# Russian Geonarratives and Arab Media (RUGAME)

# Dataset

# CODEBOOK

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## 1. Introduction

This codebook serves as a guide to how the dataset *Russian Geonarratives and Arab Media (RUGAME) Dataset* was developed and interpreted. The dataset contains coded artuicles from a diverse collection of Arab media. It examines how Russian geonarratives such as multipolarity and Eurasianism are perceived in the Arab world, in particular their space-framing assumptions and the space-making processes that accompany them such as infrastructure-building. It also captures how these narratives intersect with local geonarratives that speak to Arab agency, ranging from supra-national geonarratives such as Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism to regional ones such as Greater Syria and Mashriqism and reference points at the level of the nation-state.

## 2. Sources

The dataset is based on a content analysis of 2,890 Arabic-language media items, including articles, reports, news items, and opinion pieces published between 2000 and 2024. The selection covers a broad range of ideological orientations and countries in the Arab World:

- Axis of Resistance-aligned outlets: *Al-Mayadeen*, *Al-Manar* (Lebanon)
- Conservative and Western-oriented Gulf media: *Al-Jazeera* (Islamist-leaning), *Al-Arabiya*, Sky News Arabia (anti-Muslim Brotherhood), *Al-Sharq al-Awsat, Al-Quds al-'Arabi*
- National and state-aligned outlets: *Al-Ahram* (Egypt), *Al-Sabah* (Iraq)
- Secular Arab nationalist, left-leaning outlets: *Al-Akhbar, Al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin, Al-'Arabi al-Jadid*
- Foreign media: RT Arabic (included and coded, though its website does not contain an archive of articles further back than 2023)

## 3. Definitions of Key Concepts

- **Geonarratives:**
  Geonarratives have a three-dimensional character. They can be storytelling in the service of representation, a mobilization of history to create geography, and the subsequent knowledge production about the latter in the form of maps, reports, and media items. Geonarratives are space-framing assumptions of reordering that are discursively constructed, only partly overlapping with ideologies. By willing imagined national, regional, civilizational, or global worlds into being they offer a spatiotemporal framework to their audiences and convey a sense of geography and history. Beyond ideational discourses they are also underpinned by material space-making processes such as institution-building and cooperation on infrastructure. As such, geonarratives are different from the strategic communication that is used to disseminate them, including foreign policy and status-signaling. Geonarratives do not have a single author. Chronology takes a backseat in them, yet they create imaginaries that perceive and explain causality. They can be used tactically in negotiations, even by weaker states and non-state actors, and create a larger sense of purpose, mythical belonging, threat, or opportunity, often put forward by elite-driven discourses. Geonarratives and policies are in a dialectical relationship. Geonarratives can lead to the creation of policies and institutions (e.g. BRICS, Non-Aligned Movement, Axis of Resistance) or be used to further policies by various actors and institutions. In the threefold conceptual framework in critical geopolitics of

geopolitical field, culture, and condition that Toal/ Tuathail has proposed, geonarratives thus cut conceptually across the latter two aspects.

- **Multipolarity:**
  As a dominant Russian geonarrative in the dataset, multipolarity is framed as an alternative to the US-led "liberal world order," often identified with unipolarity and Western interventionism. Frequently, it draws on Cold War nostalgia and co-occurs with supporting narratives such as authoritarian legitimacy and non-interventionist respect for sovereignty and defense of traditional values.

- **Eurasianism:**
  An explicitly Russian geonarrative that positions Russia as a bridge between Europe and Asia and a civilizational pole in a multipolar world. It treats the Arab world of secondary importance compared to Iran and Turkey.

- **Authoritarian legitimacy**:
  A Russian stability narrative that purports non-interventionist respect for sovereignty. It portrays Russia as a guarantor of state stability by upholding non-interference and respect for sovereignty and by rejecting Western democracy and human rights as tools of external control. It stresses regime continuity and implicitly endorses pillars of authoritarian legitimacy such as material legitimation strategies, repression, and elite co-optation.

- **Traditional values:**
  A rhetorical appeal to moral and cultural conservatism, rooted in ancient civilizations, focusing on gender roles, opposition to LGBTQ+ rights, and the defense of patriarchal and religious structures.

- **Arab agency:**
  The degree to which Arab actors, namely nation-states, assert independent strategic, ideological, or discursive positions and express them in their own geonarratives in response to Russian geonarratives.

## 4. Unit of Analysis

The main unit of analysis is the individual Arabic-language media item, typically a full-length article, report, or opinion piece published between 2000 and 2024. Items were selected for their relevance to Russian strategy, ideological narratives, and Arab agency.

## 5. Variables and Descriptions

The dataset consists of 92 coded variables (Figure 1) grouped into six major analytical categories:

a. Russian Ideology and Geonarratives: multipolarity, Eurasianism, anti-Westernism, historical references, and religious conservatism
b. Countries: specific states or regions in relation to Russia's role or alliances (e.g. Syria, Iran, the US, China, Turkey)
c. International Organizations: multilateral institutions such the UN, BRICS, and the Arab League

d. Axis of Resistance and Islamist Groups: Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and other relevant groups
e. Nature of (Possible) Cooperation with Russia: type of interaction (military, economic, educational, industrial) between Russia and Arab countries
f. Arab Political Agency: expressions of Arab agency, including both resistance to and alignment with Russian geonarratives

**Figure 1: Codes and description**

| Codes | Abbreviation | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **1) Russian Ideology and Geonarratives** | | |
| Multipolarity | mp& | contains the word multipolarity or refers to a New World Order |
| Eurasia | eura& | has Eurasia as a word in the article |
| (Pan)-Slavism | slav& | mentions the idea of cultural proximity of Slavic nations (e.g. Serbia) and their political collaboration |
| Russian nationalism | gru& | mentions Russian nationalism, notions of "Russianness," Russian soul, Greater Russia |
| Orthodox Christian Church | otzh& | mentions the Orthodox Church, its culture, and what political role the Russian regime attributes to it |
| Soviet Union reference | su& | mentions the Soviet Union (USSR) past Arab–USSR collaboration, or Russia as heir to the USSR |
| Traditional values | tv& | refers to traditional values, opposition to women's and LGBTQ+ rights, ideas of male identity, female chastity, religious piety |
| Dialogue with Islam | disl& | contains depictions of positive dialogue between Russia and Islam |
| Dialogue with Judaism | jud& | contains depictions of dialogue between Russia and Judaism inside and outside Russia |
| Understanding or supportive of Russian authoritarian legitimacy narrative | autc& | understanding or supportive of Russian narratives of authoritarian legitimacy |
| Critical of Russian authoritarian legitimacy narrative | autc-& | critical of Russian narratives of authoritarian legitimacy |
| Neutral regarding Russian authoritarian legitimacy narrative | autcn& | neutral regarding Russian narratives of authoritarian legitimacy |
| Putin positive | pupos& | uses Putin as a positive symbol for something |
| Putin negative | puneg& | uses Putin as a negative symbol for something |
| Putinism | puism& | uses the word *al-butiniyya* explicitly |
| Mackinder's Heartland | mack& | uses the word Mackinder and/or heartland |
| Dugin | dug& | uses the name Dugin |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Colonialism | col& | any mentioning of colonialism, including "neo-colonialism," the mandate system, or protectorates of UK and France in the MENA |
| **2) Countries** | | |
| Syria | syr& | uses the word |
| Egypt | egy& | uses the word |
| Iraq | irq& | uses the word |
| Jordan | jord& | uses the word |
| Gulf | gulf& | uses the word |
| Saudi Arabia | saud& | uses the word |
| Emirates | uae& | uses the word |
| Qatar | qtr& | uses the word |
| Oman | omn& | uses the word |
| Bahrain | bhr& | uses the word |
| Kuwait | kwt& | uses the word |
| Yemen | ymn& | uses the word |
| Sudan | sud& | uses the word |
| Lebanon | leb& | uses the word |
| Algeria | alg& | uses the word |
| Libya | lyb& | uses the word |
| Morocco | mrc& | uses the word |
| Tunisia | tus& | uses the word |
| Palestine | pls& | uses the word |
| Iran | irn& | uses the word |
| Turkey | tur& | uses the word |
| Kurds | kurd& | uses the word |
| Horn of Africa | haf& | uses the word or Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia |
| Central Asia | cas& | uses the word or an individual country from Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, etc.) |
| Caucasus | cauc& | uses the word or an individual country from the Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan, etc.) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Israel | isr& | uses the word |
| China | chn& | uses the word |
| India | indi& | uses the word |
| North Korea | kor& | uses the word |
| USA | usa& | uses the word |
| Europe/EU | eu& | uses the word |
| Ukraine | ukr& | uses the word |

**3) International Organizations**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| BRICS | bric& | uses the word |
| Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) | sco& | uses the word |
| G20 | g20& | uses the word |
| Eurasia Economic Union | eaeu& | uses the word |
| G7 | g7& | uses the word |
| UN | un& | uses the word |
| NATO | nato& | uses the word |
| Arab League | al& | uses the word |
| OIC | oic& | uses the word |
| GCC | gcc& | uses the word |

**4) Axis of Resistance and Islamist Groups**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Axis of Resistance as institution | axin& | uses the word, depictions of the axis as an institutional arrangement and collaboration |
| Hezbollah | hezb& | uses the word |
| Houthis | hout& | uses the word |
| Hashd al-Shaabi | Hash& | uses the word or alludes to Iraqi militias with Iranian allegiance with a different term |
| Muslim Brotherhood | mb& | uses the word |
| Al Qaeda | qaed& | uses the word |
| ISIS | isis& | uses the word |
| Hamas | hamas& | uses the word |
| Tahrir al-Sham | sham& | uses the word |

**5) Nature of (Possible) Cooperation between Russia and Arab Countries**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nuclear cooperation | nucl& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| Arms exports | arm& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| Food exports | food& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| OPEC+, oil exports | opec& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| Industrial cooperation | ind& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| Transport infrastructure, incl. INSTC | trans& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| Other infrastructure (e.g. dams, electricity) | inf& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| Education cooperation | edu& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| Reserve currency diversification / alternatives to the dollar | curr& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |
| Sanctions' evasion | sanc& | Describes actual or possible cooperation |

**6) Arab Agency**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Pan-Arabism | panarb& | refers to pan-Arab ideas and Arab nationalism |
| Syrian nationalism / Mashriqism | mashr& | refers to Mashriqism or ideas of Greater Syria, Antoun Saadeh |
| Islamism, Pan-Islam | islam& | refers to ideas about pan-Islam or Islamism |
| National interest of an Arab state | natio& | identifies the agency at the level of the respective nation-state (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, etc.) |

## 6. Coding Methodology

Articles were coded manually using thematic content analysis as follows:

1- Items were selected based on their engagement with Russian geonarratives
2- They were initially categorized within the triadic framework (Russian strategy, Russian ideology, Arab agency)
3- Each article was coded for the presence or absence of 92 variables
4- Codes were entered into a spreadsheet to enable both quantitative analysis (e.g. frequency counts, co-occurrence patterns) and qualitative interpretation

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