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ONGOING CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THEIR IMPACT ON EUROPE

Abstract:

The Middle East is a region that significantly affects world events. A relatively hopeful period in the form of revolutionary wave of the Arab Spring, from North Africa to Gulf countries has been “drowned” in a return to “business as usual”. The political situation has escalated to the extent possible in many countries of the region and has grown up into open military conflicts and terrorist activities of individuals or smaller groups. A number of hotbeds of tension is present in the region now - Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan in a broader context. The most complicated situation is on the border between Syria and Iraq, where followers of radical Islamist terrorist organization of Islamic State has created a state of the same name on its conquered territories. Events that take place in this space greatly affect not only immediate contact regions of Europe but also more distant areas. Central Europe and Slovakia is no exception. “Export” of

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Islamic fundamentalism in Europe and extension of activities of Islamic state in the form of terrorist attacks and the recruitment of volunteers left no doubt that Europe and the world are facing very tough opponent. Conflicts taking place in this region have an impact on Europe in the secondary form too. Tens of thousands of migrants who come mainly from Syria and Iraq are trying to leave their homes due to military events and persecution and to save their lives by fleeing and a subsequent immigration in the developed countries of Central and Western Europe. This rampant process has caused conflicts within the EU and “stripped” different positions of individual countries diametrically.

Key words: Middle East, Islamic State, Europe, Conflicts.

Middle East today

The current situation in the Middle East region is a reflection of historical events. Main factors have been colonialism, the formation of successor states after the World War I, the border organization, the location of mineral resources (especially oil and gas) at the beginning of the 20th century and the strategic importance of the region (the Suez Canal, the Strait of Bosphorus and Dardanelles, railway Berlin - Baghdad - Basra). These aspects have caused enormous interest of world powers (Britain, France, Germany, USA, Russia) in this region.

Direct consequences of the colonial and post-colonial policies have been territorial claims and border changes of the actors involved.

After World War I existed in the Middle East only two independent states, Turkey and Iran, four other states were formed during the interwar period (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt). Main focal points of conflicts became Palestine, Kurdistan, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, etc. The current political and economic development is marked by a "combat" for dominance in the region between three main geopolitical players – Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The first of these three players is Turkey (a successor state of the Ottoman Empire). Ottomans, after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the destruction of the Byzantine Empire, dominated in the western part of the region (together with parts of southeastern Europe) from the first half of the 16th century. They tried to suppress the Persian and Arabic influence. The Ottoman Empire went through a gradual decline since the mid-19th century. In 1923 was created Turkey and reform processes introduced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk brought overall expansion of the new state - it was connected with efforts for a revision of "lost territories". Turkey is a state, which currently supports military operations of the opposition Free Syrian Army in neighbouring Syria, which has been ruled by one of the main opponents of Turkey's policy in the region, Syrian President Bashar al - Assad.

The second player is Saudi Arabia, an absolute theocratic state based on conservative and bigoted monarchical system of Saud family and a mainstay of Wahhabi Islam (Puritan reform movement (forerunner of modern reformism) based on the rejection of innovation and practices of pre-Islamic times). Saudi Arabia is the main US ally in the region, but it is also a major, albeit tacit supporters of the Islamic State (ISIS) and the opponents of Bashar al - Assad-in-Syria.

The third player is Iran (Persia until 1935), the biggest historical rival of the Ottoman Empire and a current rival of Saudi Arabia and Turkey for position of leadership in the region. It is a stronghold of the Shiite form of Islam and opponent of sunnism penetration. The development of country has fundamentally changed the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Nowadays, it tries to maintain considerable influence in Iraq and Syria and it supports Hezbollah and Shiite militias. It is the main support column of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al - Assad.

An important player in the region is definitely Israel that tries to liquidate the ancient enemy – Syria with its Zionist policy implemented with the support of the United States and other Western countries (Issue of strategic Golan Heights - control of water resources and share of control of potential transit lines exports of strategic materials). A similar scenario is also preparing in Iran.

Factor, that is impossible to analyze current events in the Middle East and North Africa without, is also a process called revolutionary wave of Arab Spring movement which began in the whole Arab world. It began in 2010 and was aimed to fight against poverty, poor economic and social conditions, corrupt and authoritarian regimes long reigning in the countries of the region (Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, Syria, Libya and others). The whole process involved falls of regimes, armed uprisings, civil wars associated with high numbers of casualties (over 134,000).

In the Middle East and North Africa have been implemented identical scenarios (Syria, 2010, Libya 2011) since 2003 (Iraq). Military interventions by Western countries under the tutelage of the US, which were preceded by the induction of internal strife within the borders of states, followed by civil war, by a removal of an old regimes connected with their physical liquidation (Saddam Hussein in 2006, Muammar Gaddafi, 2011) was the situation in these countries out of control and it launched a wave of uncontrolled development and activation of the various fundamentalist and Islamist groups. Destabilization of the region was further strengthened by the withdrawal of the US occupation forces from Iraq, paralysis of instruments of state power in the country and by intensifying confessional tensions between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq but also in other countries (Yemen, Syria).

In the following part, we present a model example of the currently strongest and most active terrorist group in the Middle East – the Islamic State, activities of whose interfere other continents (Asia, Africa, Europe).

The Islamic State

The Islamic State (IS) - the earlier sign - Jihad Organization in Mesopotamia (2004-2006), the Islamic State in Iraq (2006-2013), the Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant (2013-2014), Movement of Islamic state (2014 - present) - Arab term (Daesh) is a terrorist organization that seeks the establishment of a universal wahhabi caliphate reassuming the idea of a new world order under the tutelage of Islam. IS leads a “holy war” through uncontrolled terror against the people practicing religions other than Sunni Islam (Christians, Yazidis, Shiite Muslims and others). It presents by the physical liquidation of soldiers, journalists, humanitarian workers, together with media coverage and Internet use (“online” executions), destruction of cultural monuments of high historical value (Palmyra, Nimrud, Hatra, Rakka, Mosul etc.). IS is not recognized under international law of any country of the world. The capital is Rakka in North Syria. Its main head is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the first Caliph Ibrahim. IS separates from al - Qaeda. Armed forces (approx. 50,000 to 120,000) consists of mercenaries of many nationalities from all over the world (Caucasus, Near and Middle East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, North Africa, Russia, Australia, US, EU

and others) and realize fast mobile operations. Guerrilla warfare follows a good knowledge of local conditions (former officers of the Iraqi and Syrian army). IS conquered oil fields and water sources in northern Iraq and north-eastern Syria by its massive expansion. It derives funds from taxes, sales with petroleum and trades with precious historical artifacts. A significant part of incomes comes from wealthy Middle Eastern donors, especially from the Gulf countries (mainly from Saudi Arabia and Qatar). IS has overcome with its activity al - Qaeda and fulfilled its vision (territory gain, foundation of caliphate, getting the attention of global jihadists). Another spawn of IS became the inability of Middle Eastern leaders to find a new model of governance for the majority of population, experiments with pan-Arab socialism, corrupt regimes of authoritarian rulers and a shift towards more radical Islam, as well as the effect of external influences of world powers (an unprecedented invasion to Iraq without the mandate of the UN Security Council). A type of military operations in Iraq and Syria, in addition to pro-Western activities in Iraq since 2003, became the baseless accusation of Syria by the United States on ownership of nuclear weapons, the subsequent destruction of chemical weapons by Syrian regime, the abolition of the state of emergency in the country, which lasted from 1963 to 2011, presidential election in June 2014, the winner of which became al - Assad and the subsequent civil war of apocalyptic proportions

(destroyed country, huge human casualties, hundreds of thousands of refugees).

Military conflict in the region IS controls attends several actors, characteristics and objectives of which are presented in the following part.

Coalition forces of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Kurdistan - military and religious group led by Iran. It represents so called Republican Shia Islam as an opposite of Wahhabi and Salafist Sunni Islam. Its military power is estimated to approx. 120,000 fighters. They fight against Syrian opposition supported by the US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Turkey and Israel, whose main demand is the resignation of President al - Assad. Syrian president belongs to the Alawite religious group belonging to the Shiite branch of Islam. On the side of regime are Iran, Russia and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Kurdish armed force Peshmerga - 20,000 Kurdish militants fighting actively against IS.

Pro-Western coalition of 25 countries led by the US - its origin dates back to August 2014. Activities of USA took place in Syria since 2013 (deliveries of weapons to Syrian opposition). Its main objective was the elimination of the current Syrian government al - Assad by opposition forces. Nowadays, this rhetoric has been changed. Other objectives of the pro-Western coalition forces are the destruction of IS. Military forces of 12,000 militants together with 7,000 soldiers of the Syrian opposition realize an air attacks on positions of IS,

implement training and instructional activities of soldiers and members of the special forces (US SEAL and Delta Force, British SAS, French Foreign Legion, the Turkish Red Berets and MAK and others), disrupt logistics of IS and operate diversion activity related to the physical liquidation of IS representatives.

Russia - a major supporter and ally of the al - Assad regime (material, technical and logistical assistance). It fights against IS and the opposition forces. At the same time it pursues its geostrategic and security interests (direct distance area controlled by IS in eastern Syria from the Russian Federation is only 600 km - thousands of Russian citizens from the Caucasus and other regions fight among IS). The main objective is to paralyze IS.

An Nusra Front - a militant jihadist group mostly of Sunni Muslims who fight for the overthrow of the al - Assad regime. It is one of many offshoots of al-Qaeda. It consists primarily of Mujahideen. Other allied groups against al - Asad are Fatah al-Islam, Abdullah Azzam Brigades, Martyrs Brigades of Al-Baraa Ibn Malik, Jaish al-Islam, Liwa al-Islam, Brigade Omar al-Farouq and others.

Hezbollah - the Lebanese Shia political and military organization sponsored by Iran. It fights on the side of the al - Assad forces against IS and the Syrian opposition.

Result of activities of participating sides and the causal contexts of the conflict (2011-2015)

Over 500,000 fighters have been deployed on all fronts and sides in combat operations in Iraq and Syria. The conflict brought more than 260,000 victims (soldiers and civilians). Approximately 4 million registered refugees fled from Syria and 2,5 million from Iraq. Material damages include 100 billion USD in Iraq and 15 billion USD in Syria.

Further terrorist attacks and suicide actions, organized by members of the IS or its sympathizers have taken place in Libya, Tunisia (National Museum of Bardo, the attack on holidaymakers on the beach of Imperial Marhaba Hotel in Susa), Yemen (Sana'a, Aden), Turkey (Istanbul, Ankara), Lebanon (Beirut), France (Paris), Southeast Asia (Jakarta), etc.

The basic problem is the inability of the United States, Europe, Russia and Middle East regional powers to make an agreement on a common strategy to fight not only against IS but also other jihadist and Islamist militant groups. There is seen deep individualism of individual leaders and virtually "zero coordination" of collective actions. Moreover, the reluctance, inertia and ignorance of Western states to take a critical position on the situation in the Middle East and North Africa (the Arab Spring) is added. Many of the participating states of conflict have had their subjects of interest mainly in the economic level (strategic raw materials). They also supported old

regimes, and when those were no longer satisfactory, they chose the way of their removal (Husseini, Gaddafi, Mubarak). There was an effort to replace them with new ambitious leaders, but they at some point become even worse than the previous one. And it resulted in the bloody civil wars, where the Western powers participate too (the sale of arms to various factions - efforts to gain influence in areas rich in minerals and water resources - for political and economic influence in the region).

Impact on Europe

Europe borders to the southeast (Bulgaria - Turkey and Greece - Turkey borders) directly to the region of the Middle East (3% of the territory of Turkey is part of the European continent). In the current tense situation is the direct contact rather problematic. It raises many questions and is a potential source of unrest. Turkey, as a NATO member state, participates directly or indirectly through logistic support on some military operations against IS. The policy of the Turkish government of R. Erdogan is considerably unbalanced and causes mistrust on both poles of the political spectrum of participating sides. The fact is weak, virtually no military and political influence of European countries (especially the EU) on the events in the Middle East. European commitment narrowed to participate in military operations (air strikes of France, UK and potentially other states). After a long period of waiting and missteps of European political

leaders, there began peace talks between the warring parties of the Syrian conflict in Geneva.

The biggest problem that plagues Europe and is directly related to military operations in Syria and Iraq is uncontrolled influx of migrants and refugees to the "old continent". Only in 2015, more than 1 million people came to Europe, who fled according to official versions due to war and terror of IS. Many indications, however, point to the inconsistency of these claims. The stream of refugees leads mainly to the strongest European economies (Germany, France, Great Britain, the Nordic countries), which clearly points to the effort to get many privileges from the social system of the state concerned. Another significant factor is the effort to create a coherent religious (especially Muslim) community and thus to bring even greater diversity in quite colourful multi-ethnic environment of European cities. Financial support for these confessional groups, given by the laws of the state concerned (especially Germany), is thus an indispensable part of a planned strategy. Several European countries after the initial euphoric and in many ways illogical and irrational approach to migration issues, in which they criticized especially the "new" EU countries (V4) and threatened them, among other things by the suspension of financial and project support (funds), gradually accept some tough measures, which should slow the pace of influx of migrants and refugees. Forecasters estimate their number in the near future to more than 3,000,000. Several economic analysts say with

regard to the refugee crisis of another global threat. Claims of positive or negative economic benefit of these mostly unskilled people also vary. Slovakia, in close cooperation with V4 countries, especially Hungary and the Czech Republic, enforced to the refugee crisis and waves of migrants to Europe fundamental position, particularly as regards the allocation of quotas. Further development will show which alternative and currents of opinion have become reality and which have not.

Forecasts and Conclusions

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan developed and submitted a plan to organize conditions in Syria. Due to ignorance and zero support of participating sides, including major powers (financial and military donation of participants of the conflict), this plan foundered. At a conference of intelligence services in Washington in October 2015, intelligence chiefs of the United States and France, John Brennan and Bernard Bajelet noted, that countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya) are no longer in a position to restore its original boundaries. For any central government is not possible to restore full control over contiguous territory within the limits set out by two world wars, which creates the conditions for a new geopolitical assumptions (<http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1071764/sefovia-rozvedok-neveria-v-obnovenie-povodnych-hranic-syrie-ci-iraku.html>).

"The Greater Middle East Project" was very famous - RAND Corporation study: "The future security environment in the Middle East, conflict, stability and political change." Primary concerns relate to the control and shipment of mineral resources (oil, gas), potential direct control over the region and weakening of the political influence of Syria, Iran and Russia. Similarly, there is preparing a project of a new state "Great Kurdistan" (Free Kurdistan), whose main task should be to link Sunni territory of Kurdistan and northern Iraq and to block one of the main allies of Syria - Iran (so-called Peters' map). As there were discovered one of the largest deposits of natural gas in the world (the Qatari - Iranian gas field North dome /South Pars and Levantine pool in the Mediterranean), a critical issue of creating a transport corridor from mining towns on the Mediterranean coast is becoming the most important. For Western states is inconvenient rival Islamic pipeline project (Iran artery), which should provide transport of natural gas from Iran through Iraq to Syria around the city of Homs, which is the most important transport junction on the main road to the port of Tartus on the Mediterranean coast. US activities in the region aim to overthrow the pro-Iranian and pro-Russian regime of al - Assad (geopolitical interests of the US, Israel, S. Arabia, Qatar), which was associated with creating of anti-Assad revolt in 2011 with financial support from Qatar and rebel control of routes of upcoming pipeline.

A significant downside of all sides was weak support for peacekeeping activities (interviews, roundtables, dialogue) before

escalating the conflict, respectively before the start of the Civil War by the US and EU, no stronger support for the Annan peace plan, the lack of tools petition rights in the EU, the need for the creation of humanitarian corridors in affected areas and the minimum support of political parties that promote peaceful coexistence between communities. A positive example was the Movement Musalaha (Reconciliation), which was founded in 2012 and preaches inter-religious character (Christians, Muslims, laity, men, women). The best example of the rejection of the war in Syria is the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, Gregory III. Laham assertion: "I do not want to be an apologist for Syria, but I am Syrian, and when I see that the world mass media talk a lot about Syria in a false way, I can only say that among all the Arab countries, Syria was the state with the lowest poverty, smallest illiteracy and the greatest freedom. Health care and education were free, free banking and trading, women participated in social, economic and political life, and no less important is that everyone could profess own faith in Syria. This is precisely why this conflict is even more frightening. Syria is the place of integration and peace and not of blood and division." (<https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cisloclanku=20121024025>).

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