



Alarming tensions in the Middle East

The policy of escalation can easily turn into a real hot conflict and the region can find itself in a real war.

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We are heading to the 2020's amid politics of escalation in the Middle East, which has been a global war zone for the last 100 years. At the center of this escalation are the decisions – which we can call radical – taken by U.S. President Donald Trump. These are decisions no American president in the past has chosen to implement, preferring to stay out or delay. They, of course, had strong arguments in doing so.

No American administration had moved the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem before a negotiated peace agreement, because the act means unilaterally determining the status of Jerusalem, which was occupied by Israel, according to international laws, in June 1967. This puts the U.S. in a position that it is taking sides with one of the parties to the conflict. The U.S. is losing its role of being a fair mediator in the eyes of the Palestinians.

No American administration had recognized Israel's annexation of Golan Heights from Syria, which was occupied in 1967 too, until Trump. On the contrary, former President Bill Clinton, as a sponsor of the peace talks in the 2000s, met with then-Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad in Geneva to find a solution to the problem. Turkey also mediated between then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2008 on the same subject and negotiated Israel's withdrawal from Golan. The recognition of the annexation and moving the embassy mean U.N. resolution 242, which has served as the basis of peace talks, has been thrown into the dustbin.

Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been elected Israeli prime minister again and got enough seats to form a coalition, shared his vision about the West Bank during his election campaign. He revealed his intention to annex the West Bank, which has been ruled by Israel since the 1967 war. In that tiny territory, almost three million Palestinians live. Major Palestinian cities like Jenin, Jericho, Ramallah and Qalkilia have been surrounded by hundreds of Jewish settlements. Palestinians are forced to live in small Bantustan-like territories reminiscent of the South African apartheid regime. It is not hard to guess that the U.S. president may support Netanyahu's annexation plans of the West Bank. So far, all American presidents, although having turned a blind eye to the expansion of settlements, never made it legitimate and instead found it illegal in accordance with international law. The U.S. had always kept the hopes for a two-state solution alive.

The main problem of Trump's decisions in the Arab-Israeli conflict is that he is cutting down the carrier columns of a possible negotiated peace settlement option. He is destroying reference points

of negotiations. In this case, when the climate changes in international politics, future leaders will not know where to and how to start without these references. The basis of a possible Israeli-Syrian peace has been destroyed. The pillars of the two-state solution have been destroyed. What will the alternatives be? The answer is not pleasant.

These decisions and steps are seeds sown for future disasters. Weak reactions against these decisions may be manipulating Trump and Israeli leadership. But these steps are creating serious deep waves. When things break down, it will be destructive for everyone.

Another axis of escalation is between Iran and the U.S. According to CNN, Trump this week announced that the U.S. will formally designate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization, a move some in the administration had opposed over concerns about potential risks to U.S. troops in the Middle East. The step "recognizes the reality that Iran is not only a state sponsor of terrorism, but that the IRGC actively participates in, finances, and promotes terrorism as a tool of statecraft," Trump said in a statement that described the IRGC as "the Iranian government's primary means of directing and implementing its global terrorist campaign."

Iran's reaction has been in the same direction. "The Islamic Republic of Iran declares itself in reciprocity against the unlawful and unreasonable action of the United States, considering the United States as a terrorist-sponsored government and the Central Command of the United States [CENTCOM] and all its affiliated forces as terrorist groups," the National Security Council of Iran said in a statement. "Obviously, the U.S. regime will take all the responsibility for the dangerous consequences of this undertaking," the statement added.

Aren't these statements declarations of war? If they are, then in this case where will be the war zone?

When we think about the military deployment of the U.S. army in the Gulf region, in Iraq and in Syria, it will not be surprising to see these regions on fire.

This policy of escalation can easily turn into a real hot conflict, and the region from the Gulf to Mediterranean can find itself in a real war. We did not even mention the roles of Russia, China, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

We have not forgotten how the global terrorist organization benefited from the chaos in the region and killed innocent civilians in European capitals by using the black holes in failed states.

Let's hope that common sense prevails soon.