

# Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe

KRAKOW INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR  
ON THE MIDDLE EAST

edited by  
JERZY ZDANOWSKI AND MICHAŁ LIPA

numer 1 (XX) Kraków 2023



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## Table of contents

**Jerzy Zdanowski, Michał Lipa**

The impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war on the Middle East. Introduction 7

### ARTICLES

**Jerzy Zdanowski**

What the Russian war in Ukraine means for the Middle East? 13

**Sayyad Sadri Alibabalu**

The geopolitical impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian war on Iran 43

**Marcin Krzyżanowski**

Realism, idealism or opportunism? Iran's reason of state in foreign policy towards Russia 55

**Mahnaz Zahirinejad**

Humiliations: Middle Eastern middle class and the war in Ukraine 81

**Karolina Wanda Olszowska**

Turkey – the big winner or the big loser of the Russo-Ukrainian war? 93

**Michał Lipa**

Global, regional and internal factors of Egypt's stance towards Russo-Ukrainian war 103

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Marcin Styszyński</b>   |     |
| Arab context of the Ukraine conflict in <i>Russia Today Arabic</i> and <i>Sputnik</i>        | 121 |
| <b>Bartosz Wróblewski</b>  |     |
| The foreign policy of Jordan and the Russia-Ukraine conflict                                 | 139 |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>BOOK REVIEW</b>   |     |
| <b>Aleksander Pikulski</b>   |     |
| <i>Against the Smart City: A Pamphlet</i> by Adam Greenfield,<br>New York: Do Projects, 2013 | 157 |
| <br>   |     |
| Informacje dla autorów   | 167 |
| <br>   |     |
| Zasady recenzowania publikacji w czasopismach  | 169 |



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# **The impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war on the Middle East. Introduction**

The outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022, seen by many analysts as a ‘proxy war’ between the United States and the Russian Federation, can be seen as another manifestation of tensions developing in East-West relations since at least 2008. At that time, not only was there a global financial crisis that undermined confidence in the liberal world order (global market mechanisms and economic institutions controlled by the Western powers) but there was also the outbreak of the Russian-Georgian war, a prelude to the subsequent Ukrainian crisis (2013–2014) and Russia’s annexation of Crimea.

However, the Russian-Ukrainian war has far-reaching implications beyond the Euro-Atlantic region. Thus we will be most interested in how it has affected the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In the MENA region,

we are dealing with several states with regional power aspirations (Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran). All of them are looking at transforming the structure of the international system in a direction other than unipolar, willing to benefit as much as possible from this transformation. That is why Saudi Arabia is no longer as devoted an ally of the United States as it was in the 1990s, and the US administration views Iran as a potential counterweight to unpredictable Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis were not eager to take clear sides in the American-Russian dispute, as evidenced by Riyadh's warm relations with Moscow and Muhammad Ibn Salman's cold relations with Joe Biden. Similarly, Turkey – a crucial member of NATO – has also tried to get as much for itself as possible (both in the Kurdish context and in the energy and military context), acting as a mediator rather than as a partisan of the US. Other Middle Eastern countries (except for pro-Russian Syria) had begun to watch the situation closely, especially since the negative consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war have become severe for them. These include the food crisis that the war has caused. Indeed, many MENA countries depend on imports of agricultural goods (mainly grain) from Russia and Ukraine. These events are part of growing tension between the Western/democratic bloc (led by the United States) and the Eastern/authoritarian bloc (where China is the strongest; however, Russia also plays an important role – especially in the European and Middle Eastern contexts). This has led many scholars to return to neorealism as a theoretical basis for analysing international relations.

According to neo-realists (or structural realists), states are on their own. If they enter alliances, it is only to increase their sense of security (according to defensive realism) or to expand (according to offensive realism). Power should be measured only in relation to the power/capabilities of other states (relative power). It is because there is a certain distribution of power/capabilities in the world, which can change over time, which in turn can lead to a qualitative change in the distribution of power/capabilities and, thus, a change in the hierarchy of powers. The distribution of power/capabilities thus determines the structure of the international system, which can be unipolar, bipolar or multipolar. While during the Cold War, this structure was bipolar (according to neorealists, the international system was the most stable then), after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became unipolar – with the United States as the only superpower.

A superpower cannot be sure of its position, meaning it must continue to act to increase its power at the expense of other powers to preserve the



status quo, i.e. to secure its dominance. This kind of situation creates a security dilemma, which means that if one actor increases its potential, especially its military capabilities (regardless of its intentions, e.g. wanting to protect itself from a potential attack), then other actors feel more threatened and also seek to increase their military capabilities (the security dilemma is thus the basis of the arms race). In turn, other powers (e.g., regional powers) with greater ambitions may seek to change the balance of power and challenge superpower hegemony, which in turn causes them to be referred to as revisionist states. China and Russia can currently be considered as such.

Using the neo-realist theory, regardless of the variant (defensive or offensive), one can note that the unquestioned hegemony of the United States within the unipolar system lasted quite a short period (just over a decade). Indeed, in the last decade or so, we can observe the relative rise in power of the other superpowers – China, Russia and India, with China and Russia seeming to challenge US hegemony to the greatest extent. While China does so through economic means (at least so far), Russia seeks, first, to stop the further eastward expansion of NATO at all costs, especially into post-Soviet areas (the Georgia and Ukraine cases), and second, to increase its military presence in the Black Sea and Mediterranean basins.

Under a bipolar system, states that are not great powers can either join one of the rival blocs or try to pursue a balancing policy between the blocs, using the global rivalry to their advantage. During the Cold War, the MENA region was divided into two camps – the revolutionary one supported the Soviet Union, and the conservative one supported the United States. However, some countries, such as Egypt (which in the 1970s shifted its orientation from pro-Soviet to pro-American), tried to use global rivalry to their advantage. It remains an open question whether, in the face of a ‘new Cold War’, the Middle Eastern states will also try to balance between antagonistic blocs (the West and the East – with China and Russia as its prominent representatives), trying to gain as much as possible for themselves. Indeed, the bipolar system creates such an opportunity.

Our preference for various kinds of realist approaches does not mean that other theoretical approaches cannot help analyse the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on other regions and states. Especially since the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a century of multiple interdependencies, mainly economic (manifested by the networks of supply chains and international trade), these should also be considered. Economic interdependencies, internal factors (such as the type of political system in a country), and international organisations are areas of

interest for proponents of the liberal (and neo-liberal) approach. In turn, the subjective dimensions of politics, including the public's perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the securitisation of various potential threats related to it, are of interest to proponents of constructivism. All of them – and many more – can be useful in analysing the impact of this Eastern European conflict on the MENA region.

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## **ARTICLES**

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# What the Russian war in Ukraine means for the Middle East?

## Introduction

Constructing scenarios of international relations connects theory to practice and is a method of understanding future world events. While it focuses on predicting future trends, it is based on analysing current world politics. It suggests making decisions on a problem-solving basis.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the terminology used to construct future scenarios actually refers to the present and helps to understand current policy conditions.

The scenario method was initiated by Hermann Khan in his 1962 book *Thinking about the Unthinkable*, in which he pointed out that decision-makers should anticipate the consequences of their decisions. Khan was primarily concerned that these decisions would not lead to a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Both Khan and Peter Schwartz believed that forecasting the future in

<sup>1</sup> Dong-ho Han, "Scenario Construction and Its Implications for International Relations Research", *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, June 2011, pp. 39–65.

<sup>2</sup> H. Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable*, New York: Horizon Press, 1962, p. 185.

international relations meant identifying and analysing the “changing aspects of our present environment.”<sup>3</sup> These aspects are referred to as fundamental dynamics that determine trends in international relations. These, in turn, may include both continuities and discontinuities and, in each case, include uncertainties.

The scenario methodology supports several vital concepts. These are driving forces, predetermined factors, critical uncertainties, wild cards and scenario plot lines.<sup>4</sup> Driving forces can be defined as factors that, appearing in various combinations, are elements of a cause-and-effect nature that surround a problem, event or decision.<sup>5</sup> Schwartz defines them as “the elements that move the plot of a scenario that determine the story’s outcome.”<sup>6</sup> Driving force forms a structure of each scenario plot line in determining trends and their likely development. As for predetermined elements, these events have already happened or are sure to happen; however hard to predict their consequences. Dong-ho Han describes them as ‘givens’ and emphasizes that predetermined factors affect outcomes, but not directly. These are the factors hidden under the surface of the phenomenon that should be considered, and their impact on the phenomenon should be understood. The relationship between predetermined elements and outcomes can be compared to the meaning of the underlying cause, which does not have such an impact on the outcome like proximate causes do. It, however, does not mean that underlying causes do not impact the outcome.<sup>7</sup>

However, the most important in the discussion about the future are critical uncertainties. These are the conditions of these elements of reality that we consider essential or even the most important but whose nature and scope of impact still need to be fully known and predictable. The discovery of those factors affecting reality that are the most uncertain and, at the same time, the most important for the assessment of the phenomenon is decisive for forecasting the future.<sup>8</sup> If critical uncertainties are known, although the scope of their impact and the related consequences are not fully known, then wild cards are to be expected, which no one can predict and which can have a profound impact on political strategy and radically change the course of events.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> P. Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View*, New York: Currency Doubleday, 1991, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100–117.

<sup>5</sup> Dong-ho Han, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> P. Schwartz, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–102.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> See S. Weber, “Prediction and the Middle East Peace Process”, *Security Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1997, p. 173.

<sup>9</sup> J.L. Peterson, *Out of the Blue: Wild Cards and Other Big Future Surprises, How to Anticipate and Respond to Profound Change*, Arlington, Virginia: The Arlington Institute, 1997, p. 1.

A narrative or a story about what is happening is equally crucial for assessing the situation. A plot line describes how driven forces interact with predetermined elements and indicates possible combinations of critical uncertainties. Narratives or stories follow the events in question in a specific sequence and place them in time. It is essential for the social reception of the presented events and the decision-making process by politicians.<sup>10</sup>

## Two plot lines

An Arab News/YouGov opinion poll conducted in May 2022 by the Arab News/YouGov showed that out of 7,835 respondents in 14 Arab countries, 66% had no opinion on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. At the same time, 18% of respondents supported Ukraine, and 16% supported Russia. Sympathy for Russia was highest in four countries: Algeria (19%), Oman (19%), Qatar (19%) and Tunisia (18%). In the Gulf States, 22% of respondents declared themselves on the side of Ukraine and 15% on the side of Russia. The widespread lack of interest in the Arab countries in the war in Ukraine was conditioned, according to analysts, by several factors. The first was the geographical remoteness of the conflict site. For the inhabitants of the Middle East, conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Libya and Palestine were closer. The conflict in Ukraine was perceived as a European conflict, and its impact on the situation in the Middle East was assessed through the prism of rising energy and food prices. Ukraine and Russia were among the leading grain suppliers to Middle Eastern countries, and this fact could have been influential in formulating the view of the conflict. For example, in Egypt, which imported as much as 85% of imported grain from Russia and Ukraine, interest in expressing a view was higher than in countries less dependent on grain imports from Russia and Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

The same opinion poll showed that most respondents in 14 Arab states expressed that the responsibility for the conflict lies not with Russia but with NATO. The only exception was Syria, whose inhabitants blamed Russia and NATO equally for the Ukraine war outbreak. Arab public opinion thus had a completely different opinion on the causes of the conflict than public opinion in Europe. The countries of the Middle East did not accept the Western

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<sup>10</sup> P.D. Aligica, "Analytic Narratives and Scenario Building", *Futures Research Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 2, Summer 2003, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Arab News Staff, "Poll finds that Arab street has no stance on Russia-Ukraine conflict", *Arab News*, 31.05.2022, p. 5, [www.arabnews.com/node/2092841/jserrors/page\\_view\\_timing/aggregate](http://www.arabnews.com/node/2092841/jserrors/page_view_timing/aggregate) [accessed: 5.07.2023].

narrative of an ‘unprovoked act of aggression’ by Russia against Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> According to this line, Western leaders were not in the least responsible for the terrible events, and the West was simply a victim of the world’s madman. Putin was either a madman or a megalomaniac, trying to revive the imperial, expansionist agenda of the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup>

The Arab respondents’s trust in the Western media was shallow. One in four respondents believed that Western media are not impartial in their coverage of events in Ukraine, and only 27% of respondents considered Arab media coverage credible. Only 8% of the respondents believed the Russian media, and 33% believed that no media conveyed accurate pictures of the war in Ukraine.<sup>14</sup>

The vote in the UN General Assembly on a resolution demanding an end to the Russian offensive in Ukraine on March 2, 2022, showed that out of 193 UN members, 141 countries supported the resolution. Only five countries (Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Russia and Syria) were against it. The vote showed that Russia was isolated and that the UN was determined to defend Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. However, as many as 35 countries abstained from voting and were among China, India, and other countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Among the countries in the Middle East, only Algeria, Iran, and Sudan abstained from voting.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> It was the EU statement of 28 February 2022, see “EU Statement regarding Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine”, *European Union. External Action*, 28.01.2022, [www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-statement-regarding-russia%E2%80%99s-unprovoked-and-unjustified-military-aggression-against-ukraine\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-statement-regarding-russia%E2%80%99s-unprovoked-and-unjustified-military-aggression-against-ukraine_en) [accessed: 7.07.2023].

<sup>13</sup> J. Cook, “Russia-Ukraine war: How the US paved the way to Moscow’s invasion”, *Middle East Eye*, 10.01.2023, [www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/russia-ukraine-us-invasion-paved-how](http://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/russia-ukraine-us-invasion-paved-how) [accessed: 12.06.2023].

<sup>14</sup> L. Fouad, “Most Arabs distrust media coverage on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine: Poll”, *Arab News*, 30.05.2023, [www.arabnews.com/node/2092851/media](http://www.arabnews.com/node/2092851/media) [accessed: 8.07.2023]; it is difficult to determine what impact on the Arab world was influenced by the voice of Pope Francis on June 14, 2022, who said that Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine “maybe was somehow provoked or not stopped” and who described Nato’s action against Russian aggression as “barking at the gates of Russia”, see A. Giuffrida, “Pope Francis says Ukraine war was ‘perhaps somehow provoked’”, *The Guardian*, 14.06.2022, [www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/14/pope-francis-ukraine-war-provoked-russian-troops](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/14/pope-francis-ukraine-war-provoked-russian-troops) [accessed: 14.03.2023], this voice was surely heard in the Middle East.

<sup>15</sup> “General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine”, *UN News*, 2.03.2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152> [accessed: 30.03.2022]; The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, “UN General Assembly demands Russian Federation withdraw all military forces from the territory of Ukraine”, *European Union. External Action*, 2.03.2022, [www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/un-general-assembly-](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/un-general-assembly-)



However, voting results can be misleading. A year after Russia's aggression, in the circles of the Middle Eastern power elite, understanding prevailed for Russia's position as a country that had to take military action to avoid being encircled by NATO. Moreover, a survey of youth opinion in Arab countries showed that in 2022, 31% of Middle Easterners aged 18–24 blamed the war in Ukraine on the United States and NATO, not on Putin. At the same time, 37% of respondents had no idea who was responsible for this war or did not want to express their opinion. As many as 78% of the young Arabs surveyed believed that China was a more reliable ally of the Arab world than the US.<sup>16</sup>

Such high support for Russia in the Arab world had various interpretations. Anna Borshchevskaya, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, drew attention to the Russian disinformation campaign with the help of the Russian state-owned media outlets *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik Arabic*. In the West, these and similar media were either banned outright or chose to shut down. In the Arab world, these media had constant access to the audience.<sup>17</sup>

The propaganda factor undoubtedly played an essential role in shaping it. However, it must be said that the main slogan of Russian propaganda, presenting Russian aggression as a challenge to the US-led hegemonic order, fell on fertile ground. One of the explanations for this result of the Arab public opinion poll was common in the Middle East to equate NATO with the US and the bad experience of the people of the Middle East with US military operations in the region.<sup>18</sup> The example of Iraq in 2003 came to mind as a comparison of events in Ukraine in 2022. The US and Britain invaded Iraq as illegally as Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. A similar role was played by the

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demands-russian-federation-withdraw-all-military-forces-territory-ukraine\_en [accessed: 30.03.2022]; A. Finnis, "Who voted against the UN vote on Ukraine? Results in full and which countries abstained on Russia withdrawalnited Nations", *News World*, 24.02.2022, <https://inews.co.uk/news/world/un-vote-ukraine-who-voted-against-results-which-countries-abstained-russia-2170599> [accessed: 30.03.2022].

<sup>16</sup> J. Jarallah, "Arab Youth Survey 2022: democracy in the Middle East will never work, most say", *The National News*, 21.09.2022, [www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2022/09/21/arab-youth-survey-2022-democracy-in-the-middle-east-will-never-work-most-say](http://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2022/09/21/arab-youth-survey-2022-democracy-in-the-middle-east-will-never-work-most-say) [accessed: 20.03.2023].

<sup>17</sup> A. Borshchevskaya, "Russia's Disinformation Machine Has a Middle East Advantage", *Foreign Policy*, 23.03.2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/23/russia-ukraine-war-disinformation-middle-east-rt-sputnik-arabic> [accessed: 23.06.2023].

<sup>18</sup> J. Gornall, "Study shows Arabs more likely to blame NATO than Russia for Ukraine war", *Arab News*, 30.05.2022, [www.arabnews.com/node/2092861/middle-east](http://www.arabnews.com/node/2092861/middle-east) [accessed: 6.06.2023].

Western media, which portrayed Saddam Hussein as a dangerous, irrational ruler who refused to compromise and had ties to al-Qaeda, so he was responsible for the Twin Towers attack of 9/11 and had weapons of mass destruction to hit Europe in 45 minutes. As we know, United Nations inspectors could find no trace of Iraq's biological and chemical weapons arsenal.<sup>19</sup>

### Predetermined factors

In March 2022, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published a report entitled "What the Russian War in Ukraine Means for the Middle East." Its authors emphasized that the conflict in Europe is perceived by the inhabitants of the Middle East and North Africa through the prism of food security, energy prices and jobs. The war is well known to the people of the Middle East, as it continues in Syria, Libya and recently took a bloody toll in Iraq and Lebanon. For Middle Eastern governments, a war in Europe means the potential for fragile economies to collapse and public discontent to erupt on a large scale. An example is Egypt, which imports food and subsidizes the prices of basic foodstuffs. Egypt needs land to grow grain and depends on grain supply from abroad. About 85% of imported wheat comes from Ukraine and Russia. Considering that about 30% of the Egyptian population lives in poverty or is on the verge of poverty, the considerable importance of grain supplies from abroad becomes understandable. The Egyptian government has expanded relations with Russia in recent years and has started buying Russian weapons and cooperating with Russia to build a nuclear power plant. In the Arab arena, Egypt informally supported Russia's policy in Syria and Libya. The war in Ukraine forced the Egyptian authorities to manoeuvre diplomatically between commitments to Russia and commitments to its strategic partner, the US and the EU.<sup>20</sup>

Tunisia turned out to be in a similar situation. This country felt the effects of the war in Europe in two ways, economically and diplomatically. The Tunisian economy depended on the influx of tourists from Russia, and the society depends on grain imports, 80% of which came from Ukraine.

<sup>19</sup> J. Cook, "Russia-Ukraine war: A different invasion, the West's same 'madman' script", *Middle East Eye*, 28.01.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/russia-ukraine-war-invasion-madman-script-same](http://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/russia-ukraine-war-invasion-madman-script-same) [accessed: 18.11.2023].

<sup>20</sup> A. Hamzawy *et al.*, "What the Russian War in Ukraine Means for the Middle East", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 24.03.2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/03/24/what-russian-war-in-ukraine-means-for-middle-east-pub-86711> [accessed: 2.07.2023].

Immediately after Russia's aggression in Tunisia, wheat prices surged. In turn, the increase in oil prices to USD 100 per barrel forced the Tunisian government to increase the size of fuel subsidies. As a result, the budget deficit deepened to such an extent that the only way out was the help of the International Monetary Fund. However, negotiations with the IMF were complex due to the authoritarian tendencies in Tunisian politics, which became apparent after President Kais Saied took power on 25 July 2021. Another factor that hindered the negotiations was Tunisia's position in the Ukraine war. The Tunisian authorities sought to maintain good relations with Russia due to tourism and trade with this country. At the same time, they wanted to avoid criticism from the West, on which the Tunisian economy depended. As a result, neutrality in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict was declared, which met with strong criticism from the European Union. On 28 February 2022, the EU ambassador to Tunisia described Tunisia's neutrality as siding with the aggressor. Following this pressure, Tunisia voted on 2 March 2022 in the UN General Assembly for a resolution denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, the Tunisian authorities emphasized the importance of the bilateral relationship between Russia and Tunisia and Tunisia's desire to strengthen that relationship. Saied's government carefully assessed the price of severing relations with Russia and the possible gains from siding with Ukraine. It was about economic interests and preventing the outbreak of social discontent due to the deterioration of living conditions.<sup>21</sup>

The determinants of the Palestinian response to the war in Ukraine were even more complex. On the one hand, Palestinians know what war and being a refugee mean. On the other hand, the West's response to Russian aggression made it clear to the Palestinians that the West's policy towards their cause is inconsistent and full of double standards. While the West recognized Ukrainians' resistance to aggression as 'legitimate and heroic'<sup>22</sup> and condemned Russia's human rights violations,<sup>23</sup> the State Department strongly condemned

<sup>21</sup> S. Yerkes, 'Tunisia,' [in:] A. Hamzawy *et al.*, *op. cit.*; Marcus Cornaro@AmbUeTunisie, Tweet, 28.01.2022, <https://twitter.com/AmbUeTunisie/status/1498343878784655373> [accessed: 14.06.2023]; "Jerandi recoit l'ambassadeur de Russie en Tunisie", *LaPresse.tn*, 9.07.2023, <https://lapresse.tn/124780/jerandi-recoit-lambassadeur-de-russie-en-tunisie> [accessed: 8.07.2023].

<sup>22</sup> See "Joint Statement on Further Restrictive Economic Measures", *White House*, 26.01.2022, [www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/26/joint-statement-on-further-restrictive-economic-measures](http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/26/joint-statement-on-further-restrictive-economic-measures) [accessed: 14.03.2022].

<sup>23</sup> See A.J. Blinken, Secretary of State, "Promoting Accountability for Human Rights Abuses Perpetrated by the Governments of Russia and Belarus", *Statement, U.S. State*

the actions of Palestinian human rights organizations calling for boycotts of goods produced by companies accepting Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.<sup>24</sup> The US has consistently blocked draft resolutions criticizing Israel at the United Nations Security Council,<sup>25</sup> and in March 2021, the Department of State objected to the International Criminal Court (ICC) launching an investigation into human rights violations in Palestine.<sup>26</sup> President Biden's administration imposed sanctions on Russian citizens and Russian goods, and on the other hand allowed the importation of goods produced by Israeli settlers on the occupied West Bank. Attempts by Palestinian human rights organizations to boycott the goods of Western companies in the occupied territories were assessed by the American administration through the prism of an expanded interpretation of anti-Semitism, which reduced any criticism of Israel to anti-Semitism.<sup>27</sup>

Such politicization of the human rights issue and the exceptionalization of Israel undermined in the eyes of Arabs, especially Palestinians, the credibility of "Biden's effort to restore respect for the rules-based international order and the normative framework upon which it was built."<sup>28</sup>

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*Department*, 15.03.2022, [www.state.gov/promoting-accountability-for-human-rights-abuses-perpetrated-by-the-governments-of-russia-and-belarus](http://www.state.gov/promoting-accountability-for-human-rights-abuses-perpetrated-by-the-governments-of-russia-and-belarus) [accessed: 28.03.2022].

<sup>24</sup> C. Downey, "State Department Says It 'Firmly Rejects' BDS Movement amid Ben & Jerry's Israel Withdrawal", *yahoo!news*, 21.07.2021, [https://news.yahoo.com/state-department-says-firmly-rejects-013914204.html?guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmluZy5jb20v&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAALm6xOjv1ooy6tO5WMlhhFyQ8Z-o1WK6HfAQs0Z2u7oAVF7NTQ6B4NbyZKLE143QwRaCMwl0jddQD7heZmoTiHkK4xDILwzU5AR8cJlJCdj58G5QZjwCyByNAybaCMFrCrGbQTkxrzvVj7xqY0aqp4INKxyMfW4fhTT8wfwY0vN29&gucounter=2](https://news.yahoo.com/state-department-says-firmly-rejects-013914204.html?guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmluZy5jb20v&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAALm6xOjv1ooy6tO5WMlhhFyQ8Z-o1WK6HfAQs0Z2u7oAVF7NTQ6B4NbyZKLE143QwRaCMwl0jddQD7heZmoTiHkK4xDILwzU5AR8cJlJCdj58G5QZjwCyByNAybaCMFrCrGbQTkxrzvVj7xqY0aqp4INKxyMfW4fhTT8wfwY0vN29&gucounter=2) [accessed: 14.06.2023].

<sup>25</sup> According to UN data, the US has blocked 53 drafts of such resolutions since 1972, see "Security Council – Veto List", *the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, UN*, [https://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact\\_veto\\_table\\_en.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact_veto_table_en.htm) [accessed: 12.06.2023]; see also C. Newton, "A history of the US blocking UN resolutions against Israel", *Aljazeera*, 19.05.2021, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/19/a-history-of-the-us-blocking-un-resolutions-against-israel](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/19/a-history-of-the-us-blocking-un-resolutions-against-israel) [accessed: 12.06.2023].

<sup>26</sup> A.J. Blinken, Secretary of State, "The United States Opposes the ICC Investigation into the Palestinian Situation", *Statement, Statement, U.S. State Department*, 3.03.2021, [www.state.gov/the-united-states-opposes-the-icc-investigation-into-the-palestinian-situation](http://www.state.gov/the-united-states-opposes-the-icc-investigation-into-the-palestinian-situation) [accessed: 14.06.2023].

<sup>27</sup> M. Arria, "Biden administration says IHRA definition of antisemitism is 'gold standard'", *Mondoweiss*, 29.06.2021, <https://mondoweiss.net/2021/06/biden-administration-says-ihra-definition-of-antisemitism-is-gold-standard> [accessed: 14.06.2023].

<sup>28</sup> Z. Hassan, 'Palestine', [in:] A. Hamzawy *et al.*, *op. cit.*

## Driving forces

### (a) *Türkiye: Strategic autonomy*

Turkey's position should be considered in a geographical and historical context. Turkey is a neighbour of both parties to the conflict, sharing the Black Sea coastline. Over the centuries, Turkey has resisted Russia's efforts to gain greater control over the Turkish Straits, Russia's gateway to the Mediterranean. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire did not stop Russia's expansion on land and lost the Balkans, and in 1878, a hundred years after Constantinople lost Crimea, Russian troops were on the outskirts of Constantinople. Turkey treated Ukraine as a buffer against the expansion of Russian influence in this basin. Ankara expressed concern about the future of relations in the Black Sea basin following a possible collapse of Ukraine before the Russian attack on 24 February 2022. Such a prospect would also be unfavourable for Ankara's cooperation with Kyiv in defence. Ukrainian companies supplied Turkey with engines for aircraft and tanks, including the Bayraktar TB-2 drone. In December 2021, the Turkish company Bayrak bought land in Ukraine on which it intended to build a factory producing drones. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed deep concern about this. Russia cooperated with Turkey in Syria but it was clear that did treat Ukraine as a post-Soviet area and did not allow anyone to interfere in the affairs of this area.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, Ankara avoided situations that could increase tension in relations with Russia and, on the other hand, tried to prevent Russia from gaining an advantage over Ukraine. President Erdogan did not visit Kyiv until August 2022, six months after the start of the war and after Western leaders had already visited Kyiv. Turkey has condemned Russia's aggression and has sent drones and other military equipment to Ukraine but has not joined the Western sanctions against Russia. At the same time, Ankara tried to use the conflict to strengthen its international position. In particular, it opposed Sweden's admission to NATO because Sweden refused to extradite persons suspected of belonging to Kurdish organizations banned in Turkey who had found asylum in Sweden. The policy of maintaining neutrality was also expressed in the opening of Turkish territory to refugees from both Ukraine and Russia.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> R. Soyly, "Ukraine conflict: Why it really matters to Turkey", *Middle East Eye*, 27.01.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/ukraine-turkey-why-conflict-matters](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/ukraine-turkey-why-conflict-matters) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>30</sup> M. Abu Sneh, "Russia-Ukraine war: Seven ways it shaped the Middle East and North Africa", *Middle East Eye*, 23.01.2023, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-middle-east-north-africa-shaped](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-middle-east-north-africa-shaped) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

Turkey's policy towards the war in Ukraine should be seen in the broader context of changes in the international system. The transformation of this system from a US-led unipolarity to a multi-actor-centric multipolarity that has taken place over the last decade has benefited Turkey's interests as a medium-sized country. In the past decade, Turkey has become involved in the civil war in Syria and Libya and the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, has established friendly relations with Russia and has proceeded to normalize relations with the Sunni states of the Middle East and Israel. Hakan Fidan's foreign minister appointment on 4 June 2023 shows that Turkey intends to continue this line in foreign policy. Fidan, who has headed the National Intelligence Organization since 2010, played a crucial role in making critical decisions as part of a post-American international order. These decisions shaped another concept of 'strategic autonomy' as a central element of Turkish activity in the international arena. This concept assumes maintaining multipolarity in the international system and seeking a balance of power politics among regional and global powers in Turkish national interest.<sup>31</sup>

***(b) Israel: Regional security first***

Israel was walking on an even thinner line. Ukraine was an important trading partner for Israel in agricultural products and technology and home to tens of thousands of Jews. Ukraine was willing to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, even though the UN recognized the city as occupied territory. All this led to taking the side of Ukraine. On the other hand, Russia was an essential partner of Israel in Syria, agreeing to Israeli air strikes on Iranian forces and their allies. About 150,000 Jews from Russia lived in Israel and maintained family and emotional ties with the country of exile. Some observers believed that apart from state security issues, ties with Russia also strengthened the illiberal tendencies in the policies of both Putin and Netanyahu.<sup>32</sup>

Besides, Israel's policy towards the war in Ukraine was determined by Syrian and Iranian factors. After the intervention in Syria in 2015 to save Bashar al-Assad, Moscow played a double game in Syria. On the one hand, it cooperated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and their allied Shia militias to break up the anti-government opposition. On the other hand, it disregarded more than

<sup>31</sup> MEMO Staff, "Turkish foreign policy in the new era", *Middle East Monitor*, 15.06.2023, [www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230615-turkiye-foreign-policy-in-the-new-era](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230615-turkiye-foreign-policy-in-the-new-era) [accessed: 7.07.2023].

<sup>32</sup> S.A. Cook, "The Deeper Reason Netanyahu Won't Arm Ukraine Against Russia", *Foreign Policy*, 6.01.2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/06/israel-ukraine-war-russia-hawk-air-defense-netanyahu> [accessed: 20.06.2023].

1,000 Israeli air strikes against Iranian and Hezbollah forces, resulting in losses to al-Assad forces. Prime Minister Netanyahu built this strategic cooperation over the years, and its failure could adversely affect Israel's security. At the UN Security Council's February meeting in 2022, Russia objected to Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights. It could be translated as a warning that if Israel comes out strongly against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there could be consequences for its campaign in Syria.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, Israel played a very cautious game in the Ukrainian-Russian war. Immediately after Russia's attack on 24 February 2022, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid condemned the Russian attack and called on the Israeli government not to assist Russian oligarchs of Jewish descent in connection with the sanctions imposed on them. At the same time, Israel did not support the resolution submitted by the US to the UN Security Council condemning the Russian invasion, which was supported by 87 states. However, on 28 February 2022, Israel voted for a similar resolution the UN General Assembly. Israel disagreed with the US proposal to transfer the Iron Dome defence system to Ukraine, as it could deteriorate relations with Russia. Prime Minister Naftali Bennet tried to involve himself in the conflict as little as possible and tried to be an intermediary between Kyiv and Moscow. However, it was known that Moscow did not need mediation services, as Putin's goal was to win over Ukraine.<sup>34</sup> In October 2022, President Volodymyr Zelensky renewed his appeal to the Israeli authorities of February 2022 to side with Ukraine, primarily because of the strengthening alliance between Moscow and Tehran, but the government led by Naftali Bennett rejected the possibility of departing from a balanced policy.<sup>35</sup>

Prime Minister Yair Lapid, who headed the Israeli government on July 1, 2022, rejected the possibility of joining the sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union and the US and provided only humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The Israeli government justified its caution in taking radical steps towards the war in Ukraine by the increasingly complicated situation in the Middle East region. International isolation pushed Russia towards Iran, and military cooperation

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<sup>33</sup> T. Lazaroff, "Russia takes issue with Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights and Jerusalem", *The Jerusalem Post*, 24.01.2022, [www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-698512](http://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-698512) [accessed: 25.06.2023].

<sup>34</sup> Y. Melman, "Russia-Ukraine war: Israel's ties with the West strained by its fear of Putin in Syria", *Middle East Eye*, 2.03.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-israel-west-strained-fear-putin-syria](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-israel-west-strained-fear-putin-syria) [accessed: 15.04.2023].

<sup>35</sup> F.S. Isik, M.F. Yavuz, "Russia-Ukraine war: Israel's tricky balancing act", *Middle East Eye*, 4.03.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/russia-ukraine-war-israel-tricky-balancing-act](http://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/russia-ukraine-war-israel-tricky-balancing-act) [accessed: 2.06.2023].

between the two countries gave rise to Israel's concern about the consequences of this cooperation for the state's security. The more so that Iran was perfecting drone technologies that could reach Israel. Many observers believed Russia could limit its involvement in Syria due to the war in Ukraine, which could mean an increase in Iran's activity in Syria. At the same time, a decreased Russian presence in Syria could mean less support from Moscow for Iran-backed militias and the Syrian regime, giving more operational freedom to Israel. However, this could also mean more missiles fired from Lebanon and Syria towards Israel, embroiling Israel in a deeper conflict.<sup>36</sup>

In December 2022, a government led by Benjamin Netanyahu was formed in Israel, and Israel's position in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict has not changed. Although in February 2023, many observers believed that Israel was gradually siding with Ukraine and pointed to events such as the visit of Foreign Minister Eli Cohen to Kyiv on the eve of President Biden's visit to the Ukrainian capital, Prime Minister Netanyahu refrained from condemning Russia and did not express his sympathy with the Ukrainians. Although Israel promised to deliver the Iron Dome missile defence system to Ukraine in October 2022, it did not fulfil this promise by the end of February 2023. Tel Aviv has not granted the loan requested by Ukraine so far.<sup>37</sup>

In February 2023, Israel assumed that the war in Ukraine would not end soon and was guided primarily by security considerations in the region, specifically the strategic rapprochement with Russia in connection with its role in containing Iran's ambitions in Syria.<sup>38</sup> Prime Minister Netanyahu defended his balanced stand between Russia and Ukraine, saying on 9 March 2023 in an interview with Italian daily *La Repubblica*:

<sup>36</sup> J. Roche, "Iranian and Syrian factors shape Israeli response to Russia's Ukraine invasion", *Atlantic Council*, 27.04.2023, [www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/iranian-and-syrian-factors-shape-israeli-response-to-russias-ukraine-invasion](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/iranian-and-syrian-factors-shape-israeli-response-to-russias-ukraine-invasion) [accessed: 25.05.2023].

<sup>37</sup> A. Abu Amer, "Israel is gradually taking Ukraine's side in the war against Russia", *Middle East Monitor*, 28.01.2023, [www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230228-israel-is-gradually-taking-ukraines-side-in-the-war-against-russia](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230228-israel-is-gradually-taking-ukraines-side-in-the-war-against-russia) [accessed: 26.06.2023]; T. Krämer, "Israel's Ukraine dilemma?", *Deutsche Welle*, 21.10.2022, [www.dw.com/en/israels-ukraine-dilemma/a-63517231](http://www.dw.com/en/israels-ukraine-dilemma/a-63517231) [accessed: 22.06.2023].

<sup>38</sup> J.-P. Filiu, "Why Israel still refuses to give military aid to Ukraine", *Le Monde*, 15.05.2023, [www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/15/why-israel-still-refuses-to-give-military-aid-to-ukraine\\_6026664\\_4.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/15/why-israel-still-refuses-to-give-military-aid-to-ukraine_6026664_4.html) [accessed: 3.06.2023]; MEMO Staff, "Israel concerned by Russia's military cooperation with Iran", *Middle East Monitor*, 16.06.2023, [www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230616-israel-concerned-by-russias-military-cooperation-with-iran](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230616-israel-concerned-by-russias-military-cooperation-with-iran) [accessed: 4.07.2023].



Israel is the only country whose pilots fly over the Golan Heights at a very short distance from the Russian jets in Syria because we have to prevent Iranian military aid to Hezbollah [...]. We are interested in avoiding a confrontation with Russia [...]. Our relationship with Russia is very complex.<sup>39</sup>

### *(c) Iran: Drone diplomacy*

Iran has moved even closer to Russia and has provided military assistance in the form of drones, hoping primarily for a transfer of military technology from Russia, which would help Iran modernize its military potential under Western sanctions. According to American sources, Russia offered Iran ‘an unprecedented level of military and technical support,’ which should not be treated as an ordinary commercial transaction, but as a technological and defence partnership at a higher level than before. In addition to expanding the production of transport and combat helicopters, the Mil Mi-38, Mi-28N, and Kamov Ka-32/-226/-60/-52 and expanding the naval fleet, Tehran also counted on Russia’s help in expanding its nuclear weapons arsenal.<sup>40</sup>

In 2023, Russia’s military cooperation with Iran deepened. At least, that is how the American side assessed it. In May 2023, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel will name Iran ‘Russia’s top military backer’ that supplies Russia with artillery and tanks. Patel reported that since August 2022, Iran had supplied Russia with 400 Shahed drones, which have been used by the Russian army to attack Ukrainian critical infrastructure.<sup>41</sup> Iran hoped to tighten military cooperation with Russia and signalled its intention to purchase Su-35 fighter jets, combat helicopters, radar and Yak-130 combat trainer aircraft from Russia. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby described the extent of military cooperation between Iran and Russia as ‘unprecedented.’<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> G. Zampano, “Israel’s Premier Netanyahu says Ukraine war will likely continue”, *World*, 9.03.2023, [www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/israel-s-premier-netanyahu-says-ukraine-war-will-likely-continue/2841290](http://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/israel-s-premier-netanyahu-says-ukraine-war-will-likely-continue/2841290) [accessed: 2.06.2023].

<sup>40</sup> L. Dugit-Gros *et al.*, “After Ukraine: Russia’s Potential Military and Nuclear Compensation to Iran”, *Policy Analysis/Policy Watch 3693*, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 20.01.2023, [www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/after-ukraine-russias-potential-military-and-nuclear-compensation-iran](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/after-ukraine-russias-potential-military-and-nuclear-compensation-iran) [accessed: 14.06.2023].

<sup>41</sup> VOA Persian Service, “US Says Iran, Russia Are Expanding Military Ties”, *VOA News on Iran*, 16.05.2023, [www.voanews.com/a/us-says-iran-russia-are-expanding-military-ties/7095107.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/us-says-iran-russia-are-expanding-military-ties/7095107.html) [accessed: 4.07.2023].

<sup>42</sup> L. Seligman, A. Ward, “New U.S. intelligence shows Russia’s deepening defense ties with Iran”, *Politico*, 6.09.2023, [www.politico.com/news/2023/06/09/united-states-security-council-russia-iran-weapons-00101191](http://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/09/united-states-security-council-russia-iran-weapons-00101191) [accessed: 4.06.2023].

Another possible direction of cooperation is Russia's modernization of the Iranian oil and gas industry. In May 2023, a delegation of 28 Russian companies visited Iran, expressing interest in cooperation with Iranian partners in the modernization of the Iranian oil and gas extraction and processing industry. The talks concerned joint exploration and extraction of raw materials from new wells.<sup>43</sup>

### The rich and the poor

The war in Ukraine has deepened the inequalities in the region. For the oil states of the Persian Gulf, the war brought additional revenues from the sale of energy resources. In August 2022, the Saudi company Aramco announced that in the second quarter of 2022, it achieved record profits of \$48.4 billion. In March 2022, the price of Brent crude oil rose to \$119.84 per barrel, the highest since May 2012, while the price of West Texas Intermediate crude oil was \$116.57 per barrel, making it the highest since 2008. This increase in profits meant increased opportunities for many development projects in the oil countries of the Persian Gulf, Algeria, Libya and Sudan. On the other hand, Arab countries such as Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon were painfully affected by the increased fuel and energy prices, and their ability to implement development projects deteriorated. Tunisia found itself in a challenging situation, as almost half of Tunisia's grain imports came from Russia and Ukraine, both belligerent countries, which threatened to disrupt supplies. In addition, in 2019, Tunisia was visited by almost 750,000 tourists from Russia, providing Tunisia with a significant share of tourism revenues.<sup>44</sup>

The war in Ukraine, combined with climate change and economic stagnation caused by COVID-19, has led to further price increases in Middle Eastern countries. In April 2022, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) reported that cooking oil prices rose 30% in Yemen and 39% in Syria. Wheat rose 47% in Lebanon, 15% in Libya and 14% in Palestine. Even before the war broke out in Ukraine, inflation and rising prices made the situation of the poorest families critical. The cost of a basic food basket providing the minimum food needs per family per month increased in Lebanon

<sup>43</sup> MEE Staff, "Iranian press review: Russia to modernise Iran's outdated oil and gas industry", *Middle East Eye*, 18.05.2023, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-russia-modernise-dated-oil-gas-industry-press-review](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-russia-modernise-dated-oil-gas-industry-press-review) [accessed: 4.06.2023].

<sup>44</sup> M. Abu Sneineh, "Russia-Ukraine war: How soaring oil prices will be felt in the Middle East", *Middle East Eye*, 4.03.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-soaring-oil-prices-middle-east-felt-how](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-soaring-oil-prices-middle-east-felt-how) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

by 351%, the highest increase in the entire region. In Syria, the increase was 97%, and in Yemen, it was 81%. These three countries were the most dependent on food imports and experienced the highest depreciation of their currencies. In Syria, a rise in imported food prices coincided with a drought-induced crop failure. The most challenging situation was Syria and Yemen, where 29 million people needed food assistance and 19 million were directly dependent on daily food supplies from WFP. Meanwhile, WFP's financial capacity has deteriorated due to higher prices and smaller donor subsidies.<sup>45</sup>

### The limits of autonomy

Since the global rivalry has led global powers to follow realpolitik in their foreign policies, many regional powers, such as Brazil, India, Germany and Turkey, have been trying to increase their autonomy to protect their national interests against these global powers. It led to tensions in situations of conflict of interest. An example from the Middle East is the decision of the Opec+ countries to reduce production by 2 million barrels a day from November 2022 to keep prices at the current level. This decision was met with severe criticism from the US. The American administration assessed that the Opec+ countries help Russia achieve high revenues from oil sales and, simultaneously, need to do more for Ukraine. President Biden was furious and announced that the US would review its policy towards Saudi Arabia. Since the Opec+ decision meant that Saudi Arabia was on the same side as Russia on oil issues, suspicion arose in Washington that Riyadh and Moscow were working together to undermine the US position. Senator Bob Mendez, chair of the influential Senate Foreign Relations Committee, announced an immediate freeze on all aspects of cooperation with Saudi Arabia except "what is absolutely necessary." The condition for returning to the previous cooperation was that Riyadh would take the 'correct' position in the face of the Ukrainian-Russian war. The decision of Opec+ coincided with the midterm elections in the USA, and it was known that fuel prices are an essential factor in the elections to the US Congress.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> "War in Ukraine pushes Middle East and North Africa deeper into hunger as food prices reach alarming highs [EN/AR]", *reliefweb*, 31.03.2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/war-ukraine-pushes-middle-east-and-north-africa-deeper-hunger-food-prices-reach> [accessed: 15.04.2023].

<sup>46</sup> U.A. Farooq, "Outraged US looks for ways to break up Opec, reassess Saudi ties", *Middle East Eye*, 11.10.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/outraged-us-looks-ways-break-opec-reassess-saudi-ties](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/outraged-us-looks-ways-break-opec-reassess-saudi-ties) [accessed: 16.04.2023].

In response to criticism from the US, Saudi Arabia stated that it is guided by its interest in the implementation of development projects, and Amin Nasser, Chief executive of Aramco, said: “We are looking at it from a Western point of view and the rest of the world needs to adapt. Well, it does not work like that.”<sup>47</sup> However, the Ukrainian-Russian war and US policy significantly limited the room for manoeuvre for regional powers, in this case, Saudi Arabia. Despite its significant role in the fuel and financial markets, this country cannot pursue a completely independent foreign policy, as it primarily depends on US arms supplies. In June 2022, the US Government Accountability Office reported that between 2015 and 2021, the Department of Defence provided \$54.6 billion in military aid to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for the war in Yemen, which the United Nations characterized as one of the world’s greatest humanitarian disasters.<sup>48</sup> The American side raised the argument of Saudi Arabia’s dependence on American military aid in the person of Congressman Ro Khanna, who stated that Riyadh’s ignoring President Biden’s appeal to increase production should result in the immediate suspension of arms supplies to Saudi Arabia.<sup>49</sup>

Undoubtedly, the US is a significant player in the Middle East. The policy of the administration of President Joe Biden towards the Middle East is part of the US grand strategy of global hegemony, which Washington has been implementing since 1945. This strategy focuses on three world regions of particular importance to the US: Western Europe, Eastern Asia and the Middle East. The global hegemony of the United States depends on preventing the emergence of “a dominant rival on the Eurasian landmass or a single power in the Gulf controlling the majority of the world’s oil reserves.”<sup>50</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 eliminated such a dominant Eurasian rival. In the Middle East, US supremacy was served by the ‘war on terror’ announced

<sup>47</sup> MEE staff, “War of words escalates between US and Saudi Arabia over Opec+ cut”, *Middle East Eye*, 25.10.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/war-words-escalates-between-us-and-saudi-arabia-over-opeccut](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/war-words-escalates-between-us-and-saudi-arabia-over-opeccut) [accessed: 15.04.2023].

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Yemen: State and DOD Need Better Information on Civilian Impacts of U.S. Military Support to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates”, 15.06.2022, [www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105988](http://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105988) [accessed: 16.04.2023].

<sup>49</sup> U.A. Farooq, “Outraged US...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>50</sup> R. Ramesh, “The US was prepared to bomb the Middle East into shape. In Ukraine, it seems no less self-serving”, *The Guardian*, 18.03.2023, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/mar/18/middle-east-ukraine-washington-iraq-kyiv](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/mar/18/middle-east-ukraine-washington-iraq-kyiv) [accessed: 4.06.2023].

by President George W. Bush, which was guided by the belief that Middle Eastern countries are ‘either with us or against us.’<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, Washington’s zero/one game towards its allies in the Middle East means that the American authorities ignore the psychological aspect of international contacts, which in the case of the Middle East are intercultural, and ignore the personal ambitions and egos of the leaders of Middle Eastern countries. In previous decades, Western paternalism spurred the search for other allies and stimulated rapid policy changes in the Middle East. Examples include events in Egypt after 1952 and Iraq after 1958. Although Egypt and Iraq returned under American wings after many years, the example of Afghanistan shows that pure hard power is only sometimes effective without a combination with soft power.

From this point of view, the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Saudi Arabia on 8 December 2022 gave a lot to think about. It meant that China treated Saudi Arabia as a strategic partner in specific sectors of the economy, in particular, the energy sector and short- and long-term investments. At the same time, strengthening cooperation in the military sector is noteworthy. Between 2016 and 2020, Chinese arms sales to Saudi Arabia increased by 286%.<sup>52</sup> China’s activity in the Middle East can be assessed as an element of shaping a new world order and even replacing the US as Saudi Arabia’s strategic partner. On the other hand, the question is whether the Saudi-Chinese cooperation results from China’s strength or the weakness of US policy during Joe Biden’s presidency. The key question is whether US relationship with Saudi Arabia ‘is critical to maintaining stability in the Middle East.’<sup>53</sup> From this point of view, the US remains a strategic partner for Saudi Arabia regarding regional threats to this country from Yemen and Iran. On 2 August 2022, the State Department agreed to sell 300 Patriot missiles to Saudi Arabia to bolster Saudi Arabia’s air defence system against possible Houthi attacks from Yemen. This decision was made after President Biden visited Saudi Arabia on 15 July 2022, during which the US held talks with the Saudi side about human rights and energy security.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> “The Bush Doctrine”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 7.10.2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2002/10/07/bush-doctrine-pub-1088> [accessed: 5.07.2023].

<sup>52</sup> W. Taleb, “On heels of Biden visit, China’s Xi expected to visit Saudi Arabia soo”, *Fox News*, 20.08.2022, [www.foxnews.com/world/on-heels-biden-visit-chinas-xi-expected-visit-saudi-arabia-soon](http://www.foxnews.com/world/on-heels-biden-visit-chinas-xi-expected-visit-saudi-arabia-soon) [accessed: 10.04.2023].

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> P. Best, “State Department approves potential sale of 300 Patriot missiles to Saudi Arabia”, *Fox News*, 2.08.2022, [www.foxnews.com/world/state-department-approves-potential-sale-300-patriot-missiles-saudi-arabia](http://www.foxnews.com/world/state-department-approves-potential-sale-300-patriot-missiles-saudi-arabia) [accessed: 11.04.2023].

On the other hand, President Biden's emphasis on human rights in talks with the Saudi side was perceived in Riyadh as an expression of American paternalism towards Saudi Arabia and a sign of the design to alienate the kingdom policy. It prompted Riyadh to increase its cooperation with Beijing.<sup>55</sup>

The political position of the Middle Eastern countries regarding the war in Ukraine resulted from combining national interests with allied obligations with the USA. At the same time, a high degree of independence and autonomy in decision-making was visible. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel are regional powers still thanks to American support and still have to accept American paternalism to maintain their positions. It was made clear by Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, the Saudi energy minister, speaking about Washington's pressure to increase Saudi Arabia's oil production in October 2022. "I keep listening, are you with us or against us? Is there any room for 'We are for Saudi Arabia and for the people of Saudi Arabia?'"<sup>56</sup>

In addition, there are other types of limitations to the independence of the region's countries in conducting policy. The war in Ukraine has revealed many weaknesses in the Middle East, including the problem of food dependence. The Middle East is primarily dependent on grain imports. Home crops in Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya meet only half of the demand for wheat. The state subsidizes grain prices to keep the price of bread low. It harms public finances, but governments have no choice. To maintain social peace, they must subsidize essential food items. In Egypt, about 72 million inhabitants out of 102 million of the total population benefit from price subsidies. Ukraine and Russia gave the Middle East about 70% of grain supplies. The war that broke out on 24 February 2022 stopped deliveries from Ukraine and forced the governments

<sup>55</sup> B. McKernan, "Joe Biden defends human rights record ahead of Saudi visit", *The Guardian*, 14.07.2022, [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/14/joe-biden-defends-human-rights-record-ahead-of-saudi-visit](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/14/joe-biden-defends-human-rights-record-ahead-of-saudi-visit) [accessed: 5.07.2023]; Q. Forgey, K. Hooper, "Biden fist bump with MBS triggers backlash", *Politico*, 15.07.2022, [www.politico.com/news/2022/07/15/a-fist-bump-at-the-palace-biden-squares-off-with-mbs-00046106](http://www.politico.com/news/2022/07/15/a-fist-bump-at-the-palace-biden-squares-off-with-mbs-00046106) [accessed: 5.07.2023]; R. Michaelson, "Joe Biden lands in Saudi Arabia seeking to halt shift towards Russia and China", *The Guardian*, 15.07.2022, [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/15/joe-biden-lands-in-saudi-arabia-seeking-to-halt-shift-towards-russia-and-china](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/15/joe-biden-lands-in-saudi-arabia-seeking-to-halt-shift-towards-russia-and-china) [accessed: 5.07.2023]; D. Ottaway, "Partners of Choice: Biden's Plan to Check China in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf", *Insight and Analysis*, 1.05.2023, *Wilson Center*, [www.wilsoncenter.org/article/partners-choice-bidens-plan-check-china-saudi-arabia-and-gulf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/partners-choice-bidens-plan-check-china-saudi-arabia-and-gulf) [accessed: 5.07.2023]; M. Bishara, "The Middle East: Goodbye America, hello China?", *Aljazeera*, 6.06.2023, [www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/6/6/the-middle-east-goodbye-america-hello-china](http://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/6/6/the-middle-east-goodbye-america-hello-china) [accessed: 5.07.2023].

<sup>56</sup> MEE Staff, "War of words...", *op. cit.*

of Middle Eastern countries to take extraordinary steps to ensure the continuity of bread supplies to the population.<sup>57</sup>

Disruptions in grain deliveries exacerbated inflation. In 2022, compared to December 2021, it increased on average monthly from 3% to 8% in Morocco, from 7% to 10% in Tunisia, from 8% to 22% in Lebanon, from 36% to 52% in Iran and from 49% to 52% in Turkey.<sup>58</sup> The increase in inflation was therefore moderate. Food prices, such as wheat, which had risen in the first days of the war, soon returned to pre-war levels. However, the challenge posed by the Middle East's dependence on grain imports will play an increasingly important role in the region's geopolitics and needs to be adequately addressed.

### New weapons and new producers

In the military sphere, the Russian-Ukrainian war introduced Turkey and Iran to the international arena as essential manufacturers and exporters of drones. Iran has started to deliver the Shahid-136 suicide drone to Russia and train Russian soldiers to use it. At that time, Ukraine introduced Turkish Bayraktar TB-2s drones into the fight, which had proven themselves early in Libya, Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey started working on the Bayraktar TB-2 UAV model in 2007 and it entered military service in 2014. The successes of Ankara meant that Turkish drones have found buyers in the UAE, Kuwait and Romania since 2017. The demand for drones from Iran turned out to be equally high. The interest in drones in Iran dates back to the 1980s and the Iran-Iraq War. Since the Iranian air force could not develop after the US sanctions, the authorities turned to simpler weapons that did not require advanced Western technology. The rapid development of this weapon production occurred in the last ten years when the Iranians shot down an American drone and began copying its design. In early 2022, Iran launched a drone factory in Tajikistan to avoid Israeli attacks

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<sup>57</sup> M. Abu Sneineh, "Russia-Ukraine war: Seven ways...", *op. cit.*; R. Soyulu, "Why Ukrainian grain is not going to countries with a food crisis", *Middle East Eye*, 13.08.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-turkey-grain-deal-explained](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-turkey-grain-deal-explained) [accessed: 15.04.2023]; F.S. Schiavi, "The Costs of Food Insecurity in the MENA Region: A Conversation with Roberta Gatti", *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 1.06.2023, [www.ispionline.it/en/publication/the-costs-of-food-insecurity-in-the-mena-region-a-conversation-with-roberta-gatti-130388](http://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/the-costs-of-food-insecurity-in-the-mena-region-a-conversation-with-roberta-gatti-130388) [accessed: 4.07.2023].

<sup>58</sup> L. Fruganti, "How the Ukraine War Has Disrupted the MENA Region, One Year On", *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 24.02.2023, [www.ispionline.it/en/publication/how-the-ukraine-war-has-disrupted-the-mena-region-one-year-on-117984](http://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/how-the-ukraine-war-has-disrupted-the-mena-region-one-year-on-117984) [accessed: 3.06.2023].

on this facility and establish closer contacts with Central Asian states. The political and diplomatic aspects of Iran's production of drones should be considered as important as the military ones. Tehran's cooperation with Russia in the production of drones began in 2016.<sup>59</sup>

It can be assumed that Turkish and Iranian drones will change the arms market in the Middle East and will become competition for many types of Western weapons due to their low price and ease of use. With the price of the Iranian Shahed-136 ranging from \$20,000 to \$30,000 and the cost of a rocket that can knock it down at around \$300,000, it is understandable that this weapon is growing in popularity, which could mean reshaping the battlefield. The Middle East has been filled with weapons from the former Soviet Union and the US for decades, ranging from Katyusha rocket launchers and AK47s to M16 rifles and FIM-92 Stingers surface-to-air missiles. However, now new manufacturers are expanding in the region. In the Middle East, this means reshaping the political landscape and the birth of a new generation of warlords, definitely more dangerous and able to buy these drones. The situation may be similar to that in Afghanistan in the 1980s when the Mujahideen became warlords thanks to the Stinger missiles.<sup>60</sup>

### Impact on Syria

The war in Ukraine had a visible impact on the situation in Syria, which before 24 February 2022 was characterized by a difficult humanitarian situation and a delicate balance of political power due to the military involvement of five foreign powers in the conflict: Russia, Turkey, the USA, Israel and Iran. Each of these countries created a sphere of influence in Syria and tried to expand the borders of its sphere.<sup>61</sup>

As a direct result of the war in Ukraine, the humanitarian situation in Syria deteriorated. The Syrian economy has been completely devastated by

<sup>59</sup> E. Gjevori, "Russia-Ukraine war: The rise of Iran's drone industry", *Middle East Eye*, 30.10.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-iran-drone-industry-rise](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-iran-drone-industry-rise) [accessed: 15.04.2023]; M. Abu Sneineh, "Middle East turns arms exporter as combat drones take flight in Europe", *Middle East Eye*, 31.10.2022, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/middle-east-arms-exporter-combat-drones-take-flight-europe](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/middle-east-arms-exporter-combat-drones-take-flight-europe) [accessed: 15.04.2023].

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> UK Parliament, "Syria's civil war in 2023: Assad back in the Arab League", *House of Commons Library*, 9.06.2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9378> [accessed: 4.07.2023].



the war, mass displacement of residents, mismanagement, sanctions, COVID-19 and the financial crisis in Lebanon. Before February 22, 2022, nearly 90% of Syria's population lived in poverty, and two-thirds depended on humanitarian aid. In December 2021, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization indicated that 55% of the Syrian population is dependent on daily food supplies and that the Syrian population is at risk of famine due to severe drought and a steep decline in the country's wheat harvest. With the outbreak of war, fears arose that grain supplies from Ukraine and Russia, on which the lives of 1.35 million people in the northwestern depended, would be disrupted.<sup>62</sup>

In the political sphere, the war in Ukraine has raised concerns about the prospects of preserving the delicate balance of power in Syria. In particular, it was feared that Russia, due to new priorities in Europe and the confrontation with NATO, would be forced to limit its military presence and would cease to be a factor in stabilizing the Syrian regime. From the point of view of the West, such a situation threatened Iran's strengthening in Syria, which would be unfavourable primarily for Israel and Turkey. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine had no significant impact on the Russian official military posture in Syria. Russia mainly maintained aerospace defence forces and military police in Syria rather than substantial ground forces, which only numbered around 4,000. Russia has also not changed its strategy towards Syria as a military and political base in the Middle East, allowing it to influence this region. As a result, in the first months after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, tensions between Russia and the US and Israel did not escalate in Syria. Russia and Turkey continued to jointly patrol Syria's northern border based on the March 2020 cease-fire agreement. Only relations between Israel and Iran escalated in tension following the killing in early March of two officers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. There were also informal talks between Russia, Turkey, the US and European countries on the supply of humanitarian aid.<sup>63</sup>

The developments in Syria after 24 February 2022 indicate that Russia and Iran quickly adapted their policy in Syria to the new international situation. Russia must still change its strategic plans for Syria and the Middle East. On 16 July 2022, President Putin paid a visit to Iran, and on 19 July, in

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<sup>62</sup> S. Adar *et al.*, "The War in Ukraine and Its Impact on Syria", *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, no. 32, April 2022, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

Tehran, Putin met with President Erdogan and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, during which the coordination of activities in Syria was discussed.<sup>64</sup>

It could be assumed that Russia wanted to normalise the situation in Syria in connection with its military and political involvement in Ukraine. It was to be achieved by persuading Turkey to move closer to the al-Assad regime at the expense of Turkish support for the Syrian opposition. Such a solution was in Turkey's interest, as it allowed some refugees to return to Syria, whose maintenance was a heavy burden for the Turkish economy. The price of such a solution was to neutralise the Kurdish militia in Syria. Iran's role was to refrain from steps that could lead to an escalation of tension in Syria. Confirmation that such a scenario was the subject of talks in Tehran was the statement of Turkish Minister Cavusoglu on 23 August 2023 that Turkey had no preconditions for dialogue with Syria. It showed that Ankara had softened its stance towards the authorities in Damascus. It was confirmed by the statement of the government of President Erdogan about the need to start negotiations between the regime and the opposition in Syria, which coincided with the steps of the Arab states towards the normalisation of relations with Damascus.<sup>65</sup> These steps ended on 19 May 2023 with the decision of the Arab League to restore Syria's membership in this organisation.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

In 2022, the US continued the policy initiated during the 2003 Iraq War of presenting the region's countries with the choice: 'You are either with us or against us.' However, paternalism towards the Middle East has proved ineffective. It has created tensions between the US and its clients, who were trying to balance supporting Ukraine and maintaining good relations with Moscow. Moreover, the Western narrative about the causes of the war in Ukraine has deepened the Arab public's suspicions that the West is playing a double game: it accuses Russia of imperialist intentions while pursuing the same policy

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<sup>64</sup> France24 Staff, "Putin, Erdogan and Iran's Raisi pledge cooperation against 'terrorists' in Syria", *France24*, 19.07.2023, [www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20220719-putin-to-meet-turkey-s-erdogan-and-iranian-president-raisi-in-tehran](http://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20220719-putin-to-meet-turkey-s-erdogan-and-iranian-president-raisi-in-tehran) [accessed: 4.07.2023].

<sup>65</sup> M. Otte, "Syria, the Middle East and the war in Ukraine", *Egmont*, 6.09.2022, [www.egmontinstitute.be/syria-the-middle-east-and-the-war-in-ukraine](http://www.egmontinstitute.be/syria-the-middle-east-and-the-war-in-ukraine) [accessed: 4.07.2023].

<sup>66</sup> Aljazeera Staff, "Arab League brings Syria back into its fold after 12 years", *Aljazeera*, 7.05.2023, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/7/arab-league-agrees-to-bring-syria-back-into-its-fold](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/7/arab-league-agrees-to-bring-syria-back-into-its-fold) [accessed: 5.07.2023].

towards the Rest. Middle Eastern elites focused on national interests, the main driving force of Middle Eastern policy in the war in Ukraine.

Iran has moved even closer to Russia and has provided military assistance in the form of drones, hoping primarily for the transfer of military technology from Russia, which, under Western sanctions, would help Iran to modernize its military potential. Oil countries saw increased revenues from oil sales, and Arab states without oil were hit hard by the increase in energy and fuel prices in the aftermath of the war. Turkey and Israel tried to maintain a delicate balance in relations with Moscow and Kyiv to avoid losing their regional power positions. The policy's increasingly vital predetermined factor was grain shortages in the Middle East and dependence on agricultural imports from Ukraine and Russia. The impact of another predetermined factor of Middle East policy, the US policy in the region, was equally strong.

In each case, the driving force of the policy of the Middle East countries was state interests and the desire to maintain or strengthen their positions in the region. It was most evident in the case of Israel, for which state security considerations were paramount. If the war in Ukraine continues, Israel will be under increasing pressure from the US to take an unequivocal side with Ukraine. However, despite Tel Aviv's cautious approach and public remarks supporting Ukraine, it would be tough for Israel to join the countries imposing sanctions on Russia.

In the case of the oil states of the Persian Gulf, the war in Ukraine revealed the processes that have been taking place in this region in recent years. These are tendencies to increase independence from the US and strengthen its autonomy in foreign policy. A manifestation of this tendency was maintaining neutrality towards the Russian-Ukrainian war. It was confirmed by the visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Saudi Arabia on 18 May 2023 to participate in the Arab League summit. Arab countries declared their willingness to cooperate with Ukraine. However, talks with the Ukrainian president did not go beyond the formula for ending the war, protecting Muslims in Ukraine, and returning political prisoners from the Russia-annexed Crimea region.<sup>67</sup>

On the other hand, the countries of the region, in particular Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have long-term commitments with the United States, especially in the military sphere. In this situation, in order to strengthen autonomy, they try to diversify trade and security relations to obtain a higher level of independence. In practice, this means expanding economic and partly

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<sup>67</sup> MEE Staff, "Zelensky arrives in Saudi Arabia to attend Arab League summit", *Middle East Eye*, 19.05.2023, [www.middleeasteye.net/news/arab-league-zelensky-arrive-saudi-arabia](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/arab-league-zelensky-arrive-saudi-arabia) [accessed: 16.06.2023].

military cooperation with Russia and China, and normalizing relations with Iran. However, in the military issue, the view that Russia can replace the US as the guarantor of the security of these countries was debatable even before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, and the military operations after February 2022 confirmed the assumption that Russian weapons cannot compete with Western weapons.<sup>68</sup>

Although the countries of the Middle East did not become participants in the war in Ukraine, the ongoing war had a visible impact on the situation in the region. First of all, the war in Ukraine marks the closing of a chapter in the history of the Middle East known as ‘the global war on terror,’ which started the 9/11 terrorist attack against US hegemony. It was characterized by limited cooperation between the US, Russia and China in combating terrorism, and in particular the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Currently, the Middle East is entering a new period of global competition between global powers and the Middle East will become one of the arenas of this competition. The war in Ukraine, however, did not become a wild card that could overturn the entire pyramid of hierarchy and dependencies. Changes in strategic links are unlikely.

It is worth noting that the delicate game played by the Middle Eastern power elites in connection with Russia’s war in Ukraine showed how vital the Russian intervention in Syria in 2015 was. It had significant consequences for the global balance of power. Putin used Russia’s position in Syria as a bargaining chip in the negotiations on the Minsk Agreement. The presence of Russia in Syria was assessed in the Middle East as proof of the weakening position of the US in the region and the limited possibilities of the West in solving problems in the Middle East. The position of Israel and Turkey towards Ukraine proved that in 2022–2023 Russia was still playing the Syrian card.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

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## Abstract

This article refers to the impact the war in Ukraine had on the policy of the Middle East countries in the international and domestic aspects and what development of events can be expected in this connection. The Middle East countries reacted quickly to the war in Ukraine; most condemned Russia's aggression. However, none sided with Ukraine, and Iran firmly sided with Russia. How to explain it? Also, Arab public opinion did not accept the Western narrative about the causes of the war in Ukraine. Was it the result of Russian propaganda, or were there more profound reasons? Washington strongly pressured its Middle Eastern allies to move away from their policy of neutrality. Still, a year after the aggression, the Middle East not only continued to maintain relations with Russia but also expanded its

scope. Was it the result of the rejection of American paternalism or the greater autonomy of the region's countries in the conditions of multipolarity in international relations? The article tries to explain these questions within the methodology and terminology of constructing scenarios of future trends in international relations.

**Key words:** Russian-Ukrainian war, Middle East countries, policy, plot lines, driving forces



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# The geopolitical impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian war on Iran

## Introduction

Iran's domestic policy after the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA in 2018, the spread of COVID-19 and the sharp fall in the value of the national currency faced a heavy blow with Russia's attack on Ukraine. However, at the international level, Russia's attack on Ukraine was perceived by Iran as a form of revenge against the West and an insult to the pro-Western world order. In this regard, while Iran did not join the wave of international condemnation of Russia's attack, it did not officially support Russia's action by adopting a vague policy as well.<sup>1</sup> In the meeting with Putin in Tehran, Iran's Supreme Leader stated that

in the case of Ukraine, if you did not take the initiative, the other side would have caused the war with its own initiative. [...] If the road is open to NATO, it knows

<sup>1</sup> A. Azizi, "Iran-Russia Relations in the Aftermath of the Ukraine Crisis: Business as Usual", *Al Sharq Strategic Research*, 12.04.2022, <https://research.sharqforum.org/2022/04/12/iran-russia-relations> [accessed: 25.05.2023].

no boundaries, and if it were not stopped in Ukraine, it would have started the same war sometime later under the pretext of Crimea. [...] Of course, today, America and the West are weaker than before, and despite the tremendous effort and expense, the success of their policies in our region, including in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, has been dramatically reduced. [...] Americans are both a bully and cunning, and one of the factors of the collapse of the former Soviet Union was being deceived by American policies. Of course, Russia has maintained its independence during your time.<sup>2</sup>

### Securitization of Iran

From the perspective of the theory, securitization is not only a military action, but a verbal one that is formed intersubjectively by actors, in which a securitizing actor makes an issue or an actor appear as an existential threat, and therefore, it justifies urgent and exceptional measures to better deal with it. Therefore, securitization applies politics beyond the established rules and considers the issue as a special kind of politics or something beyond it. In this regard, securitization can be considered an extreme version of politicization.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, securitization is a strategic method to convince the audience to accept the claim that a certain issue or a threatening phenomenon is sufficiently threatening.<sup>4</sup> In this framework, some believe that Iran does not acknowledge the logic of political and security frameworks of the international system, and this has caused many difficulties for its neighbours, the region, and even Iran itself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> “The Americans in Syria should be withdrawn from the east of the Euphrates River”, *The Office of the Supreme Leader*, 19.07.2022, [www.leader.ir/en/content/25922/The-Leader-of-the-Islamic-Revolution-in-a-meeting-with-the-President-of-Russia](http://www.leader.ir/en/content/25922/The-Leader-of-the-Islamic-Revolution-in-a-meeting-with-the-President-of-Russia) [accessed: 27.05.2023].

<sup>3</sup> B. Buzan, J. de Wilde, O. Waever, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998, p. 23; H. Stritzel, “Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond”, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2007, pp. 357–383.

<sup>4</sup> C. Kaunert, I. Yakubov, ‘Securitization’, [in:] *The Routledge Handbook of Justice and Home Affairs Research* Routledge, eds. A.R. Servent, F. Trauner, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> F. Rostami, M. Naderi, “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (BARJAM), the Iranian Nuclear Dossier and the Non-Securitization Context of Securitization”, *Political and International Scientific and Research Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 27, 2016, pp. 151–175. (in Farsi)

Based on the identity of its political system, Iran has chosen revisionism as its main policy and welcomes any change in the structure of the international system. Because the rigid structure of the international system has not only not allowed Iran to pursue its macro targets in foreign policy, but following the securitization of the issue of Iran by powerful states and under the influence of numerous international sanctions, its foreign policy has been reduced to a defensive position. In this regard, government or pro-government media excitedly covered the news of the successes of the Russian army and fuelled the idea that Russia will soon erase Ukraine from the world map.<sup>6</sup>

### Impacts on Iran's regional relations

From a regional point of view, Iran's presence in the crises that Russia had previously cast a shadow on its equations is striking. Therefore, the weakening of Russia's role strengthened Iran's presence in the war in Syria and the Karabakh conflict in the Caucasus.

Regarding the war in Syria, the difficult war situation in Ukraine forced Russia to withdraw some Russian forces from Syria and send them to Ukraine. In this regard, a number of Russian air bases have been handed over to Hezbollah and Iranian forces and various groups supported by Iran, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, have taken dozens of positions and areas in Aleppo Province under their control after the start of the war in Ukraine and the reduction of Russia's influence in Syria. Iran has also taken control of large military depots, which it can use to strengthen its presence in Syria.<sup>7</sup>

Syrian authorities are worried that in the middle of the economic crisis caused by civil war, COVID-19, the uproar of Russia's war in Ukraine and the terrible earthquake of February 2023, the country will remain without support. Therefore, in an effort to ensure Iran's support, Syrian officials visited Iran repeatedly, which shows the strategic importance of Iran to the Syrian government. For Iran, which was waiting to breathe in Syria, this is an exceptional opportunity. Economically, considering that in the current international situation, Western countries do not show a desire to rebuild Syria, Iran along with China is Syria's first priority. This target was more evident in the unexpected visit of the

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<sup>6</sup> "Russia's Aim to Remove Ukraine from the Map", *Khabaronline*, 15.06.2022, [www.khabaronline.ir/news/1641734](http://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1641734) [accessed: 3.06.2023]. (in Farsi)

<sup>7</sup> W. Al Nofal, "Amid War in Ukraine, Russia Withdraws and Iran Expands in Syria", *Syria Direct*, 4.05.2022, <https://syriadirect.org/amid-war-in-ukraine-russia-withdraws-and-iran-expands-in-syria> [accessed: 7.06.2023].

Iranian president to Syria in May 2023. Iran's aim was to emphasize that in the absence of Russia's presence in Syria, it will never leave its ally alone. Therefore, Iran "is attempting to redraw the map of its strategic interests in Syria through a face-to-face meeting between the two countries' leaders in Tehran."<sup>8</sup>

The stabilization of the current Syrian government convinced the Arab leaders in the region to have a different and non-western approach to Syria amid international chaos after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In this manner, as a result of changing their priorities, powerful Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE adopted a positive approach to Syria in order to control Iran's influence in Syria and the Middle East.<sup>9</sup>

Simultaneously with the unexpected visit of the President of Iran to Syria in May 2023, the decision of the Arab League to readmit this country ended the 12-year suspension of Syria. This decision is a turning point in the re-legitimization of Bashar al-Assad's government. Arab leaders hope that Syria will help to solve regional security concerns and important challenges such as the huge wave of refugees, drug smuggling from Syria to Arab countries and containment of Iran.<sup>10</sup>

### The China-centered order in the Middle East

Until now, Iran has been trying to build balance by looking to the East policy, against the Western approach of its Arab neighbours, but this policy has failed.<sup>11</sup> This failure was due to the widespread mistrust of Iran among most of the Arab countries during the 2010s, and as a result of this, these countries became close to Israel, and Iran could not prevent the wave of Arab reconciliation with Israel. Although it is difficult for the Iranian authorities to accept this reality, they were forced to accept the new status quo with a realistic approach. Therefore, Iran is looking for its security and economic interests in

<sup>8</sup> M. Al-Sulami, "Iran sends important message with Assad visit", *Arab News*, May 16.05.2022, [www.arabnews.com/node/2083386](http://www.arabnews.com/node/2083386) [accessed: 12.06.2023].

<sup>9</sup> E. Loanes, "Why Arab Countries Are Welcoming Back Assad", *Foreign Policy*, 14.06.2023, [https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/14/why-arab-countries-are-welcoming-back-assad/?tpcc=recirc\\_latest062921](https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/14/why-arab-countries-are-welcoming-back-assad/?tpcc=recirc_latest062921) [accessed: 15.06.2023].

<sup>10</sup> S. Heydemann, "Syria's Normalization Signals A New Middle Eastern Order", *Brookings Institution*, 10.05.2023, [www.brookings.edu/articles/syrias-normalization-signals-a-new-middle-eastern-order](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/syrias-normalization-signals-a-new-middle-eastern-order) [accessed: 16.06.2023].

<sup>11</sup> S. Shahsavari, "The Beginning of the Series of Normalization of Relations Between Iran and Saudi Arabia", *Etemad Online*, 16.03.2023, [www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D9%84-17/602618-](http://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D9%84-17/602618-) [accessed: 5.06.2023]. (in Farsi)

the regional peace environment through the mediation of China, a policy that China is the founder of, and regional actors are connected to each other in line with China's de-escalation strategy in the world. In addition, Russia, which is severely isolated after the invasion of Ukraine, cannot meet Iran's expectations of a supporting superpower in the post-war environment. Therefore, Iran has no choice but regional initiatives.

According to the Copenhagen school, desecuritization is the optimal option in the long run because when the interests of the actor require it, the successful policy is the one that can bring issues out of the security space and into the political space.<sup>12</sup> In the atmosphere of mistrust of Western security approaches, the Arab governments also gave a green light to Iran after the beginning of diplomatic relations with Israel, and in the absence of the US and Russian active role, they reconciled with Iran in a historic move with the Chinese mediation. In this regard, in March 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran signed an agreement in Beijing to resume bilateral relations and reopen embassies. This agreement aims to resolve regional conflicts such as the war in Syria and Yemen and the instability in Iraq and Lebanon. Although both actors are highly suspicious of each other, their long-term cooperation in regional security will definitely lead to consolidating regional stability. After this agreement, the conflicts between the Yemenis and the Saudi army stopped. Also, Saudi Arabia invited the Syrian president to participate in the meeting of the Arab League in Jeddah, and Bashar al-Assad made a historic trip to Jeddah in May 2023 which is a historical development in regional stability.

Prior to the normalization of Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran's relations with the UAE improved with the visit of UAE officials to Tehran.<sup>13</sup> But strong steps were not taken and the re-establishment of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia opened the gate of the Arab world to Iran, and less than a week later, Ali Shamkhani, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, visited the United Arab Emirates.<sup>14</sup> Despite the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel, Iranian officials have stopped blaming the UAE and have focused on improving mutual relations.

Following the wave of normalizing Iran's relations with the Arabs and desecuritisation of it, Iran's relations with Bahrain also entered the operational

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<sup>12</sup> B. Buzan, J. de Wilde, O. Waever, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> "A New Page in the Political Relations between Iran and the UAE after 7 Years Opens", *ISNA*, 17.07.2022, [www.isna.ir/news/1401042517112](http://www.isna.ir/news/1401042517112) [accessed: 12.06.2023]. (in Farsi)

<sup>14</sup> "Shamkhani's Visit to the UAE is a Continuation of the Iran and Saudi Arabia Agreement", *Mehr News*, 18.03.2023, [www.mehrnews.com/news/5734134](http://www.mehrnews.com/news/5734134) [accessed: 24.06.2023]. (in Farsi)

phase, and only three days after the signing of the Iran and Saudi Arabia deal, on March 13, 2023, the Speaker of the Bahraini Parliament met with the Iranian delegation, attending at the World Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) in Manama. On the same day, Nasser Kanani, the Spokesman of the Ministry Foreign Affairs of Iran, expressed hope for the improvement of relations with Bahrain after the reconciliation with Saudi Arabia.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, the circle of renewing Iran's relations with Arab countries extended to Egypt. Thus, with the mediation of Oman and Iraq, talks between Egypt and Iran began in earnest, and according to an Iranian official, an agreement has been reached between Tehran and Cairo to re-establish diplomatic relations and reopen the embassies of the two countries.<sup>16</sup> The establishment of Tehran-Cairo relations after 40 years will be a heresy in the security system of the Middle East, which will have a great impact on regional politics, especially on the issue of Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Palestine.

Also, Iran's relations with Morocco, which have been severed since 2018 following the Moroccan government's accusations against Iran for interfering in the country's domestic affairs, is an issue that Iran is trying to resolve. In this regard, Iran's foreign minister stated in June 2023 that Iran is ready to establish relations with Morocco. Considering the normalization of Morocco's relations with Israel, it seems that the Moroccan government suspects Iran of working against Israel in Morocco.

Iran's relations with the Arabs are improving with the positive approach of all parties, but there are territorial disputes between the parties. Recently, Russia and China have sided with the UAE and supported the UAE's territorial claims over three Iranian islands, which is an important geopolitical shift in the region.<sup>17</sup> Russia and China supported the anti-Iranian statement for the first time in the history of Iran's relations with the two countries due to the fact that, by supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Iran was in the weakest international position and as a result, subjected to securitization by the big powers. Therefore, in such a difficult situation where Iran has lost its international prestige and foreign policy has faced an impasse,<sup>18</sup> it has little choice against Russia and China.

<sup>15</sup> "Behind-the-scenes consultations between Iran and Bahrain", *Rouydad* 24, 18.03.2023, [www.rouydad24.ir/fa/news/333065](http://www.rouydad24.ir/fa/news/333065) [accessed: 22.06.2023]. (in Farsi)

<sup>16</sup> "Fluctuations in Reviving Relations between Egypt and Iran", *Abna* 24, 20.06.2023, <https://fa.abna24.com/story/1374105> [accessed: 28.06.2023]. (in Farsi)

<sup>17</sup> "The Russians, Like the Chinese, Supported the Arab Countries of the Persian Gulf!", *Bahar News*, 11.07.2023, [www.baharnews.ir/news/415377](http://www.baharnews.ir/news/415377) [accessed: 12.07.2023]. (in Farsi)

<sup>18</sup> "Russia's Abuse of Iran's Foreign Policy Impasse", *Fararu*, 12.07.2023, <https://fararu.com/fa/news/648998> [accessed: 13.07.2023]. (in Farsi)



## Securitization of Caucasus by Iran

Contrary to the positive trend of desecuritization of Arab countries by Iran, Iran securitized sharply its foreign policy towards the Caucasus. Following the accumulation of the economic crisis caused by the war in Ukraine and its integration with social pressures, Iran's domestic politics faced an unprecedented wave of demonstrations in September 2022 in protest against the killing of a girl due to an inappropriate government's standard hijab. In such conjuncture, extensive propaganda was carried out about numerous threats from the Republic of Azerbaijan, including its intention to occupy Armenian lands, the disconnection of Iran with Armenia, the Black Sea and Europe, the presence of Israel and ISIS terrorists on the border of Iran with Azerbaijan. Moreover, only two weeks after the protests started, the Iranian armed forces conducted an unprecedented military exercise in which the Iranian forces practised crossing the Aras River by building a bridge.<sup>19</sup> A similar exercise was carried out after the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, which was met with the protest of Azerbaijan. These drills were conducted while Iran had not held any drills during the 30-year occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenia, and took place only after the status quo was changed.

Iran's perception was that since Russia was weakened in the Ukraine war, an opportunity has been provided for Iran to enter the equation of the Caucasus by intimidating its rivals. As a result, Iran intended to change the status quo in the region, which was stabilized in favour of Russia and Türkiye after the Second Karabakh War, to its advantage. Consequently, the relations between the two sides worsened and with the terrorist incident in the Azerbaijani Embassy in Tehran, the two countries came close to breaking diplomatic relations and even having serious confrontations.<sup>20</sup> But with the restraint of the parties, their friction did not go beyond the media level.

Apparently, Russia's absence or its low influence in Caucasus politics due to the war in Ukraine has encouraged the Iranian authorities to take bolder measures. Needless to say, for Russia, Iran's influence in the Caucasus geopolitics is more pleasant than Türkiye's powerful presence, especially after the heavy defeat of Armenia. Therefore, every step by Iran was met with the reaction of Azerbaijan, and the parties pushed the issue to the point of 'crisis'

<sup>19</sup> "Rereading the 'IRGC Ground Forces' Iqtidar Drills", *Fars News*, 25.03.2023, [www.farsnews.ir/news/14020105000442](http://www.farsnews.ir/news/14020105000442) [accessed: 20.06.2023]. (in Farsi)

<sup>20</sup> M. Salem, A. Goodwin, "Gun Attack on Azerbaijan Embassy in Tehran Kills Security Chief", *CNN*, 27.01.2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/27/middleeast/iran-azerbaijan-embassy-attack-tehran-intl/index.html> [accessed: 17.06.2023].

in the Caucasus for a while. On a closer look, it is obvious that the existence of a problem or crisis in foreign policy that can divert the attention of the public opinion of the two countries was necessary. In other words, the economic and social crisis in two countries, especially Iran, necessitated any kind of securitization of foreign policy issues to divert public opinion. Iran, which had engaged in extensive desecuritisation with its southern neighbours, by making the Caucasus issue more securitized, has made it possible to enjoy it.

### Iran's global relations

In addition to regional issues, following the outbreak of Russia's war in Ukraine, Iran faced new opportunities and threats at the global level. The most important of these threats was Iran's nuclear program, which, with the outbreak of war in Russia, the relevant negotiations faced Russian obstructions. While the negotiations between Iran and the US to revive the JCPOA had reached its final stages, Russia, set a new condition for its signing. The Russian Foreign Minister said in a statement that Moscow wants a written guarantee from the US that the sanctions imposed against the Kremlin will not affect its trade with Iran.<sup>21</sup>

Following the rejection of this request by the US and other member powers of the UN Security Council, the aforementioned negotiations were closed and Iran could not complete the process of desecuritising its nuclear file. The success of these negotiations seems to depend a lot on the outcome of the war in Ukraine. Moreover, in the current polarized international environment, Russia is reluctant to lose Iran by signing the deal, which may open Iran's doors to the West. Therefore, from Iran's perspective, the first global result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the damage to negotiations and the continuation of severe international sanctions against Iran.

The second crisis Iran faced was Russia's use of Iranian drones in the attack against Ukraine. In this regard, if the media reports about sending weapons from Iran to Russia are true, it can be argued that Iran, which is looking to buy military aircraft from Russia, has finally been able to make Russia depend on it, at least in this case. According to the news published in the media, it seems that the weapons sent to Russia had an acceptable function for the Russians. Iranian officials have repeatedly denied sending weapons to Russia, especially suicide drones until Iran's foreign minister admitted that Iran had

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<sup>21</sup> "Russia Demands US Guarantees Sanctions Will Not Harm Moscow-Tehran Ties – Lavrov", *TASS*, 5.03.2022, <https://tass.com/world/1417379> [accessed: 17.06.2023].

sold drones to Russia months before the war. He declared that “if it is proven to us that Russia used an Iranian drone in the war against Ukraine, we will not be indifferent to it.”<sup>22</sup>

In response to the back-breaking pressures of the West, Iran sought membership in Eastern organizations in order to gain international organizational support. In this regard, following huge efforts, in September 2022, Iran signed the memorandum of understanding for membership in the organization with the support of Russia and China and based on this, Iran expects to solve its economic problems with the help of the organization. However, it seems that such an intention will not be possible without signing the nuclear agreement and integrating Iran into the global economic system, and this is why the authorities are seeking to revive the JCPOA.

## Conclusion

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has had wide consequences on the domestic, regional and international levels of Iran’s policy. At the domestic level, Iran’s economy, which had already been severely affected by the sanctions over the nuclear program and the COVID-19 crisis, faced a severe crisis of rising prices and rising inflation rates, which 7 months after the beginning of the war, it caused unprecedented demonstrations in most cities. Due to the special status of Iran in world politics and the foreign support for these demonstrations, the repression of protests took months. What is certain is that Iranian society is no longer the same as it was before the protests because the fear and ugliness of protest have disappeared as a result of the accumulation of economic and social problems. Therefore, at the domestic level, Iran has been directly affected by Russia’s war in Ukraine.

At the regional level, Iran has tried to reduce the security dimension of the Arab countries with the opportunities it has gained and has taken a conciliatory approach to them, taking advantage of the opportunity to improve its geopolitical influence. In this manner, Iran has launched a wave of normalization of relations with Arab countries, which has had positive results. However, Iran has also faced challenges. The most important challenge for Iran is the desire of Arab countries towards Russia and China and the reduction of Iran’s importance to these two countries. Also, Turkey, which is considered

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<sup>22</sup> “Amir Abdollahian After Denial: We Gave a Small Number of Drones to Russia!”, *Aftab News*, 5.11.2022, <https://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/805958> [accessed: 2.07.2023]. (in Farsi).

Iran's strategic rival, by adopting a policy of neutrality while actively opposing Russia's aggression, has practically increased its geopolitical weight and established itself as a superior power in global crises. Turkey's mediation in this crisis has been met with international appreciation while Iran has not been able to even put down its discourse about not selling arms to Russia, and therefore the direct impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on Iran is the loss of international prestige. This is despite the fact that Russia has carried out destructive measures against Iran when its interests were in conflict with the support of Iran.

The distance of Iran's foreign policy from the logic ruling the equations of international relations has continuously exposed it to securitization, and the government's efforts to convince the main actors of the international system have not been very successful. In this way, by accumulating problems in foreign policy, Iran spends its energy on defending its policy, which has not had tangible results. It will take a long time for Iran to repair its damaged public image.

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## Abstract

Russia's attack on Ukraine has had huge and destructive consequences for Iran. The war began when the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the Western countries for the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) were in a promising state and the parties were in the final stages. This paper seeks to examine the effects of this war on Iran's foreign policy by considering securitization and desecuritization. Considering this, the paper concludes that Iran has faced the direct consequences of the war in its

domestic and foreign policies. At the foreign policy level, Iran has faced a decrease in international prestige due to its proximity to Russia, the use Iranian drones by Russia on the battlefield and the 'death' of the JCPOA. As the West securitized the issue of Iran, Iranian authorities desecuritized Iran's relations with Arab countries, while securitized relations with the Caucasus.

**Key words:** Iran, Ukraine crisis, securitization, Russia, Middle East



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# **Realism, idealism or opportunism? Iran's reason of state in foreign policy towards Russia**

## **Introduction**

Since the end of the Cold War, the Islamic Republic of Iran has significantly increased its political holdings in the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. They did it mostly by using political changes caused by the uprising in the 1990s in quasi-anarchic turmoil after the collapse of the USSR. On the other hand, the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought with it to the Middle East *inter alia* the US intervention in Afghanistan, the war in Lebanon, the ruin of Iraq, the Arab Spring, political changes in Turkey, the emergence of ISIS/DAESH and the return of Russia as an active element of the political puzzle in the region. Above events resulting from long-term socio-political processes also contributed to a significant strengthening of Iran's position. For many years, Tehran patiently rebuilt its tarnished revolution, war with Iraq and sanctions limited economy. It was equally meticulous about expanding its influence in the region, at the expense of his main rivals. Thanks to extremely favourable political circumstances, in particular the disintegration of Iraq and Afghanistan and the Arab Spring, Iran

‘emerged’ from its mountain stronghold and re-emerged as a regional power. Despite the initial competition for influence in the post-Soviet states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan), in the face of Russia’s obvious advantage at the time and the need to focus on the main threat that Iran has considered the US to be since 1979, the Islamic republic improved relations with Russia and strengthened the message, which positioned Iran as a revisionist force actively seeking to change the US-created post-colonial and post-imperial balance of power at the regional level.<sup>1</sup>

This paper’s aim is not to analyze the behavior of Iran toward Russia in details. Instead it seeks to indicate the main sources and currents that mold the general pattern of Iran’s foreign policy and propose the explanation of Iran’s actions in regard to Russia. The paper shortly analyses, political dualities like pragmatism vs. idealism, decision making through the institutions of the revolution vs. parliamentary democracy, Iran’s desire for recognition as a regional power vs. forward defensive approach and last but not least an accurate terminology to use in a broader debate about Iranian policy.

### ***Raison d’etat* or national interest? Definitions, concepts, ambiguities related to the Iranian political system**

At the beginning it is worth mentioning why the term the ‘reason of state’ (or more widely known *raison d’etat*) usage in relation to the subject is more accurate than the more common ‘national interest.’ This is important for a proper understanding of the ontological foundations on which Iran’s policy towards Russia is based. Arkady Rzegocki criticizes the traditional concept of *raison d’etat*, which boils down to the praise of absolute power and the supremacy of the interest of the state over the interests of citizens, and points to the anachronism of such a concept. He distinguishes two concepts of *raison d’etat*: traditional (connected with complex relations between the sacred and the profane) and modern (where the state is superior to citizens).<sup>2</sup> Klaudia Kałużna and Remigiusz Rosicki, agree with the thesis about the anachronism of the primacy of the state (as an *essential entity* per se, being more important than the welfare of citizens), treat the

<sup>1</sup> As the Par. 3:16 of the Iranian Constitution defines “[...] framing the foreign policy of the country on the basis of Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to the freedom fighters of the world.” Par. 154 expresses it equally explicitly. Full text of the English translation of the constitution at: “Constitution of Iran”, [www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ir00000\\_.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ir00000_.html) [accessed: 3.07.2023].

<sup>2</sup> A. Rzegocki, *Racja stanu a polska tradycja myślenia o polityce*, Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2008, pp. 15–18.



national interest as a category related to the community of citizens, and not to the state as a political entity.<sup>3</sup>

However, referring to the nation as a relatively unified community is problematic from the point of view of the theory of international relations. As Kałużna and Rosicki note, one can abstractly assume a situation where the nation will represent other interests that may be contrary to political actions. An example of this is the opposition of American society to participate in the Vietnam war. The concept of interest presented in this way should be extended with elements of social influence, as well as the possibility of shaping the interest in the consciousness of the nation, not only in terms of the actions taken by political decision-makers. Such an extension of the concept of interest would go beyond the traditional definition of the national interest as the interest of the state.<sup>4</sup> George Modelski, on the other hand, tries not to use the concept of national interest at all, because it is not, in his opinion, legible. According to him, this category would suggest the existence of a coherent national community with a common interest, which seems impossible due to the multiplicity of interests put forward by various groups within the state and society.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of Iran, this is particularly evident because, despite the roots of the state embedded in the mass revolutionary movement, the current political system and the practical implementation of its paradigms, means that the vital needs and demands of large numbers of Iranians are marginalized or even considered harmful from the point of view of the priorities set by the *rahbar*.<sup>6</sup> Iranian society is extremely atomized in its views. In its spectrum we will find both radical apologists of the Islamic republic ready to die (and kill) at the

<sup>3</sup> K. Kałużna, R. Rosicki, "O interesie narodowym i racji stanu – rozważania teoretyczne", *Przegląd Politologiczny*, vol. 1, 2013, p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> G. Modelski, *A Theory of Foreign Policy*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1962, pp. 70–72.

<sup>6</sup> This is evidenced by, for example, the fuel protests, which were a reaction to the increase of fuel prices without a political charge, the less intense but still important farmers' protests in Isfahan, and the protests after the death of Mahsa Amini, carrying a very large political and emotional charge. The issue of political marginalization of some elites and their current voters is also very important. See more at M. Krzyżanowski, "Iranian Parliament and its Political Role after the Recent Elections", *Mena Monitor*, 22.02.2022, [www.warsawinstitute.org/iranian-parliament-political-role-recent-elections](http://www.warsawinstitute.org/iranian-parliament-political-role-recent-elections) [accessed: 3.07.2023]; M. Tomczak, "Czy protestujący obalą reżim w Iranie?", *Oko.press*, 24.10.2022, [www.oko.press/czy-protestujacy-obala-rezim-w-iranie-](http://www.oko.press/czy-protestujacy-obala-rezim-w-iranie-) [accessed: 3.07.2023]; M. Krzyżanowski, "Czy Iran wróci do rewolucyjnych korzeni", *Dział Zagraniczny*, 8.12.2022, <https://dzialzagraniczny.pl/2022/12/czy-iran-wroci-do-rewolucyjnych-korzeni> [accessed: 3.07.2023].

behest of the *rahbar*, as well as people who morbidly fight the ruling system. The number of citizens who do not identify themselves with their state and actively contest it is steadily growing. Therefore, from the point of view of policy, the Iranian nation cannot be treated as one, egalitarian collectivity, and thus the category of 'national interest' is of little use, especially considering Iranian foreign policy. This is an otherwise interesting composition with Weber's behavioral-instrumental definition of power, mentioned by Kałużna and Rosicki. The first part of this definition assumes that the relationship of power is of a conflict nature, because it is based on the imposition of one's own interest by the holder of power, which does not always have to be the same as the interest of the people affected by it. The second element of this definition implies that the state has legally sanctioned centers of violence that enable the achievement of its goals.<sup>7</sup> This is very relevant in the case of Iran, as evidenced, for example, by the authorities' approach to the recent protests after the death of Mahsa Amini (September 2022–March 2023) and their brutal pacification.

In the case of Iran, the analysis of its policy is additionally complicated, because unique features of the Iranian political system defies simple categorization. First of all, the Iranian state claims to own religious sanction. The Islamic republic is not only a form of government, but also a system that is also a tool for establishing the Islamic government (*hokumat-e eslami*). The most important documents defining the framework of the system explicitly indicate the supremacy of religion over the good of citizens. The official doctrine which is the basis of Iran's current system, i.e. *velayat-e faqih*, assumes that the country is headed by a supreme leader (*rahbar-e moazzam-e enqelab-e islami*), which can only be a Muslim cleric, because only such a person is qualified to lead the country on the patch of sharia.<sup>8</sup> This leads to interesting paradoxes. Namely, the *rahbar* (as a religious authority, not a political one in the strict sense) may, in extreme situations, temporarily suspend religious duties, as long as it would serve the good of the state (and thus the religion promoted by it) in the long run. Similarly, the *rahbar* may, by personal decree, suspend existing laws, including the constitution.<sup>9</sup> The grounds for the post-revolutionary state of Iran were clearly laid out by ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, stating that "the government (state) which is a part of the absolute vice-regency of the Prophet of God is one of

<sup>7</sup> K. Kałużna, R. Rosicki, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Such leadership will prevent any deviation by the various organs of State from their essential Islamic duties. "Constitution of Iran", *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> H. Mavani, "Khomeini's Concept of Governance of the Jurisconsult (*Wilayat al-Faqih*) Revisited", *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 67, no. 2, Spring 2013, pp. 214–215.

the primary injunctions (*akhhkam-e avvaliye*) of Islam and has priority over all other secondary injunctions, even prayers, fasting and Hajj.”<sup>10</sup>

During the post-Khomeini era in Iran, *rahbar* has initially played a crucial role as a balancing force, adapting to the shifting dynamics of both domestic and foreign conditions. Throughout this period, there has been a gradual inclination towards the more radical factions within Iran. The supreme leader has skilfully managed to maintain a balance among Iran’s diverse political groups, depending on the prevailing circumstances gaining more authority at the same time. For instance, when the United States encroached upon Iran’s borders in 2001 and 2003 ayatollah Ali Khamenei adopted a relatively appeasement oriented approach. He aligned himself with the pragmatists and, in October 2003, agreed to sign the additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), which included provisions for a comprehensive inspection regime. This decision was made despite calls from the radicals to reject the NPT. Furthermore, in November 2004, Khamenei consented to postpone the uranium-enrichment projects and abandon the completion of the nuclear fuel cycle. It was only in August 2005, following President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s declaration of election victory, that Khamenei reversed his position and supported Ahmadinejad’s policy of reactivating Iran’s uranium enrichment program. This shift demonstrated a change in stance by the Supreme Leader, aligning with the more assertive and radical approach advocated by Ahmadinejad. Throughout these instances ayatollah Khamenei strategically balanced the interests and demands of various political factions within Iran, adapting his position based on the prevailing circumstances and the specific domestic and foreign policy challenges faced by the country.<sup>11</sup> However, over time, the *rahbar* shifted the center of gravity towards the radicals and allowed the IRGC to gain unprecedented importance in the country’s politics and economy. The final stimulus that led to the marginalization of centrists and reformists turned out to be the breaking of the JCPOA by Donald Trump in 2018. This event entailed a number of changes in Iran’s internal and external policy, including *rahbar*’s decisions about the so-called pivot to the East.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> M. Moslem, “Ayatollah Khomeini’s role in the rationalization of the Islamic government”, *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 8, no. 14, 1999, p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> I. Salamey, Z. Othman, “Shia Revival and *Welayat Al-Faqih* in the Making of Iranian”, *Foreign Policy, Politics, Religion & Ideology*, vol. 12, no. 2, June 2011, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> See more at S.H. Mousavian, “Iran’s New Doctrine: Pivot to the East”, *The Diplomat*, 5.10.2020, [www.thediplomat.com/2020/10/irans-new-doctrine-pivot-to-the-east](http://www.thediplomat.com/2020/10/irans-new-doctrine-pivot-to-the-east) [accessed: 20.04.2023] and S. Jafari, “Trump Has Pushed Iran Into China’s Arms”, *Foreign Policy*, 8.08.2020, [www.foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/08/trump-has-pushed-iran-into-chinas-arms](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/08/trump-has-pushed-iran-into-chinas-arms) [accessed: 20.04.2023].

This is all the more important from the point of view of considerations on the question of whether Iranian foreign policy is guided by the reason of state based on realism or is it an idealistic one? The political idealism of Iran is visible primarily in the political foundations of the republic, which was created as a result of a grassroots revolutionary uprising. In practice, however, *rahbars* were guided by realism and sacrificed ideology in the name of the interests of the state as it was seen in the case of events of the Arab Spring in Bahrain. The policy of the Islamic Republic towards Shiite communities in Bahrain has proven to be multi-faceted and complex, which stands in contrast to its clear and explicit paradigm of supporting the revolution and the ‘Islamic awakening,’ which significantly damaged its credibility. In case of Syria Iranian rhetoric quickly excluded the Syrian issue from the realm of revolution, which it had previously labelled as part of the Islamic Awakening as Arab Spring was mainly called in Iranian medias. The Iranian narrative described the situation in Syria in terms similar to those used against internal protests in Iran after the 2009 presidential election, such as ‘sedation,’ ‘treason’ and ‘foreign conspiracies.’<sup>13</sup> In this significant case religious idealism lost to pragmatism.

This turn of events has an extensive theological background. Among the Shia clerics, there are many views on both the religious and political competence of the *rahbar* and the source of his power. Opinion ranges from seeing him as a leader chosen by the clergy in recognition of his theological competence, to seeing him as the regent and representative of the Hidden Imam on whose behalf he exercises power on earth. This power, despite some signs of democracy, is not based on the will of the people and is not dependent on it. In the most extreme version of this interpretation, *rahbar* has sole power to govern, and concepts such as democracy and politics are considered irrelevant in view of his divine mandate.<sup>14</sup> The Iranian theological currents nowadays are significantly increasing the number of supporters of the thesis of the mystical legitimacy of the *rahbar*’s power, and he himself has managed to marginalize all other centers of power, effectively becoming an autocrat. His theological vision became the most important determinant of Iran’s policy goals. Therefore is justified to say that in case of Iran the *raison d’état* is superior to the national interest (understood as the good of the community), because

<sup>13</sup> See details at L.J. Cerioli, “Roles and International Behaviour: Saudi–Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain’s and Yemen’s Arab Spring”, *Contexto Internacional*, no. 40(2), 2018, p. 299 and S. Chubin, “Iran and the Arab Spring: Ascendancy Frustrated”, *GRC Gulf Papers*, no. 9, 2012, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> A. Nader, D. Thaler, S.D. Bohandy, *The Next Supreme Leader*, Santa Monica: RAND, 2011, p. 20.

the state, or more precisely, state power, is an instrument for the implementation of God's plan. This concept focuses on the traditional view of the national interest as the interest of the state, which in turn is dictated by the need to fulfil God's will.

Interestingly, in the context of deliberations on the nature of politics and the possible validity of theses proclaimed by the supporters of realism in international relations, according to Charles Beard, the concept of *raison d'état* was replaced by the concept of national interest along with the suppression of theological norms from the public space in the West and secularization. This phenomenon resulted from the competition between the 'old order' represented by the interests of the dynasty and the 'new economic force' represented by the bourgeoisie. The victory of the bourgeoisie made economic priorities the main factor shaping the perception of the national interest of states.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Iran, we are dealing with a post-revolutionary return of theology to the political scene, with the growing importance of the alliance between the mosque and the bazaar and the subsequent reliance of the authorities on the IRGC military-industrial conglomerate.

Among the group of scholars who questioned the existence of the category of one universal national interest and denied its definition was Raymond Aron. Instead of the overriding national interest, Aron formulated two groups of features of international relations: eternal and historical. An autonomous political entity, i.e. the state, thanks to its power and potential, strives to achieve the basic eternal goal, which is survival, i.e. its own security in an antagonized international environment. Unlike Henry Morgenthau, however, Aron did not believe that the strength of a given political unit was autonomously equivalent to its security.<sup>16</sup> An example is the Third Reich under the rule of Adolf Hitler, who, using the strength and potential of the German state, irrationally led to the collapse and almost destruction of Germany. Iran, contrary to appearances, behaves rationally and fulfils the goals formulated by Khomeini. Russia is far less of a threat to Iran than the US.

As rightly noted by Imad Salamey and Zanoobia Othman, it is crucial to acknowledge that the foundation of the regime is rooted in religion. Therefore, the exclusion of "ideologism" from the scope of analysis cannot be completely disregarded. Khomeini introduced a Shia tradition of religious and political emulation, which required a shift from individual choice and preference

<sup>15</sup> R. Wordliczek, *Regionalny wymiar interesu narodowego Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2019, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> R. Aron, *Pokój i wojna między narodami*, trans. A. Mielczarek, Warszawa: Centrum im. A. Smitha, 1994, p. 100; R. Wordliczek, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–72.

to an institutionalized Vatican-like 'Popeism' (which *velayat-e faqih* resembles in most political aspects). In his work 'Islamic Government,' Khomeini emphasized that the faqih's knowledge of Islamic law and justice is a prerequisite for assuming *velaya* (leadership) and subsequently establishing a just and universal Islamic government, which constitutes the core purpose of the existence of the Islamic Republic.<sup>17</sup> Comparing two countries of Islamic identity, Saudi Arabia and Iran, Przemysław Osiewicz stated that although ideology holds significant influence in both countries, it should not be assumed that their leaders make decisions solely based on ideological beliefs. Rational political calculations also come into play. In both Iran and Saudi Arabia, the ultimate authority lies with the current Supreme Leader and the Saudi King, respectively, when it comes to crucial political issues. However, it is important to note that the Iranian system is unique in that it assumes *rahbar* serves as both a political leader and the spiritual guide of the nation, acting on behalf of the hidden Twelfth Imam. Consequently, the supreme leader's political position carries a metaphysical aspect in addition to its practical implications.<sup>18</sup>

In connection with the above, it can be concluded that Iranian policy, including foreign policy, is based on an idealistic (even messianic) foundation, and idealism co-shapes the paradigms of the Iranian *raison d'état*. Is idealism the dominant factor? As Rafał Wordliczek noticed, according to realists, the current realities of the international order and the ability of individual states to adapt to these realities are crucial for their survival in an anarchic political system. Conflicts between participants in international relations are a natural element of the global system, and peace is only a temporary ceasefire between them. Hence, the period of peace is used to accumulate resources and increase strategic potential in the event of a conflict that could threaten the key paradigm of *raison d'état*, i.e. the physical survival of the state.<sup>19</sup> Iran, due to the constant threat from the US and Israel (leaving aside at this point how much this threat is caused by Iran's aggressive attitude on the international arena and the sense of threat caused by the Iranian nuclear program and how much by the hostile attitude of the US) fits perfectly into this canon of thinking. However, instead of references to the famous Machiavellian advice to the prince, ayatollah Khomeini is quoted, in whose words one can find the foundations of defensive realism and preventive defence.

<sup>17</sup> I. Salamey, Z. Othman, *op. cit.*, p. 201, more at *Velayat-e Faqih*.

<sup>18</sup> P. Osiewicz, "Ideological Determinants of the Current Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in the Middle East", *Przegląd Polityczny*, nr 2, 2016, p. 122.

<sup>19</sup> R. Wordliczek, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

The superpowers are intent on opposing Islam at present. The other puppet regimes would do likewise. [...] Is it Iran that threatens them or is it Islam? If they call on the Arabs to unite, it is a call to unity against Islam. They consider Islam to be against their interests. [...] We have no recourse but to mobilize all of the faithful forces of the Islamic Revolution, and with the mobilization of forces in every region, we must strike fear into the hearts of our enemies so that the idea of invasion and the destruction of our Islamic Revolution will exit from their minds. If our revolution does not have an internationalistic and aggressive worldview the enemies of Islam will once again enslave us culturally and politically.<sup>20</sup>

Despite those grim predictions the actions of the main enemy of the revolution were, by the long term, beneficial for Iran's position in the region as it took the opportunity created by US military endeavours. The 'war on terror' (including invasion of Afghanistan and more importantly – Iraq) has had significant implications for Iran's foreign policy agenda. It not only eliminated key obstacles to Iran's expansionist goals but also provided a rational pretext rooted in the ideological Shia revival to justify those objectives. A closer examination of Iranian strategy in Middle Eastern regional hotspots reveals a shift towards a more offensive realist foreign policy. The presence of an anarchic international system and pervasive mistrust among states often necessitate a rational survival strategy based on offensive militarism. The rise of a strong transnational Shia ideological orientation, inspired by the Supreme Leader, complements the principles of offensive realism. Offensive realism acknowledges that states may pursue goals beyond security, such as economic prosperity and the promotion of specific ideologies like pan-Islamic unity, to enhance their power. Iranian radicals have capitalized on this, guided by the Supreme Leader, to extend Iran's influence beyond its borders. While Iran's state-centric pragmatism may seek international normalization and state-building, ambitious radical visions and a desire for leadership beyond mere survival often hinder these efforts. That's the reason why any analysis of Iranian foreign policy must consider the regional focus on Shia revival and its connection to the concept of *velayat-e faqih*. Despite some predictions suggesting a shift towards a pragmatic post-revolutionary state foreign policy, Iran appears to be experiencing a 'double movement.' On one hand, as the regime matures, pragmatic considerations become increasingly important for the state's survival. This may involve economic cooperation with other states to ensure domestic growth or regional collaboration to address

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<sup>20</sup> A. Ostovar, "Sectarian Dilemmas in Iranian Foreign Policy: When Strategy and Identity Politics Collide", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 30.11.2018, [www.carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/30/sectarian-dilemmas-in-iranian-foreign-policy-when-strategy-and-identity-politics-collide-pub-66288](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/30/sectarian-dilemmas-in-iranian-foreign-policy-when-strategy-and-identity-politics-collide-pub-66288) [accessed: 15.05.2023].

common security threats. Such considerations prioritize practical interests over ideological preferences, as evident in Iran's cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq. On the other hand, ideological considerations complement political calculations, especially when the surrounding environment fuels domestic divisions and awakens long-standing suspicions. In such circumstances, the regime reverts to revolutionary strategies and rhetoric, transcending the state's immediate domestic interests.<sup>21</sup>

As indicated by Eskander Sadeghi-Borujerdi, some researchers consider Iranian foreign policy as a manifestation of the application of the assumptions of offensive realism and the concept of Aron relating to the existence of 'eternal' interests. The core element that remains constant and unchanging in Iran's case is its 'imperial ambition' that serves as a driving force behind its foreign policy. This ambition is coupled with a religious worldview that rejects the principles of the traditional international order. However, the argument presented suggests that instead of being exclusively aggressive and sectarian, the Islamic Republic should be perceived as a 'regional middle power.' Its foreign policy has predominantly been shaped by the systemic insecurity within a regional system influenced by dominant global powers. The historical evolution of Iran's security policies after the revolution is intricately intertwined with its adoption of asymmetric 'strategies of opposition.' These policies often involve providing financial and military support to co-sectarian groups that are politically responsive. These processes align with security crises, issues of trust, and legitimacy in weak states, ultimately fueling the dynamics of sectarianism in local and regional conflicts.<sup>22</sup>

Iran has frequently been perceived by the West as a threat and a significant concern for regional stability in the Middle East. In the realm of international relations theory, there exist two contrasting explanations for Iran's aggressive (or defensive – depends of a point of view) behaviour. The first theory posits that Iran views a chance to establish itself as a regional hegemon, aiming to capitalize on various opportunities and assert dominance, both economically and politically, over the Middle East. This perspective suggests that Iran seeks to attain an imperial position in the region, encompassing cultural and societal influence as well. On the other hand, the theory of defensive realism offers an alternative interpretation. According to this viewpoint, Iran's engagement in

<sup>21</sup> I. Salamey, Z. Othman, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>22</sup> E. Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Strategic Depth, Counterinsurgency & the Logic of Sectarianization: Perspectives on the Islamic Republic of Iran's Security Doctrine and Its Regional Implications", [in:] *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, eds. N. Hashemi, D. Postel, London–New York: Hurst, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 1–2.



aggressive behaviour is driven by a need for self-preservation in an unpredictable and chaotic world of international politics. In this narrative, Iran perceives itself as vulnerable to external threats and adopts a defensive stance, seeking to safeguard its national security interests through proactive measures.

These competing theories attempt to explain the motives behind Iran's actions and its approach to regional dynamics. They reflect the differing perspectives within the field of IR regarding Iran's objectives and the underlying factors influencing its behavior in the Middle East. Iranian state ratio paradigms are simple – achieving economic self-sufficiency, international legitimacy, regional security, power and influence and finally to overthrow what it sees as the US-dominated global political order. All those to guarantee survival of the Islamic republic in an unfriendly environment.<sup>23</sup> Khomeini considered imperialism, particularly that of the US and Israel, to be the main enemy of Iran, the Muslim world, and the Third World. He believed that the interests of these hegemonic powers were based on politically, economically and culturally subjugating the underprivileged nations, plundering their resources and confiscating their territorial independence.<sup>24</sup> Due to the fact that today the USA is considered both the greatest threat to the physical existence of the Islamic republic and the greatest ideological threat (through the 'moral corruption' spread by the USA, which threatens Islam), and Iran in a possible open clash with the world hegemon would become in a lost position, then all other threats necessarily become secondary. Consequently, as the practice after 1979 shows, Iran is guided in its foreign policy by anti-Americanism rooted in religion and fear of a US military attack and Washington's policy aimed at 'regime change' in Tehran.

This could lead to simple conclusion that Iranian foreign policy is based on defensive realism flavored with Islamic idealism. However, many critical theorists, exemplified by Robert W. Cox, express dissatisfaction with neorealism's inflexibility in adapting to evolving circumstances. They contend that neorealists disregard the historical context and mistakenly ascribe a universally applicable value to the state-centric framework of international relations. Critical theorists advocate for an analysis encompassing ideas, material factors, and social forces, aiming to comprehend the origins of this structure and its potential for transformation. They argue that neorealism perpetuates exclusionary practices and a quest for dominance, while neglecting alternative

<sup>23</sup> Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's inaugural address to the Non-Aligned Movement Summit on 30.08.2012, "Part II: Khamenei on U.N./World Order", *The Iran Primer*, 31.08.2012, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2012/aug/31/part-ii-khamenei-unworld-order> [accessed: 22.06.2023].

<sup>24</sup> I. Salamey, Z. Othman, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

approaches and the historical evolution of identity construction. However, when realism transforms into a rigid dogma, it loses its effectiveness. By adhering strictly to a state-centric and oversimplified framework like neorealism, and by rejecting the potential for any advancements in international relations, realism itself becomes an ideology. Its focus on power dynamics and national interests can be exploited to legitimize acts of aggression. Consequently, it is necessary to replace such theories with frameworks that more accurately reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of global politics.<sup>25</sup>

Extensive researches have been dedicated to gaining theoretical insight into the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. A range of theories, from positivism to post-positivism, have been employed as conceptual frameworks to explore Iran's foreign policy. According to Seyed Jalal Dehghani-Firouzabadi, classical or structural realism emerges as the prevailing paradigm that most accurately characterizes the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nonetheless, simply applying international relations theories to analyze Iran's foreign policy without necessary adjustments and adaptations would be insufficient. This is due to the distinctive Islamic, revolutionary, and developing identity and nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which introduce additional limitations and considerations that hinder the complete explanatory capacity of such theories. One notable limitation stems from the context and nature of international relations theories, predominantly shaped by Western values and perspectives aimed at maintaining the existing international order or establishing a desired global structure. Furthermore, the dominance of realism in post-World War II international relations studies has confined the discipline to the relationships and interests of major powers, marginalizing developing countries and excluding their foreign policies and relationships from the purview of such theories. Consequently, mainstream international relations theories lack the capability to thoroughly analyze and comprehend the foreign policy behavior of states whose history, culture, and values diverge significantly from the Western world. However, despite the limitations imposed by theoretical and conceptual frameworks, it is crucial not to perceive the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran as an inexplicable phenomenon. As Dehghani-Firouzabadi noted, to gain a comprehensive understanding, paradigms must incorporate three distinct levels of analysis: the third world perspective, the revolutionary nature, and the Islamic identity and essence

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<sup>25</sup> W.J. Korab-Karpowicz, "Political Realism in International Relations", [in:] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E.N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/#KennWaltInteSyst> [accessed: 10.04.2023].

of Iran, and how these factors shape its foreign policy variables. Mainstream positivist theories in international relations, particularly realism, whether classical or structural, are inadequate for this task. They primarily focus on the positions and foreign policies of major powers, while underestimating the dynamics of developing countries. Furthermore, they tend to overlook the role of non-materialistic structures and capabilities in shaping foreign policy, such as national identity, revolutionary character, and the predominant Islamic and ideological discourse that significantly influence the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These theories also fail to consider the communicative and critical rationality evident in Iranian foreign policy, and they view Iran solely through the lens of interest-based rational choices, disregarding its unique motivations, objectives, and foreign policy behaviours. Given the differences in conceptualization, one can utilize critical theory of the Frankfurt School, to conceptualize Iran's foreign policy with necessary modifications to its principles and assumptions. Critical theory, rooted in the notion of 'homo-sociologicus,' diverges from rational choice theories that centre on the analysis of 'homo-economicus' as the fundamental actor. In critical theory, the actor is not driven solely by self-interest, profit-seeking, or isolated objectives, but is inherently social and context-oriented. Foreign policy, within the framework of critical theory, is defined and analysed in a distinct manner compared to other conceptual frameworks. It perceives foreign policy as a pursuit of emancipation from hegemonic and oppressive structures in the global system, aiming to safeguard and actualize aspirations and foreign objectives. Hence, the concept of emancipation assumes a pivotal role in analysing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>26</sup> Those assumptions above lay in a line with the thesis of R.K. Ramazani, who argues that there are four ideal types of interest as guides to foreign policy in Iran's modern history are: sultanic (prerevolutionary), ideological-Islamic, pragmatic-Islamic, and democratic-Islamic. Each one except outdated sultanic, it is made of many interpenetrating layers and various proportions of messianic manifest of destiny and technocracy.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, academic investigations of the post-1979 constitution that emphasize Islamic internationalism have led many analysts to conclude that the foreign policy of the IRI is idealistic rather than realistic, but it is more realistic not to say-opportunistic in its nature. The question if offensive

<sup>26</sup> S.J. Dehghani-Firouzabadi, "Emancipating Foreign Policy: Critical Theory and Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy", *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 3, Summer 2008, pp. 2–6.

<sup>27</sup> R.K. Ramazani, "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy: Defining the 'National Interests'", [in:] *Iran at the crossroads*, ed. J. Esposito, New York: Palgrave, 2001, p. 211.

or defensive realism is prevailing remains open, however more arguments are supporting defensive approach.<sup>28</sup>

Contrary to popular misconception, Iran does not choose its partners based on their shared affiliation with Shia Islam. To enjoy Iranian support, actors must defy the status quo, defined by a regional order dominated by the United States and its local partners, especially Israel and Saudi Arabia; they don't necessarily have to be Shiites. This is why Hamas and Islamic Jihad – Sunni nationalist groups opposed to Israel – are Iran's partners in the Palestinian territories. Iran has also provided limited and discreet support to the Taliban, an extreme Sunni group in Afghanistan with which it has had conflicts in the past.<sup>29</sup> Instead on simple sectarian approach Iran is using rather the *mostazafin-mostakberin* ontological division where 'oppressed' can be any entity (state and non-state) standing against US interests, position and activities.

### Iran's reason of state and the war in Ukraine

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a blow-by-blow account of the various phases of Iranian foreign policy over the last forty-four years but rather to provide a general picture of Iranian policy toward Russia and to put some light on complexity of Iran-Russia relations.

Relations between Iran and Russia have a history dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and have undergone many fluctuations. Starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were rather hostile, then went through the stage of Iran's imperial dependence on tsarist Russia, the occupation of part of Iranian territory by the USSR, Iran's membership of the anti-communist alliance under the aegis of the USA, the USSR's support for Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran, and finally, after collapse of the USSR to return to a more positive track. Initially, the 'new' Russia and post-revolutionary Iran treated each other with distrust and tested the limits of their expansion possibilities in the case of Iran and defended their spheres of influence as in the case of Russia. The Tajikistan Civil War (1992–1993) and the Armenian-Azerbaijan War (1993) serve as notable examples of the early phase of Iran's foreign policy. In both instances, Iran's involvement prompted Russia to respond, employing a combination of public warnings and private diplomacy to convey that Iran was nearing the point of

<sup>28</sup> *Idem*, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy", *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 58, no. 4, Autumn 2004, pp. 1–11.

<sup>29</sup> T. Juneau, "Iran's policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: a limited return on a modest investment", *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 3, 2016, pp. 649.

crossing a line. Iran, recognizing the red lines set by Russia, adjusted its more aggressive stance, reaffirming its dedication to collaborating with Moscow in order to alleviate tensions and restore peace and stability. This demonstrated a modest indication of the two countries' potential to effectively manage crises in the future.<sup>30</sup>

In the face of American hegemony, mutual animosities receded into the background, and zones of regional domination were established. Competition gave way to limited economic cooperation, and then, after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, it became a tactical alliance based on reluctance towards US world domination and Iran's sense of threat. On the one hand, Russia was afraid of the American presence in the region, on the other hand, it wanted to gain economic benefits from supplies to Iran, which at that time was under the pressure of American sanctions. At the same time, Iran needed a strong partner to help it resist pressure from the West.

In the past decade, the intensification of Western sanctions against Iran and hostilities between Iran and the US have prompted Tehran to further deepen its political, economic and security ties with Moscow. Russia shares the Iranian vision of a multipolar world order in which the role of the US is smaller. Until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, or more precisely, the imposition of broad economic sanctions on Russia, Moscow behaved quite restrained and placed itself in the role of a benevolent mediator rather than an ally. Russian companies were afraid of sanctions, which blocked the development of economic relations. Fearing the reaction of the West, Russia also inhibited the previously agreed deliveries of anti-aircraft systems<sup>31</sup> and remained deaf to Iranian proposals for deepening military cooperation. Failures in Ukraine, economic problems caused by sanctions, disruption of supply chains and pushing Russian companies out of many existing markets prompted Moscow to 'release the brake' and start a new stage of cooperation with Iran.<sup>32</sup> This fact has reignited a debate in Tehran about how much Iran should lean towards Moscow. The debate in the Iranian parliament, of course, did not affect the

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<sup>30</sup> J. Hannah, "Evolving Russian Attitudes Towards Iran", [in:] *Iran's Strategic Intentions And Capabilities*, ed. P. Clawson, Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1994, pp. 56–57.

<sup>31</sup> A. Brady, "Russia Completes S-300 Delivery to Iran", *Arms Control Association*, 1.12.2016, [www.armscontrol.org/act/2016-11/news-briefs/russia-completes-s-300-delivery-iran](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2016-11/news-briefs/russia-completes-s-300-delivery-iran) [accessed: 20.05.2023].

<sup>32</sup> E. Avdaliani, "Russia-Iran Ties Are Transactional – And Warming Fast", *The Moscow Times*, 9.06.2023, [www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/06/09/russia-iran-ties-are-transactional-and-warming-fast-a81414](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/06/09/russia-iran-ties-are-transactional-and-warming-fast-a81414) [accessed: 10.06.2023].

general direction of the policy of the Islamic Republic, determined by *rahbar*, but it was a signal of disagreement as to future relations among Iranian politicians. Nevertheless, Tehran's approach did not change and continued within the lines crystallized in the 1990s, this time approaching the upper limits of support for the Russian 'friend.'

There are two primary explanations for the notable continuity observed in the relationship between Iran and Russia. The first explanation lies in the institutional framework. The Supreme Leader holds the primary decision-making authority concerning the Iran-Russia relationship, which is considered a matter of significant national security importance. This relationship has played a crucial role in the survival of the Islamic Republic, particularly when faced with pressure from Western countries since the end of the Cold War. The second explanation relates to the limited alternatives available to Iran.<sup>33</sup> The context of Western and international sanctions, which target various sectors including the Iranian economy, civil nuclear technology, space technology,<sup>34</sup> and military domains, has significantly restricted Iran's options for international cooperation. In this context, Russia stands as one of the few major powers willing to engage in collaboration with Iran in these strategically significant areas. China, albeit to a lesser extent, also presents some opportunities for cooperation alongside Russia. Given the combination of institutional factors and the scarcity of viable alternatives, the continuity in the Iran-Russia relationship persists, serving as a crucial pillar for the Islamic Republic's resilience and maneuverability in the face of Western pressure and economic sanctions.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the official message omitting all historical and current conflicts of interest between Russia and Iran, many Iranian politicians remain deeply suspicious of Russia, bearing in mind both the predatory policy of Tsarism and the USSR, as well as Russia's maneuvering during the negotiations of the nuclear deal. The Iranian political elites, including the *rahbaram* court, have divided themselves into two main groups regarding the assessment of the development of mutual relations. One group advocates strong ties with Russia as beneficial to the survival and development of the Iranian regime and as

<sup>33</sup> C. Therme, "The Iran-Russia entente after the Vienna Agreement: marriage of convenience or strategic partnership?", [in:] *Iran After the Deal: the Road Ahead*, eds. P. Magri, A. Perteghella, Milano: Epoké, 2015, p. 97.

<sup>34</sup> See more at M. Krzyżanowski, "Irański program atomowy – historia i perspektywy", *Układ Sił*, nr 27, marzec 2021.

<sup>35</sup> See more at *idem*, "Partnerstwo z rozsądku? Relacje ekonomiczne Iranu i Chin", *Układ Sił*, nr 26, luty 2021.

a counterbalance to both the US military presence near Iran's borders and the growing economic dependence on China. The decision of the Trump administration in 2018 to withdraw the US from the nuclear deal and the policy of maximum pressure on Iran increased support for supporters of rapprochement with Russia under the so-called Return to the East. This group includes e.g. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Ibrahim Raisi and Speaker of Parliament Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, although the latter is highly sceptical about Russia's ability to fulfil its commitments. Supporters of rapprochement with Russia share the Kremlin's concerns about the threat from the West (including NATO expansion) and seek stronger bilateral cooperation to protect Iran from Western sanctions and military strikes. Generally speaking, the supporters of closer ties with Russia are mainly representatives of the principalists camp.

The second group, combining the parties of centrists and reformists, are politicians who are ideologically more moderate and in favor of economic liberalization. Its members see Russia as an important neighbour, but reject efforts to strengthen strategic ties with that country. They believe that it is beneficial for Iran to leave options open to the West and to avoid becoming overly dependent on Moscow. Members of this group include former Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, former President Hassan Rouhani and former Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani. All three call for a de-escalation of tensions with the West. Another member of the group, former IRGC commander Hossein Alaei, is a particularly vocal critic of the Russian-Iranian rapprochement. In his criticism of Iran's policy towards Russia, he points to the conflict of interests (competition in the energy sector), Russia's close relations with Israel, which interfere with Iranian activities in Syria, and Russia's unreliability as a close ally, as evidenced by the delays in deliveries of anti-aircraft systems purchased by Iran, and several times supporting sanctions against Iran in votes in the UN Security Council. The Supreme Leader's support for the 'turn to the East' policy and the economy of resistance makes Iran increasingly gravitate towards Russia, but the political current that recognizes independence from any foreign entity as the basis of the policy enabling the survival of the Islamic republic is still dominant.<sup>36</sup>

Various analysts and politicians are raising concerns about an imbalanced foreign policy that appears to heavily favor China and Russia. These voices are advocating for a more balanced approach and the resumption of nuclear talks

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<sup>36</sup> M. Sinaee, "Former IRGC Commander Says Iran Must Remove Russia From Nuclear Talks", *Iran International*, 27.03.2022, [www.iranintl.com/en/202203277344](http://www.iranintl.com/en/202203277344) [accessed: 9.06.2023].

with Western nations. Additionally, there has been strong criticism directed at Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, with some asserting that he lacks the capability to effectively manage Iran's foreign relations.<sup>37</sup> Mohammad Sadr, a member of the Expediency Council, has particularly expressed strong criticism of Iran's dependence on Russia and China. In an interview with the centrist Entekhab News, he argued that these two countries are not genuine strategic allies of Iran but rather act in their own self-interests. The sentiment being conveyed is that there is a growing concern about an overreliance on Russia and China in Iran's foreign policy, and there is a call for a more balanced approach that includes engagement with Western nations. Additionally, there are doubts about the effectiveness of the current foreign minister in handling Iran's diplomatic relations. Mohammad Sadr's criticism highlights the belief that Russia and China prioritize their own national interests rather than fully aligning with Iran's strategic objectives.<sup>38</sup>

Mehdi Motaharnia stated that if Iran positioned itself an 'official' enemy of the US and Europe, it will have no third option soon *vis-à-vis* the EU-US-Israeli alliance and the new alliance between Arab countries and Israel. He warned that China and Russia have also let Tehran down. The biggest political upheaval of the country in the past 43 years has paralyzed the government. Iran's tilt towards the Russia and China has left nothing of its initial non-alignment policy. As a result, whatever is against the West finds legitimacy. This inevitably brings about an identity crisis for the political system.<sup>39</sup>

It is also worth recalling the behaviour of Russian companies after the signing of the JCPOA and throughout its duration. Despite Sergey Lavrov's statements emphasizing Russia's intention to disregard US unilateral sanctions concerning Iran, there remained a degree of apprehension within Russia regarding the potential impact of such sanctions. One of the major concerns

<sup>37</sup> P. Mojtahedzadeh, «جراحی تسمه‌های سرد»، *Didban*, 19.12.2022, [www.didbaniran.ir/ش-خ/3-145733-سی-ای-س-ش-خ/](http://www.didbaniran.ir/ش-خ/3-145733-سی-ای-س-ش-خ/)-ه-ا-پ-س-ن-ا-ر-د-س-ت-س-ا-م-ق-ن-م-ر-د-ی-ز-ا-ب-ه-ز-و-د-ل-ا-ح-ر-د-ن-ی-چ-م-ی-د-ی-س-ر-ی-گ-ت-س-ک-ش-ر-و-م-ب-ن-و-چ-د-ن-ت-س-ن-ه-د-ی-ز-و-ن-ا-ر-ی-ا-ه-ت-ا-م-ل-پ-ی-د-ن-ر-و-خ-ی-م-ن-ی-س-ا-م-ل-پ-ی-د-ه-ز-و-ح-ر-د-ر-د-ه-ب-م-ه-ه-ی-س-و-ر-ت-س-ا-ل-ی-ا-س-ا-ز-ا-ر-ت-د-ب-س-ا-م-ح-ت-س-ا-ه-ن-ز-ی-ژ-و-ل-و-ی-د-ی-ا-ی-س-ا-م-ل-پ-ی-د-ه-ا-گ-ت-س-د-د-ش-و-ر-ف-ی-م-ا-ر-ا-م-] [accessed: 20.06.2023].

<sup>38</sup> M. Sadr, «دز ناری ایلیل‌مان‌ی‌ب تیه‌عقوم مبی‌کل‌هم مبرض‌ه‌س‌ور»، *Entekhab*, 20.01.2023, [www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/708137/](http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/708137/)-ت-ی-ع-ق-و-م-م-ب-ی-ک-ل-ه-م-م-ب-ر-ض-ه-ی-س-و-ر-ه-ت-ف-ر-گ-ر-ا-ر-ق-ا-و-ز-ن-ا-ت-ل-ا-ح-ر-د-ی-د-و-ح-ا-ت-ن-ا-ر-ی-ا-د-ز-ن-ا-ر-ی-ا-ی-ل-ل-م-ل-ل-ا-ن-ا-ی-ب-ی-ب-ا-ن-ی-ب-س-ک-ع-ت-س-ا-] [accessed: 20.06.2023].

<sup>39</sup> M. Motaharnia, «ناری‌ای‌جراحی‌تسمه‌های‌سرد‌موس‌وی‌ت‌ان‌رت‌ل‌آ‌ز‌ای‌اش‌گ‌ز‌م‌ر»، *Fararu*, 25.12.2022, [www.fararu.com/fa/news/594377/](http://www.fararu.com/fa/news/594377/)-ر-د-م-و-س-و-ی-ت-ان-رت-ل-آ-ز-ای-اش-گ-ز-م-ر-ا-ی-ش-گ-ز-م-ر-ه-س-ا-ی-س-ر-د-م-وس-وی-ت-ان-رت-ل‌آ‌ز‌ای‌اش‌گ‌ز‌م‌ر-ن‌ا‌ر‌ی‌ا‌ی‌ج‌ر‌ح‌ی‌ت‌س‌ا‌ی‌س‌-] [accessed: 20.06.2023].



for Moscow revolved around Russian companies that operated both in Iran and the United States. This issue was particularly sensitive in the energy sector, where Russia opted to prioritize cooperation with US companies over investing in Iran. This decision aimed to foster collaboration with American counterparts in order to advance the development of Russia's domestic energy sector.<sup>40</sup> At the moment this barrier vanished but still there is a lot of distrust between businessmen and politicians.

In terms of balancing relations with major powers, Iran maintains diplomatic ties with both China and Russia, as they share similar strategic visions. However, the level of engagement with China is not substantial enough to form an anti-US bloc. In the case of Syria, Iran and Russia effectively collaborate to support the al-Assad regime. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that this cooperation extends to other conflicts such as Yemen or Afghanistan. In Yemen, Russian-Iranian relations are strained due to Iran's backing of the Houthis. In Afghanistan, the two parties have differing approaches regarding the inclusion of the Taliban in the emerging political settlement. Iran's foreign policy options are constrained by the regime's adherence to the strict principles of the Revolution. Although there have been attempts at innovative approaches, like Khatami's Dialogue of Civilizations, they were swiftly curtailed by conservative factions in response to counter-reactions from the United States. Overall, while Iran maintains relations with China and Russia and cooperates with Russia in certain contexts, the extent and scope of their collaboration vary depending on the specific conflicts and political dynamics involved. The ideological constraints of Iran's regime and its historical interactions with the United States also play a significant role in shaping its foreign policy decisions.<sup>41</sup>

Iran-Russia relations are characterized by complexity. While both countries have aligned in supporting Syrian President Assad against opposition forces, their motivations stem from different national interests. For Russia, aiding Assad's regime serves as a means to reestablish its influence as a major power in the Middle East. On the other hand, for Iran, maintaining a friendly Syria is crucial for sustaining its anti-US and anti-Israel coalition.<sup>42</sup> In Syria, Russia and Iran maintain a close military alliance. However, their political

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<sup>40</sup> C. Therme, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>41</sup> T. Bayar, "Multiple Dualities: Seeking the Patterns in Iran's Foreign Policy", *All Azimuth. Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2019, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> More at N. Grajewski, "The Evolution of Russian and Iranian Cooperation in Syria", 17.11.2021, *Center for Strategic International Studies*, [www.csis.org/analysis/evolution-russian-and-iranian-cooperation-syria](http://www.csis.org/analysis/evolution-russian-and-iranian-cooperation-syria) [accessed: 20.06.2023].

strategies within the country may diverge as they pursue their respective objectives. In the broader Middle East region, Moscow and Tehran often have distinct goals and priorities. However, within the wider Eurasian context, their objectives are comparatively more compatible. The dynamics of Iran-Russia relations reflect the intricacies of their overlapping interests and differing approaches in various geopolitical contexts. While they find common ground in Syria, their broader objectives diverge in the Middle East. Yet, when considering the broader Eurasian landscape, their interests show a greater degree of compatibility.

Another part of discrepancy protocol is the issue of Iranian nuclear program. Russia recognizes Iran's aspirations to become a significant player in the Middle East; however, it prefers that Iran remains a non-nuclear state. Moscow's position on the Iranian nuclear issue is primarily driven by its own national interests, and it has remained unaffected by the confrontation between the United States and Russia in 2014. The Russians strongly support the nuclear deal with Iran, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the alternatives would either entail an Iran armed with nuclear weapons or a major conflict occurring in close proximity to Russia's borders. Therefore, Moscow is motivated by the desire to maintain the JCPOA, which it sees as crucial for preventing both a nuclear-armed Iran and a potentially destabilizing war in the region. Russia's approach to the Iranian nuclear issue is shaped by its own strategic interests and the potential consequences of a breakdown in diplomatic efforts. While acknowledging Iran's regional ambitions, Moscow is driven by the goal of preserving stability and preventing nuclear proliferation, which it sees as serving its own national security concerns.<sup>43</sup> Such attitude (apart from the real goals of the Iranian nuclear program) raises doubts in Tehran about possibility of basing a long-term policy on cooperation with Russia.

In light of Russia's challenges in Ukraine, its leadership sought assistance from Iran through various means. Firstly, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, a branch of the Iranian military, provided additional manpower to fill the gap left when Russia redeployed troops from Syria to focus on its campaign in Ukraine. Secondly, Russia plans to utilize Iran's cost-effective and battle-tested drones to counter Kyiv's Western-supported arsenal and bolster its own struggling forces, which have shown limited effectiveness in warfare.

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<sup>43</sup> D. Trenin, "Russia and Iran: Historic Mistrust and Contemporary Partnership", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 18.08.2016, <https://carnegie.moscow.org/2016/08/18/russia-and-iran-historic-mistrust-and-contemporary-partnership-pub-64365> [accessed: 20.06.2023].

Thirdly, cooperation with Iran allows Russia to navigate economic challenges and circumvent international sanctions. These contributions from Iran serve a larger purpose in advancing Iran's ration of state. They enable Iran to directly challenge and undermine the United States and NATO beyond its usual regional sphere of operations. They enhance Iran's standing among countries that also aspire to confront the political, military, and economic power of the United States and NATO. Furthermore, they foster a sense of solidarity among these countries, strengthening their collective resolve.

Already after the first Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the Russians considered replacing sanctioned European supplies with Iranian ones. For instance, the Islamic Republic was mentioned as an option in order to replace, at least partially, some European products that Russia is banned from importing under the sanctions. However, at that time, the sanctions regime was not tight enough or wide enough to force (yes, force) Russian companies to deepen their cooperation with Iran. Currently, Russian entities are more motivated and determined, but logistical and legal barriers still remain in place. Although trade between Russia and Iran is expected to increase by 20% in 2023, it will still be relatively low compared to the expected increase in Russian-Turkish (100%) and Russian-Indian (200%) trade since the beginning of the war. It is worth mentioning here that these are very optimistic assumptions. As part of the strategy to revive trade, in July 2022, Moscow and Tehran signed numbers of memoranda on interbank cooperation. In addition, the Tehran exchange launched a rial/ruble exchange in an attempt to replace the SWIFT interbank payment system with domestic instruments aimed at de-dollarization of joint trade. Despite these efforts, bilateral trade will only play a minor role in meeting Russia's enormous needs. It will help Iran to a greater extent, but it will not be a breakthrough in the fight against the economic crisis. Even if the optimistic forecasts regarding the increase in trade turn out to be accurate, the mutual turnover will not exceed the level of 3% of Russia's total foreign trade. There is a huge gulf between Iran and countries like Turkey, whose trade with Russia is worth around \$30 billion a year compared to Iran's around \$3 billion. For Iran, Russia is one of the leading trading partners, but despite this, it lags far behind China, Turkey, the UAE in terms of turnover, and even Afghanistan in terms of exports (according to IMF data, in 2022 it was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> as an importer to Iran and 5<sup>th</sup> for Iranian exports, with Russia ranked 41<sup>st</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> respectively).<sup>44</sup> It is safe to say that the potential of economic cooperation is not (and will not be) fulfilled in the near future.

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<sup>44</sup> Own research based on IMF data.

## Conclusion

National interest as a category related to the general community of citizens is not adequate to Iranian policy-making and could be misleading in debate. The more appropriate category is reason of the state. The main center for formulating Iran's foreign policy is *rahbar* which shifted from balancing-powers role to revolutionary-authoritarian one.

Idealism in principle, due to religious sanction loomed into the political fabric of the Islamic Republic of Iran is present in Iranian foreign policy. However, the *rahbars* were more often guided by defensive realism manifesting in forward defence strategy and sacrificed ideology in the name of state interests whenever it was necessary or justified. Such actions have a theological underlay based on principles of *velayat-e faqih*.

To some extent concepts of Frankfurt school are useful in explaining Iran's policy. The author believes that approaches based on a single school of thought whether it would be states security-maximizer approach (as defensive realism), power-maximizer (offensive realism), influence-maximizer (neoclassical realism) or absolute gain-seeker (neoliberalism), are not sufficient to fully explain Iranian foreign policy and security behavior. Therefore, a multifaceted approach is essential to analyze it.

Iran is among Russia's most vocal supporters in the war. This has little to do with Ukraine and everything to do with Iran's long-term strategy *vis-à-vis* the United States, considered by *rahbar* as the main and active threat to Islamic Republic existence.

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**Abstract**

The paper seeks to indicate the main sources and currents that mold the general pattern of Iran's foreign policy and propose the explanation of Iran's actions in regard to Russia. The paper shortly analyze, political dualities like pragmatism vs. idealism, decision making through the institutions of the revolution vs. parliamentary democracy, Iran's desire for recognition as a regional power vs. forward defensive approach and last but not least an accurate terminology to use in a broader debate about Iranian policy. The paper secondary aim is to provide a general picture of Iranian policy toward Russia and to put some light on complexity of Iran-Russia relations.

**Key words:** Iran, Russia, Realism, *velayat-e faqih*







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# **Humiliations: Middle Eastern middle class and the war in Ukraine**

## **Introduction**

The Middle East is not geographically far from Ukraine, thus the effects of Russia's military invasion were quickly felt in this region. The war became linked to some important issues for Middle Eastern countries such as energy and global peace. Several Middle Eastern governments have developed relationships with both Russia and the United States, making it challenging for them to take a stance on the Ukrainian war. Despite economic and political factors, public opinion significantly influenced the state decision-making towards involvement in the war in Ukraine.

The nations in the Middle East showed sympathy towards the Ukrainians who were forced to leave their homes and cities due to the destruction caused by Russian weapons. However, the middle class as a leading class did not approve the involvement in the war. Consequently, with the exception of Syria, the Middle Eastern states have generally condemned Russia's actions towards Ukraine and avoided involvement in the conflict. In addition, despite having

a close association with Russia and being hostile towards the US and the policies of NATO in the Middle East, Iran also declined to support the invasion.

The question arises how does the Middle Eastern middle class view involvement in the war? To answer the question, the research will focus on two important factors that influence the Middle Eastern middle class's attitudes towards war. The first factor is history and the humiliation of past wars. The Middle Eastern countries have a history of fighting for independence, which has resulted in numerous conflicts with the European colonial powers. The feeling of humiliation can be perpetuated from one generation to another through storytelling, historical narratives, and cultural expressions.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, history and memories matter. The second factor is the middle class fear of political-economic instability, which has been exacerbated by several recent wars in the Middle East. The Middle Eastern middle class prioritizes avoiding international or national conflicts, seeking a more peaceful environment.

Studying these two factors, this research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Middle Eastern middle class's perspective on war. The assumption is that, as a leading class, the middle class does not approve of conflicts or wars due to its past experience of humiliation and current fear of political-economic instability.

### Theoretical framework: Humiliation and the middle class

Although, humiliation is a personal emotion, it can be triggered by factors that target one's identity, which can also be shared among groups. Therefore, individuals who share an identity may have a higher likelihood of having similar emotional responses when their identities are activated. This may be a reason that war humiliation can cause a strong nationalist response. The humiliation experienced during war may lead to a desire for reassertion and the restoration of national pride, often influencing a country's foreign policy and military actions in the future.<sup>2</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, France had to give up the territories of Alsace and Lorraine. The French were determined to regain these provinces. Russia was also humiliated in the Franco-Prussian War. Therefore, they feared the rising power of Germany, which had

<sup>1</sup> T. Kisantal, "Beyond the Battlefields of Memory: Historical Traumas and Hungarian Literature", *Porównania*, vol. 2, no. 27, 2020, pp. 47–58.

<sup>2</sup> M. Masterson, "Humiliation and International Conflict Preferences", *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 84, no. 4, 2020, p. 5.

already formed alliances with Austria-Hungary and Italy. So the two nations decided to join forces for mutual protection as well. It was the start of what would become the Allied side, the Triple Entente, in World War I.

Adolf Hitler referred to the Treaty of Versailles as a tool for blackmail and a source of disgraceful humiliation. Fifteenth years later, during the signing of the 1940 Armistice with France, he intentionally evoked the memory of Germany's humiliation by sitting in the same chair where Ferdinand Foch had signed the Armistice marking Germany's defeat in 1918.<sup>3</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, colonial humiliation resulted in wars between colonizers and colonized nations. These nations, having suffered under foreign powers, rejected external rule and demanded the right to govern themselves independently. These movements emerged in colonized nations seeking independence, using a range of tactics including armed struggle to challenge colonial rule. However, the colonial powers frequently responded with brutal force to suppress resistance movements, resulting in massacres, punitive expeditions, and repression of dissent. The nature of these movements was severe.<sup>4</sup>

However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century seems with the rise of middle class in the developed countries and even developing countries, the response to humiliation has changed. This is because the middle class generally values stability and security in their lives. Armed conflicts and wars can disrupt economies, threaten personal safety, and create uncertainty, which can negatively impact their financial well-being and overall quality of life. In addition, the middle class with higher levels of education have a better understanding of the complexities and consequences of armed conflicts. Educated individuals may be more receptive to diplomatic and peaceful approaches to resolving disputes. Therefore, economic development leads to rise of middle class and according to research, higher income countries tend to be the most peaceful.<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that the most recent populist movements, in developed countries, often appeal to the frustrations and grievances of certain segments of society. In populist humiliation discourse, the country of the present is described as a fundamentally weakened nation. Members of the target audience are constructed as an idealized community of shared origin and destiny, the 'pure people' who have been betrayed and humiliated because what is represented as

<sup>3</sup> J. Barnhart, *The Consequences of Humiliation; Anger and Status in World Politics*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> See M. Kebede, "The Rehabilitation of Violence and the Violence of Rehabilitation: Fanon and Colonialism", *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 31, no. 5, May 2001, pp. 539–562.

<sup>5</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), "Positive Peace Report 2019", *Vision of Humanity*, 2019, <http://visionofhumanity.org/reports> [accessed: 15.07.2023].

their way of life and righteous place in the world has been lost.<sup>6</sup> It seems the rise of the middle class is closely connected to a stable economy. Thus, the middle class actively seeks peace and stability to sustain its upward mobility and growth.

### The experience of humiliation in Ukraine and the Middle East

Ukraine's history is complex and defined by a prolonged quest for independence and self-determination, intertwined with periods of foreign domination and occupation. It was during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the collapse of the Russian Empire and subsequent events like the Russian Revolution and the Soviet era, that Ukraine eventually gained its independence as a sovereign nation. Ukraine remained part of the Soviet Union from 1922 until its dissolution in 1991. During this time, it was known as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukrainian SSR).

It is not doubtable that a special relationship exist between Ukraine and Russia. Their relationships are deeply entangled, and goes beyond that of many other nations. This connection is rooted in shared elements such as the common religion of Orthodoxy, a partially common East-Slavic culture, long periods of shared history, and parts of a common memory. However, the Ukrainian nationalists believe that Russian and Soviet rule separated Ukraine from the common European world.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to what Russian nationalists claim, when the Soviet government came to an end in 1991, about 92% of Ukrainians voted in a national referendum for independence from the collapsing Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup>

Independent Ukraine has been trying to re-establish its traditional ties with Central Europe. This is while, Russian national ideologues looking at the Ukrainians as uncivilized Russian peasants or anarchic Cossacks who have to be ruled and civilized by Russia which brings European culture to Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> In addition, according to Vladimir Putin, Ukraine doesn't exist.<sup>10</sup> Russian has

<sup>6</sup> A. Homolar, G. Löffmann, "Populism and the Affective Politics of Humiliation Narratives", *Global Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1, issue 1, March 2021, pp. 4–5.

<sup>7</sup> A. Kappeler, "Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the imperial past and competing memories", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, no. 5, 2014, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> J. Mankoff, *Russia's War in Ukraine. Identity, History and Conflict*, Washington, DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, April 2022, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> A. Kappeler, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>10</sup> O. Khromeychuk, "Putin Says Ukraine Doesn't Exist. That's Why He's Trying to Destroy It", *The New York Times*, 1.11.2022, [www.nytimes.com/2022/11/01/opinion/ukraine-war-national-identity.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/01/opinion/ukraine-war-national-identity.html) [accessed: 15.07.2023].

always ignored Ukraine independency and try to keep Ukraine in its own sphere of influence, its view towards Ukraine can be describes as a combination of past humiliations and current threats.

Moreover, Russian leaders have repeatedly invoked national humiliation at the hands of the West when discussing their motivation for recent acts of aggression within the former Soviet sphere. In 2014, President Vladimir Putin cited Western failure to consult with Russia over the admission of Ukraine to the European Union as one in a long line of humiliations at the hands of the West.<sup>11</sup> It seems that one significant reason behind invasion of Ukraine was Putin's humiliation.

Some Middle Eastern nations have been humiliated by Russian in the past and present as well. In several wars between Persia and Russia 1651 and 1828, Persia surrendered much of its Transcaucasian territory to the Russian Empire. In 2015, Russia became involved in the Syrian civil war through military intervention, to safeguarding its strategic interests in Syria. However, the majority of Middle Eastern people have experienced humiliation during the colonial era under European powers.

Prior to 1900, the Ottoman Islamic Empire had control over the Arab Muslims. The Arab speakers were invisible in the Ottoman Empire and identified as distinct national groups. The Ottoman Empire had always been a multi-ethnic state based on loyalty to the ruling dynasty, not on a shared national identity. Thus, it was not strange if these groups, over the hundred years prior to 1900, had begun to identify themselves as distinct national groups rather than as subjects of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>12</sup>

During WWI, Arab Muslims sought liberation from their Muslim oppressors, but did not defend against the European forces who claimed to support justice, freedom, and liberation. In November 1914, the Ottoman Empire declared a holy war against France, Russia, and Great Britain. Despite this, Arab Muslims were allied with the British and France. They hoped that their efforts in helping the Allies fight the Turks would result in them being allowed to govern their own lands.

Although the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 and British support of the Arab Revolt occurred, the agreement between Great Britain and France aimed to divide rather than unite the Arab people. This resulted in the Middle

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<sup>11</sup> J. Barnhart, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> J. Mchugo, "The legacy of Arab nationalism and the end of the Ottoman Empire", *The National*, [www.thenational.ae/arts-lifestyle/the-review/the-legacy-of-arab-nationalism-and-the-end-of-the-ottoman-empire](http://www.thenational.ae/arts-lifestyle/the-review/the-legacy-of-arab-nationalism-and-the-end-of-the-ottoman-empire) [accessed: 15.05.2015 (inactive)].

East and North Africa (MENA) being split into multiple small states with artificial borders that disregarded their varying cultures and geographies. The Arab Muslims were now humiliated by the non-Muslims and their lives became increasingly miserable as their local orders were dismantled, traditional economies destroyed, cultures demonized, resources plundered and politics corrupted. The Muslims were now for the first time in their history 'subjects' of the domineering European powers.<sup>13</sup>

If WWI ended the Ottoman-dominated geopolitics and led to the utter humiliation of the Arabs and Muslims, WWII led to the collapse of European colonial dominance. However, before giving 'independence' to their Muslim colonies, the European powers fought bloody wars against local 'liberation movements'.<sup>14</sup> The European powers then created artificial and conflicting 'nation states' from the former colonies to be ruled by local dictators whom the Europeans had nurtured. Thus, after the Second World War these countries became independent; Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Israel.<sup>15</sup>

Contributing to the humiliation, Orientalism was promoted in Western policy circles, academia, and media, exaggerating and distorting the differences between Arab peoples and cultures and those of the West. Arabs and Muslims were viewed as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and at times dangerous. Worse, Arabs and Muslims were also humiliated by their own corrupt, inept, or ignorant rulers dictators and populists alike. Anti-Arabism led to Western domination of Arab oil resources. France between 1954 and 1962 took over a million Arab lives in Algeria. In the late 1970s, as dictatorships started to lose power, it was the Islamists who managed to take control quickly in countries such as Iran, and the Arab World.<sup>16</sup>

Arab Spring, wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings took place in the Middle East in 2011, however failure of the movement again led to rise of radical Islamists ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh, in 2014, which caused the loss of countless lives. However, there has also been the emergence of a middle class in the region, which is dedicated to promoting peace and stability.

<sup>13</sup> H. Amirahmadi, "Dark New Geopolitics of the Middle East", *Cairo Review*, no. 18, 2015, p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> V.R. Nasr, "European Colonialism and the Emergence of Modern Muslim States", [in:] *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. J.L. Esposito, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 550.

<sup>15</sup> See S. Heydemann, *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> H. Amirahmadi, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

## The middle class stand for peace

During the 1960s and 1970s, the increases in oil revenues led to urbanisation, improvements in infrastructure, higher employment rates, and a rapid growth of per capita income. The economic growth have also resulted in notable improvements in increasing literacy rates and higher levels of education.<sup>17</sup> In 2021, the adult literacy rate for Egypt was 73.1% and Saudi Arabia about 99.38%. In Iran the literacy rate of women above the age of 15 years reached 85% in comparison to the men's rate of 80%.<sup>18</sup> These changes led to rise of a new middle class. Currently, the Middle East region is home to over 500 million people with an average life expectancy of 78 years and a current median age of 31 against a global average of 30.<sup>19</sup>

However, the middle class faces some economic and political obstacles due to disadvantages of the rentier or semi-rentier states in the most oil exporter countries of the region. This is due to the fact that, the emergence and development of the middle class in the Middle East are quite different from the middle classes in developed countries. The raising oil revenues have resulted in the formation of rentier states in the region. The oil revenues has given rise to state control over the economy. As a result, the middle class has become increasingly reliant on the state due to its dominance over the economy.

This middle class has had little input in terms of the competitiveness of the economy, given that the state is so powerful and integral at all levels of the economy, with distribution of rents the main function of the rentier state, undermining even nascent linkages between the people and the state. In other words, with the reliance on rents, the rentier state becomes autonomous from society and can play an active and decisive role in the nation's social, economic and political life due to its structural autonomy.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the middle class vulnerability, there have been several attempts to bring about political change in which the middle class has played an important role. However, the middle class has compromised over democracy with

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<sup>17</sup> M. Alexeev, R. Conrad, "The Natural Resource Curse and Economic Transition", *CAEPR Working Paper*, no. 018, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Literacy rate, youth total (% of people ages 15–24)", *World Bank*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.ZS?locations=ZQ>, 2021 [accessed: 20.10.2022].

<sup>19</sup> "Middle East: 9 countries make up the middle east region", *World Economics*, 2022, [www.worldeconomics.com/Regions/Middle-East](http://www.worldeconomics.com/Regions/Middle-East) [accessed: 10.07.2023].

<sup>20</sup> M. Zahirnejad, "The Economic Effects of Sanctions and the Iranian Middle Class", [in:] *Iran in the International System: Between great Powers and Great Ideas*, eds. H. Gärtner, M. Shahmoradi, London: Routledge, 2019, p. 109.

the state in these countries due to its fear of socio-political instability. In another word it seems, the priorities of the middle class are based on interest and stability, not necessarily democratic goals.

Influenced by the new world politics and economy, several Middle Eastern states have become more globalised and are seemingly spending their rentier wealth more intelligently to develop their economies and societies, diversifying away from their strong reliance on oil, building new international images and roles for their cities and states, and even changing the state's relationship with society.<sup>21</sup>

In the recent years, the COVID-19 outbreak had a significant impact on the economies of the Middle East and North Africa, leading to declines in oil production, tourism, and remittances. This is while populations keep growing, and many countries are shaken by conflicts and deal with a growing number of refugees. Due to declining oil prices, it is no longer possible for governments to redistribute wealth by integrating their citizens into the public workforce or providing large subsidies. This has led to an increase in inequality and with it, a questioning of the social contract in many countries in the region.<sup>22</sup>

Now, the Middle East is the most unequal region worldwide: 56% of national income accrues to the top 10%, and only 12% goes to the bottom 50%. Extreme concentration at the top of the distribution: the top 1% income earners own 23% of total income in 2019, almost twice as high as the share earned by the bottom 50%.<sup>23</sup> This has affected the life of the large middle class in the region. The new middle class plans to see their youthful populations educated in the science, technology and innovation sectors, with a view to preparing them for the jobs of tomorrow.

On the other hands, the Middle East still is involved with the ongoing civil wars in Syria and Yemen, persistent threats posed by Salafi-Jihadi extremism, large-scale displacement and humanitarian emergencies and sectarianism. These have rendered the region susceptible to political, religious, and social instability. To avoid rise of radicalisms, according to research the middle class in particular young generation is demanding reform to religious institutions.

<sup>21</sup> See M. Gray, *Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of The Gulf*, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, The Australian National University Canberra, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> L. Assouad, "Inequality and Its Discontents in the Middle East", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 12.03.2020, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2020/03/12/inequality-and-its-discontents-in-middle-east-pub-81266> [accessed: 15.07.2023].

<sup>23</sup> R. Moshrif, "Income Inequality in the Middle East", *World Bank*, 10.10.2020, <https://wid.world/news-article/income-inequality-in-the-middle-east> [accessed: 16.07.2023].



More than two-thirds of youth want their religious institutions to modernise while people increasingly believe that religious leaders should not interfere in politics.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, peace is an essential element for the Middle East's middle class as it serves as the base for economic development, social stability, and better quality of life. Currently the Middle East's economy is recovering after the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, the middle class struggles to keep pace in generating meaningful employment for the young and educated. It is obvious that involvement in another war which may cause economic crisis is another humiliation that they can't afford.

## Conclusion

The dominant view towards the Middle East is that the region is stuck in the past and plagued by conflict. Consequently, due to the poor domestic circumstances in some Middle Eastern countries, such as bad economic conditions or political unrest, it is anticipated that the states in the region may initiate or become involved in conflicts. Such conflicts serve as a means for state leaders to divert public attention away from internal challenges by directing it towards an external conflict.

However, the Middle East has undergone many economic changes and improvements in education over the past century. This has resulted in the emergence of a large educated middle class in the region with a focus on enhancing socio-economic conditions. Although the middle class's efforts have not yet led to a complete transformation of authoritarian governments into democratic ones, the middle class demand for the state accountability is increasing. The region has witnessed rising protests, prompting governments to take notice.

Simultaneously, the prolonged civil wars over the past decade have had a profound impact on the middle class's perspective on politics. As a result, it appears challenging to mobilize a larger middle class towards supporting a new conflict. The middle class's priorities have shifted towards stability and progress rather than engaging in further wars and being stuck to past humiliation.

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<sup>24</sup> Shelley J. *et al.*, "Think Again: Inside the Modernisation of the New Middle East", *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 14.07.2022, [www.institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/think-again-inside-modernisation-new-middle-east](http://www.institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/think-again-inside-modernisation-new-middle-east) [accessed: 20.07.2023].

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## Abstract

The dominant view towards the Middle East is that the region is stuck in the past and plagued by conflict. Therefore, it was anticipated that Middle Eastern states would take a side in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Despite expressing sympathy for Ukrainians due to their own experiences of humiliation caused by several wars, the Middle Eastern people and states remained cautious and chose to avoid getting involved in the conflict. It seems that the view of the Middle Eastern middle class had an influence on state decision-making regarding involvement in the war in Ukraine. Considering the rise of an educated middle class in the region, it can be hypothesized that the middle class’s priority is political-economic instability rather than engaging in further wars. The objective of this research is to comprehensively understand the Middle Eastern middle class’s viewpoint on war.

**Key words:** Middle East, middle class, humiliation, war, Ukraine





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# **Turkey – the big winner or the big loser of the Russo-Ukrainian war?**

## **Introduction**

Turkey skilfully exploits its geographical position and advantages to gain status as a regional power and an important international player.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, voices criticized Turkey for its balancing posture between NATO and Russia. More than a year after the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is clear that Ankara is trying to look after its interests, including economic ones. It is also hoping to gain the status of a mediator who has helped to bring peace between Moscow and Kyiv. Turkey is keen on peace and the return of its interests with both countries before 24 February 2022. Analysing Turkish-Ukrainian and Turkish-Russian

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relations for more than a year since the war's outbreak and the conflict's impact on Turkey, one can ask whether it will gain or lose more in the international context with its stance. Will it become the big winner or the big loser of this conflict, and how will President Recep' Tayyip Erdoğan's balancing policy affect the domestic situation in the country?

### Turkish-Russian relations

Due to its strategic location as a 'gateway' between the Middle East and the Balkans and guarding the passage from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, Turkey has been an important ally or dangerous adversary in various conflicts. After the experience of the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire sided with the Central Powers, which lost the war and paid for it with the loss of a large part of its territory, the Turkish elite wanted to avoid entangling the state in another war at all costs. It balked for most of the Second World War, declaring war on the Third Reich and Japan only in February 1945. Given the situation of the Cold War period, Ankara could not remain in a neutral stance.<sup>2</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) came to power, it returned to a policy of balancing between 'East' and 'West,' defined as Russia and the US/NATO. Turkey's attitude after the Russian aggression against Ukraine represents one dimension of this balancing act.

When analyzing the consequences that the Russo-Ukrainian war will have for Turkey, it is essential to realize the interests the countries shared before the outbreak of the conflict. Turkish-Russian relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century were shaped correctly and depended on mutual interests and areas of rivalry. The biggest crisis of recent years occurred in 2015 when a Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian Su-24 aircraft that was alleged to have violated Turkish airspace.<sup>3</sup> The Russian side disagreed with this version of events, which believed that the plane had not violated Turkish airspace, so the use of force was unjustified.<sup>4</sup> After the incident, the rank of mutual diplomatic relations

<sup>2</sup> More K.W. Olszowska, "The significance of the Black Sea in Turko-Soviet relations in 1939–1946", *Folia Historica Cracoviensia*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2021, pp. 43–61.

<sup>3</sup> *Eadem*, "Trudne sojusze Turcji", [in:] *Konteksty dla Trójmorza. Turcja, Bałkany Zachodnie i Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w polityce międzynarodowej*, red. *eadem*, Kraków: Regionalny Ośrodek Debaty Międzynarodowej, 2020, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> "Главнокомандующий ВКС России представил фактическую картину атаки 24 ноября турецкого истребителя F-16 на российский самолет Су-24М в небе над Си-

dropped significantly. The Russian administration imposed an embargo on Turkish food products, cooperation in the economic and military spheres was suspended, and the number of Russian tourists traveling to Turkey dropped by 90%.<sup>5</sup> It was Ankara that first bent to improve relations. Both sides tried to escape the crisis ‘with a face’; according to the Turkish side, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent a statement to President Vladimir Putin explaining how important Moscow was for Ankara and was said to regret the situation. On the other hand, the Russian side maintains that the Turkish president apologized for the downing of the plane.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the actual content of the message, the goal was achieved, and on 27 June 2016, the two countries re-established close cooperation.

Gazprom immediately declared its readiness to resume talks with Turkey’s BOTAŞ Petroleum Pipeline Corporation regarding constructing the Turkish Stream offshore gas pipeline. Both parties are keen to build this pipeline; the contract for Türk Stream (then Turkish Stream) was signed on 10 November 2016. Construction of the first line of the offshore part started on 7 May 2017.<sup>7</sup> This investment is necessary for Moscow, as it reduces Russia’s dependence on transit through Ukraine.

Russia is one of Turkey’s most important trading partners. The volume of trade between the two countries reached in 2019. USD 26 309 billion, with Turkish exports worth USD 3 854 billion and imports worth USD 22 454 billion.<sup>8</sup> In August 2021, Trade Minister Mehmet Muş announced that Turkey and Russia aim to increase trade volumes to USD 100 billion and increase cooperation in energy, industry, agriculture, and tourism.<sup>9</sup> In 2022, Turkish exports to Russia rose to USD 9,340 billion, and Russian imports to Turkey

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рией”, Министерство обороны Российской Федерации (Минобороны России), [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12066900](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12066900) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>5</sup> K.W. Olszowska, “Przyjaciel Ameryki, sojusznik Rosji? Zawilości tureckiej polityki zagranicznej”, *Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Nauki Społeczne*, nr 18(3), 2017, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> *Eadem*, “Trudne sojusze Turcji”, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> *More Eadem*, “The intricacies of (un)lasting Turkish-Russian alliances”, *The Warsaw Institute Review*, nr 3(14), 2020, pp. 82–83.

<sup>8</sup> “Relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation”, *Republic of Türkiye – Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, [www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey-and-the-russian-federation.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey-and-the-russian-federation.en.mfa) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>9</sup> “Turkey vows to rev up trade with Russia to reach mutual \$100B goal”, *Daily Sabah*, 1.08.2021, [www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkey-vows-to-rev-up-trade-with-russia-to-reach-mutual-100b-goal](http://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkey-vows-to-rev-up-trade-with-russia-to-reach-mutual-100b-goal) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

were USD 58,850 million.<sup>10</sup> Turkey has not joined the Western sanctions on Russia. It has even become a trading platform between Russia and Western countries. Of course, the US is aware of Turkish assistance in circumventing sanctions. In April 2023, the US State Department imposed sanctions on a minimum of four entities based in Turkey that assisted in the transfer of 'dual-use' goods and thus helped the Russian war effort.<sup>11</sup>

An important issue for the Turkish economy was Russian tourists, who continue to be one of the largest groups, and tourism is an important sector of the Turkish economy. It is also worth noting that the Russian authorities have already used tourists as a tool to put pressure on Turkey. An example from 2021 is worth mentioning when Turkish Bayraktary TB2 drones sold to Ukraine bombed Russian positions in the Donbas. President Erdoğan stressed internationally that Crimea should be returned to Ukraine. Russia responded by halting air links with Turkey. Moscow justified the move with the epidemiological situation related to the SARS-Cov-2 virus outbreak. Anna Popova, Russia's chief sanitary doctor, reported that among Russians who had returned from abroad and tested positive, as many as 80% were in Turkey. Initially, flights were halted from 12 April to 1 June, a decision taken even though 533,000 Russians had already purchased trips to Turkey during this period. The ban was then extended further until 21 June.<sup>12</sup> After the outbreak of war, Russians were no longer just a tourist movement. Russians also became the largest group of foreigners to buy property in Turkey, among them the Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, who rented property in Istanbul for \$50,000 a month. Turkey has enabled the Russian capital to evade sanctions, with Russians launching more than 1,300 companies in the Bosphorus country in 2022, 670% more than the year before.

The construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant in Mersin province was also an essential joint venture; the contract for its construction was concluded in 2010. Rosatom built the plant, and nuclear fuel is to be supplied by the Russians. The investment will officially open at the end of April 2023.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> H.F. Büyük, "Turkey's Foreign Trade Deficit Spikes, Imports from Russia Double", *Balkan Insight*, 31.01.2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/01/31/turkeys-foreign-trade-deficit-spikes-imports-from-russia-double> [accessed: 16.04.2023].

<sup>11</sup> J. Spicer, "U.S. sanctions Turkey-based entities it says helped Russia's war", *Reuters*, 12.04.2023, [www.reuters.com/world/us-sanctions-turkey-based-entities-it-says-helped-russias-war-2023-04-12](http://www.reuters.com/world/us-sanctions-turkey-based-entities-it-says-helped-russias-war-2023-04-12) [accessed: 16.04.2023].

<sup>12</sup> "Rusya Türkiye'ye uçuş yasağını 21 Haziran'a uzattı", *Deutsche Welle*, 1.06.2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3uFud> [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>13</sup> K. Byzdra, "Putin z wizytą w Turcji? Ma otworzyć elektrownię budowaną przez Rosatom", *Energetyka24*, 1.04.2023, <https://energetyka24.com/gaz/wiadomosci/put>



Of course, relations with Russia are not only about economic cooperation. They are also about competition for influence in Syria, Libya, and the Caucasus. The Russian-Ukrainian war led to some relaxation in the Syrian war. Erdoğan, due to internal economic problems and public dissatisfaction with many migrants, is keen to expand the ‘security zone’ so that Syrians can be moved there. In the last year, when the Turkish side warned of the possibility of another offensive, Iran pressured Russia not to give way to Turkey, which showed unequivocally that it would not give way to Ankara in its sphere of influence.

### Turkish-Ukrainian relations

However, when looking at the implications of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Turkish relations with Kyiv should not be overlooked. Trade turnover between Turkey and Ukraine in 2019 was USD 4.8 billion (USD 2.09 billion exports from Turkey, USD 2.72 billion imports from Ukraine). Turkish drones were already 2021 used during the Donbas War. Even under Russian aggression against Ukraine, on 3 February 2022, Erdoğan traveled to Kyiv for a meeting with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy. This visit was pre-planned and linked to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Ukraine and Turkey. At that time, a free trade zone and a framework agreement on cooperation in high aerospace technology were signed in Kyiv. An agreement was also signed on establishing a drone factory and a training center for drone operators near Kyiv, jointly to produce Bayraktar Akinci heavy combat drones, with the Ukrainian side responsible for building the engines. It is worth noting that at the beginning of April 2023, the Bayraktar Akinci drone with Ukrainian motors passed tests. Cooperation in the defense sector is thus developing despite the ongoing war in Ukraine.

We must determine how many Bayraktar TB2s and other weapons Turkey has sold or transferred to Ukraine. This is hardly surprising, as it is sensitive data. There is mainly unofficial information provided by Foreign Policy that since November 2022, Ankara has been supplying Kyiv with Dual Purpose Improved Conventional Munition (DPICM), which Turkey produced with the US during the Cold War.<sup>14</sup> In addition, there have been reports of

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in-z-wizyta-w-turcji-ma-otworzyc-elektrownie-budowana-przez-rosatom [accessed: 16.04.2023].

<sup>14</sup> Unofficially: “Turcja przekazuje Ukrainie amunicję kasetową”, *Rzeczpospolita*, 11.01.2023, [www.rp.pl/konflikty-zbrojne/art37756721-nieoficjalnie-turcja-przekazuje-ukrainie-amunicje-kasetowa](http://www.rp.pl/konflikty-zbrojne/art37756721-nieoficjalnie-turcja-przekazuje-ukrainie-amunicje-kasetowa) [accessed: 16.04.2023].

sales to Kyiv of Kirpi transport vehicles, helmets, and bulletproof vests. However, accurate and official figures must wait until the war ends.

Turkey is sending humanitarian aid to Ukraine. By August 2022, it was estimated at 98 trucks. It is also negotiating between the Ukrainian and Russian sides on the transfer of prisoners. It was to the territory of Turkey that the now legendary defenders of Azovstal were transported, where they were reunited with their families as, according to the agreement, they could not return to Ukraine. It is estimated that there are currently around 100,000 Ukrainian refugees in Turkey. Of course, this aid also brings concrete benefits to Ankara. On 18 August 2022 (a dozen days after the Turkish-Russian meeting in Sochi), President Erdoğan visited Lviv and met with his Ukrainian counterpart. The composition of the Turkish delegation was comprehensive, but the Turks returned to the country with separate agreements for the reconstruction of Ukrainian infrastructure after the war. A joint working group was also set up to attract Turkish companies and capital after the war.

Ukrainian-Turkish economic cooperation is crucial for Ankara (and Kyiv), even though there are claims that it is not a long-term cooperation for either side.<sup>15</sup> However, observing how essential sectors it is, we could not be sure of heralding its temporary nature. Moreover, the Turkish market is open to economic cooperation; in March 2023, it was reported that it opened up to Ukrainian fish and seafood exports.

### Big winner or big loser?

The importance of Turkey became apparent very soon after the war began. The subject of the Black Sea straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, over which Turkey has control under the Montreux Convention of 1936, resurfaced. This allowed it to close the passage to countries at war (but then it had to enable the return of the Black Sea fleet), or if it feared the threat of war, it could close it completely. Ankara chose the first option, which was predictable; otherwise, it would have suggested that it feared Moscow's aggression. However, this situation has shown that despite the development of the arms sector and the world since the Cold War, Turkey's geographical location still makes it an important ally.

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<sup>15</sup> I. Kusa, "From Ally to Mediator: How Russia's Invasion Has Changed Ukraine-Turkey Relations", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 7.10.2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88097> [accessed: 16.04.2023].

President Erdoğan cared precisely about showing that Turkey was a regional power to be reckoned with and not to be ignored as an inferior ally. He did not care about cutting himself off from either side, as economic interests became paramount. Therefore, Turkey decided to use its balancing act to mediate between Russia and Ukraine. In doing so, it wanted, on the one hand, to gain international prominence, to show itself to be an essential member of NATO whose interests must be reckoned with, and, on the other hand, a peaceful resolution of the war and a return to the situation before it broke out would be in the interests of the Turkish economy.

The first meeting of foreign ministers took place on 10 March 2022 on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum.<sup>16</sup> Negotiations in Istanbul occurred a few weeks later, on 29 March 2022. They did not yield significant results but showed that both sides considered Turkey, as a potential mediator. Turkey returned to this context a few months later when on 22 July, grain agreements were signed for 120 days (renewable) between Turkey, the UN, and Ukraine and Turkey, the UN, and Russia. Under these, it became possible to transport grain from Ukrainian ports across the Black Sea. This agreement was necessary for Ankara not only for prestige reasons – a mediator in such an important agreement, but also because by buying a significant part of the grain (at a discount), it could either sell it or give it to countries threatened by famine and thus increase its soft power. By March 2023, 23 million tonnes of grain had been exported under the agreement. Under the ‘Grain from Ukraine’ initiative, Kyiv is expected to send around 60 ships with Ukrainian grain to Africa by mid-2023. By March 2023, Ukraine had raised over \$200 million and sent 140,000 tonnes of Ukrainian grain to the poorest countries. This is undoubtedly a significant success for Turkish diplomacy, although there are also controversial reports of, among other things, Turkey buying Ukrainian grain looted by Russia.

## Conclusion

The first year of the Russian-Ukrainian war has shown that Turkey primarily focuses on its interests. Huge economic problems, inflation reaching more than 80% officially and 180% unofficially, and the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in May 2023 have caused Turkish foreign policy to

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<sup>16</sup> K. Strachota, A. Michalski, “Ostrożność i wyczekiwanie. Turcja wobec wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej”, *Komentarz OSW*, 10.03.2022, [www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2022-03-10/ostroznosc-i-wyczekiwanie-turcja-wobec-wojny-rosyjsko](http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2022-03-10/ostroznosc-i-wyczekiwanie-turcja-wobec-wojny-rosyjsko) [accessed: 6.04.2023].

change considerably. Relations with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt improved significantly. This turn in Turkish policy was geared towards increasing trade and gaining support from wealthy Gulf countries to reduce inflation. Turkey's attitude towards Russia and Ukraine was also geared towards satisfying its main economic objectives of increasing exports and pursuing major investment projects. Turkey sought to balance as long as possible without incurring costs.

Under the embargo of five Turkish banks by the US Treasury Department, they withdrew from using the Russian payment system 'Mir'.<sup>17</sup> On 10 March 2023, Bloomberg news agency, citing a senior Turkish government official, confirmed that Ankara had halted the transit of EU- and US-sanctioned goods to Russia. This indicates that, on the one hand, Turkey continues to carry a propaganda message indicating independence from the US and pursuing an independent policy. Still, it must reckon with the US and Western countries when it comes to incurring costs or seeking assistance.

At this point, Turkey can be considered a winner in the Russian-Ukrainian war, as it manages to pursue a balancing policy using, especially economically, contact with both Kyiv and Moscow. However, Ankara cannot seek such a policy in the long term without incurring costs. As historical experience has shown, such indecisiveness will likely discourage all interested states once they no longer need Turkey.

Despite its efforts, it also seems to need help to mediate the peace talks. Although Turkey is safer and more neutral than Belarus, a mediator with a more robust international position than Turkey will be needed here. Despite the uncertainty about the consequences (negative or positive) of Turkey's foreign policy base, it can already be said that neutrality was what the Turks themselves expected of their leader. Unsurprisingly, much foreign policy is now conducted on domestic politics and the upcoming elections.

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<sup>17</sup> M. Ciesielski, "Turcja beneficjentem wojny w Ukrainie", *Obserwator finansowy*, [www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/tematyka/makroekonomia/trendy-gospodarcze/turcja-beneficjentem-wojny-w-ukrainie](http://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/tematyka/makroekonomia/trendy-gospodarcze/turcja-beneficjentem-wojny-w-ukrainie) [accessed: 25.03.2023].

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**Abstract**

More than a year after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, a little can already be said about Turkey's attitude and the consequences of the conflict for Ankara. Turkey is balancing between Moscow and Kiev, trying to gain ground as a mediator, but also looking after its interests, especially economic ones. The text aims to analyse Turkish-Russian and Turkish-Ukrainian relations, especially since the outbreak of the war, and to answer the question of what the possible consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war are for Turkey, whether it will be the big winner or rather the big loser of the situation.

**Key words:** Turkey, Ukraine, Russia, war



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# **Global, regional and internal factors of Egypt's stance towards Russo-Ukrainian war**

## **Introduction**

A full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war broke out in early 2022, throwing many countries of the Global South into a kind of confusion. This is because their governments knew that with the outbreak of this conflict, the post-Cold War era was over, and the world had entered a period of turbulence from which a new international order could emerge. Many countries of the Global South tried to distance themselves from this conflict, as they did not want to unequivocally take sides, primarily since taking the side of Ukraine would have meant de facto taking the side of the United States and other Western states. One such country was Egypt.

Even before the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the foreign policy of the Arab Republic of Egypt had undergone significant shifts compared to the period before 2013. That is especially true of relations with the United States and the Russian Federation (balancing strategy) and the key players of the Arabian Peninsula – Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – on

which Egypt has become even more financially dependent. This balancing act (though still with the pro-American bias) and dependence on the wealthy Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states thus determines Cairo's foreign policy, which, in its actions in the international arena, must consider the sometimes conflicting interests of its partners.

Consequently, from the very beginning of the full-scale war that erupted in February 2022, Cairo presented itself as a neutral actor, which favoured Russia more than Ukraine and its Western partners. Especially the United States, for which this armed conflict in Eastern Europe can be perceived as 'proxy war' between Washington and Moscow. Thus, on the one hand, Egypt condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine but, at the same time, it refrained from joining Western sanctions against Russia. The Egyptian government declared its commitment to peacefully resolving the conflict and offered to mediate between Russia and Ukraine. That did not change the fact that Egypt's position on the war in Ukraine was complex. That is because the country has close economic ties with Russia and increasingly depends on it to purchase military equipment, investments and grain imports. Accordingly, in the first months since the war broke out, Cairo has tried to strike a balance, as evidenced by the fact that it voted for a UN General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, it did not join Western sanctions against the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup>

The paper aims to explain the origins of Egypt's foreign policy toward the Russian-Ukrainian war, analysing both systemic (global and regional levels) and internal determinants. The primary hypothesis says that Egypt's policy towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict results from Egypt's relations with the United States, the Russian Federation and regional powers, namely Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with the Egyptian leaders – seeking to balance between global actors (Washington and Moscow) – are trying to pragmatically put their policy in line with those of major regional powers with which Cairo has close relations while taking into account interests of their nation, i.e. food security. Cairo's attitude to the Russian-Ukrainian war exemplifies such a policy. However, it also highlighted the limits of a balancing policy when one global actor (the US) is more powerful than another (Russia).

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<sup>1</sup> J. Sharp, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations", *Congressional Research Service*, 2.03.2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf> [accessed: 4.06.2023].



## Global and regional factors

The main systemic context for analyzing Egypt's policy toward the Russian-Ukrainian war is the assumption of a declining role for the United States in the world, and therefore, in the MENA region, which has led to an intensification of the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran (and – over some time – Turkey), as well as generating more significant activity of the Russian Federation in the Middle East, the best example of which is its participation in the civil war in Syria on the side of Bashar al-Assad, which coincided with Cairo's position towards the Syrian regime after 2013.<sup>2</sup>

When discussing the declining role of the United States in the world, it should be noted that the country remains the world's largest military power. However, its relative power is less dominant than in the 1990s or 2000s. In doing so, the concept of relative power – one of the main categories of structural realism – refers to the comparison of capabilities in power distribution among states within the international system. According to this concept, states are driven by the desire to survive and maintain security in a world of anarchy, which is served by maximizing their relative advantage over others. In doing so, states recognize that their security and survival are influenced by the relationship of their power to other states rather than their absolute power. In discussing the relative power of the United States, therefore, it is essential to take into account the fact that the United States remains in many respects a global superpower, with significant – albeit gradually diminishing – advantages in economics, military, technology, innovation, research, higher education and cultural influence.

Whether the relative power of the United States is declining is a topic of ongoing debate among scholars and analysts. Several factors have contributed to the discussion of a potential decline in US relative power. The rise of emerging economies, particularly China, has shifted the global economic landscape. While the United States remains the largest economy in nominal terms, China's rapid economic growth and investment expansion have led some observers to conclude that Washington's economic dominance over China is no longer as great as it once was. The United States has also faced numerous military challenges in regions of the world, including the MENA region and East Asia. These challenges, coupled with long-term involvement in conflicts such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have questioned the sustainability of US

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<sup>2</sup> M. Lipa, "Polityka Egiptu wobec wojny domowej w Syrii po 2013 roku", [in:] *Dziesięciolecie tragedii: wewnętrzne i zewnętrzne uwarunkowania wojny domowej w Syrii 2011–2021*, eds. K. Kościelniak, K. Rak, Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2022, pp. 125–140.

military supremacy and its willingness to interfere in global affairs. In addition, some argue that the United States' soft power and ability to shape global norms and values have also eroded. The United States has also been criticised for withdrawing from some international agreements, which has raised concerns about its role as a global leader.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, when analyzing Cairo's stance toward the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is necessary to pay attention to the changes that have taken place in the structure of the international system in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both at the global and regional levels, and then relate them to Egypt's foreign policy actions toward two antagonists, one of which is directly involved in the war in Ukraine (Russia), and the other is actively supporting the Ukrainians in their struggle for territorial integrity (the United States).

While Russia's rise to global superpower status is out of the question for the foreseeable future (China, Russia's main ally, is the only country that stands a chance of doing so), undermining the United States' global position as world hegemon is becoming increasingly possible. The beneficiary of this process – as mentioned earlier – will most likely be China, whose influence on Egypt is not analyzed in this article, which does not change the fact that it is Beijing that stands to benefit most from the Russian-Ukrainian war in order to consolidate its status as the leader of the Global South, of which the MENA region is also a part. At the regional level, there are, in turn, several rivalries of varying intensity that have intensified with the transformation of the international system in a direction other than unipolarity: the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, which has recently been eased thanks to Chinese mediation, the Turkish-Arab-Israeli rivalry (also eased in recent years due to the warming of Arab-Turkish relations); and even a potential Saudi-Emirati rivalry.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> More on this debate in: P. van Hoof, "US Decline: Structural Trends or Poor Choices?", *Atlantisch Perspectief*, vol. 46, no. 6, 2022, pp. 4–8; N. Kitchen, M. Cox, "Power, structural power, and American decline", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 6, 2019, pp. 734–752.

<sup>4</sup> S.G. Almotairi, "China's Emergence as a Potential Superpower and the World Order", *Margalla Papers*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2021, pp. 35–46; J. Barnes-Dacey, E. Geranmayeh, H. Lovatt, "Middle East Battle Lines", *ECFR Policy Brief*, May 2018, [https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/The\\_Middle\\_Easts\\_New\\_Battle\\_Lines.pdf](https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/The_Middle_Easts_New_Battle_Lines.pdf) [accessed: 4.06.2023]; H. Baycar, "China-U.S. Rivalry Enters a New Phase in the Middle East", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 18.05.2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/89789> [accessed: 4.06.2023]; Ch.W. Dunne, "The UAE-Saudi Arabia Rivalry Becomes a Rift", *Arab Center Washington DC*, 6.07.2023, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-uae-saudi-arabia-rivalry-becomes-a-rift> [accessed: 9.07.2023].

### *Egypt towards Russia after the Arab Spring*

Since the military coup in Egypt that took place in mid-2013, the Russian Federation had shown great interest in its initiator and leader (Abdel Fattah al-Sisi), giving him unequivocal support when he ran for the presidency in spring 2014, for which the latter reciprocated to Moscow in the form of Cairo's policy towards Damascus and the civil war in Syria, which was in line with Russia's line. On the Egyptian side, moreover, the primary motivation for intensifying relations with Russia was the desire for a stable partnership with one of the emerging global actors (competing with the United States and allied with China), which was assumed to bring additional military and economic benefits in the context of the progressive 'diversification' of Egyptian foreign policy. The first official meeting between representatives of the two countries, which took place after the overthrow of Muhammad Mursi, took place in Cairo even before Sisi became president of the Arab Republic of Egypt, i.e. in the fall of 2013. It was attended by the foreign and defence ministers of both countries, as well as Sisi (then as defence minister) and Sergei Shoygu.<sup>5</sup>

That was the first in a series of diplomatic meetings that have been held repeatedly in subsequent years (including at the level of heads of state), resulting in a deepening of strategic relations. The first example of strengthening these relations was the signing of a preliminary agreement in September 2014 on Egypt's planned purchase of \$3.5 billion worth of Russian military equipment. The provisions of this agreement were confirmed in February 2015 during Vladimir Putin's visit to Egypt, which can be seen as a revisit since Sisi visited Russia twice in 2014 – as defence minister (in February) and as Egyptian president (in August). The main topics of these talks were Egypt's purchase of Russian military equipment, the development of a free trade zone in Egypt (preferential for Russia), the sale of Russian agricultural goods to Egypt, and Russian investments in the Suez Canal zone. One of the main achievements of Putin's visit to Egypt in early 2015 was signing military contracts for Egypt's future purchase of Russian fighter jets and combat helicopters.<sup>6</sup>

Egyptian-Russian cooperation was tested in late October 2015 when there was a tragic terrorist attack on a Russian passenger plane that went down on Egyptian soil. The so-called Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. However, the leaders of Egypt and Russia managed to overcome this

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<sup>5</sup> M. Lipa, "Egipt wobec głównych osi rywalizacji międzynarodowej na Bliskim Wschodzie po Arabskiej Wiośnie", *Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe*, nr 3, 2018, pp. 51–66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

crisis, as evidenced by the fact that a month later – at the end of November 2015 – a preliminary agreement was signed under which the air forces of each signatory country would be allowed to use the airspace and military air bases of the partner. That was in line with the Russian Federation's new naval doctrine, which focused on restoring a permanent Russian naval presence in the Mediterranean and strengthening Russia's strategic position in the Black Sea basin. Another agreement in this regard was signed by the two countries' defence ministers in November 2017, with another important meeting held in December 2017 in Cairo. At that time, the catalogue of joint military and economic ventures was supplemented by a plan to build a nuclear power plant in the north of Egypt. The issue had been discussed since 2014, but it was not until late 2017 that the project details were presented and the relevant agreements were signed. The project is expected to cost \$30 billion, with 85% of the investment to be covered by a Russian loan. Construction of the power plant was expected to be completed in 2026, although the deadline can be expected to be extended.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, it is clear that the last decade has seen a significant evolution in the Russian Federation's policy in the MENA region, exemplified by Moscow's unambiguously pro-regime policy and several other actions that challenge the hegemonic position of the United States. These actions include Russia's involvement in the Libyan conflict, as well as, in particular, the intensification of relations with Cairo about issues of strategic importance, i.e. not only economic cooperation but also defence and energy cooperation, which made it possible to describe Egyptian-Russian relations as very close, although not yet strategic, as these were still reserved for the US.

### *Egypt towards the United States after the Arab Spring*

During the Barack Obama presidency, the American administration condemned the coup in Egypt and criticized human rights violations. As a consequence, Cairo started to pursue good relations with Russia, which – like during the Cold War in the context of US-Soviet rivalry – began to grow into a US competitor in the region. Unlike the US, Russia welcomed the overthrow of the Islamist president and joined the 'diplomatic offensive' that was counterbalanced during the presidency of Donald Trump – formally began in January 2017.

The Obama administration has been criticized for not doing enough to stop Russia's growing presence in the Middle East. The momentum for that

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<sup>7</sup> S. El-Wardany, E. Mazneva, A.L. Wahba, "Putin and Sisi Finalize \$30 Billion Nuclear Plant Deal", *Bloomberg*, 11.12.2017, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-10/putin-sisi-set-to-finalize-30-billion-nuclear-deal-boost-ties](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-10/putin-sisi-set-to-finalize-30-billion-nuclear-deal-boost-ties) [accessed: 16.07.2023].

was when the Russian Federation joined the Syrian war. This happened at the expense of relations with Ankara. However, due to deteriorating relations between Ankara and Washington (as well as NATO), the Turkish government pragmatically accepted Russia's military activity in the Black Sea and the Levant. The question was how much Russia would be able to financially bear the costs of its new policy in the Middle East – both in the Levant and towards Egypt. Regardless of the answer to this question, the US-Egypt relations have deteriorated after the mid-2013 coup and Obama did not want to hide it.

US government, willing to 'punish' its Arab ally, decided to suspend both military assistance (\$1.3 billion per year), as well as previously planned joint military exercises.<sup>8</sup> That only strengthened the pro-Russian course of Cairo. This means that 'sanctions' of this type have proved ineffective since Egypt holds a kind of 'pivotal potential' in terms of establishing favourable alliances with stronger actors. The Egyptian government has proved again that it can conduct hyper realistic foreign policy and exploit tensions between global actors.

It was only the change of the head of state in Washington that allowed to break the deadlock in mutual relations, although the first steps in this direction were taken at the end of Obama's presidency. Trump began to shun President Sisi's criticism of his actions in Egypt (human rights violation and political cleansing aimed at moderate Islamists), focusing on security issues and strategic cooperation.<sup>9</sup> Due to the number of regional issues, such as the civil war in Libya or the conflict on the Sinai Peninsula (with jihadist militias), the Americans resumed – after 2014, when Egypt did not receive the planned military support – military assistance. Trump knows that Egypt plays an important role in securing the western border of Israel and the border crossing between Egypt and Gaza, which is of great importance for the security of Israel. As a result, the Egyptian army received from the United States another combat aircraft (F-16), Harpoon missiles, as well as modern tanks.<sup>10</sup>

However, the real revival of diplomatic relations did not occur until 2017, when both presidents, Trump and Sisi, began to communicate regularly, having several meetings on various occasions and conducting a number of telephone conversations. These talks concerned matters related to the

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<sup>8</sup> J. Sharp, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> B. Barfi, *Egypt's New Realism. Challenges under Sisi*, Washington, DC: The Washington Institute, 2018, pp. 87–90.

<sup>10</sup> P. McLeary, "U.S. Resuming F-16, Tank Shipments to Egypt", *Foreign Policy*, 31.03.2015, [www.foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/31/us-f-16-arms-abrams-shipments-egypt](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/31/us-f-16-arms-abrams-shipments-egypt) [accessed: 16.07.2023].

development of economic cooperation and security. Specifically, they concerned the same issues that the leaders of both countries dealt with before the Arab Spring (such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the war on terrorism), as well as the new issues – i.e. the internal conflict in Libya. This was followed by the civil war in Syria, which made reaching an agreement between Cairo and Washington harder. On the Syrian issue, the Egypt supported the Russian stance, once again balancing between the Russian Federation and the United States. The American administration – understanding that previous policy towards Egypt has proved ineffective – begun restoring the status quo. A good start was the efforts to resume joint military manoeuvres (Bright Star), conducted since 1980. They actually resumed in late summer of 2017.<sup>11</sup>

Sisi's first visit to Washington during Trump's presidency took place in April 2017. During the year, the American president did not mention Egypt's internal political problems, focusing on common international security challenges. The meeting could be considered a 'new opening' that was disturbed in December 2017 – along with the decision to move the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which put the Egyptian government in a difficult position. Although the reaction of Cairo was moderate, the Egyptians could not but distance themselves from this move. This was reflected in the reporting of this issue to the UN Security Council, which was eventually vetoed by the Americans.<sup>12</sup>

Washington has begun to take some measures in order to reverse Egypt's pro-Russian direction. Vice President Mike Pence's visit to Egypt was supposed to be the first step to achieve this goal. It was originally planned for December 2017, but due to the events mentioned above, it was necessary to move it to January 2018. It was the highest-level visit led by a US official to the region since Trump announced his declaration on Jerusalem. During this visit, Pence assured Sisi that the United States would support a two-state solution if the two sides agreed to it. In his meeting with Sisi, Pence also pledged US backing Egypt's fight against terrorism and said that the ties between the two countries had never been stronger after a period of 'drifting apart'. However, the US parliament still had some reservations concerning the financing of the Egyptian army to the same extent as it was before 2014. This is evidenced by

<sup>11</sup> A. Eleiba, "US-Egyptian Bright Star Manoeuvres Start Today", *Abram Online*, 8.09.2018, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/311097/Egypt/Politics-/USEgyptian-Bright-Star-manoevres-start-today.aspx> [accessed: 16.07.2023].

<sup>12</sup> A. Elhadidi, "Egypt's Shifting Foreign Policy Priorities", *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, Spring 2018, [www.thecairoreview.com/essays/egypts-shifting-foreign-policy-priorities](http://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/egypts-shifting-foreign-policy-priorities) [accessed: 16.07.2023].

the fact that in August 2017 the sum of military aid was reduced by \$200 million. However, this was accompanied by unambiguous signals – coming from the White House – of support for Egypt and President Sisi from Trump.<sup>13</sup>

Relations between Egypt and the United States became strained in 2018 since Donald Trump's government became increasingly critical of Egypt's human rights record and, as a result, suspended some military aid to the country. The Joe Biden administration has reinstated some military aid but has continued to raise concerns about human rights violations. Egypt and the United States have cooperated on many levels despite these tensions.<sup>14</sup> However, relations cooled again in the context of the war in Ukraine when it emerged that Egyptian authorities may have wanted to sell GRAD launcher combat missiles to Russia. When the matter came to light, Cairo denied that and then pledged to sell the weapons to the Ukrainians.<sup>15</sup>

### *Egypt – Saudi Arabia – UAE triangle*

Egypt's relations with major GCC players Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates determine the foreign policy of Cairo, which is economically and politically dependent on Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. This dependence increased after 2013, making it necessary for the Egyptian regime (in order to survive economic problems) to cultivate relations with these countries. As a result, Egypt's policy toward the Russian-Ukrainian war is a product of these countries' positions toward Russia, Ukraine and the United States.

Egyptian-Saudi and Egyptian-Emirati relations improved significantly after 2013 and were characterized by close cooperation on political, economic and security issues. Both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi provided significant political support to Egypt after the ouster of President Mohamed Mursi in 2013. As a result, both the Saudi and Emirati governments saw the political changes in Egypt as a way to counter the rise of Islamist movements in the region. They supported the Egyptian government's efforts to increase political stability. In addition, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are critical financial supporters of Egypt, as evidenced by the fact that the two oil monarchies regularly provide

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*; B. Barfi, *op. cit.*, pp. 87–90.

<sup>14</sup> J. Sharp, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> E. Hill, M. Ryan, S. O'Grady, S. Oakford, "Egypt secretly planned to supply rockets to Russia, leaked U.S. document says", *The Washington Post*, 10.04.2023, [www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/04/10/egypt-weapons-russia](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/04/10/egypt-weapons-russia) [accessed: 16.07.2023]; "Egypt agreed to supply arms to Ukraine after US talks: Report", *Al-Jazeera*, 18.04.2023, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/18/egypt-agreed-to-supply-arms-to-ukraine-after-us-talks-report](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/18/egypt-agreed-to-supply-arms-to-ukraine-after-us-talks-report) [accessed: 16.07.2023].

Egypt with financial and investment assistance to address economic challenges and support development projects in Egypt. The countries have also entered into various economic cooperation agreements to boost trade and investment, as evidenced by the two countries' close cooperation on joint development projects, including infrastructure initiatives and energy-related ventures. They have also cooperated on security issues, particularly in combating terrorism and addressing regional security threats. As Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE coordinate efforts to combat extremist groups and maintain regional stability, they also hold similar positions on regional issues such as the conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Libya.<sup>16</sup>

Egypt and Saudi Arabia have signed many agreements on economic cooperation, tourism and investment since 2020. They have also held a number of high-level meetings, including a visit by the Saudi heir to the throne, Mohammed bin Salman, to Egypt in February 2020. Relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been strengthened by shared concerns over the political situation in Libya and the rise in popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood and its vision of political Islam. In 2020, Egypt and Saudi Arabia (as well as the United Arab Emirates and Russia) also provided military support to Khalifa Haftar, a Libyan general fighting the Government of National Unity (GNA). Although there are sometimes tensions between Cairo and Riyadh, it does not take long for Egypt and Saudi Arabia to agree on critical issues.<sup>17</sup>

The two countries also share a strategy of distancing themselves from Washington, particularly evident during Biden's presidency, with whom the Saudis are not on good terms. US-Saudi relations have been strained in recent years due to several factors, including the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen and Saudi Arabia's poor human rights record. In 2019, Saudi agents killed Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist who had been critical of the Saudi government, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. The international community widely condemned the killing, and the United States imposed sanctions on some Saudi officials. Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen has

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<sup>16</sup> D. Butter, "Egypt and the Gulf. Allies and Rivals", *Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme*, April 2020, [www.chathamhouse.org/2020/04/egypt-and-gulf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/04/egypt-and-gulf) [accessed: 16.07.2023].

<sup>17</sup> A. Adly, "Will Saudi-Egyptian geopolitical partnership push for economic integration? Increasing interdependencies", *Middle East Directions*, no. 2, February 2019, [https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/61125/MED\\_2019\\_02.pdf?sequence=1&is-Allowed=y](https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/61125/MED_2019_02.pdf?sequence=1&is-Allowed=y) [accessed: 16.07.2023]; Y. Farouk, "More Than Money: Post Mubarak Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf", *Gulf Research Center Paper*, April 2014, [www.files.ethz.ch/isn/179860/Egypt\\_Money\\_new\\_29-4-14\\_2576.pdf](http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/179860/Egypt_Money_new_29-4-14_2576.pdf) [accessed: 16.07.2023].



also been a source of tension between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The war has caused a humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and the United States has been criticized for supporting the Saudi-led coalition. Finally, the state of human rights in Saudi Arabia has also been a source of tension with the US. The Saudi government has been accused of human rights violations, including the imprisonment of dissidents and torture. Despite these tensions, the US and Saudi Arabia continue cooperating on many issues, including the fight against terrorism in the Middle East. In 2022, President Biden visited Saudi Arabia and met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in what was seen as an attempt to reset relations between the two countries, which is of great importance to Washington, especially in the face of the Russian-Ukrainian war. If only because Saudi Arabia has a strong influence on global energy commodity prices and cooperates with Russia under the OPEC PLUS format.<sup>18</sup>

Setting aside the aforementioned economic cooperation, Egypt and the UAE are linked by increasingly close security cooperation, as evidenced by the fact that the two countries conduct regular military exercises to enhance military and intelligence cooperation. In this regard, Egypt and the UAE have often coordinated their positions on regional issues in the past and have been aligned on issues related to the conflicts in Libya and Syria and *vis-à-vis* Qatar during the 2017–2021 blockade of Qatar. It can be said that Egypt and the UAE have jointly sought to consolidate their influence in the Middle East (sometimes even at the expense of Riyadh), supporting allies and intervening in conflicts to shape regional dynamics jointly. The increasingly close cooperation between Cairo and Abu Dhabi is evidenced by the fact that Egypt and the UAE have signed a number of agreements on economic cooperation, tourism and investment in recent years. They also held a number of high-level meetings, including a visit by UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Egypt in February 2020.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war, the United Arab Emirates had taken a relatively neutral stance on the Russian-Ukrainian war, with some pro-Russian bias, as was pointed out by Jean-Pierre Filiu when he wrote that UAE enabled „key financial transactions in support of the Russian military campaign, all the while becoming a coveted haven for oligarchs who find

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; J. Sharp, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> D. Butter, *op. cit.*; N. Belmonte, “UAE and Egypt celebrate half a century of bilateral relations”, *Atalayar*, 26.10.2022, [www.atalayar.com/en/articulo/politics/uae-and-egypt-celebrate-half-century-bilateral-relations/20221026180540158820.html](http://www.atalayar.com/en/articulo/politics/uae-and-egypt-celebrate-half-century-bilateral-relations/20221026180540158820.html) [accessed: 16.07.2023].

themselves targeted by Western sanctions.”<sup>20</sup> Of course, Abu Dhabi has abstained from voting on UN resolutions condemning the Russian invasion and has not imposed sanctions on Russia. However, the United Arab Emirates supported Ukraine’s territorial integrity and offered to help mediate the conflict. The UAE’s stance on the war is likely due to several factors. The country has close economic ties with Russia and depends on Russia for military equipment. The United Arab Emirates is also the GCC, which has condemned the Russian invasion but, at the same time, has called for a negotiated solution favourable to both sides in the conflict, putting the organization at odds with anti-Putin US policy.<sup>21</sup>

### Internal factors: economic stagnation and food security

Egypt is a country whose population surpassed one hundred million in 2020, the result of dynamic population growth that generates ongoing demographic pressure on the Egyptian economy and its ability to ensure food security. The country has been facing severe economic troubles for many years, which the Russian-Ukrainian war has reinforced, as it has not only affected food security but also contributed to rising food prices, particularly for grain.

In the middle of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Egypt faced severe economic challenges that affected its economy and financial stability. At that time, a sweeping economic reform program was initiated to address long-standing problems such as the budget deficit, high public debt and currency shortages. The reforms included subsidy cuts, reduced public spending and currency devaluation, which initially led to higher inflation and an increase in the cost of living. As a result of the economic reforms and currency devaluation, inflation skyrocketed in Egypt. The higher cost of goods and services eroded purchasing power and negatively affected the standard of living of many Egyptians. The main factors contributing to this increase were the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the global economic downturn. The pandemic disrupted global supply chains, leading to higher prices for goods and services. The war in Ukraine – on the other hand – led to the increasing food prices and caused energy prices to rise, further contributing to inflation, which exceeded 30% in 2023. In Egypt, the economic slowdown

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<sup>20</sup> J.P. Filiu, “The UAE is on team Russia in war against Ukraine”, *Le Monde*, 2.04.2023, [www.lemonde.fr/en/russia/article/2023/04/02/uae-is-on-team-russia-in-war-against-ukraine\\_6021450\\_140.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/en/russia/article/2023/04/02/uae-is-on-team-russia-in-war-against-ukraine_6021450_140.html) [accessed: 16.07.2023].

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

was accompanied by a decline in the value of the Egyptian pound, which pushed up the price of imported goods. Egypt has also struggled with high unemployment, especially among the youth, which, combined with a rapidly growing population, poses serious social, economic and political challenges.<sup>22</sup>

Egypt also faces serious food security challenges due to rapid population growth, limited arable land, water scarcity and dependence on food imports. Its rapidly growing population pressures the country's resources, including food production and distribution. Much of Egypt's land is desert, and arable land is limited to the Nile Delta and the Nile Valley. The scarcity of arable land and water scarcity make it challenging to increase agricultural productivity. Egypt, therefore relies heavily on food imports to meet its domestic needs. Dependence on international food import markets exposes Egypt to price fluctuations and supply disruptions, making the country vulnerable to economic turbulence.<sup>23</sup>

Egypt is thus one of the largest importers of wheat in the world. Due to limited arable land and water resources, the country heavily depends on wheat imports to meet domestic demand for this staple food item. Wheat is a crucial part of the Egyptian diet and is used in producing various food products such as bread and pasta. Wheat imports to Egypt come from Russia, Ukraine, France and the United States, among others, and more recently from India. The price and availability of wheat on the international market could affect Egypt's economy, given its heavy reliance on imports. Fluctuations in global wheat prices or disruptions in supply chains could affect food costs and potentially impact food security in the country, which is an existential problem for Egypt.<sup>24</sup>

Egypt is a significant importer of wheat from both Russia and Ukraine. Both countries are major wheat exporters, and Egypt depends on these supply routes to meet its domestic demand for this staple food product. In 2019–2022, these countries accounted for the bulk of Egypt's wheat imports (66–87%), with Ukrainian wheat accounting for 20–30% of imports, while Russian wheat accounted for up to 67% (in the years 2021–2022). Russian wheat exports have

<sup>22</sup> “How deep are Egypt's economic troubles?”, *Reuters*, 3.03.2023, [www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-deep-are-egypts-economic-troubles-2023-03-03](http://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-deep-are-egypts-economic-troubles-2023-03-03) [accessed: 23.07.2023]; R. Fabiani, M.W. Hanna, “Egypt in the Balance?”, *International Crisis Group*, 31.05.2023, [www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/egypt/egypt-in-the-balance](http://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/egypt/egypt-in-the-balance) [accessed: 23.07.2023].

<sup>23</sup> A. Mazloum, A. Rizk, N. Muhab, Z. Asal, “Addressing Food Insecurity in Egypt: Towards Sustaining Food Access for All”, *Policy Policy Paper – The AUC School of Global Affairs and Public Policy*, June 2021, [https://documents.aucegypt.edu/Docs/GAPP/Public%20Policy%20Hub%20Webpage/27\\_Policy%20Paper\\_Addresssing%20Food%20Insecurity%20in%20Egypt.pdf](https://documents.aucegypt.edu/Docs/GAPP/Public%20Policy%20Hub%20Webpage/27_Policy%20Paper_Addresssing%20Food%20Insecurity%20in%20Egypt.pdf) [accessed: 23.07.2023].

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

been growing in recent years, making the Russian Federation a significant player in the global wheat market, with the fact that Russian wheat was offered at attractive prices also crucial for Egypt. Ukraine, like Russia, provides convenient access to chip wheat to Egypt from its Black Sea ports (via the Mediterranean). That makes Kyiv an attractive exporter as well. The Russian-Ukrainian war has significantly disrupted Ukraine's wheat exports, leading to a sharp increase in the grain price, generating several negative consequences for the Egyptian economy and society. First, it has led to increased food costs, straining household budgets. Second, it made it more difficult for the government to provide subsidized food to people experiencing poverty. Third, the war also disrupted the supply of other food products, such as cooking oil and sugar. Not surprisingly, the Russian-Ukrainian war has become a food security concern for Egypt and an additional factor in the deepening economic recession.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

Summarizing Egypt's position towards the Russo-Ukrainian war, it should be noted that it is conditioned by several factors, the most important of which are political and external. Egypt, distancing itself from its global ally (the US) by maintaining a neutral stance toward the war, seeks to diversify its foreign policy, directing it toward balancing the global centres of world politics. That aligns with the policies of Egypt's main regional partners, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with which Cairo must reckon. However, there is also a non-political factor of an internal nature – food security threatened by the war, which also prompts Egypt to pursue policies that favour Egypt's primary importer of wheat, the Russian Federation. That is accompanied by severe economic problems, manifesting primarily in high inflation.

<sup>25</sup> M. Tanchum, "The Russia-Ukraine War has Turned Egypt's Food Crisis into an Existential Threat to the Economy", *Middle East Institute*, 3.03.2022, [www.mei.edu/publications/russia-ukraine-war-has-turned-egypts-food-crisis-existential-threat-economy](http://www.mei.edu/publications/russia-ukraine-war-has-turned-egypts-food-crisis-existential-threat-economy) [accessed: 23.07.2023]; K. Abay, F. Abdelradi, C. Breisinger, X. Diao, P. Dorosh, K. Pauw, J. Randriamamonjy, M. Raouf, J. Thurlow, "Egypt: Impacts of the Ukraine and Global Crises on Poverty and Food Security", *International Food Policy Research Institute*, 14.08.2022, <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/125312/136532.pdf?sequence=1> [accessed: 23.07.2023]; M. Gadallah, N. Mamdouh, "The Socioeconomic Impact of the Russia-Ukraine Crisis on Vulnerable Families and Children in Egypt. Mitigating Food Security and Nutrition Concerns", UNICEF, June 2023, [www.unicef.org/egypt/reports/socioeconomic-impact-russia-ukraine-crisis-vulnerable-families-and-children-egypt](http://www.unicef.org/egypt/reports/socioeconomic-impact-russia-ukraine-crisis-vulnerable-families-and-children-egypt) [accessed: 23.07.2023].

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## **Abstract**

The paper aims to explain the origins of Egypt's foreign policy toward the Russian-Ukrainian war. The major hypothesis says that Egypt's policy towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict results from Egypt's relations with the United States, the Russian Federation and regional powers, namely Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with the Egyptian leaders trying to pragmatically put their policy in line with those of major regional powers with which Cairo has close relations while taking into account interests of their nation.

**Key words:** Egypt, United States, Russia-Ukraine war, foreign policy, food security







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# Arab context of the Ukraine conflict in *Russia Today Arabic* and *Sputnik*

## Introduction

The ongoing war in Ukraine has affected media sources in the world, including main information agencies. In fact, everyday news reports that describe brutal activities of Russian troops in Ukraine, as well as growing threats from Moscow's regime have shocked public opinion and rose concerns about global security and stability.

However, Russian authorities try to present their own perspectives of the conflict, and they have launched information campaigns in state-controlled media such as *Russia Today (RT)* or *Sputnik*, including their Arabic versions.<sup>1</sup> The Kremlin also exploits social media such as Telegram, which

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<sup>1</sup> The referenced *Sputnik Arabic* and *RT Arabic* websites have been blocked in the browsers of users located in the European Union from April 10, 2023, under Council Regulation (EU) 2023/427 of February 25, 2023, amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures given Russia's actions destabilizing the situation in Ukraine.

provides different pro-Russian channels. In March 2022 The United States and its allies in the West imposed a ban on Russian information agencies due to alleged disinformation and manipulation.<sup>2</sup>

The present article deals with research on Russian narrative of the Ukraine war in Arabic versions of *Sputnik* and *RT Arabic*. The study also focuses on Arab context in media coverages of these media sources. It should be noted that media studies often emphasize that journalistic writing should respond to information that are relevant for a certain audience. For example, news reports about any events in a particular region have a bigger impact on local readers than news, which takes place in distant locations.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, combination of the Ukraine war and the Arab context has more effective communicative values.

Furthermore, the corpus of the study relies on media reports that demonstrate specific and emotional narrative of the Ukraine conflict addressed to different audiences in the Arab world. They are selected from other news released by *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik*, which usually consists of neutral or impartial headlines, and avoid any commentaries or emotional payload such as angry, fear, joy or sadness and surprise.

Thus, examples presented in this article refer to materials published on official websites of *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik* from the beginning of the Ukraine war on 24 February 2022 to 31 March 2023. It should be noted that materials released by *RT Arabic* date back to February 2023 when *RT's* website became accessible. The void may be explained by the fact that the long suspension of the website has affected the availability of archives. Therefore, most of the media reports presented in this article are dated back to 2023.

The article is divided into two sections. The first part reflects research on negative approaches to the West, and the second section deals with analysis of media reports concerning reinforcement of alliances between Russia and the Middle East.

## Methodology

The methodology implemented in this article relies on critical analysis and evaluation of data, including qualitative data. It should be noted that main

<sup>2</sup> F.Y. Chee, "Russia Today loses fight against EU ban, Moscow warns of retaliation", *Reuters*, 27.07.2022, [www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/eu-court-backs-eu-ban-russia-today-2022-07-27](http://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/eu-court-backs-eu-ban-russia-today-2022-07-27) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>3</sup> I. Fang, *Writing style differences in newspaper, radio, and television news*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1991, pp. 7–48.

examples selected and presented in this article are based on theoretical approaches of propaganda techniques which consist of different narrative or stylistic devices to persuade the audience and stimulate opinions and particular behaviors.

Propaganda tools, contain, among others, *ad hominem*, which is one of the most popular indoctrination devices. It focuses on attacking an opponent by fallacious argumentation, false analogies or personal and emotional beliefs in order to discredit the adversary. *Ad hominem* is often related to simplification of reality and stimulation of emotional payloads in order to create and impose a dominant point of view without any alternatives. In addition, least-of-evils concerns narrative that justifies and authorizes negative policies or actions by highlighting bigger evils and more tragic consequences. Besides, card stacking reflects techniques which aim at convincing the audience by using selected information or one-sided views without complex details and contexts.<sup>4</sup> This technique is similar to agenda setting that deals with attracting the attention of the audience to certain details and data, as well as formulating opinions according to hierarchy of news.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, persuasion of the audience to certain views relies on stylistic devices such as glittering generalities which reflect condensation of words that endorse a person or an idea. These words are used in general statements that cannot be proved or disproved. In addition, the words often rely on euphemisms that modify the essential meaning and relieve its negative connotations.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, propaganda campaigns also consist of testimonial, which reflects combination of respected and credible sources with negative ideas or personalities to glorify them. Band wagon deals in turn with techniques suggesting that particular ideas or leaders are responding to needs and expectations of the majority of people.<sup>7</sup>

### Negative approaches to the West

Some media reports releases by *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik* consist of additional messages and stylistic devices, which stimulate emotions and opinions of the

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<sup>4</sup> M. Kula, *Propaganda współczesna, istota – właściwości*, Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2005, pp. 155–157.

<sup>5</sup> E. Nowak, “Teoria agenda-setting a nowe media”, *Studia Medioznawcze*, vol. 3, no. 66, 2016, pp. 11–24.

<sup>6</sup> M. Shabo, *Techniques of Propaganda & Persuasion*, Clayton: Prestwick House, 2008, pp. 30–35.

<sup>7</sup> M. Kula, *op. cit.*, pp. 162–166.

public opinion in the Middle East. It is evident in the media coverage concerning blasphemy of the Quran by Ukrainian soldiers.

In March 2022 *RT Arabic* referred to a controversial video, which circulated on social media and showed Ukrainian soldiers cutting pork meat on a copy of the Quran, and then burning some pages of the holy book. Ukrainian authorities claimed that the video is fake, and it is a part of Kremlin's propaganda against Kyiv.<sup>8</sup> Despite the controversies and manipulations, *RT Arabic* has started massive media campaigns on this video.

For example, *RT Arabic* quotes representatives of Muslim associations in Sudan who condemn the incident and consider it as a provocation against Islam. In addition, the representatives encourage other Muslim states to cut relationships, including economic relations with Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, *RT Arabic* is also concerned with political responses declared by the organization *Harakat al-umma* (Movement of the Nation), which is affiliated with Hezbollah in Lebanon. The group argues that the profanation of the Quran leads to religious tensions in Ukraine, and Ukrainian leaders should apologize for this humiliation. Thus, Muslim leaders who support Ukraine must also modify their support to Kiev.<sup>10</sup>

More radical opinions are presented by the president of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov who stresses that the incident is an example of fascism and satanism. He is also wondering how the Ukrainians will treat the Quran when Chechen soldiers approach to their positions. Kadyrov also threatens the Ukrainians to punish responsible for the blasphemy.<sup>11</sup>

Increase of religious tensions by *RT Arabic* is also evident in the news report, which refers to the Muslim scholar Sadiq al-Nablusi from Lebanon who designates an Arabic neologism *zalinskiyya* (zalenskism) for the blasphemy in Ukraine. The scholar elaborates that this word identifies Ukrainian extremism and religious prejudice. He also claims that the blasphemy will encourage

<sup>8</sup> D. Ong, "Ukraine Says Russia 'Staged' The Video Showing Ukrainian Soldiers Desecrating Muslim Quran", *International Business Times*, 16.03.2023, [www.ibtimes.com/ukraine-says-russia-staged-video-showing-ukrainian-soldiers-desecrating-muslim-quran-3677797](http://www.ibtimes.com/ukraine-says-russia-staged-video-showing-ukrainian-soldiers-desecrating-muslim-quran-3677797) [accessed: 11.04.2023].

<sup>9</sup> "Mas'ul fi majma' al-fiqh al-islāmī as-sūdānī yad'u al-muslimīn li-muqāṭa'at ukrānyā 'ala khalfiyyat ḥarq al-qur'ān", *RT Arabic*, 21.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1444989](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1444989) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>10</sup> "Amīn 'am ḥarakat al-umma li-RT: tadnīs al-qur'ān fī ukrānyā yushbihu mā yaqūmu bihi al-isrā'īliyy min isā'at li-al-muqaddasāt", *RT Arabic*, 17.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/middle\\_east/1444095](http://www.rtarabic.com/middle_east/1444095) [accessed: 11.04.2023].

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Muslim soldiers in the Russian army who will be more brave on the battlefield, and they will gain more capacities and fighting spirit.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine, Ekrima Sabri defines the blasphemy in Ukraine as: *khalfiyya ta'aşşubiyya sawdāwiyya* (black fanatic background), which leads to hate and humiliation of human values and peaceful coexistence of different faiths in the world.<sup>13</sup>

*RT Arabic* also quotes Sheikh Abd Allah al-Salih, the scholar from Qom (Iran), which is considered as a holy city in Shia Islam along with Al-Najaf in Iraq. Sheikh Al-Salih argues that people responsible for the blasphemy in Ukraine represents Nazi groups, and he explains that the West is concerned with secularism and it ignores religious values.<sup>14</sup>

The citations of different representatives of Muslim associations and centers demonstrate the testimonial strategy that aims at increasing negative sentiments towards the West, which is considered by *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik* as evil, depraved and wicked world. Ironically, none of the citations are directly addressed to Russia. Moreover, the claims declared by the Muslim scholars and leaders coincide with Kremlin's ideological backgrounds and political objectives in Ukraine, which refer to the so-called military operation against nazis. The references to the bravery of Muslim soldiers in the Russian army or the neologism *zalinskiyya* (zalenskism) demonstrate influences of Putin's regime in the media coverage.

The religious connotations are also adapted to *Sputnik's* reports on the attack against the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in East Jerusalem on 19 March 2023 when two Israeli settlers injured one of the priests in the church. The news report focuses on Russian respond, which reflects strong condemnations of the attack, and it insists on Israeli authorities to take decisive actions against persons responsible for the assault.<sup>15</sup> The news report corresponds to Putin's declarations regarding defense of Orthodox church's values and national

<sup>12</sup> "Bāḥith islāmī lubnānī li- RT: ḥarq al-junūd al-ukrān li-al-qur'ān zāhira 'zalinskiyya' jadīda", *RT Arabic*, 17.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/middle\\_east/1444073](http://www.rtarabic.com/middle_east/1444073) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>13</sup> "Khaṭīb al-aqsa: al-junūd al-ukrān al-ladhīn aḥarqu al-qur'ān yantamūna li-khalfiyya ta'aşşubiyya sawdāwiyya ḥāqida", *RT Arabic*, 17.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/middle\\_east/1444050](http://www.rtarabic.com/middle_east/1444050) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>14</sup> "Ustādh bi-jāmi'at qum yataḥaddathu 'an dalālāt tadnīs al-junūd al-ukrāniyyin nuskhan min al-qur'ān al-karīm", *RT Arabic*, 17.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1444115](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1444115) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>15</sup> "Al-Khārijīyya ar-rūsiyya tuṭālibu bi-muḥākamat al-mas'ūlīn 'an al-hujūm 'ala kanīsat al-juthmāniyya fī al-quds", *Sputnik*, 23.03.2023, <https://sputnikarabic.ae/20230323> [accessed: 12.04.2023].

identity. Putin also criticizes liberal ideas or behaviors, as well as secularization of public spheres in European countries, and he condemns LGBT's rights and aspirations of other communities.<sup>16</sup>

*RT Arabic* also presents its own perspectives of the arrest warrant against Vladimir Putin issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 17 March 2023.<sup>17</sup> *RT Arabic* refers to the opinions of Sameh Mohamed Ashour who is an Egyptian lawyer and former Vice President of the Egypt Bar Association. According to Ashour, the ICC represents interests of the US and NATO, and it ignores crimes committed in the Arab and Muslim world, including Palestine, which suffers from human tragedies. The lawyer also stresses that the West aims at destruction of Ukraine like it did in the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> The report includes the testimonial technique, which relies on the quotation that lends credibility to Russian views on Putin's innocence. In addition, the media coverage exemplifies the card stacking and the agenda setting that withhold inconvenient information about Putin's crimes and the arrest warrant and instead, the message highlights the hostile policy of the West against its opponents such as Russia or the Arab world. Moreover, *RT Arabic* aims at polarization of different countries, and split into two opposing camps like it happened during the Cold War in the eighties when many Arab states, including Egypt, formed an alliance with the Soviet Union.

Moreover, the card stacking and the agenda setting is also applied to the content presented by *Sputnik*. Many headlines are politicized, and they serve a political approach, as in reports on the tragic earthquake in Turkey and Syria. On 6 February 2023 a massive earthquake struck Turkey and north-western Syria, especially Idlib province, which is inhabited by around 3 million people who have already suffered from medical, food and water shortages before the earthquake, which has just decreased the situation in the country. However, Syria and Russia have blocked humanitarian supplies across

<sup>16</sup> N. Buckley, "Putin urges Russians to return to values of religion", *Financial Times*, 19.09.2013, [www.ft.com/content/cdedfd64-214f-11e3-a92a-00144feab7de](http://www.ft.com/content/cdedfd64-214f-11e3-a92a-00144feab7de) [accessed: 7.04.2023].

<sup>17</sup> "Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Beleva", *The International Criminal Court (ICC)*, 17.03.2023, [www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and](http://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>18</sup> "Mişr, naqib al-muḥāmīn as-sābiq yu'alliqu 'ala qarār al-maḥkama al-jinā'iyya ad-dawliyya bi-khuṣūṣ ar-ra'īs būtin", *RT Arabic*, 17.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1444103](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1444103) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

the border with Turkey at the UN because Moscow insisted on deliveries from Damascus controlled by Al-Assad regime.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, *Sputnik* ignores many details and concentrates on Kremlin's perspectives of the disaster by selecting certain data and information. According to *Sputnik*, border crossings with Turkey and Syria do not need any decisions from the UN, and authorities in Damascus have already accepted new land accesses to Syria. *Sputnik* also mentions Russia, Iran, Algeria, Egypt and the UAE, and maintains that only those countries have provided humanitarian aid to Syria. Besides, Western assistance is omitted in the report because Russia aims at reinforcement of tensions between the East and the West.

However, strengthening of relationships between the Arab world and Russia is also demonstrated by the news report on the official visit of Sergei Lavrov to Iraq on 5 February 2023. The Head of Russian diplomacy expresses his gratitude to Iraq for wise and responsible position in the context of Western sanctions against Putin's regime. Moreover, *Sputnik* describes these sanctions as: *al-'uqūbāt al-mu 'ādiya li-rūsya ghayr ash-shar 'iyya* (hostile sanctions against Russia are illegitimate) to persuade the Arab audiences that the West is pursuing negative policy against Russia.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the phrase implies *ad hominem* based on simplification of reality and selective perspectives of the Ukraine conflict and its geopolitical consequences. The report underlines the importance of Iraq for Moscow's concept of a broad alliance in the Middle East. In fact, Iraq is an important component of Russia's foreign policy along with historical and strong relationships with Iran.

Furthermore, the similar concept of propaganda is adapted to media releases demonstrating Russia as a stable and credible partner for the Arab world. On 4 January 2023 *Sputnik* releases a report arguing that Western countries try to divert Russia from the Middle East. However, *Sputnik* refers to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and states that the West demonstrates its helplessness and powerlessness. This statement is exemplified by ineffective cooperation between the US and the Fourth Committee of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

<sup>19</sup> A. Sparrow, H. Rihawi, "Don't Rely on Assad to Get Aid to Syria's Earthquake Victims", *Foreign Policy*, 15.02.2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/15/un-assad-syria-earthquake-aid-victims> [accessed: 7.04.2023].

<sup>20</sup> "Al-Khārijīyya ar-rūsīyya: al-'irāq yattakhidhu mawqifan mutawāzinan izā'a al-'amaliyya al-'askariyya al-khāṣṣa fi ukrānyā", *Sputnik*, 6.02.2023, <https://sputnikarabic.ae/20230206> [accessed: 7.04.2023].

(UNRWA).<sup>21</sup> Although *Sputnik* does not elaborate any details of this topic, it is worth mentioning that one of the problems between the US and the UNRWA reflects freezing of funds to this institution by president Trump's administration in 2018. The decision was a result of exerting pressure on Palestinian factions to start negotiations and compromises with Israel.<sup>22</sup> However, the tensions between the Trump's administration and the Palestinian authorities become a strong argument for Russian propaganda, which continues to build the negative image of the West in the Middle East.

### Reinforcement of alliances with the Middle East

Russia's foreign policy during the Ukraine conflict aims at reinforcement of bilateral relations with Middle Eastern countries. Official visits of Russian delegations create the possibility of achieving this objective.

For example, *RT Arabic* refers to the visit of Bashar al-Assad to Moscow on 15 March 2023. The media report demonstrates Syria's concession and support towards the Russian regime. For example, the war in Ukraine is called by Al-Assad *mantiqat al-ʿamaliyya al-ʿaskariyya al-khāṣṣa* (the region of special military operation), which aims at destruction of nazi influences in Ukraine.<sup>23</sup> Al-Assad repeats the statements attributed to Putin who referred several times to denazification's plans in Ukraine to justify and authorize brutal attacks against civilians and local infrastructure.<sup>24</sup> Besides, the narrative reflects the fallacious argumentation and emotional payload that justifies and authorizes Putin's policy in Ukraine.

However, Al-Assad declares that the world order has changed since the Ukraine war. The world need, in his opinion, a new balance between global

<sup>21</sup> "Al-Khārijīyya ar-rūsiyya: ayyu muḥāwala li-ibʿād mūsū ʿan ash-sharq al-awsaṭ maḥkūm ʿalayhā bi-al-fashli", *Sputnik*, 4.01.2023, <https://sputnikarabic.ae/20230104> [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>22</sup> H. Amr, "In one move, Trump eliminated US funding for UNRWA and the US role as Mideast peacemaker", *Brookings*, 7.09.2018, [www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/09/07/in-one-move-trump-eliminated-us-funding-for-unrwa-and-the-us-role-as-mideast-peacemaker](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/09/07/in-one-move-trump-eliminated-us-funding-for-unrwa-and-the-us-role-as-mideast-peacemaker) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>23</sup> "Al-Asad yuʿalliqu ʿala musharaka mutaṭawwiʿin min sūryā fi al-ʿamaliyyāt al-ʿaskariyya al-khāṣṣa fi ukrānyā", *RT Arabic*, 16.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1443557](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1443557) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>24</sup> J. Veidlinger, "Analysis: Putin's claim that war on Ukraine is to target Nazis is absurd. Here's why", *PBS News Hour*, 28.02.2022, [www.pbs.org/newshour/world/analysis-putins-claim-that-war-on-ukraine-is-to-target-nazis-is-absurd-heres-why](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/analysis-putins-claim-that-war-on-ukraine-is-to-target-nazis-is-absurd-heres-why) [accessed: 10.04.2023].



superpowers, as well as political scenarios for the near future. Al-Assad also denies speculations over Syrian troops within the Russian army in Ukraine. He claims that Syrians who are fighting on the Ukraine battlefield are rather volunteers without any support from the Syrian government.<sup>25</sup> Al-Assad's statements demonstrate a breach of Syrian submissiveness to Russia.

Putin, for his part, emphasizes that bilateral military operations against ISIS, allowed to decrease terrorist threats in Syria. In addition, he calls Syria and Russia *aṣḍiqā' mukhliṣīn* (faithful friends).<sup>26</sup> Thus, Russian president puts pressure on Al-Assad, and he recalls the importance of Russian military and political assistance, which guarantees stability of Al-Assad's regime. *RT Arabic* applies once again the card stacking and agenda setting that deal with selective data to pay the attention of the audience to certain messages.

Furthermore, the card stacking and agenda setting are also adapted to *RT Arabic's* media coverages of the official visit of the UAE's president Mohammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan to Saint Petersburg on 11 October 2022. The news report refers to Putin's statement, which emphasizes the diplomatic importance of the UAE as a mediator between Ukraine and Russia. The Russian leader also appreciates involvement of the UAE in release of war prisoners in the Ukraine battleground.<sup>27</sup> Muhammad bin Zayed focuses in turn on economic cooperation with Russia, and he argues that the trade exchange between both countries increased from 2,5 billion USD to 5 billion USD in recent years, and more than 500 thousand Russian tourists have already visited the UAE. Muhammad bin Zayed also notices that around 4 thousand companies operate in the Emirati market, and local authorities have opened a Russian school.<sup>28</sup>

Besides, the bilateral relations are identified as *ṣadāqa waṭīda* (strong and close friendship) which demonstrates glittering generalities because the Arabic adjective *waṭīd* expresses intensification and closeness of the relations. Hence an ordinary strength is usually designated by the adjective *qawiyy* (strong).

<sup>25</sup> "Al-Asad khilāl liqā'ihi ma'a būtin ya'rabu 'an da'mihi li- ar-rūsiyā fi al-'amaliyya al-'askariyya al-khāṣṣa bi-ukrānyā", *RT Arabic*, 15.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1443354](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1443354) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>26</sup> "Al-Asad yu'alliqu 'ala musharaka mutaṭawwi'in min sūryā fi al-'amaliyyāt al-'askariyya al-khāṣṣa fi ukrānyā", *RT Arabic*, 16.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1443557](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1443557) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>27</sup> "Ar-ra'īs al-imārāt akkada li-nazīrihi ar-rūsiyy isti'dādihi li-muwāṣala al-wasāta bayna mūskū wa kiyif", *RT Arabic*, 11.10.2022, [www.rtarabic.com/middle\\_east/1398102](http://www.rtarabic.com/middle_east/1398102) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>28</sup> "Al-Khārijīyya al-imārātiyya: ziyāra ra'īs al-bilād ila rūsiyā tahdifu li-al-ishāmi bi-qasṭinā fi ihlāl as-salām", *RT Arabic*, 11.10.2022, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1397859](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1397859) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

Despite positive outcomes of the visit and promising approaches, the media report includes some additional messages. The economic objectives is the most important factor for the Emirati side. Besides, Putin rather focuses in his declarations on strong political alliance with the UAE and other Gulf states, which are considered as Western sphere of influences by Russia.

Moreover, the bilateral relations between Russia and the UAE are also endorsed by *Sputnik*, which defines the Emirati support by the following phrase: *al-khārijīyya ar-rūsīyya taqdiru ‘āliyyan al-musā‘ada al-imārātiyya, al-amr al-ladhī yushīru ila daraja ‘āliyya min thiqa bayna al-baladāyn* (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs highly values the Emirati support, which leads to high degree of confidence between both states). The adjective *‘āliyy* (high) plays an important role in the sentence, which applauds and exaggerates the relationships between the two countries. Indeed, *‘āliyy* is adapted both to the value and degree. However, the verb *qadara* (to value) designates multiple meanings in Arabic such as esteem, appreciation or cherishing.

Thus, the new concept of Russian foreign policy is also evident in the news report regarding the phone call between Putin and Sultan of Oman Haitham ibn Tarik Al-Said on 23 March 2023. According to *RT Arabic*, the Omani side is interested in development of transportation projects in the context of Russian infrastructure plans in Iran. In addition, Putin stressed that he appreciates a balanced and reasonable policy of the Sultanate, which does not agree with Western sanctions against Russia, and it avoids economic and military pressures from Western countries.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, *RT Arabic* conducted a long media campaign in the frame of the G20 foreign ministers meeting in New Delhi under India’s presidency on 1–2 March 2023. The summit was represented by Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, head of the US diplomacy Antony Blinken and China’s foreign minister Qin Gang. The sessions included talks on food security, climate change, terrorism and humanitarian assistance.<sup>30</sup>

However, *RT Arabic* implies once again the card stacking and agenda setting strategies by emphasizing less important details such as information about taking a seat by Sergei Lavrov next to Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister

<sup>29</sup> “Ba‘īdan ‘an ar-riwāya ar-rasmiyya, khabīr yaqra’u fī sabab al-itṭiṣāl al-hātifiyy at-tārīkhiyy bayna būtin wa sulṭān ‘umān”, *RT Arabic*, 23.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/middle\\_east/1445667](http://www.rtarabic.com/middle_east/1445667) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>30</sup> V. Pandey, S. Fraser, “India G20: Bitter divisions over Ukraine war mar talks”, *BBC News*, 2.03.2023, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-64796718](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-64796718) [accessed: 23.04.2023].

Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud and UAE's representative Abdullah bin Zayed.<sup>31</sup> The news report also noticed that Antony Blinken was seating at the far end of the room. It should be noted that these banal details contain additional content arguing growing position and influences of Russian diplomacy in the Arab world. The US role is simultaneously decreased because according to *RT Arabic*, Antony Blinken is seating alone, and Sergei Lavrov has good relations with the most important officials in the Gulf.

Moreover, Sergei Lavrov uses the opportunity to express his opinions about US policy in the world. He points out that the White House tries to replace traditional diplomacy by strength solutions. Sergei Lavrov refers in this context to the Black Sea Grain Initiative.<sup>32</sup> It is worth mentioning that the agreement was signed by Ukraine, Russia and Turkey, and it allowed to export grain products to the Middle East and Africa through the Black Sea. Russia suspended the export in October 2022, and accused Ukraine of attacks against its navy and cargo ships. The deal was renewed in November 2022 for 120 days, and in March 2023 Russia decided to extend the Agreement for 60 days contrary to Ukraine and Turkey, which insisted other 120 days.<sup>33</sup>

*RT Arabic* coverage is limited to Sergei Lavrov's statements, which accuse the West of blocking grain's shipping, and violations of international law or free trade. Lavrov also notes that the West responds and operates without any remorse, and it has buried the mediation of the UN Secretary-General in the field of the grain export. However, the negative approaches against the West are combined with Lavrov's statement about Russian willingness to donate grains without any costs for the Middle East or Africa.<sup>34</sup>

The simplification of reality and domination of one point of view is also evident in another report on the grain crisis. *RT Arabic* presents the following

<sup>31</sup> "Blinkin „yataṭarrafu" wa lāfrūf yatawassaṭu ṭāwila al-‘ishrīn bayna nazīrihi as-su‘ūdiyy wa al-imārāṭiyy", *RT Arabic*, 2.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1439440](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1439440) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>32</sup> "Lāfrūf amāma al-‘ishrīn: rūsiyā taṣirru ‘ala ijrā’ taḥqīq sarī’ wa shaffāf fī takhrīb as-sayl ash-shimāliyy", *RT Arabic*, 2.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1439444](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1439444) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>33</sup> S. Savage, "Ukraine cheers rollover of grain deal, but Russia objects again", *Politico*, 18.03.2023, [www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-grain-export-deal-extended-for-120-days](http://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-grain-export-deal-extended-for-120-days) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>34</sup> "Lāfrūf amāma al-‘ishrīn: rūsiyā taṣirru ‘ala ijrā’ taḥqīq sarī’ wa shaffāf fī takhrīb as-sayl ash-shimāliyy", *RT Arabic*, 2.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/world/1439444](http://www.rtarabic.com/world/1439444) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

lead: *al-qamḥ* „*bi-balāsh*” *li-ifriqyā* (wheat for free to Africa),<sup>35</sup> which consists of the colloquial form *bi-balāsh* (for free), which refers to popular expressions in the Arab world concerning bargaining in Middle Eastern marketplaces, as in the phrase: *yalla ya balaash*, which may be translated: ‘come on, it’s free!’<sup>36</sup> Thus, the lead in *RT Arabic* suggests that the export of grains is not a big deal for Russia, and it is considered as a simple trade transaction compared to bargaining. In fact, Russia exploits and extends the ongoing tension to affect Arab audiences, and to stimulate their concerns, fears and anger.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative is also elaborated by *Sputnik*, which assures the Arabic audiences that deliveries of grains will be preserved for the Arab world. *Sputnik* quotes the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “Kullu ma ittafaqnā ‘alayhi ma ‘a shurakā’inā, a bi-mā fi dhalika shurakā’ muhimmin mithla miṣr, al-latī ladayna ma ‘ahā qadr kabīr jiddan min al-ta’awun fi mukhtalafi al-majālāt, sa-yatimmu tanfidhahu” (Everything we agreed with our partners, including important partners like Egypt, with which we have highly valued cooperation in different fields, will be implemented).<sup>37</sup>

Similarly to *RT Arabic*, *Sputnik* implies the word *qadr* (value) to assess the relationships with certain countries such as the UAE or Egypt. However, Russia demonstrates the strategy of fear that reflects a warning for Arab states that are concerned over further cooperation with Moscow. Eventually, the grain agreement becomes a blackmail on Middle Eastern and African countries. For example, Egypt’s food security relies on import of grains and sunflower oil, and Russia exports 85% of wheats to Egypt.<sup>38</sup> However, countries, which declare full cooperation with the Kremlin are assured that grain supplies will reach their ports. Thus, the syntactic structure of the sentence mentioned above starts with uncertain conditions regarding the cooperation between Egypt and Russia, and the end of the sentence includes the favorable supplement: *sa-yatimmu tanfidhahu* (will be implemented).

<sup>35</sup> “Būtin: al-qamḥ „bi-balāsh” li-ifriqyā”, *RT Arabic*, 20.03.2023, [www.rtarabic.com/business/1444728](http://www.rtarabic.com/business/1444728) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>36</sup> “The word ‘balaash’”, *Language of Life*, <https://languagesoflife.com/2015/06/22/the-word-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4> [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>37</sup> “Al-Khārijīyya ar-rūsiyya tu’akkidu ‘ala anna mūskū sa-tanfī bi-kāffa iltizāmātihā li-tawrīd al-qamḥ li-miṣr”, *Sputnik*, 31.10.2022, <https://sputnikarabic.ae/20221031> [accessed: 12.04.2023].

<sup>38</sup> M. Tanchum, “The Russia-Ukraine war has turned Egypt’s food crisis into an existential threat to the economy”, *Middle East Institute-MEI*, March 2022, [www.mei.edu/publications/russia-ukraine-war-has-turned-egypts-food-crisis-existential-threat-economy](http://www.mei.edu/publications/russia-ukraine-war-has-turned-egypts-food-crisis-existential-threat-economy) [accessed: 11.04.2023].

Furthermore, *Sputnik* refers to Yemeni separatists from the Southern Transitional Council (STC). This group is supported by the UAE and it is fighting for the autonomy of Southern provinces in Yemen. The members of the delegation have emphasized historical role of Russia in the Arabian Peninsula, and its proper relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran, which may improve political and social situation in Yemen. The delegation also stressed that the STC must be involved into political dialogue with other sides of the conflict.

The Russian side did not respond officially to the Yemeni statements. However, the visit took place during the current truce and political negotiations with the main players of the war in Yemen: Houthi rebels and the internationally recognized government backed by president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi who is supported by Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that in January 2018 STC insurgents conducted heavy fights with forces loyal to president Hadi, and they besieged strategic points in Aden. President Hadi started negotiations with the separatists, and he promised to join the STC into future government. In addition, the UAE demonstrated independent policy in Yemen, despite an official alliance and military collaboration with Saudi Arabia. For example, Emirati forces have occupied Socotra in Spring 2018, and they installed loyal authorities in this island.<sup>39</sup>

The news report released by *Sputnik* suggests that Russia may engage more actively in the ongoing events in Yemen. The truce forged under auspices of the UN in April 2022 for six months. Along with a cease-fire, the agreement allowed deliveries of humanitarian aid to the port of Hodeida and the international airport of Sana controlled by Houthi rebels.<sup>40</sup> Fights have not escalated, although expire of the truce, but the political rivalries within different factions still affect tensions and possible eruption of fights. Therefore, Russia as an active member of the UN Security Council is pursuing its own objectives, especially in the context of Ukraine war, which contributed to economic sanctions against Russia. The conflict in Yemen can be used as an easy bargaining chip for Moscow, that can put pressure on other members of the UN to relieve the sanctions. Moreover, the STC may expect Russian support similarly to separatists from the Donbas region in Ukraine. Indeed, on 11 May 2014 Russia organized the referendums on the status of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and announced recognition of the republics on 21 February 2022, as the first UN member state,

<sup>39</sup> M. Styszyński, "Konflikt w Jemenie jako przykład wojny zastępczej", *Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe*, nr 3, 2018, pp. 243–256.

<sup>40</sup> S. Ballard, J. Kurtzer, "The Humanitarian Influence of Yemen's Truce", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 19.12.2022, [www.csis.org/analysis/humanitarian-influence-yemens-truce](http://www.csis.org/analysis/humanitarian-influence-yemens-truce) [accessed: 11.04.2023].

despite worldwide boycott of the results.<sup>41</sup> However, the narrative demonstrates the testimonial, which reflects combination of Yemeni separatist aspirations with negative outcomes of Russian interferences in Ukraine independence.

## Conclusion

The study demonstrates that *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik* incorporate Arabic context into the media coverage of the Ukraine war. However, the research argues that the narrative relies on propaganda objectives such as *ad hominem*, the card stacking and agenda setting, as well as the testimonial and glittering generalities. These devices play an important role in creation of the two opposite images, which reflect condemnation of the West and reinforcement of Russian political, diplomatic and economic relations with the Middle East.

For example, the testimonial is applied in the news reports on the blasphemy in Ukraine. The media coverage is based on statements declared by Muslim representatives to affect and stimulate emotions of the Muslim audience. However, the testimonial also enables to express Kremlin's political views on Ukraine and Western influences in the world. Besides, the testimonial adopted to the media report on the visits of Yemeni separatists to Moscow aims at justification and authorization of the referendum on the status of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine.

Moreover, the card stacking and agenda setting lead to the image of Putin's innocence in the context of the arrest warrant. In addition, many details are also ignored in the media coverage concerning the earthquake in Syria or the official visits of Russian and Arab officials. In fact, the research demonstrates that *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik* focus on details that reinforce the Russian position in the Arab world.

Furthermore, *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik* also combine emotional payloads of fears with Kremlin's objectives. It is evident in the media reports on the grain supplies to the Middle East. Indeed, *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik* suggest that negative policy of the West affects the deliveries, and Russia is the only credible power in the world, which can influence the supplies.

The study also argues that the glittering generalities play an important role in the Russian narrative. In fact, certain words and phrases reinforce the two images implemented in the media campaign.

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<sup>41</sup> A. Wierzbowska-Miazga, T. Iwański, P. Żochowski, "The farce of the 'referendum' in the Donbas", *The Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW)*, 14.05.2014, [www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-05-14/farce-referendum-donbas](http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-05-14/farce-referendum-donbas) [accessed: 12.04.2023].

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## Abstract

The present article is concerned with the Russian narrative of the Ukraine war in Arabic versions of *Sputnik* and *Russia Today Arabic* (*RT Arabic*). The tragic war in Ukraine has affected different media sources in the world, including Russian and pro-Russian media. However, *Sputnik* and *RT Arabic*'s media reports combine the Ukraine conflict with Arabic context addressed to different audiences in the Arab world.

This study also argues that the Russian narrative relies on propaganda devices such as *ad hominem*, card stacking and agenda setting, as well as testimonial and glittering generalities. These techniques affect the audience and enable to express Kremlin's political objectives on the Ukraine war and foreign policy. Moreover, the research demonstrates that the media coverage released by *RT Arabic* and *Sputnik* aims at creation of two opposite images, which blame the West and endorse Russian policy.

**Key words:** Ukraine war, Russian media, propaganda, the audience, the Middle East





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# **The foreign policy of Jordan and the Russia-Ukraine conflict**

## **Introduction**

On 24 February 2022 the Russian army initiated a full-scale aggression against the Ukrainian state. Without a doubt it is one of the most shocking events in world politics. Waging a war in Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was beyond imagination of most politicians and commentators. Russian authorities managed to concentrate a big army, before the eyes of the whole world, and then to strike. Nevertheless, until the very end most people did not believe that the situation would end up in aggression. This lack of faith had rational reasons. There were, of course, commentators believing in the good will of Russia, but this type of naivety characterised only a minority. Most commentators were convinced that a total Russian attack was too risky for Moscow, in political and economic terms. In this case one can speak of a complete lack of understanding of the way of thinking of both sides. Western politicians and observers were convinced that despite all the differences, with regard to basic issues Russians think the same as they do. They were supposed to be guided by the

state and society economic interests. They were also supposed to value, after all, international cooperation. Meanwhile, Russian elites despise the economic approach to foreign affairs and also fully accept isolation, whereas the welfare of Russian society for the authorities in Moscow is completely irrelevant when it comes to military issues. What is more, the society itself fully accepts this line of thinking of the authorities. A certain justification of the observers may be the fact that the attack of 24 February 2022 did bring Russia significant political and economic losses. From the perspective of western observers the losses surpass any benefits.

The actions Vladimir Putin's government result from a complete disregard towards European and American politicians and societies. One must admit that the disregard of Russian elites towards Western Europe turned out to be justified. After a year of war Germany and France showed weakness and their role in global politics underwent further decline. The European Union as a whole again turned out to be a politically minor force. Fortunately, the disregard toward American elites presented by Moscow turned out to be excessive. Additionally, the Russian assessment of Ukraine and the countries of central Europe turned out to be wrong.

The attack of 24 February 2022 was supposed to be a coup, the aim of which was quick overthrowing of pro-western Ukrainian authorities and to establish a pro-Russian government. It was also thought that the Ukrainian society would, at least passively, accept the results of the aggression as it felt a part of the Russian nation. This is the prerequisite to understand further events. Russia, surprisingly, did not plan a long-lasting war, but a brutal and spectacular coup. One may compare it to the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, although the comparison is a bit distant. After the failure of the abovementioned plan the government of Putin did not hold back, but began a long-lasting war. A seemingly impossible situation occurred – in Europe there began a regular war between two countries. The conflict is bigger than the war that broke out after the collapse of Yugoslavia. The war between Russia with Ukraine resonates not only locally, but it also affects the global situation.

A long-lasting war was not a plan of Russia; however, when it became reality Moscow escalated the conflict. Regarding the efforts of the USA to oppose its imperial plans Russia attempted to engage all overt and potential antagonists of Washington around the world. From its perspective an ideal situation would be to create an active, anti-American coalition supporting Moscow, also in its fight in Ukraine. Considering that perspective a vital issue is the attitude of Middle Eastern states, in particular the 'Arab world.' As it is commonly known, it is in the Middle East where Russia has the greatest

possibilities to gain overt allies. Iran, in fact, became a participant in the aggression. The government in Damascus also fully supports Moscow in the conflict. Thus, the area of Levant suffered very severely from the effects of the Dnieper area conflict.

The following text presents the situation of Jordan in the world changed by Russian aggression. Jordan is a pro-western Arab monarchy. It comprises a good example of the effects that the war between Russia and Ukraine exerts on such states. It is necessary to analyze the political situation with which the authorities in Amman have to deal with after 24 February 2022. The question that arises is whether the Jordan monarchy undertook any political actions in the new reality and how it generally has been reacting to this crisis. The second issue are economic results of the war from the perspective of the authorities in Amman. A discussion on this topic requires a revision of the general situation of the Jordanian monarchy that results from the late modern period.

Due to the fact that the topic is, literally, contemporary, it is not possible to use reliable documents in the analysis or to rely on relevant monographies. The following text, apart from the historical part, is based on commonly available news; to a large extent it comprises a personal reflection of the author concerning the abovementioned issues.

## The Hashemiite Kingdom of Jordan

The future Jordan was established as the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921 as a result of talks between Prince Abdullah, elder son of King Hijaz Hussein, and the British Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill. As a result of the agreement, the British handed over civil and police authority to the prince over the lands east of the Jordan, which formally belonged to Palestine, which was their mandate territory. Transjordan, of course, was not independent. Abdullah recognized British suzerainty and his country was a British protectorate until 1946.<sup>1</sup>

Transjordan was only created by the political will of London. Its own people did not seek to form this state. The very organization of a separate statehood was possible thanks to British subsidies. A separate elite in Amman, both at the court and in administration, was shaped in close cooperation with Great Britain. Until the end of his life, Abd Allah I himself hoped that his loyalty to London would allow him to seize the throne in Damascus and

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<sup>1</sup> M.C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the making of Jordan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 52–53.

unite Syria with Transjordan.<sup>2</sup> The most important element of this cooperation, however, was the establishment of the emirate's professional army (the Arab Legion) consisting of several thousand members during World War II. It was created by British officer John Bagot Glubb. Previously, this force was a small police unit. It was only during the war that Glubb persuaded London to create a professional emirate army. Formally, the commander-in-chief was the monarch, however, the de facto role was filled by Glubb. This army was almost entirely financed by London. In return, senior positions in the Arab Legion were filled by the British. The armed forces became the most important state institution and at the same time the main tool of London's influence on Amman.<sup>3</sup>

The army created by Glubb was a professional formation, employing even the illiterate. People from the Bedouin tribes were especially valued. There were no incentives for educated Arabs. Recruits had to serve from a simple soldier and could reach the position of an officer after many years. At the same time, the pan-Arab ideology had little influence on the soldiers. The only ideology that was promoted was loyalty to the monarch and the Hashemite family. Partly thanks to this, Amman avoided a phenomenon so typical of the 'Arab world' in the years 1949–1970 – military coups. Even after the Arabization of the command, the officer corps remained weakly politicized.<sup>4</sup>

In 1956, Glubb and British officers were removed from the kingdom, but the army maintained a strong relationship with the West, mainly (from 1957) with the USA. The army, expanded to tens of thousands of men, remains dependent on foreign subsidies.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, these armed forces allowed the state, which gained formal independence in 1946, to take part in the first Arab-Israeli war. As a result, the kingdom took control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1948. From then on, two-thirds of its population were Palestinians. The old people of Transjordan passively accepted the foreign policy of the court. The new subjects were reluctant to having any ties with the West, and were even hypersensitive to any rumors about talks with

<sup>2</sup> Abd Allah Ibn al-Husajn, *The memoir of King Abdullah of Transjordan*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1950, p. 203; J.B. Glubb, *Britain and The Arabs. A Study of Fifty Years 1908 to 1958*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1959, pp. 50–60.

<sup>3</sup> M.C. Wilson, *op. cit.*, s. 217; J.B. Glubb, *The Story Of The Arab Legion*, London: Da Capo Press, 1948, p. 350 and 359–360; P.J. Vatikiotis, *Politics and Military in Jordan: A study of the Arab Legion 1921–1957*, London: Taylor and Francis, 1967, pp. 73–74.

<sup>4</sup> P.J. Vatikiotis, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> J. Lunt, *The Arab Legion*, London: Constable, 1999, p. 138.

Israel. The hostility of the Palestinians was the main internal problem of the monarchy, which was called Jordan only after 1948.<sup>6</sup>

The next decades of Jordan's history were characterized by periodic clashes between the Palestinian-backed left-wing opposition and the court and army. In 1951, the first king of Jordan, Abdullah, was assassinated in Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> His grandson Hussein I, who reigned from 1953 to 1999, maintained a generally pro-Western option in foreign policy, but three times he risked actions contrary to the will of his protectors. In 1956, he broke off cooperation with the British and appointed a pro-Naser government. However, already in 1957 he suppressed the left-wing opposition and became associated with the USA. In 1967, the king made an alliance with Egypt and sided with it in the war against Israel. This decision turned out to be a fatal mistake. Israel smashed the Jordanian army and occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This loss turned out to be irreversible.<sup>8</sup> In 1970, the existence of the monarchy was threatened by armed Palestinian groups. In September 1970, a civil war broke out in Jordan. As a result, the government army defeated and expelled the Palestinian militants from the country.<sup>9</sup> For 20 years, the monarchy was unthreatened, and Hussein I pursued a pro-Western policy. However, in 1990 he made another volt. After Iraq attacked Kuwait, the king did not support the US. He demanded that the conflict within the 'Arab world' be resolved through talks. His stance was considered pro-Iraqi, and the oil monarchies cut Jordan off from subsidies and expelled its citizens. Hussein I gained popularity among the Palestinians, but the country was in danger of economic disaster.<sup>10</sup>

In order to get out of the impasse, the king established talks with Israel and rebuilt good relations with the West. In 1994, Jordan broke the peace treaty with Israel and was the second Arab state after Egypt to recognize the existence of this state.<sup>11</sup> These important decisions marked the full return of the kingdom to cooperation with the Anglo-Saxons, and it was also the last major decision of the monarch. King Hussein I died in 1999.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> M.C. Wilson, *op. cit.*, s. 198; J.G. Sparrow, *Modern Jordan*, London: Routledge, 1961, p. 15; P. Robins, *History of Jordan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> M.C. Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 208–209.

<sup>8</sup> P. Robins, *op. cit.*, pp. 120–124.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130–132; K. Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan*, London–New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998, pp. 240–241.

<sup>10</sup> J. Zdanowski, *Historia Bliskiego Wschodu w XX wieku*, Wrocław: Ossolineum 2010, p. 462; U. Dann, *King Hussein's Solidarity with Saddam Husayn*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1990, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> P. Robins, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

## The reign of Abdullah II

During the reign of King Hussein I, Jordan basically pursued a policy of cooperation with the USA, despite officially declared neutrality. Hussein, however, was able to take risky steps and temporarily associate himself with anti-Western Arab leaders. His successor Abdullah II broke with these pretenses and became involved with US policy without any understatement. This may be due to the fact that the new king is deeply rooted in Anglo-Saxon culture. It should be recalled that Abdullah II is the son of Hussein and his second British wife, Mrs. Toni Gardiner. At the beginning of his reign, he was even accused of speaking better English than Arabic. The new monarch, unlike his father, is also characterized by a reluctance to make sudden decisions.<sup>13</sup>

Abd Allah II's reign, which has already lasted more than twenty years, is overshadowed by two threats. The first is the danger of Islamic terrorism. This is especially true of the rise of Sunni jihadism. The second is mass exile. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria have led to a massive influx of refugees into Jordan. The Kingdom incurs significant economic costs for this.

The primary goal of the Jordanian system of power is to maintain a stable monarchy. The security of the state in fact means keeping power in the hands of the Hashemite family and securing the position of the current monarch. In the times of Abd Allah II, who has been associated with the army and secret services for a long time and initially not very liked by the masses, this is even more obvious. Security understood in this way, based on cooperation with the Anglo-Saxon powers and on an agreement with Israel, is at odds with the moods of a large part of society. How consistently Abd Allah II implements this option is evidenced by the fact that in 2003, when the US invaded Iraq, Amman supported Washington's move. This was despite the fact that neither the court nor the king was in favor of this step. Jordanian elites have had good relations with Saddam Hussein's regime for years. What is more, they correctly predicted the catastrophic consequences of the American move. Despite this, the king decided that for the Hashemites there was no other option than to maintain close relations with the US, even when Washington pursued wrong policies.<sup>14</sup>

As predicted, the occupation of Iraq brought mainly problems to Jordan, and also to the Americans. The rise of the anti-American guerilla in Iraq has given great new strength to the Islamic movement, both Sunni and Shia. The complete destabilization of the neighboring country also threatened to backfire

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193 and 200.

<sup>14</sup> B. Milton-Edwards, P. Hinchcliffe, *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy*, London–New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 120.



on the authorities in Amman, and yet they still have problems related to the conflict in Palestine. In 2008, it was estimated that there were over 700,000 refugees from Iraq in Jordan. Earlier in 2005, terrorists associated with al-Qaeda in Iraq carried out several bomb attacks in Amman, killing dozens of people. The leader of the organization was a Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The threat of such attacks has become a permanent element of the situation in Jordan after 2004.<sup>15</sup>

The destabilization of Iraq by the attack of US forces, however, led to even worse consequences from Amman's point of view. In Iraq, the dominance of Sunni Arabs, existing since the creation of a separate state there, has collapsed. Shia politicians took power. This marked a dramatic increase in Iran's influence in Iraq. At the same time, the Shi'ite Hezbollah movement has become a veritable state within a state in Lebanon. In fact, his army is stronger than the government army. As the government in Damascus is dominated by Alawite Shiites, the Jordanian authorities began to feel something of a strategic encirclement. As early as 2004, King Abdullah II began talking about the creation of a 'Shia crescent' that stretches from Iran through Iraq to Syria and Lebanon. The king also spoke in 2005 about the threat to Arab countries from Iran's influence. Jordan's elite may indeed have felt threatened. In the changed situation, Iran, and even more Lebanese Hezbollah, have become very popular among Palestinian youth. They managed to overcome the barrier separating Shiites and Sunnis in this environment. Faced with these threats, the Jordanian monarchy stepped up police measures. At the same time, the alliance with Saudi Arabia was strengthened. It should be added that this alliance results from a common perception of threats. It exists despite the longstanding animosity between Hashemites and Saudis. The Jordanian authorities also continued the policy of cooperation with the Anglo-Saxons, despite the fact that the 2003 US attack was rightly pointed out as the cause of the threat.<sup>16</sup>

In 2011, the events of the so-called 'Arab Spring' occurred. In Jordan they were peaceful. They manifested themselves in small demonstrations of the opposition. However, in neighboring Syria, they led to a bloody, still unfinished civil war. The country has de facto disintegrated. The civil war in Syria, which was supposed to be a nation's struggle against Bashar Assad's dictatorship, at least in the West's imagination, has to a large extent become a series of clashes on a religiously divided background. The armed groups of Sunni fundamentalists have become the core of the opposition. In turn, the ineffective government army was replaced by units of Shiite fundamentalists. A large army of Hezbollah and even

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121 and 128.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Revolutionary Guard troops from Iran were fighting in Syria. The government in Damascus also received support from Russia. This situation was predictable. Syria was allied with the USSR for decades. Russia of Putin upheld this alliance. The US and Western Europe have clearly declared their willingness to overthrow the Assad dictatorship and the BASS party. Russia, Iran and Shia groups defended the Syrian government. In retrospect, it should be noted that this situation has strengthened the Moscow-Tehran axis. Moreover, the actions of Russia and Iran were consistent and successful, the Assad government survived. US actions have been inconsistent and unreliable. The situation in Syria has undoubtedly strengthened the Russian leader's contempt for Western politicians.<sup>17</sup>

The civil war in Syria is a multifaceted subject that is impossible to describe within the framework of this text. However, it is important to note the problem faced by the Jordanian government. As a permanent ally of the US and Great Britain, it was a supporter of the overthrow of the Assad government. If Washington decided to attack Syria as it did Iraq, Amman would undoubtedly accompany the ally. However, the US did not attack, but supported the armed opposition. Some units hostile to the regime were created, armed and trained in Jordan. In 2014–2015, these groups appeared in the southern suburbs of Damascus and the Golan Heights. Ultimately, however, the Syrian government overcame this threat. Jordan has been flooded by another wave of refugees. It had to appeal for new international aid to sustain over 1 million Syrian and Iraqi refugees. The relations with Damascus, which had always been tense, were completely broken and nothing was gained.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, there was the case of the completely incalculable so-called Islamic State. On June 6, 2014, troops of this organization entered Mosul. Within a few days, they captured Iraq's second largest city. In a matter of weeks, the Islamists took over most of northern Iraq. They also controlled a large part of northern Syria. This organization, thus, created a territorial state, obviously not in the light of international law, but de facto. In this territory, the Islamists used a policy of terror. The Islamic State represented an extreme form of Sunni fundamentalism. Its actions were clearly intended to shock the West. It is difficult today to explain the reasons for the rapid success of these extremists in 2014–2015. The information that is difficult to verify indicates that Sunni elites, e.g. in Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and Qatar wanted to stop the expansion of Iran's influence. This extreme organization could initially be seen as a tool to achieve this goal. However, this organization almost immediately

<sup>17</sup> F. Pichon, *Syria. Porażka strategii Zachodu*, trans. G. Majcher, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, 2015, pp. 7–8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

crossed any boundaries that Sunni leaders could tolerate, including the court in Amman. If the Islamic State limited itself to fighting the Assad government or the authorities in Baghdad, it could be tolerated. However, the Islamists proclaimed their leader the Caliph of the Muslims. If this declaration were to be accepted even for a moment, Abd Allah II's Hashemite background or the title of guardian of the holy cities borne by Saudi kings would lose all meaning. At the time of this proclamation, the Islamic State was at odds with the conservative Arab monarchies, as if the conflict with the Shiites was not hard enough.<sup>19</sup>

In such a complicated situation, Abd Allah II pursued the traditional policy of close cooperation with the US. Because Washington formed a coalition against the Islamic State, Jordan joined it. The activities of this coalition in 2014 were limited to bombing Islamist territories. Several Jordanian aircraft participated in this action. Finally, in 2014, one Jordanian plane was shot down (or crashed); its pilot, Maatha al-Qassasba, fell into the hands of the Islamists. The Islamic State may have been playing this card when negotiating the release of the pilot. Meanwhile, the Islamists, in accordance with their strategy of shocking the world with images of terror, burned him alive in January 2015, and in February showed the recordings. Some specialists suspect that the recording of the execution was faked to evoke horror, and the pilot was killed in a different way. Jordan responded with increased airstrikes against Islamic State positions. King Abdullah II was said to have personally participated in these attacks. All in all, this act of bestiality strengthened the position of the king and the rulers of Jordan, and deprived the fanatics of all support. In 2016, the Islamists, operating in the deserts of Syria and Western Iraq, were approaching the borders of Jordan, but they did not achieve a lasting success.<sup>20</sup>

And here a paradoxical situation arose. Against the background of the activities of Sunni Islamists from Mosul, even the conflict with Iran has temporarily receded into the background. There was also no doubt that it was Iran and the Shiite forces armed by it that dealt decisive blows to the Islamic State. Russia's intervention in Syria and its cooperation with Iran also contributed to this. US forces also intervened against the Islamists. However, the aviation of Russia and the USA did not cooperate with each other and sometimes even bombed each other's agents. The authorities in Amman remained in the US camp, at the same time having to look with dejection at the ineffectiveness of the ally.

<sup>19</sup> P. Cockburn, *Państwo Islamskie*, trans. M. Bielik, Warszawa: PWN, 2015, p. 57.

<sup>20</sup> "VP/HR – Execution of Muath al-Kasasbeh", *European Parliament*, 11.02.2015, [www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2015-002205\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2015-002205_EN.html) [accessed: 21.03.2023].

## War in Ukraine

Jordan, as indicated above, is deeply involved in the events in Syria, but at the same time it was not interested in the problem of Russia's relations with Ukraine. Unexpectedly, these issues became surprisingly close. For the Russian leader, the intervention in Syria could even become a political and military training ground for future actions. In Syria, he found out that he could act in a risky way against the US; after all there were almost clashes between the special forces of the two superpowers. The inefficiency of Washington, which lost the case of Syria, despite having all the advantages on its side, must have strengthened Putin's will to act. For Moscow's decision to invade Ukraine, the conflict in Syria and the behavior of the Americans could have important and underestimated consequences. In Moscow's calculations, the other superpower has lost some credibility.

The Jordanian authorities, like the leadership of many smaller countries, unexpectedly faced the consequences of a conflict that originally did not interest them. This happened at a time when the political structure of the region was clearly deregulated. The most important fact seems to be that the US policy of 2001–2021 led to a disruption of Washington's relations with its former allies in the Middle East. No new ally was gained. Anyway, it is difficult to talk about US policy towards the region. The presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden have seen four different policies and constant changes in fundamentals. Relations with Turkey can be cited as an example of Washington's 'achievements' during this period. In view of the important changes in Ankara and the consolidation of the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his party, The US did not find any methods of cooperation. On the contrary, the biggest rupture in mutual relations in decades has been allowed. Ankara has started to promote the idea of its strategic 'autonomy,' although fortunately it has not severed allied ties. Putin's Russia, on the other hand, took full advantage of the situation and greatly improved its relations with Turkey, while maintaining a close alliance with Iran. This is worth noting.<sup>21</sup>

The previous pages showed how deep are the ties between Jordan and the Anglo-Saxon countries, currently with the USA. King Abdullah II is a vivid example of a pro-American leader for the Arab world. And yet, even in this case, the Americans managed to weaken the unions. This resulted from Washington's fundamental disregard for the political interests of the weaker partner. King Abdullah II supported the US on Iraq and had nothing but problems as a result.

<sup>21</sup> K. Smoleń, *Geostrategiczne położenie Turcji w XXI wieku*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2020, p. 76.

He also supported them on the issue of Syria, and at times it threatened armed clashes. If the US invaded Syria like Iraq, he would become a participant in the action. Meanwhile, Washington led to a complete severance of relations with Damascus, and then left its partner alone with all the problems arising from the situation in Syria. This disregard for the weaker partner came to a head under the presidency of Trump. Then a typical accident happened. In May 2017, the US president, in a conversation with Dmitry Lavrov, allegedly provided him with important information about the Islamic State. Apparently, he did it to show off his knowledge. The problem was that this was top-secret information provided by Jordanian intelligence. They were handed over on the condition of non-disclosure, even to US partners. Trump did not care at all. His behavior must be considered pure stupidity. It should be added that this information is unofficial and given in the publications as guesses.<sup>22</sup>

Regardless of whether everything in this story was true or not, it well reflected the way Trump behaved. Under the circumstances, even the Jordanian regime had to regard the US as an irresponsible partner. Most of all, they understood that they had to deal with problems on their own. Already in 2018, when the Syrian rebels operating from Jordan finally lost, Amman accepted the de facto resumption of border traffic. However, in 2021, the normalization on the Amman-Damascus line deepened. On September 30, 2021, the full restoration of border traffic between Jordan and Syria was officially announced. The Nasir-Jaber border crossing has been opened. On October 3, 2021, Jordanian Airlines resumed direct flights to Damascus. Moreover, representatives of Jordan and Lebanon called on Washington to ease the sanctions imposed on Syria. However, a spokesman for the State Department wrote that the US does not want to normalize relations with the Assad regime and does not encourage other countries to do so. Following this statement, Jordan's move became moderately anti-American. It was the biggest crack between the USA and Jordan during the reign of Abdullah II. It may be added here that also in September, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt signed an agreement to transport Egyptian natural gas to Lebanon via a pipeline through Jordan and Syria (existing but inactive for years).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> O. Górczyński, "Trump zdradził swoich sojuszników Ameryki. Konsekwencje będą wielkie", *Wirtualna Polska*, 16.05.2017, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/trump-zdradzil-swoich-sojusznikow-ameryki-konsekwencje-beda-wielkie-6123233566713473a> [accessed: 21.03.2023].

<sup>23</sup> "Jordania i Syria wznawiają ruch graniczny", *TVN24 Biznes*, 30.09.2021, <https://tvn24.pl/biznes/ze-swiata/jordania-i-syria-wznowily-ruch-graniczny-rzecznik-departamentu-usa-komentuje-5433650> [accessed: 21.03.2023].

Jordan became an example of a conservative Arab state that had previously been closely cooperating with the US, which, as a result of Washington's actions, abandoned its previous policy and started acting independently. Of course, Jordan conducts such activities with moderation, but even for Amman it has become impossible to adhere to Washington's directives. Similar symptoms apply to the policies of Saudi Arabia, Qatar or Abu Dhabi, which of course have much greater resources.

Against this background, the role of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine can be properly assessed. Over the past dozen or so years, Putin's Russia has conducted a very good policy in the Middle East. It has managed to strengthen its alliance with Iran and Syria. What is even more interesting, however, has improved its relations with Turkey and Egypt. At the same time, relations between the Arab monarchies and the US were rather deteriorating. The example of Jordan, until now absolutely faithful to Washington's policy, is an extremely significant case here. Russia was not the initiator of this situation; it was the US that ignored Amman's interests for many years. Russia did not even benefit from the situation, so far, but in the perspective of this type of circumstances gave it the chance of new advantages. A special opportunity for Moscow's policy was created by the so-called Ankara's 'neo-Ottoman' policy. Potentially, Jordan could be a partner not so much to Russia as to Turkey. This finesse game, given the level of incompetence displayed by the US, could have completely destroyed Washington's dominance in the Middle East. The problem was that this type of activity had to continue for decades. Moreover, Russia could not pose a threat to its neighbors. Meanwhile, it turned out that all this finesse was intended to prepare a brutal attack. The government of Putin did not want to continue its long-term policy. He dreamed of changing the entire international order in a few days with one blow. It failed. Moscow's entire game was largely wasted. The Russian attack and its failure in 2022 is an unexpected political 'gift' for the US. Thanks to this, Washington was able to partially rebuild its influence with its former allies. In the case of Jordan, it must be added that it does not oppose US policy in Central and Eastern Europe. Already in January this year, information appeared about the plan to transfer to Ukraine about 400 Jordanian Challenger 1 tanks. These tanks are obsolete, so they would be renovated in Germany. The tanks would be bought from Amman. Again, it is impossible to say whether the thing is real, or rather someone in Amman dreams of getting rid of the hardware ballast and making money on it. There was no doubt, however, that at least on the issue of Russia's war with Ukraine, Washington and Amman returned to close relations. Is the thing real, or rather someone in Amman dreams of getting rid of the

equipment ballast and earning money on it. There was no doubt, however, that at least on the issue of Russia's war with Ukraine, Washington and Amman returned to close relations.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

Russia in the times of President Vladimir Putin sought to rebuild its position as a world power- this has never been a secret. The problem was whether this program was real. Also important was the question of how far Moscow could go to achieve this goal. After 2000, most countries in Europe and Asia preferred to forget about Russia's aggressive nature. Against the backdrop of Moscow's weakness, US policy was particularly aggressive, inept and short-sighted. Russia was no longer feared as a potential aggressor and was perceived as a real economic and political partner. In the Near and Middle East, Moscow has effectively supported its policy with Iran and its Shiite partners. In Syria, this axis successfully defended the dictatorship of Assad and the BASS party. Even in Iraq, where the US completely changed the political system, Russia's successes in relations with Iran and Syria were partly due to relations dating back to the times of the USSR. However, after 2000, Moscow also clearly improved its contacts with Turkey. The USA, on the other hand, effectively compromised itself politically. Even its former partners began to see Washington as an unreliable partner. President Trump's actions sometimes cannot be perceived in terms of any policy at all. Jordan, one of the oldest US allies in the region, had to make its policy on Syria independent of its ally's disregard for its interests. Potentially, there was a possibility of a gradual disintegration of the American sphere of influence in the region. Apart from Russia, the policy of China (PRC) also contributes to this. There was also, perhaps, a chance to create a group of conservative countries in the region around Turkey, which have become independent of US directives.

Jordan could be such a partner, and Turkey's cooperation with Qatar during its conflict with the Saudis was a fact. These prospects were favorable for Russia. These opportunities were lost by Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Moscow revealed its aggressive nature, its actions crossed the boundaries accepted in politics. The inept USA has again become a potential defender. As far as the Middle East is concerned, this aggression has put

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<sup>24</sup> A. Świerkowski, "Niemcy wyremontują jordańskie Challengey dla Ukrainy?", *Defence24*, 27.01.2023, <https://defence24.pl/przemysl/niemcy-wyremontuja-jordanskie-challengery-dla-ukrainy-komentarz> [accessed: 21.03.2023].

Turkey in a difficult position. Ankara is trying to maintain independence and an equal distance between Moscow and Washington. However, it undoubtedly does not care about the conquest of Ukraine by Russia. Jordan, which may have been moving away from its American protector, will rather maintain the old type of relations with Washington in the new situation. Once again, it should be recalled that for Putin, Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022 was supposed to be a historic breakthrough that would change the balance in the world in a few weeks and break NATO and US influence in Central Europe. The attack was supposed to lead to a change of power in Kiev, exchange of elites and bringing Ukraine to the position of Belarus. In the Middle East, in Syria, he became convinced of the ineffectiveness of US forces. The attack was, therefore, to additionally discredit the Americans and to demonstrate their passivity. The transformation of the conflict into a war lasting over a year broke these plans.

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## Abstract

On 24 February 2022 Russian forces attacked Ukraine. This attack started a war that had been going on for a year. However, before the attack the authorities in Moscow had for many years been pursuing the policy of weakening American influences. It turned out to be effective in the Middle East; Russia consolidated its alliance with Iran and supported Syrian authorities. Simultaneously, unsuccessful policy of the USA led to weakening Washington alliances, even with such pro-American countries as Jordan. The article presents the relationship of the Hashemite monarchy with the USA and the relationship crisis. The attack of Russia on Ukraine spoiled the so far effective policy of Russia, made it weaker on the international stage, and enabled the USA to revive former alliances.

**Key words:** Russia, Ukraine, war, Jordan, Abd Allah II



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## **BOOK REVIEW**

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## ***Against the Smart City: A Pamphlet* by Adam Greenfield, New York: Do Projects, 2013**

In recent years, the topic of smart cities has appeared more and more in the Internet and popular science publications, but also has become an important topic for scientific research. Although the term ‘smart city’ is interesting, due to the difficulty in defining its meaning, it is a field of broad academic discourse. Bruce Sterling simply defined ‘smart’ as: “a snazzy political label used by a modern alliance of leftist urbanites and tech industrialists. To deem yourself ‘smart’ is to make the NIMBYites and market-force people look stupid.”<sup>1</sup>

The smart city became a ruling term for urban management despite certain arguments against smart cities, as it is against the informal character of a city, it subjects the city to corporations, and it reproduces social and urban inequalities. Other scholars, however, state that either the smart cities critics do not understand the functioning of power in the management process of an intelligent city, or they do not refer to its entrepreneurship modality

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<sup>1</sup> B. Sterling, “Stop Saying ‘Smart Cities’”, *The Atlantic*, 12.02.2018, [www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/02/stupid-cities/553052](http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/02/stupid-cities/553052) [accessed: 7.05.2022].

in urban management. Some even treat the smart city as an “urban embodiment of a society of control.”<sup>2</sup> Such mechanisms of societies of control can be found in Gilles Deleuze’s essay from 1992, as a continuous invigilation by means of transaction registers, mobile location spying and other information enabling a person’s identification.<sup>3</sup> For Maroš Krivý a smart city has been places “in cybernetic intelligent frames and expresses its subjectivity in data and environmental and behavioral – over individual (penetrating a city with sensor networks) and infra-individual categories (making citizens its sensor networks).”<sup>4</sup>

The whole idea of an intelligent city came to be in the late 80s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when IT experts began researching methods of incorporating computing intelligence in the urban environment. “The simple human-computer interaction became socially integrated and spatially conditioned, because objects and everyday-use spaces were connected by computer network.”<sup>5</sup> The momentum for the Smart City idea started in the year 2000, when projects such as levelling out almost 700 mountains in preparation of constructing Lanzhou city in the Chinese province of Gansu came to life. The city of Lavasa (India), designed by multimillionaire Ajuta Gulabchanda in 2001, was to be built from scratch as one of the first intelligent cities in the world.<sup>6</sup>

The bibliography of the subjects continues to grow every day. One of the outstanding publications on the topic of intelligent cities is considered Adam Greenfield’s work *Against the Smart City*, published in New York in 2013.

The author is the founder and the CEO of the New York company Urbanscale, which specializes in designing urban systems. In the years 2008–2010 he worked at Nokia as one of the specialists designing services and user interface. He worked as the head architect of information at Tokyo’s Razorfish consulting agency. He is also the author of many publications, such as *Everyware: The dawning age of ubiquitous computing* (2006), *Urban computing and its discontents* (2007, co-author Mark Shepard). He was also a lecturer at

<sup>2</sup> M. Krivý, “Towards a critique of cybernetic urbanism: The smart city and the society of control”, *Planning Theory*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2018, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> G. Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, *MIT Press*, vol. 59, Winter 1992, pp. 3–7.

<sup>4</sup> M. Krivý, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> A. Greenfield, M. Shepard, *Urban Computing and Its Discontents*, New York: The Architectural League of New York, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> M.M. Euklidiadas, “Smart Cities That Failed Along The Way”, *Tomorrow City*, 26.11.2019, <https://tomorrow.city/a/smart-cities-that-failed-along-the-way> [accessed: 4.05.2022].

Harvard University Graduate School of Design and Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Office of Privacy Commissioner of Canada, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts et Métiers, MIT Media Lab, Royal Society of London.<sup>7</sup>

The aim of Greenfield's publication was to emphasise certain aspects of the smart city programme, which are a concern, and to identify opportunities for its development. In chapter '0', understood as the introduction, the author mentions that the discussion of the matter is extremely difficult. He writes how he has been painstakingly collecting internet material since 2011 and getting acquainted with interviews and promotional materials of many development and IT companies, which gave him a picture of how corporations and developers imagined the city of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at that time. He believes that we are currently in the moment of history when cities, both in form and experience, are under a lot of pressure from new networked information processing technologies. That is, what can condition the functioning of the city is situated in an invisible and elusive cyber layer of information, which surrounds the city.

In his work, divided into fourteen short chapters, Greenfield focused on presenting three key smart city concepts: Songdo City, a \$20–40 billion investment for a city of 500,000 built on reclaimed land on the Yellow Sea in South Korea; Masdar 'eco city' in Abu Dhabi, UAE, which was advertised as a future home for 40 thousand residents and a workplace for 50 thousand commuter workers; and last but not least PlanIT Valley, a \$10 billion development project located in Porto, Portugal.

All these above-mentioned smart cities were designed from scratch, and their concepts and solutions gave an important push for discussions on what a smart city should be, what kind of cities we need, and what level of technology we want to achieve in our society. So far, a general standard for a smart city has not been created because each of the cities discussed has a different specificity.

Greenfield exclaims that the main objective of all smart city concepts was to centralise data gathering from every available device and its processing in order "to permit the 'optimization' of all the flows of matter, energy and information that constitute a great urban place."<sup>8</sup> He also underlines the fascination of various cyber techniques and solutions driven by IT corporations such

<sup>7</sup> *Against the smart city: A pamphlet* by Adam Greenfield, Part I of *The city is here for you to use*, New York City: Do projects, 2013, p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

as IBM, CISCO, Siemens, and companies such as Samsung, Intel, Philips, Hitachi, which translates into a race of city managers to create ever bolder concepts of smart cities. Herman van den Bosch also repeatedly emphasised that the role of IT in the development of cities is indisputable, although not in the way most big tech companies imagine.<sup>9</sup>

The other aspect emphasised by the author is the relative comfort of creating smart cities *ab initio* – from scratch in open spaces, without the need to take into consideration pre-existing infrastructure or other claims from owned properties with the ability to process gigantic volumes of data, gathered from sensors embedded in objects, surfaces, spaces, as an ideal base for experimenting and development. Cities such as Masdar or Plan IT Valley are being presented as huge laboratories and places to engineer models for smart city functioning, seemingly transferable anywhere.

In the following short chapters, the author discovers successive processes of the physical reality of these places (e.g. *The smart city unfolds in generic time chapter*). Greenfield makes it clear that the narrative about the technologically advanced city and the whole discussion around it was created mainly by IT companies, which are the main beneficiaries of the process and thanks to which they develop. Let us take the CISCO company as an example and their involvement in Songdo. CISCO claims that combining technologies can reduce infrastructure maintenance costs. IBM uses a similar strategy, which believes that thanks to using the right tools to analyse data, better decisions will be made when operating smart cities (reducing the time and safety of commuting to work or reducing pollution in cities). Greenfield also recalls Siemens' representatives statements that cities of the future will be equipped with countless autonomous and intelligent IT systems, which will gather data and knowledge of user habits and energy consumption and will provide optimal service. The goal of such a smart city is to optimally regulate and control resources using autonomous information systems, aspiring to objectivity, unity, and perfect knowledge that are not available anywhere. Such statements regarding far-reaching surveillance are extremely disturbing and raise social concerns.

The smart city vision, promoted by companies such as IBM, Siemens or CISCO Systems, aims for achieving comfort of living and safety. A proposed self-learning city computer would allow moving parts of the city to operate at very good efficiency, without wasting too much energy. However,

<sup>9</sup> H. Bosch, *Smart City Tales, In search of the inclusive city: 24 short essays by Herman van den Bosch*, 2018, [www.dropbox.com/s/c9f1v4od86ibaa3/2018%2007%2030%20Smart%20City%20Tales.pdf?dl=0](http://www.dropbox.com/s/c9f1v4od86ibaa3/2018%2007%2030%20Smart%20City%20Tales.pdf?dl=0) [accessed: 11.05.2022].



society is not ready for such a far-reaching presence of technology in life because for many people, it remains difficult to understand, not to mention the cost. With the exception of China, where demographic pressure due to rural exodus requires a huge number of new cities, it seems that turning a city into a smart city is more coherent than building it from scratch. Founded in 2001 in the middle of the desert and costing \$200 billion Ordos city (PlanIT Valley was supposed to cost only 5% of that amount), it won the title of ‘the greatest ghost town on earth.’ In 2016, only 100,000 people lived there, although it was designed for a million inhabitants. It was not until 2019 that satellite images showed vehicles parked next to endless rows of houses designed with a higher than average quality in the country and are therefore too expensive for the local population. And those who are able to afford it prefer to move to nearby cities, such as Baotou, rather than a deserted metropolis in the middle of nothing. Ordos is considered one of the youngest modern cities, with the largest number of its facilities and shopping centres remaining empty or closed. As the author concludes, they did not even have to suffer the agony of American malls because the ones in Ordos never opened.<sup>10</sup>

Greenfield points to problems with maintenance and constant replacement and upgrade of equipment and sensors. In a technical sense, it is impossible to design a smart city forever. Smart cities in the technological sense cannot be designed forever. They will undergo constant transformations, being a set of changing technologies, so they should provide residents with the ability to adapt to new functions as their needs develop. According to Greenfield, “there is little need to invest in the comprehensive instrumentation of the urban fabric with sensors, device controllers or informational displays when people themselves are already equipped with something that can act in all of these roles.”<sup>11</sup>

The author also indicates inconsistencies in the planning of discussed smart cities, which reflect the formal order of a medium-sized American town from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Asian smart city visions are new constructions on non-urban ground. They often do not identify specific technologies, but use general terms. Cities are geographically defined for different social backgrounds and their inhabitants. Human life develops on various levels, so everyone should be able to use them at any time (e.g. studying or physical activities). The city itself should have the ability to develop and adapt at every stage of development.

Cities are dynamic organisms that tend to grow or to fall over millennia, centuries, or at least decades. Designating a new city is a key decision that can

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<sup>10</sup> M.N. Eukliadiadas, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> A. Greenfield, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

decide the future of the project, and starting a new one in the middle of nowhere is rarely a good idea. Examples are Smart Cities that did not meet the expectations placed on them, such as Lavasa (India), PlanIT Valley (Portugal), Ordos (China), or Santander (Spain), because they did not develop organically and in accordance with the needs of citizens.<sup>12</sup>

One of the other issues analysed by Adam Greenfield is the rhetoric of seamlessness where users live unaware of the web. This ignorance makes their lives more comfortable. However, everything has its price because the technology that is supposed to help them can be unreliable, making them powerless in the event of a failure of the iris scanner or a failure of a security gate preventing them from entering their homes or work areas. The author brings in Mark Weiser's experience, who was perceived as a visionary and computer pioneer in Silicon Valley. His concepts influenced many of the world's leading corporations, including IBM, Siemens, Microsoft, claiming that the problems of everyday life will be alleviated by the operation of 'powerful technologies.'

Greenfield is bold in expressing his dissatisfaction with the actions of the companies mentioned above, which constantly and almost exclusively focus on the abstract performance of smart cities. In his words "positioning efficiency as the only index of value available to us overlooks the many simple pleasures afforded by city life that would be utterly unimproved by any optimization, and might well be destroyed in the attempt."<sup>13</sup> The author believes that an open discussion is needed to determine what the city's inhabitant expects? Should efficiency be the only measure to assess urban processes? For what purpose and for whose benefits?

Currently, it seems that there is a phase of verification of the assumptions of the global trend of transition to the so-called smart cities with innovative technologies. This is characterized by diffuse, local citizen resistance to smart city programmes in both large cities like Toronto and New York and small cities like Ross, CA, near San Francisco, with fewer than 2,500 residents.<sup>14</sup>

While reading *Against the Smart City*, we ask ourselves: what kind of place a smart city is? It seems that the collection and processing of information is the basis for corporations, which see the role of a citizen as a provider of data only (Chapter: *The smart city's systems are deployed for the sole benefit of administrators*).

<sup>12</sup> M.N. Eukliadas, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> A. Greenfield, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> S. Wachter, "What's Fueling the Smart City Backlash?", *Knowledge at Wharton*, 24.09.2019, <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/whats-behind-backlash-smart-cities> [accessed: 5.05.2022].

Greenfield's work also includes references to political involvement (neoliberalism understood as a political philosophy), security priorities, capital flows, and tax issues. The examples of Masdar City or Songdo show their location in relation to airports. This is mainly aimed at improving the flow of capital, which is also to be served by reduced local taxes or even their absence (as in the case of Masdar). The author draws attention to the privatization of such cities, writing that: "It's hard to imagine a robustly autonomous community, or a public sphere in any traditional sense, taking root in the soil of a municipality that is owned and operated as a business in the way these places are,"<sup>15</sup> and the examples cited here treat cities in this way.

There are also references to the subordination of smart cities to political influence. Even though IT corporations emphasise pretended technological neutrality, they value the concentration of power (according to the author, companies like Microsoft believe that centralization is necessary for implementation citizen-centric governance in the smart city). The author expresses concern about the permanent surveillance in such 'smart' cities and the lack of anything resembling the traditional public sphere in the cited examples. Widespread video surveillance based on real-time monitoring can lead to privacy restrictions, hence it raised many doubts from the beginning. It deprives citizens of privacy and anonymity. Concerns about the invasion of privacy in today's digital age and unbridled growth threatening the public interest have been compounded by the erosion of trust between residents, city administration, and private companies running 'smart' projects. Tracking people in places such as shopping malls undermines the privilege of anonymity in public spaces.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, this element of urban intelligence is beginning to enter the daily life of residents more and more boldly. San Francisco in May 2019 banned the use of facial recognition software by police and other government agencies for fear of potential abuse. Other cities followed suit, such as Somerville near Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Oakland, California. In fact, according to a New York Times report, the California legislature is considering a bill that would propose a state-wide ban on the technology. Cambridge and Brooklyn, in Massachusetts are two other towns considering similar actions.<sup>17</sup>

Greenfield argues that smart cities have little to do with cities and are mainly associated with modernist urban features of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such cities are designed and marketed as consumer products aimed at a specific audience. Greenfield emphasizes that no designer can anticipate all the potential

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<sup>15</sup> A. Greenfield, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> S. Wachter, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem.*

uses for which things created by them can be used in the distant future. IT corporations treat cities like machines: The PlanIT Valley plans, as well as the New Songdo plans, do not correspond to the collective knowledge we already have about how urban space actually works. An example here is the strategy of the Songdo developers, which boiled down to recreating “the skyline vistas of New York, the strolling walks of Boston, the reflections of Venice, the kinetic energies of Wall Street, the pocket parks of London [...] the stunning impact of Sydney’s Opera House, the street Paris153 scenes of and Soho, the polish of Park Avenue.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, they sell the purest falsehood. Similarly, Ajit Gulabchand’s desire was to create a spectacular ‘New Portofino’ in Lavasa, architecturally based on Portofino in Italy, famous for its natural beauty, but far away from any trade routes.<sup>19</sup>

The attractiveness of the city is the result of a long process of organic growth, driven by people’s diversity, ambitions, mostly unrecognizable desires, interests, power, and money. Moreover, when looking at designing smart cities, it is vital to take into consideration different customs, local traditions, and the culture of local inhabitants. In the assumptions of a smart city, residents should have a wide range of opportunities to participate in infrastructure management. Their knowledge and their needs could be appropriately used to improve living conditions by responding to their needs, e.g., energy consumption or better mobility within the city.

The author continues the topic in the next chapter (*The smart city replicates in tone, tenor, form and substance most if not all of the blunders we associate with the discredited high-modernist urban planning techniques of the twentieth century*), claiming that the final elaborate plans of places like Songdo, Masdar, and PlanIT Valley reflect what their creators (not residents) would like to see in existing cities. In this part of the publication, the author refers to specific examples and urban visions of Ebenezer Howard, Georges-Eugène Haussmann, and Le Corbusier in order to identify the historical context. Greenfield is extremely critical of the legacy of CIAM and the Athens Charter, comparing it to supposedly smart cities designed in a similar way. In this context, Greenfield also provocatively refers to the failed Pruitt-Igoe modernist project in St. Luis, which was finally blown up.

The conclusion of the book comes in the last chapter (*The same set of technical potentials that give rise to the smart city can be turned to more responsive ends*). The main narrative of the chapter is permeated with arguments of distrust

<sup>18</sup> A. Greenfield, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> M.N. Euklidiadas, *op. cit.*

towards smart cities, especially in the context of an alliance of corporations that are unable to take care of all the needs of their residents. He describes the processes that support the development of smart cities; starting with simple things like the use of smartphones through the IoT, digitization, automation and the more complex ones such as artificial intelligence.

Those interested in exploring the topic of intelligent cities will find Greenfield's book *Against the smart city* an important publication. In an extremely interesting and colourful way, it shows the intertwining of public life and information technology in modern smart cities. The work is an in-depth analysis of hundreds of various advertisements, commercial brochures, reports, and articles. These form the basis of Greenfield's analysis and thus his conclusion about the role of technology in smart cities. He reflects on the possibilities and benefits of its best implementation, and at the same time shows in which cases it threatens us. Greenfield's book organises this knowledge in terms of technology security or privacy and freedom in public space. As an invitation to a debate of what is expected and required of smart cities, he presents three case studies of Songdo, Masdar, and PlanIT Valley. At the same time, the work underscores the role played by powerful international corporations such as: IBM, Siemens, CISCO, followed by Samsung, Philips, or Hitachi. It is a huge business for them, and their modern smart devices have the ability to gather information about smart city users.

According to Greenfield, there are already many imitators of Songdo, Masdar, and PlanIT Valley projects and the technologies tested in those cities are seen in privatized housing estates, shopping malls, and public spaces. We are at such a stage of history that technologies are an important element of our lives, collecting, processing, and sending information on the basis of which various social and political activities are undertaken. From smartphones in our pockets and cameras on lampposts to sensors in canals, sidewalks, and bike stations, the modern city is permeated with networked information technology. In his conclusion, Writing about the smart city marketing game, Greenfield reminds us that cities are primarily people who shape their city from scratch with their character, subjectivity, independence, and their own intelligence.

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### Tabele

Tabele należy umieszczać możliwie blisko powołania i numerować kolejno. Tabele tworzy się, stosując polecenie: *Wstaw – Tabela*. Wskazane jest unikanie skrótów w rubrykach (kolumnach) tabel. Tekst w tabeli powinien być złożony pismem mniejszym niż podstawowy. Ewentualne objaśnienia należy umieścić bezpośrednio pod tabelą, a nie w samej tabeli.

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S. Grodziski, *Habsburgowie*, [w:] *Dynastie Europy*, red. A. Mączak, Wrocław 1997, s. 102–136.

– artykuły w czasopismach:

S. Waltoś, *Świadek koronny – obrzeża odpowiedzialności karnej*, „Państwo i Prawo” 1993, z. 2, s. 16.

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M. Arnold, *China, Russia Plan \$242 Billion Beijing–Moscow Rail Link*, Bloomberg, 22.01.2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-22/china-russia-plan-242-billion-rail-link-from-beijing-to-moscow> [dostęp: 10.07.2015].

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