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Neo-Ottoman Cool: The Rise of Turkey in Arab Media Space

Abstract:

This paper explores the spectacular rise of Turkey in Arab media space as one of the most intriguing developments in transnational political communication in the Middle East. Based on an extensive textual analysis of the coverage of Turkey in Arabic-language newspapers (more than 100 articles), we examine Arab public discourse about Turkey’s rise as a regional great power. First we explain Turkey’s courting of “Arab hearts and minds” in the context of the country’s neo-Ottoman foreign policy. Second, we analyze the recent pan-Arab popularity of Turkish television drama and cinema. Finally, we discuss the launch of TRT7-al-Turkiyya, a Turkish Arabic-language satellite television channel, signaling the official entrance of Turkey into the global battle for Arab public opinion alongside US, French and Russian rivals. In combination, Turkey’s new Arab-friendly foreign policy pronouncements, the rise of its “soft power” through popular culture, and the establishment of a government-operated Arabic language satellite television channel, promote Turkey to Arabs and contribute decisively to the construction of what we call Neo-Ottoman Cool, grounded in a Turkish-inflected accessible modernity attractive to Arabs because it combines hitherto separate and seemingly contradictory political, economic and socio-cultural elements in one seductive package.