

Unacceptably High Risks and Distress—End the Ukraine, Middle-East and Sudan Wars Now

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There is only so much of stress, distress and high risk that our world can bear at any given time, and today this has crossed the limits.

While there are over 55 important conflicts in the world and several other smaller ones, not to mention the widespread violence and stress in daily life, the three conflicts associated with the highest risks and distress are those of Ukraine, the middle-east (itself a multi-dimensional conflict) and Sudan.

These three conflicts/wars must end as soon as possible, if possible now and here. The risks involved are simply too great.

The over 1.5 million people who have already died and the over 15 million who have been displaced in these three conflicts within 30 months are a very disturbing indication of the mass distress related to these conflicts but it is also a very partial indication- the high risks posed by the continuation/escalation of these conflicts are so huge that in fact the destruction of the entire world is a real possibility, as the escalation of at least two of these conflicts and their linking up can lead to a world war and a nuclear war.

There used to be a time when the top leaders and diplomats of the world could be trusted to avoid the worst possible scenarios. Unfortunately this appears to be no longer so, and it is best that people of the world know and realize this.

Several persons placed at senior levels in the west have routinely stated in recent times, more or less,—as we have crossed several stated red lines in the past and Russia did nothing, so this means we can go on crossing bigger ones and nothing will be done. For any sane persons, the horrible dangers inherent in such reasoning and arrogance should be clear. A reasonable response would have been to show at least some appreciation for the restraint exercised by Russia.

Image: People gather at the Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab Mosque in Doha for Friday prayers before the burial of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [Showkat Shafi/Al Jazeera]



On the other front, when Iran's expected retaliation for the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, at a time when he was an official high-level guest in Tehran on July 31, did not come, again there was no appreciation of restraint. If escalation cannot come from this anticipated retaliation, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu appeared to say, then I'll escalate on my own, and he has done so on the Lebanon front with relentless bombing preceded by the horrible communication device attacks.

Thus extremely irresponsible and escalatory behavior has been seen on the part of some senior leaders and diplomats who ought to have known and behaved better. Incredibly and sadly, the big media follows more the lead of such persons instead of becoming an important voice of peace and restraint, which should be its true role.

The peace and safety of the world cannot be said to secure in the hands of such leaders, officials and diplomats. Of course they must follow their national interests, but not in such narrow and dangerous ways as to endanger the safety of the entire world which includes their own country and people as well. As one listens to what senior officials and leaders of the most aggressive countries frequently say, one wonders if they have ever been sincerely trained and educated regarding the needs of world peace. Most distressing has been to see war mongering in those countries of Europe and among those sections which were expected by many people to stand for peace.

Given the fact that several leaders and diplomats of world in top decision making positions are not exercising the responsibility and caution expected from them, the ongoing most serious wars and conflicts become all the more dangerous and the possibilities of sudden escalations and widening of conflicts increase further. The fact that a situation has been reached where Russia has formally announced a significant revision of its nuclear doctrine is an indication of the extent to which the risks are rising.

It is not that some world leaders have not behaved irresponsibly in the past, but it is important to also remember that such irresponsibility and recklessness often resulted in bigger regional wars and, on two occasions, in world wars. The big difference then and now is that now the world has around 13,000 nuclear weapons, just 5 to 10% per cent of which are enough to destroy the world.

In Ukraine the risks of a wider war have been most discussed in recent times in the context of NATO countries possibly permitting Ukraine to use weapons supplied by them to attack mainland Russia. This is an explosive issue, but there are other possible flash points also for escalation, in a situation where the Ukraine President wants a wider war to reduce his own problems relating to military reverses.

In the middle-east, the Israeli Prime Minister appears to take pride in the number of fronts on which he is fighting, not acknowledging that he could have avoided most of this conflict by acting in a more responsible way. What is worse is that he appears bent on initiating escalations that can lead to an even wider regional war. There is also an additional possibility that the two escalating most dangerous conflicts of Ukraine and middle-east (with its many fronts) can get linked up with each other to become a world war and a nuclear war.

While the civil war in Sudan cannot lead to a world war, risks of a wider regional war in a highly volatile region certainly exist. The sheer magnitude of the humanitarian crisis that has been caused within a short period by this civil war are deeply disturbing. People have faced indiscriminate killings, one fifth of the population of the country has been displaced, one half of the population suffers from severe hunger, fleeing people are often forced to move from one danger area to another, famine conditions have been declared even in big refugee camps, women and children face extremely harsh risks. On top of this in neighboring countries we now have increasing tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia, between Somalia and Somaliland and the rise in tensions in the wider region relating to Ethiopia's giant GERD dam project. If the humanitarian crisis in Sudan and the Horn of Africa region is already so huge, one can imagine the dimensions of the crisis if a wider regional war erupts.



Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (From the Public Domain)

Keeping in view all these high risks and possibilities of escalations, it has become extremely important that all these three conflicts should end as soon as possible, if possible should end immediately now. The only way of ensuring such a very early end of these wars, as this writer has been emphasizing, is to agree to a more or less unconditional permanent ceasefire. There may be a few exceptions in the form of conditions that are relatively easy to achieve, such as the release of Israeli hostages, but what is important is that any conditions cannot be allowed to become the cause of further delay in ending war. So

ceasefire now and here on the basis of the existing line of control should be the broad principle for ending these wars, while all contentious issues are then resolved later by peace negotiations. The peace negotiations can be prolonged but should not break down. Meanwhile the international community should contribute generously to start rehabilitation work on a large scale. Other peace and goodwill creating initiatives should continue all along. All the top statesmen, diplomats, scholars of world who are committed to peace should come forward to create such a consensus, the United Nations should contribute as much as possible to this, leaders of individual counties should contribute with mediation and rehabilitation assistance, all peace movements everywhere should extend their support.

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