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Turkey welcomes, but does not yet itself join...

The Arab-Israeli conflict will end someday, but the crisis itself will not be resolved unless Palestinian statehood is recognised. Turkey welcomes the beginning of the process of recognising the independence of Palestine, but has itself not yet joined in those efforts. Why?

The essence of the Arab-Israeli conflict and crisis

Since the proclamation and formation of the State of Israel on the 14th of May, 1948, ongoing contradictions in the Middle East in the context of Palestinian-Israeli relations have, from time to time, led to the detonation of new conflicts. It can be said that the essence of the permanent confrontation is, in this case, the unresolved Palestinian issue, i.e. the absence of a Palestinian state.

In other words, it is once again a territorial issue. The Jewish question has been resolved via the formation of a nation state, and yet the Palestinian question remains unresolved. As is known, the revival or formation of new states occurs as a result of major historical events, e.g. wars, global geopolitical and geo-economic transformations, the collapse of empires.

The greater Middle Eastern issue took diplomatic shape following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Berlin Congress of 1878. It was centred on the geopolitics of the leading powers of that time (primarily Russia, England, France and Prussia) in contrast to the declining Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, the national issue often became a tool in the hands of the “powerful ones” to realise their own regional interests in such an ethnically diverse and strategically important region as the Middle East. The greater Middle Eastern question included a set of national and territorial issues of the peoples subject to Ottoman Turkey, including Arabs, Armenians, Jews, Greeks and Kurds.

Contradictions between the leading countries, on the one hand, and Turkey, on the other, and, most importantly, the contradictions and intractability between the countries of Europe and Russia led to the decisions of the Berlin Congress not yielding a political and legal resolution in favour of the subjected peoples of Anatolia. Following the end of the WW1, the greater Middle Eastern issue was returned to the attention of international diplomacy during the Versailles Conference, taking into consideration the secret Sykes-Picot-Sazanov Agreement (1916) of the Entente countries on the division of the Asian possessions of the Ottoman Empire into “zones of responsibility” of the victorious countries.

However, the Versailles system could ultimately not resolve the well-known contradictions between the leading powers. This, nevertheless, allowed the newly-formed Turkey, having lost its imperial status, to prevent the loss of strategic territories in Anatolia in favour of resolving the Armenian, Greek and Kurdish issues. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, following the results of the First World War and in accordance with the decisions of the Sevres (1920) and Lausanne (1923) treaties, the anti-colonial process and the revival of national states of the peoples formerly subject to the Ottoman Empire – based on the principle of dividing the “zones of influence” between England and France – were initiated.

The decisions made at the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences in 1945 brought the victors (USSR, USA, Great Britain) back to the greater Middle Eastern issue. As a result, it was decided to create two national entities on the territory of Palestine under the mandate of London, i.e. a Jewish and an Arab state. However, the State of Israel has become a reality of the new world, and yet there is still no Palestinian state.

In political and historical literature it is often possible to find the opinion that the influential Jewish diaspora was able to have a beneficial (primarily for the United States and Great Britain) impact on the leading countries of the world to resolve the Jewish question, to form and strengthen Israel and to “freeze” the Palestinian issue. Proponents of this approach “forget” that one of the main initiators of the formation of the State of Israel was the Soviet Union, i.e. Russia.

Moreover, if the Anglo-Saxon leaders are so passionate about supporting the Jewish people, then why are they constantly using the Palestinian issue to threaten the integrity of Israel, the territory of which is already so small and which would be reduced in the event of the recognition of Palestinian independence? Finally, why did Britain author the formation of more than twenty Arab states, but omit the Arabs of Palestine from the composition of considerable and ethnically related countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates)?

From these considerations it becomes clear that the United Kingdom and United States are not at all concerned with the Jewish and Palestinian issues, but rather with the possibility of using them as tools to influence regional processes and keep the Middle East in the Anglo-Saxon orbit.

Wars end sooner or later; they cannot continue endlessly and they exhaust the physical and material resources of the opposing sides. However, whether the end of the next military conflict within the Palestinian-Israeli scope will be the end of the conflict remains an unanswered question. In my opinion, until the Palestinian issue is resolved in such a way that satisfies the Arab world, the conflict with Israel and the Western forces backing it will not end.

Can Turkey offer anything new in solving the Palestinian issue?

Turkey's modern foreign policy is aimed at reviving its status as a key global player and a super-regional power. Ankara is trying to implement the doctrine of neo-pan-Turanism in the post-Soviet southeast, but in post-Ottoman Middle East and North Africa, Turkish diplomacy relies on the doctrine of neo-Ottomanism.

It is no coincidence that Recep Erdogan in this regard recalls that the territory of modern Israel and the Palestinian Authority was once a part of the Ottoman Empire, and therefore Turkey bears a certain degree of responsibility for peace in this region. It is clear that modern Turkey no longer has the same power as the Ottoman state to subjugate all the peoples and states of the Middle East by force, and it is hardly possible to imagine that the richest monarchies of the Arab East will agree to return to Turkey or submit themselves to the Turkish president.

Nevertheless, Turkey demonstrates flexible diplomacy and aims to receive new dividends in its status of "leader of the Islamic world", "influential member of the NATO bloc" and "leader of the Turkic" world through dialogue with Britain and the United States, the leaders of the Anglo-Saxons. In this regard, with the beginning of the next Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Gaza Strip, Recep Erdogan spoke in support of a political solution to the Palestinian question, the novelty being not the idea of Palestinian independence with East Jerusalem as its capital and the 1967 borders, but the proposal to grant Turkey the status of a security guarantor, thus an international mandate for Palestine.

This is why Ankara began to aggravate relations with Tel Aviv, though Turkey is not at all against preserving the independence of pro-Western Israel, but only for recognising the independence of Palestine.

The current escalation of Turkish-Israeli relations is mostly limited to Erdogan's criticism of Israeli leader Netanyahu, accusing the latter of all mortal sins and crimes. However, Israel does not accept the Turkish vision of the resolution of the Palestinian issue, instead insisting on continuing the military conflict until the victory over Hamas (including the destruction of Rafah).

Such a position from Tel Aviv, which is met with explicit, behind-the-scenes support from the United States and Europe, reduces the chances of the implementation of the Turkish approach. Ankara, unlike Tehran, is very dependent on the United States and NATO in terms of providing military assistance to the Palestinian resistance. Turkey cannot show its proxy forces (the "grey wolves" or Turkmen combat units), engaged in the war against Israel. This is so, because Turkey remains a member of NATO, hosts important US military bases on its territory and remains dependent on military supplies and technologies from the West.

New means of deterring Israel

Benjamin Netanyahu is adamant in his desire to continue fighting in the South of the Gaza Strip and to completely destroy Hamas, accompanied by the reduction of the Palestinian civilian population in Israel. The unwillingness of the United States to get involved in a direct military confrontation with Iran due to Netanyahu's irresponsible policies increases the threat of new crimes by the Israel Defense Forces against Palestinian refugees in Rafah.

In this regard, the tools of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the threat of the beginning of the process of international recognition of Palestinian independence are becoming new means of deterring Tel Aviv's radical position. South Africa's lawsuit in the International Court of Justice and the subsequent demand of Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan for the arrest of Netanyahu, Galant and other senior Israeli officials, as well as three Hamas leaders (Yahya Sinwar, Ismail Haniyeh and Muhammad Deif), for military brutality and crimes against humanity, evoked a storm of bitter dissatisfaction in Israel and on the part of Hamas.

Tel Aviv accused Karim Khan of bias, a lack of objectivity and anti-Semitism (they say he is Pakistani and supports the Islamic radicalism represented by Hamas). At the same time, the Israeli side completely disregards the biographical fact that Karim Khan is not a native of Pakistan, but of the Scottish capital Edinburgh. In turn, Hamas considers the ICC's decision unfair because "the victim is equated to the executioner".

This decision of the ICC, targeting "both ours and yours", caused a mixed reaction from the international community. Some, e.g. Turkey and Iran, support the idea of arresting Israeli politicians for brutality in the Gaza Strip; some, e.g. US, UK, Germany, Italy, Czech

Republic, condemn such a demand by Karim Khan, and others, in particular, France, Belgium and Ireland, are defending the ICC prosecutor. As a result, the prosecutor's demand has not yet been confirmed with the decision of the court itself, but here the pressure on Israel is key. Meanwhile, another development vis-à-vis the pressure on Tel Aviv was the decision of Norway, Ireland and Spain to recognise the independence of Palestine on the 22nd of May. Israel strongly condemned such a position of the aforementioned European countries, and Israeli Foreign Minister I. Katz recalled his ambassadors from Norway, Ireland and Spain for consultations.

Will the declarative recognition of Palestine by the EU countries mark the beginning of the end of the Palestinian question and the formation of the 23rd Arab state? In my opinion, without ensuring the security of Palestine by force – or any similar issue (disputed territory) for that matter – such declarations only pursue political goals and are detached from the reality on the ground. It is difficult to imagine that such recognition of independence from three European countries will push Israel to open an embassy in Ramallah tomorrow.

It should be noted that before the 22nd of May, 2024, nine other countries had already recognised the independence of Palestine at various times. For example, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic did so in 1988 and Sweden in 2014. However, from then until today, Palestine has not yet become an independent State.

Why does Turkey support, but not recognise, the independence of Palestine now?

Turkey, in the face of President R. Erdogan and Foreign Minister H. Fidan, publicly and actively supported the decision of the 'European trinity' to recognise Palestine. In particular, Erdogan called the recognition of the State of Palestine by Norway, Ireland and Spain a "conscious decision" and likewise urged other countries to do the same. In this regard, the Turkish leader stated: "I am glad that Norway, Ireland and Spain have announced their recognition of the State of Palestine. We congratulate their leaders on this conscious decision. We call on countries that have not yet recognised the State of Palestine to take the same step".

Accordingly, the Turkish MFA issued a communique stating that the "recognition of Palestine is a necessity in terms of international law, jurisprudence and justice".

Another different statement from the Turkish side, as well as from other countries of the Islamic world, for example Iran, should not have been expected. However, along with the support of such a declaration, Ankara could set an example and itself recognise the State of Palestine. Moreover, using its leading position in the Turkish-created Organisation of Turkic

States, Turkey could involve the Turkic countries of the post-Soviet space in this process. However, how can this be done in the case of fraternal Azerbaijan if Baku remains an ally of Tel Aviv, continues to export its oil to Israel through Turkish territory and buy modern weapons from them?

From this it becomes evident that Turkey has thus far refrained from substantial action on the Israeli track because of fears of undesirable consequences from Israel's Western patrons.

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