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**RUSSIA'S PROPAGANDA IN THE MIDDLE EAST
OR INTERCULTURAL ADVANTAGE?**

The primary purpose of the study is to indicate the increasing role of “the war of ideas” in modern conflicts of a different kind. Today, Russia practices information warfare, combining a number of well-known tools of influence with a new embrace of new technologies and capabilities, such as the Internet. Nevertheless, Russia has also initiated the updating of the principles of subversion. These new approaches cover internally and externally concentrated media with a significant online presence (RT and Sputnik are the most known sources), the use of social media (like online discussion boards and comment pages) as a force multiplier to ensure Russian narratives achieve broad reach and penetration, and language skills with the purpose of engaging with target audiences on a wide scale. In this connection, it is considered appropriate to pay attention to the experience of creating the US Foreign Service Institute in the 1950s. The need for the theoretical development of a special course, later a separate science called “intercultural communication”, appeared after the Second World War. Experience of international cooperation during the war and after it, in particular, Peace Corps activists who were sent to various countries for help, revealed a lack of knowledge and skills in intercultural and interethnic communication. Therefore, the article aims to identify the difference between the so-called ethical component and the ultimate goal of the American means of intercultural communication and the persistent attempts of the Russian propaganda machine to attract modern tools and spread its narratives, as well as to identify the specifics of the possible impact on the system of international relations and to avoid negative feedback from the affected population all over the world in general and in the Middle East in particular.

Key words: the war of ideas, tools of influence, principles of subversion, social media, Russian narratives, intercultural communication, ultimate goal, affected population.

Introduction. The research topic “Russia’s Propaganda in the Middle East or Intercultural Advantage?” doesn’t provide an answer to the stated question only, but

it demonstrates its relevance and timeliness at the same time. It seems important to emphasize what techniques and methods are used to form pro-Russian opinion and beliefs among people living in the Middle East, as well as to find out what contributes to the penetration of Russian propaganda into the region. The subject appears to have been covered enough by scientific studies, monographs, analytical articles by leading domestic and foreign scientists. Therefore, the new circumstances caused by aggressive Russian propaganda all over the world and especially in its parts where the population tends to be nostalgic towards the former Soviet Union required a certain need for new analysis and research work.

Aim. The study aims to identify the specifics of the possible impact at the system of international relations and to avoid negative feedback from the affected population not in the Middle East only but in the other parts of the world by means of objective clarification of the reasons and motives for Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine.

Materials and methods. The study is based on the texts of international documents, research papers of international think tanks, articles by national and international scientists, analytical reviews of the mass media, etc. The case study, event analysis, and fragmentary comparative methods were applied to analyze the relative success of Russia's propaganda in the defined region, the principles of its practical implementation, broad feedback from scientists, politicians, and experts. The instruments of discourse analysis were applied to indicate Russian narratives which are subject to dissemination in the information space of the Middle East and Africa.

Results and Discussions. The Middle East region, which has long been the target of the Kremlin's information operations, is flooded with disinformation from Moscow against the backdrop of the invasion of Ukraine, launched on February 24, 2022. This campaign involves the use of various propaganda tools, including mass media, social networks, cultural events etc. Russian disinformation is quite effective and successful and aims to create a favorable image of Russia in the eyes of the local population. Therefore, the study of the problem of the reasons for the successful promotion of Russian propaganda policy in the Middle East is an important task for understanding geopolitical processes in the region.

One of the key actors in this matter is the Russian Federation and its propaganda. Russian propaganda is one of the main weapons in the hands of the Kremlin, which allows it to influence world politics, public sentiment in other countries and realize its great power ambitions.

According to the US-researcher McLuhan, the “sheer inclusiveness” of information as a medium and as a concept expands both the field of battle and the semantic field of war. “Real, total war has become information war,” notes McLuhan in *The Medium is the Massage*, “it is being fought by subtle electric informational media – under cold conditions, and constantly” (MacDonald, 2012).

Russia's information war in Ukraine is a systematic campaign of influence in the information space on the public worldview and opinions of the people, which aims to create a negative image of Ukraine and its authorities. Knowledge of the methods and techniques used in information warfare to spread propaganda and disinformation can help Ukraine more effectively fight Moscow's provocations and protect itself from its negative influence. The Middle East is a region where conflicts and tense situations have always existed.

Considering the specifics of the relative success of Russian propaganda in the Middle East, there is a certain possibility to turn to the example of the creation of the US Foreign Service Institute in the 1950s. The need for theoretical development of a special course, a later and a separate science, "Intercultural communication", appeared after the Second World War. Experience of international cooperation during the war and after her, in particular, Peace Corps activists who were sent to various places for help, revealed a lack of knowledge and skills in intercultural and interethnic communication, which led to failures in positive intentions of volunteers. This became the impetus for the creation in 1946 in the USA special Institute of Foreign Service (Foreign Service Institute), which was led by Edward Hall. This became the impetus for the creation in 1946 in the USA special Institute of Foreign Service (Foreign Service Institute), which was led by Edward Hall. This institution was supposed to train diplomats, scouts, Peace Corps volunteers, international military and other specialists to work abroad, and promote the elimination of interracial and interethnic conflicts. E. Hall involved specialists from various fields – psychologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, culturologists, etc.

Intercultural communication as an academic discipline is taking its toll beginning in 1951–1955, associated with the name of the American researcher, anthropologist Edward H. Hall. It is he who introduces the scientific Intercultural communications discourse term "intercultural communication", and considers it "the goal of ideal that a person should strive for in his desire as best as possible and adapt more effectively to the surrounding world." Intercultural communication is interaction between people of different cultures. The first study of intercultural communication originated in the United States in 1946, when the Diplomatic Service Institute in Washington passed the Diplomatic Service Act. It provides linguistic and anthropological training for foreign diplomats (Jandt, 2020). The courses prepare American diplomats and other specialists to develop their professional skills. It helps them build relationships with other countries and cultures. Finally, it helps them promote the capabilities of the US foreign policy community.

Russian propaganda can be used to support various parties in these conflicts and spread an ideology that opposes the interests of Ukraine and the region in general. Therefore, studying the impact of Russian propaganda on the Middle East can help Ukraine and its partners in the region understand how to defend their interests in this context. Moreover, Russian propaganda can affect diplomatic relations between the countries of the Middle East and change the attitude towards Ukraine and its partners.

If the first actor of the problem is Russia, then the second is undoubtedly the Middle East. This is a region in Western Asia and North Africa, which at one time was traditionally the geopolitical sphere of the USSR. Although Moscow has not been able to regain the level of influence it enjoyed before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Putin is now doing his best to change that, largely through propaganda.

Russia has always made efforts to extend its influence where political instability and regional security crises exist or are potentially brewing. The Middle East is a conflict-prone region with complex relations between states and peoples due to territorial conflicts, religious and ethnic differences, as well as geopolitical interests. Conflicts in the Middle East are often international in nature, involving external actors, which makes it much more difficult to solve all the existing problems. It is worth emphasizing that a large part of the Middle Eastern states have authoritarian

and undemocratic regimes that sympathize with the Russian regime. Authoritarian regimes characterize the state of political life of society, in which there is a partial or complete removal of the people from state power, restrictions and violations of formally declared rights and freedoms of man and citizen (Tsvik, 2006, p. 117). Rigid authoritarian regimes of the patriarchal-traditional type persist in Qatar, UAE, Yemen, Iraq, Oman, Bahrain and Egypt. Jordan and Kuwait have a moderate-authoritarian regime. Syria and Saudi Arabia are classified as totalitarian states. In such countries, there is usually no independent media, freedom of speech, human rights and other democratic freedoms (Тымчук, 2009, p. 52).

Authoritarian countries see support and strength in Russia because of its opposition to the ideas of globalization, loud speeches about the responsibility of the United States and its European allies for instability in the Middle East, and help in the fight against terrorism. Russia, in turn, equates the preservation of the status quo in the Middle East with the reduction of terrorist threats on the territory of its state, the increase in opportunities for concluding agreements with autocratic states, and the reduction of US influence in the region (Jensen, 2018, p.266). Moscow seeks to support the existing state structures and governments of the Middle East against both external intervention and internal insurgencies.

It is not surprising that for such purposes, the Russian Federation not only helps countries militarily and economically, but is also ready to defend them on the international stage, using its influential position, putting forward the issue to help its Middle Eastern allies. For example, Russia can block UN resolutions criticizing authoritarian regimes in the Middle East or use its veto vote in the Security Council.

Russia actively spreads its version of events in the Middle East and uses information resources to influence the local population.

It has found a rich source of material for criticism of the West while cultivating a sympathetic regional audience. The development of digital technologies in the Middle East and the increasing dependence of people's political organizations on social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter) creates the conditions for Russia to promote a disinformation agenda – especially since the most active users of social media are young people, who tend to be the driving force of street protests and representing almost half of the entire population.

The two most prominent Kremlin media outlets in the region are RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic. Their goal is to strengthen the Kremlin's legitimacy and discredit the West. The channel covers a wide range of events in the world from the point of view of the Russian government. Instead of using straight propaganda or hard ideological narratives, RT Arabic creates its own style of persuasive soft power on social media. Over the past few decades, two major developments have turned RT Arabic into an important asset. First, the "Arab Spring" and the role of social media in the upheavals made Russia realize that the Middle Eastern information space provides the Kremlin with ample opportunities to promote its strategic narratives.

Polls conducted seven months before Russia's military intervention in Syria showed that RT Arabic was among the three most popular news channels in six Arab countries (Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE and Iraq). Second, Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015 marked Russia's return to the region and thus forced the Kremlin to establish a local propaganda unit. While Moscow's military intervention in Syria was an exceptional escalation since the end of the Cold

War, running counter to its traditional policy of avoiding direct intervention, the intervention is in line with Russia's support for a longtime ally.

Skillfully balancing exposure and concealment, RT Arabic fulfills a legitimate function of portraying Russia's presence and power in a positive light (Jensen, 2018, p. 270). The Arab-speaking population believes that Putin is the man who led his country out of the chaos of perestroika orchestrated by Western leaders who conspired to collapse the Soviet Union, just as they tried to fragment the Arab region through the 2011 uprisings. In addition, in their opinion, he is a leader who challenged the Western conspiracy to democratize Eastern Europe, created the West's dependence on Russian energy resources, interfered in the US presidential election, successfully stabilized the Syrian regime despite opposition from the West and Islamic groups, and moved closer to Arab governments as their differences with the West deepened (Salah, 2022).

Regional polls conducted in 2018 showed that the percentage of young Arabs who consider the US an ally fell from 63% in 2016 to 35%, while Russia is increasingly seen as the main non-Arab ally and 20% see it as the region's best friend outside the Middle East (Attias, 2019). Reliance on the news platforms of social media in the Middle East allows Moscow to reach millions of people. Russia Today and Sputnik Arabic generate much more on Twitter content than BBC Arabic or Al Jazeera. Meanwhile, RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic publish an average of 180 and 87 tweets per day, Al Jazeera averages 55 tweets and BBC Arabic only 32 (Janadze, 2022). There are many topics that appeal to the Middle Eastern population. For example, the essence of one of them in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war is that Russia allegedly opposes "external interference in the sovereign affairs of the country", as stated in the report of the Marshall Center. This is exactly what the people of Iraq can appeal to, into which US and allied troops were introduced in 2003. (Sher and Hassan, 2022).

In general, RT and Sputnik cultivate the image of Moscow as a stabilizing force. Given the anger felt by many in the Middle East over failed Western operations on their soil, the decline in trust in the US over inefficient policies in the region, and the proliferation of protests and demonstrations, this narrative naturally works.

Russia's main narratives regarding disinformation in the region originate from the superpower complex inherited from the USSR. Russia's strategy in the Middle East is still influenced by the Soviet way of thinking, which depicts the world in a simplistic but pernicious dichotomy of Russia versus the West. The Soviet Union built close relations with many countries in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s, taking advantage of anti-American sentiment through Washington's support for Israel. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union came as a shock to Russia and left the country's foreign policy in disarray. Given the political upheavals of the 1990s and the severe economic crisis, The Kremlin was forced to focus on the economic dimension of relations with the Middle East, but Russia's great power ambitions did not disappear completely.

The Middle East is fertile ground for Russia to advance its dominant foreign policy narrative that demonizes the West. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Russian-funded satellites broadcasting in Arabic began to popularize a barrage of conspiracies about the origin of the virus, accusing the West of creating it in a laboratory. The absurdity of these narratives can only be explained by the delusional ideology and outdated bipolar worldview that still dominates the thinking of key Kremlin officials today. Most of them were trained by the State Security Committee,

better known as the KGB, so the vast majority of Russian intelligence and security officials are nostalgic for the superpower status that Soviet Russia once enjoyed (Janadze, 2022).

The official reaction of the West to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is another element in the formation of support for Putin among the Arab population. For Putin's supporters, the Western response to the Ukrainian crisis demonstrates double standards and contradicts the prevailing Western discourse on the Arab crisis. As for the case of Ukraine, the main Western countries characterized the Russian war as an invasion in violation of international law, stated that Russia's annexation of Ukrainian land is illegal, and called for global protests against Russia.

They urged free and democratic nations to supply arms and ammunition to enhance the Ukrainian resistance, support its right to use force against the aggressor, and encourage Russia's boycott while isolating its facilities from global finances and banks (Salah, 2022).

And vice versa, in the case of the Arab countries, the same Western countries ignored it, either participating in the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 or not. The invasion, which was seen as a violation of international law, was framed as an act of "liberation." In addition, for decades, Western countries did not pay attention to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands, ignored the actual annexation of the Palestinian territories by the Israeli government, and considered the resistance of Palestinians and Iraqis as terrorism. In fact, the Arab world is quite polarized by prevailing dualities, and the doubts about the veracity of the Western pro-Ukrainian narrative seem to serve the Russian narrative, which often highlights these contradictions (Salah, 2022).

Today, many media platforms in Arab countries (including but not limited to Alikhbaria Syria, Sky News Arabia, Al Mayadeen, and Alchourouk in Tunisia) are adopting a narrative that justifies the Russian invasion by citing Russia's right to defend its national security. It follows that Ukraine is a puppet of the West, which initiated hostilities and threatened Russia. Furthermore, to make the war more understandable to the Arab mass audience, comparisons are often made between a series of color revolutions in Eastern Europe and the unrest of the Arab Spring, arguing that these two events are simply a conspiracy of the West (Salah, 2022).

The dream of a multipolar world may be another explanation for Putin's support throughout the Arab region. Russia's invasion of Ukraine helped advance narratives about a new world order emerging, motivated by China's growing economic influence and Russia's geopolitical expansion. In this narrative, analysis is intertwined with wishful thinking, nostalgia, and Arab discontent with the prevailing unipolar system. As mentioned earlier, the global institutions created by the West seem politically inconsistent in relation to the Arab crisis. Except for the Arab oil monarchies, development and production figures in the Arab world today remain dire.

In this context, many inhibitors of the Arab world live in poverty and war conditions, some of them are forced to emigrate, while several Arab countries are on their way to turning into failed states. Recovery measures for these countries may take decades. In fact, future ambitions are mixed with collective memories of the Cold War and, nostalgia for the USSR as an ally of Arab regimes, some kind of guarantor for the balance of power, a reliable source of military and economic aid, and a political supporter of ambitious plans.

Below are some of the most common methods used by the Kremlin to spread false stories and disinformation: a misleading headline; false facts; fake visual effects; denial of facts; lack of evidence; exaggeration or overgeneralization; changing the source, citation or context; load of words or metaphors; ridicule, discredit, belittlement; totum pro parte ("whole for part"); whataboutism; concealment of sources; conspiracy theories; joining the group; drowning facts with emotions; creating a context (Jensen, 2018).

Authoritarian regimes, along with Russia, are using social media to portray Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine as David vs. Goliath – and, incredibly, Western powers as Goliath vs. Russia's David. On Twitter, for example, simply typing "Ukraine" in Arabic [Ukraniya] results in a bunch of mostly pro-Russian messages. Arab coverage of Russia's war against Ukraine and its widespread anti-democratic message is a pressing issue, likely to lead to thousands of militants joining the war on Russia's side to fight the West in Ukraine. If liberal democracies continue to ignore the information warfare waged by authoritarian states around the world, a Syria or Libya scenario may develop in the heart of Europe (Oweidat, 2022)

Russia's close cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries, as one of the consequences of a successful propaganda policy, has led to the fact that Iran is now supplying the Russian Federation with Shahed-136/131 combat drones, with which the Russian occupiers seek to destroy civilian infrastructure. The Arab world has largely taken a wait-and-see attitude toward this conflict. True, the most influential Arab countries supported Ukraine during the vote for the resolution in the UN General Assembly. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Libya voted for it. Iraq and Algeria abstained; Morocco did not vote. As expected, the only open ally of the Russian aggressor among the Arab countries was the Assad regime in Syria. The Arab countries are extremely alarmed by the fact that, as a result of the war, Ukraine will not be able to supply the previously estimated amount of grain and other agricultural products to the foreign market this year, which will lead to serious problems.

Russian propaganda in the Middle East actively spreads misinformation about Ukraine and its citizens. This can lead to an increase in the number of false and negative stereotypes about the country, its culture and people.

This problem is important for Ukraine both from the point of view of security and from the point of view of the country's economic and political situation. The consequence of the propaganda may be distrusted by Middle Eastern countries towards Ukraine, which may undermine Ukraine's efforts to attract international support in the fight against Russian aggression. This, in turn, will lead to the escalation of the conflict.

Conclusions. As a result of the conducted research, it is possible to draw certain conclusions. The use of various ideological means and tools to promote its risky political course in the Russian case is aimed at spreading propaganda and falsification of the real goal of aggression against neighboring countries and Ukraine personally and to spread its influence as a descendant of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. In the American case, the ultimate goal of implementing the principles of intercultural communication is aimed at establishing trusting relationships with representatives of countries with different cultures and customs, particularly Middle Eastern countries. The USA, implementing its course of intercultural communication, aims foremost to find a common language and understanding among its opponents based on democratic

values, aspiration for freedom, and free choice for its existence. Russia, in turn, tries to justify the seizure of foreign territories and the forcing of the population on the occupied lands to the ambiguous standards and values of its Russian peace.

One of Russia's main tools for promoting its own propaganda in the Middle East is television, in particular RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic, channels used to spread propaganda and disinformation among the Arabic-speaking population. In its programs, RT Arabic demonizes the US and the West, claiming that they have a negative impact on the development of the region, and actively promotes the position of Russia as an important player and partner that ensures security in the region. The increase in the number of people using the Internet leads to an increase in the influence of social networks and other online resources on the formation of public opinion, and Russia successfully uses this to spread its ideas.

The reasons for the strengthening of Russian propaganda in the world and in the Middle East region are the strengthening of Russian foreign policy, the expansion of Russia's influence on the international arena, the desire to discredit the actions of its competitors, the attraction of Middle Eastern countries into its sphere of influence, as well as the strengthening of its own internal and external authority.

The negative impact of Russian propaganda at the Middle East is that it can influence the attitude of the population towards Russian politics and even affect geopolitical relations between countries, as well as have consequences for stability and security in the region. To prevent the influence of disinformation, it is necessary to take measures to strengthen media and information freedom, implement counter-propaganda, as well as promote the development of critical thinking and information literacy among the population and journalists, providing support and funding for the development of free and independent media that can provide access to objective information and true information.

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ПРОПАГАНДА РОСІЇ НА БЛИЗЬКОМУ СХОДІ ЧИ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНА ПЕРЕВАГА?

Резюме

Основна мета дослідження – вказати на зростання ролі «війни ідей» у сучасних конфліктах різного характеру. Сьогодні Росія практикує інформаційну війну, поєднуючи низку добре відомих інструментів впливу з новими охопленням нових технологій і можливостей, таких як Інтернет. Тим не менш, Росія теж ініціювала оновлення принципів підривної діяльності. Ці нові підходи охоплюють внутрішні та зовнішні концентровані медіа зі значною присутністю в Інтернеті (RT і Sputnik є найвідомішими джерелами), використання соціальних медіа (як онлайн-форуми та сторінки коментарів) як примножувач сили для забезпечення широкого охоплення російських наративів проникнення та мовні навички з метою залучення цільової аудиторії в широкому масштабі. У зв'язку з цим вбачається за доцільне звернути увагу на досвід створення Інституту дипломатичної служби США в 1950–х роках. Потреба в теоретичній розробці спеціального курсу, згодом окремої науки під назвою «міжкультурна комунікація», виникла після Другої світової війни. Досвід міжнародної співпраці під час війни та після неї,

зокрема, активістів Корпусу Миру, яких відправляли на допомогу в різні країни, виявив брак знань та навичок міжкультурного та міжетнічного спілкування. Тому стаття має на меті виявити різницю між так званою етичною складовою та кінцевою метою американських засобів міжкультурної комунікації та наполегливими спробами російської пропагандистської машини залучити сучасні інструменти та поширити свої наративи, а також виявити специфіку можливого впливу на систему міжнародних відносин та уникнення негативних відгуків від постраждалого населення в усьому світі загалом і на Близькому Сході зокрема.

Ключові слова: війна ідей, інструменти впливу, принципи підривної діяльності, соціальні медіа, російські наративи, міжкультурна комунікація, кінцева мета, постраждале населення.