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REPORT

By Member of the Dissertation Committee on
the Dissertation of
ZIAD Shahoud on the Theme:

“The Role of Information Technologies in the Foreign
Policy of the Russian Federation in the
Arab World,”

Submitted in conformity with the requirements for the
candidate degree in political sciences
Specialisation 23.00.04 Political problems of
international relations, global and
regional development

Having now fully read the English-language version of the above-mentioned doctoral thesis by Shahoud Ziad (pages 139-268), I am ready to offer a series of observations and draw conclusions concerning the academic quality of this work. The identified subject of the thesis is on page 146, which is the use of information technologies by the Russian Foreign Ministry in the Arab world. The candidate states that the aim of the thesis's research is to “determine the role of information technologies in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in the Arab world” (page 146). The structure and content of the thesis is directed towards answering and clarifying these points, the introduction set the scene well for understanding the logic and content of the thesis.

The thesis is structured in a logical and consistent manner that is in accordance with meeting the above-mentioned objectives. It consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a reference list and four appendices. Chapter one concerned “Digital Society: The World Political Dimension” and was composed of two sections. Chapter two is about



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“Digital Diplomacy of the Russian Federation in the Countries of the Arab World” and consisted of 26 sections and sub-sections. Chapter three was titled “Prospects of Application of Information Technologies in the Public Diplomacy of the Russian Federation in the Arab World,” which consists of two sections.

In chapter one the relevant theories and concepts related to diplomacy, public diplomacy and international relations appear. There is an emphasis on digital diplomacy and new information communication technologies, which is natural considering the topic and focus of the thesis. A very good and thorough literature overview was given of both international and Russian scholarly debate and definition of these aspects of contemporary international relations. Everything that was needed and expected to be there in terms of the theories and concepts that are relevant to the objectives and aims of the thesis were observed to be present.

Chapter two considers an impressive collection and collation of a massive load of highly unique and original empirical data on the approach and activity of Russian digital diplomacy in the Arab world of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Each of those countries is taken in turn within the framework of a standardised format that describes the size of the country’s population, its level of access to the internet and social media, the social media outlets and languages used by the Russian embassies. There is also a brief account of the Arab language versions of RT and Sputnik.

Chapter three is an attempt to analyse the empirical data from chapter two and engage in a SWOT analysis of Russian digital diplomacy in the Arab world. It is a thorough and systematic of actual and potential Russian digital diplomacy policy and practice in the Arab world in the MENA region. The



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emphasis and accent are very much on the policy and operational aspects of the issue. Unfortunately, this means that the conceptual and theoretical significance of the study is ignored, which means the contribution of this fabulous study to the field of international relations and digital diplomacy (both internationally and in the Russian scholarly debate) goes unexplored.

This is a serious omission considering that a thesis is first and foremost an academic work, and therefore must consider the theoretical ramifications of the study in confirming or challenging or building the theoretical orthodoxy of knowledge and state of the art research on the topic. It also means the thesis becomes somewhat separated from a heavily theoretical and conceptual first chapter with the heavily empirical and operational second and third chapters. This means that the theoretical and conceptual parts of the thesis never get to meet and complement each other in terms of additional explanatory power and the ability to understand the greater significance of the study in terms of the existing theoretical literature in Russia and internationally.

In addition to the separation of the theoretical and empirical parts of the thesis, some other relatively minor issues were also observed, mostly related to language. For example, on page 169 there is a typo in the second paragraph. This is in the sentence, “and in the late 1920s, the concept of digital society was introduced.” Presumably, the date did not occur in the 1920s? On page 185, towards the bottom of the page there is probably a hyphen missing – “reduced to one three per month.” Another problem detected is probably a product of the standardised approach to the country summaries in chapter two. Perhaps this is an indication of the use of copy and paste, but on page 186 in the first paragraph of the country description of Iraq



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are references to Bahrain in the text. This also occurs on page 192 under Yemen. The thesis also employs different (non-standard) ways of recording dates, such as on page 198 (05.29.2020 and November 21, 2014). On page 211, when referring to Twitter, in English is better to say, "it (instead of he) had only 4341 followers." One final point to make here is the need to reference concrete statements, such as "is accompanied by an active information war" (on page 220), there are numerous Russian and Western references that can be used to fully support such a declarative statement. However, in spite of the noted omissions and weaknesses of the thesis, I firmly believe that the strengths outweigh them by bringing a lot of original material and perspectives on key issues affected international relations in the context of a transforming global order.

The dissertation meets the basic requirements established by Order No. 6821/1 of 1 September 2016, "On the Procedure of Awarding Academic Degrees at Saint Petersburg State University," the candidate Shahoud Ziad deserves the award of the scientific degree of Candidate of Political Sciences in the speciality 23.00.04 – Political problems of international relations, global and regional development. Clause 11 of the aforementioned Order by the author of the thesis is not broken.

Yours sincerely,

Member of the Dissertation Council

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Institute for Russian and Eurasian
Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden

Associate Professor Greg Simons

19 February 2021

