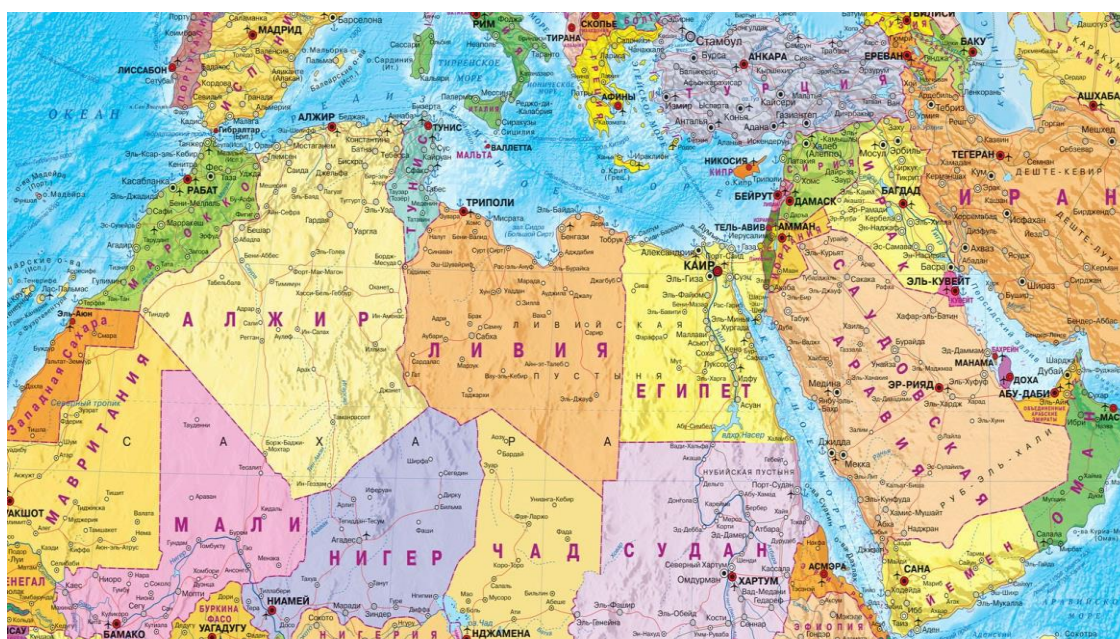


**RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES**

**THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
AND NORTH AFRICA AND ITS
DEVELOPMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE**



**Moscow
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AND NORTH AFRICA AND ITS
DEVELOPMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE

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The international scientific and practical conference “The Situation in the Middle East and North Africa and its Development in the Near Future” was hosted by the Center for Scientific and Analytical Information of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (CSAI IOS RAS). It was attended by experts from 15 countries (Middle East, Africa, Europe, Latin America), the Security Council of the Russian Federation, the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly and an international NGO, whose staff regularly conducts field research in the Middle East. In addition to researchers of IOS RAS, Russia was also represented by the Higher School of Economics, Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, and St. Petersburg State University.

This collection includes reports of the conference participants on such topics as the analysis of the current situation in the MENA region, the reasons for the escalation in the Middle East, and possible consequences for the region. The conference also focused on the processes occurring in individual MENA countries.

The book is intended for politicians, civil servants, political scientists, historians, experts studying the Middle East and North Africa and the processes the region.

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CONFERENCE OPENING



**Nikolai Plotnikov, Head of CSAI IOS
RAS, Doctor of Political Sciences**

On behalf of myself and the staff of the Center for Scientific and Analytical Information of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the participants who found time and agreed to take part in this conference. Unfortunately, not everyone was able to come to Moscow at this difficult time. For various reasons - some were unable to come here because of difficulties with flights to Russia caused by the sanctions imposed by the West, which have disrupted normal people-to-people communication. Some - because of the expected Israeli attack on Iran and the possibility of further aggravation in the Middle East. Some missed the event for family reasons. We hope that all those who could not make it will participate online.

Unfortunately, there are more and more problems in the world. We discussed this at length at the BRICS summit in Kazan,

The purpose of our conference is much more modest than that of the Kazan forum, but we are also expected to achieve concrete results. We will have to answer the following questions: what processes are taking place in such a strategically and economically important region as the Middle East and North Africa; what are their causes and effects on the world economy, trade and international relations; what should be done to prevent negative consequences. Many of our participants are at the center of events and can see what is happening in the region more clearly than we can in Moscow.

The conference will be attended by representatives of 15 countries, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (Geneva), an international NGO. From Russia, in addition to scientists from the Institute of Oriental Studies, representatives of the Higher School of Economics, the People's Friendship University of Russia and St. Petersburg University are taking part in this event. You have the lists of participants. If you have not yet met them, you will have time to do so today and tomorrow.

Considering the importance of the topic, a representative of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Dr. Zhukov, will also take part in our conference.

Our work will be organized as follows. Dr. Zhukov will speak first, then I will briefly touch upon the main problems of the Middle East and North Africa, and then we will discuss the issues according to the agenda of the conference.

In medical terms, I would like you to provide not only a diagnosis of the diseases of the region, but also the possible course of treatment. Ideas and proposals on how to stop Israel's war against its neighbors, how Arabs and Jews can continue to live together, how to solve the problems of other countries in the region would be extremely important.

The sessions will be moderated by the staff of our center. I ask them to keep to the time limit so that everyone can speak, but at the same time to give the opportunity to speak on the most pressing issues. I now give the floor to Dr. Zhukov.



Yuri Zhukov, representative of the Security Council of the Russian Federation

Hello and welcome, dear participants of the international scientific and practical conference! I am pleased to note that this event is organized by the Center for Scientific and Analytical Information of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The Institute is one of the oldest scientific structures in Russia with more than 200 years of history and its work is highly appreciated by the government.

The topic proposed for today's discussion, "The situation in the Middle East and North Africa and its development in the near future", is extremely relevant in today's circumstances.

Over the past twenty years, the region has been a constant hotbed of various negative developments in terms of international security. First, there was the growing tension over the US and NATO military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the threat of terrorism, second were the color revolutions that sent ripples throughout the region, the war in Libya. Currently, there is a war in Syria, a difficult situation in Yemen, a huge flow of refugees, the problem of the Middle East settlement, which again erupted into armed conflict on October 7 last year.

The past year has shown that despite increased attention from the international community, efforts to establish dialogue have not yielded substantial results. The scope of the conflict has widened considerably.

Political tensions have risen sharply, involving more and more neighboring states and creating the risk of a deep international crisis and negative consequences for the oil and gas markets.

The escalation in the Middle East became the central topic of the BRICS Plus/Outreach Summit in Kazan.

As the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin noted: "The hostilities that began a year ago in Gaza have now spread to Lebanon, other regional countries have been affected, and the level of confrontation between Israel and Iran has sharply increased. All of this resembles a chain reaction and brings the entire Middle East to the brink of a full-scale war."

He stated that "the solution itself must be reached on a universally recognized international legal basis that provides for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state living peacefully alongside Israel. Correcting the historical injustices against the Palestinian people could guarantee peace in the Middle East. Until this issue is resolved, the vicious cycle of violence cannot be broken.

Dear participants of the conference, on behalf of the staff of the Security Council of the Russian Federation I wish you fruitful work. We hope that your statements and proposals will be of practical interest.

Thank you for your attention.

INTRODUCTION



**Nikolai Plotnikov, Head of CSAI IOS RAS,
Doctor of Political Sciences**

The MENA region has not enjoyed peace and tranquility for several centuries. First, the Arabs fought for their rights against the Ottoman Empire. After its collapse and the division of the Middle East into British and French spheres of influence under the Sykes-Picot Treaty (May 1916) following World War I, the Arabs fought the British and French colonizers. Their withdrawal and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 marked the beginning of a new confrontation - between the Arab world and the Jewish state, which has pursued an openly expansionist policy throughout its 75 years of existence.

Among the problems common to all MENA countries are food insecurity, water scarcity (11 countries in the region are among the 17 most water-stressed countries in the world), rural-urban migration as a result of climate change, population growth, an acute lack of employment opportunities, the production of synthetic drugs, and the black-market trade in organs.

Together, these factors contribute to an increase in the number of disadvantaged and poor people, which provokes the radicalization of the population and creates a fertile ground for extremist and terrorist organizations to operate in the region.

Many countries are still struggling to overcome the negative impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. They are experiencing acute fiscal financing problems. Most countries are characterized by weak government institutions. This also contributes to the negative phenomena.

The countries of the region are home to about 6% of the world's population. Before the Gaza war, the region accounted for more than 12% of the undernourished population. The region is heavily dependent on food imports due to the lack of arable land, climate change (prolonged droughts with sudden heat waves have become characteristic, directly affecting agricultural production), limited use of modern agricultural methods, and acute shortages of mineral fertilizers.

The region has important logistic routes connecting Europe with Asia and Africa. The Suez Canal alone is crucial to the world economy and trade.

The subsoil of the Middle East and North Africa is rich in minerals. Not just oil and gas, but such coveted commodities as uranium ore, lithium, cobalt, rare earth metals, and phosphate deposits. Unlike aging Europe, the MENA region has no labor shortage. The region has all the ingredients for economic prosperity, but it cannot be achieved without stability.

At present, the most difficult situations are in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone; in Lebanon, which is mercilessly bombed by Israel; in Syria, where the economic and humanitarian environment is aggravated by Western sanctions, while part of the territory is not controlled by the country's authorities; in Iraq, where there is no stability either; in Yemen and Libya, where statehood has been shattered and parts of the country are separated and at war with each other.

There have been reports of the resurgence of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

In addition to the common problems that characterize the entire region, each country, even those as wealthy as the Gulf monarchies, has its own problems. I hope that today's conference will help reach a comprehensive agreement on these and other issues. I wish everyone fruitful work.

SESSION 1.
**THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND PROSPECTS FOR ITS
DEVELOPMENT**

*Session moderator - Alexander Butko, leading specialist of CSAI IOS RAS, PhD
in Political Science (Russian Federation)*

**ROLE OF MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA AS PART OF GLOBAL
SOUTH ASPIRATIONS**



**Ahmed Al-Wahishi, H.E. Ambassador
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the
Republic of Yemen to the Russian
Federation**

On the national level, Yemen's leadership stated that achieving peace and ending the conflict in Yemen, in any peace process must be based on respect for national, regional and international norms, especially Security Council resolution 2216, without prejudice to the legal and political status of the state, inclusiveness in any political process and its protection through regional and international guarantees and openness to mediation efforts to achieve peace and alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

Here we must highlight the role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman in de-escalation and maintaining calm in order to contribute to achieving a comprehensive political solution to the Yemeni crisis within the framework of the roadmap to support and advance the path of peace and security in Yemen.

Regionally, it should be emphasized that the position of the government and people of Yemen is firm and unwavering, as they support the Palestinian people in achieving their aspirations for security, stability, a dignified life and the establishment of their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. I would like to note that the government of Yemen has consistently called on the international community to take all necessary steps to stop the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the rest of the occupied territories, as well as in Lebanon and Syria.

Yemen's position on the Palestinian issue is based on international legality resolutions, especially the two-state solution.

Regarding the escalation in the Red Sea and the threat to international shipping, I would like to refer to the declaration adopted at the sixth session of the Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum at the ministerial level, held in Marrakesh on December 20, 2023, which called for respect for international law and the demands of the UN Security Council.

I would also like to mention the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 14th Arab Summit in Beirut in March 2002, which called for the need for Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Syrian Golan Heights and the territories still occupied in southern Lebanon, a two-state solution and the willingness of the Arab states to normalize relations with the countries of the region within the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative agreement.

Internationally, if we go back to recent history of the Cold War, there were 14 nuclear threats, including 2 related to Berlin, 2 related to Cuba, 2 in connection with the Israeli-Arab wars (1967 and 1973). At the end of the last century when Cold War era was over, the UN adopted the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). In our region, despite the adoption of the NPT, observers see, on the one hand, nuclear rivalry between Israel and Iran. On the other hand, the countries of the Middle East are striving to establish nuclear projects for peaceful purposes.

Relations between major cities and other centers influence the establishment of a new international order. These relations develop in the direction of a multipolar system which is influenced by military, economic, political and technological factors. Several powers compete to spread their influence over other powers of the world, and accordingly, we are witnessing proxy wars in Global South, including Middle East and North Africa. The development of these proxy conflicts may result in a new international order.

In the inflation situation, there have been important changes. The countries efforts for improving the international monetary system. That is why we see BRICS countries trying to use their local currencies in commercial settlements, for example, Russia with the UAE or India. This was manifested in BRICS summit hosted by Russian Federation in the period 22-24 October 2024 which was held in Kazan successfully, with participation of Middle East countries among other from different parts of the world emphasizing to establish NIO just and equitable.

Since our conference has specific objectives, I will mention some additional facts, including those related to the assessment of the prospects for settlements in national currencies. Here we should recall the success of the OPEC+ alliance, which has contributed to strengthening security in the world. There was also a

wonderful proposal at the BRICS Summit - the establishment of a grain exchange, which could make a great contribution to food security in the world.

I would also like to mention some current events that cannot be ignored. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1701 on a ceasefire in the Middle East. The Israeli army is now expanding its zone of combat operations in southern Lebanon, which at one time fully welcomed the end of the war.

As for other initiatives, I think it would be interesting to assess how the nuclear non-proliferation treaties are being applied in our region.

THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE PROSPECTS FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT: AN IRANIAN PERSPECTIVE



Mandana Tishehyar, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Iranian Peace Studies Scientific Association (Islamic Republic of Iran)

At the beginning of my speech, I would like to thank CSAI IOS RAS for inviting me to this conference and to commend the initiatives of the center aimed at organizing platforms for discussing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa. The world is in the process of constructing a new order. Over the past few decades, we have moved from a bipolar world and experienced a unipolar and also a multipolar world, and now we have stepped into a post-polar era. The defining feature of this new era is the formation of cooperative constellations by states, organizations, and individuals to achieve specific goals over short or long periods. In these constellations, actors maintain their independent identities, and coalitions form, dissolve, and reappear quickly.

In this wondering new world, the geopolitics of various regions is also being reshaped. The wars between superpowers have been replaced by intra-civilizational wars among societies whose peoples had lived alongside each other for centuries. The history of relations between Muslims and Jews from the early days of Islam until the mid-twentieth century is one of peaceful coexistence between these peoples across various West Asian countries. The living conditions of Jews in Islamic societies can be compared to the experiences they have had in Spain, Germany, and other parts of the world. The West Asia peoples' shared culture, history, and identity have historically prevented conflicts and wars among them. It was only after 1947, with Britain's interference, that Jews were placed in

opposition to other ethnic and religious groups in West Asia, leading to numerous wars and conflicts across the region ever since.

What we are witnessing in recent months in West Asia is an intra-civilizational war among peoples who share significant cultural, social, and historical elements. A similar situation can be observed in Eastern Europe and East Asia. In fact, in an effort to prevent a clash of civilizations, the West seems to be intensifying intra-civilizational wars in various regions.

In recent days, the flames of conflict have flared up in West Asia, which could also have unpleasant consequences for the peoples of the Eurasian region. All the countries and groups involved in this tension on both sides are historical friends and allies of Eurasian countries. Any kind of war in West Asia—whether a short and crushing war or a long and attritional conflict—could lead to a crisis along the southern borders of Central Eurasia. Since 7 October 2023, the West has been attempting to sustain the crisis in West Asia as part of a “new deterrence policy” aimed at Asian powers. The events occurred during the past year have both hindered the Chinese and Indian major economic projects progress in the region and brought about security tensions across the Eurasian southern territories.

A glimpse at the map of the region is well indicative of the fact that the West Asian political groups’ suppression and the escalation of wars among the countries of the region are paving the way for the resurgence of ISIS activities in the Levant (which we know as *Shamat* in Persian) and its rapid spread to ISIS Khorasan. In recent weeks, we have witnessed the assassination of leaders of certain Islamic movements. However, rather than ending the movements, it could contribute to the emergence of more radical groups with more dangerous ideologies, which would be detrimental to all the states in West Asia and the Eurasia. Should a war break out, the crisis will undoubtedly spread to various parts of Central Asia, the Caucasus, South Asia, and the Persian Gulf, and none of the major Asian powers—such as China, Russia, or India—would stand to gain.

In this situation, it seems necessary to launch a new initiative immediately and form a trans-regional contact group, with representatives from various countries, from Minsk to Islamabad, and from Astana to Doha and Cairo, tasked with engaging in dialogue with all parties involved, designing a roadmap for a ceasefire, and planning for the establishment of lasting peace and the reconstruction of the devastations resulted from the conflicts in the past year.

Alongside these diplomatic efforts, we can design and implement new models of regional cooperation and foster connections among civil societies in Eurasia and West Asia through activating networks for dialogue among elites in these countries. We should not forget that the West Asian and Eurasian worlds share significant cultural values, as well as common ethnicities, religions, and

languages, and a considerable portion of their histories overlap. Hands in hand, we can build a new world, establish a new order, and promote better cultural and political values.

I want to conclude my speech with a verse from *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi, written a thousand years ago:

*Even a leopard knows that battle and war
Are not good, as know the mountains and stones*

THE IMPACT OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT ON THE FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST



Miloš Strugar, founder of the “Conflux Center” non-governmental organization (Republic of Serbia)

It is my honor and pleasure to participate in this international scientific and practical conference. Unfortunately, this time I was not able to attend in person, not for logistical reasons, but for personal ones. I hope that next time I will be able to participate in person, as the online format cannot replace face-to-face communication, especially during such important and significant conferences.

I would like to express my special thanks to the organizers of the conference, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, for bringing together a group of prominent experts to discuss such an urgent topic. First, I would like to say that over the past year, serious, fundamental changes have taken place in the Middle East, which call for a new look at the situation in the region. At the same time, the historical references to relevant events affecting the region need to be emphasized.

In many respects, a new game is being played, the rules of which no one fully understands. In Gaza and Lebanon, the world order is breaking down. You are all aware of the situation with the International Criminal Court, whose position has been reaffirmed by a number of countries, but this is a global issue. In order to understand what is happening in the MENA region and to track its development, it is also necessary to take into account the global context.

There can be no turning back, for we are talking about wars of the future that will be unlike anything else we have seen before.

In part, developments in the region are pushing the boundaries of what used to be legally and morally permissible. Over the past 12 months, a kind of moral vacuum has developed with respect to these conflicts. Moreover, this war is a testing ground for new technologies: artificial intelligence, robotics, drones, autonomous weapons systems, and so on. All of these are new elements are changing not only how wars are fought, but also the relationships between actors. The global expansion of access to these technologies is only a matter of time: it is true that for now Israel retains the monopoly, but this will not always be the case. That is why discussing this issue is a priority for all of us.

The most important thing in any conflict, especially this one, is to determine the date of its beginning. It is often this aspect that is the most controversial. Note that many people cite October 7 of last year as the starting point of the conflict. Others point to 1948, 1967, 1973. This is one of the key aspects in analyzing the conflict and finding possible ways to resolve it. I am afraid that all those solutions that have been proposed for decades as possible ways of settlement, be it the “one-State”, “two-State” or regional security structures, must now be considered from a new perspective and honestly analyzed to see what is viable, acceptable and permissible.

For example, the Arab initiative adopted in Beirut is now 22 years old. I was there when it was adopted, and at the time it seemed like a major breakthrough that Israel simply could not ignore. However, nothing happened. The title of our conference includes the phrase “development in the near future,” but I’m afraid that on this issue I’m not very optimistic. Why? Because there is no diplomacy, not only in the MENA region, but globally. Diplomacy is being militarized and intersectionalized: absolutely everything is now seen through the optics of security, but not from a humanitarian, moral, political point of view. This is one of the biggest problems.

Secondly, public opinion in most countries is silent. Politicians remember it only before elections, and few people are interested in what happens afterwards. This is a crisis on many levels. The same can be said about the UN – I have worked for many years in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, Asia and MENA, but I have never seen such a “frontal attack” that is now being waged against this organization. The UN's role in the MENA region must be preserved at all costs, because it has historically been the “anchor” offering the only true solution to the conflict. On October 27, UNRWA facilities in Lebanon were physically attacked, not to mention similar incidents in Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank. All of this goes back to the issue of Palestinian refugees, which was raised as far back as 1948, 1967.

Why is this important now? Let us remember the UN peacekeeping mission in the Golan Heights: it was established as part of the withdrawal and ceasefire agreement, and underpins Israel's commitment to withdraw from the area. Another mission that many people (especially the new generation) are now forgetting is the UN mission in Jerusalem, which monitors the condition of a number of buildings of historical value. To summarize my vision of this problem, it is extremely important to maintain the UN presence in the Middle East. Now representatives of this organization are actually being squeezed out of the region, its participation in political processes has been minimal for a long time, there have also been attempts to replace the multinational peacekeeping forces in Lebanon, but I believe that this is unrealistic.

I would like to make a few more points. There is currently a war of narratives, political narratives that have nothing to do with the situation on the ground. Part of this war is the question of who is the victim and who is the instigator of the conflict? Especially when it comes to Gaza and Lebanon. I would like to add - the Palestinian question must be viewed as part of decolonization processes. When I first started working in MENA, we used to say “colonies” and “colonists”, not “settlements” and “settlers”. We are talking about the right of peoples to self-determination: it must be fully supported; some aspects of this right are underdeveloped from a legal point of view, but not in the context of decolonization. In analyzing the future of the region, it is necessary to keep in mind some important historical decisions taken in the past by the world community.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that regional countries have common interests: the issue of transport corridors, economic security, maritime safety, and environmental protection. All these are common interests not only on a regional scale but also on a global scale, around which cooperation can be built. I know that today some participants will talk about regional security concepts. Recently, Prime Minister Netanyahu presented the Israeli idea of regional security in strong terms, with a clear division between “us” and “them”, good and evil. Such a concept cannot underpin peace and stability in the region. Besides, there is the Iranian initiative for security in the Gulf, there is the Russian proposal, the American concept, the Arab plan of 2002, the Turkish proposal for a security architecture in the region.

What is the difference between all these approaches? Some of them are based on institutionalizing certain international treaties, while others are consensus-based, which seems to me to be a better foundation. I would like to draw the attention of the participants to these issues, which need to be analyzed in order to understand the possible prospects for the development of the situation in the region in the short

and long term. Thank you very much for your attention and for the opportunity to participate in this conference.

THE IMPACT OF THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS ON THE ARAB MONARCHIES OF THE GULF



Murad Sadygzade, President of the Middle East Studies' Center, Head of the Center for Education and Cooperation (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences), visiting lecturer at Higher School of Economics University, Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, and Moscow State Institute of International Relations

The events of October 7, 2023, when Palestinian militias launched a surprise attack on Israel, heightened tensions in the Middle East and forced the Arab monarchies of the Gulf - Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain - to reconsider their stances. These countries were faced with the dilemma of either supporting the Palestinians or maintaining strategic relations with the West and Israel. The escalation of the conflict has also affected their economies, especially in the energy sector and investment, emphasizing the complexity of their domestic and foreign policies.

Saudi Arabia, as one of the leading Islamic states, has taken a strategically prudent stance towards the escalation of the conflict between Hamas and Israel on October 7, 2023. The Kingdom, given its historical support for the Palestinians and its desire for regional stability, has called for an immediate stop to hostilities, protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law. It also showed its support for peace negotiations on the basis of international resolutions and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative proposed by Saudi Arabia itself.

Saudi diplomacy is actively involved in international de-escalation efforts. King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have held talks with world leaders, calling for coordination to end violence and reaffirming their willingness to support initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable peace. Internally, popular support is felt for the Palestinian people, expressed through social media and public organizations, which strengthens social stability and the government's legitimacy.

The Kingdom continues to support the need for a just solution to the Palestinian issue, insisting that normalization of relations with Israel is only possible with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Saudi Arabia

is also focused on stability in global oil markets and assures the international community of its commitment to maintaining balance in energy markets.

The conflict between Hamas and Israel has raised Saudi Arabia's concerns about the possible rise of Iranian influence in the region, prompting it to actively cooperate with regional and international partners. Saudi Arabia has also spearheaded humanitarian aid to Gaza and backed the emergency meetings of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, demonstrating its willingness to contribute to international peace efforts.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), as one of the region's leading economies, faced the challenge of balancing support for the Palestinians with maintaining the relationship with Israel established under the 2020 "Abraham Accords." The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed deep concern over the situation, calling for an immediate ceasefire and the protection of civilians. To de-escalate, UAE authorities have also initiated a dialogue with international partners, including the US and the EU, offering support in mediation and humanitarian assistance.

Events in Gaza have sparked a wave of solidarity with the Palestinians domestically, strengthening public calls for the government to reconsider its relationship with Israel. Although some joint projects have been suspended, the UAE has not cut ties with Israel, preferring to use them to promote peace efforts. This underscores the Emirates' strategic approach to balancing foreign policy priorities and domestic public opinion.

The escalation of the conflict has had a negative impact on the UAE economy. Instability in the region has led to volatility in stock markets and reduced tourist traffic, which is particularly sensitive for Dubai. Fluctuating oil prices have also caused anxiety in the energy markets, and the UAE has reaffirmed its commitment to market stability through cooperation within OPEC.

The UAE has actively supported the victims in Gaza by sending humanitarian aid and supporting international initiatives to resolve the conflict. This underscores the Emirates' commitment to a peaceful solution and maintaining security in the region.

Qatar, playing a significant role in Middle East politics, has taken a special stance on the escalation of the conflict between Hamas and Israel since October 7, 2023. Supporting the protection of civilians and respect for international law, Qatar has condemned the violence and called for an immediate ceasefire. The Emir of Qatar has held talks with leaders of the US, Turkey and other countries, offering his services as a mediator, carrying on Qatar's traditional role in resolving Palestinian-Israeli conflicts.

Domestically, Qatari society actively supports the Palestinian people, expressing solidarity through social activism and charity campaigns, which

strengthens the legitimacy of the government's policies. Qatari diplomats continue to engage with Hamas and other Palestinian groups to achieve a ceasefire, coordinating efforts with the UN and international organizations.

The escalation of the conflict has affected Qatar's economy. As a major exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), Qatar has felt the impact of fluctuations in energy markets. Qatar is also an investor in Gaza infrastructure, which makes it vulnerable to financial losses caused by the destruction. Support for Hamas causes tensions with Western countries, also affecting economic ties.

Qatar has announced significant humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and a willingness to fund the rebuilding of infrastructure after the cessation of hostilities. These efforts strengthen Qatar's position as a key mediator and humanitarian partner in the region, furthering its long-term goal of maintaining stability and peace in the Middle East.

Oman, known for its neutral stance and diplomatic mediation, has taken a balanced approach in response to the escalation of the conflict between Hamas and Israel since October 7, 2023. Expressing concern, the Omani government called for a ceasefire and the protection of civilians, emphasizing the importance of respect for international law and direct negotiations to achieve sustainable peace.

Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said held talks with leaders from other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt, to reduce tensions and support international diplomatic efforts to restore peace. Domestically, the Omani population, which supports the Palestinian people, remains calm, contributing to social stability.

As an oil and gas exporter, Oman is interested in the stability of energy markets. Escalation of the conflict and its possible impact on global oil prices is a concern, as it could complicate economic planning. At the same time, Oman seeks to develop non-resource sectors of the economy, and instability in the region could make it difficult to attract investment and develop tourism.

Oman provides humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip and supports international initiatives to resolve the conflict, including emergency meetings of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. This position reflects Oman's commitment to a peaceful settlement and to its role as a mediator in the region, seeking long-term stability and prosperity in the Middle East.

Bahrain, which normalized relations with Israel in 2020 as part of the "Abraham Accords," faced the difficult task of maintaining ties with Israel while expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people amid an escalation of conflict with Hamas in October 2023.

Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed deep concern over the renewed violence, calling for an immediate ceasefire and protection of civilians, and emphasized the need to resume the peace process on the basis of a two-state solution.

The events in Gaza sparked support for Palestinians among the Bahraini population, which was reflected on social media and at public events, although there were no mass protests due to strict control measures. Domestic sentiment requires the Bahraini government to take public opinion into account, which adds to the difficulty of maintaining strategic relations with Israel.

The conflict has affected Bahrain's economy by weakening the investment climate and financial markets, given its role as a regional financial center. Some joint projects with Israel have been put on hold, reflecting the impact of internal and external pressures. Bahrain also fears the impact on the energy sector and budget planning due to fluctuations in oil prices.

In addition, the kingdom has supported humanitarian efforts by sending aid to Gaza and supporting emergency meetings of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to discuss the situation. Bahrain's position reflects a balance between the need to maintain internal stability, strategic relations with Israel and security in the region.

Kuwait, known for its strong support for the Palestinian people and principled stance in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, has strongly condemned Israeli military action since the escalation of the conflict with Hamas on October 7, 2023. Kuwait's Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the "Israeli aggression" and calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities, emphasizing the need to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law. The country called on the UN Security Council to take decisive action to stop the violence and ensure the protection of the Palestinian people.

Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has held talks with Arab and Islamic leaders, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, to coordinate efforts to support Palestine. Domestically, public opinion has been active in expressing solidarity with the Palestinians through rallies, fundraisers and social media campaigns. Kuwait's parliament passed a resolution condemning Israel's actions and calling on the government to take tougher measures, including a possible boycott and sanctions.

Although Kuwait does not have direct economic relations with Israel, the conflict has an indirect impact on the country's economy. Fluctuations in oil prices due to regional tensions could affect Kuwait's budget revenues, whose economy is heavily dependent on oil exports. In addition, regional instability could adversely affect the investment climate and efforts to diversify the economy. Kuwait has

announced significant humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip, including medical and food supplies.

Kuwait's position reflected its desire for a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its active participation in diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to end the violence. The country continued to call on the international community to act and supported the unity of Arab and Islamic countries in seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict. Relations with Western countries, especially the US, are of strategic importance and Kuwait encourages its allies to take a more active role in resolving the conflict.

The events of October 7, 2023 had a significant impact on the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf, affecting the political, economic and social aspects of their development. The countries of the region were faced with a difficult choice: to support the Palestinian people and meet the demands of their own populations, or to maintain strategic and economic relations with Israel and the Western powers. The economic impact of the conflict, particularly in the oil and investment sectors, has highlighted the vulnerability of regional economies to geopolitical risks.

In the near term, the Arab monarchies will have to balance these conflicting interests. There may be a strengthening of domestic policies aimed at controlling public opinion, as well as a revision of foreign policy priorities. Long-term stability will require coordinated efforts at the regional and international levels to resolve the conflict and reduce tensions in the region.

THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE PROSPECTS FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT: A PAKISTANI PERSPECTIVE



Taimur Khan, research associate of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (Islamic Republic of Pakistan)

It is a privilege for me to be among such esteemed and accomplished participants. Thanks to CSAI and Dr. Plotnikov for arranging this conference on such an important subject.

I am honored to represent Pakistan's perspective on the current situation in the Middle East, a region with which we share profound historical, cultural, and religious ties. Pakistan's connection with the Middle East is not simply a matter of foreign policy; it is a bond rooted in shared history, faith, and values that transcends politics. The

Middle East has long been a region with which Pakistan holds strong economic, political, religious, and strategic partnerships.

We have stood by our Middle Eastern brothers and sisters in times of crisis, from supporting the Palestinian cause to working together with countries across the region on security, trade, and development initiatives. For Pakistan, the struggle of the Palestinian people is deeply personal. The people of Pakistan hold an abiding respect and concern for Palestine, viewing its cause as an issue of justice and human dignity that resonates profoundly with our nation's principles and emotions. In Pakistan, the name "Palestine" does not signify just another nation but a deeply cherished cause, a symbol of resilience and the human right to live in dignity and peace.

Pakistan has been one of the few countries to consistently advocate for the Palestinian right to self-determination, and we have raised this issue on numerous international platforms, including the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Pakistan firmly believes that a just and viable solution lies in the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This solution is grounded in international law and aligned with United Nations resolutions, and we stand unwavering in our commitment to seeing this just resolution realized. Our commitment is clear and unwavering; Pakistan believes that peace and justice in the Middle East are inseparable from the fulfillment of the Palestinian people's aspirations for a sovereign state.

Alongside our commitment to Palestine, the security, sanctity, and progress of the Middle East as a whole has always been of paramount importance to Pakistan. This region holds profound significance as the home of Islam's holiest places, and ensuring its safety and stability is a matter deeply dear to Pakistan and the people of Pakistan. The protection and prosperity of the Middle East is intertwined with our own sense of identity and reverence for our shared faith and heritage.

Additionally, the Middle East is home to a large Pakistani diaspora, and its security, progress, and stability are vital to Pakistan from this regard as well. Strategically, the Middle East also serves as a global trade and transit hub, linking key regions. Any disturbance to its peace and security would have grave consequences for international trade and global supply chains, affecting economies far beyond the region itself.

Pakistan's position on Israel has been clear, and Israel's actions only serve to consolidate our stance further. The policy orientation and aggressive posturing of Israel against innocent civilians have left Pakistan with no room for reconsideration. Instead, they strengthen our conviction in standing alongside the

Palestinian people. Our faith in their resilience and right to self-determination is reinforced as we witness these atrocities.

Today, the devastation in Gaza is an alarming reminder of the cost of conflict. According to recent reports, over 7,000 Palestinians—of whom approximately 40% are children—have lost their lives in just the past few weeks. Civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and places of worship, has been systematically targeted, leaving more than 1 million people displaced and without basic access to clean water or medical care. This suffering extends beyond Gaza. In Lebanon, Israeli airstrikes have escalated, resulting in significant casualties and an exodus of Lebanese civilians from the south. In Yemen, Israeli involvement has intensified the humanitarian crisis, exacerbating food insecurity in a region where nearly 80% of the population already relies on humanitarian aid.

As we witness these developments, Pakistan cannot ignore the strategic implications this escalation may have on our own national security. The recent intensification of hostilities between Israel and Iran is a matter of particular concern, as any threat to Iran, a neighbor with whom Pakistan shares a long border and a deep-rooted history, could inevitably have consequences for Pakistan's security environment. For these reasons, Pakistan observes the situation closely, cognizant of its potential ripple effects on our region. Pakistan stands ready to respond to any and all challenges and threats, committed to safeguarding its security and stability in a region critical to its strategic interests.

In this context, I would also like to express our sincere appreciation for Russia's balanced and proactive stance on the Middle East, as well as its efforts to advocate for diplomatic solutions over conflict. Russia's constructive approach in providing diplomatic channels and voicing the importance of peace reflects a commitment to stability that the region desperately needs. Pakistan values Russia's efforts to foster dialogue and cooperation, and we believe that such actions are essential for progress in the Middle East.

Furthermore, we commend the unified stance taken by the BRICS Plus members at this year's BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, where the collective condemnation of Israel's atrocities underscored an alignment on justice and respect for human rights. Such solidarity amplifies the call for peace and accountability, bringing hope to those suffering under occupation and violence. Pakistan stands with BRICS Plus in this shared conviction for a just resolution to the injustices in Palestine and the Middle East.

Similarly, we acknowledge Iran's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and its stance against destabilizing forces in the region. Iran's solidarity with Palestine and its resilience in the face of pressures align with the values of justice and sovereignty that Pakistan holds dear. Pakistan values Iran's role in countering

regional imbalances, and we recognize that these efforts contribute significantly to the broader goal of regional peace.

In this context, Pakistan has consistently called for restraint, dialogue, and adherence to international norms. We have advocated for constructive engagement over unilateral actions and have raised our voice in numerous international forums, calling on the global community to uphold the principles of justice and human rights. Pakistan believes that the path to lasting peace lies not in the pursuit of military dominance but in mutual respect and genuine dialogue.

However, our call for justice is met with a troubling silence from those who claim to champion human rights and international law. The Western countries, who present themselves as pioneers of these values, remain conspicuously silent, if not outright supportive, of Israel's blatant disregard for human dignity and international norms. Reports indicate that over \$3.8 billion in US military aid continues to flow annually to Israel, funding weaponry that contributes to the loss of civilian lives and destruction of essential infrastructure in occupied territories. This duplicity—this willingness to overlook atrocities when it serves strategic interests—is a stain on the global conscience and an alarming testament to the double standards at play. As Pakistan, we reject such hypocrisy. We believe that justice is indivisible, and the sanctity of human rights should not be subject to selective application.

To address this crisis, Western countries, particularly the United States and its European partners, bear a responsibility to leverage their influence over Israel to bring an immediate halt to hostilities and encourage a path of diplomacy. Restricting the flow of arms, including suspending military aid used to target civilian areas, would mark a critical step toward de-escalation. The US and its allies can also support the establishment of international monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with human rights standards in affected areas, bringing accountability to the forefront of their foreign policy. Furthermore, endorsing multilateral peace efforts under the United Nations framework and committing to fair mediation rather than unconditional support would contribute significantly to restoring stability in the region. The credibility of Western powers depends upon their willingness to stand by the very principles of human rights and international law they advocate globally.

Looking forward, Pakistan remains committed to advocating for a peaceful and stable Middle East. We believe in the potential of dialogue facilitated through neutral international forums, including the United Nations, to resolve conflicts and restore stability. We urge the global community to adopt a balanced approach, one that upholds human rights consistently and recognizes the inherent dignity of all people.

In closing, let us not be silent spectators to the suffering in the Middle East. Let us act, driven by principles and guided by justice, to foster a region where peace and dignity are not mere ideals but lived realities. Pakistan will continue to stand for these values, unwavering and resolute, in its commitment to a just and peaceful world.

As Albert Einstein once said, “Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.” Let us embrace this wisdom. Only through empathy and understanding can we hope to build a future where peace is not imposed but nurtured, where justice thrives, and where every voice is heard.

Thank you.

THE AXIS OF RESISTANCE’S LONG WAR STRATEGY AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST SECURITY ARCHITECTURE



Lucas Leiroz, member of the BRICS Journalists Association, researcher at the Center for Geostrategic Studies, military expert (Federative Republic of Brazil)

More than a year after the start of hostilities in the Middle East, it is already possible to say that the region is going through one of the most difficult and decisive moments in its history. The current war between Israel and the Axis of Resistance does not seem to be in any way just “another conflict” in the long history of the post-Israeli Middle East. On the contrary, war under the current conditions seems like a real existential challenge for Tel Aviv.

In October 2023, the official narrative in the mainstream media was that a “war between Israel and Hamas” had begun. This narrative has always been a fallacy, as the war has never involved only these actors. On the Palestinian side, there is a coalition of more than ten armed organizations in addition to Hamas, including non-Islamist groups. Of course, Hamas has assumed an extremely significant military and political role in the Gaza Strip, but it is absolutely wrong to claim that it is the only Palestinian militia fighting Israel.

Tel Aviv launched a large-scale war, targeting civilians and killing thousands of people, with the alleged goal of freeing prisoners of war taken by the Palestinian mujahideen during the so-called “Operation Al Aqsa Flood.” The Israeli operation failed to free the prisoners and did not even come close to neutralizing Hamas and the other groups, limiting itself to destroying Gaza’s civilian infrastructure.

In parallel, since the beginning of the war, Hezbollah has been carrying out moderate-scale operations in the north, with the alleged aim of using up Israeli military resources and supporting the Palestinians. The Houthis in Yemen have done something similar, focusing on the naval front, where they have begun to neutralize Western ships that were supporting Israel. Today, a year later, war has been declared in the north, with Israel continuing a land invasion of Lebanon, albeit in a moderate manner. In parallel, the Yemenis are already striking targets throughout occupied Palestine, creating yet another flank against the Zionist regime.

It is naive to believe that these events developed by chance. There was no such thing as an unexpected or unplanned escalation. In fact, the events described here were implicitly part of the military strategy of the so-called “Axis of Resistance” – the coalition of anti-Zionist movements led by the Islamic Republic of Iran with the aim of creating permanent tensions against Israel.

To understand this, we need to go back in time and remember the key role played by General Qassem Soleimani during his post in the Revolutionary Guards abroad. Soleimani was not assassinated without reason. The West targeted him because they feared him deeply. And the reason for this fear was precisely his profound strategic mindset, capable of developing long-term plans involving asymmetric warfare tactics against the Zionist enemy.

Soleimani was much more than a general, but a kind of “war diplomat.” It was under his leadership that the IRGC reached vital agreements for the creation of a broad anti-Zionist coalition. Even though he was Iranian and represented the interests of the Shiite civilization, he was skilled in negotiating with Sunni and secular militias, creating a common network of anti-Zionist groups. There are reports that indicate that Soleimani even tried to negotiate with the Kurds, an ethnic group whose armed militias are known to be linked to the West, in an attempt to co-opt them into the Iranian sphere of influence.

It was thanks to Soleimani's work that the Palestinian militiamen, who had historically been too harassed by the Wahhabi powers to be hostile to Iran, finally came under Tehran's sphere of influence. Shiites, Sunnis, communists and Christians, with Soleimani's military diplomacy, came together in pursuit of a common agenda, overcoming individual differences. This is how the Axis of Resistance was formed, as the armed coalition with which Soleimani planned to defeat Israel.

Victory, in such a doctrine established by the Iranian general, would come through a strategy of prolonged war – or rather, permanent, truly perpetual war. Since Israel is a state controlled by an elite with strong fanatical tendencies, it is predictable that Tel Aviv would secretly maintain a doctrine of “nuclear suicide”.

In other words, Soleimani certainly understood that, even though Iran is stronger than Israel, it would be irresponsible to launch a direct and symmetrical war because, if pressured and close to defeat, the Zionist regime could simply use its nuclear weapons against the countries of the region, massacring Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians and Iraqis.

Soleimani's strategy consisted of maintaining a permanent low-scale war that would make it impossible for Israel to keep working as an ordinary society. The fruits of this plan are now being seen, more than a year after the launch of Operation Al Aqsa. Israel has failed to defeat Hamas and is now in a strategic trap from which it cannot escape, facing the Palestinians, Yemenis, Lebanese and Iranians at the same time. None of these fronts is really serious enough for Israel to feel existentially threatened and use its nuclear weapons. On the contrary, it all seems like a low-scale war, without immediate catastrophic consequences, but at the same time, almost impossible to end.

If Israel ever defeats Hamas, it will still have to face all the other Palestinian militias. If it defeats all the Palestinians, it will still have to fight Hezbollah. If it defeats Hezbollah, it will still have to face the Houthis, the Iraqis and the Syrians. And at the end of this almost endless process of wars, Israel still has as its enemy Iran itself – which is the greatest military power in the Middle East. In other words, there is no end to this war. Israel is doomed to fight for the rest of its days. There will not be a symmetrical all-out war of nuclear dimensions, but there will also be no peace. There will be constant attrition, exorbitant defense spending, a decline in the Israeli citizens' life standards, the loss of soldiers' lives and all the burden of a prolonged armed conflict.

Obviously, the process of emigration will increase. Israeli citizens will emigrate en masse to escape the terrible life in an insecure country with no prospects for peace. And this is how Iran plans to defeat Israel: through prolonged attrition. Tehran wants, with the Axis of Resistance designed by Soleimani, to foster the conditions for Israel to become an "unfeasible state", with no alternative but to cease to exist or at least negotiate a territorial reconfiguration on Palestinian terms.

Soleimani, in short, created a military doctrine establishing a plan of action to defeat a nuclear power without allowing extreme escalation. His strategic skill was such that the West decided to assassinate him – as well as all his comrades in the Axis of Resistance, both in Palestine and Lebanon. However, the policy of targeted assassinations tends to fail when the attacked side has a strong military doctrine and ideology, which explains how resistance organizations become increasingly mature the more they are attacked.

In the end, I emphasize that all the events that have occurred in the Middle East since October 2023 make it clear that the Soleimani Doctrine is being implemented in practice by the Islamic Republic of Iran in conjunction with allied anti-Zionist groups. Israel agreed to go to war against the Axis of Resistance without realizing that it is impossible to win such a conflict against a multifaceted, experienced, decentralized and ideologically engaged enemy.

THE IMPACT OF THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA ON THE UNION STATE NATIONAL INTERESTS



Vitali Romanovski, research associate of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Research (Republic of Belarus)

Structural transformations in the world economy and politics are leading to an increase in the importance of regional and transregional interstate associations, a number of which are already forming the core of a new world economic order based on a more effective system of non-discriminatory economic partnerships.

Being at the forefront of Eurasian integration processes, the Union State is experiencing the impact of large-scale transformations in the Greater Eurasian space, which necessitates the adaptation of traditional approaches to building relations with partners in MENA. In this regard, there are a number of foreign policy and foreign economic directions that are significant for the realization of the lasting interests of Moscow and Minsk in the sphere of ensuring the security of the Union State.

In the context of systematic introduction of unilateral restrictive measures and subsequent disruption of the coherence of regional production and supply chains in the Eurasian space, it is strategically important to ensure manageability of geo-economic fragmentation.

Against the backdrop of the upward trend towards the formation of a new global map of industrial clusters and changes in the industrial specialization of geographical regions, the systematic connection of industrial capacities of partners to production cycles in the Eurasian economic space while taking into account the increased status of the industrial base of the Union State can become a facilitating factor.

Expansion of the formats of interstate interaction is exemplified by the development of the sphere of technological transfer. The creation of appropriate

infrastructure and competencies within the Union State to accept technologies from MENA partners will contribute to maintaining the pace of import substitution and technological development.

The instability of the food resources markets makes the problem of ensuring food security in the MENA states a major protected national interest, which in turn opens up opportunities for interfacing the relevant technological, production and logistics infrastructures between the Union State and regional countries.

The interests of the Union State are also served by involving Middle Eastern partners in the development of a polymodal system of financial relations, which will include both mechanisms for mutual settlements in national currencies and digital financial instruments.

The creation of project-thematic formats of interaction within the framework of multilateral associations, such as BRICS, will accelerate the process of finding points of convergence of interests of the member states and transfer cooperation to the practical plane.

An important area of cooperation between the Union State and partners in MENA is the optimization of migration processes in terms of creating conditions for reducing emigration of highly qualified specialists, including to the developed states of the region, and actively countering illegal migration.

At the same time, deepening contacts in the area of combating transnational crime, primarily related to terrorism, human trafficking, drug trafficking and cybercrime, is an obvious priority in the current conditions.

The trend towards an increasing share of nuclear energy in the global energy balance, as well as the growing competition for the possession of nuclear technology, leads to the need to rethink the role of the nuclear factor in Eurasian security. It appears that intensified dialogue with MENA partners will help formulate future parameters and principles for the functioning of the nuclear architecture in the Eurasian space and lay the foundation for cooperation between states in the nuclear sphere in order to strengthen peace and preserve indivisible security in Greater Eurasia.

THE IMPACT OF THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST ON SECURITY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



Aleksandar Kostovic, deputy mayor of municipality of East New Sarajevo (Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

At an international conference I learned the difference in approach to reconciliation. The Western principle is that truth is more important than reconciliation. And we all know that the truth can be manipulated. The principle of Orthodox Christians is that reconciliation is more important than truth. Because if we are reconciled with each other, the truth, which can be viewed from different angles, is less important. Because the goal is reconciliation, not who thinks they are right and why.

Some of the links between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Middle East, a territory with a rich history and many emotions, are an ethnically divided society and the wish for a different solution than the current one.

Society in BiH is quite divided. The country is not only divided ethnically or organizationally, but also by the way how we see the past and the future. Sometimes we forget that we only have the present and that it is important to learn from the past and plan the future wisely.

States and nations that are politically aware enough of the fact that the world is changing will adapt to the coming changes more quickly. And there is a fundamental difference between Bosnian Muslims and Serbs.

Bosniaks are an ethnic group that likes to be guided from large centers of power. They often get lost in the geopolitical labyrinth of various interests, wanting to please "the decision makers" at any cost. At the same time, they goal is to be part of EU and NATO, but they openly support Palestine. They proudly point out that they are Muslims, but casinos and alcohol are their leading problems among the young people. They want a unified state, but they cannot escape from the role of victim. They suffered in the last war a lot, but they are persistently served in role of victim by the West. What they do not see is that it is not a sincere intention to respect their sacrifice, but rather an intention not to reach reconciliation with the Serbs because it is easier to manage divided societies.

Serbs are a nation that loves freedom very much and we are ready to fight for it. In all conditions and against anyone who threatens our freedom. In the Balkans, we brought freedom to ourselves and other nations. The wish for a nation-state in

which there is a place for all those who speak the same language, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, was greater than any force that stood in the way. In the wars with the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German Reich, the NATO Pact and other external and internal enemies, we lost a huge number of the population. But that number of victims in the last 150 years does not give us the right to trade in such dearly paid freedom. With no one and under no conditions.

This does not mean that we, like other nations that are not under the influence of great powers, do not sometimes feel lost in great geopolitical games. We are a nation that, like hardly anyone, sincerely loves Russia and the Russian people. In all periods and situations, it was so. For us, Russia is a symbol of freedom and a political role model. But we must not forget whose zone of influence we are in and that we are surrounded by NATO countries and that because of our positions, we are often exposed to terrible pressures. And sometimes we simply have our own experiences that determine our attitude towards certain situations. We look at the situation in the Middle East with sympathy for the suffering of the Palestinian people, but our official policy also respects the Israeli innocent victims. There were Israeli flags on our public institutions after the massacre, and the anniversary of massacre was organized in our municipality because of security reasons-it was not possible to organized that in Sarajevo.

A long period of introspection, while connections between nations and states were made around the world, will cost Western Europe politically and in every other sense. And we are part of Europe as well, but I see our chance in the fact that we saw in right time that the world is not unipolar. We just need to make reconciliation in time. Because if that doesn't happen, we can easily become a training ground for diverting attention from other things.

All those who make big decisions should know that there is no permanent peace without reconciliation. And there we go back to the beginning. Reconciliation is more important than the truth. Each of us sees the truth in a different way. We have different experiences, we belong to different cultures, different religions and of course we approach problems in different ways. but when there is a wish for reconciliation, all other things become less important. And I know that in the era of wars this is not so popular topic, but as someone who spent years under shells and bullets, I know very well what I'm talking about. Politics and geopolitics do not recognize emotions but interests. But certain centers of power are very successful in using emotions to get their interests. The only peaceful future for our region is the permanent reconciliation of the Orthodox and Muslims. And that is difficult because the wounds are fresh, but also because emotions are heating up from the side. The day when the people in BiH be left to decide on their own future, will be the day of recovery.

THE IMPACT OF WATER RESOURCES ON THE STABILITY OF NORTH AFRICAN STATES



Alexey Romanov, leading specialist of CSAI IOS RAS

In recent years we can witness an increase in the frequency, intensity and complexity of crises related to water scarcity at both global and regional levels.

One of the regions, where climate risk factors are heavily compounded by unresolved security, political and economic problems is North Africa. Here, the problem of water shortages has become a threat to regional stability and security.

Growing demand for water resources and its decreasing availability provoke tensions. Within the borders of one state, it poses risks for social and economic stability. Moreover, it increases the chance that national military organizations would lose their potential to eliminate security threats.

Against this background, geopolitical opponents often become more active, seeking to take advantage of the country's exposed vulnerabilities.

So, the water problems are unique, because the happenings far beyond the borders of a country can reduce its water security and thereby push the country to the brink of crisis. What does it mean? This means that the water issue can only be considered in the context of regional security.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its reports describes the Middle East and North Africa as "one of the hotspots for worsening extreme heat, drought, and aridity conditions."

The population being at risk of water stress in the MENA region is up to 100 million people. If current climate change trends and water use patterns continue, by 2030 the demand for freshwater in North Africa will exceed its production by 60%.

The World Bank predicts that by that time, water availability per capita in the region will fall below the absolute deficit limit (500 cubic meters per year). From an economic point of view, the agriculture of North African countries is most at risk, being rain-fed for up to 70%.

Despite the harsh climate and imperfect water management systems, for some reason the water problem in North Africa would not be so serious if it was limited just by lack of water reserves – reasonable and smart cooperation would allow water to be saved.

But! The sources of fresh water, its distribution and delivery infrastructure are increasingly targeted by the regional competitors. This often limits access to this vital resource.

The outcome is expected – the use of water as a political tool or even as a weapon strikes, first of all, the population, and causes long-term social, economic and environmental consequences, jeopardizing the post-war recovery in the affected regions.

North African countries remain especially vulnerable to water insecurity due to a number of reasons – high population growth rates, specific climatic conditions, aggressive impact of industry and agriculture on the environment, problems with economy growth, high poverty, social inequality, weak political institutions, and limited financial and technical capabilities of these states. This list of the negative factors, that North African countries face, is surely not complete. And of course, each country has its own problems and specific negative factors.

A sad consequence of regional nature of the water scarcity is that even a partial normalization of the situation in a single state does not guarantee its security.

An example is Tunisia, where the filling of dam lakes in 2024 has shown the best results and amounted up to 35% (for comparison, in 2022 – not more than 20%).

The same issue is noticed in Morocco, whose government announced that two days of rainfall in September had exceeded yearly averages in several areas. Such rains, which meteorologists are calling an extratropical storm, may indeed change the course of the region's weather in months and years. Satellites showed water rushing in to fill Lake Iriqui, a famous lakebed between Zagora and Tata that had been dry for 50 years.

But still, despite the good results such climate changes can provoke a surge in illegal migration from more unstable states. Against the background of other internal problems, this can seriously affect these countries' economy.

A particular threat to the region is that water disputes lead to the strengthening of criminal and terrorist groups.

The historical experience confirms the connection between the spread of the terrorist threat and the violation of water security. Like “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb” in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, “Al-Shabaab” in Somalia, “Boko Haram” in the Lake Chad region, ISIS in northern Iraq and other militant groups, terrorists monopolize water sources and humanitarian aid, exploit the power and information vacuum, promote radical ideas and recruit new members.

Even simple competition for water between some ethnic groups, escalating into armed confrontation, creates an excellent “breeding ground” for radical groups.

Such conflicts scaling up and spreading beyond the country's borders are quite often.

As I have lined out, even a threat to the integrity of water resources provokes regional escalation.

In North Africa, we see a clear example of an unresolved dispute over the joint use of transboundary water resources between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, where construction of a large dam on the Blue Nile has led to the degradation of relations since 2011.

The concerns in Cairo and Khartoum are related to the possibility of Ethiopia using water as a weapon, which, in the context of frequent droughts, forces the parties to keep the military options on the table.

The importance of ensuring water security is discussed at the level of security councils and other specialized bodies not only in the countries of our focal region, but also in international associations – the UN, the African Union, BRICS and others.

For example, the discussion of this issue in NATO has led to the consideration of water security as a priority area of foreign policy and a key factor in regional stability. At the same time, a number of NATO countries (primarily in the south of Europe) have already adjusted their legislative base and have begun to form specialized bodies to monitor the water situation in North Africa and other regions.

In this regard, we face an urgent need to develop mechanisms to ensure collective water security in North Africa, as well as to strengthen the resilience of the region to crisis manifestations.

We in our Center believe that this sphere may become one of the areas of joint research with our partner scientific organizations in the Middle East and North Africa.

TRANSCAUCASIA AS A “NEAR PERIPHERY” OF THE MIDDLE EAST: CURRENT PROBLEMS OF MILITARY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS STATES



**Stanislav Tkachenko, professor of the SPbU
Department of European Studies, Doctor of Economic
Sciences (Russian Federation)**

Dear colleagues, it is a great honor to participate in this conference. I have been dealing with the South Caucasus for more than 20 years, addressing primarily political and economic issues. In particular, within the framework of interparliamentary relations between the CSTO countries. However, this is my first time talking about this issue here. By “South Caucasus states” I mean 5 states: Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, but in my report I focus on three or even two countries - Georgia is mentioned much less than Armenia and Azerbaijan.

After the Treaties of Adrianople and Turkmanchay this region remained the periphery of several empires for a century and a half. The first instance of nuclear blackmail against the USSR was also connected with this region, when at the end of March 1946, the USSR ambassador in Washington was given an ultimatum: withdraw troops from Iran or bombs would fall on Soviet cities. The USSR fulfilled the terms of the ultimatum.

The South Caucasus region has a great potential, currently the main priority of the countries of the region is to defend their own sovereignty, this is common ground for all external players. Azerbaijan drew the world's attention to its sovereignty more than others, first in 1994, then in the early 2000s, when the US launched its “war on global terrorism”, Azerbaijan's importance increased significantly. Another important factor is its proximity to Iran: the Azerbaijan-Iran border is more than 600 kilometers long.

It is difficult to determine the impact of Middle Eastern events on Georgia: what can be said for sure is that in 2008 Georgia got its painful lesson of “big geopolitics”. Armenian-Azerbaijani relations in this context need to be considered in more depth. It has been repeatedly said that the West's main objective is to use the Armenian population to open a new front in the confrontation between Russia and the region. The US plans to pursue a similar policy here as in Ukraine. The territory of Armenia can be used in a potential conflict between the US and Iran.

If it succeeds, it will be a good result for the US, taking into account all the efforts they have put into it.

Also, an issue important for the Russian expert community is the Zangezur corridor. Curiously, the positions of Great Britain and Russia, two countries that are bitter enemies on other issues, are converging on this issue. The Zangezur corridor was part of the agreements reached at the end of the Second Karabakh War, and now Iran has become very sensitive to this issue. We have all read about the demarche of Iranian diplomats, so it is necessary to formulate a clear Russian position on the Zangezur corridor.

Azerbaijan is one of the key states I would like to discuss. It was expected that Azerbaijan would resolve the issue of its occupied territories in the context of a potential Western war against Iran. Western and some Russian experts have been talking about this for decades. However, Azerbaijan went the other way, unexpectedly, allying itself with Turkey. In fact, Azerbaijan was armed by Israel. This fact of an obvious military alliance with Turkey and a less obvious but still very close one with Israel is a qualitatively new factor in the South Caucasus and the Middle East as a whole. After the Karabakh issue was settled, Azerbaijani politicians significantly intensified their anti-Iranian rhetoric. Azerbaijan reacted disproportionately to the strike on the embassy in Tehran, and now the discussion of the “South Azerbaijan” issue continues at the unofficial level.

There is a threat that Azerbaijan will not stop at Karabakh, will continue its assertive foreign policy, attack along the perimeter of its borders towards Nakhichevan or even Iranian South Azerbaijan, where more than 20 million people live. Azerbaijanis now hold trumps, so to speak. There have been some facts of military cooperation, in particular, the joint production of small arms by Israel and Azerbaijan, also note that Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan supply 80% of all goods needed by Israel: if in the Red Sea the Houthis can affect fuel supplies, in this region there is nothing anyone can do.

There is a significant Jewish diaspora in Azerbaijan, which is sympathetic to the agenda of the ultra-right politicians of Israel. When we analyze the processes affecting the South Caucasus, our immediate periphery, we need to pay attention to these issues. Let me remind you that Azerbaijani weapons are still killing Russian soldiers, officers and peacekeepers. Azerbaijan has apologized and made reparations, but still, we need to assess this factor at the highest political level

In conclusion, I would like to answer a couple of questions that Mr. Plotnikov raised at the beginning of our discussion. How can we cure the region's ills? I am an economist. I believe that over the last year we have definitely realized that there is no such thing as Arab or Islamic unity, so the problems of the region need to be solved by countries like Russia and China through unilateral policies, and then

building bilateral ties that would help the economic, infrastructural and social development of the region.

How do we stop the Israeli war? I'm not a military expert, but we need to increase the defensive capabilities of Israel's neighbors so they can defend themselves against attacks. This is one way. When I was in Tehran, talking to Iranian experts, they shared their expectation of Russia to support Iran, in particular to provide anti-missile systems.

It was also said today that there is no diplomacy in the region. That is absolutely true, we see the rule of force over law. Theoretically, there is a political path between diplomacy and military force: the concept of “coercive diplomacy”, for which Thomas Schelling won the Nobel Prize. Finding the right mix of diplomacy and military coercion to mitigate the severity of conflict should be the priority of our research at the moment.

ESCALATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO CSTO BORDERS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA



Vyacheslav Kocharian, councilor of the Expert and Analytical Department of the Secretariat of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, Secretary of the Information and Analytical Legal Center of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, PhD in Technical Sciences

The escalation, which can be observed to a greater or lesser extent throughout Eurasia, exacerbates the existing dangers and creates new ones for international security in the immediate vicinity of the borders of the CSTO, CIS and SCO. It is obvious that the spearhead of the conflict potential vector is more and more directed at the borders of Russia, Belarus, Iran, China, Serbia, Syria and other independent states, similarly to the COMECON and Warsaw Pact countries and the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia during the Cold War.

There is no doubt that this problem reflects the current stage of realization of interests of the leading world powers, international organizations and transnational corporations.

However, considering this problem in the spectrum of challenges and threats directly on the borders of the CSTO, the following points should be clarified:

- what is the composition, configuration and role of collective security regions in the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia?
- what are the specifics of the terms “challenges” and “threats”?
- what is the nature of external disruptive factors in the South Caucasus and Central Asia?

I will try to answer these questions briefly in the context of analyzing the escalation in the Middle East.

1. CSTO regions

The structure and capabilities of the CSTO collective security system are clearly defensive in nature. Territorially, the Organization's area of responsibility includes the Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asian regions of collective security.

In accordance with the Agreement on the Procedure for the Formation and Functioning of the Forces and Means of the Collective Security System, a “collective security region” is a part of the CSTO area of responsibility that includes, taking into account the geostrategic position, the territories of one or more Parties within which their national and collective security interests are ensured.

In Eastern Europe, this includes the sovereign territories of Belarus and Russia.

The Caucasus region of collective security includes the territory and airspace of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the entities of the Russian Federation in the southwest of the country, in the Greater Caucasus and along the coast of the Black and Caspian Seas.

The Central Asian region includes the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Tajikistan, and a number of border entities in the Volga, Urals and Siberian Federal Districts of the Russian Federation.

Long before the formation of the CSTO in 2002, the so-called Eurasian arc of instability had already been running along the external borders of the post-Soviet space, and today it encompasses conflict points on the map of Europe or South Asia, as well as in North Africa and the Middle East. As a rule, an increase in the degree of conflict at any point of the arc has a destabilizing, chain-like effect on the stability of the nearest countries and far beyond. This pattern will undoubtedly be reflected in the outcome of the conference, if we are able to confirm the hypotheses expressed in the presentations and exchanges.

The second feature that I propose to include in the documents of our meeting is the fact that over the 30-40 years the spectrum of threats has become noticeably

wider and, following the industrial revolution, has moved to a higher technological level, including the creation of weapons based on new physical principles.

However, before delving into the analysis of destructive factors, it is necessary, as is customary in the scientific community, to clarify the terminology.

2. Scientific and methodological specificity of the terms “challenges” and “threats”

I will try to be laconic in an attempt to converge our understanding of the essence of challenges and threats. I propose to build abstract models of these concepts based on the following points.

In a dialectical sense, “challenge” and “threat” signify potential and real danger up to and including aggression.

A challenge is a set of conditions, the synergy of which generates a threat;

A threat is an action that breaks the status quo.

For example:

- the availability of uranium deposits and technologies to process them for peaceful use should be considered a challenge;

- the presence of enriched weapons-grade nuclear raw materials or nuclear weapons is a threat.

I propose to emphasize the existence of a problem - a significant divergence in the interpretation of these terms, which also makes the scientific and methodological task of overcoming cognitive dissonance among specialists, experts and the general public urgent.

3. External challenges and threats to the CSTO borders

Relying on the professionalism of distinguished experts, I would like to outline the destructive factors projected from outside, including:

global and interregional:

- the escalation of the arms race, including the creation of new military technologies and the use of multi-domain warfare methods and their illegal proliferation;

- increasing probability of provocations and military incidents;

- the desire of the neighboring party to engage in political and economic activities in the disputed territories until the delimitation and demarcation of borders is completed;

- threat of uncontrolled use of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, biological, chemical, and other destructive weapons;

- increased military spending;

- the emergence of new regional alliances;
- unilateral changes in the number of participants in the "nuclear club";
- the growth of the global terrorist threat due to the increase in the number of armed groups in conflict zones and their subsequent infiltration;
- the emergence and spread of new destructive ideologies, including extremist and separatist ideologies;
- increased transit of mercenary fighters, radicals and professional terrorists, as well as the problem of their return, legalization and socialization;
- increased flow of refugees from Lebanon and Syria;
- a likely increase in the illegal trafficking of weapons, drugs and other contraband, including for the purpose of increasing the financing of extremist organizations;
- an increase in the humanitarian burden on relevant UN structures and countries;
- disruption of interregional supply chains of food, essential industrial supplies, mineral resources and energy;

in Central Asia:

- the growing potential of terrorist organizations, which poses a threat to adjacent territories and the secular path of development;
- the increasing influence of destructive on the population in order to recruit fighters and create sleeper cells. History confirms that nationalist or religious-radical maxims are especially in demand to justify the ideology of extremism, military expansion and colonization of territories;
- the probability of destabilization of the situation in Afghanistan with the aim of a new round of terrorist, ideological and territorial threats in West and South Asia;
- disruption of projects on the realization of the middle stream and East-West, North-South transport routes, as well as national development plans;
- disturbance of the balance of interests of regional actors;
- criminalization of cross-border communication and information space;
- the threat of nuclear technologies falling into the hands of extremists;
- the danger of radioactive contamination of territories caused by strikes on nuclear infrastructure in neighboring regions or the use of a "dirty bomb".

It should be noted that the CSTO, CIS, SCO, EAEU, BRICS and other political, diplomatic and economic formats that uphold the sovereign right of all countries and peoples to sustainable peaceful development in line with the central

coordinating role of the UN and mutual respect are a natural response to these destructions.

In general, the combination of a scientific vision of ways to overcome the discussed problems and the political will to implement them provides the greatest opportunity to renew the dialogue on peace, security, trust and integration in Greater Eurasia.

DISCUSSION

Ahmed Al-Wahishi: Boutros Ghali, with whom I communicated in Egypt, wrote a book about the water crisis. He expected that in the coming years the water problem would become very acute in this region, in the Middle East, in Africa. For instance, Russia has a lot of big lakes, a lot of water, water reserves. But the situation is very different in the Middle East, in North Africa, in the Nile Valley. Now there is tension around this water crisis.

Salah Halima: Two points about water, the water crisis and the Nile Valley in particular. In Egypt, at least in our Egyptian Council dealing with these issues, we believe that Ethiopia wants to act as a regional power, supporting the efforts of the US and Israel that are trying to dominate the Red Sea region. These efforts are now entering the southern Red Sea, there is a lot of military activity there. While Israel is in charge in the north, Ethiopia is operating in the south with US support. European countries are also getting involved. The Nile Valley issue is very acute and it requires a separate session to summarize what the main goals should be for those actors working in the region.

Also, a separate issue is the Palestinian question. It was clear from the very beginning, even before October 7, that Netanyahu had a plan to change the very map of the Middle East and in his subsequent speeches at the UN, he kept repeating this. I think he's doing it with US support and it's a kind of strategic partnership that we're seeing now, which is based on a military, material, economic alliance. Every area of activity is aimed at supporting Israel. Whether the Republicans or the Democrats, they're still going to support it.

The main goals of this effort between Netanyahu and the US are to eliminate and resolve the Palestinian issue geographically and demographically. To minimize Iran's strength as a regional power, which is in a better position now that it has ties at the highest level with the Middle Eastern states. They want to prevent that from happening. My colleague, Ms. Mandana, suggested that we form a contact group of foreign ministries, our leaders, but I recall that this recommendation was already put forward at the Riyadh conference in 2023 (Arab-Islamic Emergency Summit

2023) and there were 30 points on the agenda, a roadmap was presented to address the problems of the region. They have already formed a contact group/committee of 8 foreign ministers for two purposes: ceasefire and holding a peace conference to resolve the Israeli-Arab issue and the Palestinian issue.

I think there is a need to hold a second conference on this topic based on what has been achieved previously, which could benefit from what has been noted and emphasized and what is supported by public opinion. I think it is possible here to propose an idea for this conference.

SESSION 2
THE SITUATION IN INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES OF THE MENA
REGION

*Session moderator – Alexey Romanov, leading specialist of CSAI IOS RAS
(Russian Federation)*

THE PROSPECTS FOR RESOLVING THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN
CONFLICT



**Alastair Crooke, founder of the
“Conflicts Forum” international consulting
agency**

Thank you! I would like to start with a metaphor. Imagine: you are walking or driving through a city, and suddenly there is an explosion. Something terrible has happened, you see the destruction, you see dead people. At that moment, a policeman comes up to you and asks you to leave, to turn away, to pretend you didn't see anything. In this time of Western dominance, there are many things that we have to pretend not to see. Gaza is one of those things. In fact, we are blinded by the artificial reality that the authorities impose on us through narrative “art-shops.” Confusion and distrust are the main goals of Western governments, and the situation in Gaza is no accident. It happened by intent long planned. Mandatory pretending demands we do not notice or enquire.

Politics therefore has a less-spoken inside and a ‘retail’ push-narrative outside. An important “inside” in relation to Israel is that it is doing what it has planned - a plan that’s been 50 years in execution. It was created in 1973-1974 at the Hudson Institute, which at the time acted as a training ground for the Mossad, and consisted of making life so unbearable for Palestinians that they would either abandon their homes or be destroyed by bombing. Notice the Vietnam blueprint, specifically about the segregated hamlets.

The main proponent of this idea was Scoop Jackson (Henry Martin Jackson), twice the Democratic presidential nominee and a prominent political figure at the time. He embraced the plan as part of the idea of a “new American century” that the US should create a “perpetual revolution” for American interests. This idea goes back to Trotsky, whose ideas were highly respected at the Hudson Institute. Scoop Jackson also insisted that Zionists and neoconservatives must remain in the

US State Department and National Security Council so that this policy would not get rolled back by subsequent administrations - same pattern holds today.

The main purpose of the plan was to use proxies (jihadists on one side, Israel on the other) to control Middle Eastern oil reserves. In addition, it was necessary to decapitate Iran in order to weaken Russia and China. The big question on everyone's mind now is, can this plan be stopped? In 1976, Scoop Jackson's aides created what was called the “total break strategy” for Netanyahu, which involved aggressive regime change in a number of countries that would consolidate Israel's hegemony.

Who can stop this plan? Certainly not Biden. Biden plays the role of “good cop” (emphasizing “American values”) for Netanyahu, who acts as the “bad cop” supposedly beyond anyone's control. The Americans are well aware of his plans; even at the very beginning of the Israeli plan, American government officials were involved in its development and implementation. Can Netanyahu be stopped? The fact is that he has already gotten everything he wanted.

There are hidden underlying structures in American politics that drive the political processes. Since the 1970s, one of those structures has been the support Israel and the desire to control the Middle East. More broadly, to control the Eurasian “Heartland” through the weakening of Russia and China. These issues are not addressed in public debates or elections: in elections, candidates are deliberately chosen to create the illusion of a choice between “blue” and “red,” but both sides silently subscribe to the deep state and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Trump was the first outlier in this system, so his rise to power has caused major shockwaves in the American political system. Nevertheless, campaign finance is on the line, and that's millions of dollars. You have to stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel or you don't get the Israeli lobby's money. It should be remembered that campaigning in the US is a huge amount of money.

Once again, can it be stopped? The US military leadership, the Pentagon, is dead set against war with Iran. Yet, a couple months ago, Netanyahu spoke before Congress, where he was received with applause. Netanyahu's statement that the US should go to war with Iran to protect our planet from barbarism was received extremely warmly.

Is the “two-state solution” possible? I worked for 9 years in the negotiations between Yasser Arafat and Israel that preceded the Oslo Accords, and I can say for sure that this process was part of the very “inside” of politics that is not usually talked about. In other words, it was a game designed to prevent the formation of any Palestinian state in order to continue to build settlements in the occupied territories. There are currently some 800,000 settlers in those territories.

They are armed, they are fanatical, they believe that they are chosen by God. Who will drive them out of those territories? It requires military force, but no one from among the Western states will do it. If it could be done, the plan of “two states for two peoples” might work, but it is unrealistic. What options are there to change the situation? I would say maintain resistance. A Palestinian state can be formed if there is no political Zionism. There is a serious political crisis in the West, because it is not clear what is true and what is false - a kind of chimera. The non-West therefore must assume to midwife the birth of a new international system. This might have happened recently in Kazan.

Just today, the citadel of neoconservatism, the Atlantic Council, suggested that the US should prepare for war with Iran within the next 4 years. During this time, the US is supposed to train troops, continue to support Israel, and lay the groundwork for a future war. However, something has happened that is changing the situation in the region. I'll be blunt: Israel's air attack on Iran failed. According to military science, the first phase of an attack is the suppression of air defense. Israel launched long-range missiles into Iran, the purpose of this suppression was to clear the way for a full-scale infrastructure strike. However, the subsequent strike was canceled. What happened? The Israeli military said it encountered an “unexplained” Iranian air defense capability that jammed GPS navigation and prevented Israeli missiles from traveling further than 70 kilometers deep into Iranian territory.

What happened, in fact, is Russia provided Iran with a new GPS jammer that completely minimized the satellite navigation capabilities of Israeli missiles. As a result, Israel had to hit undiscovered targets with precision weapons in the hope of hitting something. As a consequence, the damage from this attack was extremely low. It turns out that Russia's GPS suppression capabilities have already reached the level of a world leader, and this signals a serious change in the balance of power.

Obviously, we are in the “fog of war”, when it is impossible to accurately assess the success of an operation. Predictably, the West considers the recent Israeli attack a “resounding success” simply because prolonging the conflict benefits the US military-industrial complex. Nevertheless, the implications for the region are enormous: it turns out that Russian weapons systems have outperformed Israeli ones. It turns out that airplanes equipped with stealth technology will not be able to penetrate Iranian airspace. It turns out, finally, that there is no way to win this conflict except by using weapons of mass destruction, which no one wants.

Despite the joyous exclamations from the US, the entire Middle East region realizes what the cancellation of further Israeli air attack means for the future regional balance of power. This represents a watershed moment for the future of the MENA region.

THE IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST ON THE SITUATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC



Vladimir Kolotov, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Head of the Saint Petersburg State University Department of History of the Far East, Director of the Saint Petersburg State University Ho Chi Minh Institute

In a way, my report will continue what has already been said by my colleagues. Among other things, I will touch upon such a geopolitical phenomenon as the Eurasian system of arcs of instability. If we analyze the situation in the MENA region and its impact on the Asia-Pacific region, we are talking about the activation of the North African and Middle Eastern segments of the Eurasian system of arcs of instability in order to carry out controlled regional destabilization. The next stage of the "great game" has begun and the escalation is intensifying. The goal is to restore direct external control over resources and transportation routes. There is a shift in the balance of power to expand the zone of control of some at the expense of others.

Thus, these arcs of instability act as fuses between powder kegs. The essence of the project is to produce and export instability to other regions in order to weaken geopolitical competitors, and the main competitor in the Asia-Pacific region is China, and the auxiliary one is ASEAN. The destabilization of the Middle East makes it possible to limit the development of competitors and create systemic security problems for them.

When Zbigniew Brzezinski was formulating the foundations of US neo-imperial geopolitics, he described the main task, the essence of which was to "maintain security dependency among vassals". This is what we are seeing now in the Middle East, we are also seeing the export of instability to the Asia-Pacific region in order to draw in US security partners, primarily Japan, South Korea, Australia, and there is also an attempt to split ASEAN in order to destabilize the region and remove China as a geopolitical competitor. Much was said about this at the BRICS Plus/Outreach summit, especially when discussing the so-called rules-based order that no one can see.

Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi met at the BRICS summit in Kazan, today they withdrew troops from the Doklam plateau, where the border guards of the two nuclear powers have been fighting with stones and sticks for the last few years. There are positive results, but we are talking about sovereign powers. As the same Brzezinski pointed out, there are players and there are pieces on the board. Japan

and South Korea cannot act on their own, they will do what they are told by Washington. Regional actors live by the principle of the "prisoner's dilemma," which allows the hegemon to pursue a tough policy against actors whose combined potential significantly exceeds its own.

Different regions (MENA, Asia-Pacific) are perceptually linked. The recent Mossad pager bombing - those pagers were made in Taiwan. Similarly, radicals from the Middle East are exported to SEA, where they take over cities, for example, in the Philippines; as we recall, some time ago radicals took over a city in the southern Philippines and held it for six months. There have even been discussions about different scenarios of moving the capital of the Islamic State there.

The Middle East is one of the world's main exporters of energy resources, while the Asia-Pacific region is the main consumer. The disruption of transportation routes could bring the economies of the Far East countries to their knees. In addition, Israel is taking advantage of the economic growth of the Far East by supplying weapons there and is becoming a very important player in the arms market. For example, in Vietnam, Russia's traditional partner, Israel is actively squeezing out Russian arms; even the Kalashnikov assault rifle factory was built by Israel and produces firearms under the Galil brand.

The Middle East is now a major producer and exporter of instability in the form of ideology and migration, with migrants infiltrated by radicals and extremists of all stripes. When these migratory flows spill over into neighboring regions, they have the potential to bring those regions to the brink of collapse. This has happened recently in Myanmar, and the same can be said of other regions.

How concerned is the Asia-Pacific region about what is happening in the Middle East? I have just returned from Kazan, where I had the opportunity to talk to colleagues from different regions of the world on the sidelines. First of all, we should remember that one of the major religions and the largest religion in ASEAN is Islam. The overwhelming majority of the population in Southeast Asia is Muslim; in particular, representatives from Indonesia and Malaysia were present at the BRICS Summit. They are very concerned about the genocide of co-religionists in Gaza; they spoke openly about it at the events. They are concerned about the threat of exporting instability to the Asia-Pacific through the closest security partners of the United States. They care about business relationships because they affect energy exports: every day, 15 million barrels of oil flow from the Strait of Hormuz through the Strait of Malacca to the Far East. If that flow is cut off, economic growth will stop.

Extremists and radicals are pouring in from the Middle East, both through the northern part (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of the PRC) and the southern part (Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines). Geopolitical pressures increase the risk

of ASEAN splitting into pro-China and pro-American camps. So far, ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific countries have limited themselves to calling for an end to the violence in the Middle East and providing humanitarian aid to the victims. There has been no talk of arms supplies. And in the Far East, the Republic of Korea and Japan are the main intra-regional relays and suppliers of instability, sending weapons to Ukraine and the Middle East, making money and doing what the US tells them to do. Another problem is the remilitarization of Japan, which is traditionally known to lead to a major regional war. The last two times it happened; the third time will be the same.

How do the countries of the Far East assess the situation in terms of stratagem? American policy is seen from the point of view of the stratagem of "killing with a borrowed knife," which means that the US is using proxies in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific region. They have not been at war themselves since the Vietnam War. They are not sensitive to the casualties among Ukrainian nationalists, Islamic State militants, and the like. None of the US adversaries have their proxies in the North American theater. This is a fundamental difference. As the great Sun Tzu articulated in the 6th century BC, war is fought on the basis of two parameters: gains and losses. So far, no one is able to inflict losses on the US that would force it to stop this policy. And accordingly, no one in the Asia-Pacific region is united against this policy.

The US follows the principle formulated by the famous Chinese general Cao Cao in the 3rd century A.D.: It is better to betray others than to be betrayed oneself. This gives the US carte blanche to do whatever it wants. Israel is doing the same thing in the Middle East: bombing Lebanon, Gaza, Iran, Yemen, Syria. This is the basic premise of what is happening in the region.

How will the situation develop? The prediction depends on the answer to the question of who will use the situation more skillfully for their own interests.

The main goal of the United States is to weaken its main competitor, China. It imposes technological sanctions, applies secondary sanctions, instigates territorial disputes and conflicts along the periphery of China's borders, shakes up the situation from within, sends its proxies, primarily Japan and South Korea, against China, exports instability from the Middle East through Xinjiang and Afghanistan. But with the US, even with its proxies, tied up in the Eastern European and Middle Eastern theaters of war, it is not certain that it will have the resources to respond if China wants to solve the Taiwan problem. Whether they would want to or not depends on the decision that will be made in Beijing.

But right now, it is Washington that has the strategic initiative. It is imposing its agenda, acting proactively, using proxies to fight for it, and is insensitive to losses in its ranks. An alternative point of view was formulated during the BRICS

Plus Summit, let's see how long it will take to implement these agreements, because none of the sovereign countries wants to live in an order based on rules that no one has seen, where the hegemon can whip, rob, corner, kill anyone - people tend not to like it. They realize that the situation can only be changed together, that we need to unite and work out new rules of the game. Thank you for your attention.

THE SITUATION IN LEBANON AND THE PROSPECTS FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT



**Firas Al-Shoufi, independent political analyst
(Republic of Lebanon)**

Lebanon is currently experiencing one of the most dangerous phases in its history since the Israeli invasion of 1982. As I speak to you now, Israel's killing machine, equipped with the latest weapons from the United States and Western Europe, continues its attempts to advance and occupy lands in southern Lebanon, while targeting all forms of life across the country, from the southernmost to the northernmost regions.

This aggression is viewed as an extension of the genocide that Israel began against the Palestinians, under the pretext of the October 7, 2023 attack. In reality, however, this ongoing assault on Lebanon, Palestine, as well as Syria and Iraq, is simply the result of a settler-colonial mindset that drives what is referred to as the Jewish state—a forward base established to control our region, hinder its progress, and serve Western interests.

Israel's sense of impunity in committing such widespread massacres stems from the complicity of a global system that emerged after World War II, oppressing weaker nations, as well as the ineffectiveness and weakness of international institutions that claim to work for global justice and defend human rights. Over the past year, it has become glaringly evident that the so-called "civilized world" uses its slogans as mere tools for dominance and hypocrisy.

Over the past month and a half, Israel has displaced over 1.4 million Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians living in the south, Bekaa Valley, and Beirut's southern suburbs. So far, around 2,700 people have been killed, and more than 12,700 injured, with dozens more missing. The country's infrastructure has suffered extensive damage, with tens of thousands of residential units, factories, and industries destroyed, and thousands of acres of agricultural land scorched by toxic and internationally prohibited weapons. Recently, the Israeli army has begun demolishing entire villages by blowing up homes and neighborhoods in southern

Lebanese villages, as it has been doing for months in Gaza, aiming to prevent residents from returning to over 75 villages south of the Litani River and thus creating a serious demographic shift. Economic losses are estimated to exceed 20 billion dollars.

The current demographic shift caused by forced displacement, village destruction, and evacuation orders issued daily by the Israeli army exposes Lebanon to severe existential, economic, and social threats, and it jeopardizes the entire eastern Mediterranean region with chaos that could last for years—benefiting only Israel and the United States, which seeks to reassert its dominance over the region and utilize it in its struggle against Russia and China.

The military escalation against Iran also appears to be a primary objective for the United States, particularly after the strengthening of Russian-Iranian military ties and the strategic alliance between Iran and China. This intensifying conflict between Israel and Iran also heightens tensions in the Arabian Gulf, which has managed to stabilize somewhat through Chinese-brokered diplomacy between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Gulf nations have expressed concern about the spillover of this conflict by swiftly condemning Israel's recent aggression against Iran and reaffirming their commitment to positive relations with Tehran.

Dear colleagues, the ongoing war on Lebanon and Gaza has opened the door to extending this conflict to Syria and Jordan as well. Today, Syria remains at the heart of the storm, whether through terrorist activities in the northwest, the project of establishing a Kurdish state in the east, or Israeli ambitions in southern Syria and Mount Hermon. Likewise, Jordan is already experiencing the consequences of the intensified conflicts in Palestine and Lebanon, with these effects likely to worsen as Palestinians face mounting challenges in Gaza and endure continuous displacement and violence in the West Bank.

Should the conflict extend to Syria, Russia's presence there will be severely impacted, especially as NATO has openly called for the removal of Russian bases in Syria, and Syrian opposition forces, with Ukrainian support, have launched attacks on Russian military sites along the Syrian coast.

Who is responsible for the failure of solutions? While the decision to partition Palestine was never just for the Palestinians, the Palestinian political system eventually accepted it through the Oslo Accords—even agreed to less than that exactly. Palestinians accepted an unfair settlement, recognized the Jewish state, and in 2002, all Arab nations agreed on a comprehensive peace solution at the Beirut Summit. Yet, this did not compel Israel to uphold its side of the agreement. Instead, over the past three decades, Israel has reneged on every peace proposals advanced by the Soviets and Americans in the early 1990s. During this time, Israel has seized over 70% of the West Bank, undermined the promised Palestinian state on its

supposed territory, and established thousands of new settlements, housing tens of thousands of settlers in Palestinian homes. In Jerusalem, Israel has displaced thousands of Palestinian families, bringing in settlers from Germany, New York, Russia, and Ukraine to replace the city's original inhabitants, who had inherited their homes for generations.

In Syria, Israel has constructed settlements on the occupied Golan Heights, housing tens of thousands of settlers on the western part of the plateau. In recent years, it has benefited from unwavering support from Donald Trump, who recognized Israeli sovereignty over both Jerusalem and the occupied Golan, dashing the final hopes for a Palestinian state on the remaining land.

Today, both the current Israeli government and its opposition are more stubborn and extreme than ever, targeting Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. Recently, there has been serious discussion in Israel about establishing settlements in Gaza, while the far right, without any resistance from the Israeli military or government, uses interpretations from the Torah to claim rights to lands in southern Lebanon—signaling potentially disastrous consequences. The world's continued failure to enforce a constitution or borders for Israel that would halt its expansionist projects means that any hopes for resolving the conflict in our region in the coming years are illusions. Instead, our region is likely to face greater tensions, given Israel's expansionist activities, tacitly supported by Western nations that remain silent on its ongoing acts of genocide.

What awaits Lebanon? In parallel with its military aggression, the United States is applying immense pressure on Lebanese institutions, attempting to force the resistance to capitulate and place a heavy burden on the Lebanese army to disarm and collaborate with UN forces to prevent any armed activity south of the Litani River. However, this American plan would only be valid if the US guaranteed no Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty or ended aggression. In reality, American mediation is focused on stripping Lebanon of its sources of strength, leaving it vulnerable to occupation or Western influence, which aims to expand NATO's military role in Lebanon by deploying forces at vital sites across the country, along the coast, and in southern Lebanon.

Furthermore, according to some political indicators, Israel is clearly betting on sparking civil strife within Lebanon, similar to the conflicts ignited by Israeli invasions in 1978 and 1982, which resulted in thousands of deaths in massacres between warring Lebanese factions at the time.

Today, Lebanon faces not only the risk of losing more territory beyond the long-occupied Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shuba hills, but also the potential for internal war and further economic collapse, threatening internal disintegration and the fall of the state to warring militias and factions with conflicting foreign agendas.

Lebanon's only hope now lies in the heroic confrontations by the resistance in the south against the Israeli army, which is backed by all the resources NATO has to offer. These fighters inflict heavy losses on the attackers and thwart the stated goals of the aggression, which seeks to secure the return of settlers in northern occupied Palestine. Lebanon also relies on friendly nations, such as Russia, to exert pressure on Israel to halt the war before it is too late.

Thank you for listening.

THE SITUATION IN THE SAHARA-SAHEL ZONE: STATUS AND PROSPECTS, AN EGYPTIAN PERSPECTIVE



Salah Halima, Board Member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (Arab Republic of Egypt)

The Sahel and Sahara Zone serves as a junction for people, cultures, and civilizations. It acts as a bridge connecting northern and southern Africa and plays a "central" role in interactions between Africa and the Eastern Arab region through the Red Sea—on one side, and between Africa and Europe across the Mediterranean on the other side

The Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) includes 18 member countries: Libya, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Sudan, Niger, Eritrea, the Central African Republic, Senegal, Gambia, Djibouti, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria, Somalia, Benin, and Togo. The Zone covers approximately 6 million square kilometers and is home to nearly 500 million people.

The Sahel and Sahara countries are rich in natural resources, particularly strategic minerals like uranium, gold, oil, and gas. The Zone also boasts vast agricultural areas, significant livestock resources, and access to maritime wealth, with growing importance of seaports for security, military, and economic purposes.

Regional and international powers are fiercely competing for authority, wealth, influence, and dominance in the area. This competition has intensified with the impact of COVID-19, the Russia-Ukraine war, and climate change. Although Africa—especially the Sahel and Sahara—has contributed the least to these crises, it has suffered the most from their effects, resulting in critical challenges such as food security, energy security, and water security.

Assessing the current situation, the Sahel and Sahara Zone faces numerous challenges:

Security and political challenges, the Zone grapples with extremist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and ISIS, engaging in terrorism, organized crime, and human trafficking.

Humanitarian and political challenges, issues of displaced persons, refugees, and irregular migration persist.

Competition among international powers, global powers seek influence with varying approaches. Some follow a neo-colonial strategy focused on security, political, and economic interests. Others adopt more cooperative frameworks based on mutual interests and balanced partnerships.

Democratic political systems are not democratic, most of the political systems in the Zone failed to establish a real democratic system to achieve security, stability and to give a big push to the economic Development. This failure is due to the interference of external powers. Regional powers from neighboring African and Arab countries are also involved, fostering balanced relations built on shared interests and collaborative partnerships.

The Zone also struggles with slow progress in sustainable development due to both internal and external factors.

The increasing frequency of military coups destabilizes security and undermines political stability. These coups may also alter the structure of regional organizations within Africa, potentially reshaping institutional relations both among sub-regional groups and with the African Union itself.

Future outlook: changes in the geopolitical map of the region.

The year 2023 witnessed major transformations in the Sahel Zone, reshaping its geopolitical map and altering regional and international alliances.

Over the past three years, the region experienced eight military coups, most of which occurred in areas traditionally under French influence, now diminishing. Among the most significant and impactful coups were those in landlocked countries—Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso—which triggered a ripple effect, spreading the trend to neighboring states. These coups were welcomed by local populations, particularly the new military leaders, despite unfavorable and ineffective international and regional reactions.

France's military intervention in the region follows both old and modern colonial patterns, aiming to secure strategic political and economic interests while maintaining or installing pro-French regimes under the pretext of combating terrorism. Meanwhile, US policy focuses on containing Chinese and Russian influence by maintaining a military presence, also under the banner of counterterrorism. The European Union adopts a third approach, focusing on

supporting local forces to combat irregular migration, human trafficking, and drug smuggling—threats that pose direct risks to European security.

Decline of French influence: several factors have fueled growing anti-French sentiment alongside the rise in military coups within former French spheres of influence:

- Fragility of governance systems rooted in colonial rule, followed by authoritarian post-colonial regimes loyal to France.

- Failure to combat terrorist activities despite the involvement of French, UN, and US-backed European forces.

- The emergence of a new generation of populist African leaders, who exploited public frustration—especially among the youth—to seize power through military coups.

- Increased activity of extremist groups linked to ISIS and Al-Qaeda, highlighting the ineffectiveness of international security strategies in addressing terrorism.

Although foreign military interventions have strengthened national armies, they have not addressed the root causes of rebellion or coups, such as widespread dissatisfaction with ruling regimes, poor performance in combating extremism, and a lack of developmental benefits.

This underscores the need for new, alternative strategies to achieve security, stability, and development in the Sahel region.

The Triangular Defense and Economic Cooperation Alliance.

The response of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to recent coups—despite internal divisions—has been strict and aligned with the African Union’s rejection of unconstitutional changes of power.

France supported this stance, resulting in the suspension of the three countries' membership, the imposition of sanctions, and demands for the restoration of constitutional governance, along with threats of military intervention by ECOWAS with French backing.

In response, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso adopted a unified stance, rejecting foreign intervention and criticizing ECOWAS’s position. They formed a triangular alliance for defense and economic cooperation through the "Liptako-Gourma" agreement, signaling a possible exit from ECOWAS.

This alliance commits to mutual defense against any external threat and cooperation in combating extremist jihadist groups.

The alliance has also leaned toward closer ties with Russia for military support in counterterrorism and modernization of armed forces, and with China for

economic development, positioning both powers as alternatives to traditional Western influence, particularly that of France.

The transitional phase of these countries is undergoing and marked by increased activity from extremist organizations, exploiting the vacuum left by the withdrawal of French, American, and UN forces.

The limited capacity of local forces to confront these threats effectively is likely to result in these groups gaining more ground in the near future.

Egypt's role in Africa and the Sahel-Sahara zone:

- Egypt's geostrategic location at the heart of the "Old World"—Africa, Asia, and Europe—gives it a unique identity with African, Arab, and Mediterranean dimensions, alongside an Islamic heritage.

- Egypt's strategic vision views its relations with Africa and the Arab world as interconnected, with the Red Sea serving as a unifying link rather than a barrier.

- Egypt engages with both regions through a strategic partnership based on cooperation.

- Egypt's involvement in the Sahel-Sahara Zone aligns with several key challenges, focusing on the following areas:

Combating terrorism:

Egypt supports both security and ideological efforts in counterterrorism, enhancing cooperation with affected countries. It established the CEN-SAD Counter-Terrorism Center to coordinate efforts and share intelligence among member states.

Egypt also uses soft power tools to combat extremist ideologies, such as educational missions, African youth conferences, and leveraging Al-Azhar's role in promoting moderate Islam.

Egypt also addresses organized crime, human trafficking, and refugee crises, especially regarding irregular migration in collaboration with Mediterranean countries and the UN. Notably, Egypt has borne significant financial burdens, treating Sudanese refugees as citizens within its territory.

Political coordination:

Egypt promotes dialogue and cooperation on regional and international issues, advocating peaceful conflict resolution, mutual security, shared interests, and respect for state sovereignty.

Egypt emphasizes the importance of maintaining national unity and non-interference in domestic affairs, as well as preserving national institutions.

These principles guide Egypt's engagement with African neighbors (especially Libya, Somalia, and Sudan).

In this regard, Egypt established the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Peace building (CCCPC) and, in partnership with the African Union, the African Union Center for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (AU-PCRCD).

Economic development:

Egypt actively promotes sustainable development, particularly in infrastructure and productive sectors. It plays a constructive role in addressing climate challenges through initiatives such as the Cairo Climate Change Conference (COP27), which achieved positive outcomes for Africa.

Egypt also fosters intra-African economic partnerships by investing in key sectors like energy, health, and education, with a focus on capacity building across the continent.

THE SITUATION IN THE SAHARA-SAHEL ZONE: STATUS AND PROSPECTS, A MOROCCAN PERSPECTIVE



Mesa Garcia Beatriz, associate professor of the International University of Rabat (Kingdom of Morocco)

The strategic importance of the Sahara-Sahel region has grown since the 2000s. Over the past 20 years, I have worked within the framework of the Liptako-Gourma Agreement between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The subject of today's discussion is the Sahel and the security situation in the Western Sahel in particular. My professional experience has been exclusively related to this region. We have collaborated with non-governmental organizations and subject matter experts who have conducted fieldwork and are well-versed in the situation on the ground.

In my view, we have made a number of missteps in recent years. We have long believed, and continue to believe, that the primary threat is from jihadism. However, I regret to say that, based on my research over the past 20 years, the violence in the Sahel has become much more complex.

If there is an opportunity to reduce violence and eliminate jihadism, it is unlikely to succeed. In addition to the aforementioned armed groups, there are also separatists, secessionists, and various splinter groups that are armed but do not

adhere to the same ideology. These groups are simply armed and operating in the region. A closer examination of the underlying causes of this violence reveals a significant shadow and criminal economy surrounding these armed groups, with complex networks of individuals and organizations involved. It is evident that certain theoretical slogans are employed as a means of providing a veneer of legitimacy and credibility to the population, as well as to serve as a foundation for the development of a robust infrastructure.

That is why we are studying the Sahel. It is essential to gain an understanding of the groups and tribes that exist in the region in order to facilitate meaningful dialogue and discussion. When studying terrorist groups, scholars often make errors in judgment. Firstly, it is essential to gain an understanding of which groups and tribes are involved, how they operate, who they are, and how they have become involved in this illicit economy. It is regrettable that most reports only mention three groups: the Tuareg, the Arabs, and the Fulani. Sometimes Bambara, Songhai, or other tribes, depending on the circumstances. The emergence of new insurgent groups is a direct result of their struggle for control and survival.

I would like to make another point, if I may. I have been engaged in the analysis of this topic for a considerable length of time. The social paradigm in the Sahel is highly intricate. It is imperative to understand the social structure of this region in order to conduct a comprehensive study. The people who live there are no longer vassals, which is a crucial factor to consider. They are not amenable to submission or control by others. For instance, within the same community, it is necessary to maintain and reaffirm one's social status. What are the implications of this criminal economy? Those who were previously in a subordinate position have now assumed leadership roles. As a result, we are witnessing a social revolution occurring within this social pyramid. This is a crucial point, and one that is particularly challenging to grasp. It is essential to comprehend the fractured social structure, which is vulnerable to the influence of the criminal economy. The political structure is also severely compromised as a result of this economic phenomenon.

What factors are preventing a comprehensive explanation of the current situation in the Sahel? Could the issue be religious extremism? That is not the sole reason. However, there is no clear answer to the question of where the border lies, as the situation is highly complex. The presence of ISIS is a significant indicator of this complexity. What arguments do they use to justify their radicalism? There is a prevalence of violence and radicalization, with individuals readily resorting to violence, though not necessarily due to genuine ideological alignment.

In conclusion, the specific religious affiliation of an individual is not a primary factor in this region. It is of greater consequence to understand the tribal affiliations

and the role of recognized leaders within the community. For instance, in the event that the government fails to provide security in the northern region of Burkina Faso, what recourse is available? What is the best way to live in the absence of protection? One might want to join a group in order to obtain protection. It is also important to consider the protection, leadership and socio-economic conditions. There are a multitude of intricate factors at play that provide insights into the nature of violence and terrorism in the Sahel.

The Sahel region is characterized by a delicate equilibrium between peace and violence. As an illustration, Mali is the epicenter of violence and radicalism. However, what is occurring in Mali? We are currently experiencing a cycle of heightened violence, with instances of violence outnumbering instances of peaceful dialogue. The aforementioned dialogue, which was previously a highly effective tool, is now experiencing a decline. It would be beneficial to implement more peace cycles at this time. It is essential to comprehend how we can revert to a period where peace prevailed over violence.

Morocco is examining the lessons learned from the Cuban crisis and other similar situations. As a result, the decision has been made to pursue three or four distinct diplomatic avenues with the aim of enhancing the influence and leverage of regional stakeholders. The Global South is also engaging in this process, and is becoming a significant force. We are no longer peripheral states. We are a new force with considerable influence globally. Morocco is seizing this opportunity, as Western players are no longer able to act. We are therefore taking the lead in diplomatic efforts.

We will pull Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso because we are using moderate Islam. We are offering to come to Morocco and provide training in correct Islam. Additionally, Morocco has initiated a new program in 2023, the Atlantic Initiative, which employs three diplomatic approaches: security, religion, military cooperation, and economic development. What is the significance of this? Morocco is extending an invitation to the Sahel to come to them, to discover the Atlantic and the maritime routes, and to engage in cooperative efforts to rethink the model of cooperation. It represents a new paradigm model, which is an interesting development. The same is true of the economy. There will be a significant agenda going forward, which will be about transportation routes and new pipelines from Nigeria to Morocco and on to Europe. We are already considering new economic projects. I believe it has a solid foundation. It also has implications for Morocco's geopolitical shift and the kingdom's growing role in the Sahara-Sahel region.

THE SITUATION IN IRAQI KURDISTAN



**Aso Talabani, independent political analyst
(Republic of Iraq)**

Good afternoon, esteemed attendees of the conference. I am grateful for the opportunity to address you today. I would like to provide you with a brief overview of the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan and a summary of the conflict in Israel.

Following the referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2017, the situation between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan has experienced a slight deterioration. In my view, we have taken some steps back on the diplomatic and international fronts. Furthermore, the economic situation has also deteriorated. Last week, parliamentary elections were held in Iraqi Kurdistan due to the Iraqi central government's decision to paralyze the parliament a year ago.

The Iraqi authorities have asserted that the parliament in Iraqi Kurdistan is no longer necessary and has exceeded its mandate. The elections that took place in northern Iraq were more akin to a diplomatic spectacle between two neighboring countries, Iran and Turkey. It is our understanding that the outcome of the voting was predetermined. As yet, there has been no comment from foreign observers on the results of these elections, and the Iraqi central authorities have yet to officially announce them.

Iraqi Kurdistan is divided into two administrative regions, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. It is reasonable to conclude that Sulaymaniyah is influenced by Iran, while Erbil is influenced by Turkey. The relationship between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah has been strained for nearly two years. There are currently no negotiations underway. Furthermore, there are customs checkpoints between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. In order to ensure the safety and security of goods transported between the two regions of Kurdistan, customs controls are in place. The past two years have been marked by significant challenges related to drug trafficking, which is a new and pressing issue. This has not occurred previously. We have already apprehended several individuals engaged in illicit drug trafficking. Due to the actions of the Iraqi central government, we have been unable to sell our oil for a period of three years, previously selling it through Turkey. The Iraqi central authorities allocate funds from the national budget, yet significant challenges persist in ensuring the timely disbursement of salaries to officials. In some instances, officials are not compensated for a period of up to three months, while in other cases, they receive only 50% of their basic salary.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges, our primary concern at this time is the situation in the Middle East, particularly the developments in Israel. Given our geographical position between Iran and Syria, with Israel situated further afield, we are particularly vulnerable to the potential for conflict in the region. Consequently, there are occasions when these missiles, which traverse the region from Iran to Israel and vice versa, are observed. It is worth noting that there have already been several strikes on military facilities in Iraq. These are military installations of pro-Iranian strongmen who have publicly declared support for Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Some Kurdish analysts posit that this conflict is facilitating a geopolitical shift in the Middle East, with potential benefits for the Kurds, particularly those residing in Syria and Iraq. It is my personal opinion that this conflict will not benefit Iraqi Kurdistan in any way. It is evident that the current situation gives rise to considerable concern, particularly in light of the apparent absence of negotiations and the uncertainty surrounding the future course of events. It is not implausible that this conflict between Iran and Israel will intensify. There is a possibility that it will escalate further in Syria and even in Iraq. Consequently, it is probable that Israel's territory and influence will expand towards the borders of Syria and Iraq as a result of this conflict. There have been reports today of strikes on Israeli targets from Iraqi territory, which suggests that the situation will deteriorate further in the region and in Iraq.

THE PROSPECTS FOR RESOLVING THE SYRIAN CRISIS AND REBUILDING THE COUNTRY



**Ali Al-Ahmed, independent political analyst
(Syrian Arab Republic)**

In regard to the reconstruction of the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR), it can be stated that the situation is challenging and extremely risky. I recall the late Mr. V. Zhirinovskiy, who predicted that the outbreak of a third world war in 2024 would emanate from the Middle East. While Mr. Zhirinovskiy was indeed a perceptive politician, it is imperative that we take all necessary measures to prevent this from happening. It will undoubtedly be challenging.

At this time, no one can definitively confirm the possibility of positive change regarding the reconstruction of Syria and UNSC Resolution 2254 of 2015. It is evident that regional forces are playing a pivotal role in perpetuating the conflict within the country, while international players are not inclined towards fostering

normalization in the SAR. It is regrettable that the situation is not confined to the question of internal political stabilization.

It is imperative that dialogue be established between the primary political and social forces within Syria. It is evident that numerous entities within Syria rely on external actors to advance “non-Syrian” agendas. I have listened with great interest to the previous speakers, who have provided excellent analysis. However, I would like to highlight a few points and express my opinion.

The United States feels impunity in manipulating other forces. They provide financial backing for these ongoing conflicts. A case in point is Israel, which previously had limited military capabilities, perhaps lasting a few days, a week, or a month. The last war lasted three months. Nowadays, Israel can go to war for years, and the support and funding from the US is not only in the billions of dollars and not only in weapons. For the first time, we are seeing large numbers of mercenaries in Israel. Washington can offset its losses by paying them considerable sums of money. Israeli society is unaware of the military losses, so there is no public outcry.

Why am I talking about this? Because the West and the United States are going all-in against Russia and China. In this situation, we - Syria, Lebanon, Palestine - are a region that the West uses to achieve strategic advantage over geopolitical rivals. Here, it seems to me, we should pursue a completely different policy, because the losses in this region are great and people are very tired.

When Russian planes took to the skies of Syria in 2015 to bomb ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra and other radical forces - that was a time when a very “correct policy” was being pursued. I am not urging anyone to bring up planes to bomb Israel, but we must realize that this is a single force. That force is a tool of the US, as are the radical forces in the region.

There are some states that are greatly afraid of radicalism being exported to their countries. However, these countries are not implementing the policies necessary to exterminate these radical forces. We must not wait for radicals to come, God forbid, to Moscow or Beijing. We must destroy them on the spot, as Russia did in 2015 in the Middle East. There is no time to waste! Even Moscow, which has become my hometown, can suffer great losses from these radical forces. Not only Ukraine has Nazis, in the Middle East these same Nazis are supported and created by Israel.

It is important to emphasize that Israel is not only a regional force. It intervenes between Azerbaijan and Armenia, between Pakistan and India. It is more than that. Israel is a tool of US imperialism that can cause serious complications for Washington's adversaries, Russia and Syria.

Coming back to the situation in Syria, I personally believe that the current domestic economic policy is insufficient to rebuild Syria. In particular, it is impossible to boost the country's economy without restoring the energy sector. And, of course, we need a favorable political environment in the region. We can, of course, use the “family” economy. We can artificially influence the economic situation in Syria, but this requires help from our friends and partners. Here Russia must and is able to play a much more significant role.

We know Russia's role in de-escalating the region and preventing a world war. We know Moscow's approach, but we see fatigue in Lebanon and in Syria. This does not mean that we are giving up, we have never given up and we will never give up. For us this is the Great Patriotic War. Its causes have nothing to do with our alleged desire to "throw the Jews into the sea" or, as they used to say, "throw Israel into the sea". This is not true; it never happened and it will never happen. On the contrary, we are witnessing Israel "throwing into the sea" the very resolutions that have been recognized by the whole world. They do not answer to anyone, not even to the United States. We also believe that Washington and Tel Aviv are not two different faces in their Middle East policy, but one and the same.

I would also like to address my colleagues in the friendly media, who still use many of the terms on which the West relies. For example, "some terrorists attacked Israel". All the territories that Resolution 181 recognized as Arab territory are Arab land. This is a guerrilla war, not a "war against terrorists" attacking some citizens or some military. These are occupied territories, so our media and the media of our friends in Russia and China should be more careful. I listen to Russian news every day, I know what terms they sometimes use and they are not very accurate.

Russia, Syria and China are allies, we work together so that there is peace in the world. We are working so that there is no single hegemon in the form of the United States. We are in favor of the return to a multipolar world order and that the President of Russia, V.V. Putin, should restore Russia's sovereignty. This is seen as a mortal threat in the West. If the West were wiser, it would use other means, but unfortunately, like the West, we are forced to use military means.

Coming back to the problem of post-conflict reconstruction in Syria, this task cannot be accomplished without a regional and international environment that is favorable to us. The positive point is that Arab countries have resumed relations with Syria to a certain extent, which has made it possible to normalize the situation in the Arab Republic. And maybe things can be normalized with neighboring Turkey as well. Russia is doing the right diplomacy, the "chess diplomacy", Moscow knows how to use this tool correctly. This correct policy will make it possible to rebuild Syria.

The fact that delegations from research institutes, including the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, are visiting Syria gives us hope that Russia's "soft power" is beginning to play a greater role. At the same time, the West is using its own soft power. In this regard, Russian academic institutions and think tanks need to step up their efforts, and I call on our friends to work together. Without close cooperation, we will be acting blindly, and this will prevent us from achieving our goals. The methods proposed by the scientific community for studying the West and Israel, whose approaches have recently been transformed, will allow us to take a fresh look and analyze the contemporary policies of these countries in greater depth.

THE SITUATION IN IRAQ



Nir Rozen, advisor of the “Center for Humanitarian Dialogue” non-governmental organization (Geneva, Swiss Confederation)

Iraq today is pretty boring compared to what it used to be. This is of course good for the people who live there, because Iraq is becoming a normal developing third world country. It is no longer torn by existential conflicts, problems like al-Qaeda, ISIS are no longer as acute. Sunni versus Shia, civil war, all that is now a thing of the past.

Today, Iraq seems to be relatively stable. There is some competition between the US and Iran. They can be compared to two divorced parents who don't like each other but are trying to maintain good relations for the sake of the child.

Now we have seen that oil prices are going up in Iraq. This is a positive trend. Employment is growing, a lot of jobs are being created, and the population that used to be involved in protests and did not have jobs in the last few years are now being employed. Since 2003, for the first time, we have seen many construction projects for bridges, new houses, shops, shopping centers. There is construction and development everywhere. Visually, we can see that the situation is improving. The middle class has grown significantly in recent years. And of course, globalization plays its role: expensive restaurants, clubs have appeared, many things are built and opened.

But no one is thinking about the future and the problems associated with the future. For example, the environment, climate change. Water shortage is a very important problem. There is less and less water available for the people of Iraq. Food security is also a big problem.

Sunni areas used to be safe havens for insurgents. But now in many Sunni areas in Baghdad, in other cities, for example in al-Fallujah, we see women driving, listening to music. The situation is slowly changing. Iraqi society as a whole is becoming part of a global culture, and what was in the past is moving further away.

We have seen in the last few years that this country is moving towards more and more sovereignty. Baghdad has more control over Iraqi Kurdistan. There are talks with the US to develop bilateral relations, to jointly combat terrorism. Of course, this is not being done to its full potential, but the country is moving forward, and so is the UN mission. There is still a semi-colonial presence, but Iraq is becoming more independent.

Iraq is also involved in some regional developments. Members of the "Axis of Resistance," including the Houthis, Hezbollah, Hamas, and other organizations under the auspices of Iran and factions in Iraq, are expressing solidarity with Gaza. Starting in the fall of 2023, there was some escalation with the United States, particularly in Jordan, and the Americans responded to that escalation, and then there was a period of de-escalation, which of course interfered with stabilization in Iran when tensions with the Americans continued.

So, what is Iraq's role in this regional axis? Iraq used to have a good relationship with the Persian Gulf, as well as with Turkey, and there was an important visit by President Erdogan to Baghdad that promoted cooperation and contacts. The Iraqi Prime Minister supported Palestine and Lebanon. Iraq expressed its solidarity with Palestine. There was support expressed for Lebanon, for Hezbollah. There were several successful attacks against Israel. When Hassan Nasrallah was assassinated, the whole country mourned his death. It wasn't just religious people; it was a serious emotional trauma for Iraq because they are very supportive of the Lebanese and very worried about them.

It is also interesting to note that Iraq under American occupation during the years of civil war was a source of refugees first to Syria, Jordan, then to Europe, Scandinavia. Now Iraq, on the contrary, is taking in refugees. Iraq helped Syria recover from a major earthquake. It also helped in the northern zones where the Turkish occupation continues and supported Syrians as well as Iraqis who live there. Iraq plays an important role in sustaining the lives of many Lebanese and Syrians who have moved to Iraq, working there and earning a living, using services, infrastructure, educational institutions, medicine.

Iraq does not sponsor the Axis of Resistance directly, but it does not abstract itself from these groups. Iraq is quite tolerant of the Houthis, groups that operate in neighboring countries, but because of the need to maintain relations with the Americans, Iraq tries to prevent attacks on US facilities and generally avoids conflicts with the United States.

Syria's role in the Axis of Resistance is very important because it is the main transportation route for various goods. Therefore, Iraq is important for transit from Iran to Syria. The economic role of Iraq is also very important. If you are a Shiite, you can do business here even if the world turns its back on you, because the Americans are trying to block all Shiite money around the world. Businessmen affiliated with the Axis of Resistance can also find opportunities to make money in Iraq, and there are places where the economy has not collapsed, where you can do business, open offices.

It should be said that with the rise in the standard of living, Iraq has fallen victim to a new epidemic. There is a "death of ideology" all over the world: before young people joined militias, now everyone just wants to live well. As a result, drug use has skyrocketed in the country: methamphetamine, opiates, synthetic drugs. The growth of drug trafficking and consumption is unprecedented, and the state has no time to react to it in an appropriate way: there are laws in this area that were passed under Hussein that simply throw everyone involved in it in jail.

The last point of my report: at the moment there is a small crisis in Iraq because of the Israeli attack on Iran, which passed through Iraqi airspace. Baghdad knows that America knew about this strike. Shiite militias in Iraq have threatened to attack Saudi Arabia if energy facilities in Iran are hit. An Israeli attack on Iraq will result in a declaration of war and continued attacks on American targets. Iraq now maintains relations with the Americans, has a close alliance with Iran, supports Lebanon, and at the same time tolerates the presence of "resistance" forces. All this, of course, does not reflect very positively on the whole situation in the region.

THE IMPACT OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHARA-SAHEL ZONE



Mikhail Ilevich, junior researcher of CSAI IOS RAS (Russian Federation)

The Sahel region has witnessed an increase in terrorist activity since the beginning of 2024. According to the latest data, between January and October 2024, more than 900 terrorist attacks were carried out in the region, killing about 10,000 people. Traditionally, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger remain the regional epicenter of Islamic radicalism.

According to the Global Terrorism Index 2024 report by the Australian Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), the main center of terrorist activity is gradually shifting from the Middle East to the Sahel region.

Burkina Faso became the main victim of terrorism in 2023, recording the highest number of casualties (about 2,000 people were killed, constituting an increase by 68% compared to the previous year, despite a 17% decrease in the number of attacks). According to a number of think tanks, the situation, particularly in Burkina Faso, is not just alarming, it is catastrophic. According to Western assessments, the withdrawal of France and the US, despite their objective failure in the fight against jihadism, may further exacerbate the situation.

At the moment, the Liptako-Gourma region (the triple border zone between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) continues to be a hotbed of terrorist activity in the Sahel, with 60% of attacks occurring in this area, and the situation is particularly acute along the border between Niger and Burkina Faso. The frequency of terrorist attacks is also increasing in the western provinces of Mali, particularly in the regions of Koulikoro, Ségou, and Gao.

59% of deaths in attacks are attributed to either unknown or unidentified jihadist groups. At the same time, 41% of the deaths are attributed to the al-Qaeda-affiliated Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) (a coalition of Salafi factions: “Katiba Masina” - active primarily in southwestern Mali, the most active JNIM subgroup; ‘Ansarul Islam’ - active in Burkina Faso, southwestern Niger, expanding gradually toward Togo, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire; Ansar al-Din, al-Mourabitoun, and the Emirate of Timbuktu - active in northern Mali; also affiliated with JNIM are Katiba Hanifa, operating along the southeastern border between Niger and Burkina Faso; Sekou Muslimou, operating in southern and southeastern Burkina Faso; and Katiba Gourma, operating between the Malian provinces of Gao and Timbuktu near the border with Burkina Faso).

JNIM’s numerical (the group has between 5,000 and 6,000 fighters) and ethnic reach has expanded significantly in recent years. In addition to the Fulani, Songai and Bambara, the Dogon, Mosi, Bissa, Jerma and Gourma have begun to join JNIM. In fact, JNIM has begun to position itself as a haven for all the disaffected who are tired of the rigid ethnic political and socio-economic hierarchy. In this case, JNIM offers equal opportunities for all, which explains the organization's growing influence in the region.

During the first and second quarters of this year, JNIM carried out 128 and 153 attacks respectively (61% of the attacks were staged in Burkina Faso, 34% in Mali, and 5% in Niger). The group began to advance more aggressively in the Eastern and East-Central regions of Burkina Faso. The Kulpelogo province of the East-Central region is the most desirable target because it is an important transit route for goods and livestock and is also covered by dense forests, making the region a favorable place to build a jihadist stronghold. Attacks have also increased in the Cascades region in the extreme southwest of Burkina Faso. The fiercest

fighting took place in June 2024 in the northern Sahel region, where Ansarul Islam is firmly entrenched (especially in the Djibo department of Soum province) on the border with Mali and Niger, with the Burkinabe armed forces reportedly losing more than 400 men in clashes with JNIM militants over the month (the largest losses in a month since May 2023). Attacks are also intensifying in Western Niger (Torodi department of the Tillabéri region). At the moment, JNIM is trying to gain a foothold along key roads (RN4, RN6, RN26) leading to the capital city of Niamey.

In Mali, jihadist activity has declined markedly north of Gao, but JNIM remains active around cities such as Timbuktu and Kidal, and south of Gao in the Mopti and Ségou regions. The establishment of local cells of Katiba Masina in Kayes and Sikaso provinces has accelerated. At the same time, given the fact that jihadist expansion in Mali is hampered by the assistance of Russian specialists to the official authorities, JNIM is seeking to expand toward Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

From July 2024, JNIM began actively attacking military barracks in northern Togo, indicating that the group had a strong foothold in the Burkinabe province of Kompienga, which borders that country. Since June 2024, the jihadists have begun to gain ground in the Lake Kainji National Park area of western Nigeria. According to foreign sources, JNIM is gradually establishing ties with Nigerian gangs. In general, it can be assumed that JNIM is trying to establish a caliphate on the territory of Burkina Faso, Western Nigeria, Benin and Togo. In fact, this is their “minimum” program. The creation of a caliphate should significantly weaken the influence of a rival and hostile terrorist group to JNIM, the Islamic State - Wilayah Sahel (“Islamic State in the Greater Sahara”, ISGS).

ISGS is currently based in Niger and Mali and functions as a subgroup of IS's Wilayah West Africa (ISWAP). The group has between 2,000 and 3,000 members and is extremely resilient. The ethnic composition of ISGS is also diverse, including Fulani, Tuareg, Arabs, Songai, Jerma, and Berbers (the Dawssahak cattle herding people). ISGS is currently most active in the northeastern region of Niger, the Tillabéri region, controlling the eastern approaches to Niamey, and has also gained a foothold in the Tahoua region, and in the southern Malian province of Gao. The jihadists are also expanding their influence in southwestern Niger, particularly in the Dosso region (here ISGS faces resistance in areas where it collects zakat).

According to the Islamic State bulletin Al-Naba (it is noteworthy that 80% of this source's data is from Africa), between July 2023 through October 2024, the group carried out 1,358 attacks and operations.

Since October 2023, there has been an increased concentration of attacks on military barracks in the Tahoua region. Despite an overall decrease in attacks in the region (14 incidents from July 2023 to July 2024), the death count remains high. In

July 2024, 237 soldiers were killed in an ambush near the Malian border town of Tankandemi (Tahoua region). In most cases, however, ISGS has attacked civilian targets and local self-defense groups in the Triple Frontier and Niger Valley regions (64 attacks between July 2023 and July 2024). There have been repeated attempts to gain a foothold in the Tera department (western part of the Tillabéri region), but as a result of successful operations by the armed forces, jihadist activity in this area has declined markedly. At the same time, ISGS is trying to establish a bridgehead on the border with Nigeria north of Sokoto to link up with ISWAP, which has much greater resources at its disposal. According to recent UN reports, ISWAP's al-Furqan branch has significantly increased its support for ISGS. The group is furthering the establishment of cells in the Sokoto area and has generally begun to coordinate operations in North and West Africa, as well as in the Sahel itself, indicating that there has been a central directive from the IS to increase its presence in the region.

According to Western experts, the situation is extremely worrying for Niger's military junta. In fact, ISGS is trying to loop Niamey from the northeast. The withdrawal of French and American troops, it is noted, will create an even greater vacuum that will quickly be filled by the jihadists. Without foreign support amid growing poverty and ethnic strife, there is no guarantee that the junta will not fall in the short term. Niger in this case should diversify its security cooperation with other states as much as possible and properly take advantage of the contradictions and animosity between ISGS and JNIM.

In the short to medium term, JNIM's influence is likely to grow in Mali, Burkina Faso, the Gulf of Guinea, and ISGS' – in Niger. The Confederation of Sahel States, established in the first half of July 2024, while providing an opportunity for better security coordination, does not guarantee success in the fight against Islamic terrorism. Much will depend on the ability of states to actually cooperate with each other and conduct joint counterterrorism operations, which is not often the case at present. There is also the issue of ethnic integration in the army.

The countries of the region need to use all available means and resources, including the involvement of military specialists from abroad, to combat jihadism, because if these groups are allowed to gain a foothold and create their own khalifate, it will become virtually impossible to eradicate them completely, and the preservation of statehood for many countries in the region will be seriously challenged.

TÜRKIYE'S MIDDLE EASTERN POLICY



**Arif Asalioglu, independent political analyst
(Republic of Türkiye)**

I would like to begin by referring to the recent terrorist attacks in Ankara. The Turkish authorities consider the Kurdistan Workers' Party (KWP), which claimed responsibility for the attack, to be a terrorist organization. However, a number of questions remain about the real organizers of the attack.

The public was later presented with some information suggesting that other actors were responsible for the attack. In any case, while the investigation is ongoing, considering four main versions of the organization of the terrorist attack, it is too early to draw conclusions.

At the same time, this terrorist attack was yet another proof that Ankara's calculations in the field of regional politics did not work out. In addition, the political steps of R.T. Erdogan during the period of the presence of the units of the US Armed Forces in the areas east of the Euphrates River in Syria did not bring the required results. At the same time, the Pentagon supports the continued military presence of the Turkish armed forces in the region and urges Ankara to enter into a military confrontation with the Syrian government forces.

An important factor is the presence of people in the ranks of the KWP who support the release of its founder A. Ocalan from prison. At the same time, there is no consensus in the KWP on this issue - there are enough opponents of Ocalan's release from prison. It is not excluded that in the last 6 months R.T. Erdogan has managed to resolve the contradictions with the current US leadership - this can be proved by the change in Ankara's relations with Moscow. The Turkish leader still expects to use American initiatives in the region to his advantage.

The terrorist attack demonstrated the problems of ensuring Turkey's security, even in the most stable regions.

The errors of R.T. Erdogan's regional policy are evidenced by the fact that the crisis in Syria continues to expand. Similarly, the stability of the region is being undermined by Turkey's intervention in northern Iraq.

R.T. Erdogan is one of the authors of the "Greater Middle East" project, the realization of which causes imbalance in the region and harms Turkey itself.

The Turkish president, who left no friends or neighbors around him thanks to his "New Ottoman" ambitions that flourished during the Arab Spring, now speaks of plans to increase the number of friends. The normalization model he proposes

has virtually no support in Damascus. Convincing Bashar al-Assad through other Arab leaders like el-Sisi is pointless. The Egyptian president himself mentions Mustafa Kemal Ataturk when talking about bilateral relations, which shows his distrust of modern Turkish Islamist politicians.

President Erdogan talks about building relations with his neighbors without addressing the contradictions between his actions and statements. The main focus of his foreign policy efforts to normalize relations with Syria after Egypt is Israel. Let's break this down in more detail.

On September 6, just six days after Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi visited Ankara, Erdogan sent Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to the Arab League meeting in Cairo. In doing so, with Syria's consent, Turkey reopened the doors of the Arab League after 13 years.

On September 7, Imam Hatip R.T. Erdogan made a provocative statement at the Lyceum Alumni Convention: he claimed that Israel would not stop at Gaza and would also occupy Ramallah in the West Bank and then switch to Lebanon, Syria and even the lands between the Tigris and Euphrates. In this regard, he said, Hamas is not only defending Gaza, but also Turkey. He went on to suggest a new front, "The new steps we are taking with Egypt and Syria are aimed at creating a line of solidarity against the growing expansionist threat."

However, is such a line of solidarity possible? Given Turkey's military presence and operations in Syria, Iraq and Libya, its military bases in Qatar and Sudan, and its interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries, the implementation of this idea is quite unlikely. Turkey's operations in Syria are often seen as "occupation and encroachment on sovereignty."

It is important to correctly interpret the normalization of relations and flexibility within the League of Arab States (LAS). All sides simultaneously expect changes in Ankara's policies while maintaining their previous positions on certain issues. Normalization with the LAS does not guarantee a similar process with Syria, with League member states continuing to closely monitor Turkey's militaristic policies in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Somalia.

The positive reaction to the normalization Erdogan needs could be seen as an attempt to revise Turkey's foreign policy. Indeed, there is a similar approach to Syria's return to the LAS. The situation in Damascus, which has reasserted its rights on the international stage thanks to Qatar's efforts, remains unstable. The fact that Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad did not address the Manama summit in May, which focused on the situation in Gaza, also points to certain sensitivities.

The actors who facilitated Syria's return to the LAS are hoping not only that certain commitments will be honored, but also that Damascus will distance itself from Iran and re-establish ties with the Arab world. Similarly, Turkey is expected

to behave in a good-neighborly manner. For Arab countries, the framework of good neighborliness is clear enough: ending occupation and military operations, refraining from the use of proxy forces, avoiding interference in internal affairs and the race for influence. These sensitive issues remain unchanged for Damascus and Cairo.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE SECURITY SERVICES AND THE ULTRA-RIGHT IN ISRAEL



Valery Zakharov, leading specialist of CSAI IOS RAS, PhD in Philosophy (Russian Federation).

In Israel, there is a growing confrontation between the far right and the army and intelligence services.

In August 2024, Ronen Bar, the head of Israel's Shin Bet general security service, sent a letter to Netanyahu and his government ministers regarding the crisis that engulfed the country after October 7, 2023.

Bar warned that attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, which he called "Jewish terrorism," threatened "Israel's national security ... and is a great stain on Judaism.

It has become a trend, Bar stressed, for settlers not only to attack Palestinians but also to clash with Israeli security forces, all with the support of members of the government. Since October 7, the UN has recorded more than 1,400 settler attacks in the Occupied Territories, resulting in Palestinian deaths and injuries, as well as extensive property damage, forcing residents to flee their homes.

Senior members of the army and intelligence services claim that some right-wing politicians are encouraging settler activity and thus acting directly against the country's interests, specifically pointing to Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir.

They live in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and demand the annexation of the territory. Smotrich, a religious nationalist, controls all civilian affairs in the West Bank, which are legally subordinate to the military administration, through his position as second minister in the defense establishment, and uses his position to protect the interests of radical settlers. A disciple of the fascist Rabbi Meir Kahane, Ben-Gvir has been repeatedly convicted of inciting racism and supporting Jewish terrorist groups. An advocate of Jewish supremacy, he openly says that the fewer Arabs, the better for Jews.

Ben-Gvir calls on Netanyahu to fire Ronen Bar and Defense Minister Yoav Galant for failing to prevent the October 7 terror attack, for supporting the release of hostages and the ceasefire agreement with Hamas. Netanyahu also blames the military and intelligence for the events of October 7, while denying his responsibility as prime minister. He continues to refuse to establish an independent state commission of inquiry into the October terrorist attack.

The situation in the West Bank has also escalated, as the government has prevented 150,000 Palestinians from working in Israel since October 7. In addition, Smotrich, as finance minister, is blocking the transfer of tax revenues from the Palestinian territories to the Palestinian Authority. The severe damage to the West Bank economy caused by these policies increases unemployment and poverty among Palestinians and, according to the Shin Bet, creates fertile ground for the growth of extremist sentiment among the local population.

The clashes between the security forces and the far right are not only about the situation in the West Bank, but also about the future of Gaza. The Defense Ministry and the intelligence services supported the deal to free the hostages. Galant and his colleagues openly criticized Netanyahu for not presenting a plan to end the war in Gaza or a realistic alternative to Hamas rule.

After Hamas executed six captives, Israel saw one of the largest demonstrations in its history. An estimated half a million people in Tel Aviv alone demanded that Netanyahu make a deal for the remaining hostages as soon as possible, but he once again ignored public opinion. In the aftermath, according to the newspaper Haaretz, a number of senior defense officials accused the government of sacrificing the hostages for the annexation of Gaza.

Another reason for the conflict between the security services and the government was the deteriorating situation on the Temple Mount in occupied East Jerusalem. The site has been a source of tension in the past, and now Ben-Gvir is deliberately undermining the status quo there by calling on Jews to pray on the Temple Mount. Security officials have condemned his actions as dangerous provocations that not only enrage Palestinians, but also provoke Jordan and the rest of the Muslim world.

The messianic ultra-Orthodox movement, until recently marginalized, is growing in popularity and influence in Israel. With the patronage of far-right politicians, it seeks to establish a Jewish monopoly over the entire Temple complex, to conduct animal sacrifices there, and eventually to build a Third Temple in place of the Islamic shrines - the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Such ideas of fundamentalist ideologues destroy the basis for a possible dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as the Muslim world, and provoke conflicts with both the Palestinians and the neighboring Arab countries.

In the Franco-German documentary "Israel: Extremists in Power," Smotrich, citing the authority of "great Jewish religious elders," spoke of his desire to create a Jewish state that would include all Palestinian land as well as territories in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In addition to differences on specific policy issues in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, there are fundamental contradictions between ultra-Orthodox Jewish ideologues and security forces that self-identify with Israel's secular democratic order. Traditionally, the highest echelons of the IDF and Israeli security services have been occupied by Ashkenazi liberals, whom Netanyahu has long sought to replace with new elites. For this he has not only ideological but also personal motives.

Throughout his political career, Netanyahu has positioned himself as "Mr. Security," arguing that he is better at security than the generals, whom he viewed as timid, lacking imagination and too attentive to US wishes. His most serious political rivals are military leaders who have also served as prime ministers or defense ministers. They are Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Benny Gantz and current Defense Minister Yoav Galant.

The representatives of the security forces are determined to maintain at least a semblance of respect for the rule of law. And it was they who opposed the judicial reform initiated by Netanyahu in early 2023. The ultra-Orthodox and the far right, by contrast, supported the prime minister and his reforms and took a hostile stance toward the army - an extraordinary phenomenon in Israel, where the armed forces have long been the object of cult worship. Many Israelis, who still regard their country as secular and democratic, see the struggle with the far right as an existential conflict that will have a decisive impact on Israel's politics and security in the coming years.

For now, the escalating war in Lebanon, as well as Israel's determination to strike back at Iranian targets, is obscuring differences over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Netanyahu, in order to retain power, still relies on the ultraright and on a large segment of Israeli society that shares his position of refusing any concessions to the Palestinians.

If the far-right policy wins, which currently seems highly likely, Israel will continue to push Palestinians off their land in the West Bank and build new settlements, including in the northern Gaza Strip, advancing a phased annexation. Together with the provocations on the Temple Mount, this policy guarantees increased violence and instability in the occupied lands, as well as the erosion of democratic institutions in Israel itself.

CONCLUSION



**Nikolai Plotnikov, Head of CSAI IOS RAS,
Doctor of Political Science**

A number of preliminary conclusions can be drawn from your presentations.

The outlook for the Middle East and North Africa does not seem very bright. The problems will only increase with population growth. By 2030, the countries of the region will be home to more than 600 million people. At least 60% of them will be young people who need to be employed. In a context of dwindling resources, unless proactive measures are taken, this may inevitably lead to conflict and, consequently, to new waves of people seeking safety.

Here are some possible ways to stop the hostilities in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone, preventing loss of life and new destruction:

- Lebanon: implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701, withdrawal of all armed formations from southern Lebanon, except for UN peacekeepers and the Lebanese army.
- Gaza: cessation of hostilities, withdrawal of the Israeli army from Gaza, unblocking of international humanitarian aid, beginning of reconstruction projects, establishment of temporary UN control over Gaza.
- West Bank: cessation of ethnic cleansing and new Israeli settlement construction, disarmament of Israeli settlers and Palestinians. Beginning of the negotiation process to implement the UN resolutions on the creation of the state of Palestine.

All of this must be done simultaneously. If anyone refuses to implement these points, the UN should impose tough, coordinated sanctions. What Benjamin Netanyahu and his radical right-wing supporters are doing now is due to a sense of impunity. He knows very well that the United States will give him the necessary financial and military support, and at the UN - political and diplomatic support.

Syria, which is suffocating under the weight of Western sanctions, needs comprehensive support.

The region has become a proving ground for cyber warfare. Israel and Iran have long exchanged cyber-attacks. In recent years, attacks on vital infrastructure, industrial enterprises, seaports, and air and sea control systems have become more

frequent. The so-called pager attack on Lebanon by Israeli intelligence can also be considered cyber warfare.

Today, we have heard a number of clear calls for further cooperation. In particular, joint research in the field of water use between our Center and scientific organizations in the Middle East and North Africa. The subject is extremely relevant and urgent. We propose to our partner, the International University of Rabat, to consider the possibility of organizing a conference on this subject next year with the participation of the countries of the region. We are ready to participate actively.

The second relevant topic for joint consideration could be the situation in the Sahara-Sahel zone.

Thank you very much for your frankness, your differentiated assessments and opinions. We will carefully analyze all the presentations and prepare a final document. Since the presentations were interesting and informative, we will also prepare a collection of reports in Russian and English, which will be sent to all participants of the conference.

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