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THE WAR IN ISRAEL AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS
What Nicosia needs to pay attention to

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Introduction

Historically, developments in the Middle East have always had broader repercussions. Cyprus, which is situated at the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean, does not remain unaffected.

The Arab-Israeli War of October 1973 led, among other consequences, to a rise in oil prices and contributed to stagflation internationally. During this war, the leader of the Greek junta, Georgios Papadopoulos, who had improved his relations with President Makarios, maintained a neutral stance. However, a few weeks later, on November 25, 1973, he was overthrown by Dimitrios Ioannidis. The consequences for Cyprus were disastrous in the following year. More specifically, Ioannides overthrew President Makarios on July 15, 1974 and provided Turkey with a unique excuse to invade Cyprus.

The Hamas attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, marks the beginning of a chain of events both in the broader region and internationally. Throughout the years Israel has been criticized from various circles for violating the rights of the Palestinians. However, with this terrorist attack, even Israel's critics find it difficult to align themselves with extremist Islamic organizations. The Jewish state will not only strive to win the war but also to assert its moral high ground. It should be noted that this attack has also aimed at challenging the notion that Israel is invincible. Certainly, the Jewish state will act in a way to reaffirm its strength and dominance.

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Historical Overview

In the past, Cyprus followed a pro-Palestinian stance, while the relations between Turkey and Israel were more than harmonious. Cyprus began to strengthen its relations with Israel during the administration of President Glafkos Clerides from 1993 to 2003. This policy was upheld by all subsequent Presidents. At the same time, Cyprus sought to maintain its relations with the Arab world.

It is important to assess Israel's stance overtime. Israeli policymakers have always considered that there are four regional powers in the broader Middle East: Israel, the Arab World, Iran and Turkey. Israel cannot afford to remain isolated within the region and needs to maintain good relations with at least one regional power. With the radicalization of Iran in 1979 Turkey remained the only option. However, Israel gradually improved its relations with some Arab states, basically Egypt and Jordan. Recently, with the Abraham Accords, the expectation was to broaden these relations. At the present juncture, the goal was to also establish diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. It is worth noting that Israel-Turkey relations deteriorated in 2010 with the Mavi Marmara incident. A few years later, trilateral collaborations were formed in the region.

The need for the right diagnosis of the current situation

It must be understood that the attack by the terrorist organization Hamas is not only the result of enmity and hatred towards Israel. The primary goal is to undermine and prevent the emerging cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel. For years, Palestinians have been trying to prevent the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Arab countries before the resolution of the conflict. They were obviously against the decoupling of the Palestinian issue from the Arab-Israeli relations. When President Sadat of Egypt did so in 1977, he was assassinated a few years later. Nevertheless, relations between Egypt and Israel continued, albeit with difficulties. Israel also improved its relations with Jordan, and in recent years, its efforts to further advance relations with other Arab states have been successful.

Inevitably, due to the recent developments, the Middle East is re-entering into a period of conflict, instability and turmoil. Israel itself, while attempting to neutralize Hamas, will be in a better situation if it adopts a stance that will not alienate moderate Arab countries. Furthermore, Israel should be careful not to undermine the philosophy of the Abraham Accords.

Developments in the Middle East are taking place in a period in which the war between Russia and Ukraine continues, and simultaneously, competition among various powers intensifies in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Furthermore, Turkey maintains a revisionist philosophy with expansionist designs against Cyprus. Last

but not least, it should be noted that in case of a broader escalation of the conflict there will be negative socioeconomic and political repercussions in the region and internationally.

What Nicosia Needs to Pay Attention To

While Cyprus has rightly condemned the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel and expressed solidarity with its neighboring country, it should take all necessary measures to avoid becoming a battleground between Israel and extremist Muslim organizations. This necessitates careful handling of the situation at all levels.

Cyprus has to balance its adherence to both realpolitik and international law. Furthermore, it must be ready to position itself accordingly following changes of the policies of the regional powers. While the Republic of Cyprus unequivocally condemns terrorism and supports Israel, it is also called upon to balance its relations with the moderate Arab world. In this case, support for Israel should be accompanied by a restatement of the position that Cyprus is in favor of a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue on the basis of a two-state solution. After all such a policy is in line with the common position adopted by the EU.

Cyprus is also called upon to emphasize that it is in the interest of the EU and the peoples of the region to become a pillar of stability as well as a provider of humanitarian aid in the Eastern Mediterranean which is next to the volatile region of the Middle East. Therefore, it is important that Cyprus attracts the support of the international community. Toward the implementation of this goal the support of the United States, the EU and the United Kingdom, would be vital. Cyprus will need the assistance of these powers not only to address migration flows but also in relation to the Cyprus problem. Finally, it should be emphasized that Nicosia must operate as a model-state and manage accordingly all issues – from the Cyprus question to the economy and to crisis management. This will be essential for its own national survival.

Conclusion

In this challenging period, Cyprus is called upon to demonstrate prudence, responsibility, and also proceed with credibility. The country must mobilize all its resources and, with rationality, pursue a path to successfully address the multiple challenges ahead.