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When will peace be reached in the Middle East and North Africa?

For centuries the Middle East and North Africa region has not seen peace and stability. The last 75 years have been burdened by the openly expansionist policy of Israel vis-à-vis its neighbours.

A poor and rich region

All countries in the region are characterised by food insecurity and water scarcity, population growth, high unemployment, climate change, synthetic drug production and organ trafficking.

Netanyahu is declaring that Israel's goal is the liquidation of Hamas and Hezbollah, but this is unrealistic

The combination of these factors leads to an increase in the number of disadvantaged and poor, provokes radicalisation of the population and creates fertile ground for the activities of extremist and terrorist organisations.

A number of countries have weak state institutions. Many still cannot overcome the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and are experiencing problems with budget financing.

About 6% of the world's population lives in the Middle East and North Africa. The region, which is heavily dependent on food imports, accounts for more than 12% of the global malnourished population.

Important logistics routes connecting Europe with Asia and Africa, which are important for the global economy and trade, pass through the region. Thus, about 12% of world

trade, 10% of world oil trade and 8% of LNG pass through the Suez Canal annually. It plays a fundamental role in maintaining global economic security.

The core of the Middle East and North Africa is rich in minerals; countries of the region account for 35% of world oil exports and 14% of gas. There are massive labour resources in the region. All necessary conditions for economic prosperity are present, but it is impossible to achieve without stability.

Catastrophic situation in Gaza and Lebanon

In addition to common problems, each country has many of its own. In the Middle East, the focus is on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Israel's aggression against Lebanon.

Settlement construction in the West Bank stopped after the signing of the Oslo Accords, but was resumed in 2017. In 1993, the number of settlers was 250,000, now it is about 800,000, including those with a second (US) citizenship. The settlers are trying to clear this territory of Palestinians once and for all, which makes the peaceful life of Israel among Arabs impossible.

Its population is experiencing acute problems with food and medical assistance. There is a deficit of water and wood, which are needed to prepare food.

Israel is discussing the resumption of its settlement policy in Gaza. A few days ago, a conference was held near the Gaza border called 'Preparing to resettle Gaza'. According to the newspaper Haaretz, it was attended by far-right politicians and the words "conquer, expel, resettle" were used as a motto. Will the Arab occupiers (as they are called in Israel) put up with such appeals? Unlikely.

Ronen Bar, the head of Israel's Shin Bet General Security Service, wrote a letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government ministers warning that settler attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank threaten Israel's "national security" and are "a big stain on Judaism".

Since October 7 last year, the UN has recorded more than 1,400 attacks by settlers in the occupied territories. Tens of Palestinian families were forced to leave their homes.

In Lebanon, there is no single place left that is not a potential bomb target. The destruction has surpassed the damage inflicted by Israel on the Lebanese capital during the 2006 War. The number of dead and injured, as well as people with nervous disorders, is growing. Thousands are forced to sleep on the street to avoid being trapped under the ruins of houses.

Lebanon has been experiencing acute crises since 2019: economic, financial, social, presidential. The outbreak of hostilities by the Israeli army against Hezbollah has further aggravated the problems of this country.

Can violence in the Middle East be stopped?

Netanyahu is declaring that Israel's goal is the liquidation of Hamas and Hezbollah, but this is unrealistic. It is an ideology, a part of the populations of Gaza and Lebanon, and for many Palestinians Hamas is also a symbol of statehood. Were Hamas and Hezbollah to disappear, other groups would replace them.

The only way to end violence in the Middle East is the existence of two states – a Jewish and a Palestinian one. However, Netanyahu and his supporters are categorically against the creation of the State of Palestine.

In Syria, there is an acute economic and humanitarian situation due to Western sanctions. If before the civil war it was the breadbasket of the region, now it ranks 148th in terms of food security.

There is a shortage of electricity in the country, serious problems in the field of medical care and a massive number of internally displaced persons. Syria is still fragmented. The Kurds control the northeast. Several US military bases are illegally located there, the largest being al-Tanf – this does not contribute to the resolution of the Syrian crisis and the restoration of the territorial integrity of the country.

The north-west Idlib province is controlled by the international terrorist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which professes the ideology of Al-Qaeda.

There has been some recovery of economic activity in Iraq, but it is far from stable. The intervention of the United States and its allies set the country's development back for decades. Before the invasion of the foreign coalition, led by the United States, Iraq provided itself with agricultural products. Now, due to the growing water shortage, progressive salinisation of soil and the destruction of irrigation facilities, domestic production has significantly decreased. Rising food prices and disruptions in agricultural imports are increasing poverty in the country.

Despite looking relatively stable, Jordan is also facing a multitude of domestic issues. The country is buried in debt. There is a high unemployment rate, especially among youth. The population's dissatisfaction vis-à-vis the government's Israel policy is growing.

Yemen has one of the most acute humanitarian crises in the world. Approximately 60% of the population faces severe food shortages. Millions do not have access to drinking water.

Hunger and lack of medical care are the most acute problems. They are aggravated by the protracted confrontation in the country.

Many in the Middle East fear the future; every day is a fight for survival

The ones with the possibility are trying to leave the country.

Shortly on the situation in North African countries

In Morocco, according to the World Bank, the national economy was growing by the end of 2023. This was facilitated by the revival of tourism, exports of manufacturing products and an increase in the inflow of foreign direct investment. But there are many problems: inflation, employment among a growing population, significant job cuts in rural areas, an increase in the number of migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa.

In Algeria – although the country receives income from the sale of hydrocarbons – there is also an increase in inflation and food prices. High unemployment, especially among young people and women, and poverty: 10 out of 44 million people live below the poverty line. Mainly for economic reasons, the country is now facing a wave of youth emigration (including illegal) to Europe.

The Algerian authorities face difficult tasks; the population is expected to increase to 51 million people by 2030 (now it is almost 44 million) with all the consequences that follow from this.

Active terrorist groups in the Sahara-Sahel zone and the long-standing rivalry between Morocco and Algeria have a destabilising effect on the Maghreb region.

The economic crisis continues in Tunisia. The country's debt amounts to almost 100% of gross domestic product. There is high unemployment, especially among women and youth under the age of 25. The number of poor people is about 20% of the country's population.

The political and security crisis continues in Libya. The country is still divided between two rival governments, each with its own armed forces and supported by its international patrons.

Egypt has low rates of non-oil exports and foreign direct investment, high public debt to GDP, a shortage of land suitable for agriculture, problems with providing the population and the agricultural sector with water. Due to the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation and the Houthi shipping blockade, revenues from shipping via the Suez Canal (which is one of the main sources of treasury currency) has fallen sharply. The country is facing a growing demand for natural gas amid declining domestic production. All of this is happening against the background of population growth (already more than 110 million people).

The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile River has a negative impact on the country's economy. Egypt takes 85% of its water from the Nile, and the Blue Nile is its main tributary. Addis Ababa's decision to unilaterally manage the filling of the reservoir has caused tension between Egypt and Ethiopia.

Bleak prospects

By 2030, about 600 million people will live in the region, and at least 60% will be young people. If the problems of the region are not solved, it will inevitably lead to conflicts and, consequently, to the emergence of new waves of people searching for safe places.

Unfortunately, traditional diplomacy does not work. The behaviour of Benjamin Netanyahu and his supporters is convincing proof of this. They know that the United States will provide financial and military assistance to Israel, as well as political and diplomatic support at the United Nations.

In the current situation, it is necessary to turn to coercive diplomacy. In terms of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Israel's aggression against Lebanon, in order to prevent further loss of life and new destruction, the following proposal considers an action plan:

- On Lebanon: executing UNSC Resolution 1701, withdrawal of all troops except UN peacekeepers and the Lebanese army from the south of Lebanon;
- On Gaza: cessation of all armed hostilities, withdrawal of the IDF, allowing for international humanitarian aid, beginning reconstruction, introduction of a provisional government in Gaza by the UN.
- On the West Bank: cessation of ethnic cleansing, cessation of building new Israeli settlements, seizure of weapons from Palestinians and settlers, start of a negotiation process on the realisation of UN resolutions on the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Everything should happen simultaneously. If anybody refuses to comply with UN decisions, they should be severely punished.

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