Обновление тенденций в регионе Средне-Восточной и Северной Африки*

Аннотация

Введение. В статье анализируются ключевые тенденции развития современного Ближнего Востока и Северной Африки (БВСА). Авторы представляют критический ретроспективный обзор выводов, сделанных в их предыдущих работах, посвященных вековым тенденциям развития Ближнего Востока и неомодерну как новому статусу социально-политической реальности.

Результаты исследования. В первой части статьи авторы фиксируют сдвиг некоторых мегатрендов глобального развития, произошедший в результате трансформации мирового порядка в 2020-е гг. Авторы приходят к выводу, что такие мегатренды, как универсализация политических систем, модернизация западного типа и глобализация, устаревают. В то же время налицо усиление антиколониального дискурса в мировой политике и ревизия феномена колониализма. Во второй части статьи показано, как эти тенденции и понятия непосредственно проявляют себя в регионе Ближнего Востока и Северной Африки, влияя на специфику политических процессов и сложность социально-политических систем и институтов, усиливая идеи странового национализма, меняя природу региональных единства и усиление центробежных тенденций в региональном развитии. В третьей части авторы отмечают, что все эти процессы представляют собой своего рода испытание на выносливость для Ближнего Востока и Северной Африки (БВСА) как единого региона, возникшего в колониальную эпоху.

Обсуждение и заключение. Ослабление идеологических связей внутри региона, рост странового национализма, экономическая и политическая дифференциация государств региона, усиление раскола субрегионов ставят под сомнение будущее ближневосточного единства. В то же время растущая тенденция постколониализма теоретически может стать новой интегративной основой для новых ценностей и идей. В этом контексте авторы обозначают такие тенденции развития региона, которые они считают наиболее актуальными и устойчивыми в среднесрочной перспективе.

Ключевые слова: Ближний Восток и Северная Африка, мегатенденции, неомодерн, идеология, национализм, колониализм, постколониализм.


MENA Region Trends Revisited*

Abstract

Introduction. The following article analyzes key development trends of the contemporary Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The authors provide a critical retrospective review of conclusions made in their previous works dedicated to the century-long development trends in the Middle East and neo-modernity as a new status of socio-political reality.

Results. In the first part of the article, they detect a shift in some megatrends of global development that occurred as a result of the world order transformation in the 2020s. The authors conclude that such megatrends as universalization of political systems, Western-type modernization and globalization are becoming outdated. At the same time, an intensification of the anti-colonial discourse in the world politics and a revision of the colonialism phenomenon are in evidence. The second part of the article demonstrates how these trends and notions directly manifest themselves in the MENA region, impacing the specifics of political processes and complexity of socio-political systems and institutes, reinforcing the ideas of country-based nationalism, changing the nature of regional unity and strengthening the centrifugal tendencies in the regional development. In the third part, the authors point out that all these processes provide an endurance test of some sort for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as a unified region that emerged in the colonial era.

Discussion and Conclusion. The weakening of ideological ties within the region, rise of country-based nationalism, economic and political differentiation of the region’s states, increasing division of the subregions call the future of the Middle Eastern unity into doubt. At the same time, a growing post-colonialism trend might theoretically become a new integrative basis for emerging values and ideas. In this context, the authors designate such development trends in the region that are considered by them most relevant and sustainable in mid-term perspective.

Keywords: Middle East and North Africa, megatrends, neo-modernity, ideology, nationalism, colonialism, post-colonialism


Preface

In 2018, the “World Economy and International Relations” journal published an article entitled “The Middle East in the Changing Global Context: The Key Trends of Centennial Development” [3], which evoked a lively reaction from the expert community. It has been a little over five years since that time,
but the Middle East region\(^1\) has been exposed to such tectonic shifts (both in a metaphorical sense, and literally, meaning a devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria in February, 2023), that it seems appropriate now to get back to the issues raised before, and to look at them from a different angle.

First, within the framework of this article, it is planned to cast a retrospective glance at the conclusions made in the above publication, at a time which was, seemingly, not-too-distant past. Although making forecasts, even for a short-term perspective, should not be part of the researcher’s responsibility, the latter is often tempted to take up this thankless task. For this reason, it is quite reasonable to try to determine which evaluations made the authors of the publication appeared to be adequate, judging from today’s position, and which failed to withstand the test of time.

Second, without fearing to fall into the same peridious science trap, with due account of the committed impracticalities and inaccuracies (and, perhaps, some successful insights as well), we would like to dwell on the “key development trends” of the same type, which have been identifiable at the present stage, and have a good chance of remaining sustainable in the future (basically, it is exactly due to this characteristic that they become eligible to fall into the category of trends and megatrends).

In order to get ready to handle this dual task, it seems expedient for us to refresh our contemplations, published about five years ago in the 2018 article, as it will be referred to by us further. From a theoretical and methodological point of view, this research is at the crossroads of several approaches, including the theory of neo-modernism, whose proponent is one of the authors. However, the second co-author prefers to mix upon the methodological palette the most diverse approaches and concepts, which produces a synergetic effect and allows to better understand the formidable reality of the region \([35]\).

The Middle East Five Years Later: Self-Fulfilling and Dampened Forecasts

First of all, it makes sense to comment on a certain time “framing”\(^2\) as designated in the article title. The “century+” image is not accidental. It, most certainly, refers us to the ideas of a renowned British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, who introduced into circulation the concepts of the “long 19th century” (from the Great French Revolution to World War I (1789–1914) and the “short 20th century” (1914–1991) \([24, p. 7–27]\). The authors of the 2018 article definitely proceeded from the concept of the “long century”, trying to demonstrate that the passage of events in the huge and extremely heterogeneous Middle East megaregion was determined, to a large extent, by the tendencies inherited from the 20th century, although already at that time, the question of their serious readjustment was raised \([2]\).

The image of the “century+” was deemed to showcase an organic connection between the system of trends/megatrends designated in the 2018 article, for the 1917–2017 century, and the tendencies underlying the last five years. These five years will be a bridge, connecting

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\(^1\) Generally, researchers define the boundaries of this region, designated by us herein with the employment of this abbreviated term, differently. As a matter of fact, its territory, in our opinion, encompasses the Middle East as such, and North Africa, so it would be more appropriate to refer to it as the MENA region, as it is customary in the academic literature, with relevant organizations and agencies. At the same time, as we prefer not to plunge deeper into terminological debates, we leave aside the term “Greater Middle East”, although it has its own advocates, as well as a more accurate term Broader Middle East, while the term Middle East is used by us only for convenience as an abbreviated name (including Iran, which in the Russian geographic tradition is referred to the Central Middle East) \([1; 4; 7; 18; 22]\).

\(^2\) See about “frames”: \([16]\)
the past, through our present, with the future, which is going to feature in the second part of this article, and whose description, in conformity with the above logic, might perhaps involve the term a “super short 21st century”, being reduced to just a few years. However, here, we would not like to act in the capacity of some self-proclaimed visionaries.

For the purpose of a simplified generalization, we will proceed from a binary division of the trend systemization – into global and regional trends. In the 2018 article, we used a more exhaustive division. The article justifiably said that, over a century, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, an intertwining of trends representing various levels was in evidence. The most important of them were grouped by the authors into two clusters: one comprised global and regional megatrends; the other included long-term, mid-term and short-term regional trends.

As for the trends (and megatrends) of global nature, the following of them have had a major impact in the Middle East reality:

- Nation-building and political system universalization;
- Globalization/regionalization of world politics;
- Change of the role played by the West in the international arena;
- Formation of a unified world economic system and global economic specialization of countries and regions;
  - High demographic dynamics;
  - Modernization and sophistication of social structures;
  - Increased importance of the religious factor in public life and public opinion;
  - Rise and demise of large ideological schools of thought [3, p. 6].

As was shown by the elapsed five year period, some of the trends (high demographic dynamics, sophistication of social structures) have retained their applicability, some can be complemented or specified (universalization of political systems, modernization, change of the role played by the West), and some others need to be altogether revised.

Thus, while at the formal level, the movement towards universalization of political systems has retained its relevance today, the content of such universalization has been more and more subject to revision. The emergence and development of parliamentary structures, political parties and movements, the improvement of electoral systems, civil society institutions – all this constitutes the existing realities, perfectly relevant for the MENA region. However, a swift development of all these institutions does not exclude the significance of others – bay’a (oath of allegiance), tribal connections and appropriate solidarity groups, confessional networks, etc.

Therefore, although modernization, commonly linked to the universalization of political systems before, has been retained as a concept today, it is accompanied not only by preservation, but sometimes also a renaissance of a substantial number of elements pertaining to the social-political archaic legacy.

The case is even more complicated with the process of democratization, that was generally linked to modernization before. Democratization has not only failed to become the primary vector of transformational movement in the region, but has vividly demonstrated its ambiguity, arising in connection with three factors.

First, the urge towards democratization has been increasingly used as an instrument of exerting pressure upon the regional states, with the aim of forcing them to consent to the dominant status of the global powers, who position themselves as exemplary democracies. Whereas, as a matter of fact, their regimes are far from being ideal, and, in any event, are not suitable for universal proliferation. We are referring, primarily, to the US, whose aggressively exclusivist and, essentially, increasingly neo-colonialist political practice
has caused nothing but rejection from not only a prevailing segment of the Middle East population, but from many within the American society, which demonstrates a substantial degree of polarization amid the events in conjunction with the BLM (Black Lives Matter) movement and fierce debates concerning the historical legacy of the nation.

Second, the recent years have provided an opportunity for us to revisit the experience known in the history of the region and the world, within the framework of which the regimes legitimized their intrinsic authoritarianism through formally democratic procedures.

Third, under the circumstances of that conflict situation, which developed with regard to the relationships between, on the one hand, the Western states, and, on the other, a group of nations, posing as their antagonists, among which a leading role is played by Russia and China, the first ones started to bring about the subject on a megatrend that allegedly defined that situation — a contradiction between the two camps: democracy in its neoliberal interpretation and autocracy [17]. They are prone to refer the majority of the MENA region states and also, most insistently, those nations, whose policies do not align with the interests of the West itself, to the second camp. This refreshes our memory about the times of the old Cold War (or Cold War 1.0, if we categorize the one which is currently faced by us as Cold War 2.0). Incidentally, in this context, it is not a question of denying the fact of a collision of democracy and authoritarianism in the region, which was addressed very vividly by our colleagues, in particular. We would like to cite the work by Konstantin Truyevtsev, as an example, where he concludes that the Arab Awakening and a new wave of regional conflicts in the Arab world that followed “unmistakably demonstrated an impending doom and a nearing termination of the authoritarian political systems” [22, p. 312; italics added by us. – V. N., V. K.]. At the same time, according to the researcher, the prospects for democracy in the MENA region are very dim, its future political development is contingent upon multiple threats, among which is the emergence of new conflicts and redesign of the statehood models.

A plain binary model drawn by proponents of the prevailing neo-liberal trend in the social ideas of the West can hardly incorporate a number of large non-Western states, who have all the prerequisites to be considered as “civilization states” [36] (Turkey is usually assigned to this category in the MENA region). Are they due to be treated as antagonists in regard to the “democracy camp”? Another salient megatrend designated in the 2018 article was related to the globalization – regionalization dichotomy, whose first part was construed by the authors in three dimensions — political, economic and intellectual. If the political dimension was linked to the idea about a changing role of the West in the world politics, then the economic dimension was related to the idea of building up a unified world economic system, while the intellectual dimension — with a thesis on the rise and fall of massive ideological movements. Today, these conclusions and observations also need to be clarified and improved.

Strictly speaking, it was due to the interlocking processes of globalization and regionalization that the Middle East was designated as a specific region, at a proper time in the past, on the one hand, it was definitely conspicuous on the world map, on the other hand, it was closely integrated with other regional communities, most of all, with the European community, and more broadly — with the Western one. The specific features of the Middle East were: the absence of a single domineering state, a constant lack of security, exclusivism of the regional security architecture, low level of regional integration, resource scarcity, high degree of propensity towards conflict, constantly rising
economic differentiation of the constituent states and their status in the world economy. The weakness of economic and political mechanisms that can be employed for making this space a coherent entity has enhanced the significance of such factors that relate to a code of values and ideological guidelines – henceforth, a special role played by the Arabic language, Islam and political ideologies (primarily, the Arab nationalism and political Islam). Concurrently, the necessity of setting a boundary line with the West has prompted the Middle East to underscore its own alternative system of values and meaningful principles as compared against a more powerful neighbor.

The events of 2020–2022 have altered a key aspect in this picture. Political globalization in the form it transpired before, has de facto ceased its existence, and no possibility for its recurrent advent is visible in the foreseeable future. Simultaneously, a rapid transition of many largest world economies to the settlements in national currency [39], “normalization” of the sanctions regime on behalf of some Western states [19, p. 36–37] and disruption of logistical networks, as a result of the Ukrainian crisis, have meant the impairing of economic globalization mechanisms. As far as the intellectual component is concerned, the increased significance of anti-colonial agenda (see: hereinafter) points to a feasible disintegration of the single global intellectual space, which can be replaced, most probably, by some new schools of thought, deeply rooted in these or those cultural traditions (Arab-Muslim, Chinese, Indian, etc.). A currently witnessed growing interest towards non-Western methodologies in the humanitarian sciences testifies to this effect.

At first glimpse, these events are perceived as “black swans”, who suddenly change the world at all the levels – globally (disrupting the global world order), regionally (altering the place held by various regions, including the Middle East, in the global economy, in the system of logistical networks and world politics) and nationally (“return of the state” during the pandemic and after it). However, a more scrupulous analysis allows to see that such developments as the COVID-19 pandemic or the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria in 2023 (their consequences are still waiting to be assessed by us) were totally unpredictable, whereas the escalating conflicts in 2022 (regional – the Ukrainian crisis and the global one), although being forecasted in most general terms, appeared to be completely unexpected in their concrete manifestations, and especially so in the degree of their intensity, while the socio- and global political repercussions of all these versatile developments can be in no way considered unpredictable or extraordinary. In particular, not only they are in line with the basic conclusions that were drawn in the 2018 article, but are in accordance with the statements made in several publications dealing with the neo-modernity problem [9–11].

In those writings, the essential features of the neo-modernity substance were listed as follows: the search of new unities (at the social, ideological, political and international levels); problematization of meanings and values with regard to the socio-political existence, new politization of historical memory and actualization of the identity problem; growing heterogeneity of the global political actors; blurring of boundaries amid the universal striving towards a reinforcement of sovereignty (not only state boundaries, but also boundaries between the internal and external policies); increasing irony of the dominant political discourses (renunciation of unambiguous utterances, attempts at matching the antipodes, citationality) and, finally, the state of transitivity, imbalance as a characteristic feature of the world order. Not only these traits of neo-modernity have failed to lose their relevance, but, on the contrary, they have proved to develop more extensively under the current conditions.
Trends after the Century+

At the regional level, the commencement of the second decade of the 21st century has been marked by several controversial processes. On the one hand, a certain de-escalation tendency has been in evidence regarding the most acute regional conflicts – the Syrian, Libyan and Yemeni ones. The military phase of the first of them is de facto completed by the SAR establishing a lasting control over the main territory of the country and by the various opposition forces controlling its separate segments, where the following entities were set up: the Kurdish Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), three Turkish-controlled enclaves of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) territories, the Syrian Salvation Government area in Idlib and the Eastern Syria Security Area established by the US at the at-Tanf outpost. The Libyan conflict has transitioned from a military phase into a political one, after agreements were reached on the ceasefire, within the context of the 2020 Berlin Conference resolutions – even the failure of a political process after the aborted election in December, 2021, did not give rise to a resumption of armed hostilities. Eventually, in Yemen, despite the expiry of a half-year truce between the Ansar Allah movement and the government in the early October, 2022, the Arab coalition declares the actual maintenance of a de-escalation regime, although it adversaries treat those declarations with open skepticism [45]. It is noteworthy that none of the above three cases raises a question of seeking a final solution to the conflict, or, least of all, of facilitating a more or less stable military and political situation on the ground.

Partially, the same de-escalation is related to the lower risks incurred in conjunction with foreign policies of a number of regional actors (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and others. At the same time, other powers, on the contrary, have begun to demonstrate, over the recent years, their new activities conducted at the regional as well as global level. First of all, it concerns Algeria, that has been trying, after the rise to power of Abdelmadjid Tebboune, to swiftly restore its status as a key Maghrebian player and a leading African nation, which has produced a few tension nexuses in North Africa [6; 43]. The growing dilemma of security and competition in the Algerian-Moroccan relationships [42], occurring against the backdrop of a sharp aggravation of global controversy, is potentially fraught with the risk of becoming a new source of conflict generation.

A certain fragility of the regional environment has been feasible not only due to the internal logic underlying the intensification of conflict situations or peculiarities of domestic policies pursued by these or those states, but also due to increasingly diverging development trajectories of the four Middle East and North Africa (MENA) subregions – the Maghreb, the Arabian Peninsula, the Fertile Crescent and the Nile Valley. Even the presence of some centrifugal factors in regional development represented by the Abraham Accords [8]3, on the one hand, and the new access to the Palestinian agenda by Algeria [6], on the other hand, cannot alter the general tendency. It possesses not only a political dimension, but also an economic one – at a time when the states, who control the key logistic and transportation networks, become the largest economic, sometimes – technological hubs and military-political centers (Turkey, the Arabian Gulf nations, Egypt), the position of other nations in the international arena, on the contrary, gets more marginalized. It means not only a quantitative breakaway of the wealthy regional nations from the poor ones, but also a qualitative breakaway – if in some cases (the UAE, Qatar etc.), a transition to a new

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3 See also: [40]. For critical review of accords, see: [32].
technological mode is underway, then in other cases a simplification of economic activity patterns is in evidence [5; 13, p. 265–278]4. Simultaneously, the four above subregions have chosen to build up their relationships with other regional communities differently. The international situation of the Fertile Crescent and the Nile Valley nations remains somewhat uncertain. However, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) member-states, who have been steadily reinforcing their positions in Asia throughout 2022, have managed to dramatically enhance their influence on the European hydrocarbon market [33], which permits them to potentially claim a specifically designated role in the shaping of a polycentric world order. At the same time, the Maghreb, that has grown to be much more closely connected to Europe, appears to be alienated from the western segment of the Arab world, by the “Libyan ditch”, using the expression coined by Konstantin Truyevtsev.

Alongside the tendencies towards polarization of various regional segments, there is another trend in place – towards greater differentiation of political systems and regimes. And this is just another argument against the above mentioned political universalization. Thus, with the progress of the Arab monarchies, their political systems become more and more complicated and different from each other. In the case of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Qatar, along with the change of political elite generations, the strengthening of individual leaders’ role is observed, at the same time, in Kuwait, a fairly significant role has been assumed by the parliamentary institutions [15]. In Bahrein, the increasing role of Parliament was curtailed in 2022, when the main opposition groups were not allowed to participate in the election [41]. In the Arab republics, the situation is even more diverse. The hybrid political system established earlier under President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, demonstrated its sustainability also under President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, although the results of all elections under both Presidents show an extremely low level of public confidence in the government [12]. In Tunisia, considered the beacon of the Arab awakening, since 2021, the process of consolidating power in the hands of the President has got underway. A record low turnout at the parliamentary election in 2022 [27] has not precluded this course from being implemented. In Egypt, on the contrary, President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi began the amnesty process for many regime opponents [28] and announced the commencement of national dialogue with the opposition forces [30]. Besides, despite the lack of popularity of the stance favoring the restoration of the primary parameters of the Hosni Mubarak political system under al-Sisi, the reality shows a somewhat different picture. Under the current President, the role of technological bureaucracy is radically lower, while the role of the Army, on the one hand, and of the Parliament, on the other hand, is much higher. However, as noted by Bruce Rutherford, the very foundation of political regime has changed and is now based primarily on the capability to provide security [38]. In Lebanon and in Iraq, the political systems continue to be hit by a crisis, and no prospects for consolidating power are visible. Ultimately, in Syria, President Bashar Assad has demonstrated his ability to retain the full power in his hands, despite the hardest economic conditions imaginable.

Such a rich tapestry of political systems and regimes is nothing new to the Middle East. At the same time, it is quite similar, as can be seen, to the general regional situation because of its fragility, transitivity and noticeable instability. The unsteadiness and instability are prone to

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4 See also: [29].
increase not only owing to the specific state of international affairs, but also the specificity of the socio-political situation. The alienation of society from the state exemplified before by the Tunisian and Algerian cases, is characteristic of other countries too. It is exactly the existing serious social, economic and political divisions that are apparently driving the regional elites to exert concerted efforts with a view to finding consolidating ideologies. If in the event with the Arabian Gulf monarchies, such role is played by the ambitious national development strategies [14], offering to the population an image of a fantastic future and in some cases, directly propagating the values of national unity [37; 44; 46; 47], then in other states, the same consolidating function is performed by an appeal towards the theme of nationalism. Thus, a widely used Egyptian slogan is “Our common goal is building a modern Egypt”. In Algeria, such assertion of national unity is made through appealing to the colonialism memory [34]. In Morocco, it is done through feeding the irredentist sentiments [26]. Overall, it can be noted that the debates on identity and civilizational choice, that were a dominant trend in the socio-public life in the 2010-s, were replaced in the 2020-s by the ubiquitous drive to achieve national accord and unity on a strictly nationalistic basis. This means, in its turn, a partial reduction of the significance of the common Arab cultural and national identity, which has compensated for decades for the weakness of political and economic integration mechanisms.

Another compensatory mechanism over the same years was a conception of being part of the Islamic world shared by this or that country, which found its political expression largely through multiple organizations of political Islam. The problem is that the success of political Islam that began to be shaped in 2011 proved to be very short-lived. However, the moderate Islamist and Salafi forces appeared to be integrated into all of the political systems in the region, in this or that format (in some cases, institutionally, in some others – non-institutionally), whereas, in no country, with the exception of Syria and the UAE, did such forces become a domineering presence in the political landscape, but everywhere they were compelled to switch over from the global Islamic agenda to the national one.

There is a connection in the emergence of a new trend with the political changes and also changes concerning the code of values and meaningful messages in the MENA region, this trend did not feature in the 2018 article, but judging by the events of the last year, it looks capable of becoming a prevailing one, within a mid-term perspective. What we have in mind is a transformation of colonialism (or, as some experts have called it quite recently, a shift towards decoloniality), organically aligned with the idea of terminating the intellectual globalization. It is emblematic that, over the recent years, the Russian authors have been actively engaged in developing this topic, often trying to interpret it in a new manner [20; 21; 23; 25].

The fact that such a megatrend was not mentioned in the 2018 article is partially explained by the factual background that the decolonization theme at that time did not carve its way into the “mainstream political discourse”, as many experts point out. Instead of it, the focus of attention, especially in the Western academic literature, was on the “theme of modernization, Europeanization, Westernization, democratization, catching-up development and integration into globalization” [25, p. 124–125]. However, nowadays, more often than not, the expert community tends to acknowledge the fact that instead of the expected weakening of colonialism rudiments over the last years, there has been a process of revitalization and even enhancement of neo-colonialism elements in the form of open and stark enforcement in evidence. Thus, with a view to exerting
pressure upon weaker partners or competitors, the collective West states, headed by the US, began to employ very vigorously an extensive and versatile arsenal of measures, including economic sanctions, various provocations, weaving of plots and direct threats of resorting to the use of force.

However, we would like to underscore that alongside the above, the opposite tendencies happened to have been gaining traction, which allows to speak about the ambivalence of this megatrend. Rising subjectivity and a drive towards sovereignty and independence on behalf of practically all of the formerly dependent states, who offer resistance to external pressure, have been more conspicuous than ever before, across all the continents. An illustrative example can be furnished by the petroleum policy pursued by Saudi Arabia.

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Comparing the current trends detectable today with what was said in the 2018 article and in the publications focusing on neo-modernity, it can be possible to try to forecast some development tracks for the Middle East situation in the mid-term perspective. As a matter of fact, it is expedient to take into consideration the fact that, today, the most serious methodological problem in connection with forecasting, in all probability, remains the necessity to evaluate the scope of such phenomena that we are dealing with, to determine which of the designated tendencies have an opportunistic nature, and which of them have a fundamental character. Broadly speaking, success in those matters can never be guaranteed.

Notwithstanding the above, it can be asserted, with a higher or lesser degree of confidence, that all of the factors that allowed to speak about the existence of a specific phenomenon – the MENA region – before, can be put into question today. At the same time, the growing striving of a number of Middle East nations towards consolidating their sovereignty in diverse areas – ranging from the military and political sphere to the code of values and the cultural domain – and also the failure of modernization strategies according to the Western model, likewise an explicit drive to search for alternative ways of modernization, coupled with the erosion of the authoritarianism and democracy dichotomy and a growth of political diversity testify to the effect that the tendency of the MENA states to distance themselves from the West has not only persisted, but is highly likely to be intensifying.

Such distancing, in all likelihood, must be linked to a new request for ideology, which will be largely construed, however, instrumentally and restrictedly (not in the same way as it was construed in the 20th century, but rather as it is construed already today in the Arab monarchies of the Gulf). Currently, this request is met by an appeal to the country-wise nationalism, however, objectively, it is conducive to a greater divide among the regional states in the face of non-regional actors. In the event their pressure (exerted through the pursuance of “democratization” policy or through economic expansionism) increases, these particularistic nationalistic strivings, apparently, can be balanced by new unifying concepts, including anti-colonial ones.

Such a situation, in its turn, will lead to the increasing role of symbolic politics, especially in the conflict zones, new “memory wars” and political instrumentalization of history, sometimes very nontrivial. Some of the tendencies illustrating this are also in evidence today. Thus, the Syrian Waqf Ministry, while devising its own religious doctrine (the so-called fiqh al-azma or fiqh of crisis management), refers to the Wahhabi ideology as fascist. Such an unusual characteristic for the Islamic religious discourse allows to describe the proponents of this ideology as the personification of absolute evil. At the other end of the Arab world, Morocco and Algeria appear to be dragged into a high-profile scandal over the use of the Mechouar mosaic...
elements in the sportswear design of the Algerian football players, who were supposed to take part in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Oddly enough, neither the fact that the Algerian national team did not go to Qatar, nor that this mosaic element was borrowed from the Mechouar Palace currently located in the city of Tlemcen on the Algerian territory, could prevent the scandal from unfolding – in the Moroccan view, the Tlemcen heritage belongs exclusively to the Alawite kingdom.

The country-specific projects seeking to solidify statehood and achieve national consolidation, most probably, can be quite successful in the states with a high degree of economic self-sufficiency, and also, perhaps, in the states going through post-crisis reconstruction, where the public request towards their elites remains to be fairly modest and is primarily reduced to the provision of security. However, in other nations (Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Iraq), the existing objective framework for such kind of strategy is fairly narrow, so, the risks of their destabilization can be higher.

This is connected to the threat of strife resumption and formation of new seats of conflict. Apart from the value-related and ideological factors, some objective circumstances will facilitate this scenario: non-resolution of the previous/ongoing conflicts, high militarization of the population, economic crises, resource deficit etc.

Simultaneously, the countries, where negative scenarios will not be averted, and also successful states, most likely, will continue even more intensely to navigate the path towards more sophisticated political systems and their hybridization, which, in general, is due to lead to their consolidation.

Thus, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) monarchies are highly likely to introduce more modern institutes of state governance, whereas in some republics, the traditional elements of exercising power can be strengthened. Both of the above tendencies are likely to provide mechanisms for overcoming a divide between the society and the state.

Finally, under conditions of regional unity disintegration, the subregional entities have a good chance of taking the center stage historically – especially, this can be applicable to such cases where the interaction at the subregional level is ensured due to the economic interdependency of the states and/or the expediency of building up common security mechanisms.

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