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MODERN RUSSIA: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, CULTURE AND RELIGION

OLGA KUZNETSOVA, ALEXEY KUZNETSOV. RUSSIA'S
PIVOT TO THE GLOBAL SOUTH AS A FACTOR OF ITS
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Keywords: Russian foreign economic relations; foreign trade; foreign direct investment; export of educational services; turn to the East; economic turn to the global South; development of Russia's Siberian and Far Eastern regions; regional economic policy of Russia.

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the possible impact of Russia's economic turnaround on the acceleration of the development of the Siberian and Far Eastern regions of Russia. It is shown that so far the intensification of the Russian foreign economic relations with the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America has not had a decisive impact on the regional structure of the economy of the Russian Federation. The main focus of the analysis is on the study of shifts in the Russian foreign trade, foreign direct investment with the participation of Russia, as well as the export of educational services. An important conclusion is made that the turn to the global South can lead to the economic recovery of the Far Eastern and Siberian regions only with the accelerated development of the transport infrastructure necessary for foreign economic contacts. Special attention should be paid to cross-border cooperation. At the same time, it is emphasized that the acceleration of the development of the Asian part of Russia largely depends not so much on the turn of the country's external relations to the East, but on a more active regional economic policy in Siberia and the Far East. At the end of the article, specific recommendations are given for the state economic policy, taking into account the objective obstacles to the rapid restructuring of not only geographical priorities in external relations, but also to the changes in interregional disparities within the country.

Introduction

In recent years, there have been developments in Russian politics and economics that were initially called a turn to the East, but today it would be more correct to call them a turn (or even a pivot) to the global South. We are talking about the increasing role of many Asian, African, Latin American countries in Russia's

international relations, in both political and economic spheres. Such developments (partly already on track, partly merely desired) also have both political and economic reasons; the major ones are listed below. First, many countries of the global South (Asia, Africa and Latin America) have a higher GDP growth rate, which gradually boosts their role in the world economy, therefore promoting economic relations with a variety of countries. Second (the matter of obvious importance for Russia), the “war of sanctions,” which began in 2014 and escalated in 2022, forces us to look for both new markets for Russian products (including fuel and energy resources) and new suppliers of necessary goods. Third, by the mid-2010s, Russia had established a new federal policy regarding social and economic development of the Far East, designed to actively attract investors to the region and develop foreign economic relations with Asia-Pacific states. However, under anti-Russian sanctions, investors are predominantly Russian, and external relations are restricted to a degree. Finally, Eurasian integration is a significant factor in economic development, examined by some experts (for example, see [24]).

The geographical proximity of Russia’s Far East and Siberia to the leading Asian economies (China and India) allows us to logically assume that it is the eastern regions of Russia that will have the leading role in relations with these countries, becoming “entry points” for capital, technology, services and labour from a dynamically developing East [23, p. 9].¹ For Russia, this would significantly improve regional development of the country, since one of the most important objectives of the federal spatial development policy is accelerating the growth of the eastern regions of the country, whose level and dynamics of social and economic development are lagging behind.

The purpose of this article is to analyze whether a turn to the East and, more broadly, the global South can fundamentally alter the regional structure of Russian economy.

We will try to determine whether there is a chance to develop the Far Eastern and Siberian regions, and to decrease the concentration of economic activities in the leading economic centers, primarily in the metropolitan area, through the country's East and South.

We examine three elements of foreign economic relations: foreign trade, foreign direct investment and export of educational services.² We are going to begin with the overview of the existing country-specific configuration of foreign economic relations and its dynamics (to the extent that the available statistical data allow) in order to show the importance of the global South for Russia as a whole; then we are going to consider the contribution of Russian regions (subjects of the Russian Federation) to foreign economic relations.

Foreign Trade in Goods

In 2022, the Federal Customs Service of Russia stopped publishing detailed data on Russian foreign trade. Nevertheless, the analysis of "mirror statistics" published by partner countries can show certain trends and most importantly the ever growing role of Asian countries in the trade turnover of Russia. However, the pivot to the East and, in general, to the global South has not been very fast in recent years, which can be seen from the data of the Federal Customs Service of Russia, published earlier. Table 1 includes Top 25 (based on the 2021 data) trading partners of Russia that are not on the list of "unfriendly countries."³ The 2013 data is given for comparison, since it was the last full year before the "war of sanctions" began, following the refusal of the collective West to recognize the results of the will of the Crimeans and the residents of Sevastopol. In the end, the Crimea peninsula was reunited with Russia.

Table 1

Commodity foreign trade of the Russian Federation with major partners outside the collective West in 2013 and 2021

Country (ranked by the place in Russia's trade turnover in 2021)	2013				2021			
	Russia's Export		Trade Turnover		Russia's Export		Trade Turnover	
	Dollars bn.	% for Russia	Dollars bn.	% for Russia	Dollars bn.	% for Russia	Dollars bn.	% for Russia
1. China	35.6	6.76	88.8	10.54	68.9	13.97	141.6	18.00
3. Belarus	20.2	3.84	34.1	4.06	23.1	4.69	38.8	4.93
6. Türkiye	25.5	4.83	32.8	3.89	27.1	5.49	33.6	4.27
10. Kazakhstan	17.6	3.34	23.5	2.79	18.5	3.75	25.6	3.26
14. India	7.0	1.32	10.1	1.20	9.1	1.85	13.6	1.72
19. Brazil	2.0	0.38	5.5	0.65	5.3	1.07	7.5	0.95
21. Vietnam	1.4	0.26	4.0	0.47	2.2	0.45	7.1	0.91
23. Uzbekistan	2.8	0.53	4.1	0.48	5.2	1.06	6.9	0.88
28. UAE	2.1	0.40	2.5	0.30	5.1	1.03	5.4	0.68
32. Mexico	0.9	0.16	1.9	0.23	3.4	0.69	4.8	0.61
33. Egypt	2.5	0.47	2.9	0.35	4.2	0.85	4.8	0.61
37. Iran	1.2	0.22	1.6	0.19	3.1	0.62	4.0	0.51
39. Azerbaijan	2.9	0.56	3.6	0.42	2.3	0.47	3.4	0.43
40. Indonesia	1.2	0.23	3.0	0.35	0.7	0.14	3.3	0.42
42. Malaysia	1.3	0.24	2.7	0.32	1.4	0.29	3.3	0.41
43. Algeria	1.6	0.30	1.6	0.19	3.0	0.61	3.0	0.38
44. Bangladesh	0.3	0.05	0.8	0.10	1.7	0.35	3.0	0.38
46. Armenia	1.0	0.19	1.4	0.16	1.9	0.38	2.6	0.33
47. Israel	2.1	0.40	3.6	0.42	1.7	0.35	2.6	0.33
49. Kyrgyzstan	2.0	0.38	2.1	0.25	2.2	0.44	2.5	0.32
51. Serbia	0.9	0.16	2.0	0.23	1.3	0.26	2.3	0.30
52. Thailand	1.3	0.24	3.4	0.40	0.5	0.10	2.3	0.29
54. Saudi Arabia	0.8	0.15	1.1	0.13	1.9	0.39	2.3	0.29
55. Moldova	1.3	0.25	1.7	0.21	1.8	0.36	2.2	0.28
56. Hon Kong	3.0	0.57	3.2	0.38	1.6	0.33	2.2	0.28
Total Top 25	138.5	26.23	242.0	28.71	197.2	39.99	328.7	41.77

Source: Data from the Federal Customs Service of Russia. - URL: <https://customs.gov.ru/> (date of access: 01.11.2022).

Over the eight years of the “war of sanctions,” the total share of Russia’s Top 25 trading partners in the global South and East increased by almost half – from 28.7 percent to 41.8 percent.

There was a slightly less increase in trade turnover, which grew by almost 36 percent (\$86.7 billion); however, this growth occurred during a general decrease in Russia's turnover of foreign trade in goods by \$55.6 billion. Over this period, the only states whose bilateral trade with Russia decreased were Azerbaijan (through the country's share as a partner slightly increased), Israel, Thailand and Hong Kong. Russian exports to these 25 countries showed even faster growth; however, Indonesia, along with Azerbaijan, Israel, Thailand and Hong Kong, also showed negative dynamics (see Table 1). Most partners outside the collective West moved up on the list of Russia's most important trading partners. The most impressive growth was demonstrated by Bangladesh (from 72nd to 44th place), Armenia (from 65th to 46th place), Iran (from 59th to 37th place), Mexico (from 52nd to 32nd place), UAE (from 45th to 28th place), Vietnam (from 33rd to 21st place) and Brazil (from 28th to 19th place).

Among the countries of the global South, we should single out those states that have become major purchasers of Russian goods over the past few years. They contributed to the diversification of predominantly oil and gas exports by purchasing commodities, ranging from grain to equipment for the construction of nuclear power plants (as is the case with Bangladesh). We should also keep in mind the underestimation of indicators for some countries, especially Iran, which has long been under sanctions. In 2021, a significant part of Russia's trade turnover with this country occurred through intermediaries in Türkiye, Azerbaijan and UAE. [11]

The increase in trade with African countries is not yet as impressive as the intensification of export-import transactions with Asian countries. The Arab states of North Africa - Egypt, Algeria and Morocco, which ranked 60th in 2021 - are among Russia's notable partners. Senegal, South Africa and Nigeria stand out among the states of sub-Saharan Africa. In eight years, the total trade turnover with Senegal grew more than

tenfold, and with Nigeria – threefold. On the one hand, Russia is considerably strengthening its position on the continent as a supplier of grain and fertilizers, while also maintaining its position as an exporter of weapons and military equipment. On the other hand, despite the efforts made after the first Russia-Africa summit in 2019, a breakthrough in expanding Russian technological exports has yet to be achieved. It is also due to the negative impact of the “war of sanctions” with the collective West. The fact is that some African partners are concerned about “secondary sanctions” for expanding economic ties with Russia. [8]

Due to its remoteness from Russia, Latin America has yet to become one of the key vectors of foreign economic cooperation for domestic businesses. Moreover, the spatial factor is significant even for the Far Eastern regions of Russia; for example, the distance between Vladivostok and Berlin is still less than between Vladivostok and Mexico City. Nevertheless, despite the numerous economic and geopolitical challenges of the 2010s, Russia and Latin America were able to build up potential for intensifying economic ties in the near future [27]. However, not all countries in the region show good dynamics of foreign trade with Russia. While the trade turnover with Brazil, Mexico and Ecuador increased significantly between 2014 and 2021, Venezuela, Argentina, Cuba and some other states were marked by negative dynamics.

There are also slight shifts associated with the turn to the South within the regional context. Looking at the structure of cargo turnover of Russian seaports by basin (Table 2), we can see that starting in 2013 the role of ports of the Baltic and Azov-Black Sea basins (trade-oriented, primarily with Europe) was shrinking. However, between 2019 and 2021, their shares in cargo turnover improved; in the first half of 2022, the situation was the same. Nevertheless, the two basins mentioned above remain the major ones in the structure of cargo turnover; their role declined not so much because of the ports of the Far Eastern basin (their figures

slightly increased starting in 2020), but rather due to the Arctic basin (more precisely, due to cargo shipping from Arctic regions along the Northern Sea Route).

A further increase in the share of the countries of the global South in Russian foreign trade will undoubtedly change the spatial structure of the economy. However, we believe that there are not going to be any fundamental changes due to a number of factors, including internal ones.

Table 2

Cargo turnover of Russian seaports by basins

Basin	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	6 mos. 2022
Cargo turnover, million tons										
Arctic	46.2	35.0	35.4	49.7	73.4	92.7	104.8	96.0	94.3	48.5
Baltic	215.8	223.4	230.7	236.6	247.5	246.3	256.4	241.5	252.8	123.3
Azov-Black Sea	174.4	194.5	232.9	244.0	269.7	272.2	258.2	252.0	256.8	124.7
Caspian	7.8	7.9	6.7	6.1	3.9	4.8	7.4	8.1	7.0	2.6
Far Eastern	144.8	162.5	171.0	185.5	191.9	200.5	213.5	223.2	224.3	111.0
Total	589.0	623.4	676.7	721.9	786.4	816.5	840.3	820.8	835.2	410.1
Freight turnover by basin, percentage										
Arctic	5.6	5.2	5.6	5.2	9.3	11.4	12.5	11.7	11.3	11.8
Baltic	35.8	34.1	32.8	35.8	31.5	30.2	30.5	29.4	30.3	30.1
Azov-Black Sea	31.2	34.4	33.8	31.2	34.3	33.3	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.4
Caspian	1.3	1.0	0.8	1.3	0.5	0.6	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.6
Far Eastern	26.1	25.3	25.7	26.1	24.4	24.6	25.4	27.2	26.9	27.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Data from the Association of Commercial Seaports. – URL: <https://www.morport.com/rus/content/statistika> (date of access: 01.11.2022) and the authors' calculations based on the data.

It should be noted that Russian imports is dominated by non-commodity goods, i.e. production equipment or consumer goods, including those produced in China. Since China's major industrial centers are geographically close to Russian Far Eastern ports, it is often assumed that greater imports of Chinese goods are going to increase port

workload. However, at present, imports from China do not move solely through Far Eastern ports. Unfortunately, there are no available up-to-date statistical data on the logistics of cargo delivery from China to Russia; according to the 2015 data, the quantitative ratio of various options for importing container cargo is as follows:⁴

- Sea transport dominates container cargo transportation from China to Russia (about 80 percent of cargo turnover, while the remaining 20 percent is railway transport).

- The volume of transshipment of Chinese cargo in ports of the Baltic basin amounted to 1.98 million TEU (52 percent), the Far Eastern basin - 1.22 million TEU (32 percent), the Azov-Black Sea basin - 604 thousand TEU (16 percent); thus, less than a third of all container cargo was imported through the Far Eastern ports. This seems quite logical: with sea freight being the cheapest mode of transportation, shipping by sea goes to the ports closest to consumers.⁵ In Russia, the population and economic activities, as is well known, are concentrated in the European part of the country, and therefore the main cargo flow goes to the ports in the western part of the country. This situation is most likely to continue regardless of the country-specific structure of Russian imports.

At the same time, in the changing political and economic conditions, there is a good chance of redistribution of cargo flows from the sea ports of the Baltic basin in favour of the Azov-Black Sea, and not merely due to the growing role of the countries of the South in Russian imports. It is also because of an increase in the volume of food products in Russian exports, since the production of such goods is confined to the more southern agricultural regions of the country due to agro-climatic conditions. Moreover, the population growth rate in these regions is increasing due to the attractiveness of migration (primarily the Krasnodar Territory) combined with increased birth rate in the North Caucasus republics.

One can hardly count on the role of the eastern regions of the country in cargo transportation to increase, even if the role of railway transport grows. In recent years, there has been a lot of talk about China's Belt and Road Initiative (often referred to as the New Silk Road in Russia). It is a big project for China, because it not only provides infrastructure support of its foreign economic relations, but also enables economic development of the internal regions of the country. Therefore, China is not that interested in a direct access to Russia's Far Eastern regions (once again, marine transportation is cheaper). There are several options for the development of the railway system of the Silk Road, [3] with an outlet to Russia in the Urals, the Kurgan region. Thus, it is primarily the western regions of Russia that can benefit from the BRI project, which is good since the Kurgan region is one of the more problematic Russian regions (the GDP per capita in the region is more than two times lower than the average). The growing role of the Far Eastern regions in Russia's foreign trade relations can be linked to the economic development of the Far East itself, rather than to the reorientation of Russian foreign economic relations to the East. In recent years, the Russian federal spatial development policy has paid special attention to the Far East, and there is even a separate federal executive body – the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and the Arctic. Though the effectiveness of the implemented measures to support investors in the Far East is controversial, these efforts are yielding certain results. For example, according to Rosstat, the share of the Far Eastern Federal District in the gross regional domestic product increased from 6.1 percent in 2016 to 6.5 percent in 2020.⁶

However, the increasing role of the Far East in oil and natural gas production has been especially clear even in recent years (Table 3). The shift in oil and gas production to the eastern regions of the country started even earlier. In 2005, Siberia and the Far East together still accounted for only 4 percent of oil production and 1.5 percent of natural gas production. Major

pipelines were constructed in order to export raw materials to China and other Eastern countries, i.e. the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline and the Power of Siberia gas pipeline. Therefore, it is no surprise that Russian-Chinese cooperation in the energy sector is the very element of foreign economic relations between the two countries that draws special attention (for details, see [6] and [26]).

Table 3

Oil and natural gas production by federal districts

Federal districts of Russia	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Oil production, including gas condensate							
Russian Federation	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Northwestern Federal District	5.5	5.7	6.2	5.9	5.7	5.6	5.4
Southern Federal District	1.8	1.7	1.8	2.3	2.6	2.6	2.6
North Caucasus Federal District	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Volga Federal District	21.9	21.9	21.6	21.5	21.2	21.3	20.8
Ural Federal District	57.1	56.1	55.4	55.3	55.1	55.1	55.5
Siberian Federal District	9.1	9.3	9.6	9.6	9.6	9.2	8.8
Far Eastern Federal District	4.4	5.0	5.2	5.1	5.7	6.1	6.8
Production of natural and associated gas							
Russian Federation	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Northwestern Federal District	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Southern Federal District	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.7
North Caucasus Federal District	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Volga Federal District	3.9	3.9	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.9	3.1
Ural Federal District	85.1	84.4	84.3	85.5	86.2	86.4	85.1
Siberian Federal District	2.4	3.0	3.0	2.8	2.5	2.4	2.4
Far Eastern Federal District	4.9	5.0	5.1	4.9	4.8	4.9	6.1

Source: Authors' calculations based on Rosstat data. - URL: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/> (date of access: 01.11.2022)

Thus, in general, the impact of Russia's pivot in foreign economic relations on the global South has caused and will

continue to cause some changes in the regional structure of the Russian economy. However, it is unlikely to fundamentally alter the picture of interregional differences, since the major cargo flows are tied to the main centers of population and economic activity in the country. Moreover, future transformations are determined not so much by structural changes in the geography of foreign trade, but by the logic of Russia's spatial development, namely the accelerated development of particular territories. At the same time, there will be great changes when internal and external factors have a synergistic effect. This may be, for example, the intensification of foreign economic relations with Türkiye at the time of growing significance of the Russian Black Sea regions, or the development of ties with China against the background of accelerated growth of the Russian Far East.

Foreign Direct Investment

The subject of foreign direct investment (FDI), including distortions in statistics due to offshore, has been repeatedly examined in various publications (see [4], [18, p. 9-10] and [19]). Therefore, for the purposes of this article, we will refrain from discussing in detail the significance of offshore capital in FDI. However, it is impossible to exclude offshore capital from general FDI data, since there are a large number of foreign investments from different countries made by de facto Russian companies. Moreover, not only Russian investors make use of offshore companies and attractive countries for business registration, for example, IKEA originated in Sweden but now is legally Dutch. At the same time, in order to obtain a complete and adequate picture, we should analyze FDI stocks by enlarged geographical and economic zones (Table 4), and more specifically, by countries that are not used merely for company registration.

Table 4

**Inward FDI stocks in Russia
by geographical and economic zones**

Geographical and economic zones	01.01.2015	01.01.2020	01.01.2021	01.01.2022	2022 cf 2015
FDI in Russia, total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.6
European Union*	76.8	70.2	61.2/67.2	59.7/65.0	1.3
Eurozone	73.3	62.7	60.2	58.8	1.3
OECD countries	50.7	44.8	45.8	44.4	1.4
EU countries - OECD members*	45.6	39.2	32.3/38.3	29.7/34.9	1.1
NAFTA/USMCA countries	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.1	2.2
OECD countries, outside EU and NAFTA, including UK (estimated)	4.3	4.7	6.6	8.4	3.2
EFTA countries	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.5	1.7
BRICS countries	0.8	0.8	0.5	0.6	1.4
APEC countries	2.7	4.1	3.8	3.9	2.4
ASEAN countries	0.3	1.0	0.9	0.8	4.5
CIS countries	0.5	1.8	1.7	1.6	4.9
EAEU countries	0.3	0.9	0.9	0.9	4.6
G20 countries	11.3	17.5	18.8	20.9	3.0
Countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific	6.0	4.7	4.6	4.3	1.2
OPEC countries	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3	5.6
Countries of the Middle East and North Africa	0.1	2.6	2.4	2.9	78.7

*Second figure includes the United Kingdom (which left the EU) in the EU data

Source: Data from the Central Bank of Russia. – URL: <https://www.cbr.ru/> (date of access: 01.11.2022) and the authors' calculations based on the data.

In general, the situation with FDI is quite similar to the situation with foreign trade. Naturally, radical changes started at the end of 2022, when many European TNCs were pulling out of Russia en masse. However, since exact data has not yet been published and the companies' departure from Russia may be politically motivated, we are going to rely on statistics from the beginning of 2022. It is also highly indicative; it includes, among other things, the figures from the first phase of the “war of

sanctions” (from Crimea’s unification with Russia to the beginning of the SMO in Ukraine). On the one hand, European countries continue to play a dominant role in investments in Russia. As Table 4 shows, investments from Europe even without Cyprus account for more than a third (see “EU countries – OECD members”). On the other hand, the role of European countries in the structure of FDI in Russia noticeably decreased over the years under consideration.⁷ Furthermore, the following trends are noteworthy:

- Traditionally, the NAFTA/USMCA countries (USA, Canada and Mexico) play a small role in FDI in Russia (due to the geographical remoteness from Russia, among other things). Nevertheless, in recent years, their share in FDI in Russia has slightly grown.

- The share of other non-European OECD countries also increased (we did not exclude the EFTA countries from “OECD countries”, since apart from Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, the group includes Liechtenstein, which is not yet a member of the OECD). Among them are such states as Colombia, Chile and New Zealand, whose role in investments in Russia is minimal, once again, due to geographical remoteness. South Korea, Türkiye and Japan made a noticeable contribution to the dynamics of the indicator, while the contribution by Australia and Israel was less noticeable.

- The share of the BRICS countries not only remained very small (especially given the total population of these countries), but even decreased. In other words, so far there has been no noticeable growth in Chinese and Indian investments at the statistical level. However, it should be noted that the volume of FDI from Asian countries may be understated in official Russian data.

- In recent years, the role of CIS countries in investments in Russia has increased, and not only the EAEU countries in general.

- The shift to the global South was reflected in the growing role of investments from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

Let us emphasize that investment ties between Russia and Latin America are developing especially poorly. If Russian FDI still shows sluggish yet positive dynamics due to isolated but promising large investment projects, then Latin American TNCs tend to avoid Russia. [10] At the same time, we would like to point out that Brazil is not the only Latin American country that is a significant exporter of FDI in the world. FDI stocks accumulated by Chile, Colombia and Argentina are comparable to those of average EU members.

Speaking about the impact of ongoing and future shifts regarding the distribution of FDI across Russian regions, it is similar to the situation with foreign trade, though has its own important characteristics. The unifying feature of the two types of foreign economic relations (foreign trade and FDI) is the fact that their regional structure is consumer-oriented. Numerous studies (see [9], [14] and [18]) show that the primary incentive for foreign investment in Russia is access to the large Russian domestic market. Thus, a significant part of investments go to the most densely populated regions in the European part of Russia, in the vicinity of the capital region and those with a focus on seaports (Baltic or Azov-Black Sea regions). Moreover, Chinese investments are no exception. At the beginning of 2022, the capital region (Moscow city and the Moscow region) accounted for almost a third of Chinese FDI; also, the Krasnodar Territory, the Lipetsk Region and St. Petersburg were at the top.

As is the case with foreign trade, FDI related to the oil and gas sector is specific, since funds are invested in regions with mineral deposits. In both cases – when focusing either on the consumer or on sources of raw materials – the pivot of Russian foreign economic relations to the global South is unlikely to have any significant impact on the distribution of FDI by the constituent entities of Russia. This is confirmed by the news of recent months: when investors from unfriendly countries exit Russia, it is often reported that their assets are being purchased

by other foreign entrepreneurs,⁸ which means keeping existing production and trade facilities where they are.

The border location is of particular importance in the development of foreign economic relations. The so-called neighbourhood effect is even more significant in FDI than in foreign trade, where the coastal location, or more precisely, the presence of seaports is more essential (although border trade is also developing). It is clearly visible in the distribution of Chinese FDI by Russian regions: among the 12 regions shown in the table, four out of five regions with considerable Chinese investment are Far Eastern (Trans-Baikal Territory, Khabarovsk Territory, Amur Region and the Republic of Buryatia). Therefore, the neighbourhood factor can impact the growth of investments in Russian regions from nearby countries, though remaining an additional factor, with the major one being consumer focus.

Table 5

**Leading regions in terms of FDI stocks
from China at the beginning of 2022**

Subjects of the Russian Federation	Investment volume, million dollars	Share of Chinese investments in Russia, percentage
Total	3 313	100.00
Moscow city	920	27.76
Trans-Baikal Territory	585	17.65
Krasnodar Territory	357	10.79
Amur Region	280	8.45
Moscow Region	156	4.72
Saint Petersburg city	86	2.59
Lipetsk Region	71	2.13
Novosibirsk Region	25	0.75
Volgograd Region	19	0.57
Republic of Buryatia	16	0.49
Sverdlovsk Region	12	0.36
Khabarovsk Territory	11	0.32

Source: Data from the Central Bank of Russia. – URL: <https://www.cbr.ru/> (date of access: 01.11.2022) and the authors' calculations based on the data.

Detailed studies support abovementioned patterns of FDI distribution, examining individual countries that are of the greatest interest today, such as China (see [16]), India (see [15]) and Türkiye (see [13] and [17]).

We need to rely on the experience of “pioneers” in order to successfully develop ties with countries that are still little known to Russian business, especially African ones; moreover, these pioneers may also be from neighbouring regions, especially if they officially promote their role in development bilateral dialogue with Russia. In this regard, the example of honorary consuls is, in most cases, highly illustrative. They are Russian entrepreneurs who have some experience doing business in the countries in question. For example, it is no coincidence that the only Honorary Consulate of the Democratic Republic of Congo in Russia was opened in Yekaterinburg. The consul is the head of the *MidUral Group*, controlling a niobium deposit in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is not the most business-friendly African state, but extremely promising due to its natural resources and growing sale market. Prospective contacts can also be established through chambers of commerce and industry and other institutional business structures. At the same time, there can be a variety of incentives for boosting foreign trade and investment activities of certain regions, starting by establishing direct air links with the key economic center of a relevant state.

Education Exports

The export of education (in other words, the training of foreign students in Russian universities), occupies a special place in Russian foreign economic relations; in political science research, it is often referred to as a tool of “soft power” (see [2] and [22]) and as one of the components of the regional economy (see [1], [20] and [21]).

There have been publications of detailed collections of statistics on the number of foreign students by university.⁹ Basic

aggregated data by constituent entities of Russia from the Ministry of Internal Affairs is presented below. Table 6 shows 18 countries for which the number of migration registration facts of foreign citizens with study as the purpose of entry exceeds 5 thousand and 20 subjects of Russia with over 10 thousand foreign students.

Table 6

**The number of migration registration facts
of foreign citizens and stateless persons
at the place of stay with study as the purpose of entry**

Countries	Number of facts	Share, percentage	Subjects of Russia	Number of facts	Share, percentage
Overall by country	633 466	100.0	Moscow city	99 497	15.71
Tajikistan	82 150	12.97	Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Region	68 950	10.88
Uzbekistan	76 049	12.01	Republic of Tatarstan	44 386	7.01
Kazakhstan	75 738	11.96	Moscow Region	26 164	4.13
Turkmenistan	53 888	8.51	Sverdlovsk Region	17 461	2.76
Egypt	50 308	7.94	Tomsk Region	13 760	2.17
Kyrgyzstan	39 288	6.20	Novosibirsk Region	13 417	2.12
India	39 068	6.17	Samara Region	11 933	1.88
China	21 855	3.45	Krasnodar Territory	11 884	1.88
Armenia	16 112	2.54	Omsk Region	11 864	1.87
Ukraine	12 971	2.05	Astrakhan Region	11 772	1.86
Azerbaijan	11 769	1.86	Chuvash Republic	11 736	1.85
Belarus	10 470	1.65	Republic of Bashkortostan	11 393	1.80
Morocco	10 148	1.60	Rostov Region	11 392	1.80
North Korea	8 969	1.42	Volgograd Region	11 266	1.78
Iraq	8 403	1.33	Belgorod Region	10 839	1.71
Syria	7 798	1.23	Voronezh Region	10 452	1.65
Moldova	6 651	1.05	Chelyabinsk Region	10 203	1.61
Vietnam	5 133	0.81	Nizhny Novgorod Region	10 080	1.59

Source: Data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. – URL: <https://mvd.ru/> (access date: 01.11.2022) and calculations based on the data.

As far as the distribution of foreign students by country is concerned, the patterns predictably differ from that of foreign trade or FDI: the CIS countries and the global South are at the top of the list. This is due to the prevalence of the Russian language, historical ties and a number of other factors (for example, a slightly different regional pattern of the distribution of foreign students). The capital region still in the lead (the total share of Moscow and the Moscow Region is about 20 percent), but not so clearly; other regions with large universities also play a significant role. In terms of federal districts, the Central Federal District ranks highest with 200.9 thousand facts of migration registration for study purposes (31.7 percent). The Volga Federal District is second with almost 144.9 thousand facts (22.9 percent), followed by the Northwestern (85.9 thousand), Siberian (66.2 thousand), Southern (58.4 thousand), Ural (43.0 thousand), North Caucasian (18.0 thousand) and Far Eastern (16.1 thousand) Federal Districts.

There are also common patterns between the export of education, foreign trade and FDI, such as the special role of border regions,¹⁰ where the number of foreign students is higher. Since the export of education is no longer associated with countries unfriendly to Russia, there should be no changes in the pattern of the distribution of students among the country's universities (the only exception is Ukraine, which will likely lead to reduction in the number of foreign students in the Belgorod and partly Voronezh regions). A certain impetus is possible only if Russia profoundly strengthens its ties with the countries of the global South in the field of R&D or at the very least applied data analytics (which is vital for social sciences and humanities) [25] and technological cooperation of the business structures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reorientation of Russian foreign economic relations to the global South generally leads to certain shifts in

the regional structure of the Russian economy. However, these shifts are not dramatic and will likely remain so in foreseeable future, which is due to two circumstances. First, despite the increasing role of the countries of the global South both in foreign trade and FDI in Russia, unfriendly countries continue to occupy a dominant position, primarily due to their social and economic development being higher. Moreover, there is no question about their full-scale departure or severing economic ties even in the current circumstances. Second, and even more important, the development of geography of both foreign trade and FDI depends little on partner countries. Regardless of their geographical location, the import of goods to Russia and the distribution of FDI in its territory are primarily determined by the consumer factor (importers focus on the ports closest to consumers, while investors concentrate on large sales markets). The export of raw materials and food, as well as the participation of investors in raw materials projects is determined by the location of the producing fields and agro-climatic conditions. However, foreign students come to study at established university centers in any case.

At the same time, the border location proves to be an important exception: cross-border trade is developing; the neighbourhood effect is also observed in both FDI and the export of educational services. This once again proves that the state spatial development program needs to further promote cross-border cooperation, which is not yet characteristic. [12]

Possible shifts in the regional structure of the economy are going to take place simultaneously due to Russia's turn to the global South and internal transformations, that is, the accelerated development of the country's Far East and South. However, while the Far Eastern state policy has been actively developing in recent years, the "southern vector" is only starting to take shape.¹¹

It is no doubt that the training of the necessary personnel should be an important part of the state policy for developing

contacts with the countries of the global South. Traditionally, Oriental and African studies were considered an “elite” specialty, and therefore specialists were trained primarily in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Moreover, after the collapse of the USSR, Russia lost some of its foreign policy ambitions, and even language training in this area dropped noticeably. However, large-scale contacts of Russian regions with the countries of Asia and Africa, as well as Latin America, require a large number of specialists in any constituent entity of Russia, which means everywhere; specialists must have knowledge of the specifics of doing business in these states and at least minimal language training. It is certainly possible to send specialists trained at metropolitan universities to the regions, though it also requires elaborate incentive mechanisms for young personnel.

Given the shortage of managers and experts in Russia at present, it would be expedient to address this problem more closely in several test regions, including those in Siberia and the Far East. It would probably be better to choose those federal subjects that already have a certain potential for intensifying ties with the countries of the global South and East. For example, the capital of Primorye Vladivostok tops the list for the number of consulates general, embassy departments, and trade mission branches of Asian countries in the Russian East. There are representative offices of Vietnam, India, China, Mongolia, North Korea, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as well as “unfriendly” South Korea and Japan; there are also honorary consuls of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia and the Philippines.¹² Moreover, investors from several Asian countries have established and successfully run enterprises in the Primorsky Territory.

Summing up, we should once again point out that the pivot of the Russian economy to the global South and East is a truly complex state mission. It is impossible to accomplish it only through a limited set of means, be it within the framework of foreign economic policy, in the educational sphere or in area of regional development.

Notes

1. At the same time, the authors of this article rightly point out that while transformations within the framework of changing international political and economic relations are obvious, the consequences of changes in federal Far Eastern policy and Eurasian integration require further elaboration.
2. This type of cross-border trade in services is most clearly reflected in Russian statistics that have a geographical breakdown.
3. Government Directive No. 430-r of March 5, 2022 (amended on 29 October, 2022) "On approval of the list of foreign states and territories involved in unfriendly activity towards Russia, Russian companies and citizens." This list includes EU member states, the United Kingdom and the British Overseas Territories, Switzerland, Norway, the US, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Ukraine, as well as such minor trading partners of Russia as Albania, Andorra, the Bahamas, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Micronesia, Monaco, New Zealand, San Marino, North Macedonia, Taiwan (the Republic of China) and Montenegro.
4. Prikhodko E. (2016). China as the origin of Russian container cargo flows [Kitai kak tsentr zarozhdeniia rossiiskikh konteineropotokov] // Sea Ports. No. 5. - URL: <https://morvesti.ru/themes/1700/63704/> (date of access: 01.06.2022)
5. This is confirmed by the commercial offers of companies importing Chinese cargo to Russia: they suggest marine shipping as a preferred means of transportation, offering to deliver cargo not only to Far Eastern ports. According to the Association of Commercial Sea Ports statistics, in 2017–2020, road freight from seaports was 2.2–2.4 times as much as rail freight; and only in 2021 the figure dropped to 1.8 times.
6. Within comparable boundaries, figures for all years for the Republic of Buryatia and the Trans-Baikal Territory are included in data for the Far Eastern Federal District.
7. Unfortunately, the Central Bank of Russia provides data on the constituent entities of Russia and on the distribution of FDI by geographic and economic zones only starting from January 1, 2015 (after the initial reaction of foreign investors to the unification with Crimea). However, the dynamics of FDI for the subsequent years is also interesting, since it allows us to trace the course of events in the new conditions of the "war of sanctions."
8. For example, according to media reports, the plant of the famous Finnish coffee manufacturer *Paulig* in the Tver region was bought by an Indian citizen who is a top manager of *Milagro*.
9. Export of Russian educational services: Statistical collection [Eksport rossijskikh obrazovatel'nyh uslug: Statisticheskij sbornik] (2020). // Ministry

of Science and Higher Education of Russia. The Pushkin State Russian Language Institute. No 10, 557 pp. (In Russian); as well as similar collections for other years.

¹⁰. For a specific example of this see [7].

¹¹. The fact that the South of Russia requires special attention is discussed in [5].

¹². Representative offices of foreign states in the Primorsky Territory. – URL: <https://vladivostok.mid.ru/ru/help/predstavitelstva/> (date of access: 01.11.2022).

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DMITRY EFREMENKO. CONSOLIDATION OF THE WORLD MAJORITY: EXPANSION OF THE SCO AND BRICS, ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND GEOPOLITICS IN THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

Keywords: World Majority; Global South; Shanghai Cooperation Organization; BRICS; crisis of the unipolar world order; Near and Middle East; soft balancing; transformation of the world economy.

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Abstract. The expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS in 2023 is analyzed in the context of the processes of transformation of the world order, as well as political turbulence in the Near and Middle East region. Iran's accession to the SCO and BRICS not only indicates that this country has overcome international isolation, but also serves as confirmation of the growth of its geopolitical significance. Iran is one of the parties to the new configuration of international actors, while its other participants are China and Russia. The Russia-China-Iran triangle is a group whose members are united by an understanding of common threats, which they seek to mitigate through "soft balancing" of the policy of the hegemonic superpower. For the SCO, the full integration of Iran, on the one hand, again emphasizes that ensuring the security of Central Asia and stabilizing Afghanistan remain a priority, but, on the other hand, encourages this organization to focus its attention on conflicts in the Near and Middle East region. The BRICS group is also focusing on this region, with four of its five new members located in the Near and Middle East. But beyond geopolitics, the expansion of BRICS forms a "personal union" of this group with the leading members of OPEC. The extensive growth of BRICS, with all the risks of complicating decision-making processes, contributes to the expansion and consolidation of various network interactions of non-Western international actors. In the current international political conditions, this feature gives BRICS advantages over "rigid" alliances with detailed regulation of formal obligations and a system of informal obligations "built into" their architecture, reflecting hierarchical interactions within blocs.

The coronavirus pandemic and related global socio-economic problems, the special military operation (SMO) in Ukraine that began in February 2022, and the war between Israel and HAMAS that broke out in October 2023 demonstrated the profound ineffectiveness of the unipolar world order both in terms of economic performance and in regard of ensuring international and regional security. Under these conditions, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and other non-Western structures, institutions and forums of international cooperation continued to form an alternative to the system of global

governance based on the hegemony of one superpower. A striking external manifestation of the ongoing changes was the expansion of the number of SCO and BRICS participants in the summer of 2023. Along with recording the general transformations of the world order, the expansion of the SCO and BRICS also indicates significant reconfigurations of forces in several regions of the planet, especially in the Near and Middle East, Central Asia, as well as Africa. When considering this entire range of issues, it is important to take into account the resonance effect of the expansion of the SCO and BRICS with the events of the second half of 2023, in particular, with the failure of the Ukrainian “counter-offensive”, the victory of Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict, the collapse of Paris’ dominance in the former colonies in Western and Central Africa, the HAMAS terrorist attack on Israel and the start of a military operation in the Gaza Strip.

Expansion of the SCO in 2023 and the Growing Geopolitical Gravity of Iran

The SCO summit in July 2023 was marked by the admission of Iran to the organization as a full participant. This event means that the SCO is becoming an important player in the Middle East region. For Iran itself, full membership in the SCO is yet another confirmation of overcoming international isolation and recognition of the growing role of this country in the system of international interactions of Greater Eurasia. Together with the decision to admit Argentina, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia as full members of BRICS, the expansion of the SCO can be seen as another symptom of the sharply accelerated transformation of the world order and the desire of most countries in the world to overcome the deeply unfair system of the American hegemony, which provided one country with unfair and unilateral advantages. But, in addition to the general global context, the two expansions reflect significant changes in the balance of power and interactions of players at

different levels in a region of the planet that is extremely important for world politics and geo-economics.

Speaking about the expansion of the SCO and BRICS, it should be noted that this became possible thanks, firstly, to the major peacemaking success of Chinese diplomacy, which made a major contribution to the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Beijing was able to achieve this result due to the fact that it was in China that both countries saw a strong and impartial mediator interested in stabilizing the situation in the Near and Middle East. The US in the modern world can no longer claim this role. Washington's last major achievement as a mediator in the Near and Middle East – the so-called Abraham Accords – had an anti-Iranian lining, that is, they deliberately excluded a position of impartiality in relation to all major actors in regional politics.

Secondly, Russia made a significant contribution to changing the situation in the Near and Middle East by intervening in the Syrian conflict in 2015. A smart combination of hard power projection and skillful diplomacy allowed Moscow to strengthen relations with leading regional players, or at least build a new configuration of mutual interests in relations with them, despite the fact that these players themselves compete fiercely and sometimes openly quarrel with each other. The assistance of Russia and China allowed the states of the Near and Middle East to quickly get used to the new situation of multipolarity and begin to derive a number of advantages from it.

The basis of Russia's strategically oriented relations with Iran was the de facto alliance in the Syrian conflict, which began with the successful efforts of the Iranian side in 2015 to convince Russia to intervene in the conflict, as well as unity on a negative basis, due to the strong sanctions pressure from the West and especially the efforts of the US aimed at undermining the security of both Russia and Iran. In the case of the latter, the inability and unwillingness of the Biden administration to return to the nuclear deal, choosing instead a policy of increasing pressure on the

leadership in Tehran to the point of efforts aimed at destabilizing the Iranian regime was of particular importance. In the conditions of the SMO, Iran has become a very valuable and important partner for Russia. In particular, the “alleged” deliveries of Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles played a significant role in the hostilities in Ukraine, although, apparently, the matter was not limited to just these deliveries.

The military-political efforts of Iran, which secured its status as one of the most powerful powers in the Near and Middle East, were of utmost importance for changing the regional balance of power. In addition to its dominance in the political life of Lebanon (primarily thanks to the Hezbollah movement), strong but shared with Moscow influence on the Bashar al-Assad regime in Damascus, and a stable presence in Iraq (even despite difficulties with a number of Shiite groups), Tehran quite successfully intervened in processes on the Arabian Peninsula, especially in the Yemen conflict. The Iranian-backed Houthis have successfully resisted the Saudi-led military coalition, effectively using new means of warfare such as UAVs. The success of the Houthis was one of the most important factors that forced Riyadh to negotiate with Tehran through Chinese mediation. Finally, as the war between Israel and HAMAS progressed, the Houthis began to exert increasing influence on the conflict, which by the end of 2023 led to a near-total shutdown of supplies to Israel through the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, forcing the US and a number of other states announced the launch of Guardian of Prosperity Operation, aimed at countering “threats to maritime trade” from Yemen’s Shia-Zaydis.

Thus, throughout the 2010s – early the 2020s, Iran not only remained an integral part of the complex equation characterizing the regional balance of power, but managed to strengthen its influence to such an extent that it acted as a party to fairly stable configurations of major international actors [1]. One of these configurations, the Russia-India-China triangle, or the “Primakov’s

triangle" [2], became the basis for the formation of BRIC (later BRICS) and the expansion of the SCO in 2017. The Russia-Türkiye-Iran triangle acted as a moderator of the Syrian conflict, allowing us to find a balance of interests that contributed to the exit from the most dangerous and bloody stages of the conflict, as well as the relative marginalization of the role of the US and the West in it. Iran's accession to the SCO can be seen as an indicator of the influence of another configuration of players consisting of Russia, China and Iran. The force that unites this triangle is, first of all, hostility on the part of the US, but at the same time, the growing interaction within the triangle is gradually filled with positive political and economic content [3].

The Russia-China-Iran triangle is not a group whose members are bound by any strict obligations of joint action in relation to a superpower pursuing a hegemonic policy. However, an understanding of the common threats emanating from the US encourages the participants in this triangle to coordinate interaction in such a way as to block the hegemon's policies through "soft balancing" [4] without the costs of direct confrontation with it. Soft balancing uses non-military instruments such as international institutions, trade and economic cooperation, and diplomatic agreements to counter the pressure of a hegemonic power [5]. Taking into account the interaction during the SMO (in particular, between Russia and Iran), we can say that the "soft balancing" toolkit also includes military-technical cooperation, carried out to the extent that it does not cross Washington's "red lines". Geo-economic and geo-strategic aspects should also be taken into account, since it is on the territory of Iran that the main vectors of trade and infrastructure development projects of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and the international North-South transport corridor, the end points of which are located in Russia and India, intersect.

For India, the transit potential of Iran (in addition to the route to Russia, communications to Central Asia can pass through Iran), its role in the supply of hydrocarbons and the

generally constructive direction of cooperation between the two countries served as weighty arguments in favor of supporting Tehran's accession to the SCO family. Indian leaders appear to recognize that China's strong economic presence in Iran does not mean a zero-sum game for New Delhi. Iran appears to have a special place in India's geostrategy, something that both Moscow and Beijing should take into account. The need for such consideration reveals the ambiguity of interactions between international players participating in several "triangular" configurations at once.

Iran's entry into the SCO means that Afghanistan becomes a territory surrounded on almost all sides by states participating in this association. Thus, Afghanistan becomes a clear and permanent priority for the SCO. Here, first of all, what is important is a high level of mutual understanding between the SCO countries on the issues of combating Islamic terrorist and extremist groups, primarily ISIS. The Taliban government in Kabul also recognizes that the "three evil forces" pose an immediate threat to the stability and secure future of Afghanistan. In general, we can talk about a number of achievements of the Taliban government after the flight of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. The Taliban largely control the country; they demonstrate sufficient effectiveness in the fight against drug production and drug trafficking. Thus, there are grounds for strengthening interaction between the SCO countries and the new Afghan authorities both in the areas of security and in the areas of economic cooperation. Next in line is the start of the implementation of infrastructure projects necessary both for Afghanistan itself and for ensuring a higher level of transport and economic connectivity between the SCO countries. Afghanistan can play a very important role in the development of energy projects.

Politically, the government in Kabul obviously supports the international approaches of China, Russia and other SCO member countries, and at the same time, mindful of the

consequences of a long American presence in the country, demonstrates rejection of the hegemonic course of the US and the collective West. At the moment, China, Russia and Iran are increasing the level of interaction with the Afghan authorities. At the same time, they, as well as other SCO states, exert influence that encourages the Taliban regime to take greater account of the interests of Afghanistan's ethnic minorities and women's rights. Ultimately, progress in this direction will make it possible to achieve a higher level of international legitimacy for the Afghan government, including discussion of the possibilities of full integration of this country into the SCO. In turn, the security, stability and economic recovery of Afghanistan should be considered as the primary and long-term responsibility of the SCO member countries.

Problems and Prospects for the Development of the SCO and Other non-Western Institutions

The expansion of any international organization where decisions are made on the basis of consensus means a certain complication of the process of political agreements and, in some cases, limits the efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making. The SCO is no exception in this case. India's SCO presidency in 2023 was nevertheless quite effective. The fact that the Final Declaration of the New Delhi summit included a mention that the SCO is not opposed to any country or group of countries cannot be considered as India's exclusive merit or initiative. Even in its narrower composition, in the first years of its existence, the SCO was not an anti-Western alliance. However, the Shanghai Organization was and remains a non-Western international political institution offering an alternative path to the countries and peoples of the Global South.

In a sense, India's achievements in recent years in terms of rapprochement with the US, Japan and other countries of the Western camp were facilitated by the fact that India had

previously strengthened its authority as one of the leading non-Western countries – a co-founder of BRICS and a member of the SCO since 2017. At the same time, it is necessary to avoid a possible weakening of the unity of the SCO due to the influence that the US is trying to exert on India or the countries of Central Asia. In particular, Washington's efforts to transform the QUAD grouping, which includes India, into an anti-Chinese alliance are a serious risk factor. The announcement of the start of work on the formation of a transport corridor linking India and the European Union through the countries of the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula was presented as creating a counterweight to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. True, the war between Israel and HAMAS and its long-term consequences will most likely lead to the blocking of this project, while the alternative North-South transport corridor will continue to develop.

The US and EU countries are also putting significant pressure on India so that it joins the Western sanctions regimes directed against Russia, or at least reduces military-technical cooperation and energy trade, compliance with the "price ceiling" illegitimately established by the West for Russian oil. Similar pressure is being exerted by the West on the countries of Central Asia through threats of imposing secondary sanctions and curtailing assistance programs, which, however, is not comparable to the level of support provided to the economies of the Central Asian countries by Russia and China. In this regard, it should be noted the value of the SCO consultation mechanisms, which allow member countries to discuss complex problems and relieve tensions caused by the actions of other states that consider the SCO as a competitor.

The SCO represents one of the key elements of the emerging cooperation networks of the non-Western world, or the World Majority [6]. Of great importance is the connection of the SCO with other non-Western structures and initiatives, such as BRICS, the Belt and Road, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), etc. In this network

mega-format, it is important to strive for a more effective division of labor between the elements, and also, if necessary, supplement it with new structures. For example, within the SCO it is quite difficult to achieve coordination of the macroeconomic policies of the participating countries. But this problem can be solved in the format of interaction between China and the EAEU countries. The development of steps aimed at further liberalizing the conditions of trade and investment cooperation can be seen as specific tasks that are still difficult to solve with the full membership of all SCO participants, but it is quite possible to achieve tangible progress as part of China, Iran and the EAEU countries (including Belarus). At the same time, China, Russia, as well as Iran could coordinately prevent Western attempts to undermine economic cooperation in Central Asia, in particular, through the use of primary and secondary sanctions and putting pressure on the political and economic elites of the countries of this region. Also urgent is the convergence of technological standards, the creation of common mechanisms for stimulating and regulating the development of new technologies, and the prevention of external interference aimed at blocking the technological development of China and the EAEU countries. It is important to keep these cooperation formats open, allowing them to be extended to other SCO member countries as soon as they are ready.

With its full complement the SCO is entirely justified to work out further steps related to the comprehensive development of energy, overcoming energy shortages, which is an acute problem for Central Asia, Pakistan, India, developing new routes for energy supplies, linking various energy sources (hydrocarbons, nuclear power, water resources and renewable energy sources) into a single technological and economic system, as well as the formation of coordinated and socially realistic approaches to combating climate change. The significance of the latter was confirmed by the decision of the summit in New Delhi to declare 2024 the SCO Year of Ecology.

Arabian Monarchies and the Resonance Effect between BRICS and OPEC

The challenges of energy markets and the interests of key international actors in these markets played a very important role in the selection of specific countries that received invitations to join BRICS. In its expanded composition, BRICS will include leading hydrocarbon producers and their consumers (outside the West). There is partial interference between BRICS and OPEC, which can rightfully be called the most influential organization that united in the 20th century a number of oil-rich non-Western countries. As a result, the enlarged BRICS group will control 43 percent of global oil production; the addition of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates alone adds more than 1.5 trillion dollars to the total GDP of the BRICS countries. With the fragmentation of the once united global hydrocarbon market sharply accelerated as a result of Western sanctions against Iran and Russia and attempts by oil consumers to set price ceilings for individual producers, the two Arabian monarchies have made a fundamental political choice that will further deepen this split. Even earlier, the KSA made a major contribution to undermining the position of the petrodollar by deciding to trade oil with China for yuan.

Apparently, the seizure by the West of a significant part of Russia's foreign assets and gold and foreign exchange reserves made a particularly strong impression on the leaders of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Prince Muhammad bin Salman is well aware of the lack of guarantees that such an operation will never be applied to Saudi assets. In this case, the role of the subjective factor in world politics should not be underestimated. Perhaps if the de facto leader of the KSA were another member of the Saudi dynasty, changes in relations with the West, rapprochement with China and constructive cooperation with Russia would have proceeded at a much slower pace. But here we are talking about a

very ambitious person who, obviously, is not inclined to forgive the insults once inflicted on him. This can be seen in how the US President Joe Biden was received in Riyadh (July 2022) and how the leaders of China (December 2022) and Russia (December 2023) were received. Of course, Prince Muhammad's policy is quite pragmatic and we are by no means talking about Saudi Arabia moving into the anti-Western camp. But, and this is no less important, Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of Prince Muhammad, is moving towards becoming one of the important players in the multipolar world, with a significantly higher level of strategic autonomy than before.

The former pro-American orientation of the Arabian monarchies is becoming a thing of the past. Taking a position close to neutral in the Ukrainian conflict, they pose another challenge to Washington. The Biden administration is increasing pressure on the Arabian monarchies, but, obviously, this activity is overdue and the leading Gulf countries have made a fundamental choice in favor of further diversification of ties in the areas of trade and security.

Since the beginning of the SMO, Russia's relations with the Arabian monarchies have strengthened significantly, the importance of trade and economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia and especially the UAE has increased sharply due to the harsh sanctions policy of the West towards Moscow. Of course, relations in the OPEC+ format come first here. The Gulf countries undoubtedly benefited greatly from the dynamics of energy prices after the start of the SMO, as well as from the redistribution of supply channels and the forced sharp reduction in Russia's presence in European markets. True, cheap Russian oil has greatly pushed Arab oil out of the markets in China and India. The redrawing of gas markets will have even more controversial consequences, which may, in particular, resonate with previously existing interstate contradictions.

The choice of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in favor of BRICS is also due to the awareness of the long-term risks associated with

the economic decarbonization strategy promoted by the West, which will be focused not only on solving climate problems, but also on securitization and achieving geopolitical and geo-economic advantages. The global “green transition” will be accompanied by serious technological challenges, and the Arabian monarchies will strive to avoid new technological dependence on the West. Membership in BRICS will allow them to strengthen their positions at a time when technological and regulatory tools will be used even more actively by the West.

For the BRICS countries in the framework of five, expansion at the expense of the Arabian monarchies and Iran was a very serious geopolitical and geo-economic stake. As a result, a unified BRICS / OPEC system will not emerge in 2024, but both groups will mutually reinforce each other. Instead of unpromising attempts to form a hierarchical system of alliances alternative to the West, there is an expansion and consolidation of various network interactions of non-Western international players.

Of course, the factor of civilizational representation is also very important. The absence of countries from the Moslem world among the BRICS members has long been the Achilles heel of this group. Starting from 2024, four Moslem countries, both Sunni and Shia, will be represented in BRICS. Their geographic localization will focus special attention of BRICS on the regions of the Near and Middle East, North Africa, and also (taking into account the predominantly non-Moslem Ethiopia) the Horn of Africa.

Development of events in the Middle East after the 2023 BRICS summit in Johannesburg will inevitably strengthen the criticism of the group members and the World Majority as a whole regarding Western policies that remain openly pro-Israel in the context of the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip that is worsening with every passing day. In fact, we are talking about the complete self-discreditation of the entire Western system of moral and ethical arguments, demanding that the countries of the Global South condemn Russia’s actions in the

course of the SMO and join the sanctions regimes. The new regional geopolitical structure, the foundation of which was to be the Abraham Accords, turned out to be practically frozen by the end of 2023. And although the leading BRICS countries are not able to stop Israel's military operation in Gaza, their possible actions in connection with the consequences of this operation may be very sensitive for the US and the EU.

Is the BRICS Glass Half Empty?

The reaction of Western and pro-Western political analysts to the expansion of the SCO and BRICS ranges from alarmism to hopes that the formats for uniting the powers of the World Majority will turn out to be short-lived and ineffective due to growing contradictions between their participants.

Daron Acemoglu, viewing the expansion of BRICS through a synocentric lens, believes that it automatically leads to increased Chinese (and, incidentally, Russian) influence, since all BRICS recruits already have quite friendly relations with Beijing and Moscow. Moreover, according to Acemoglu, the nature of the regimes in Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Ethiopia contributes to a much faster transformation of the entire group into an "anti-democratic club," which ultimately indicates a reduction in the area of democracy on a global scale. In turn, support from Beijing, in particular, the unhindered transfer of Chinese video surveillance technologies, acts as a factor in strengthening these regimes [7]. However, references to the role of artificial intelligence technologies in supporting authoritarianism are apparently related to fears of further strengthening of the technological influence of the PRC and the acceptance by non-Western countries of Chinese regulatory regimes, leading to the undermining of the universal nature of political decisions of Western countries in the field of AI. In any case, all the new BRICS members are already participants in the

Belt and Road Initiative, and China is their largest or one of the main trading partners [8].

The vulnerability of Acemoglu's argumentation is due to the fact that all new members of BRICS, with the exception of Iran, have quite constructive relations with the US. Moreover, it is the US (especially under the administration of Joe Biden) that is trying to carry out black and white division of all other countries into democracy and non-democracy. Both the declared and actual position of BRICS consists in non-interference in the internal affairs of each other and indifference regarding the government systems in any of the countries included in this club. The motives that encourage the leading non-Western countries to participate in BRICS are connected, first of all, with the strengthening of their sovereignty and international subjectness, while an attempt to impose from outside the differentiation according to the criteria Freedom House can only undermine these general aspirations.

Acemoglu does not conceal his hopes for the internal weakening of BRICS, considering as an ideal development option the formation within the group of a peculiar counterbalance to both the China-Russia axis and the dominance of the US. It is worth noting that the very idea of a "democratic alternative" inside BRICS clearly highlights the growing dysfunctionality of American leadership, the direct support of which in the global South is already almost "not in trade" (Argentina under Javier Milei is an exception, obviously, of the temporary anomaly nature). According to Acemoglu, the composition of the countries that replenished the ranks of the BRICS means that the chances of forming a counterbalance to Russia and China among the participants of the BRICS are missed at the present moment, but in the future it seems possible to form a separate "democratic" block from developing economies (Indonesia, Türkiye, Mexico, Colombia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Kenya), which then could "pull" India, Brazil and South Africa to their side.

Another assessment of BRICS expansion, less alarming for the West, is offered by C. Raja Mohan, in the past, the first

director of Carnegie India. He criticizes on reasonable basis the miscalculations of the Western expert community: “mixing their hopes and fears about the global order with analysis, Western commentators demonstrate complete ignorance in relation to the countries of the global south, their various interests and their interactions with the great powers” [9]. At the same time, Raja Mohan states that BRICS is not a military or political bloc, and its accession to the group of new participants will further reduce the space of possible consensus. It is assumed that the addition of the contradictions within the main axis of the BRICS related to the border conflict of China and India, the new zones of tension (Iran / Saudi Arabia, Egypt / Ethiopia) will still more undermine the vitality of the group. The West may be sure that BRICS does not transform into an anti-Western alliance, since there is a sufficient number of “friends” of the US and the European Union. The most powerful of these powers – India – “balances” its participation in BRICS by participation in the format of Quad, as well as in forum I2U2 (India, Israel, the UAE, and the US). According to Raja Mohan, in the future, rivalry inside BRICS can be more acute than the contradictions of most of its member countries with the US. The West needs to get out of strategic hibernation, use the contradictions inside BRICS and find new ways to attract the global south to its side, which, supposedly, is only waiting for this.

This very common line of argumentation – it can be called “a glass of BRICS is half empty” – proves to be very vulnerable in a more detailed analysis. If BRICS group was a military-political unit like NATO or an institutionalized political and economic union like the EU, the Indian-Chinese contradictions would quickly bring it to a critical decline in effectiveness. In the absence of an institutional basis, in principle, it is not too clear what exactly can fall a victim of contradictions between the participants of BRICS. Where there is a stable zone of common interests, a problem-oriented institutional structure can arise following the declarations of leaders (the creation of the New Development Bank can be an example), but so far, such

derivatives of BRICS do not form a holistic architecture of institutions at the level of the entire group. In relevant international political conditions, this feature gives BRICS advantages over “stiff” unions with detailed regulation of formal obligations and a system of obligations of non-formal obligations that reflect hierarchical interaction within the blocks, “built-in” into their architecture. We can say that the idea of “the strength of weak ties” [10] is quite in demand here, if you try to transfer it from the field of social communications to the interstate communications area.

The BRICS group, as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, never acted as Western antagonists, although it is the West that antagonizes the two key participants in BRICS and SCO. At the same time, the identity of SCO and BRICS emphasizes the otherness in relation to the West and the desire to restore global justice precisely by strengthening the positions of the world majority. In the logic of the zero sum game, characteristic of Western political elites, this is more than enough for concern.

Possible Transition from Geo-Economic Fragmentation to a New Globalization and Strengthening of the World Majority

In a broad geo-economic context, the new opportunities associated with the expansion of BRICS provide serious additional grounds for discussing the problems of economic fragmentation and the prospects for a new globalization. There is no doubt that the crisis of the economic globalization model of the 1990s and early 2000s was largely rooted within an unbalanced geo-economic system aimed at preserving the dominance and unfair preferences of Western countries. This was confirmed by both the Great Recession of 2008 and the global shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the decisive acceleration of the deglobalization processes was given by the

motives of geopolitical competition, primarily between the US and China [11], and in the last two years, by the actions of the parties within the framework of the proxy war that broke out on the territory of Ukraine between Russia and the West. Securitization is becoming the main driver of reformatting cross-border flows of services, capital and investments, breaking off previously existing ones and forming new supply chains and added value. Unprecedented sanctions, the arrest by the West of part of the foreign exchange reserves and other assets of the Russian Federation, and the beginning of attempts to illegally manage them led to widespread awareness of the fundamental political risks of the global financial system based on US dollar. In addition, the increasing crisis potential of the international monetary and financial system is caused not only by external geopolitical shocks, but also by its internal instability, producing global imbalances [12]. The fears expressed by many economic experts, in particular, the First Deputy Managing Director of the IMF Gita Gopinath, about the danger of losing the main achievements of “almost three decades of peace, integration and growth” seem well founded [13].

In this context, one of the most pressing issues of global development is the formation of a new financial architecture. BRICS, SCO and other non-Western structures can significantly facilitate and speed up payments between countries in national currencies (for now, payments in Chinese yuan are the most convenient), and then consistently solve the problem of creating an alternative international currency unit that uses all the advantages of digital money and, unlike dollar and euro, secured by real resource assets of the issuing countries. Non-Western international structures also need to form an effective system of scientific and technological cooperation that excludes dictates from the West in the field of high technologies.

Although the scenario of creating a common currency of the BRICS countries in the near future is one of the most unlikely (something can be quickly changed here only by a massive attack

of “black swans” on the global economy), more modest steps, which include progress in the formation of the payment system BRICS Pay, as part of the development of a common platform for payments and transfers using blockchain technologies, have important policy implications. By making a significant contribution to the process of de-dollarization, this project should help increase the popularity and compatibility of national payment systems [14]. According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, the advantage of such payment systems, as well as digital currencies issued by the Central banks of non-Western countries, is not only the avoidance of the political dictates of the dollar issuer, but also the technological advance compared to the SWIFT system [15].

It is very significant that the IMF, in assessing the likely contours of a new geo-economic fragmentation, used extremely politicized data - information about the vote in 2022 at the UN General Assembly on resolutions on Ukraine. In fact, we are not talking about a picture of the global economy that corresponds to the mainstream ideas about regionalism, but about purely geopolitical dividing lines. The formation of trade and economic blocs in such a configuration could, according to Gita Gopinath, lead to a reduction in global GDP by 2.5-7 percent with the greatest losses for the least developed countries. Given that this expert voice is heard from the citadel of one of the most important institutions of the Washington Consensus, the US and the West would do well to once again assess the full consequences of the geopolitical tensions they are provoking.

It appears that the noted trends generally correspond to the scenario of transition to dual global circulation [16], the essence of which is the emergence of two relatively autonomous zones of circulation of resources, goods, services, technologies and capital. China will be at the center of one, the US at the center of the other, and interaction between them will occur to a lesser extent directly and to an increasing extent - with the help of connecting links - interconnectors, which can be represented by state and

non-state economic actors, as well as supranational integration associations. Membership in BRICS, as well as participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, provides the most comfortable access to Chinese economic power [17]. The expansion of BRICS means in this context that a significant number of countries in the Global South perceive the role of an interconnector as very promising. First of all, joining BRICS increases their political weight as regional and / or global players. On the contrary, strictly following the political and economic lead of the US and the West does not bring additional international political capitalization; rather, on the contrary, there is a danger of ending up in the second echelon of the Western-led “values-based partnership” due to the dubious democracy of their political regimes from the point of view of the Americans and Europeans. A pro-Western orientation in economic terms almost inevitably means maintaining the corresponding country or group of countries in their previous positions in international value added chains. Participation in BRICS and in the general development of comprehensive economic South-South interaction opens up significantly more opportunities in this regard. Taking advantage of integration into the Sino-centric economic circulation zone, many old and new BRICS members will simultaneously seek to gain additional benefits as a connecting link with the US-centric zone. Moreover, they will most likely be participants or even initiators of a number of projects within the BRICS framework, objectively leading to a general increase in the share of non-Western countries in the world economy and politics.

Although China, due to its economic weight, plays an exceptional role in BRICS, the group itself in its expanded composition can be considered as an umbrella format for intensifying a wide variety of interactions between non-Western state actors. In a sense, the expanded BRICS, as well as BRICS+, can be presented as a school of multilateral dialogue, unmediated by Western-dominated institutions and mechanisms of global governance. It is not hierarchy, but network structuring, the

building of many horizontal connections between international actors at various levels that ensure the gradual strengthening of the World Majority at the current stage of global development.

Conclusion

Why is the BRICS group today so attractive to the countries of the World Majority, acting as its de facto leader? The real weight of the joint actions of the BRICS countries is given not only and not so much by the totality of their resource capabilities, soft and hard power factors, but by far-reaching changes in these countries associated with the fight against poverty, reduction of inequality, demographic transition, urbanization, adaptation of mass groups to lifestyle and consumption standards of the information society, changes in identity, articulation of images of the future. Despite all the obvious differences and disproportions between the BRICS countries, in the coming decades they will account for the “critical mass” of global transformations, the result of which, obviously, will be a new, post-Western picture of the world of the 21st century.

There is a growing worldwide interest in non-Western structures that offer alternative formats of international economic cooperation, as well as, which seems no less important, alternative ideological approaches to understanding world politics. In contrast to the hegemonic approach, which prescribes a certain interpretation of liberal values to the whole world, the SCO and BRICS countries offer the world a mutually respectful dialogue of cultures, ideas and value systems.

The year 2023 determined the vectors for the further development of SCO and BRICS. A very restrained approach to the expansion of these structures was replaced – especially clearly in the case of BRICS – by a choice in favor of extensive growth. This choice is justified in the context of the sharply accelerating destruction of the unipolar world order. The expanded SCO and BRICS do not form an alternative institutionalized system of

global governance by themselves, but through the tightening of connections and interactions of the countries of the World Majority they create more favorable conditions for the emergence of such a system before the end of the first half of the 21st century.

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PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

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EURASIA IN GLOBAL GEOECONOMIC REGIONALIZATION:
FIRST OUTLINES

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Abstract. The article examines the impact of identity factors on political, socio-economic, and cultural-historical processes in the Eurasian space. The author provides a classification and evaluation of the largest transforming geopolitical nodes of the Eurasian subsystem. The conclusion is drawn about the inevitability of forming a new economic geography of Eurasia, for which three alternative models of reconfiguration are proposed. The author's vision of Russia's role, place, and key tasks in the Eurasian geo-economic model is presented. The main factors for preserving Eurasia as a potential geo-economic macro-region are identified.

The political and economic processes in the space of post-Soviet Eurasia are influenced by two most important factors. Firstly, this is an increasing internal multi-vector development which leads to the loss of not only drivers of regional integration, but also macroeconomic incentives for it. The main incentives for the continuation of integration processes are residual ties at the level of specific economic entities or systems of economic interests. If the current dynamics are maintained, the situation will worsen as the signs of global stagnation grow. Secondly, these are external, “non-Eurasian” geo-economic processes associated with the formation of a new system of regionalized centers of economic growth and the competition of key states of the world for the opportunity to influence them.

As a result of overlapping of these factors, a special “contradiction of the pace of development” of heterogeneous geopolitical and geo-economic processes arises.

On the one hand, it is observed, especially in the context of the special military operation of Russia in Ukraine, the emphasized short-term goals and plans of the political and economic elites of the states of the region, as well as their vulnerability to external manipulations. This circumstance may

have already had a negative impact on the majority, if not on all institutions, created to coordinate the interests of post-Soviet states. Moreover, more and more signs indicate that the goals of external players are becoming primarily short-term and orientated not to formalize promising trends in development and institutional support. An exception is still Türkiye, but in this case, short, maximum medium-term goals prevail, institutionally “wrapped up” in the concept of “hub,” although this approach does not directly address the issue of identity [1].

On the other hand, the trends in the transformation of the socio-economic and cultural-historical (civilizational) space around post-Soviet Eurasia are long-term, but are relatively slow, which creates the effect of a brighter manifestation in modern state and international administration of short-term trends – “political fluster.”

Nevertheless, taking into account the peculiarities of the development of the situation within post-Soviet Eurasia itself, it should also be assumed that in the economic sphere, it is also possible that in some cases and in the military-political region, the formation of consolidation hubs around post-Soviet Eurasia will be ahead of these internal processes. This means that for a defined, relatively long period of time, the main factors for maintaining the integration of post-Soviet Eurasia will be cultural, historical and socio-economic factors, that ultimately returns to the question of the role of identity, more precisely, identities, in political processes.

Taking into account the above, three basic statements can be formulated.

1. The logic of breaking the integrity of the Eurasian economic space, which is currently dominant for most external forces, means not only the deindustrialization of Eurasia, which is already taking place quite actively, but also socio-economic degradation with the emergence of enclave zones of reindustrialization, possibly of an extraterritorial nature.

This is possible only if a new investment cycle is launched in the space of post-Soviet Eurasia, which totally changes not so much technological as organizational and economic chains in accordance with the new economic geography of the continent. A simple recovery of the Soviet economic chains is impossible and inappropriate. It is necessary to act outside the current industrial urbanization scheme in Soviet times, which is currently degraded and represents a classic investment “black hole.”

2. The integration impulse that updates the processes of Eurasian development can only be complex, i.e. include not only trade and financial, but also socio-economic modernization, which would create conditions for at least a partial restoration of the spaces of industrial modern and the corresponding system of social ties. This means not only the need to declare a certain system of values acceptable for the post-Soviet Eurasia as a whole or at least for most public (ethno-confessional) systems in its space, but also rivalry with other similar value systems that have actively penetrated Eurasia, especially over the past 15 years.

3. “A built-in problem is overcoming the negative aspects of the Soviet socio-economic heritage, which led to the emergence of territories of social destruction” around the industrial centers of the Soviet time (for example, around the Aral Sea or in a number of regions of the Caspian region). However, this problem forces us to return to the issue of the social and socio-cultural component of Eurasian integration and socio-economic modernization.

It should be noted that the post-Soviet West (trying to accept the features of the West) as a subsystem of international relations as a whole has not developed, while the post-Soviet East (equally seeking to adopt the features of the East), which includes the space of post-Soviet Eurasia, has all the prospects for successful development, provided that key interested parties (in particular the Russian Federation) will deal in its construction [2].

In general, it can be stated that the space of post-Soviet Eurasia more than many other regions, to an extent demonstrates

the example of a complex socio-political and ideological hybridity [3], which forms complex nodes of contradictions that cannot be resolved within the framework of one "sectoral" approach, but which nevertheless appear spatially.

The above allows us to derive the following hypothesis: post-Soviet Eurasia is currently a space holding transformations (exsolved phase) in at least four largest geo-economic nodes.

- *New Eastern Europe*, which is being formed around the geo-economic project "Interlude" and the political concept "axis" London - Vilnius - Kyiv - Bucharest, for the implementation of which the fundamental condition is the complete elimination of Russian influence and presence in the westernmost tip of Eurasia and the Baltic states. Undoubtedly it concerns containing the deep mainly geo-economic reformatting of the region, which has lost the potential for independent economic development, but is quite suitable for use as an instrument of military force pressure on Russia and a certain geo-economical buffer.

- *New Black Sea Region*, in which the fundamental reason is the choice of a vector of geo-economic orientation: western, as the "southern frontier" of NATO and the southern region of the geo-economic space "Intermarium," or southern, in the direction of Türkiye, which involves the formation of fundamentally different systems of economic relations, as a result, under certain conditions, and fundamentally different models of building social identities.

- *New Middle and post-Soviet East*, which is not a full-fledged macroeconomic region without integration of Central Asia into it, currently retains, despite all the changes in recent years, involvement in the overall Eurasian economic and logistics chains. This geo-economic node has objectively the greatest potential in terms of globally significant geo-economic transformations, but also in terms of the formation of new identities primarily in the socio-economic sphere, and subsequently in the cultural and historical (civilizational) behavioral type. Conceptually, the next node (the New South Caucasus) can be considered both separately and as a constituent

element of the post-Soviet component of the New Middle and post-Soviet East. This space has not chosen its own path and vector yet, but a choice has not yet been made for it either.

- *New South Caucasus*, which development is constrained by the prospects of the Eurasian, in fact, project of the Big Caspian Sea. Actually, the Great Caspian Region is becoming one of the most tangible constraining factors in the development of the concept of the Turkocentric "Türkiye" world (project of Turkocentric integration [4]), directly aimed at separating the Caucasus and not only the South, as well as a number of other regions from post-Soviet Eurasia. The importance of this potential macroregion is determined by the fact that in this direction the most large-scale potential of spatial transformations is accumulated, including the change in the configuration of political boundaries.

In addition, ambiguities arise in terms of strategic planning regarding the format of the implementation of the Chinese project - the Great Silk Road, which in the modern situation can be considered mainly as integrating various macroregions, and not as a self-sufficient system. And this requires completely different mechanisms for putting in the context of conditions, and not only purely organizational, but also political and power. In particular, a new updating of the issue of the extraterritoriality of logistics corridors and supporting infrastructure is inevitable, which means completely different principles for reconfiguring space, including from the point of view of issues related to national-state sovereignty.

It is logical to assume that the new geo-economic configuration of the world, which will inevitably become the result of global transformations [5], in a varying degree, in respect certain "transformation filters" associated, among other things, with the issue of identities, will lead to the emergence of a new ethno-political geography. A fundamental issue in the process of consolidation of the Eurasian space will be the question of the real symbol of cultural and historical identities

and traditional socio-economic ties. In other words, the new economic geography of Eurasia will be formed, sooner or later, with most scenarios for the development of the situation. But the key question will be whether Russia will be able to take a leading position in these processes or at least ensure here the realization of its own national-state interests.

Implementation of Alternatives: Destruction against Consolidation with Expenses

There are most likely no options for maintaining the integration of the space without expenses. The issue of reformatting management is not only a matter of managing the resources available to Russia, but also minimizing expenses plus managing the consequences of the process. In fact, at the strategic level, there are three options for alternative reconfiguration models that directly affect Eurasia.

- *Greater Middle East / New Middle and post-Soviet East / Shia World (Alternative #1)*. The most dangerous model for the integrity of post-Soviet Eurasia is the reformatting model within the framework of Western geopolitical models, for example, the Greater Middle East, which practically excludes the possibility of preserving the integrity of Eurasia both geo-economic and political. The eastern model of the Shia world seems less dangerous, since it is integrated somehow or other into post-Soviet Eurasia. At the same time, Russia needs to form its own concepts that meet the strategic interests and vision of the world, and on their basis create models for reconfiguring Eurasia, for example, through the New Middle and post-Soviet East. Nevertheless, the basis of reformatting for all three of these models will be the inevitable formation of a fundamentally new identity or identities.

- *Turkocentric "Türkiye" world / Big Pre-Caspian / New Rakhdonites (Alternative #2)*. In this chain of alternatives, the basis, of course, will be the formation of a permanent geo-

economic focus of consolidation. However an important point in this case is the initial occurrence of contradictions between concepts in which the identity factor plays an extremely major role (for example, the concept of a Turcentric “Türkiye” world, and in this case we can talk at a certain point about the formation – on the premise of the emergence of a post-Erdogan [6] situation – a request to construct a new “non-Türkiye” identity), and concepts, essentially built on the destruction of existing identities in the explored space.

- *“Great Silk Road 3.0-3.1” / North-South Corridor / Greater Persian Gulf (Alternative #3)*. In the group of alternatives, it is a case of the choice between concepts, two of which are related to space segmentation and one is related to integration. At the same time, the latter leaves a significant space for the restoration of at least geo-economic, and under certain conditions – and socio-cultural integration of space. In two other models, the preservation of the integration of the Eurasian space is unlikely, and the formation of a new Eurasian identity is even more unlikely.

In reliance of the above parameters, the following principal conclusions can be formulated.

- For all major, globally important macro-regions, post-Soviet Eurasia is on the periphery.

- There is no sign of a willingness to include the countries of post-Soviet Eurasia in the macroregions entirely in any of the emerging macroregions.

- The integrity of the countries of post-Soviet Eurasia can only be preserved in the context of the return of Eurasia’s integrity and its reindustrialization.

- Resources and logistics are a key factor in the interest of outside forces.

- The focus of economic growth in the Caspian region is critical. This is the most promising focus of qualitative and globally significant economic growth.

Russia for post-Soviet Eurasia is a financial and investment core at the same time, a broadly security donor, a center for technological standards, a model for the development of a political and feedback system with society, as well as a source of new socio-cultural paradigms. At the same time, if we ourselves do not create a new aesthetic for Russia and the post-Soviet Eurasia, it is created for us and against us. All processes, both constructive and destructive, are tied to Russia and its foreign and political vector, especially within the framework of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS countries, taking into account their own national interests and strategic tasks [7].

The key task for modern Russia, with no reference to Eurasia, is as follows.

1. Creating a transport hub with its own logistics tools. In this case, the implementation of the majority of the “southern routes”, the “Great Silk Road” are becoming more and more difficult.

2. Socio-economic and institutional modernisation of Russia itself.

Critical factors for solving these problems are:

- a steep increase in the level of social connectivity of the regions of Russia;
- final nationalization of the financial system. Creation of new investment instruments;
- breakthrough in the development of traditional cultures of Russia in the modern interpretation;
- traditionalist anti-archaic – a new social identity in Russia also implies the formation of some new social, and in the future – socio-cultural identity, which in the medium term will create the effect of competition in the social space with a social model “everyman,” under which the concept of “stability” and credit prosperity was built.

In conclusion, we can also formulate the following important components of preserving the potential of post-Soviet Eurasia.

First, the defining point concerning the future of post-Soviet Eurasia as a potential geo-economic macroregion, it is necessary to avoid the turning of these territories into "investment vacuum cleaners," which in the medium term almost automatically means an acceleration of social degradation and an increase in the prospects for implementation in post-Soviet Eurasia, first of all, in the post-Soviet Middle Asia, the scenario of the "Arab Spring" with the formation of destabilizing migration and criminal flows in the direction of Russia. This emphasizes the emergence not only for Russia, but also for other states bordering post-Soviet Eurasia, an extremely specific dilemma: either the launch of any processes of reindustrialization of the socio-economic space and restoration, albeit gradual, of social and socio-cultural identities associated with industrial modernity or pre-postmodern ones. Or the search for the formats of "enclosing" from the "wild field" forming in this direction with the transformation of nomad-type archaic, reproducing the model of the "trophy economy."

At the same time, these formats not only include, but also directly imply the integration of part of the spaces into their own sovereign investment and economic spaces and the launch of processes for the targeted re-construction of traditional identities. The archaic that is forming in this direction will constantly reproduce destructive models of social behavior for Russia (being in a state of relative socio-ideological vacuum), not to mention the inevitable formation of socially archaic ethno-religious enclaves not only in metropolises, but also in border territories.

The second component of preserving the potential of post-Soviet Eurasia as the basis of the macroregion is the formation of a transit logistics system operating in the space of Eurasia, excluding the possibility of external occurrence (introduced) extraterritoriality.

Finally, the third condition for maintaining the geo-economic potential of Eurasia will be the ability of Russia to achieve consensus of interests with other countries of post-Soviet Eurasia (primarily with the EAEU member states) and the transformation of its new energy strategy into an integrating framework for a future unified energy policy [8], since keeping a consolidated energy base both in relation to intra-Eurasian development and in relations with the outside world is a critical condition for maintaining the integration of the space of post-Soviet Eurasia. In this case, it is Russia that will play a leading role, act as a consolidating core and become the center of attraction as an original state-civilization that has a special position in the world [9].

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VLADIMIR KIRICHENKO. SHIA ISLAM IN AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract. The article analyzes the history and current place of Shia Islam in Azerbaijan, where the majority of the population is Shia. The article provides a historical review of the formation of the main Islamic institution of Azerbaijan, the Caucasian Moslems Board, and discusses Azerbaijan's relations with neighboring Iran, a major Shia power.

More than 8.7 million Moslems live in Azerbaijan [1]. According to approximate estimates, 95 percent of the population of Azerbaijan profess Islam [2]. At the same time, 35 percent of the Moslem population are Sunnis, and 65 percent are Shiites [3].

Starting from the 7th century. Azerbaijan was part of the Arab caliphate. Gradually, Moslem states arose on the territory of

modern Azerbaijan. The first of them was the state of Shirvanshakhs (861-1538).¹ The title of Shirvanshakh has been known since the Sassanids² and was adopted by the Moslem rulers of Shirvan from the Mazyadid dynasties (799-1027) and Kesranids (1027-1382). Shirvanshahs adhered to Sunnism, however, in their states there was a Shiite minority [4].

In the last decades of the 14th century, Azerbaijan was invaded by the Central Asian ruler Tamerlane (Timur) (1336-1405)³ and his sons. Officially, Timur was a follower of the Hanafite Sunni Islam, but his mentor and closest adviser was the famous Shiite scientist Seyid Barack. In the first half of the 15th century the Sunni Shirvanshahs and the Türkiye Shiite Confederation of the Kara-Kounlu tribes (1375-1468)⁴ ("Black Tups" - due to the image of the Black Tup on banners) ruled. The latter ultimately defeated from the rival Türkiye Sunni tribal confederation "Ak-Kounlu" (1467-1501/1503) ("White Tups")⁵ with a white tup on banners [5, p. 3].

The 16th century, the period of reign of the Sephevids,⁶ became the peak of the spread of Shiism on the Azerbaijani lands. During this period, both the Sunni and Shiite beliefs were adjacent at the territory of the state (which included the Azerbaijani lands). One of the rulers, Sheikh Safi ad-Din founded the Sufi Order of Safaviya, which fell under the influence of Shiism. It was during the reign of Sephevids (1501-1732) that Shiism was established in Iran. In the subsequent period (and before the beginning of the 19th century), small Azerbaijani khanates formed in the territories of the future Azerbaijan. At the beginning of the 19th century, as a result of military conflicts of 1804-1813, and the Russian-Persian war of 1826-1828 the territories of the Khanates - Baku, Ganjin, Derbent, Cuban, Talysh, Sheka and Shirvan - transferred to the Russian Empire. According to the Gulistan peace treaty (1813), Persia recognized the accession of these territories and Eastern Armenia to Russia. The Turkmanchai Peace Treaty (1828) confirmed the transition of these lands under the power of Russia. In the 19th century the

entire territory of modern Azerbaijan has become part of the Russian Empire.

On April 5, 1872, the Russian emperor Alexander II established the Office of the Transcaucasian Moslem clergy of the Shiite and Sunni teachings. The head of the Sunnis was a mufti, the head of the Shiites – Sheikh-ul-Islam. The powers of these bodies were also extended to the territory of modern Azerbaijan.

As researcher R. Huseynov points out in his article, departments performed the following functions: “considering complaints against decisions of provincial assemblies; observation of qadis⁷ who were supposed to provide information about mosques, schools and other institutions; preparation of annual reports and draft programs for Moslem schools; testing the knowledge of clergy; consideration of all cases sent to them by the highest Russian administration” [6, p. 88].

During the Soviet Union period (1920–1991), commitment to Islam was preserved mainly by rural residents and part of the urban population, but they usually lacked deep knowledge of the religion, and even mullahs usually had only rudimentary knowledge of Islam: they could only read the Quran, without speaking Arabic, and were familiar only with oral Islamic tradition. Moreover, even in the Soviet period, the population of the southern regions and Baku villages, where the Shiite population predominated) annually for 40 days observed mourning after the death of Imam Hussein.⁸ In the central regions of the country, mourning events in honor of Hussein were criticized, but they could not be banned.

In May 1943, during the Great Patriotic War the government has carried out several activities indicating a decrease in pressure on religion. In particular, the Spiritual Administration of Moslems of Transcaucasia was created (DUMZak), The residence of DUMZak was in Baku. The organization was headed by Sheikh-ul-Islam, who was elected from among the Shia Imami.⁹ These Shiites adhere to Jafarite madhhab.¹⁰ Deputy head of DUMZak – mufti – was a Sunni

religious leader. In fact, by 1991 DUMZak ceased to exist as a single structure. In 1992 it was replaced by the Caucasus Moslems Office (UMK) [7].

According to the Constitution, Azerbaijan is a secular state. However, in 2015, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, as a sign of respect for the religion of his ancestors, performed Umrah (small Hajj),¹¹ walking around the Kaaba, which was covered in state media [8].

Azerbaijan is characterized by the absence of contradictions between Sunnis and Shiites. Thus, in 2016, Azerbaijani Shiites and Sunnis for the first time in the world held joint Friday prayers in Heydar Mosque in Baku (named after former President Azerbaijan G. Aliyev). Services in this mosque are in turn carried out by imams belonging to different movements. The joint prayer was dedicated to the “Year of Multiculturalism”, announced by the country’s President Ilham Aliyev [9].

In one of the interviews, the President of Azerbaijan noted that “Azerbaijan is a secular state and values it very much”¹² [10].

It should be noted that ritual practice in Sunnism and Shiism has its differences.

Pilgrimage to the Kaaba, which is located in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is considered one of the five main responsibilities of every Moslem. However, visiting the burial places of saints is also a very important tradition, especially in the Shia practice.

Hajj in Islam is a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, which every adult Moslem should do it at least once in his life. Hajj is the fifth of fundamental Moslem practices known as the five pillars of Islam. The ritual of pilgrimage begins on the 7th day of the month of Dhul-Hijjah (last month of the Islamic year) and ends on the 12th day. All Moslems who are

physically and financially able to make the pilgrimage, but only if their absence does not create difficulties for their family [11].

In 2022, a quota of 680 people was allocated for pilgrims of Azerbaijan. The cost of the pilgrimage was \$5,350 [12]. In 2023, 1,440 pilgrims from Azerbaijan made Hadj.¹³ [13].

Along with the Hajj, Shiites make a pilgrimage on the fortieth day after the third Shia Imam Hussein bin Ali (grandson of Prophet Muhammad) was killed in 680 by forces loyal to the second Umayyad caliph Yazid I.¹⁴ The Shiites highly value him and remember him for the battle against thousands of soldiers sent by Yazid to resist to him and his companions [14].

There are many reasons why more Azerbaijanis make an Arba'een pilgrimage (forty days of mourning) than Hajj. Firstly, Azerbaijani pilgrims during this period are not limited by external quotas, as in case of the Hajj. Azerbaijani citizens can travel to Iran and Iraq, where Shiite shrines are also located. There are no visa requirements for Azerbaijanis traveling to Iran. As for Iraq, getting an Iraqi visa is easier than a permission to travel to Saudi Arabia to worship in Mecca and Medina.

Moreover, unlike the Hajj, there is no internal monopoly on the organization of an Arba'een pilgrimage. Saints tours places in Iran and Iraq can be organized both by travel agencies and individual groups, the latter of which are usually formed and led by local religious figures. Arba'een pilgrimage is also significantly cheaper than Hajj [15]. In 2023, the cost of the Hajj pilgrimage package per person was USD 5,750 [13].

As noted at the beginning of the article, until the 19th century, territory of the present Republic of Azerbaijan was part of Iran.

Today, most of the Azerbaijani ethnic group lives in Iran. They mainly live in the provinces Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Zanjan, Qazvin, Merkezi and Hamadan. Their

number reaches 35–40 percent of the entire country population. During Soviet times, contacts between citizens of Iran and Azerbaijan were isolated, family ties were practically impossible to support. With victory of Islamic revolution in Iran, the situation became even more complicated [16, p. 53]. However, with Azerbaijan gaining independence in 1991, many family ties were restored. Azerbaijanis on both sides of the border advertised in Iranian and Baku newspapers in search of relatives with whom they had lost contact in the Soviet period. Azerbaijanis on both sides created families, and these marriages became an important means of restoring ties between Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijanis in Iran and in the republic who had common professions, established relationships and cooperation. So, in October 1992, the First Tabriz-Baku Conference on teaching foreign languages was held in Tabriz.

Iran initially welcomed cultural exchanges between its Azerbaijani citizens and their compatriots in the Republic of Azerbaijan and considered this as an opportunity to spread Iranian influence in the new Moslem republics and establish economic and other types of cooperation with them.

However, by the end of 1992, Tehran realized that cooperation, especially in the field of economics, can contribute to the development of Iranian economy. But at the same time this interaction can contribute to the growth of Azerbaijani self-awareness among Azerbaijanis in Iran. Tehran tried to regain control over these contacts and place them under central control, and from the end of 1992 began to limit contacts between Azerbaijanis of the two countries [16, p. 199].

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, religious organizations from Türkiye, Iran, countries the Arab world and the North Caucasus began its activities in Azerbaijan. In particular, since declarations of independence there were several pro-Iranian organizations in Azerbaijan. One of them, the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA) was especially popular in the village of Nardaran near Baku, where it was founded in 1991. The IPA lost

registration in 1996, but still has influence in Nardaran. The ideology of the party is based on Islamic values and norms. According to the party program, it is Islam that must play consolidating role in the construction of the Azerbaijani state [17].

During the presidency of Ayaz Mutalibov (1991–1992)¹⁵ and Abulfaz Elchibey (1992–1993)¹⁶ practically no power controlled their activities. However, under Presidents Heydar Aliyev (1993–2003)¹⁷ and Ilham Aliyev (2003–present time) the activities of religious organizations began to be perceived as hostile to the state. Political Islamic parties were outlawed [18].

It should be noted that the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan played a leading role in organizing protests over living conditions in Nardaran in 2002. After the collapse of the USSR, Nardaran, residents of which were engaged in selling flowers throughout the Soviet Union, found itself in a deplorable socio-economic situation.

According to some experts, Iran is sending to Nardaran funds through IPA. However, party leaders deny receiving financial assistance from Iran. From its part, in 2011 Azerbaijani government trying to help the residents of Nardaran overcome economic difficulties, sent about 19 agricultural loans amounting to about 10,000 manats (\$12700) [19].

In 2015, an operation was carried out in Nardaran against members of the movement Moslem Unity, which in many ways is a heir to the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan. At the same time five Islamists and two policemen were killed. According to Minister of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan Ramil Usubov, the purpose of the activity Moslem unity was a “violent change of the constitutional system in the country, the creation of a religious state, governed by Sharia laws” [20]. Subsequently, the leader of the Moslem Unity movement Taleh Bagirzade was sentenced to 20 years in prison. His deputy Abbas Huseynov also received 20 years in prison [21]. In March 2013, Bagirzade was arrested for purchase and possession of drugs. This happened after he

criticized in his sermon the activities of Azerbaijani authorities. In the summer of 2015, he was released [22].

Despite the fact that the facts of any practical support of Nardaran activists by the Islamic Republic were not discovered, the movement experienced ideological influence from the side of the Islamic Republic. Its leader, Taleh Bagirzadeh, received theological education in the Iranian city of Qom, as well as in Iraq Najaf. Group members did not follow directions of the Administration of Moslems of the Caucasus, but focused on Iranian or Iraqi theologians [23].

At the beginning of 1997, the Azerbaijani branch announced itself Hizbullah (Party of Allah). It is this group that the February 21, 1997 assassination of orientalist scholar Zia Buniyatov¹⁸ is attributed to. Members of the organization accused Buniyatov of working for Israeli intelligence services and the spread of Zionist ideas in Azerbaijan [24]. As a result of the investigation, five members of the group were arrested and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. By 2002, the Azerbaijani intelligence services eliminated most of the Hezbollah cells in the country.

Another organization, Jayshullah (Army of Allah) was founded in 1995 with the goal of "cleansing" Azerbaijan of foreign influence and restoration of "true Islam". Located in mountains north of Baku, the group first collected information about their objects, mainly about foreign organizations. Then it distributed leaflets threatening to attack foreigners if they will refuse to leave the country. Between 1996 and 1999 members of Jayshullah organized an armed raid on the Baku office of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), laid a bomb at the headquarters of the International Organization for the Fight against terrorism and mined the headquarters of the International Krishna Society in Baku. In addition, the group committed murder of the chairman of the Azerbaijan Society of Psychics and his two sons. Members of Jaishullah attempted an unsuccessful attempt to hijack a military helicopter. In 2000, the

leader of Jayshullah and his associates were sentenced to various prison terms of imprisonment - from four to thirteen years.

The purpose of the organization Northern Mahdi Army was a struggle against the US and Israel and the creation of a separate Islamic state. The group presumably maintained secret contacts with the Iranian Revolution Guards Corps, and its members underwent military training in Iran. In 2006, it was liquidated by Azerbaijan security forces. The group members were sentenced to various prison terms [25].

Most of the cargo passes through the territory of Azerbaijan from Iran to Russia, relations with which are important for Iranians. In addition, the transport route corridor North - South runs through the territory of Azerbaijan (from Russia to India through Iran) [26]. All this makes Azerbaijan an important partner of Iran. Based on the results of 2022, trade turnover between Iran and Azerbaijan increased by 13 percent compared to the previous year and amounted to \$688 million. Iran supplies to Azerbaijan construction materials, agricultural products and chemical products, buys equipment, clothing and food products. [27].

Azerbaijan tops the list of Iran's export destinations among the coastal states of the Caspian Sea, sending to this country 121,338 tons of goods worth \$114.97 million [28].

However, during the new Karabakh war in 2020, there were allegations that Iran supports Armenia, which, in its turn, is supported by Russia. In social networks there appeared videos that allegedly showed military equipment transported to Armenia on trucks passing through Iranian border crossing.

Iran quickly denied the accusations, saying they were "baseless rumors" aimed at denigrating relations with Azerbaijan. Iranian state television broadcasted footage of border terminal Norduz, where the transport means in question could be found. It was proven that they were Russian trucks (Kamaz),

which, according to a local official, were acquired by Armenia before the conflict and transported through Iran. Moreover, it was alleged that the trucks were carrying spare parts for military equipment [29].

Relations between Azerbaijan and Iran deteriorated sharply in January 2023. The reason was the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan reported that a man with a Kalashnikov assault rifle in his hands broke through the post of embassy guards in Tehran just after 8 a.m. and killed the chief of the security services. Two embassy guards were also injured while trying to prevent the attack [30]. The attacker was detained by the police. Azerbaijani authorities considered the incident a terrorist attack.

On August 15, 2023, Amir Abdollahian, Iranian Foreign Minister, stated, that the perpetrator of the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy would be severely punished [31].

Azerbaijan's relations with Iran are negatively affected by Israeli factor. Azerbaijan has supported diplomatic relations with Israel for three decades. Friendly relations between the two countries are indicated by opening of the Azerbaijani Embassy in Israel in 2023 [32]. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov took part in the ceremony. The event caused outrage in Tehran, and therefore Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said: "The Islamic Republic has always tried to thwart efforts of ill-wishers to drive a wedge between two neighboring countries, and the Azerbaijani government is also expected to avoid the trap, placed by enemies of two countries. It is obvious that Iran cannot remain indifferent to the Zionist regime's plot against it from the territory of Azerbaijan" [33].

At the same time, against the backdrop of deteriorating relations, on November 14, 2022 it became known that the State Security Service of Azerbaijan exposed the spy network created by Iranian intelligence services. During the investigation, there were identified five Azerbaijani citizens who received money for

cooperation with Iranian intelligence services. Three of them visited some cities of Iran for various purposes such as treatment and religious training, after which they were involved in espionage activities against Azerbaijan [34].

In May 2023, law enforcement officials of Azerbaijan detained several people on suspicion of propaganda of religious radicalism on behalf of Iran. According to investigation, their social accounts contained many indisputable facts proving their involvement in these criminal activities [35]. In June 2023 the cultural center of Iran in Baku was closed [36].

Nevertheless, already in July 2023, relations between the countries began to improve when Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abodollahian arrived in Baku to participate in the ministerial meeting of the Non-alignment Movement. The Iranian Foreign Minister met in Baku with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. This meeting took place against the backdrop of tense relations between Tehran and Baku. However, it gave both sides the opportunity to exchange opinions on a number of issues and contributed to improving relations between the countries.

The Iranian Foreign Minister emphasized the desire of the two countries to improve bilateral relations. "Given the positive atmosphere emerging in relations between the two countries, and especially overcoming some misunderstandings, the Islamic Republic of Iran declares its readiness to follow and implement all previous agreements," said the minister [37]. In turn, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov noted that "Azerbaijan has always been interested in positive development of relations with Iran. Recently there was tension between the two countries, and there were very serious reasons for it," Bayramov said. He added that "though we highly appreciate the visit of Iran Minister of Foreign Affairs. Hossein Amir Abdollahian to Azerbaijan, his participation in ministerial meeting of the Non-Alignment Movement, as well as its meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev during this visit" [38].

In July 2023, a meeting of departments responsible for transport communications in Iran and Azerbaijan took place in the Iranian city of Astara. Based on its results, it was announced that by the end of 2024. Construction of the Astara cargo terminal (part of the international transport corridor “North-South”) will be completed to the end of 2024. Also by this date, border and customs control infrastructure will be created on the road bridge over the Astarachay River (eastern border of Iran and Azerbaijan) [39].

Azerbaijan is a secular state in which Shiites and Sunnis get along peacefully. The country’s authorities are trying to smooth out contradictions between representatives of different movements of Islam. At the same time, the state sharply suppresses radical manifestations of Islam in politics. Despite the fact that the majority of the population of Azerbaijan is Shia, the country’s relations with Iran sometimes they are tense. However, bilateral cooperation is of great importance for both countries.

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Notes

1. State of the Shirvanshahs (861-1538) - a large medieval state of the Caucasus.
2. The Sasanians were a dynasty of Persian rulers who ruled Iran from 224 to 651.

3. Tamerlane (Timur) (1336–1405) – Türkiye-Mongol conqueror, founder of the Timurid Empire, which occupied the territory of modern Afghanistan, Iran, Mesopotamia, northern India and Central Asia.
4. Kara-Koyunlu – an association of Oguz Türkiye nomadic tribes, existing in the 14–19 centuries in Western Asia, on the territory of modern Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq, northwestern Iran and eastern Türkiye.
5. Ak-Koyunlu (1467–1501/3) – a Türkiye tribal association, as well as a state of the same name, which occupied the territory of modern Iran, Iraq, eastern Anatolia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.
6. The Safavid Dynasty is one of the most influential ruling dynasties of Iran, who ruled from 1501 to 1736
7. Qadi is a Sharia judge appointed by the ruler.
8. Hussein ibn Ali (626–680) – the youngest son of Ali and Fatima, grandson of Muhammad. The second imam of the Ismaili Shiites and the third imam of the Imami Shiites.
9. Imami Shiites (Twelvers) are representatives of the numerous and moderate sects of Shiism.
10. Jafarite madhhab is a school of Islamic law (fiqh). Twelver Shiites and Ismailis adhere to this school.
11. Umrah is a minor pilgrimage, different from the Hajj in time of visits, as well as the brevity of the rituals.
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14. Yazid I (645–683) – the second Arab caliph from the Umayyad dynasty. Ruled from 680.
15. Ayaz Niyazi oglu (Niyazovich) Mutalibov (1938–2022) – first president of Azerbaijan (1991–1992).
16. Abulfaz (Elchibey) Gadirgulu oglu Aliyev (1938–2000) – second president of Azerbaijan (1992–1993).
17. Heydar Alirza oglu Aliyev (1923–2003) – third President of Azerbaijan (1993–2003).
18. Ziya Bunyatov (1923–1997) – orientalist, academician of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences.

ISLAM IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

ALEXANDER VAVILOV. THE IMPACT OF THE SMO ON THE POLICIES OF ARAB COUNTRIES AND ISRAEL

Keywords: the shift towards a multipolar world; the desire of the West to replace it with an 'order under the rules'; the wariness of Arab countries regarding such subversive intentions; the balanced and pragmatic approach of the countries in the region to the SMO.

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Abstract. The article analyzes the influence of SMO on the policies of the Middle East and North Africa, attempts to identify the factors that encourage the leaders of these countries to pursue a balanced and realistic policy on the Ukrainian crisis. It defines the prospects for further development of the political course of the countries in question in the context of the formation of a multipolar system of international relations.

The absence of a system in international relations for several decades now, attempts by the US and its partners to replace the one-centered model with certain “rules” established by them, which leads to increased confrontation on the world stage and erosion of the security system, pose Arab countries and Israel with difficult choices when forming its foreign policy.

Despite all the attempts of the US and its partners, the SMO found understanding in the Arab world generally: at the international conference in support of Ukraine (organized by the US in April 2022), the defense ministers of only four Arab countries (Morocco, Jordan, Qatar and Tunisia) were present. More than 18 Arab states, as well as Israel, abstained from participating in this dubious event. “The four Arab countries,” noted the electronic Arabic-language newspaper Rai Al Youm, “who took part in this conference, made a serious political and strategic mistake. They should not have taken sides or become involved in a situation of this nature at all. They should have remained neutral in this conflict. Moreover, these countries should not have bet on the Americans losing their status as world hegemon, especially given the growing influence of the new Russian-Chinese alliance”.¹

We appreciate it,” noted the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov at the end of May 2022 in an interview with RT Arabic TV channel – that the countries of the Arab world refuse to follow the lead of the West and objectively assess what is happening in Ukraine, understanding the reasons that led to the current situation and which consist in the categorical refusal of our Western colleagues to agree on equal and indivisible security in our common region, and do not join anti-Russian sanctions.” “These countries,” the Minister said, “do not want to sacrifice their national dignity” and run around “like servants, carrying out the tasks of their senior comrades”.² “None of the Arab countries,” he later noted, “joined the sanctions, despite unprecedented, brutal, unceremonious and self-deprecating pressure from the West”.³

Consistent and steady implementation of assigned tasks, Russia's persistent opposition to unilateral and illegitimate Western sanctions encourage the countries of the region to adhere to a constructive and balanced position. Based on its own national interests, despite pressure from the West, Saudi Arabia restored relations with Iran, and Syria was readmitted to the Arab League.

In repeated contacts with S.V. Lavrov, his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin F. Al Saud declared the kingdom's continued support for all efforts aimed at achieving a political settlement in Ukraine and the KSA's readiness to provide good offices in achieving this important goal.

In an effort to enlist the assistance and help of Arab countries, V. Zelensky, in the second decade of May 2023, visited the Arab League summit in Jeddah on the plane of the French President. His desperate attempts to win over the region's leaders to his side were unsuccessful. "Arab countries," said the head of the Saudi Foreign Ministry, "have taken a position of positive neutrality regarding the crisis in Ukraine. We strive to [maintain] our relations equally with Russia and Ukraine".⁴

Four days later, despite numerous sanctions from the US and its partners, the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation V.A. Kolokoltsev was warmly received in KSA. He discussed with his Saudi colleagues issues of strengthening bilateral cooperation in law enforcement. The minister expressed gratitude to the kingdom for not joining the anti-Russian sanctions and focused on continuing concerted efforts to combat extremism and drug trafficking.⁵ Despite the anti-Russian campaign launched by the collective West and Washington's destructive line to dismantle the system of international law, noted the head of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Saudi Arabia defended the traditional principles of interstate relations.⁶

Thus, all attempts by the "collective West", led by the US, to isolate Russia from the Arab world and oust it from interregional ties failed. On the contrary, after the start of the

SMO, there was a significant intensification of contacts between Russia and Arab countries at the highest, high and working levels. Russian-Arab relations developed dynamically and progressively. The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the RF M.L. Bogdanov, noted in this regard in an interview with the newspaper "Arguments and Facts" in the first ten days of December 2022: "Arabs understand the geopolitical context of the events taking place today just as well as we do. They see and do not approve of the overt desire of the Americans, by hook or by crook, to reverse the processes of democratization of international relations and the formation of a multipolar world in which the West will no longer be able to use all the other countries included in the "golden billion" as a "feed base" for its own overconsumption."⁷

In May 2023, Egypt did not comply with the US request to ban Russian aircraft flying to Syria. Earlier, the US called Türkiye, Jordan and Iraq to limit the possibility of Russian aircraft flights to and from the Syrian Arab Republic. The American administration believed that Russia could transport weapons from Syria for use in Ukraine. The listed countries agreed to limit the possibility of Russian military aircraft flying over their territory. However, flights continued to take circuitous routes through Egyptian airspace.⁸

During his visit to Cairo in the second decade of July 2022, in a conversation with the President of Egypt A.F. al-Sisi S.V. Lavrov gave him a message from V.V. Putin, in which the President of the Russian Federation expressed gratitude to his Egyptian counterpart for Egypt's initiative to create a ministerial contact group within the Arab League to resolve the situation around Ukraine, as well as for its visit to Moscow in April 2022.

Then S.V. Lavrov met with the Secretary General of the Arab League A.A. al-Gheit, to whom he expressed gratitude for the balanced position recorded in previously adopted statements of the Arab League on the Ukrainian issue.⁹

“When I was in the League of Arab States,” the Minister later recalled at a press conference on the results of Russian diplomacy in 2022, “before the start of my speech, the Secretary General of the Arab League told me that three days before my arrival a delegation of Western ambassadors, visited them and demanded that my speech be cancelled.

When they received a polite answer that this was impossible, because The Arab League is friends with Russia, they demanded that after my speech, each member of the League of Arab States should stand up and condemn Russian aggression. To this they also received a polite answer that each country has its own position, and they determine it themselves. And the third request, which I consider the most humiliating for the West, was to at least not take pictures with me. I am not kidding.

Then the Secretariat employees “put” all this “on paper” and sent it to all embassies to inform that they had received such a demarche. I don’t want to say that I was somehow flattered by this, but for the sake of history, I will note that after this speech (it lasted more than an hour) I was asked to take a separate photo with each of these ambassadors. This seems like a small thing, but it’s something that would require remarkable political courage in many other countries, particularly in Europe”.¹⁰

Russian Ambassador to Egypt G.E. Borisenko in his statement expressed his sincere gratitude to Egypt and the general Egyptian public for understanding the causes of the confrontation around Ukraine and support for Russia at the end of February 2023. As the head of the Russian diplomatic mission noted, despite the streams of lies about the actions of the Russian Federation from the US, the Egyptians saw and understood that Russia was fighting in the interests of all humanity against the forces of evil that were striving for global domination.

“We,” he said, “will also not tire of exposing the false statements of Western representatives, including on the topical subject of supplies of agricultural products for Egypt,” emphasizing that the food crisis in 2022 arose not at all through

the fault of the Russian Federation, but because Western sanctions imposed against Russia. The ambassador noted that, despite Western sanctions, Russia conscientiously fulfilled all contracts for sending grain to Africa and the Middle East. According to him, “the supply of Russian wheat to Egypt has even increased significantly, and we are happy to help our Egyptian friends ensure their food security”.¹¹

Russia’s relations with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have also developed steadily. “We,” said S.V. Lavrov in a conversation with OIC Secretary General Kh.I. Tahoy at the end of May 2022, “appreciated the balanced and objective position taken by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as the League of Arab States and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Persian Gulf, regarding what is happening [in Ukraine]. I hope that our Western partners will realize at some stage the need to consider world problems and agree on ways for the further development of the international community not on the basis of dictate, but on the basis of the principles of the UN Charter, first of all the principle that presupposes respect for the sovereign equality of states”.¹²

Taking a balanced position on the events around Ukraine, the countries of the region did not refuse to participate in the search for ways to resolve conflict issues. The Ukrainian topic was at the center of S.V. Lavrov’s meeting with the heads of the Foreign Ministry of the Arab League contact group on the 77th session of the UN General Assembly in the second half of September 2022, which was attended by the ministers of Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and the Secretary General of the Arab League. “The Russian side highly appreciated the balanced position of the Arab League on this issue, which was confirmed during the regular meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Arab League member countries in Cairo on September 6”.¹³ Saudi Arabia and Egypt have repeatedly offered their services in search of a negotiated solution to the Ukrainian crisis. Soon a number of African countries joined them. Through the mediation of the

UAE leadership, in early February 2023, an agreement was reached on the release of 63 Russian military personnel from Ukrainian captivity.¹⁴

US attempts to drag the countries of the Middle East and North Africa into a hybrid war against Russia during the Ukrainian crisis, to attract their oil and gas resources to replace Russian ones, which were under illegitimate sanctions, also did not yield results. After the start of the NWO, the US persistently encouraged the Algerian leadership to increase gas supplies to Europe in order to replace Russian ones. However, such persistent requests from overseas remained unanswered.

The West's desire to change the country's political line also turned out to be fruitless: Algeria abstained from voting on the UN resolution condemning the "Russian invasion" of Ukraine. It also opposed subsequent resolutions suspending Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council and the "illegal annexation" of part of Ukrainian territory.

In the fall of 2022, 17 members of the European Parliament, in a letter to the head of the European Commission, U. von der Leyen, expressed deep concern about the close political and economic ties of Algeria with the Russian Federation, drawing her attention to the fact that this country did not join Western sanctions against Moscow and abstained from voting on the resolution of the UN General Assembly, which condemned the special military operation in Ukraine. The continuation of the Kyiv regime's resistance to the implementation of the SMO, when incited by the West, threatened many countries in the region (Lebanon, Sudan, etc.) with increasing difficulties with food due to a reduction in its supplies from the combat zone. Manipulations with the "grain deal," which violated the agreements reached and infringed the interests of Russia and the poorest countries, only aggravated such difficulties and clearly demonstrated all the hypocrisy of the "defenders of freedom and democracy".¹⁵

Having supported the UN resolution condemning Moscow's actions to ensure its security, even traditional US partners in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies, except Israel, refrained from joining the sanctions arbitrarily imposed by the US and its European henchmen. The Western media started talking about the gradual but inevitable loss by the Americans of their previous positions in the region.

"The belief that the US cannot offer its traditional Middle Eastern allies sufficient levels of assistance," noted *The Asia Times*, "means that these allies will seek to avoid upsetting Russia, which, through its consistent strategy in the Middle East, has been able to significantly strengthen the regional influence. By not offering its allies anything new, the Biden administration risks seeing them continue to move further and further away from Washington."¹⁶

This distance was clearly evident during the visit of J. Biden to Saudi Arabia in mid-2022, who received a very cool reception. Persistent attempts by the US to attract Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the two leading oil-producing countries, to anti-Russian sanctions on Ukraine and, in violation of OPEC+ agreements, to increase oil production instead of Russian production, were also unsuccessful.

A serious concern in the region was the West's pumping of modern weapons into the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv, which were actively sent by corrupt Ukrainian officials to the black market, which became a real treasury for radical Islamists throughout the Middle East. According to data provided by the official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry M.V. Zakharova, at one of the briefings in the second half of October 2022, the monthly smuggling turnover of the black market of weapons supplied to Ukraine by the West exceeded \$1 billion.¹⁷

Foreign mercenaries also posed a significant threat to the security of the region, who, as noted by Russian President V.V. Putin, covered themselves with civilians as human shields.¹⁸

“The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service,” said a statement from its press bureau in the second half of February 2022, “has reliable information that the intelligence services of Western states are secretly recruiting militants to be sent to the conflict zone in eastern Ukraine. Priority is given to persons with experience of combat operations in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, Nagorny Karabakh, and the Balkans. The most active are the US CIA and British foreign intelligence MI6”.¹⁹

Against such a gloomy background, at the end of May 2022, The Arab News published the results of a survey of residents of 14 Arab countries: 24 percent of them considered NATO to be responsible for the conflict in Ukraine, 13 percent - J. Biden, 6 percent - Ukraine, only 16 percent blamed Russia, and 42 percent were undecided or found it difficult to answer.²⁰

Russia's policy in the global and regional arenas found understanding and support among wide circles of the Arab population. During the period of aggravation of the situation around Ukraine in February-March 2022, in the center of Baghdad there was installed a large poster with a portrait of V.V. Putin and the inscription “We support Russia” and below in Arabic - “Friends of the President”.²¹

In the second half of March 2022, a mass rally was held near the main UN building in Beirut, in which Russian compatriots, Lebanese and Syrian activists took part. They announced their intention to submit a letter to UN Secretary General A. Guterres with a call to take action in connection with the actions of the Ukrainian armed forces in the Donbass, which resulted in the death of civilians, and in connection with the activity of Nazi formations that terrorized the Ukrainian population. Activists raised banners with portraits of V.V. Putin and the flags of the Donetsk and Lugansk republics.²²

The deepest and most sincere support for Russia in difficult times of SMO was provided by Syria. At the end of June - beginning of July 2022, Damascus was the first to announce its

intention to recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics and its readiness to participate in the international tribunal over war criminals in the DPR. In early July, it completed the necessary procedures and officially announced the recognition of the DPR and the LPR. Kyiv responded by breaking off diplomatic relations with him, which had remained frozen since 2018, when employees of the SAR embassy were denied visas. In a similar move, Damascus did the same in response.

The inclusion of four new constituent entities into the Russian Federation in September 2022 met with a positive response in the SAR. According to the head of the international relations committee of the Syrian parliament, A. al-Assad, it marked the "collapse of the unipolar world".²³

Receiving in Damascus in the second half of October a Russian interdepartmental delegation led by the Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for Syria A.L. Lavrentev, the President of the SAR said that Syrian citizens followed the progress of the special military operation in Ukraine in the same way as the battles with terrorists in their country, since Russia's actions were aimed at restoring international balance. The head of the Syrian state congratulated Russia on the successful holding of referendums on joining the Russian Federation in the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, the Kherson region and the liberated territories of the Zaporozhye region.

Speaking about the development of Russian-Syrian cooperation, he noted the importance of joint work in the cultural and educational sectors, since, from his point of view, the most significant goal was to achieve integration at the level of peoples. B. Assad added that "the circumstances of the joint war against terrorism will also contribute to the integration of the [Russian and Syrian] peoples from a cultural and social point of view".²⁴

In a conversation with A.L. Lavrentev at the beginning of the second decade of January 2023, B. Assad noted that "the

struggle currently observed in the world in the political and media spheres has reached its climax, and the intensification of this struggle requires greater steadfastness and clarity in political positions, indicating in this regard for Syria's support of the Russian military district in the Donbass".²⁵

Official visit to Moscow on March 13-15, 2023 by B. Assad, accompanied by a large delegation at the ministerial level, his meeting with V.V. Putin clearly demonstrated the mutual understanding and unshakable attitude of the SAR leadership to continue interaction with the Russian Federation on Ukraine, on the Middle East region and in Syria itself, as well as in the field of defense and the fight against terrorism. The Syrian president indicated that Damascus recognized Russia within the new borders. In an interview with Russian journalists, he noted that he would not object if Russia expressed a desire to increase the number of its bases and military personnel in the SAR, since its military presence was necessary from the point of view of maintaining the "international balance."

V. Zelensky, whom B. Assad called "a puppet of the West," reacted in his practiced servile manner, immediately introducing sanctions against the Syrian leader. Later, Ukraine unilaterally withdrew from the agreement with Syria on merchant shipping.²⁶

Syria considered the Ukrainian drone attack on the Kremlin in early May 2023 a terrorist attack from which Russia had the right to defend itself. At the end of the same month, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemned the Ukrainian drone attack on Moscow and the Moscow region.²⁷ "We confirm again," said the head of the Syrian National Security Bureau A. Mamluk at the XI international meeting of high representatives in charge of security issues in the Moscow region, "that Syria fully supports the Special Military Operation that Russia is conducting in Ukraine." He noted that Syrian President B. Assad had previously stated that the special operation in Ukraine was an attempt to correct history and restore balance in the world, which was lost as a result of the collapse of the USSR.²⁸

Moscow also appreciated the consistent and principled position of the Syrian leadership. "Syria," said V.V. Putin at the ceremony of presenting credentials of foreign ambassadors in the Kremlin "is our reliable partner, our ally in the Arab world and in the international arena in general. Russia helped the Syrian people in difficult times to defend their sovereignty and independence in the face of the aggression of international terrorists".²⁹

Russian-Syrian mutual understanding was not limited to the official framework. During the period of aggravation of the situation around Ukraine in February-March 2022, a banner with a portrait of V.V. Putin and a photograph of the presidents of Russia and Syria shaking hands was installed near the entrance to the Russian Embassy in Damascus. Other posters posted in the SAR capital read "Truth will prevail" and "We are with Russia." In the first ten days of March 2022, students of Damascus University held a rally in support of the Russian special operation in Ukraine. Faculty members, representatives of public organizations, political parties and the creative intelligentsia also took part in it. On the campus, protesters with the flags of Russia and Syria, as well as the DPR and LPR, lined up in the letter Z as a sign of solidarity with the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. And ordinary citizens held crowded rallies and processions throughout the country in support of Russia.³⁰ By mid-March, an automobile convoy of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations delivered a batch of humanitarian cargo from Syria to the Lugansk People's Republic.³¹

"Mass rallies with the participation of residents of the cities of Latakia and Tartus," the Syrian agency SANA reported at the end of March, "took place in support of Russia in its fight against the US and the West." Their participants raised Russian and Syrian national flags and banners with words of support. In Latakia, hundreds of citizens in white and blue T-shirts held a flash mob. The protesters lined up in a Z shape in a square.³²

In the second half of April, the International Lesson of Courage was held via teleconference between schoolchildren in the Syrian city of As-Saqlabiya and students from schools in Moscow, Rzhev, Kursk, Sevastopol and Kovrov. As part of the online lesson, they talked about the war in Syria, during which the Russian and Syrian military fought against international terrorism, about the Great Patriotic War, the exploits of Soviet soldiers, and drew parallels between the past and the events that were taking place in Ukraine.

On Victory Day, a parade was held at the Khmeimim base, in which military personnel of the Russian and Syrian armed forces took part. The Minister of Defense of the SAR, Corps General A. bin M. Abbas, who spoke at it, highly praised the actions of the Russian armed forces, which waged a successful fight against the neo-Nazi conspiracy in Ukraine, defending the right of peoples to live peacefully. Festive events dedicated to the 77th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War took place in the cities of As-Suwayda and Daraa.³³

In the first half of May 2022, Syrian artillerymen, during night training, placed the V symbol in the sky over Idlib with illuminating shells as a sign of support for a special military operation in Ukraine.

In Israel, against the backdrop of an acute internal political crisis, not wanting to aggravate relations with Russia, especially in Syria, took a balanced position regarding the SMO, refraining, despite urgent requests from the Zelensky regime and its Western patrons and puppet masters, from supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine.

In the second half of May 2023, Israeli Foreign Minister E. Cohen, in an interview with the Jerusalem Post newspaper, confirmed that his country continued to morally support Ukraine and provide it with non-military assistance, but could not ignore the influence of the Russian Federation in the Middle East and the interests of large Jewish community living in Russia.³⁴

Over time, the position of Arab countries on the events in Ukraine has not changed. “We note with satisfaction,” noted S.V. Lavrov in an address to the participants and organizers of the XII Middle East Conference of the Valdai International Discussion Club at the end of February 2023 – that, despite unprecedented pressure from the collective West led by the US, Arab friends take a cautious and balanced position on the situation in Ukraine and around it, guided primarily by fundamental national interests”.³⁵

It seems that in the future the countries of the region will maintain a cautious and balanced position regarding events in the Ukrainian direction.

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KANYBEK KUDAYAROV. TÜRKIYE “THOUGHT FACTORIES” ON RUSSIA’S SMO IN UKRAINE *

*Keywords: Special Military Operation /
SMO; Russian-Ukrainian conflict; Türkiye;
analytical centers; experts.*

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Abstract. The article discusses Türkiye analytical centers that study Russia's internal affairs in Ukraine. The brain centers involved in the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis have been identified, the materials of these "thought factories" have been selectively studied.

About 7 analytical centers (ACs) of Türkiye¹ are engaged in post-Soviet research. However, a count of materials on the websites of Türkiye think tanks revealed 20 "thought factories"² that in one way or another cover the topics of the Russian SMO in Ukraine. The increased interest in Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine and its consequences, which affected many countries around the world, indicates the significance of events in Eastern Europe for the entire world community.

This review briefly examines 16 "think tanks" that directly or indirectly address the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. The materials of the Economic and Social Research Foundation of Türkiye (SETA), which is one of the largest and most influential Türkiye "think tanks",³ are examined in more detail. The SETA website lists 34 items of materials covering the subject of SMO. Considering that SETA is positioned by many experts as a pro-government AC that fully supports the policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) in Türkiye and provides it with information, analytical and consulting services, the general position of the Fund when considering the SMO corresponds to the official position of the Türkiye leadership. Let's look at 8 publications by key SETA experts to get a more detailed understanding of the Foundation's position on Special Military Operations. Of these publications, five refer to 2022, and the remaining 3 to 2023.

The work of the research director of the Washington branch of SETA, Kilich Kanat, published in the Türkiye state daily newspaper Daily Sabah (dated March 9, 2022), can be considered one of the earliest articles on SMO. In this article he argues that Ankara's position regarding the Russian - Ukrainian crisis is extremely clear: Russian troops must be withdrawn from the

territory of Ukraine, and independence and the territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected by everyone. Kanat also says that Türkiye continues to conduct defense cooperation with Kiev and supply armed drones to the Ukrainians. The author also emphasizes the position of the Türkiye opposition forces, expressed in the form of absolute disagreement with the policies of Recep T. Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party, accusing the latter of supporting the regime of Vladimir Putin.⁴

On the same day, an article by Muhittin Ataman, editor-in-chief of Insight Türkiye magazine, was published on the Daily Sabah page. Ataman argues that only the US benefited from the SMO, which, thanks to its launch, was able to consolidate around itself European partners in NATO and strengthen its position in Europe as a whole. At the same time, M. Ataman emphasizes the obvious economic losses for the countries of the European continent associated with the forced severance of trade and economic cooperation with the Russian Federation.⁵

In the March 10, 2022 edition of Daily Sabah, Kilych Bugra Kanat, analyzing the first two weeks after the start of the SMO in Ukraine, rightly suggested that “it is too early to predict the outcome of the war or analyze the potential consequences of the conflict, since events are developing very quickly. Kanat analyzes the possible and actual economic consequences of the SMO for the Russian Federation, lists some foreign policy changes associated, first of all, with the beginning of the diplomatic isolation of Russia from Western countries.

An article entitled “Bolder Steps Needed for Peace in the War in Ukraine,” written by SETA Brussels Coordinator and SETA Thematic Director for Society and Media Studies, Talha Köse, states that that “a change of leadership in Moscow could have significant consequences for all actors, but the Russian people and the Russian establishment are united around Putin.” Concluding his thoughts, the expert argues that “there is an urgent need to return to diplomacy in order to prevent a catastrophe in Ukraine. A ceasefire can only be achieved with the

help of bolder decisions and steps on the part of leaders in both Moscow and Kiev".⁶

SETA experts and some other international researchers who participated in the TRT World Forum 2022 "Mapping the Future: Uncertainties, Realities and Opportunities", held in Istanbul, believe that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will continue until complete mutual exhaustion, with possible "respite" to replenish military forces, since loss is unacceptable for both sides.

Türkiye experts G.Sh. Ozdemir and R. Oncel, in the article "The War in Ukraine Revolutionized the Fight against Drones," believe that a new era of UAV use may have arrived, a feature of which is the use of both military and civilian drones in Ukraine. Military and commercial unmanned aerial vehicles have brought more benefits to the war effort than expensive fighter jets or other military systems in terms of cost-effectiveness and efficiency and procurement capabilities. This has led to innovative operational concepts that demonstrate the power of simple, cheap and easy-to-use technologies as opposed to the existing expensive and difficult-to-develop military mainstream.

Kadir Ustyun, executive director of SETA in Washington, in his article "What is behind China's "peace plan" for Ukraine?", examines China's position on the Russian-Ukrainian crisis against the backdrop of the publication of the Chinese peace plan for the political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis, which was harshly criticized in the West. The author emphasizes that Chinese initiatives are aimed at relieving tension in the Eastern European region through diplomatic means. The PRC is not interested in the victory of the collective West over Russia, and the Chinese leadership's unofficial support for Russia, as Ustyun believes, is explained by China's reluctance to enter into confrontation with the collective West and spoil relations with Ukraine, which could affect primarily the existing trade and economic relations between Beijing and Western partners. In this difficult situation, the Chinese authorities see a solution in unburdened support of the Russian Federation, expressed in the

political and economic plane, without affecting military support, in contrast to the costly campaign of the West to support Ukraine.⁷

In another review, Kadyr Ustyun cites a number of opinions of Western politicians and experts regarding Western policy to support Ukraine; these points of view do not boil down to a single denominator regarding the degree of support necessary to strengthen the defense capability of the Ukrainian army. At the same time, Washington's concerns are also indicated in connection with this support, which, to some extent, may weaken its military readiness to repel possible Chinese aggression against Taiwan. The author points out that the loss of diplomatic and economic relations with the West for Russia could be compensated by the BRICS countries and, more generally, the countries of the "global south," which represent that part of the world that "does not seem to buy the Biden administration's narrative of the historical struggle between democracies and autocracies in the war in Ukraine".⁸

The next center we are considering is the Foreign Policy Institute (DPE).⁹ There are 17 articles on the DPE website that mention events in Ukraine and Northeast Russia. Let's consider two of them: from July 15, 2022 and April 2, 2023. The first mention concerns an interview given by Henry Kissinger to Bernhard Sand, a correspondent for Der Spiegel. During the interview, Kissinger said that the fact that all the territory between Berlin and the Russian border passed to NATO made Ukraine a key point for Russia. Kissinger also believes that the conflict in Ukraine, on the one hand, is being fought for the balance of power (in the region and the world), and on the other hand, when this conflict ends, the question will be whether Russia will achieve a coherent relationship with Europe or whether it will become an outpost of Asia on the border of Europe? The political scientist also believes that the primary responsibility of the US and the collective West is to prevent a possible war between the two largest high-tech countries - China

and the US, which will definitely be a lose-lose for both sides. In the situation with Ukraine, the expert outlined it briefly: two nuclear groups are waging a conventional war on the territory of a third state.¹⁰

The second mention is made by Gülsum Akbulut, Director of the Department of Global and Türkiye Economic Studies at the Foreign Policy Institute. In the article “The Resilience of the Russian Economy After the invading Ukraine,” she believes that the Russian economy will continue to experience recession in the coming years. Even if the military conflict is resolved, the expectation of a new Cold War era between West and East suggests that a return to pre-SMO economic conditions may not be possible. The long-term impact of sanctions on Russia’s economic strength remains uncertain, but it is clear that the country’s economic resilience has been put to a test. It is therefore critical for third parties to gain a comprehensive understanding of the long-term consequences of the conflict and the consequences of EU and US actions.¹¹

Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research (EDAM)

There are over 15 references to SMO on the EDAM¹² website. Let's consider just one of them. The authors (Tadjan Ildem - head of AC EDAM and expert Sedan Yulgen), describing the first day of the Russian Federation’s SMO in Ukraine, emphasize that Russia violated the basic principles directly related to European security, which were confirmed by the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Charter of Paris (1990.) and the Istanbul Charter (1999), to which it was a party. It is indicated that Türkiye is an important ally of NATO and, as part of its membership in this organization, Ankara will contribute to the implementation of the steps that NATO will take to strengthen the system of deterrence and defense. Ilden and Yulgen believe that in such a situation it will also be difficult for Türkiye to

pursue the policy of balance between its NATO allies and Russia.¹³

Next, let's look at two events conducted by the Eurasian Center for Strategic Studies (ASAM).¹⁴ The first event took place in April 2022 in the format of an open online lecture by Associate Professor of the Aegean University, historian S. Acar. As part of a lecture entitled "Historical Background of Türkiye-Russian-Ukrainian Relations", which was broadcast live via the hosting channel Youtube, S. Acar spoke about the relationship between the Turks and the Eastern Slavs, between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, ending his lecture with the events of today and Russia - Ukrainian crisis. Speaking about the current situation around the SMO, Acar believes that violation of the integrity of Ukraine's borders is to the detriment of Türkiye. If Ankara is left alone with Moscow in the Black Sea, Türkiye interests in the Black Sea will suffer in the long term.¹⁵ Despite the fact that this video was published over a year ago (April 2, 2022), it has only received 440 views to date.

On May 16, 2022, a conference entitled "Regional Geopolitical Events and the US War in Ukraine" was held within the walls of the Eurasian Center for Strategic Studies, also posted on YouTube, which received less than two hundred views. During his speech, Türkiye expert Güçlüer listed the main stages in the formation of the US of America as a world power, where at the first stage control over Europe was established through NATO, at the second stage control over Africa and the Middle East, at the third stage a policy of establishing control over Iran and Russia, and finally, at the last, fourth stage, control must be established over China.

In recent years, the expert believes, a policy has been promoted to establish control over China. To suppress the PRC, the Americans are using the Syrian war, the Armenian-Azerbaijani military confrontation, events in Kazakhstan and the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. China is in a state of uncontrolled economic growth, and this economic growth also brings greater

political and military weight. This in turn leads to the movement of global capital from the West to China and East Asia. Since it is impossible to stop this with the help of the economy, it is possible that a war with China will begin in the coming years.

However, first the US and the collective West must weaken Russia in order to then enter into a war with China. The author believes that if China continues to grow at this rate for another 10 years, America's hegemony will come to an end.¹⁶

Türkiye Economic Policy Research Foundation (TEPAV)¹⁷

TEPAV expert, Murat Ersavci, in the article ("Russia's attack on Ukraine: Putin must not win") dated December 28, 2022, briefly describes Russia's geopolitical successes in the Syrian crisis, and believes that the Kremlin has calculated the possible economic and diplomatic consequences that it may encounter after the start of the SMO in Ukraine. At the same time, as Savdzhı believes, the Russian leadership never expected such a protracted nature of the special operation. The author is confident that the EU and the US will continue to support Ukraine in this conflict so that the latter does not end up defeated. Summarizing his thought, Ersavci believes that Türkiye should not forget that its place is among Western democracies.¹⁸

Economic Development Fund (IKV)¹⁹

On March 17, 2023, IKV held a webinar entitled "The Second Year of the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis and its Consequences for Europe," during which the Foundation's expert, Eralp, emphasized that Türkiye's geopolitical importance has increased after the Russian-Ukrainian war. While his colleague, Achykmedzhe, noted that the Russian-Ukrainian war has changed the security paradigm in Europe in areas such as defense, finance, energy and food.

In turn, the Secretary General of the Economic Development Fund said that the war did not hinder, but rather accelerated the process of the EU's transition to renewable energy sources. Finally, the Secretary General noted that the EU is moving towards overcoming bureaucratic barriers in order to speed up the decision-making process on energy and investment projects.²⁰

Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM)²¹

The article "Changes in Ukraine's Middle East Policy"²² talks about the rapprochement of Ukraine with some states of the Middle East. In particular, this concerns KSA, whose Foreign Minister made a visit to Ukraine in February 2023, as a result of which KSA allocated \$400 million as humanitarian aid to Ukraine, as in the previous year. This fact allowed some part of the expert community to assume that bilateral relations are reaching a new level.

In its articles, ORSAM focuses more on the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis on processes in international politics that have both regional and global significance. They are mentioned in articles such as: "Biden's Iraq Policy: Restoring US-Iraqi Relations After the War in Ukraine";²³ "Strengthening Iranian-Russian energy competition after the (end of) the war in Ukraine";²⁴ "Is Morocco leaving behind its neutral position in the war in Ukraine?";²⁵ "Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on Africa";²⁶ "Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Possible Consequences for Moscow's Arms Exports to the Middle East";²⁷ "The influence of the Northern Military District on Russia's position in Syria: foreign fighters and problems of the population";²⁸ "Iran's war with Ukraine: economic and strategic prospects and other materials.

Türkiye Asian Center for Strategic Studies (TASAM)²⁹

Hassan Kanpolat in the article "Ukrainian War: What Did Russia Do Wrong?"³⁰, analyzes the Russian North Military

District in Ukraine and describes the general course of the military operation. He believes it is too early to say how the SMO will develop further, saying that time will tell.

Institute of 21st Century Türkiye (21YYTE)³¹

Umut Badakoglu³² speaks about the state of Russia's tank and armored capabilities in the Northern Military District, as well as the role of armored forces in various conflicts in the world. The author identifies the key characteristics of tanks that are currently attracting the attention of American, Chinese, Türkiye and other armies of the world.

In the article "British-German conflict in the Ukrainian-Russian war",³³ Alaeddin Yalchinkaya writes that the British and Americans are deliberately weakening Germany, and, at the same time, trying to prevent a possible alliance between the Russian Federation and Germany. The author briefly talks about England's policy towards Germany (Europe) and Russia, carried out over the past centuries. Yalcinkaya believes that the existing Russian-Ukrainian conflict will continue.

The website of the analytical center contains a total of more than 7 articles directly or indirectly related to the subject of SMO. In general, the authors focus more attention on international and global politics, the development of world trends in various aspects of the life of states, periodically making excursions into the history of international relations during the Cold War and earlier historical periods.

Strategic Thinking Institute (SDE)³⁴

Ilyas Syupurgedzhi in the article "The importance of the center of gravity and balance in the war over the Russian-Ukrainian struggle" reflects on the centers of gravity of Russia and Ukraine, emphasizing that the West and Ukraine consider the Kremlin as such a center of gravity in the Russian Federation.

In turn, writes Syupurgedzhi, Kyiv was initially considered the center of gravity of Ukraine, but later the Donbass region and the Black Sea ports also began to be perceived as such.

In total, SDE has 5 articles related to the subject of SMO.

Strategic Studies Center (ASSAM)³⁵

Ali Qajar, in the article “The situation in the 8th month of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict,” believes that the situation around the SMO is a continuation of the policy of the global oligarchy to establish control over the world, by organizing a global economic recession, inciting conflicts, etc., which should also lead to a significant reduction in the world population.³⁶

A similar position is taken by Suat Gün, who noted that representatives of world/global capital manage not only organizations, but also entire states, pursuing exclusively their own goals, which run counter to the generally accepted official position of states.

Ankara Policy Center (APM)³⁷

Diplomat Metin Kılıç, in the article “The situation in Central Asia after the (beginning of) the Russian-Ukrainian conflict: Kazakhstan,” cites Kazakhstan’s position on the SMO, outlines Kazakh-Russian and Kazakh-Chinese relations. The author points to the strengthening of relations between Astana and Beijing and mutual interest in further enhancing bilateral cooperation within the framework of the One Belt, One Road initiative.³⁸

In March and September 2022, two online conferences were held under the special APM section ‘Diplomatic wisdom’, numbers 10 and 12 on the topics: “Russian-Ukrainian conflict in global strategic competition and its impact on international security” and “Ukraine: what’s going on?”³⁹ Türkiye experts took part in the first conference, and the second also included the

Ambassador of Ukraine to Türkiye V. Bodnar and former adviser to the Prime Minister of Ukraine on Foreign Affairs E. Gaber. The current situation in the Northeast Military District zone was discussed, as well as Ukraine's position on this issue.

Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)⁴⁰

The materials of the analytical center posted on the AVİM website include articles from the Türkiye state news channel "TRT Haber", which, firstly, suggests that AVİM does not have its own analytics on the topic of SMO; secondly, that the opinion of the state, and therefore the state and pro-government ACs, coincides with the opinion of AVİM.

Center for Strategic Studies of the Sages (BİLGESAM)⁴¹

An expert at the BİLGESAM analytical center, I. Yulger, believes that the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis caused a reconsideration of European security issues and increased EU funding for defense. As an example, Yulger cites Germany, which initially did not consider increasing military spending, but changed its mind on this matter after the events of February 24, 2022.⁴²

Center for Humanitarian and Social Research (İNSAMER)⁴³

Center employee F. Beyaz, in the article "China's attitude to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict," believes that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has created the ground on which China can challenge the international system, although not directly, not openly. China is trying to turn existing geopolitical realities into opportunities without damaging its image in international relations and at the same time undermining the global authority of the US. The author emphasizes that with its position regarding

the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, China is trying to show that it is not opposed to the EU, taking a position that does not provoke the European Union, thereby maintaining the balance of power.⁴⁴

Caucasus Center for Strategic Studies (KAFKASSAM)⁴⁵

Borzu Daragahi, speaking about the incident that occurred on the night of May 3, 2023, when unmanned aerial vehicles attacked the Moscow Kremlin, believes that a series of events of this kind (including an attack on an oil depot in Crimea April 29 of this year and other events), make it clear that the location of the upcoming battles will not be limited to the geography of Ukraine and the Russian border region.⁴⁶

Conclusion

A review of Türkiye's "thought factories" showed that, in general, they cover and analyze events related to the Russian North Military District in Ukraine close to the official position of the Türkiye leadership. Despite the presence of some points related to the easy condemnation of Russia's policy regarding the start of the military action in Ukraine in the first weeks after the start of the conflict, in general, it is of a rather restrained nature (especially when compared with the rhetoric of Western experts).

As a result of a small review (which does not imply a detailed consideration of all available materials), it was revealed that anti-Russian rhetoric in the materials of the Türkiye AC is present (albeit in a superficial and insignificant form in terms of content) in 7 of the 20 analytical centers of the Türkiye Republic.⁴⁷ However, their popularity and influence (including the reach of the target audience) are much inferior to the SETA Foundation for Economic and Social Research, which suggests that, in general, the negativity towards Russian policy in Ukraine is completely (or mostly) leveled out by government and near-government think tanks and the media.

The negative rhetoric of the SMO of the RF is rather superficial and is mainly associated with a painful awareness of the growing influence of Russia in the Black Sea region and the greater penetration of the US into the zone of Türkiye geopolitical interests. Considering the special role that Türkiye is trying to play in world geopolitics, any intervention by extra-regional powers in its zone of interests is perceived quite painfully by it.

Despite the fact that there are materials (7 AC) condemning the policy of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, the essence of the articles reviewed is more neutral in nature, aimed at an analytical overview of the general situation and the alignment of regional and global forces in this conflict. The presence of anti-Western and anti-American attacks in publications indicates Türkiye's special position regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, despite its close mutual relations with Western states. Considering that the largest and most influential AC in Türkiye, SETA, described the current situation around the NWO in neutral tones, we can say that all state media in Türkiye, as well as a number of news agencies affiliated with the Türkiye government, take a similar position on the SMO.

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2. Economic and Social Research Foundation of Türkiye (SETA), Foreign Policy Institute (DPE), Economic and Foreign Policy Research Center (EDAM), Eurasian Strategic Studies Center (ASAM), Türkiye Economic Policy Research Foundation (TEPAV), Economic Development Foundation (İKV) , Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM), Türkiye-Asian Center for Strategic Studies (TASAM), Institute for 21st Century Türkiye (21YYTE), Institute for Strategic Thinking (SDE), Advocates for Strategic Studies Center (ASSAM), Ankara Policy Center (APM), Center Eurasian Studies (AVİM),

Center for Strategic Studies of the Sages (BİLGESAM), Center for Humanitarian and Social Research (İNSAMER), Caucasus Center for Strategic Studies (KAFKASSAM).

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12. An independent think tank with a wide range of research in the areas of international politics and security, cyber policy, arms control, energy and climate change. AC has a large staff of experts, some of whom, to some extent, can be classified as pro-Western. These include, for example, Takan

Ildem, former NATO Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy (2016-2020); Meltem Müftüler-Bac - professor at Sabancı University (the most liberal university in Türkiye); Çigdem Yüstün is a freelance fellow at the Australian Institute of International Affairs; Sinan Ülgen is a former Türkiye diplomat, research fellow at the Carnegie European Center in Brussels and others.

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17. The AC is engaged in a comprehensive analysis of domestic and foreign policy aspects of Türkiye economic policy, analysis of economic data, fiscal and monetary policies, and urban studies. The management of the AC includes persons who have direct relation to the Türkiye government. For example, Cemil Cicek is a member of the Supreme Advisory Council under the President of the Republic of Türkiye, a former deputy from the AKP.
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19. An analytical center specializing in economic relations within the EU space, as well as interaction between Türkiye and the European Union. The leadership of the AC includes persons who have a direct or indirect

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 21. An independent AC, focused on the study of political, economic and social aspects of the development of the states of the Middle East and North Africa, whose staff includes such experts as: Ibrahim Aydın - ex-member of the Türkiye Parliament from the AKP; Abdennur Tumi - also works for the pro-government newspaper Daily Sabah English; Mehmet Aladzha is an employee of the largest state news agency Anadolu Ajansı and the Daily Sabah newspaper.
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47. TEPAV; IKV; APM; AVIM; INSAMER; DPE; EDAM.

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ALEKSEY ILIN. TÜRKİYE-NATO DEAL: WHAT RUSSIA IS PREPARING FOR AND THE ESSENCE OF ERDOĞAN'S POLITICAL BENEFITS

Keywords: Türkiye; Sweden; NATO; Russia; European Union; political benefits.

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Abstract. The Türkiye Parliament ratified Sweden's accession to NATO. The process was quite complex and accelerated after a telephone conversation between Türkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the US President Joe Biden. It should be assumed that the parties were able to reach an agreement among themselves and each received a certain benefit. It is obvious that Türkiye asked for EU membership, strengthening the country's defense potential, and economic benefits. The US put forward a number of its demands, which certainly affected the issue of relations between Türkiye and Russia. The article also

examines the historical prerequisites for concluding a deal between countries.

The author analyzes the political, economic and military bonuses for countries as a result of the agreement, identifies possible threats to Russia and prospects for further cooperation with Türkiye, makes a preliminary forecast about Sweden's prospects in NATO and assesses the long- and medium-term interests of the US.

Several decades are already behind us, and Türkiye is still not a member of the European Union. And, it may seem, it no longer particularly strives to become an ally with the Europeans, but when the opportunity arises, the country's authorities remind the Western political establishment that their request has not been granted. Therefore, Türkiye builds its relationship with the West based on its own benefit. According to Türkiye, the West and the US must pay for decades of waiting. Now it is just the time for reckoning, according to Türkiye's political elite, and the country has begun trading. Before analyzing today's deal between Türkiye and the West, let me remind you what difficulties and reforms the state had to go through to obtain EU membership.

It should be noted that "Türkiye's 'movement towards' Europe dates back to the "Tanzimat era" (1840-1875), when the Ottoman Empire began economic, political and military transformations on the European pattern. Later, in the twentieth century, a huge step in this direction was taken by Kemal Atatürk, who was elected the first president of the country after the proclamation of the Türkiye Republic in 1923. Atatürk was convinced that the root cause of the empire's backwardness lay in its adherence to many outdated traditions and Islamic dogmas." [1] It was then that Türkiye began internal modernization and embarked on a secular path of development. These were not just words, but a whole complex of events, which began with the transformation of traditions.

In 1925, the national parliament decided to close religious monasteries, liquidate numerous sects, prohibit the wearing of the burqa, and introduce European suits, ties, and hats. At the same time, Türkiye starts implementing a far-reaching economic policy and establishing trade ties with European countries.

The Türkiye government of that period earned the trust of Europe largely due to the fulfillment of its financial obligations. In particular, it paid off part of the Ottoman debts, which made it possible to receive loans from the West for the development of the country. Permission to join the League of Nations can be considered an important political success of Türkiye in the last century and a kind of reward from the West. It seemed that Türkiye was getting closer to Europe, but in 1938 K. Atatürk died and relations with Europe became cooler. True, Türkiye did not lose connections with Europe. During the Cold War, the state joined the Western coalition, which helped it receive large loans and non-repayable subsidies. Then membership in NATO, later joining other international organizations.

In the late 50s of the last century, Türkiye made repeated attempts to join the EU. And only in 1964 it received the status of an associate member, but this, I note, is far from full membership. The state still needed to go through quite a lot of stages of verification, notes researcher G.I. Starchenkov: "Through the efforts of the leadership of the EEC and Türkiye, a three-stage fifteen-year program was developed with the aim of achieving Türkiye's full membership in this organization. In particular, it was envisaged that at the first stage (1965–1969) Türkiye would receive a number of benefits in trade and financial relations with the Common Market (preferential tariffs on some export goods, loans for industrial development, etc.). Since 1973, the country entered the second stage (the delay occurred due to the coup d'état of 1971 and a number of "technical reasons"), which was called the "transition period", designed for a long 22 years. Türkiye pledged to reduce and, after 12 years, completely abolish customs duties on almost all industrial products of the EEC

countries... At the final stage, Türkiye was supposed to completely liberalize the import of EEC industrial goods and adopt regulations on the migration of labor and capital. It was planned that in 1995 Türkiye would become a full-fledged EC member." [2] I'd like to note that the Türkiye authorities fulfilled the designated obligations, but did not receive proper assessment from the EU elite.

In 1999, the EU again gave Türkiye hope, the country was included in the list of applicants, and even a new deadline was set – 2015. Nine years have passed, but Türkiye is still not a member of the EU.

In the fall of 2023, Türkiye leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke sharply about Europe's promises about Türkiye's accession to the EU: "We have no expectations from the European Union, which has made us wait for 60 years." [3] Erdogan's bold statement and reproach to the collective West happened after Türkiye felt its importance in resolving the issue related to Sweden's accession to NATO. The decisive vote remained with Türkiye. (Hungary does not count in this matter.) Therefore, a public statement of this kind is a challenge to another dialogue, which should benefit Türkiye, the Türkiye leader considered. Otherwise, according to Erdogan, Türkiye will go down different paths with the EU. Which ones? – didn't specify.

It should be noted that the European Parliament reacted to Erdogan's statement quite calmly. Türkiye was not promised anything, but only noted the need to "begin a process of reflection in order to find a parallel and realistic model of relations between the EU and Türkiye, which takes into account the interests of all participants." [4]

Based on this exchange of views, it is clear that Türkiye and the European Union have begun the bidding period. Türkiye's international policy became a stumbling block for the collective West. The fact is that the European Union accuses Türkiye of developing Russian- Türkiye relations: "trade turnover between Ankara and Moscow has almost doubled since the introduction

of EU anti-Russian sanctions in 2022.” [5] It is obvious that the EU’s dissatisfaction is also caused by the fact that Türkiye refused to impose sanctions against Russia and maintained neutrality in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Accusations against Türkiye from the EU are also heard regarding the state’s retreat from democracy, discrimination and sexual minorities, the introduction of censorship, pressure on journalists and the use of the judicial system as a political tool. There are quite a few complaints, but the Türkiye leader has prepared tools to influence the EU. Now Türkiye’s resolution on the issue of NATO expansion acts as a kind of leverage. Realizing this, the Türkiye leader began to blackmail Brussels and the European Union.

Soberly assessing the situation that Türkiye will not be accepted into the EU, because it has serious problems in the economy, disagreements with Cyprus, and the number of citizens is too large for European countries - about 85 million people. Erdogan started bargaining according to the principle: “ask for more than you need, you will be given the needed.” Based on the fact that in January of this year, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced that Türkiye voted for Sweden to join NATO, we should expect some overtures to Türkiye from the US and the West.

Official sources are already reporting that “In return, the Türkiye government received full support for the path of membership in the European Union, the lifting of sanctions against the Türkiye economy and the liberalization of visas for Türkiye citizens... Washington has agreed to conclude a \$20 billion deal to sell F-16 fighter jets and spare parts to Ankara.” [6] These agreements provide opportunities for business development, which is currently extremely important for Türkiye even without official EU membership. Not to mention strengthening our own army. Let us recall that after the purchase of S-300 aircraft from Russia, “Türkiye was first deprived of the opportunity to receive

the F-35, and then the F-16, in addition, sanctions were imposed against high-ranking Türkiye military officials.” [7]

The benefits of Türkiye, which were officially announced, are understandable, but it should be assumed that there were also unofficial demands. It is likely that Türkiye was asked to sever political-economic relations with Russia. Obviously, Türkiye did not take this step. Since trade with Russia is a guarantee of survival for Türkiye in an unfavorable economic situation, and a guarantee of the country’s own security in case of pressure from the West. For example, Türkiye can form a political, economic, military alliance with Russia against the collective West. Therefore, one should not expect any deterioration in Russian-Türkiye relations. Russian Senator K. Kosachev drew attention to the main disadvantage in the deal between Türkiye and NATO: “A negative impact on us has already occurred after Finland joined NATO. And if Sweden’s predicted membership in the alliance changes anything, it will be only quantitatively, not qualitatively. And measures on our part have already been taken, for example, the revival of the Leningrad Military District by decision of the President of Russia.” [8]

Despite the fact that NATO receives almost 800 thousand square kilometers of new territory near the very borders of Russia, it is too early to talk about a superiority of forces. It will take several years to reformat the armed forces of the Scandinavian countries. Sweden is beneficial to the American military-industrial complex from the point of view of the defense industry. “Sweden does not currently produce only tanks of its own design – in all other respects, military high-tech is quite at the world level. Saab Bofors Dynamics is able to build anti-ship missiles, and Saab AB is able to build fourth-generation fighters and AEW aircraft. Swedish gunsmiths are consistently among the top ten largest exporters in the world.” [9] It is obvious that Sweden will act as a supplier of weapons to the American military-industrial complex. It is clear that the Americans will dictate the quantity of production, the Swedes are assigned only

the role of the performer. This will hit the Swedes' own military developments.

Therefore, the expansion of the bloc does not carry anything beyond threatening for Russia. This is another party of the West, a step forward, after which they will take a few steps back. It is important that steps back are less painful for the US, so America is setting Europe up and watching our reaction. This is all that the political elite of Britain and the US are capable of.

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THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

DANILO KRYLOV. THE IMPACT OF REFLEXIVE CONTROL TECHNOLOGIES ON INCLUSIVE SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. REFLECTION AND REFLECTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Keywords: reflexive governance; Middle East; inclusive security architecture; foreign policy; international relations; Russia; Türkiye; Iran; Saudi Arabia; Israel.

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Abstract. The article is devoted to considering the influence of reflexive control technologies on the process of building inclusive security architecture in the Middle East. The author analyzes various types of reflexive control technologies. The situation and processes in the Middle East are characterized, as well as the peculiarities of the

functioning of the inclusive security architecture. Examples of the use of various reflexive control technologies by Türkiye, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel are given. A conclusion is drawn about the effectiveness of the use of reflexive control technologies by individual states in the Middle East within the framework of bilateral relations, as well as the advisability of Russia's use of reflexive control in relation to states and processes in the Middle East in order to achieve national interests and strategic objectives.

At the interdisciplinary level, the concept of “reflection” usually refers to the ability of a system to build models of itself, as well as other systems, while simultaneously seeing itself constructing similar models. In the context of control, reflexive activity can be considered within the framework of two scientific rationalities: classical and non-classical [1].

In classical scientific rationality, there is an ignorance of the reflexive activity of the object of control, since various modeling methods are used. However, this principle works primarily with technical systems and objects. The transfer and application of modeling methods in relation to social systems has shown some insufficiency and limitations. Nevertheless, similar principles continue to be actively used, for example, within the framework of classical game theory.

The emergence of non-classical scientific rationality made it possible to find new applications for reflexive control technologies. Thus, within the framework of the new paradigm, control is carried out in the “subject-subject” format. Within the framework of this article, “the object of control implies the party that carries out reflexive control, and the “subject of control” is the party in relation to whom control is carried out. Non-classical rationality is associated with a certain refusal to ignore the reflexive activity of the parties, and the activity itself has become a key attribute of the control objects being studied. As a result, the focus was on communicative reflection, which, among other

things, can be carried out using various reflexive technologies (theories).

It should be noted that the concepts of reflexive control were developed and substantiated primarily by Soviet and Russian scientists. As noted by T.L. Thomas, this concept is "alien" for the US [2]. At the same time, the armed forces and decision-makers in the USSR and modern Russia have used and are actively using reflexive technologies not only at the strategic and tactical levels in the military sphere, but also in domestic and foreign policy. In addition, if there were cooperation between Moscow and Washington in the field of reflexive control, then the paradigm of information war between two states could gradually change to the paradigm of partnership, albeit in the form of a controlled confrontation.

Major General N.I. Turco established a direct connection between information warfare and reflexive control, concluding that the latter is one of the means of waging the former. As a consequence, the use of reflexive control in all its diversity of capabilities, technologies and tools can be more significant and important, including in achieving military goals, than traditional combat military means, "fire power" [3]. Also, reflexive control can be used to achieve geopolitical dominance in certain regions or in the world as a whole, for example, as part of a containment policy, based on reflection in the sphere of subjects inflicting a possible unacceptable level of destruction [4].

As a result of research conducted by military and civilian scientists, three groups of reflexive activity technologies were identified: technologies of social regulation, technologies of controlled confrontation and technologies of reflexive control [5].

Technologies of social regulation include methods of organizing expedient practical activities that are aimed at achieving a given result by a social object of control [6]. Based on the complex nonlinear nature of the mechanism of social regulation, researchers have put forward the assumption that the basis for the implementation of this technology is a change

(including self-change) of interacting subjects under the influence of reflection [7]. There are a number of social regulations that can be applied in the implementation of the state's foreign policy. Moreover, they are most effective in situations involving influence on compatriots abroad (diaspora). Such regulations include, for example, value regulations that are used based on universal or ethnic values, historical memory and "national self-identification" [8]. Another form is traditional ritual regulations, focused on the traditions of groups, which make it possible to strengthen the unity of the diaspora and ensure the stability of the community as a social system. Socio-psychological regulations make it possible not only to strengthen existing ones, but also to form new values among individual groups. These regulations are related to issues of education and moral encouragement and should be built taking into account the characteristics of the psychology and characters of people [9]. Communication regulations imply a change in the nature and methods of communication and interaction with compatriots abroad. Comparative regulations are based on elements of comparison (comparative studies), juxtaposition, commensurate of people's behavior, their aspirations, goals, options for self-identification, and consciousness. Finally, symbolic regulations make it possible to control individuals and groups using both physical and various ideological symbols.

As for the technologies of controlled confrontation, historically the concept of "controlled confrontation" was developed and introduced into practical and scientific use by the Soviet and American psychologist and mathematician V.A. Lefebvre [10]. This group of reflexive technologies includes various methods of covert manipulation of the behavior of the subject of reflection, as a result of which this subject will independently make unfavorable decisions for him/herself, which will not be formalized with the legal guarantees necessary in such cases. Often, the subject will also assume responsibility for such actions independently, unilaterally [11]. Technologies of

controlled confrontation were actively used by the American leadership in relation to the Soviet Union / Russia, especially in those situations when the US proposed replacing official agreements and agreements with a compromise agreement, without requiring the Soviet / Russian side to officially sign them [12]. A striking example of the use of such technologies is the situation with the expansion of NATO to the East, despite the informal compromise agreements reached between the West and the Soviet Union in 1990 during negotiations on the unification of Germany [13]. Since there was no discussion between NATO member countries on this issue and no collective decision was made, and also due to the absence of an official signed document, the North Atlantic Alliance had for many years acted based on its own interests and violated the agreements reached, regularly declaring that there were no agreements ever [14]. At the same time, this form of control is incompatible with the "bureaucratic method" [15]. The effectiveness of a controlled confrontation decreases when one of the parties tries to force the other to sign a document. An even greater reduction in the effectiveness activity was noted by researchers during the intervention of the so-called ghostly subject, i.e. a hidden control subject whose strategy, goals and objectives, as well as whose interests and values are unidentifiable and who secretly seizes the initiative using a similar control model [16].

From the point of view of Lefebvre and subsequent researchers, the system of controlled confrontation is built on mathematical static models of reflection [17], which creates difficulties when working with social models that are extremely hard (if not at the level of impossible) to be assessed logically and substantiated mathematically, especially within the framework of political systems. Thus, despite the theoretical and historical justification, practical application and logical simplicity, the very concept of conflict control within the framework of international relations and world politics makes it possible to describe certain

ongoing processes and evaluate them, but cannot serve as a basis for adoption similar decisions.

As for reflexive control technologies, they include not only the control of reflexive activity, but also the imitation of reflexive activity, and reflexive programming. One of the conceptual results of the development of the set of these technologies was the emergence of the theory of "reflexive games" [18]. These include a group of open-type games, during which each participant tries to implement his own control strategy, using reflexive approaches. In these games, analysis and calculation of the options and consequences of various forms of social interaction are important [19].

Technologies for reflexive activity simulation include methods for simulating reflexive processes and structures, reflexive programming, the decision-making process, as well as tools that allow revealing the facts of reflexive control. Reflexive programming is considered to be the use of various systems and mechanisms for managing reflexive structures, technologies and processes. Programming also makes it possible to both block and stimulate reflection (both in general and reflexive control in particular). In addition, this technology allows you to create two unique states of reflection: "pulsating" and "virtual". The first refers to a situation in which the object of control finds itself in a situation where current information about the nature of the effectiveness of the reflexive control model is dynamically changing. This is followed by a lack of understanding about the real development of the situation, the lack of the ability to verify information, as well as errors in assessing the results of reflection, which leads to the incorrect application of control methods. "Virtual reflection" is a state of the subject of control, in which the latter is not able to specifically and reliably determine who specifically, within the framework of reflexive control, makes decisions or influences their adoption [20].

As for activity control, it consists of transmitting information from an object to a subject, which is the basis for

decision-making. There are various forms of reflexive control, including simple, counter and double. For example, within the framework of double reflexive control, situations arise in which the subject carries out (as he believes) “revealing” of control attempts and sends the object a simulation, which is aimed at confirming the effectiveness of the technology. In this case, the object can distinguish the imitative nature of this data and, thus, use it to form adequate conclusions based on the results of using technologies [21]. If we complicate the reflection model, a situation may arise in which the object will initially lay down in his control program the factor of “opening” and the subject’s attempts to distort information and carry out counter control. In a simplified form, such a system can be characterized through the expression “I know that he knows that I know that he knows...”, in which “I” is the object that carries out reflexive control, “he” is the subject in relation to whom reflexive control is carried out, and the verb “knows” reflects the process of reflexive activity (both in the form of control, and imitation or programming). Thus, reflection can be repeated many times and focus on the mutual reaction of the object and subject to the actions being performed.

Situation in the Middle East and Inclusive Security Architecture

At the present stage, the Middle East region is one of the cornerstones forming the modern system of international relations, and an important link in the field of global energy and economic policy. At the same time, this region is traditionally characterized by an extremely high level of conflict, and the processes occurring in it affect not only neighboring regions, but also influence the global system as a whole.

The collapse of the bipolar system of international relations, which followed the formal end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, led to the intensification of internal political

conflicts in the Middle East and to their internationalization [22]. Existing contradictions within individual countries are aggravated not only by complex interstate relations within the region and the active influence of external actors, but also by the lack of effective security architectures (at the regional level or uniting several neighboring ones), which would have the potential, capabilities and political willpower sufficient to actually reduce the intensity of conflicts.

Frequent conflicts, military-political and socio-economic crises cause constant changes in the balance of power at the regional and cross-regional levels. As of May 2023, five cross-regional centers of power have formed and strengthened their influence in the region: Egypt, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Two of these states (Türkiye and Iran) are currently, among other things, guarantor states of the Astana process, which is the basis for resolving one of the three largest regional crises – the Syrian one. Moreover, each of these centers of power plays its own role and exerts its own influence on regional processes, having not only lines of cooperation, but also confrontation with each other center state.

As for the Russian Federation, it is actively promoting its interests and values in the Middle East, preventing the destabilizing influence of world powers on regional processes and interference in the sovereign affairs of Middle Eastern states. To this end, since 2017, Moscow has been actively developing inclusive security architecture in the Middle East [23]. Currently, this structure largely affects the Syrian tension zone and is being built with the aim of resolving the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, in the future, especially if the number of key states – member of the architecture expands, it is possible that the influence of this structure will spread to the entire Middle East region. The inclusiveness of the structure presupposes the involvement of all parties interested and ready for dialogue on equal terms, as well as the focus not so much on imposing certain decisions on the part of one hegemonic country, but on finding a compromise

between all participants and making mutually acceptable decisions [24]. Inclusive security architecture in the Middle East currently includes three states: Russia, Iran and Türkiye. Among the other states that represent cross-regional centers of power, only Egypt has the least influence and interest in the tension zone around Syria (compared to similar ones in Palestine, Libya or Yemen). As a result, Cairo, unlike Riyadh and Tel Aviv, is minimally involved in the functioning of the security architecture at the present stage.

Application of Reflexive Technologies by Middle Eastern states in the Context of an Inclusive Security Architecture

The states of the region are actively using various combinations of reflexive technologies. One of the striking examples is the Republic of Türkiye, which uses them to achieve its goals in the ideological and value sphere, using elements of Islamic and Türkiye discourse [25], in order to spread its values and image abroad [26]. For example, Ankara provides humanitarian assistance to neighboring countries, including through the Türkiye Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA; Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı). Most of the actions it carries out relate to technologies of social regulation. Thus, symbolic and socio-psychological regulations are actively used in relation to Islamic communities, and communicative, comparative and traditional ritual regulations are used in relation to Türkiye peoples. Simple reflexive control is used in the work of various Türkiye funds, centers and agencies, for example, when involving them in Ankara's military maneuvers [27].

Thus, the arsenal of opportunities even within one individual country is extremely wide. In this regard, firstly, when considering the political actions of states through the prism of reflexive control technologies, this study examined exclusively Iran, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Secondly, due to the

impossibility of covering the entire diversity of the multidirectional foreign policy of each state, the main attention was paid to the processes that influence the inclusive security architecture built by Russia in the Middle East. Thirdly, since the number of various actions exceeds the number of main groups of technologies, the examples of reflexive control presented below will be given in relation to the technologies used.

Technologies of social regulation (symbolic and communicative) are actively used by Türkiye and Saudi Arabia as part of the promotion of their national interests, especially in the religious sphere. Thus, Ankara actively supports the activities of the Moslem Brotherhood group, banned in Russia. At the same time, Riyadh, which has recognized this organization as terrorist (together with some other Arab states) [28], is both an object and a subject of reflection: Saudi Arabia uses this occasion as a cornerstone element in consolidating around itself those who advocate against the banned Moslem Brotherhood (for example, Egypt), but at the same time is the subject of simultaneous reflexive control on the part of Türkiye, improving its relations with Qatar, which shares its position on this issue. Thus, each country strengthens its own position in the region and forms coalitions: Saudi Arabia provides financial assistance to Egypt, which in return supports Riyadh in Libya and Yemen; Türkiye carries out military cooperation with Qatar and creates military bases on its territory, and Qatar responds politically, as well as informationally supports Ankara, including through mass media (Al Jazeera).

Another example of the use of social regulation technologies (symbolic and communicative) is the propaganda and psychological aspects of the Iranian-Israeli confrontation. Thus, Tel Aviv uses various aggressive political statements addressed to Tehran [29] in order to obtain a negative and harsh response. This is used not only to unite its own population against an external threat, but also to demonstrate to the international community the danger allegedly emanating from

Iran, as well as to possibly discredit and worsen Tehran's position at the international level, for example, in the area of possible achievement in the future of a new Joint comprehensive plan of action on Iran's nuclear program [30].

Conflict control technologies do not have such striking examples, since the states of the region strive to conclude real and valid bilateral agreements. Nevertheless, the individual actions of Saudi Arabia and Israel to normalize relations can be indirectly attributed to this form of reflection. Earlier in September 2020, the Israeli side had already signed agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain [31]. Each side cannot openly acknowledge the implementation of such steps towards political dialogue, since there is an unresolved Palestinian-Israeli issue, within which the positions of Riyadh and Tel Aviv are diametrically opposed. However, economic processes force in some cases to make certain compromises. In this regard, the parties actively use conflict control to obtain maximum benefits from unofficial informal contacts and achieve certain agreements without legally formalized agreements.

Most often, countries in the Middle East region use the tools of simple, counter and double reflexive control. Thus, Tel Aviv actively uses this type of technology in the situation related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Provoking the Palestinian public and the Hamas group, as happened in the situation with blocking access to Al-Aqsa in May 2022, or Israel's confrontation with the radical Islamic Jihad group (a banned organization) in the Gaza Strip in May 2023, lead to a violent counter-reaction and attempts to resist. This, in turn, allows Israel to justify military spending on maintaining a high level of military forces and developing technologies, as well as conducting military operations in the Gaza Strip to combat the threat posed by armed Palestinian groups. Thus, Israel does not allow them to strengthen themselves and take control of the situation.

Saudi Arabia (KSA) also uses reflexive control in the foreign policy arena, for example, in its desire to manipulate world powers, using the oil and gas sector, OPEC/OPEC+ and oil supplies through the Persian Gulf as leverage. Understanding that the US is withdrawing troops from the region, including with the aim of creating a more controlled regime and weakening the KSA, Riyadh carries out counter reflexive control through price regulation and certain requirements in the field of security and arms supplies, taking into account that Washington and its allies in Europe cannot completely abandon oil supplies from the Persian Gulf countries.

Nevertheless, the events of 2022 and the first half of 2023 demonstrate that this control has a second level, at which the US creates legal obstacles to the reflexive control of the KSA, for example, through the adoption of the Oil Prohibition and Export Cartel Act (NOPEC) [32]. If Riyadh can respond in such a way that the White House again has to make decisions that leave the US with even fewer possible options for the development of events, limit Washington and create future difficulties in relations with the monarchies of the Persian Gulf and members of OPEC, then the Saudi Arabia will demonstrate the effective use of multi-level reflexive control technologies.

The main task of reflexive control, regardless of the technologies and methods used, is to influence the enemy, its plans (both military and political), as well as its understanding of the situation. Thus, from the military point of view, this concept is more related to the concept of “military art” than “military science”, and requires an understanding of the “internal nature”, concepts, ideas and values of the enemy [33]. As a result, these technologies may in the future become one of the key elements in conducting both individual information operations and

information warfare in general, especially in the ideological and value sphere.

At the same time, the information war, in which Russia takes an active part and which is an element of the total war of the West against the Russian world [34], is also being waged in the Middle East. Some actions of Western opponents are not so much directed against Moscow directly, but are aimed at weakening the positions and influence of the Kremlin [35] in the region, as well as destabilizing the situation in the Middle Eastern subsystem. Some of these actions contain elements of reflexive control technologies that influence as well the functioning of the inclusive security architecture being built by Russia. In this regard, in the future, Moscow itself will have to become an active and proactive object of reflexive control in order, through soft manipulations and the use of internal and external contradictions in the region, to direct the decision-making process in the states of the Middle East region in the direction that will be most acceptable and beneficial for Russian Federation.

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