



Perceptions of Russian Strength in Middle East

OE Watch Commentary: Arabic-language media continues to be bullish in its appraisal of Russian influence in the Middle East. The prevalent view is highlighted in the first accompanying article, written by a former member of the Palestinian National Authority who served as its information minister and ambassador to Russia and Egypt. Writing in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, a Saudi daily with wide distribution throughout the region, he notes that Russia has made itself an essential player in the region by maintaining cordial relations with and providing weapons systems to any interested country in the region, while at the same time establishing itself as the main powerbroker in Syria. As a result, he believes that Russia will soon become involved in negotiations between Israel and its Syrian and Palestinian neighbors, though the specifics of that involvement are not yet clear.

Arabic-language media stories have of recent also touted Russia's purported ability to resolve the Yemen and Libya conflicts. The second accompanying excerpt originates from the Yemeni news site *Akhbar al-Yom*. It claims that "Yemeni political circles" believe that Iran and Oman intend to help Russia "establish a foothold" to end the war in Yemen. The third excerpt, from Egypt's semi-official *al-Ahram*, quotes Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, son of the former Libyan dictator, as believing that Russia holds the key to solving the Libyan conflict, given its neutrality and good relations with all parties. The original source for the article is an interview with a political advisor to Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, published in the Arabic-language website of Russia's *RT* and subsequently picked up by several media sources from the region, including *al-Ahram*.

If one is to believe the fourth accompanying excerpt, Russia's regional strength has led three Arab countries (Libya, Sudan, Egypt) to request hosting Russian military bases in their territory. The claim, which was carried by a handful of Arabic-language media sources, including the Qatari daily *al-Sharq* and the Arabic-language website for Turkey's *Anadolu Agency*, originates from a Russian-language website and was first published in Arabic by *Sputnik*, Russia's other main Arabic-language media outlet.

These articles demonstrate how the perception of Russia as the Middle East's new powerbroker remains prevalent in mainstream Arabic-language media. Although not dependent on it, this narrative is reinforced by Russia's Arabic-language media outlets. The Arabic-language operations of *Sputnik* and *RT* have emerged as fundamental tools for the Russian government to continually and cheaply bolster the perception of itself as the new dominant player in regional affairs. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"Russia can be relied upon to resolve the Libyan crisis by virtue of its neutrality..."

Source:

Nabil Amr. "The Russians are Approaching," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 10 March 2019. <https://goo.gl/uYzWmo>

الروس يقتربون

Russia's intelligent diplomacy succeeded in making it natural and necessary for all Middle Eastern countries to have relationships with it. Its trade expanded with all the countries of the region, even its adversaries, and it liberated its arms from the constraints of ideology and the demands of the Cold War, finding its way to most armies without barriers or conditions. The most important achievement has been in terms of the influence it has achieved in Syria...

It is too early to conclude the extent of the Russian role and its specific impact in this area [Israel-Palestine], but it can be said that the Russians are coming.

Source:

"Iran and Oman Pave the Way for Russian Intervention in Yemen," *Akhbar al-Yom*, 19 February 2019. http://akhbaralyom-ye.net/news_details.php?sid=109213

إيران وعمان يمهدان لتدخل روسيا في اليمن نتيجة عدم الحسم

Yemeni political circles considered the bilateral talks between the Sultanate of Oman and Russia to be part of the Iranian-Omani plans through which the three countries seek to establish a foothold for Russia in Yemen.

The political circles said that for more than a year and a half, Oman, Iran and Russia have been looking at this seriously, especially since the war in Yemen has dragged on and in light of the coalition's difficulty to end the coup and help government forces decisively end the conflict.

Source:

"Saif al-Islam Gaddafi: We are Counting on Russia to Resolve the Libyan Crisis," *al-Ahram*, 15 February 2019. <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/696224.aspx>

سيف الإسلام القذافي: نراهن على روسيا لحل الأزمة الليبية

Saif al-Islam, the son of the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, stressed that Russia can be relied upon to resolve the Libyan crisis by virtue of its neutrality. "What we want from Russia and others is to help the Libyans get out of their crisis, stabilize the country and unify their institutions," he said.

Source:

"Seven Countries Announce their Readiness to Host Russian Bases, Including Arab Countries," *Sputnik*, 5 February 2019. <https://goo.gl/sywQNX>

سبع دول تعلن استعدادها لنشر قواعد روسية على أراضيها...منها دول عربية

State governments from across the world, from South-East Asia to South America, have confirmed that they are ready to host Russian naval and land bases on their territory.

According to the Tsar Grad website, some suggested that Russia use all of the infrastructure for its flights.