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DISTINCTIVE NARRATIVE OF THE UKRAINE WAR IN THE ARAB WORLD

INTRODUCTION

The war in Ukraine has brought new geopolitical challenges for global security and international relations, including relationship with the Arab and Muslim world. In fact, the MENA region has been facing its own conflicts in Syria and Yemen, as well as political, social and economic tensions in Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan or Libya for many years. In addition, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still affects political, security and social unrest in the Middle East.

Therefore, the initial response of the Arab world to the war in Ukraine was ambiguous, and many states avoided direct involvements in the rivalry between East and West. Official statements released by local authorities at the very beginning of the war usually highlighted neutral positions towards the conflict in Ukraine, and they included similar narratives based on the following phrases: *nutābi 'ū bi-qalq bāligh taṭawwurāt al-azma al-ukrāniyya* (we are following the developments in Ukraine with great concern), *nad 'ū ṭarafay an-nizā' ila iltizām bi-al-ḥiwār wa ijrā' mufāwadaṭ* (we appeal both sides of the conflict to respect dialogue and enter into negotiations) or *nad 'ū ila ḥimāyat waḥda arādī ukrāniyā* (we appeal to preserve the unity of Ukrainian lands) and *ḍabṭ an-nafs* (restraint). This type of the narration style was evident, among others, in the public discourse of the Arab League delivered on 28 February, 2022 (*Li-mādha inqasama*, 2022).

However, some official statements released by the Arab states included additional political messages, and they demonstrated emotional reactions to the ongoing situation in Ukraine, as well as evaluation of the war from local perspectives. Therefore, the article aims at presentation of distinctive and expressive responses to the conflict released by ministries of foreign affairs (MFA) and political groups, including opposition leaders.

However, the research is also confronted with ambivalent statements of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or Qatar in order to demonstrate explicit and inexplicit policy of the Arab world towards the Ukraine conflict. It is also important to note that the study is combined with analysis of political, social and economic backgrounds and contexts which affected the narrative presented by Arab states.

This article is divided into four sections. The first part reflects analysis of MENA's concerns over the Ukraine war, and the second section deals with emotional responses to the conflict. Moreover, the third part includes assessment of the crisis by local oppo-

nents. However, the fourth section refers to international and economic consequences of ambiguous policy of the Gulf states.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology implemented in this article relies on critical analysis and evaluation of data, including qualitative data. The research materials are based on official statements released in Arabic from 24 February 2022 to April 2022 by MFA of particular MENA's states, including official responses and press releases regarding different claims of political leaders and parties operating in the region. Moreover, the timeframe of the statements is not accidental because during the first weeks of the conflict Arab countries have formulated their explicit or implicit stands towards the war in Ukraine.

Furthermore, stylistic features played an important role in selection of examples presented in the article. The analysis of the statements refers to Arabic stylistics and rhetoric which implies informative and affirmative utterances (*khobar*) as well as performative emotional utterances (*inshā'*) that reflect different techniques of narrative and syntax based on imperative, prohibition or interrogative and vocative sentences. The structure of discourse relies on clear, lucid words and brief sentences or appropriate arguments. However, the syntactic structure of Arabic texts is also concerned with expressive epithets, similes and metaphorical expressions that contain additional semantic features describing main meanings (Siwiec, 2008: 128–143).

Moreover, the analysis of the statements is combined with academic publications which reflect political, social and economic conditions in the Arab world, as well as different contexts that affect the narrative.

MENA'S CONCERNS OVER THE UKRAINE WAR

Along with the domination of neutral claims, some Arab countries have released statements that demonstrated growing concerns over tragic developments in Ukraine. For example, the press release of the MFA of Egypt from 24 February 2022 insists to solve the conflict by dialogue and diplomacy within both sides of the crisis in order to reduce social and humanitarian consequences.

The Ministry adopts appropriate epithets such as the word *masā'ī* that designates intensification of efforts to achieve peace. This word is different from the neutral and more popular equivalent *juhd* (effort) (*Al-Khārījīyya*, 2022). The epithets describe certain emotions and they include additional messages that stand for complex foreign policy in the MENA region. It is also worth mentioning that Egypt's statement does not exclude Russia from the negotiations, and the two-way foreign policy is concerned with maintaining relationships both with the Russian Federation and the West that supports Ukraine. For example, Egypt relies its defence strategy on US military equipment and financial assistance estimated at more than 1 billion USD. The deliveries consist, among others, of F-15 aircrafts or short-range missiles. However, Egypt has diversified its policy, and cooperates with Russia in the field of Sukhoi Superjet 100

aircrafts and other equipment (Dizboni, El-Baz, 2021). Moreover, Cairo is interested in growing number of Russian tourists who represent more than one-third of the tourist stays in Egypt. It should be noted that tourism was affected by the tragic terrorist attack against the Russian plane, which exploded over Egypt's Sinai in 2005 (Rabie, 2022). Moreover, Egypt is also concerned with grain crisis, which aggravated wheat deliveries during the Ukraine war. In fact, in 2019 around 55% of wheat imports to Egypt relied on Russia's supplies, and only 14,7% came from Ukraine (Al-Ghazi, 2022).

Similarly to Egypt, the importance of negotiations and peace talks is also emphasized by Jordanian diplomacy, which issued a statement on 24 February 2022. It consists of the expressions *badhl aqsa al-juhūd* (to make the greatest effort) and *al-fatra al-ḥaraja* (the critical period) that raise greater concerns of Jordan's authorities than these claimed by the Egyptian side. The superlative form *aqsa* (the greatest) and the adjective *ḥaraja* (critical) reinforce the pessimistic approaches of authorities over further consequences of the Ukraine war (*Al-Urdun yad 'ū*, 2022).

Jordan demonstrates a certain distance to any involvements in the Ukraine crisis, which could deteriorate its relationships with Moscow and Western allies. Thus, since 1946 Jordan's economy is based on international assistance in the frame of new technologies, finances or transfer of different commodities, as well as cooperation in agriculture, health or education sectors (Hammad, 2014: 11–32).

In addition, Amman is concerned with security situation in Syria, which poses a risk to Jordan's borders. Likewise, Jordanian authorities are aware of Kremlin's support to Al-Assad regime and military operations against opposition forces, including Islamist insurgents (Al Sharif, 2022). Paradoxically, the Russian involvement in Syria decreases terrorist threats for border crossings with Jordan, and Amman does not want to change these guarantees.

Furthermore, some statements reflect growing concerns over the situation of Arab nationals in Ukraine, as in the communiqué released by Algeria on 26 February 2022. The MFA assures that Algerian authorities are monitoring the developments in Ukraine and they are organizing evacuation flights. The Ministry also recommends caution and vigilance, as well as compliance with the recommendations of local security services. Algeria encourages to stay in touch with diplomatic missions in Poland, Romania or Hungary. The statement also confirms the death of an Algerian citizen in Kharkiv city but the message is limited to short information about the deceased and condolences to the family (*Wizārat al-khārijyya*, 2022). The briefness is caused by the fact that Algerian authorities try to avoid panic within families of other nationals staying in Ukraine. Indeed, the tragic incident of the Algerian citizen concerns Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, a 25-year old student, who was killed on 28 February 2022 by a sniper during his escape to the shelter along with other students from Egypt and Sudan (*Algerian graduate*, 2022).

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE CONFLICT

Lebanon is one of the rare countries, which expressed its objections to the ongoing situation in Ukraine on 25 February 2022. The MFA of Lebanon emphasises

the breach of international law by Russia, and it appeals to immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. The statement also includes an emotional impact, which is exemplified by the word *ijtiyāḥ* that designates the sense of destruction, annihilation or eradication. It differs from other synonyms such as *ghazwa* or *iḥtilāl*, which define military operations and seizure of external territories. The war in Ukraine is also described by the words *māsī* and *law‘a*. (Al-Jamal, 2022). The first determines a tragedy and a disaster, and the second variant identifies grief and anguish. Thus, the emotional charges of these words indicate intensification of misery and destruction (*Al-Ma‘ānī*, 2023).

Moreover, the statement claims that Lebanon has experienced in the past similar interferences or invasions that violated the sovereignty of the country, and local societies were affected by regional conflicts. The Lebanese diplomacy does not refer to any particular historical events but it suggests tragic experiences during the civil war from 1975 to 1990. The fights took place between Christian, Shia, Sunni or Druze communities, including Palestinian political factions and Lebanese paramilitary groups and parties. The battlefield also became an arena of international rivalries between main superpowers during the Cold War in the 80ties: The Soviet Union and the US. In addition, regional players such as Israel or Syria were involved in the conflict as well. For example, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and launched military operations against Palestinian camps. Likewise, the war still evokes emotions and martyrological feelings within the Lebanese society (Haugbolle, 2010: 5–28).

Furthermore, on 27 February 2022 Al-Assad regime presented an opposite statement, which declared fully support to the Kremlin’s policy in Ukraine. However, the press release issued by the MFA of Syria consists of various stylistic devices that express negative approaches towards Kiev and its Western allies. For example, Al-Assad identifies Syrian and Russian alliance as *ḥarakat taṣḥīḥ at-tārīkh* (movement of history’s revision) and *taṣwīb al-būsula naḥwa al-ḥaqq* (redirection of the compass toward the truth) (‘Awda, 2022). The emotional and metaphorical expressions refer to Al-Assad’s concept of new political order in the world, including the Middle East. Indeed, this concept revives the polarisation between East and West during the Cold War in the 80ties, and it reflects Russian political, military and economic support to Arab states such as Syria, Iraq or Egypt and Libya.

Moreover, Al-Assad condemns Western activities against Russia such as economic sanctions, and he stresses that Moscow is just defending its borders and internal security against Western threats. The Syrian president also refers to the US military interventions in Iraq or Afghanistan that exemplify, in his opinion, violation of international law and risks for global security (‘Awda, 2022).

Al-Assad also attributes certain epithets to the US foreign policy which is called *ra‘nā* (reckless, mindless), *nifāq* (hypocrisy) or *taḍlīl* (manipulation). Besides, the statement also contains the expression *quttā‘ at-ṭuruq*, which signifies literally a robber who crosses the road and attacks innocent people (*Al-Ma‘ānī*, 2023). However, this metaphorical expression is attributed to Western opponents. In addition, the accumulation of the epithets aims at intensification of negative image of the West, and the narrative demonstrates uncompromising foreign policy which adapts the worst names to enemies.

ASSESSMENT OF THE CONFLICT BY LOCAL OPPONENTS

Contrary to the statements of official authorities, local opposition forces express critical views on the war in Ukraine. For example, the member of the Allegiance to Resistance Faction affiliated with Hezbollah, Ibrahim al-Musawi declares that his country has no interests in defending the US policy in Ukraine, and Russia was always standing by Lebanon. The same opinion was voiced by Wiam Wahhab who is the founder of the left-wing Arab Unification Party which is affiliated with the March 8 Alliance composed of different pro-Syrian factions (*Al-Mawāqif*, 2022).

The claims demonstrate reinforcement of regional coalition of anti-Western forces headed by Iran in cooperation with Hezbollah and Al-Assad's regime under the auspices of Russia. Indeed, these countries provided military and economic assistance one to another especially during the conflict in Syria. Al-Assad regime was supported by Hezbollah insurgents who were fighting with opposition forces in northern parts of Syria, and the military base in Tartus defined Russian sphere of influences in the Middle East (Nizameddin, 2008: 475–500).

Furthermore, the anti-Western coalition is also joined by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen who seized the capital Sana in 2014 and established its own government in opposition to the UN-recognized authorities headed by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi in Aden.

On 21 February 2022 Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, a senior member of the Houthi Supreme Political Council recognized the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk provinces (*Yemen's Houthi*, 2022). The statement was released two days before the Russian invasion in Ukraine, and it demonstrated ahead sympathy to the Kremlin's policy. In addition, the claim aimed at drawing attention to Yemeni separatism, which according to Houthis is similar to political approaches of pro-Russian insurgents in Eastern Ukraine.

The negative views towards Ukraine radicalized in March 2022 when Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi stated that the war in Ukraine is caused by the Jews and the Jewish president Zelensky. The message was addressed to local militants that advocate for anti-Zionist and anti-Israel sentiments along with Iran (*Yemeni-Houthi leader*, 2022).

Furthermore, the East-West rivalry also affected Libya and the internationally recognized government of the Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh in Tripoli that conducts political disputes with the former Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha who is leading the House of Representatives in Tobruk. Bashagha's position on the war in Ukraine was vague, although he condemned officially the Russian invasion and declared his support to Western partners. However, Moscow became one of the few states which recognized Bashagha's government, and the Kremlin claimed that the authorities in Tobruk give the opportunity to unite the conflicted sides in Libya. Moscow also proposed military support to the airbase in Qardabiyah near Sirte (Abdullah, 2022). The Kremlin insists in this regard to involve Libya into Russian sphere of influences, and to put pressure on pro-Western government of Dbeibeh. Thus, Bashagha did not respond clearly to Moscow's statements, and he still balances between Western and Eastern pressures.

Moreover, Sudan is also affected by the rivalry of local factions. For example, one of the Sudan's prominent leaders, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as

Hemedti visited Moscow and held talks about further cooperation with Russian officials on 23 February 2022. The visit also reflected the establishment of military base at Port-Sudan that was approved in 2020 by Vladimir Putin. The MFA of Sudan declared that the visit was scheduled previously, and it has not any coincidences with the Ukraine crisis. In addition, the MFA released the statement that appealed to dialogue and diplomatic resolution of the crisis (Ramani, 2022).

It is important to note that Hemedti was appointed the Deputy Chairman of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) following the Sudanese coup d'état in 2019. He is also the leader of the paramilitary militia Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that was responsible for brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests in 2019 (El Mquirmi, 2021). On 15 April 2023 Hemedti started the conflict with General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan who is the Chairman of the TMC. The political dispute have led to violent fights between the RSF and regular army headed by al-Burhan. Hemedti's visit to Moscow in 2022 could be exploited by the Kremlin to put pressure on al-Burhan to expand Russian influences in Sudan and other African countries.

CONSEQUENCES OF AMBIVALENT POLICY

Neutral and ambiguous positions of certain Middle Eastern states had further consequences for international relations and energy sector in the world. For example, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman also known as MBS initiated phone calls with Russia's leader Putin and Ukraine's president Zelensky on 3 March 2022. According to the official press release, the conversation between Russian and Saudi leaders has focused on stabilization of energy market and oil sectors in the frame of bilateral cooperation within the OPEC Plus. In addition, Putin criticized Western economic sanctions against Russia, which are, in his opinion, politicized and they affect common interests. MBS, for his part, underlined the importance of diplomatic talks and dialogue, and he offered mediation between the two sides of the conflict (*Saudi crown prince offers*, 2022).

Moreover, during the conversation with president Zelensky, MBS also declared his support for peaceful solutions and he offered his mediation as well as humanitarian aid to Ukraine. However, the talks with president Putin seemed more important for Riyadh because of the strategic role of hydrocarbons for Saudi economy (*Saudi Crown Prince supports*, 2022).

It should be also noted that the calls had further geopolitical consequences. In April 2022 Saudi Arabia decided to cut oil production by 500 thousand per day, and then 2 million barrels per day in October 2022 in cooperation with the OPEC plus. These decisions had an impact on collaboration between Riyadh and Washington that declared reevaluation of ties with the Saudi monarchy. Therefore, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee has appealed to freeze all contracts, including military assistance to Saudi Arabia. Besides, accusations against the Saud dynasty regarding the violation of human rights or the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi have dominated the debate (*Saudi Arabia*, 2018).

The Saudi diplomacy referred to the accusations and presented different counter-arguments arguing that the modification in oil production has economic backgrounds

caused by decrease of the demand in worldwide markets. In addition, the monarchy granted around 500 million USD of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and participated in negotiations on release of prisoners of war between Russia and Ukraine (*Safīrat as-su'ūdiyya*, 2022).

Sometimes, vague responses are caused by previous decisions like in the case of the UAE and Qatar. On 25 February 2022 Albania and the US submitted a resolution condemning the Russian invasion in Ukraine at the UN. The initiative was supported by eleven members of the UN but China, India and the UAE have abstained, and Russia applied a veto at the UN Security Council (*Security Council*, 2022). The UAE reduced the impact of discrepancies among Western allies, and on 26 February 2022 the MFA issued a statement which appeals to immediate de-escalation of the conflict and return to diplomatic talks between the opponents (*Ba'd taṣwīt*, 2022).

Moreover, on 22 February 2022 the Qatar's Minister of Energy Saad Al-Kaabi stressed that his country is unable to replace Russia in gas supplies to Europe because of long-term contracts with Asian markets. This statement was exploited later by Russian propaganda that highlighted the importance of Russian hydrocarbons for stability of European energy sectors. However, after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Qatari authorities reduced the tension and declared fully cooperation with the West in LNG deliveries to main European ports. Qatari diplomacy has issued simultaneously an official statement, which emphasized the importance of de-escalation and dialogue that was called *taghlīb ṣawt al-ḥikma* (domination of wisdom's voice) (*Al-Mawāqif*, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The research demonstrates that apart from the neutral stands towards the Ukraine, some Arab states have released distinctive and emotional reactions at the beginning of the conflict. Thus, Egyptian and Jordanian authorities express their deep concerns over the crisis, and Algeria stands for the situation of its citizens in Ukraine. The study argues that these countries are afraid of any involvements in the conflict because of certain economic and military cooperation with Russia or the US like in the case of Egypt and Algeria. Besides, Jordan is aware of the security guarantees from Russia which fights ISIS terrorists in neighbouring Syria. This type of the statements is reinforced by appropriate epithets that contain additional semantic features related to fear, uncertainty and insecurity.

Moreover, the research demonstrates that Lebanon and Syria are the rare countries which declared explicit responses to the war in Ukraine. It should be noted that certain stylistic devices play a crucial role in the statements released by both states. The Lebanese communiqué includes the words *ijtiyāh*, *māsī* or *law'a* that designate the multiple sense of destruction, annihilation or eradication caused by the Russian aggression. However, Syria declares the opposite stand that supports the Kremlin and criticizes the West by the metaphorical expressions *taṣwīb al-būsula nahwa al-ḥaqq* (redirection of the compass toward the truth), *quttā' aṭ-ṭuruq* (robbers) or the words *ra'nā'* (reckless, mindless), *nifāq* (hypocrisy) or *taḍlīl* (manipulation).

However, the study also argues that the official statements differ from claims declared by opposition leaders and political factions in Sudan, Lebanon, Yemen or Libya. For example, Fathi Bashagha's government in Tobruk is supported by Russia, and it competes with the Prime Minister Dbeibeh who is allied with the West. In addition, the claims declared by Lebanese pro-Syrian parties affiliated with Hezbollah and Iran, including Houthi rebels in Yemen, reflect similar reactions against the West, and they follow the Kremlin's foreign policy.

It is worth mentioning that the opposition leaders had negative impact on the region, as in the case of General Dagalo who visited Moscow on 23 February 2022. In April 2023 the conflict between Dagalo's paramilitary group the RSF and regular army headed by General Al-Burhan led to violent fights in Sudan. The conflict could be inspired by Moscow that tries to expand its influences in Africa.

Furthermore, the research argues that the Gulf countries have expressed the ambivalent statements that had further consequences for the international relations. The study demonstrates that the talks on oil sectors between MBS and Putin led to reduction of oil production by OPEC plus that affected global energy crisis and has weakened political and military relations between Saudi Arabia and the US. Besides, the talks between MBS and Zelensky enabled to transfer humanitarian aid to Ukraine. In addition, before 24 February 2022 Qatar stated that it is unable to replace Russia in LNG supplies to Europe. Likewise, the UAE abstained the UN-resolution on 25 February 2022 against the Russia's invasion. However, both states released afterwards the neutral statements to relieve tensions with Western allies.

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with distinctive statements released by certain Arab states, including responses of political leaders or parties operating in the MENA region. These statements differ from neutral positions that dominated in the Arab world.

The research argues that the narrative of the statements reflect emotional and explicit reactions to the ongoing situation in Ukraine from local perspectives, as in the case of Lebanon or Syria. However, the study also argues that claims declared by opposition leaders and political factions in Lebanon, Libya or Sudan contradict the official statements released by authorities of these countries. In addition, the analysis is confronted with inexplicit claims of the Gulf countries which demonstrate differences in the narrative of the Ukraine war. Moreover, the article reflects various contexts and complex social, political and economic conditions that affect the statements.

However, the research also demonstrates the importance of stylistic features applied in the statements. Thus, particular words and phrases in Arabic reinforce the messages and express certain stands of local authorities and political leaders towards the Ukraine war and geopolitical tensions.

Keywords: Middle East, Ukraine war, propaganda, media

WYRÓZNIAJĄCA SIĘ NARRACJA WOJNY W UKRAINIE W ŚWIECIE ARABSKIM

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł dotyczy analizy wyróżniających się oświadczeń dotyczących konfliktu ukraińskiego publikowanych przez ministerstwa spraw zagranicznych państw arabskich. Analizy odnoszą się również do deklaracji przywódców politycznych i partii opozycyjnych działających w regionie MENA. Oświadczenia te różnią się zarazem od neutralnych stanowisk deklarowanych przez większość państw arabskich.

Badania zawarte w artykule wskazują ponadto, że wiele oświadczeń odzwierciedla emocjonalne i jednoznaczne reakcje na wojnę w Ukrainie widzianej z lokalnej perspektywy, jak ma to miejsce w przypadku Libanu czy Syrii. Analizy oświadczeń dowodzą zarazem, że deklaracje wygłaszane przez przywódców opozycji i różne frakcje polityczne w Libanie, Libii czy Sudanie stoją w sprzeczności z oficjalnymi oświadczeniami władz tych krajów. Badania w tym zakresie zostały ponadto skonfrontowane z niejednoznacznymi deklaracjami krajów Zatoki Perskiej, co

ukazuje różnice w narracji poszczególnych państw. Artykuł uwzględnia ponadto złożony kontekst danych wypowiedzi, a także różne uwarunkowania społeczno-polityczne i ekonomiczne wpływające na narrację komunikatów.

Artykuł ukazuje także znaczenie określonych środków stylistycznych zastosowanych w oświadczeniach. Poszczególne słowa i wyrażenia w języku arabskim wzmacniają przekaz i wyrażają określone stanowisko przywódców politycznych wobec wojny w Ukrainie.

Słowa kluczowe: Bliski Wschód, wojna w Ukrainie, propaganda, media

