Will the US Military-Industrial Complex Save the Middle East?

During the recent so-called “strategic dialogue” with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, the US Foreign Minister said that “the US Military-Industrial Complex will save the Middle East.” Given the particular emphasis placed in Washington on the supply of American weapons to the Middle East region, the position indicated by Mike Pompeo speaks of its “strategic” role.

Yes, the United States has a very dubious reputation as a world leader in the arms trade, which has repeatedly confirmed the direct relationship between the supply of weapons and the intensity of conflicts, and how arms exports can serve the political interests of the American elite. Therefore, Washington's argument that the transfer of weapons to US allies is an element of “stability” does not stand up to criticism.

The volume of global arms sales in 2015-2019 increased by 5.5% compared to the previous five-year period, the most noticeable growth was shown by the United States, as evidenced by the annual report of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). According to SIPRI, the United States now accounts for almost 50% of all weapons imported by the Middle East countries. The largest importers of weapons by this Institute are such countries of the Middle East as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Qatar, and Iraq. The volume of arms deliveries to the Middle East increased by almost 20% in 2014-2019.

Among these Middle Eastern importers, the Institute highlights Egypt's recent growing arms imports, which tripled between 2010 and 2019, making it the world's third-largest arms importer.

It must be recognized that its combat readiness and technical equipment have always distinguished the Egyptian army. Of course, primarily due to the explosive region in which this country is located and the need to "be ready" in the event of an armed conflict. In recent years, these concerns have been linked in Cairo to a large extent with the increase in Turkish aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as in Libya, where Ankara continues to provide military support to the Tripolitan regime of Fayez Sarraj, supplying the GNA (Government of National Accord) fighters with weapons, ammunition, war outfit, and modern combat equipment.

For this reason, Egypt’s political leaders began to call on the command of the country's armed forces to put the army on alert to ensure national security if necessary and take active measures to improve the Egyptian military’s technical equipment. The Egyptian Parliament has already officially announced that it sees the illegal Turkish military presence in Libya as a threat to national security. As reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), referring to the statement of one of the most influential Egyptian officials, Egypt intends to take all necessary measures to prevent any threats to the country’s security, even if this requires a strike inside any state.

In recent years, Egypt has actively strengthened its army and improved relations with the United States and Russia by purchasing weapons and equipment. Egypt also bought the Mistral ships, which are very modern ships, from France.

Today, Egypt has created a powerful military potential with 320 thousand military personnel and 400 thousand reservists, more than 4 thousand tanks, and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS). The Egyptian air force is considered very strong compared to many countries in the world. It consists of 35 thousand people, and there are 552 modern military aircraft and 121 combat helicopters, as well as drones. There are ADMS (air defense missile systems) and anti-aircraft defense complexes. Also, Egypt has a powerful Naval Forces, which include 60 warships, as well as submarines. About 40 thousand people serve in the Navy.

All this makes it possible to consider the Egyptian army as one of the strongest in the region.
At the same time, Cairo is continually paying attention to the national army's technical improvement and acquiring new weapons. So, in early June 2020, the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte approved two Bergamini-class frigates, the Spartaco Shergat (F-588) and the Emilio Bianchi (F-589) to Egypt for 1.2 billion euro on the results of negotiations with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, President of Egypt.

In September, Kiel (Germany) launched a fourth of four Type 209/1400 diesel attack submarine ordered for the Egyptian Navy.

To jointly resist other States’ attempts to undermine the Arab world’s security and the importance of a political solution to Yemen, Libya, and Syria, the Egyptian-Jordanian-Iraqi summit was held in late August in Jordan created an Arab bloc aimed at containment of Turkey.

And so, demonstrating its readiness to resist Ankara’s aggressive policy, Cairo has joined the Syrian conflict this summer, starting its game against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. According to Turkish media reports, Egypt sent about 150 of its military to Syria to fight on the Syrian Armed forces’ side. The Egyptian military coordinates with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and Iranian-backed groups. The Egyptians are located in the South of Idlib and the West of Aleppo. According to the reaction expressed by Youssef al-Hamoud, a spokesman for the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), "this step on the part of the Egyptians can be compared to a slap in the face to Erdogan." This news caused a wave of militant sentiment in Turkey.

Although Washington does not advertise its support for Recep Erdoğan in the confrontation with Egypt, however, secretly supports it. As for the European Union, it is cautiously supporting Egyptian leader Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, trying to prevent a new influx of refugees to Europe if the war in Libya continues.

As for the armed clashes between Turkey and Egypt’s armies, most military experts believe that this should not happen, although they do not rule out a possible local conflict between Egyptian soldiers and Turkish proxies in Syria, in particular, in Idlib.

Valery Kulikov, political analyst, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.