THE ISLAM - A DYNAMIC WORLD, 
BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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Abstract: One of the great monotheist religions of the world, the Islam covers a vast geographic area in North and Sub-Saharan Africa up to the Middle and Near East, Central, South and South-East Asia, with a population of over 1.1 billion inhabitants. The Islam is studied in the light of its geographic position, of its religious philosophy and history, of its economic, demographic and geopolitical coordinates. The Islam’s complexity is defined by the location of the hydrocarbon resources, the contemporary oil politics and also by the frustration feelings of a population scattered in 46 world states, terrorism and the need for modernization of this world at the beginning of the third millennium. The Islamic world, which is so dynamic, doubtlessly represents one of the great challenges of the contemporary times.

Keywords: Islam, Mohamed, Koran, Jihad, the Islam’s pillars, Sunnites, Shiites, pivot-States, Oil politics, Terrorism, the Islamic Arabic and non-Arabic world, Sharia.

Rezumat: Una dintre cele mai importante religii monoteiste din lume, Islamul acoperă un areal geografic larg în Africa Nordică și Subsahariană, până în Orientul Apropiat, Asia Centrală, Asia de Sud și de Sud-Est, cu o populație de peste 1,1 miliardi locuitori. Islamul este studiat în lumina poziției sale geografice, a istoriei și filozofiei religioase, a coordonatelor economice, demografice și geopolitice. Complexitatea islамului este definită de localizarea resurselor de hidrocarburi, de politicile contemporane referitoare la petrol și de asemenea de frustrările unei populații împrăștiată în 46 de state ale lumii, terorism și nevoia de modernizare a acestei lumi la începutul mileniului al III-lea. Lumea islamică, foarte dinamică reprezintă, față înțeială, una dintre cele mai mari provocări ale perioadei contemporane.

1. THE GEOGRAPHIC ISLAM

The Islamic world occupies a vast geographic area, extended on three continents, from the Magrebian shores of the Atlantic up to the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, including no less than 46 states of the Earth. We will highlight from the very beginning of our study that the Islamic world is made up of Arab countries (the melting pot of the Islam) and non-Arab Islamic countries.

The Arab area is made up of the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen and the Palestinian Authority: Cisjordan and Gaza; at the same time, we must mention that in this area, from a geopolitical viewpoint can be included as well the state of Egypt) and Northern Africa (Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco).

To these are added as well other states from the African, Asian or European zone, depending on the proportion of the Islamic population in these states’ total population.

The Islamic non-Arab geographic area is made up of the following geographic regions: Near and Middle East (Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan), Caucasus –Transcaucasia (republics of the Russian Federation: Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan etc., Azerbaijan), Central Asia (the ex-Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan), South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, states of India-12% of the Indian population), South-East Asia (Indonesia, Brunei, partially other states) and the Balkan Peninsula (Albania and the controversial and recent state of Kosovo). So, in such a vast geographic area, covering the huge Saharan and Arabic deserts, steppes and mountainous chains, and also fertile

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plains, there is a population of over 1 billion people (some sources show over 1.1 billion people) animated by the Islamic religion, which is “more than a religion, a way of living”, as a scholar originating in this area once wrote.

As proportion, just one Islamic person out of four comes from the Arab world, the melting pot of the Islam.

Table no. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Population (thousands inhabitants)</th>
<th>Population growth rate 2005-2010 %</th>
<th>Life expectancy (years)</th>
<th>HDI %</th>
<th>GDP (PPP) $/inhabitant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>228,864</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>4,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>160,943</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>0.539</td>
<td>2,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>155,991</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>0.530</td>
<td>2,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>144,720</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>0.448</td>
<td>1,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>74,166</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>0.702</td>
<td>4,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>73,922</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>0.757</td>
<td>9,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>70,270</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>0.746</td>
<td>8,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>37,797</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>0.516</td>
<td>2,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>33,351</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td>7,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>30,853</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>0.640</td>
<td>4,956</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In India (a non-Islamic state, there is an important Islamic population, of about 12% of the 1.140 billion inhabitants population).

Source: Adapted from L'état du monde – 2008

If the proportion of the Islamic world in 1980 was of 18% of the Earth’s population, in 2000 it reached 20%, and the moderate prognoses show for 2025 a proportion of 30%, which represents an important global issue.
2. THE HISTORIC AND RELIGIOUS ISLAM

One of the great monotheist religions of the world, the Islamism was founded by Mohamed (570 – 632) following his revelations of the divinity, and in Arabic the world Islam means devoted submission to God, and the one submitting himself to the will of God is Muslim.

The holy book of the Islam is the Koran, a complex book, which, beyond its intrinsic moral-religious values, represents and regulates the entire religious, political, civil, criminal life up to the daily preoccupations.

The Koran is completed by: Sunna (tradition with compulsory ancestral rules), Idjma (consensus of the highest authorities of the Muslim theology) and Qiyas (analogical reasoning).

We need to highlight the fact that the Islam is born in the Arab world (melting pot), even though at present, numerically, just one Muslim out of four is Arab; and the holy places where the Islamism appeared were the Arab Peninsula with the holy cities of Mecca and Medina; later on, other holy cities will be added to these (Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Istanbul – the main caliphas).

The expansion of the Islamism was achieved by means of vast and rapid Arab conquests (Syria – 634, Egypt – 639, Persia – 642, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Spain – 711).

After the first “Arab cycle” follows the Abbasid dynasty, the capital of the Islam is moved from Mecca to Damascus and the focus of the Arab conquests turns to the Asian areas (Asia Minor, Central Asia, the Indian Peninsula and gradually to South-East Asia, in the far-off archipelagos of Indonesia).

The clash of the Islamic civilization / religion with the other civilizations / religions has generated geopolitical consequences still visible today (the Islamism of the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia, etc), and the “melting” of the ancient civilizations of the Middle and Near East into the Muslim one has determined the religious, spiritual, philosophic and scientific enrichment of the world. Soon after the crystallization of the Islam, next to the majority of Sunnites (or the orthodox Islam, which acknowledges the revelation, the tradition kept from Mohamed and the legitimacy of the three caliphs), appeared the Shiites (between 10-15% of the total, who believe in the existence of the 12 “imams” – “infallible leaders”, the first of them being Ali, and the last having disappeared in the 9th century; the appearing of a new imam would be the equivalent of the Final Judgement from Christianity).

While most of the Islamic people are Sunnites, interesting is the location of the Shiites: most of the population of Iran (90%) a minority in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Lebanon, Turkey, etc.

In brief, the Muslim philosophy is expressed, metaphorically speaking, in the existence of the “Islam’s Pillars”:
1. Allah’s / God’s uniqueness, Mohamed being Allah’s envoy;
2. The ritual prayers have to take place 5 times a day;
3. Respect for the feasts of the Ramadan;
4. Pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in a lifetime;
5. Charity (payment in money/goods of the 40-th part of the revenues/goods earned).

The complex issue of the Islamic philosophy is expressed as well by the existence of certain terms triggering extremely vivid debates, especially after the terrorist events of September 2001, in the USA.
We are referring to: Jihad (holy war, but also an increasingly accepted conception meaning fight of the believer with himself in view to order his life according to the Koran’s norms); Mujahedin (fighter in the holy war, and the use of this word to denote the Afghan, Algerian or Iraqi realities demonized this ancestral word, which initially had a different meaning); Sharia (the body of Islamic religious law – traditional Muslim conduct norms, the men’s law or the discrimination of women).

The Islam should be studied from several different viewpoints:
- the religious/philosophic viewpoint (norms based on the Koran and the other complementary books: Sunna, Idjma and Qiyas);
- the political viewpoint (the expression of the national identity of the Muslim states, after a climax between the 8th-12th centuries and of the Ottoman Empire, between the 14th-18th centuries, followed by the implacable decline begun with the 18th century, when the Industrial Revolution and modernity were missed);
- the socio-economic viewpoint (the existence of the largest resources of hydrocarbons in the world, the role of OPEC, dominated by the Muslim states, and the precarious economic development of this huge geographic area give birth to feelings of collective and individual feelings of frustration);
- the demographic viewpoint (a population of over 1.1 billion people, with record levels of numeric growth and a population which has a majority of young people);
- the psychological and media viewpoint (during the last few decennia, the Islam was demonized, and through terrorism people often identify only the Arab one, this being a serious perception error).

3. THE ECONOMIC ISLAM

The immense geographic area spread from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean (Magreb), to those of the Indian Ocean (the Arab Peninsula) and to the Pacific (Indonesia), from the arid sub-Saharan lands to the steppes and cold deserts of Central Asia concentrates important natural resources, of which the hydrocarbon resources are the most significant natural wealth, triggering important geopolitical implications concerning the contemporary oil politics.

Though the oil fields were discovered in certain areas even since the period between the Two World Wars, they became a really planetary stake only after the Second World War, when oil constituted the engine of the post-war economy, and probably this hydrocarbon’s role will continue for at least 2-3 decennia in the 21st century.

The main oil reserves of the world are found in some Islamic states of the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, etc.), in the North of Africa (Libya, Egypt, Algeria), in the Gulf of Guinea (Nigeria), in East Asia (Sudan and Eritrea), in the ex-Soviet Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, etc.), and finally in South-East Asia (Indonesia and Brunei).

For the last years’ world oil production, four of the top ten producers are Islamic states (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, with a cumulated production of about 1 billion tons, around 25% of the world’s production); actually, the cumulated production of the Islamic states is of about 60% of the total of the exploitations and around 2/3 of the world’s reserve.

This is why the stake of the Islamic oil represents the main challenge for the great geopolitical actors of the world (USA, EU, China, Russia, India, Japan, etc.).
To the rich oil resources, we must also add the natural gas, for which again four Islamic states are among the world’s top ten producers (Algeria - 91 billion m$^3$, Iran - 85 billion m$^3$, Indonesia - 75 billion m$^3$ and Saudi Arabia - 73 billion m$^3$); and the main gas producing areas are in the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Yemen), in North Africa (Algeria, Libya, Morocco), in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan) and in South-East Asia (Indonesia and Brunei).

The hydrocarbons of the Islamic area are at the basis of the world’s economy, and the dependence of the USA, EU, Japan and more recently of China, is worrying; consequently, the complexity of the geopolitical problems with roots in the world of the colonial empires, and this area can be very well taken as an example for geopolitical applications (spheres of influences, nationalism, terrorism, domination through or without territories).

This huge area that provides about 65% of Terra’s sources of energy has as well other natural resources, which are varied and in enormous quantities; yet the hydrocarbons’ geoeconomic interest is inevitably exceptional at least for a few decennia from now on.

It is here that the oil politics has its origin, and if we overlap the history of the Islamic oil and the history of the last six decennia we will see “oil covered in blood”.

Certainly, the Islamic population of about 1.1 billion people, so young and dynamic and aware of the treasures it holds, is at the same time very frustrated, nationalist and religious up to extremism, easy to manipulate, but at the same time a great danger/challenge especially for the Western world/ civilization.

The socioeconomic context of the Islamic countries, despite their rich resources, determined a slow economic development, an incredible wealth polarization, an endemic poverty, and the fact that they missed the industrial revolution left violent traces on these states’ destiny.

There are socioeconomic disparities on the one hand inside the respective states (between the urban and rural areas, between clans / tribes / casts or between population categories young vs. old people), but also among different Islamic states (some in the head of modernization: Turkey, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, etc., compared to some extremely underprivileged Islamic states: Nigeria, Sudan, Mauritania, Algeria, etc.).

For most of the Islamic states that are part of the category of the “developing countries”, the economic problems are extremely serious, on the background of: accentuated population growth, precarious development, week urbanization, lacks of the sanitary and educational systems.

These states’ modernization means the modernization of the Islam, of the ancient civilization of these Arab and non-Arab peoples, and the international community owes this immense region and brilliant civilization its support through transfer of technologies, economic and educational support, etc.

In this context we must mention the special role of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) created in 1960 in Baghdad, of which initially were part: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela; to which later on adhered other states: Qatar (1961), Indonesia (1962), Libya (1962), United Arab Emirates (1967), Algeria (1969), Nigeria (1971) and Ecuador (1973). As we can notice, most of the OPEC states are Islamic states, and their ratio concerning the oil reserve, production and exports has had a strong influence on the world’s economy, including on the oscillation of the prices and the periodic crises.

Certainly, the oil represents these states’ main strategic weapon in the world economic competition, and the Islamic crises are world crises (thanks to globalization).
Harta 28: Lumea musulmană — mize strategice, dispute, evoluții (după Revue Française de Géopolitique, nr. 1/2003, p. 257)
4. THE GEOPOLITICAL ISLAM

The extremely dynamic and populous Islamic world continues a remarkable civilization whose climax was situated between the 7th century, when the arms carried the green Islamic flag from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa to South, Central or South-Eastern Asia.

The appearance of the Ottoman Empire determined an exceptional Islamic impetus, between the 14th-17th centuries, when the Ottomans dominated the Balkan area, the Romanian Countries, Hungary, up to the gates of Vienna, and the geopolitical consequences can be felt even nowadays, especially in the Balkans.

The Islam’s decline occurred beginning with the 18th century, by missing the industrial revolution, by losing the influence in the maritime (Mediterranean) area and also in the continental area (when the ancient Asian commercial roads become obsolete in front of the world’s modernization).

Of course, the geopolitical interest for the Islamic world was identified with the interest for energy resources, especially beginning with the second half of the 20th century. During the 20th century, practically the Islamic area of the Middle and Near East became a “geopolitical magnet” for the great powers, in the context of the great world conflagrations, of the Cold War’s decolonization and of its consequences.

Numerous conflicts shook the Islamic states, their motivations being diverse (religious, ethnic, economic, psychological). Among them, we will mention the “border conflicts” of the Islam’s world in contact with other religions / civilizations:

- Islam versus Judaism – the uninterrupted conflicts between the Arabs and the state of Israel (appeared in the area of Palestine in 1947, trough the desire of the Great Powers), with numerous episodes, with unimagined implications, with the involvement of certain powers. Even now, as we are working on this study, the “war of Gaza” is just going on;

- Islam versus Christianity - the historical episodes in the Iberian Peninsula, the Balkans, Romania, Hungary, Austria, etc., recently in Central Asia, Caucasus, etc.;

- Islam versus Hinduism / Buddhism - the conflicts from the Indian Peninsula, which have led, after the decolonization, to the separation and formation of the states of Pakistan (West Pakistan), Bangladesh (East Pakistan), and also the problem of Kashmir (claimed at the same time by the Islamic Pakistanis and the Buddhist Indians);

- the conflicts from Africa that generated secession movements, with numerous examples: Tanzania (the separation of the Island of Zanzibar - which is Muslim from the Christian continental part), Ethiopia (the separation of Muslim Eritrea from Christian Ethiopia), Sudan (the conflicts between the Muslims from north and the Christians from south), Nigeria (the secession of certain provinces), Kenya or the more recent separation of Christian Timor from Muslim Indonesia.

At the same time, we cannot omit the conflicts between different Islamic actions (between the majority of Sunnites, about 90% and the Shiites – around 10%), the movements of Algeria (from claim to revolution), or the singular position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the contemporary world.

Special attention should be given to Turkey, the inheritor of the old Ottoman Empire, which, during the first part of the 20th century, under the leadership of Kemal (Ataturk), managed to modernize / Europeanize this state, which is consequently situated in the vanguard of the modernization of the Islamic world, becoming a true model for this civilization and not just for it. After the fall of communism, “the Turkish model” has won proselytes especially in the Caucasian – Caspian area and Central Asia, in the former
Soviet republics, the consequence being that Turkey has become a significant regional power.

The geopolitical situation of the Iraqi state deserves a moment of attention; continuator of the ancient Assyrian-Babylonian civilizations, today’s Iraq arouse the interest of the great powers because of its huge oil reserves; after a terrible dictatorship - “the Saddam Hussein age” (a “creation” of the Soviet and American intelligence) - follow the “repetitive wars” of 1991 and 2003 fought by a multinational coalition led by the USA, with the declared purpose of introducing the occidental model of democracy and prosperity.

After 5 years of terrible fights led by the international military coalition and the rebels (more or less “terrorists” or members of the Al-Quaeda organization!), of doubtless state disorganization, of fratricide war, of promotion of Kurds’ interests at the expense of the other ethnic groups (the Sunnites and the Shiites from south) “the American experiment” lamentably failed (in the year 2011 the last American soldiers will have to leave these places), all proving that not always the “export of democracy” is at the same time beneficial for the “addressee”.

The Afghan issue is also extremely interesting: situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, this mountainous state played, in the politics of the 19th and 20th century, the role of buffer-state between the Russian Turkestan in the north and the British Indies in the south; after the decolonization and the increase of the USSR’s influence, this state was wanted to become a Moscow satellite, but after a long and shameful war in the 8th decennium, the “great Red Army” was defeated (defeated not just militarily in the classical way, but mostly through guerrilla fights / wars, by the crusade of the civil population against communism, with concrete American support by means of the intelligence, and Ossama bin Laden is doubtlessly a creation of theirs, becoming after September 2001 the most hunted man in the world.

The intervention of the NATO military coalition (naturally led by the USA) after this date did not give the expected results.

So, neither the (military) English, nor the Soviet, nor the American domination brought about the expected results, and this rebel state of Central Asia continues a precarious existence, dominated by the Mujahedins, being the greatest cannabis producer in the world.

Through these examples we have tried to highlight the almost insurmountable difficulties related to the modernization / occidentalization of the Islamic world.

In the Anglo-Saxon geopolitics emerged as well the concept of “pivot state”, which, applied to the political world map, imposes next to the great powers these states with an extremely important regional role. From the Islamic world of Africa, Algeria and Egypt were appointed as pivot states, from Asia: Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia, a fact that determines a new geopolitical architecture of the contemporary world.

After the 90s, in many cultural environments emerged the theory of fundamentalism and especially of Islamic rebirth; in the conception of the author (S.Huntington), “the Islamic rebirth” is comparable to the French Revolution, to the American Revolution or to the October Revolution, a phenomenon “similar and comparable to the protestant reform: the Islamic fundamentalism, generally conceived as political Islam, is just a component of a much more extended rebirth of the Islamic ideas, practices and rhetoric and of the return to the Islam of the Muslim populations”.

So, the Islamic rebirth can be a form of modernization of the Muslim world, made so necessary especially by the immense human potential represented by the young population, dynamic, yet frustrated between traditions, religion, and the modern occidental kind of life. Let us not forget that the Islamic society is most of it organized as a hierarchy,
polarized, traditionalist (apparently petrified in the precepts of the Koran similarly to the previous periods).

The dialogue of the major civilizations / cultures led, among the “occidental learned people” to debates on their “clash”; however, it has been proved that we are not dealing with a civilization clash (be they “major” or “minor” civilizations) but with a much simpler thing: a clash of interests (and when it comes to hydrocarbons, the oil politics is “at home” here, in the Islamic world). Before being catalogued, this Islamic world has to be known, understood and accepted, without fundamentalisms and prejudices. Numerous other studies and analyses have been dedicated to the problems of the Islamic terrorism even since the end of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, on the background of the (British and French) colonialism; identity claims movements, national conscience awakening movements, amplified a lot by the decolonization period (after the Second World War), nationalism (especially the Arab one) have been accompanied everywhere by political, economic, social and religious components, and from here to the appearance of the Jihad (the Holy War) there was but a stone’s throw.

It is true that to the radicalization of the Islamic terrorism contributed as well the tensions accumulated since the Cold War, as the Americans fed the groups / militias in the fight “against communism” while the Soviets, in counterpart, helped the creation of “national salvation fronts” with pro-Marxist / communist views.

Sometimes, the consequences of the decolonization without taking into account the geopolitical realities in the field created traumas for several generations (for example the states of the Indian Peninsula: the Kashmir issue, Bangladesh, the huge minority of Muslims of India - of over 100 billion inhabitants). An interesting case (which remained unsolved for half a century) is the creation of the state of Israel - 1947) on the territory of the state of Palestine (55% of the territory going to this state and the remaining 45% to the Palestinians; at present the proportion is totally unfavorable to Palestine, with about 10% of the surface, despite several wars, the Intifada, or the efforts of the Arab League, the complicity of the great powers or the total support of the USA for Israel and of the USSR / Russia for the Arab world).

The analysis of the terrorist groups from 19 Muslim states shows the presence of 83 entities that can be grouped into liberation fronts, leftist /Marxist movements, right-wing movements and religious movements. The most numerous terrorist groups (that are known) are in Pakistan (10), Indonesia (9), Sudan (8), Somalia (7), Afghanistan and Kashmir (6)... up to the controversial and uncertain state Kosovo (3).

Certainly, some of these groups have become global, the most eloquent example being Al Qaeda, responsible for numerous terrorist acts, beginning with the USA attempts (September 2001).

The problems related to these terrorist groups are extremely complex, and the war against the asymmetric / urban guerrilla-type of terrorism etc. represents one of the major challenges of the contemporary world.

Given this situation, the solution to the problem of terrorism should start with the causes and not with the consequences, just like the treatment of a disease that is however... curable.

To conclude, the Islamic world, with its unimaginable richness and fascination, represents a challenge for mankind, and is now at a great crossroads between the ancestral traditions and the need for modernization, without which the future of over one billion people will not be possible in the globalized and intricate world in which we live nowadays.
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