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BAYRAKTAR

Peace or fierce struggle in the Middle East

The "Conference on Peace and Stability in the Middle East" in Poland's capital Warsaw on Feb. 13-14 was presented as another search for peace in the region.

Some Arab ministers attended the conference, initiated by the U.S., along with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Neither Iran, as one of the most important actors of Middle Eastern politics, nor Palestinians, who have been the victims of the most important conflict in the region for the last 100 years, were invited. Only this tells us a lot about the nature and success of the conference.

Many issues were tackled during the panel meetings. Peace and stability was the main theme. "A New era" and "normalization" were words most frequently used by the participants. But they remain as "empty hopes" once again. For instance, if the meaning of normalization is to make the heavy conditions of the occupation in Palestine look normal, it is not wise.

Peace by its nature is made between enemies. You cannot make peace by ignoring your enemy. By this way, you can only sow the seeds of a new conflict. Without the enemies, with these kinds of gatherings you can only build alliances against them. Unfortunately, the real message of Warsaw looked more like an ultimatum. Excluding the main actors of conflicts is the harbinger of a new polarization in the region.

Those who want to shape the affairs of the Middle East should keep in mind that there is a great gap between the Arab streets and the ruling Arab elite. Ordinary Arabs are concerned about events in Jerusalem and what is happening on Palestinian territories. The conditions of the occupation, unilateral steps to determine the status of Jerusalem, and violence in Syria, Iraq and Yemen are feeding into the sense of injustice and discontent.

This gap has turned into a major threat to regime security in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Western-supported Gulf kingdoms. The events of 2011 during the Arab revolts provided clear evidence to this. For these countries, the main concern is the security of their regimes. Radical terrorist organizations have also been exploiting these feelings. And this excluding approach is playing into the

hands of these terror groups.

The hypocrisy about the Iranian nuclear program can be added to these issues. People notice the double standards between the approach to Israeli nuclear arsenal and Iran's nuclear activities. No one in the region likes the idea of a nuclear Iran. But the lack of an effort to de-nuclearize Israel has been regarded as unjust.

To reach a fair and permanent peace in the region, firstly, the main questions must be defined and be addressed properly. In this context, the most protracted conflict in the region is the Israeli-Palestinian question. It is not only about resources and political differences. It is about values and identity. Palestinian territories are under Israeli occupation and millions of Palestinians live miserable lives. Millions of refugees are waiting to see progress. The third holy city of the Muslims, Jerusalem, has been Judaized. The whole Muslim world is watching these incidents with great concern. President Donald Trump's decision to move the American embassy to Jerusalem is being regarded as part of determining the status of Jerusalem unilaterally in favor of Israel without the consent of the Palestinians.

The Jewish settlements in the West Bank are expanding rapidly, breaching international law. How can we talk about peace and normalization without addressing these issues?

Furthermore, many Western countries do not question the order established by a military coup in Egypt. While people go missing, Riyadh is trying to cover up these incidents by signing big military contracts. Everybody seems O.K. with that.

No one seems worried about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Terrorist organizations are being used as tools, and there are even efforts to legitimize them.

The world has witnessed many similar peace conferences in the past. But failure in these kinds of initiatives leads to the escalation of violence. We have seen many times that polarizing peace efforts based only on power bear no fruit.

If a fair and permanent peace is the goal, all the parties must come together and discuss the real issues openly, even if they are enemies.