FEMEN — a Weapon of Political Provocateurs

Political activists have recently begun increasingly performing acts that greatly harm public morality in order to create instability in individual countries and even entire regions. Actions by the group FEMEN are a striking example of that.

Following Pussy Riot’s attacks on the Orthodox Church, feminist groups financed by the West set about attacking the morals of Muslim society. FEMEN proclaimed April 4 “International Topless Jihad Day” to protest the Tunisian clergy’s sharp disapproval of a prank by a 19-year-old student named Amina Tylor, an activist in FEMEN’s Tunisian cell who posted a topless picture of herself on Facebook with an anti-Islamic slogan painted across her chest. Since the political situation in Tunisia is a long ways from being settled, any actions that upset the delicate balance of power and incite moral and religious conflict in its society only play into the hands of aggressive political forces funded by the West.

These are just the kind of actions that further extremist ideologies in politically unstable countries.

The year 2011 is remembered in the Arab world for the North African revolutionary movement that began in Tunisia and quickly engulfed Africa and the Middle East. And Tunisia — a country that Western political strategists use as a testing ground for the new revolutionary technologies that are affecting social morals — was in the news again as 2013 got underway. It was clearly no coincidence that FEMEN staged its April 4 protest in Kiev and Paris in order to draw attention to the issue of “civil liberties” in Tunisia.

But how correct is it to equate this professed “civil liberty” to public nudity? Orthodox and Islamic societies certainly have higher morals than does the West. Religion and morality contribute to a stronger and more centralized government in those countries. At a time when the West is undergoing an aggressive modernization of its morality, Islamic society has begun a legislative battle to retain its traditional principles. Politicians in the Arab East and the Maghreb believe it is necessary to restore the national and religious component of morality to their countries as the fundamental achievement of their revolutions by enshrining Islam in their constitutions as a state religion and giving primacy to Sharia law. Legislators took into account the views of various sectors of society and their attitudes towards religion, tradition and modernization processes; considered 21st century realities; and concluded that they needed to thoroughly analyze Islamic law and religious principles and precepts in terms of the modern state in order to determine the extent and direction of reforms.

Traditional women’s clothing — the chador and the hijab — was the first stumbling block for modern Muslim states. Although it seems paradoxical, modern Muslim women hold two opposing views on the chador simultaneously. On the one hand, the garment is being seen less as women become better educated, hold more jobs and participate in public life and penetrate former all-male spheres.

On the other hand, the chador and the hijab have recently come to play a greater role as an instrument of political struggle, and wearing them has become an ideological symbol. We see confirmation of that in the well-known events involving girls from Maghreb countries who are living in several Western European countries, as well as the strained situation in some areas of Russia. Many women in Muslim countries insist on wearing the hijab because it shows that they are living a “more moral” economic, political and social life and have returned to the roots of Muslim unity. In
principle, therefore, the hijab issue could not divide society and cause serious political conflicts in the Arab East because the wearing of the hijab in the East is the business of each family.

Although the hijab can be worn in traditionally Muslim countries, it is unacceptable in multi-faith states where the blatant display of one’s religious beliefs can (and, as we have seen, does) increase social tensions. And political activists have recently taken advantage of this to destabilize the situation in a number of countries.

Islam has always disapproved of the exposure of any part of the female body in public. But although the Islamic world is more or less tolerant regarding the uncovered face and secular clothing, public exposure of the female breast is a real insult to society, the Muslim community and Islam as a whole.

That is why FEMEN’s actions disrupt the traditional equilibrium of Muslim society. They cause chaos and result in clashes with all sectors of society, both traditional Muslims and the supporters of modernization, and they distract them from solving serious political problems whose settlement could stabilize the region’s politics and economy.

Under such circumstances, any society must assess the actions of FEMEN, Pussy Riot and those pulling their strings objectively in order to avoid eroding the traditional values of Christianity and Islam, because only a strong societal morality can guarantee a political regime’s stability.

_Yekaterina Alexandrovna Ryzhkova, Cand. Sc. (Law), is an Associate Professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University) of Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This article was written expressly for New Eastern Outlook._