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MODERN RUSSIA: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, CULTURE AND RELIGION

YURY ZININ. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: A VIEW FROM THE
MIDDLE EAST MEDIA FIELD

*Keywords: terrorist attack; Russia;
Crocus; Middle East; reaction; opinions;
assessments; Arabs; ISIS; Afghanistan.*

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the analysis and assessment of events in Ukraine in the Middle East media from the start of the SMO. The author analyzes the responses and reactions in the media and virtual space, which to a certain extent indicate that they are searching for ways to show their attitude to the Ukrainian dossier without the pressure from the West, primarily the US.

Considerable attention is paid to the attempts by Western forces to isolate Russia and the way these attempts are perceived in the media and political circles of the region.

The article cites the opinions of a number of political scientists who draw parallels between the crisis in Gaza and the events related to the conflict in Ukraine.

Articles in local mass media indicate that despite the ambiguity of the countries' stances regarding the Ukrainian dossier, there is a demand in the Arab world for Russia to not lose its role as an alternative partner in politics, economics, and international affairs in general.

The responses and reactions in the media and virtual space to the events in Ukraine since the beginning and during the Special Military Operation are of undoubted interest, both in scientific and practical terms. The list of authors speaking on this issue is very wide. These are political scientists, well-known publicists, analysts, representatives of the military and academic elite, etc.

The perception of the SMO should be viewed through the prism of the efforts of Washington and its allies to draw Middle Eastern countries into their political games against Moscow under the slogans of protecting democracy, fighting against authoritarianism represented by the Kremlin.

In general, in the Arab region, there is a search for ways to record the attitude of Arabs to the Ukrainian dossier outside of pressure from the West, an emphasis on balance and equidistance in the interpretation of events, in particular the course of military operations and their assessment.

Middle Eastern media increasingly rely on independent assessments of authors, rather than on the theses of Western media. The latter are known for their bias towards Russia and are based on the substitution of meanings, false statements by Kyiv "about its successes on the fronts".

"Russia is steadfastly waging the current indirect war against 31 NATO countries, which are using the Ukrainian army as the tip of the spear," states Algerian media figure Hussein Lakraa. "The Russian Federation does not accept any outcome other than total victory, because this is a battle for existence"¹.

This concerns the perception of the so-called "counteroffensive" of Kyiv in the summer of 2023 against

Russian forces. In July 2023, the leading Middle East security website "Difaa Al-Arab" (Arab Defense) called the advertised operation of Ukrainian forces "a failure".

Unbounded ambitions have led Kyiv into a swamp of countless problems of military-tactical and other nature. Ukrainian attack aircraft were powerless against the line of Russian fortifications, which, according to military experts, turned out to be the most effective and complex. They were well integrated into the geography of the battlefield, where open terrain prevails and there are no camouflaged roads, which deprived the Ukrainian Armed Forces of the element of surprise as a decisive factor for success.²

The Emirati newspaper Al-Khalij noted that NATO officials supplied Kyiv with everything they had, but its forces were unable to break through the Russian defense. Everything that they achieved does not correspond to either the scale of the Atlantic support or the losses of thousands of servicemen suffered by the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

The Leopard and Abrams, Hymers and other equipment sent by NATO could not change the rules of the game. There are no significant changes on the battlefield.³

Experts closely monitored the course of action on the battlefield. The name Avdeevka, little known in the Arab world, flashed on the pages of the Middle Eastern media during the battle for this important settlement.

The media referred to a number of military observers who in February 2024 called the liberation of this settlement a "turning point in the war", comparing it to the conquest of Bakhmut by Russian forces in 2023 due to the strategic and symbolic value of these two cities.

Thus, Rizk Al-Khawalda, a retired brigadier general and military expert from Jordan, pointed out that the return of Avdeevka allowed Russian forces to further strengthen their position in Ukraine, guaranteeing the protection of the territories they had brought under their control. For the Kyiv forces, this meant the failure of their attempts to recapture what they had

lost, which made the loss of territories that had become Russian irreversible.⁴

According to other authors, the capture of the city opened the way for the Russian army to control the area around Donetsk and opened a network of logistical corridors for expanding the scale of its operations.

The Egyptian publication Al-Qahira News saw the capture of Avdeevka as an “important victory” achieved by Russian troops on the eve of the second anniversary of the beginning of the SMO. “They outnumbered the enemy on the battlefield and outgunned them, which contributed to their advantage in attacks on Ukrainian formations”.⁵

Political scientist Amr Hamzawi, a former director of studies at the Carnegie Endowment for the Middle East Center in Beirut, agrees with this assessment. In his opinion, the government in Kyiv and the Western governments behind them underestimated the potential of the military-industrial complex in Russia and its enormous capacity to produce ammunition and ensure uninterrupted supplies that Russian soldiers have needed in recent years.

The Ukrainian and Western parties also ignored the defensive capabilities that the Russian army had, which helped it withstand the Ukrainian counteroffensive in the spring and summer of 2023 without losses.⁶

The situation after Ukraine’s invasion of the Kursk region in Russia has been actively commented on. Ukraine is taking a great risk by concentrating its forces in Kursk, which could weaken its defensive lines on the Eastern Front. Russia, for its part, still retains superiority in manpower and equipment, which doubles the future problems for Ukraine, especially with winter approaching and the growing pressure on regions like Pokrovsk, noted the Egyptian Al-Qahira News.⁷

In the materials of the Middle Eastern media, political scientists noted traces of disarray and disagreement within the Western camp regarding Ukraine. If we exclude the enthusiasm of the current American administration and the British government in continuing to support Kyiv with weapons,

material resources and intelligence, then the Western alliance supporting Kyiv in the war with the Russian Federation is no longer as united as it was at the beginning.

NATO curators are disappointed with the failure of the offensive, although they provided the regime with the latest weapons from their arsenals, and cannot give more.

A number of Arab authors are convinced that the media mouthpieces of the West are deliberately concealing the realities of today's Ukraine. In their materials, the newspaper "Ray al-Yaum" wrote, "you will not find truthful information about the situation in society, about what ordinary Ukrainians think, whose sons are sent to the slaughterhouse to be returned in coffins".⁸

The author of the article from this newspaper referred to information from his friend who returned from Kyiv and survived the period of the special operation. According to him, ordinary people feel bitterness because they are forced into a war that they do not want.

In connection with the events in Ukraine, Arab publications point to the double standards of Western media. According to Amna Fayyad, an expert at the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Research, the media, which endlessly torment about freedom of speech and opinion, have dropped the masks of objectivity and impartiality when covering Ukrainian affairs. They demonstrated their bias by accepting the West's unified narrative, and participated in an operation to suppress and block any media that promoted or supported the Russian point of view.⁹

The Saudi author accused the West of a one-sided discourse that silenced every voice that "tweeted outside the general chorus," and spreaded malice in its media against everything Russian. This practice has spread to culture, art, sports, etc.¹⁰

A number of authors have criticized the style and policy of the Euro-Atlantic community towards Ukraine. Bahraini political scientist N. Al-Asumi called the West's attempts since the collapse of the USSR to tear Ukraine away from its historical,

humanitarian, and spiritual heritage, its cultural ties with “its loving mother, Russia.” All this was done to provoke enmity between the two countries and peoples, which was destined to become an explosive volcano.¹¹

Is Russia “Isolated”?

Many people in the Arab media do not believe the popular thesis in the Western world that Russia is allegedly isolated, cornered, and its economy is exhausted. You can find many publications that reject this tendentious rhetoric.

The balance of power for the Russian leader, according to Egyptian political scientist Hazim Hussein, seems more favorable than two years ago. Moscow’s economy suffered in some places, but recovered in others, and the damage is still bearable, and the sanctions are ineffective even taking into account the recent, very radical package.

The military-industrial complex demonstrated its activation, and half of the wealth fund’s assets were directed toward recovery. Freezing \$300 billion of Russian funds abroad and threatening to confiscate them had no effect. In turn, the Europeans suffer from Russian gas supply shortage, confusion in supply chains, inflation and interest rate boost, groaning under the burden of support.¹²

The influential Saudi newspaper Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat leads readers to the conclusion that Washington and its allies have made mistakes in their calculations. This concerns the West’s introduction of anti-Russian sanctions, attempts to undermine the Russian economy, deprive it of income from hydrocarbon exports, etc. The calculations of Russian President V. Putin, according to the publication, correspond to common sense and are correct.

He correctly avoided the traps set for him, was able to skillfully and gradually dismantle the economic blockade declared against his country, and aroused admiration for the undeniable victories of the troops on the military fronts.¹³