



By: *Emre Alkin*

The US might stir up the Mediterranean



This week's article is based on the notes that I gathered from my recent talks with foreign and domestic policy experts, strategists, historians and economists who understand the Middle East quite well.

Those who follow US politics closely know an important fact. US presidents never directly intervene in the Middle East during their first terms. It is during their second term that they choose to take action because they want to have accomplished an important task, a national security objective, before they leave office. Biden, on the other hand, appears to have gone against this rule.

In terms of diplomacy, the United States has been going downhill for a long time. The fact that there are fewer and fewer people who provide wise counsel to President Biden, the incompetence of Vice President Harris, and the fact that New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez stepped down as foreign relations chairman after a bribery indictment have all left a major vacuum in US politics.

Whenever there is a political vacuum, it is filled by more disciplinary-oriented people.

The classic US attitude is that China and Russia are the enemies. However, the US government does not seem to have a clear strategy on how to combat them.

The United States does not intervene directly in Russia, North Korea, or its arch-enemy Iran.

However, when its plan to stir up the Middle East raises oil prices, it will certainly not be good for US citizens. The country has already tapped its emergency crude oil in its Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which might push oil prices towards \$100, even \$150 a barrel. This means inflation will remain high and borrowing will grow.

The US aircraft carriers will hinder Turkey's exploration drilling activities in the region

In this context, we need to pay attention to 3

facts. The first of these facts is that the US sent 2 aircraft carriers to the eastern Mediterranean. While the US government constantly sends the "we will fight if necessary" message, Biden has pressed for expansion of Turkey's role in fighting ISIS in a memorandum that Biden himself sent to Congress.

The aircraft carriers will hinder Turkey's exploration drilling activities in the region. For this reason, Turkey issued a NAVTEX (Navigational Telex) as part of its research into potential exploration deposits within the Eastern Mediterranean.

Could a NATO member country engage in conflict with another NATO member country? Normally, it should not be possible, but frankly the US makes it seem like it could.

If the aircraft carrier battle group sent by the US becomes a permanent presence in the region, instability will increase. Let's remember the PROVIDE COMFORT forces that came to defend refugees fleeing their homes in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

These military operations had created major instability in the northern Middle East. It is quite likely that something similar might happen in the Mediterranean.

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The second fact is that Iran's connection was mentioned regarding the attack on Israel. As reported in The Wall Street Journal, "Iranian security officials helped plan Hamas's surprise attack on Israel and gave the green light for it at a meeting in Beirut last Monday". This was stated by senior members of Hamas and Hezbollah.

So, it is extremely probable that US and UK forces arriving at the region are directly targeting Iran. No one has a clear idea what Turkey might do in the event of a Western assault on Iran.

Undoubtedly, Iran would not run from battle in order to preserve its regime. It could even close the Strait of Hormuz during a war, which would dramatically jeopardise the energy supply from the Persian Gulf to the Arabia Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Economic Impacts

The third fact is that Turkey might be asked to take the initiative to reconcile Russia and Ukraine. Such reconciliation would obviously help gain Turkey an advantage in the region.

Besides, last month Zelenskyy stated that Ukraine might lose the war if it does not get more aid soon, while Russia admits that the price of this war has been too great.

I sincerely hope that we can see a permanent ceasefire and peace between the two countries.

Clearly, rising tensions in the region also has economic angle. There are natural gas reserves offshore the Gaza Strip.

On the other hand, the Arabian Peninsula lies on one side of the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz lies on the other side. Both waterways are crucial for global energy and trade.

The Suez Canal is a key trade route that accounts for 15% of world trade. 4.5% of crude oil, 9% of refined petroleum products and 8% of liquefied natural gas (LNG) transportation.

In addition to the canal itself, 80% of the crude oil from the Middle East to Europe will be transported through the Sumed pipeline, or the Suez-Mediterranean Pipeline, which will be fully operational soon.

The Strait of Hormuz has even greater importance. Iran's oil production of more than 3 million barrels per day is shipped to the world through the Strait of Hormuz. And half of it is shipped to China. 17.5% of global oil shipment pass through this strait, not to mention Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG).

If the Israel-Hamas war and Russo-Ukrainian war do not come to an end soon, a severe food crisis might strike the world

So, even the current state of tensions between Israel and Hamas alone could push oil prices up to \$100 per barrel, perhaps up to 150\$ if the war between these two escalates into a regional conflict. And this would obviously mean a new energy crisis.

Israel alone accounts for 6% of all potash fertiliser and 8% of phosphatic fertiliser production and export.

The Middle East North Africa (MENA) region is a net fertiliser exporter, producing almost 50% of global fertiliser requirements. MENA countries that do not produce it constitute 25% of global fertiliser importers.

The bottom line is that if the Israel-Hamas war and Russo-Ukrainian war do not come to an end soon, a severe food crisis might strike the world.