
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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Citation: Vavilov A. The Impact of the SMO on the Policies of Arab Countries and Israel. // Russia and the Moslem World, 2024, № 1 (323), P. 79–93. DOI: 10.31249/rimm/2024.01.05

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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Received: 17.06.2023.

Accepted for publication: 30.06.2023.

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

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

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Citation: Kudayarov K. Türkiye “Thought Factories” on Russia’s SMO in Ukraine // Russia and the Moslem World, 2024, № 1 (323), P. 93–112. DOI: 10.31249/rimm/2024.01.06

* The article was written for the research project on the role of think tanks and expert communities in the development of scientific diplomacy in relations with countries of the global South in terms of shaping Russia’s role in the world and the image of Russia’s future; the project is supported by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the Expert Institute for Social Research. State registration number of the article: 123091200069-1