policy, its orientation and foundations. But the continuity of the Muslim Brotherhood in Mubarak's foreign policy is obvious. Thus, after his election, Morsi announced that Egypt would remain committed to its international obligations and treaties, including the peace treaty with Israel. The Islamists emphasized the obligatory nature of the preservation of the peace treaty, referring to the Koran (Selim, 2020). Responsibly, the Morsi government, which grew out of the Islamist movement, faced contradictions between old positions and new realities. The reason was that in
order to stabilize the economic situation, Egypt needed predictable relations with foreign the world.

The transformation of Egypt’s identity-oriented foreign policy in the spirit of the Muslim Brotherhood is evidenced by efforts to achieve regional leadership (Grimm & Roll, 2012). Egypt sought to strengthen relations with countries where parties and movements were in power, ideologically or organizationally close to the Muslim Brotherhood, in order to form a regional axis of interactions “Egypt - Turkey - Qatar - Sudan - Tunisia”. But this diplomatic geometry was not beneficial to all participants and observers. That is why its creation was greeted with caution. But Morsi could not achieve full control over the main instruments of foreign policy, since the army retained its independence, special services and structures opposed the desire of the Muslim Brotherhood for hegemony, and employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs secretly resisted the attempts of the new rulers Egypt to take certain positions. As noted by the former foreign minister Nabil Fahmi country, Morsi was more concerned with the politics, priorities and discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood than with the presidency (Ahmadian, 2014). The sixth president of Egypt in 2014 was the political and military leader Abdul Fattah Said Hussein Khalil al-Sisi, who played a central role in the 2013 military coup that overthrew the previous president, Mohammed Morsi. In the view of al-Sisi, the country needs to change its image so that instead of a religiously oriented revolutionary state, a “new Egypt” would enter the international arena, ready to respond to political and economic challenges, as well as to security challenges, and each citizen will have a multi-layered identity (Winter & Shiloah, 2019). An important step in this direction was the approval of the National Sustainable Development Plan "Egypt Vision 2030", which proclaimed the main national goals: modernization and reform. It is envisaged to encourage an active civic position and positive participation of all sectors of society in the development of the country. Close attention is paid to issues of empowerment and opportunity, equality and social justice. Uncertainty about their political future burdened the public discourse in Egypt. In these circumstances, al-Sisi put forward three concepts: 1) Egyptian politics should deal with the management of the country’s human and material wealth; 2) it is necessary to abandon isolationism, and instead strengthen the alliance with the states of the Persian Gulf with the prospect of creating a regional security system; 3) it’s time to stop obsessive obsession with the past, and look at the future. Egypt has a long history of authoritarian rule, so it is impossible to separate national identity from foreign policy.

Conclusion

The foregoing gives grounds to assert that the “Ibn Khaldun’s law” formulated above takes into account the most negative variant leading to the disintegration and change of the ruling group. At the same time, the actions of the rulers aimed at asserting their power, demonstrating power and prosperity are, up to a certain point, adequate compensatory responses. At a certain point, there is an increase in external and internal legitimacy. But such an extension of certain stability in the face of changes in a number of factors begins to provoke conflicts, crises and the collapse of the system. According to Al Khaldun, this is the effect of switching ties. The broadest powers of the president of the country in conducting foreign
policy predetermine the exclusive influence of the personal factor on it. As shown in this paper, the development of identity through the redefinition of national interests set the direction of Egypt’s foreign policy, so that any transformation of identity at the level of the ruling elites changed Egypt’s foreign policy. In other words: since identities define interests, which in turn shape foreign policy, so much the fundamental change in Egyptian foreign policy can be traced to a change in identity. Despite these limitations, the example of Egypt shows that factors of political identity, such as the role of leader, are extremely important in shaping the country’s foreign policy, although they are not decisive in each case.

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