Arab Spring or Arab Winter?

The current year, 2016, is a watershed in the history of the Middle East. It has been almost 5 years since the beginning of the so-called “Arab Spring,” which for many turned suddenly into “winter.” Another historic date marks 100 years since the notorious Sykes-Picot Agreement, by which, on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, the then great powers England and France divided up nearly the entire map of the region according to their interests, and made many territories their own colonial possessions.

Massive outpourings of Tunisians and Egyptians in January 2011 represented at first genuine popular protests against rotten regimes, total power of the ruling elites, corruption, unemployment, social injustice, and the expanding gap between rich and poor segments of the society.

Western governments were at first alarmed, having in effect lost, in the span of 2 months, two of their key allies represented by the former presidents of Tunisia and Egypt. They didn’t know what steps to take, fearful that this movement might be the beginning of genuine revolutionary opposition to westernization.

This paralysis didn’t last long. One has to give western politicians their due. They managed to adjust fairly quickly, and make use later of the true existing popular discontent, in order to remove those political leaders who did not comply fully with advice and directives from Washington, London, Paris, and who tried to defend their own interests.

As usual, various tested resources and methods were brought into play, which had been used earlier against undesirable regimes, right up to military interventions.

It seemed that the West had crossed the “red line,” tossing aside all norms of human treatment, decency, and civility during the merciless and brutal slaughter of Muammar Gaddafi (the execution of Saddam Hussein was not enough). That was all done just to be able to declare without ceremony the intent to maintain power over this strategically important region of the world, endowed richly with natural resources, while also intimidating and providing at times a fearful lesson to the rest.

Subsequent scenarios for the other countries, such as Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, etc., differ somewhat in form, but the political course has remained essentially unchanged to ensure, by any means, the West’s position and advancement of its interests.

The old logic, “divide and rule”, time-tested as far back as ancient Rome, achieved this time also the needed benefits. While upsetting the balance of forces in the Persian Gulf, the 21st-century neocolonizers began to incite new conflicts, provoke clashes among various ethnic and religious groups, and foment sectarian strife.

This time, however, new elements were added to the formula. With its allies’ assistance, the US began for real to use Islamic extremists for its own interests. Whatever officials in Washington may say about the fight against the so-called Isis and other terrorist alliances, the majority of Arabs, Turks, Iranians, and other citizens of the region believe that the interference itself by the US and other Western powers explains to a great extent the problems that the Middle East confronts today. In the Middle East, nearly everyone is convinced of the assertions made by Al Jazeera’s TV-channel political analyst, Marwan Bishara, in his commentary on Jan. 19, 2016, “... the Arabs’ misfortunes stem from the West’s intervention, and its manipulations of the Arab youth, which will ultimately lead to
the growth of destructive ideas. Additionally, people in the West repeat the worn-out cliché - the Arabs are hopeless. Islam is incompatible with democracy.”

As a result, the peoples of this region are paying a heavy price for such policies, since average citizens suffer most of all from terrorist acts: people from Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, etc.

As is well known, Tunisians initiated the events that later became known as the "Arab Spring." Located in the central zone of the Mediterranean Sea, where the mighty Carthage flourished in ancient times, Tunisia, with its population of 10 million, is a beautiful and bountiful country, a genuine tourist paradise. After events of the “Jasmine Revolution,” Tunisians were able to demonstrate their ability to reach accord among various groups of the population and choose a peaceful path for development. But their attempts for active development of the economy, based on the consensus they achieved, did not lead to the desired results. Savages from the Isis terrorist alliance, who dug themselves in Libya, could not conceive of their peace loving neighbours leading normal lives. As a result of three, bloody terrorist acts in 2015, tourism (the basis of Tunisia’s economy as a whole) suffered a huge blow. As a result, the situation in the country deteriorated. Unemployment rose to 650,000, where 250,000 were graduates of higher schools.

The recent policies of the US in the region have been labelled irresponsible, even by American political analysts.

But all these cataclysms and disturbances have not been in vain. Wide sections of the peoples of the region's countries, young people first and foremost, realize that their future is in their own hands, and to achieve a just resolution to the problems that have arisen, they must select correctly allies and friends.

Veniamin Popov, Director of the “Center for Partnership of Civilizations” in MGIMO (U) MFA of Russia, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, exclusively for the online magazine "New Eastern Outlook."