PRESENT-DAY INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS AND WAYS TO SETTLE THEM

A key tendency of the present time is redistribution of the global balance of power. Globalization encouraged the rise of developing countries and emerging countries. The states that used to be its drivers, primarily in the West, are gradually losing their grounds of unconditional dominance. Also, new centers of economic and, to a large extent, political influence are more and more determined to claim their rights. These countries represent almost every continent and bring their historical and cultural peculiarities in the global processes.

At the same time, a number of active participants of international relations is increasing, and the growing polycentricity doesn't fit the system of global governance institutions properly, since most of them are our legacy of the previous age with its old and well-established set of major players. The situation in its turn boosts confrontation in state-to-state relations, leads to limiting space for constructive cooperation even to address common challenges and threats for all the global community. The reason is primarily some Western countries countering today's transformation processes, since they have already charted a course toward suppressing new centers of power by putting economic, informational, military and political pressure.

It's not just about a reflexive urge of a small group of Western countries for maintaining supremacy on the global stage. The problem needs a broader look. Today the West is going through a complex crisis - economic, social, political and ideological one. A neoliberal model turned out to be unable to ensure steady development of economy and society. Income inequality in developed countries, the USA especially, triggered a crisis of confidence in traditional elites and formed a demand for national-oriented agenda in the lower classes as opposed to the globalist one. Hence attempts of these elites to switch society's attention to something else and to consolidate it in the face of an "external threat" in order to stop a swing towards neo-isolationism.

In the West this idea is demagogically amounted to the concept that emerging polycentricity equals to the world backsliding to chaos and a war of all against all. Such a worldview is opposed to some "multilateralization" within "liberal world order" based on "rules and values": values of the Western world and rules it sets.

In practice these "rules and values" often turn out to be nothing else but a permissive interpretation, or even blatant replacement of universally received rules of law. "Multilateralization" usually comes down to making decisions on key international issues by a narrow group of countries in the name of "global leadership" of the USA bypassing the UN Security Council, at the expense of opinion of the rest of the world community and ultimate norms of the international law. It's enough to recall NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, invasion of Iraq under a false pretense or a violent regime change in Libya.

Examples of the latest years are even more telling: from a total non-admission of the Crimean referendum based on an indisputable "value" of the West - democracy - to awkward attempts to legitimate attacks of the Western coalition on Syria obviously violating international law with their "own rules".

Such actions lead to devaluation of the international law, weakening of multilateral institutes and increasing importance of military forces. Today many countries consider it practically the only efficient warranty of their sovereignty.

However it would be oversimplified and even illegitimate to say that today's multiple conflicts, including the most troubled ones taking place in the African continent, can be seen from this perspective only. There are various reasons: social disparity, inadequacy of state institutions, ethnic and confessional antagonisms, fights for resources, and, obviously, past colonial heritage. However, it's the current geopolitical environment that makes it so difficult to settle most conflicts seamlessly. The West got so used to the successful "manageable crisis method" that began to consider it universal, but nowadays it fails more and more often.

It is particularly obvious in the UN Security Council, a body which is to bear the biggest responsibility for international peace and security according to the UN

Charter. Did they manage to settle many conflicts efficiently lately? Does their work resemble a constructive dialogue aimed at looking for stable solutions for the most heated conflicts?

Unfortunately, we have seen the following chain of events lately. Crises, including internal ones, caused by some objective reasons are magnified till they reach some unprecedented scale because of interference of external actors, often involving the UN Security Council for no good reason, where the country "comes under pressure". The most popular tool of our Western counterparts in the Security Council is sanctions. Theoretical insights are developed swiftly, mostly based on such concepts as oppression of minorities with the majority, human rights abuse, a need of protection measures for civilians and, finally, humanitarian intervention.

Currently the most turbulent regions of the world include the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region), where the abovementioned algorithm has been used multiple times already. Gaining support of allies and relying on so-called "ideals of a free world and the rule of human rights" the United States conducted a few military campaigns in that part of the world in order to bring down undesired regimes. As a result, a delicate balance of ethnic, confessional and civilizational interests of the Arabic society was tilted. Sovereign states started to weaken and collapse, and as a result non-state actors reinforced their standing in the Islamic World unprecedentedly, with their own interests that disagreed with interests of the West; radical Islamists factions pressed forward; and even a quasi-state called Islamic State (ISIS, banned in Russia) emerged to establish control over parts of Iraq and Syria and to declare its "caliphate" there in 2014. Internal conflicts were growing in number and turning into regional ones rapidly.

A patent example of fueling an internal conflict from outside is a situation in Syria. In this case inter-confessional discourse is also used actively. The Syrians who have never mused on each other's confessions now begin to see Alawis, Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds and others as "insiders" and "outsiders". Besides, as it is typical for other communities of the Middle East, deep civilizational fault line lay between cities and the country-side. It was rural people that became a driver of armed

struggle by launching a challenge against city elites and trying to divide spheres of influence.

The situation in Syria was supposed to be settled based on principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. National consent was to be achieved in order to eliminate the risk of a drift to political fragmentation and geographic partition of the country which is, fortunately, something every single Syrian actor currently opposes.

Obviously, any post-settlement political order should consider legitimate aspirations of all components of the Syrian society. It's what the Resolution of the UN Security Council states and S. de Mistura, a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, promotes in his terms.

Efforts of the Russian side are aimed at early cessation of a violent conflict in Syria that has lasted for more than seven years already. It is through critically important actions of the Russian Aerospace Forces that Syrian government forces managed to clean the territory of the country from ISIS militants, to maintain its sovereignty and to create all necessary conditions for reconstructing the infrastructure and residential areas for refugees to come back, and to set about political settlement under the UN aegis seriously. It was particularly enabled by holding the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi in the end of January 2018 with an aim to address issues set in the UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

It cannot be disregarded that military defeats of ISIS in Iraq and Syria lead to the outflow of militants to other countries, which makes these countries particularly vulnerable for increasing terrorist threat in the context of unstable internal political situation and weakness caused by protracted conflicts. One of at-risk countries is Libya, where the ISIS "branch" still retains considerable fighting potential. It is entirely possible that after regrouping of forces this terrorist organization would intensify its offensive operations and enhance subversive activities. It should be kept in mind that militants also come to the European countries in the guise of refugees often, which increases a risk of terrorist threats exponentially.

In the context of processes in the MENA region equitable solution of the

Palestinian problem should be seen as a priority instead of crowding it out. An unsettled decades-old regional conflict and the fact that Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been occupied by Israel for fifty years already serve as an additional force destabilizing the region and causing a breeding ground for extremists.

In the light of a well-known decision of the USA to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel that have already provoked another surge of tension in the region, Russia continues to maintain committed position aimed at inclusive, equitable and stable settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict based on the corresponding international legislation, including the UN Security Council Resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative that both imply finding a negotiated solution to all the issues concerning the final status of the Palestinian territories, the status of Jerusalem inclusively.

Generally, as a map of conflicts in the MENA region shows, it's impossible to reveal any definite ethnocultural and civilizational trends in the context of conflictogenity. Ethnically and confessionally homogeneous countries (Libya, Somali) faced armed clashes caused by other reasons, including tribal identity and ideological attitudes. Other countries, such as Yemen, for example, demonstrate splits both within religious communities and between the North and the South under conditions of conflict.

In this context it is presumed that all efforts aimed at returning to normality in the Middle East must be dedicated to deradicalization, improvement of interethnic and inter-confessional relations, and to prevention of establishment of new ethnic borders. A benefit of the doubt given to Russia has increased significantly in the context of our efforts in Syria and stabilization in other countries of the region, which fortifies our positions as a strong actor and partner in the MENA region.

Concerning today's conflicts and ways to settle them it is impossible to ignore the situation in Ukraine. At this point it is one of the largest trouble spots in Europe.

Due to historically formed borders of the state, Ukraine is located at the

cultural and civilizational edge of the nominal West in the form of European and Euro-Atlantic structures and the nominal Eurasian region as represented by Russia. At the same time, gravitation of certain Ukrainian territories to different civilizational poles isn't implicitly explosive if the government pursues a well-balanced policy considering specificities and interests of every group of population within a multinational state.

Ignorance of those realities and Kyiv's aspiration to impose its worldview based on dogmas of the Ukrainian monoethnicity were one of fundamental causes of the conflict in Donbas the Ukrainian authorities adamantly refuse to recognize. Instead of searching for a compromise today's Ukrainian authorities take actions that only escalate the civil conflict and don't enable its de-escalation.

Gross external interference of Western countries, primarily the USA, in the expanding conflict in the Ukraine since 2014 under a slogan "either with the West, or with Russia" aggravated the situation and led to a murderous civil war. By supporting the unconstitutional coup they showed their disrespect to legitimate aspirations of people living in Donbas, their choices and fundamental rights. Unfortunately, now it's impossible to find a way to deal with Donbas problem without Washington.

As the global experience in settling conflicts in ethnically heterogeneous countries demonstrates, it is inevitable to look for mutually acceptable options for opposing parties to exist within one and the same state in order to save its territorial integrity. If one of conflicting parties - Kyiv in this case - tries to gain the upper hand and to resolve the conflict by force, it will not succeed.

Minsk Package of Measures agreed on February 12, 2015 is the inclusive and mutually acceptable mechanism for the Ukrainian conflict that can lead to the long-term stabilization of the situation and a further peaceful settlement of a conflict. There is no alternative for the Minsk accords. It is an admitted fact. Potential involvement of the UN in settling the conflict in Donbas and fielding its peace-keeping forces to protect the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission shall not substitute for the Minsk accords and serve, as Kyiv sees it, some operation on "peace

enforcement", which is the view of the Russian side stated in the draft of a corresponding UN Security Council Resolution.

At the same time, the Ukrainian authorities act against all commitments they undertook in Minsk. A so-called Law on De-occupation of Donbas aimed at resolving the Ukrainian conflict by force was passed by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in the beginning of 2018. It practically derails the Minsk accords, puts off potential reintegration of Donetsk and Luhansk regions uncontrolled by Kyiv into the Pan-Ukrainian territory, and threatens with unpredictable consequences for the European security.

The Russian side is sure, that the Ukrainian conflict with its pronounced cultural and civilizational nature can be settled peacefully only considering interests and specificities of regions, based on a well-balanced approach and an ability to conduct a dialogue with an opposing party.

Choosing approaches for maintaining peace and security Russia always adheres to such principles as the rule of international law, non-interference in the internal affairs and unacceptability of tyranny, respect of other countries' sovereignty, their equality, the right of peoples to determine their own destiny and the inconsistency of claims for exceptionalism.

We use these standards for Syria and Ukraine as well. Even in Africa a principle of containing conflict within the civilization finds its expression in the slogan "African solutions to African problems" supported by Russia. We are advocates of a more active involvement of regional organizations and integration associations into settlement of conflicts, such as the SCO, the African Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the League of Arab States. We presume that the CSTO capacity can be used efficiently not at the territory of the Organization member states only, but in other states as well, for example in UN peace-building.

Russia constantly emphasizes that today's conflicts cannot be resolved by force. Any conflict has a unique set of reasons. Every single case needs careful and unbiased approach, patient analysis and the collective search for political and

diplomatic decisions and a unique solution, first of all, at the national level.

Prevention and settlement of conflicts are ensured with following the principle of equal security for everybody, which our country has consistently defended for a long time. It closely echoes basic concepts of the Non-Alignment Movement, since its participants warn integration associations against turning into closed block structures. We understand and share their concerns. Politics become particularly dangerous if it is formed under the principle of civilizational, regional and confessional or value-based (in the bad sense of the word) affinity with an apparent or implied aim to confront other states belonging to the same affinity.

Today the world is at the crossroads, at the fork in the road. What lies ahead depends - either it's further degradation and increasing insecurity, or we will manage to agree on new, unified "rules of the game" that will give the world peaceful co-existence of countries and peoples, and a chance to develop not for some chosen ones, but for the whole international community.

UN remains a mandatory universal forum for developing these solutions, since during 72 years of its existence it has proven to be irreplaceable as a unique platform of a regular dialogue of nations on building stable, equitable, secure and efficient architecture of international relations.

In our opinion, such a scenario is possible so long as constructive and "true" polycentricity is established - a world order that will reflect cultural and civilizational diversity of the world, though, compared to fairly confrontational multipolarity of previous ages, it will be based on mutually beneficial cooperation and mutual respect of interests of different countries and associations.