Challenges in The Mediterranean region

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Foreword
From the Libyan peace processes to the EU-Turkey tensions, the Mediterranean basin is a crucial area in geopolitics. As the EU High Representative Joseph Borrell said: "A strengthened Mediterranean partnership remains a strategic imperative for the European Union". The EU is not the only actor investing in its relations with Mediterranean States. China, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, but also the United States and NATO have security, economic and political interests at stakes. More so, migration politics and energy resources put the Mediterranean at the heart of power struggles.
**Timeline**

**12/01/2021**
Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates signed a military cooperation agreement

**19/01/2021**
Libyan Envoys approved the mechanisms to select an interim government

**09/03/2021**
Israel and Cyprus reached an agreement on the Aphrodite-Yishai's dispute

**25-26/03/2021**
EU summit on the resumption of bilateral talks between Greece and Turkey and the discontinuation of unlawful drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean

**09/04/2021**
US announced the deployment of warships in Black Sea and asked Turkey for permission to navigate straits of Dardanelles and Bosporus.

**16/04/2021**
First joint meeting between Cyprus, Greece, Israel and the United Arab Emirates held in Paphos

**22/04/2021**
Turkey started talks with Russia on new batch of S-400 missiles

**14/01/2021**
Tunisia – 10th anniversary of Ben Ali’s flight into exile. Civil unrest unfolded

**10/02/2021**
Turkey proposed alternative to solve S-400 dispute and avoid sanctions.

**10/03/2021**
Libya – Parliament approved the interim government

**07/04/2021**
Turkey – US sanctions entered into force

**15/04/2021**
The European Union called on Israel not to obstruct the upcoming Palestinian elections

**19/04/2021**
Israel and Greece signed a defence procurement

**19-22/04/2021**
UN Special Envoy and UNSMIL head Kubiš held talks in Bern to support the interim government

**27-29/04/2021**
Informal 5+1 meeting on Cyprus held in Geneva composed of Turkish Cypriot, Greek Cypriot, The United Kingdom, Greece, Turkey and the United Nations.
In 2017, Turkey acquired the S-400 Triumf system from Russia, which sparked a wave of concerns in the region, more specifically, from other NATO members—the United States being the most vocal about it. After receiving the first lot of missiles in 2019, and testing them in 2020, the US and several European States established a series of sanctions that have increased diplomatic tensions in the region during the first trimester of 2021. This and other actions taken by Turkey in the past years have raised concerns about its future in NATO and the role it plays in relation to peace and security in the Mediterranean.

While some have called for a reevaluation of the membership management in NATO, it is important to remember that the organization represents one of the most cohesive and relevant security communities in the international system. Contrary to promoting exclusion and increasing constraints between its members, this article will explore the reasons why Turkey should remain a key ally in NATO’s strategies for peace and security in the Mediterranean, and why this is a suitable moment to bring Turkey closer to the organization.

The first section will make an approach to three current events that have contributed to an increase in tensions between Turkey and other NATO members: The purchase of the S-400 Triumf missile system from Russia, its support to Ukraine’s accession to NATO membership—in the context of military escalation—and the last explorations performed in Greece’s exclusive economic zone (EZ). The second section will analyze the factors that have kept Turkey close to NATO, and those who are threatening to separate it from the organization, in order to understand why this could be a convenient time to create more balance among its Member States while promoting security in the Mediterranean. The article will finalize with a few considerations regarding the future of Turkey and NATO, to not only improve the organization’s stance and mission in this particular region, but also its overall work around the globe.

Why have tensions increased in the Mediterranean?

Turkey joined NATO in 1952 during its first enlargement, but due to several historical actions within the organization, there has been a growing sentiment from Turkey that they are considered as mere second-class members in a Treaty more oriented towards a Western ideology, and that others States do not see its value beyond the military realm. Moreover, Turkey claims that, while it belongs to a security community like NATO, its air defense capabilities do not equate to those of other members, and has constantly sought to acquire sophisticated equipment from fellow NATO States in order to ensure its own safety. Nevertheless, the country has not been able to obtain it from its allies in “favorable terms”, which prompted them to look for alternative partners closer to their borders, even though the US had offered on various occasions the opportunity to buy their USS-Patriot system from them. This leads to the first current even to analyze in this article, the purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system.

In 2017, Turkey established a deal with the Russian Federation to acquire the renewed S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile system for around $2.5 billion. This action is believed to be more of a geopolitical move given the existing tensions between both states after the former
shot down a Russian fighter jet on the border between Turkey and Syria in 2015. Whatever the underlying intentions might be, the purchase was made in 2017, which raised alarms on other NATO members, especially the US, alleging the S-400 system is incompatible with NATO’s equipment and that it could pose a threat to the organization’s intelligence—considering that the system’s implementation would require on-the-ground support from Russia. In this context, and after receiving the first set of missiles in 2019, the US proceeded to remove Turkey from its F-35 Program, despite it being a financial and manufacturing member of a project that would eventually grant them a considerable amount of jets for air defense.

While no further actions came from either the US or other NATO members during that year, things changed in late 2020, when Turkey decided to test its newly acquired system, which prompted the US to enact economic sanctions under the Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). The sanctions mainly targeted assets of high rank officials of the Turkish Presidency of Defence Industries, and prohibited the “export of licenses, loans, and credits to the agency”. Since its signing in 2017, it was the first time the CAATSA had been used as retaliation against a NATO member, which does affect its already complicated relations with Turkey, now framed as an ‘adversary’. While there have been proposals for initiating talks on the side of Turkey, Joe Biden’s government remains firm on its decision.

These events have developed in the context of another major issue that concerns not only NATO, but also the European Union in general: The growing military tensions between Russia and Ukraine, where Turkey has stepped up in support of the latter. Earlier this month, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed he would back its territorial integrity, declarations that arose after the recent deployment of Russian troops in the Donbas region, a buildup that has already been condemned by both NATO and the EU. Moreover, Ukraine has purchased weapons from Turkey, and both Erdogan and Volodymyr Zelensky have considered further joint defense strategies in the past few months.

While Ukraine and NATO established cooperation ties in 1997 with the creation of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, the country has not yet managed to obtain membership status but has received ample support from Turkey in its accession to the organization. Turkey remains a key partner in the struggles between NATO and Russia since it retains control of the straits that connect the Mediterranean and the Black Sea under the 1936 Montreux Convention, which makes it a valuable geopolitical ally in case naval ships had to be deployed in the region (Reuters, 2021).

Considering its current close ties with Ukraine, there could be room for further diplomatic relations between all parties to increase security in the region.

The final issue to consider in this context is the historical tensions between Turkey and Greece, which escalated in the summer of 2020 after Turkey began explorations for fossil fuels in disputed waters. This problem has been going on for decades, and while energy exploration has been the main trigger for actions from both NATO members, there are still core disagreements between the extension of EEZs and explorations rights on said areas—an issue that also concerns Cyprus. Turkey’s considerable dependence on energy imports weighed heavily on its GDP in the past few years (Mercan, 2020), a fact that also makes its economy and development more vulnerable.

In addition, two of the most ambitious energy projects in the Mediterranean—the creation of a gas pipeline and the creation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum—have been on the move without considering Turkey as a regional partner, which has led to increased geopolitical strains between both countries. The Greek and Turkish foreign minister had a high-level meeting in mid April 2021, but far from reaching a joint framework for action, the representatives into a
heated discussion over territorial claims that have left the conflict in a stalemate.

**Are NATO–Turkey relations facing a point of no return?**

The strains between Turkey and other NATO members are not precise current issues; instead, they have been evolving and becoming more complicated as time has gone by. Considering the panorama in the Mediterranean, this article considers that Turkey should remain a key partner in the global peace and security strategy in the region, and that, despite present tensions, there is ample room to avoid further distancing between the involved parties.

It is true that there are factors that have created constraints to the relationship between both parties. Turkey’s journey as a NATO member has not been problem-free, and, as mentioned in the beginning, there are tensions because Turkey considers it is perceived as a second-class member in the organization. Events like the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey created more mistrust between both sides after President Erdogan accused the US of being involved in the operation and some NATO countries granted asylum to Turkish military components.

Moreover, Turkey considers there has been preferential treatment in regards to the acquisition of the S-400 system, given that in previous years Greece, another NATO member, purchased the S-300 Russian system without facing the same repercussions.

Considering Turkey’s already tense relations with NATO—in face of the support the US, France and the United Kingdom have offered Kurd forces fighting in Syria—and internal struggles related to an increased nationalism and anti-west sentiment, there could be signs that the relationship between both parties are reaching a point of no return. This would considerably affect the peace and security strategies of NATO, and most importantly, the Mediterranean, if Turkey decided to look for more autonomy in its security.

Nevertheless, there are factors that due favor the relationship. In the first place, it is beyond question that both would benefit mutually. Despite its lower air defense capabilities—vis a vis other NATO members—Turkey has one of the armies with the largest military personnel in the region, a characteristic that has been useful in NATO operations; it is also located in a strategic geopolitical location between Europe and Asia, and close to one of the most conflictive areas, the Middle East. However, it is also important to consider that as vital as its position may be, Turkey does benefit from the security umbrella provided by NATO in the region, and that the organization has historically provided a platform for assessing many of the country’s diplomatic issues with other members—specifically, Greece.

In the case of the recent tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the use of a trusted partner like Turkey—who also holds the key for maritime military operations in the region—could work as a buffer to de-escalate the conflict.

In the second place, there has been speculation regarding Turkey’s membership in NATO and its possible closer ties with Russia after the purchase of the S-400 system. However, it is vital to note that despite previously signed contracts, Turkey and Russia are not as close as they are portrayed to be. This is one of the reasons why it is believed that the S-400 purchase responds to a strategic move after tensions increased in 2015 after Russia imposed heavy sanctions that threatened Turkey’s economy, which were only lifted in 2017, the year the acquisition was negotiated.
While both countries might have similar ruling styles—and attempt to incline far from the West—they also have different political goals in the region. For example, while Turkey and Russia have stood against US policies in the Syrian conflict, their long-term plans vary, with the former being more concerned about its territorial integrity in relation to Kurd nationalism, and the latter focusing on its strategic partnership with Assad’s regime.

Furthermore, while the first lot of S-400 missiles has already been delivered and tested, there are no indications that Russia will share any sensitive information in regards to the system with Turkey, beyond on-ground general support, which shows that there might still be a certain level of suspicion from Russian due to Turkey’s closeness with NATO. It is highly unlikely that Turkey will change sides in favor of Russia, and this should be considered as an opportunity for NATO to retain its key partner.

What can be done at this point?

It has been possible to observe that the relations between NATO and Turkey have presented a series of mishaps throughout history, and that current events have not contributed to improving the situation. Nevertheless, both parties have been able to sort out differences of this nature in the past, and 2021 should not be the exception. While this article has focused on the behavior from NATO (and its members) that has affected the dynamics within the organization, it is also worth noting that Turkey has undergone its fair share of actions that have decreased stability levels in the region—especially its territorial issues with Greece—and inside its own borders. Besides its overall aggressive foreign policy, the last event that has sparked concern from the international community is Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, a concerning move that is seen as a step further from a Western system President Erdogan has openly criticized before.

Despite these passive-aggressive relations, the fact is Turkey has key geopolitical importance for NATO in the Mediterranean. Therefore, there are a couple of ideas to reflect upon when discussing not only the future of Turkey in the organization, but also the future of NATO itself. In the first place, considering the ongoing tensions between Ukraine and Russia, NATO should analyze reaffirming its commitments with its members, and in this particular case, with Turkey, given that it could be a valuable ally as a buffer for conflict escalation. Some envision giving Turkey more space for decision-making processes in the North Atlantic Council—predominately managed by Western European countries—as a way to enhance relations between both parties, to hold Turkey closely to its own compromises with NATO (and further away from other parties like Russia), and to show greater inclusion of non-traditional members. This strategy can be contemplated alongside other countries like Greece, in order to offer a better balance between conflicting parties, which could in turn contribute to multilateral talks that include Turkey in energy programs in the Mediterranean, thus offering a diplomatic de-escalation of recent territorial issues. This, in turn, would require Turkey to hold its stance towards NATO values, something that could be challenging given the current position (and actions) of President Erdogan; therefore, the 2023 Turkish elections will be a crucial event for both the region and NATO.

The last point leads to another area of reflection: The role of NATO in the current international system. While the organization was conceived during the first years of the Cold War, the truth is that our contemporary society has gone way beyond the nuclear dilemma and the bipolar race between the US and Russia. Rivalries between both countries have continued even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but these have developed in a completely different multipolar context where there are not only other countries with a high stance in the system, but there are also global threats to peace and security that have escaped the hands of the State.
Even though NATO has moved towards creating a broader framework for action—by enlarging its membership, and creating new key alliances—its funding idea of collective defense can be a factor that is not entirely compatible in today’s context where avoiding conflict is the preferred strategy for worldwide peace and security. The recent sanctions to Turkey for the acquisition of the Russian S-400 and its aggressive foreign policy towards gas exploration in the Mediterranean, and constant pledges from Ukraine to join the security umbrella are remnants of rivalries and strategies from a bipolar structure. These events are the result of years of neglected conflict management, and create challenges to achieving full-fledged international cooperation. Rethinking alliances, the position of its Member States, and its long-term goals in the system might offer NATO a stronger stance for effective peace and security in the Mediterranean and in other regions of the world.

References


The Israel-Palestine conflict remains one of the most controversial conflicts in human history. Decades of violence, peace processes, accords, and international community efforts have yielded little fruits. It is a conflict founded on Holocaust trauma, Palestinian nationalism, territorial occupation, and Gaza-Terrorist activities. The legal justification for conflict between the Israeli military and Palestinian militants is complex as questions exist if Hamas militants act on behalf of the Palestinian people. Further, the statehood of Palestine is contested under international law due to the lack of defined territory. In 2012, the UN granted Palestine a non-member observer State status, a de facto recognition of Palestine as a state. Many states in the UN General assembly recognize and accept Palestine statehood. However, due to the contestation of statehood by some member States like Israel, Palestine is not universally recognized as a state.

**Upcoming Palestinian Elections**

President Mahmud Abbas issued a decree on 15 January 2021, ordering that Palestinian elections will be carried out in three phases due to security and logistical challenges. The first phase will see Palestinians choose their legislative leaders on 22 May 2021; Presidential elections on 31 July 2021; and finally the Palestinian Liberation organization (PNC) elections on 31 August 2021.

The decree was welcomed by the UN who noted that the elections represent a major step toward lasting peace in the region. Hamas also welcomed the degree and called for free elections that will rebuild their Palestinian political system and create a united government that will confront the Israeli occupation.

While the international community and President Mahmud Abbas sees the elections as a means of establishing a stable government; Hamas sees an opportunity to create a strong government that will create a new front for the confrontation with Israel in their territorial quest. Hamas has been opposing the elections on grounds of transparency and the need to be recognized as an official institution in Palestine. However, the upcoming elections provide an opportunity to unite Palestinians for a common cause which has been a challenge for Hamas. A considerable number of the Palestinians do not support Hamas's provocative efforts and the use of terror against Israel in their quest to end the occupation.

**Voting in Jerusalem**

Though President Mahmud Abbas has announced the elections, key challenges persist regarding the elections. The Palestinian leader has been in power since 2005 with no elections being held for over 15 years. A key issue in the election is whether Palestinians living in Jerusalem will be allowed to vote in the upcoming elections. Jerusalem City is claimed by both Israel and Palestinians with claims being founded on religious and historical grounds. Israel's government has not issued a report on whether it will allow elections on the disputed city, which was recognized by the U.S and other countries as Israel's capital city. According to Ben Caspit from the Al-Monitor, Shin Ben Chief Nadav
Argaman reportedly told the Palestinian President that there will be no answer on permission for Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem to vote until a new Israel government comes.

Many of the Palestinians have been frustrated by the lack of progress toward a full Palestinian republic which makes the President unpopular. By declaring an election, President Abbas took a major risk as the popularity of Hamas has been on the rise and the elections will return Palestinian Authority to the Gaza strip fully or in part. Further, the elections would also provide Hamas with a foothold in the West Bank, where confrontations between protestors and authority forces have been increasing.

**Election Postponement and Threats to peace**

President Abbas has made it clear the elections will be postponed until Palestinians in Jerusalem are allowed by the Israel government to vote in the elections. On the other hand, Hamas was warned that delays in the upcoming elections will lead to public unrest and anger that would result in more clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces and that the clashes witnessed recently in Jerusalem would be nothing in comparison to what is coming. Hamas views the elections as their biggest opportunity to takeover Palestinian leadership and authority in their quest for ending the occupation. By winning the elections, Hamas will be able to attend United Nations meetings, as well as, reunions with regional leaders, hence negotiating their demands. Hamas’ views and goals are contained in the Hamas Charter largely anti-Semitic and contains conspiracies on Jewish people particularly their quest to take over the world. Furthermore, the Hamas Charter supports militant Jihad noting that all Palestinians have a duty against Jews who deserve all the wrath from Allah due to their unbelief. The reluctance by the Israel government to support the elections and allow voting in Jerusalem, is due to fears that the Hamas militants will win the elections hence giving Palestine an international stage, to continue pushing their war against Israel. An electoral win in the upcoming elections would hand power to the militant jihadists ending any hopes of lasting peace in the region. Postponing the elections would result in unrest that would force the Palestinian Liberation Authority (PLO) to form a government unity, which would empower the militants and give them international recognition as Palestine leaders. Such a move would help legitimise the organization, largely considered as a terrorist organization by many governments. Hamas leaders Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniyeh would be empowered on the international stage, which would be permanent damage to the PLO. Israel views Hamas as a terrorist organization that should also be isolated by international players if peace processes in the region were to progress. Going to elections at the current level, Fatah is divided into over 30 factions with different ideologies and approaches to the future of Palestine. With the division, Hamas remains united in their ideology which gives them an upper hand in the elections.

**Geopolitics and Challenges**

Israel is facing multiple challenges in the region and the internal political climate is uncertain. Between March and April (2021), Hamas militants in Gaza have launched rockets into southern Israel, some exploding near residential neighborhoods. At the same time, Israel and Syria have traded rockets multiple times. Further, Israel is currently in confrontations with Iran where several cargo ships from Israel have been harassed in international waters on the Red Seas and the Persian Gulf. The reports have forced Israel Navy to step up operations conducting drills in the sea and warning Hezbollah Militants who have been aggressive toward Israel that their Navy was ready to wage war against them. After the 2020 Presidential elections, President Joe Biden’s strategy on the Middle East remains clear and Israel is growing uncomfortable with the potential of another new Iran-nuclear deal between the U.S and Iran which would allow Iran to continue advancing its nuclear missiles, escalating the volatile situation in the Middle
Conclusion

Palestinian elections provide another opportunity for the citizens to unite together in one voice and, for the government to further their quest for an independent Palestinian State with internationally recognized borders. However, the infighting within the current government threatens to hand over the authority to Hamas, a Jihad militant group that advocates for violence and hatred toward Jewish people. Tensions between Israel and Iran, Jordan, and Syria also threaten peace in the region hence diverting attention and resources from the Israel-Palestine conflict. Dialogue between the Israel government, Palestinian government, and Hamas are critical in ending the tensions and paving way for constructive progress in the peace processes in the region.

References


In this respect, we commend the extraordinary commitment of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya [...]." 

Since Gaddafi’s regime was ousted in a NATO-backed uprising in 2011, the country has been torn between factions. After 10 years of conflicts, the peace processes led to promising results: the UNSMIL’s three-point peace plan indeed led to a permanent ceasefire and to the creation of an unified government. As the country was previously split into two regions administered separately since 2014, the announcement of the agreement was saluted by the international community. These are nonetheless not the first peace negotiations: from the African Union’s roadmap, to the Skhirat talks, there have been many tries to achieve what the Libyan National Conference started in April 2019.

The new interim Libyan government, approved by the Parliament on 10 March, nonetheless reinstated its commitment for reconciliation. The current Libyan Cabinet is composed of 35 members representing the different Libyan regions and constituencies, and its Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dabaiba confirmed its intention to follow the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum Roadmap’s 30 percent of female senior executive positions in the future. National elections should be held on the 24 December 2021. However, before that can happen, it is important to first confirm a constitutional framework. Even though these steps are crucial toward establishing a durable peace, there are indeed many hurdles to overcome.

This article will explore why Libya was deemed a ‘failed State’, by providing an overview of past peace negotiations, as well as the issues the new interim government still has to face.
Gaddafi's forces [3]. The implementation of this resolution led to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) airstrikes as well as the murder of Gaddafi by rebel forces on the 20th of October 2011, thus signing the end of the international phase of the conflict. The African Union (AU) peace initiative, grounded in the context of the Arab Spring, aimed at influencing and mediating between the warring parties. The AU's "roadmap" first focused on the regime's repression and threats against the opposition. While the peace negotiations featured a ceasefire, humanitarian assistance and the need for a democratic transition, the national and international context were major hurdles toward the success of this plan. Internally, Gaddafi did agree to the plan but refused to leave. On the other hand, the TNC refused the plan, and the war later swung in their favour. Even though both sides had backing, key states within the AU such as Nigeria and Ethiopia recognized the TNC and called for the AU to do the same. It is revealing of the divisions within the mediating parties: on one side, AU member countries did not overly support the monitoring of the ceasefire efforts, as they were divided between the "Brother Leader" supporters and the others. At the NATO level, the strategy adopted disregarded most of the AU's plan, as the US, France and Britain, driving the UN policy, followed a different strategy, by implementing the Resolution 1973. As such, the UN Security Council took the initiative, marginalizing the AU's plan. These tensions between the two mediators had political [4] and economical [5] consequences on the peace processes.

The aftermath of the First Libyan conflict.

As such, none of the peace processes could bring a durable and sustainable peace: after Gaddafi was killed, the TNC declared the country as 'liberated', and formed a new government. Elections were held in July 2012, as the TNC dissolved to let the General National Congress (GNC) in place with Ali Zeidan as its Prime Minister. However, the new regime provided opportunities for new political actors and remaining security forces to take control of the many resources the country had to offer. Among these, political elites from the previous regime, but also tribal leaders, political Islamists, but also remnants of the LNA, militias, but also salamists and terrorist forces were present on the territory. With the exception of terrorist and criminal groups, the other factions did not have any specific legitimacy: the instaured government was thus weak, divided, and chosen not to be able to affect the other forces. [6]

Second Civil War

The second Libyan conflict that broke out on the 25th of August 2014 was thus not a surprise [7]: the GNC had been replaced at the beginning of August by the House of Representatives. However, some members of the former GNC instead unilaterally chose another Prime Minister, Omar al-Hasi and left for Tobruk, scindent the country in two governments. As the General National Congress (backed by Qatar and Turkey) rejected the 2014 elections results after the Supreme Constitutional Court nullified an amendment, the conflict broke out between the

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[3] The Resolution 1973, passed on the 17th of March, allowed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to intervene in Libya to "use all means necessary to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas". In practice, it led to a no fly zone over Libya, and authorized NATO to use all means necessary to protect civilians. As Gaddafi did not abide by the immediate ceasefire nor stopped the repression against civilians, NATO forces landed, transforming the conflict into a non-international conflict.

[4] During the peace negotiations, the African Union Ad Hoc Committee, in charge of the implementation of the Roadmap, was supposed to meet in Noakchoutt on the 19 March, on the day the no fly zone came into effect. They were only able to meet for the next meeting on the 9th of April.

[5] Especially since the EU, itself divided over the mediating process, was contributing over 12 million to the AU's mission.
GNA and the House of Representatives. As Tripoli was controlled by Islamist groups, the HoR established its stronghold in Tobruk, controlled by General Haftar. The Government of National Accord was then formed between the main factions in December 2015, as per the result of the Libyan Political Agreement signed after talks in Skhirat. This accord, facilitated by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), was the fruit of a year and a half of negotiations between the main actors.

The Libya Dialogue process indeed faced tensions during the process, as the situation worsened and doubts against the UNSMIL threatened to derail the negotiations. Terrorist attacks were frequent, and participated in the instability within the country [8].

Their timing, during the first Skhirat talks, nonetheless did not stop the negotiations. On the other hand, the LNA was gaining control over more territory, launching military operations as the end of the talks was approaching. However, this peace process was flawed from the beginning: from September 2014 onward, only HoR members were consulted, leading to a stalemate—as both parties refused concessions made to the other. This has to do with the mediating party: Leon’s negotiating style had driven them apart, and the scandals to which he was tied only created distrust from its partners [9].

As Kolber became the new head of mission of the UNSMIL, an agreement was found between the parties. The Libyan Political Agreement was signed in September 2015. This was possible not only thanks to the change in leadership, but also to the context: the UN and the international community backed the processes and recognised the GNA as the sole legitimate government. From these talks, a one-year transitional period before legislative elections in the country was agreed upon. It however did not put an end to the instability within the country: Tripoli became the capital of the GNA, but the control of the territory remained uncertain. From 2016 during which the GNA controlled approximately 70%, while in 2017 it was the opposite.

Libya remained divided between factions, among unrest and terrorist attacks. More so, the gain in power of the LNA made it unlikely the latter would be interested in signing a peace agreement. That is why in 2017, the UNSMIL launched a new peace initiative, focusing on prolonging the Libya Political Agreement (LPA): it aimed at organizing a constitutional referendum in September 2018, and elections by the end of 2018—in fact leading to the Libyan National Conference in 2019.

However, the peace agreement was far from bringing stability: as Haftar’s forces launched a campaign to capture Tripoli, the LNA also blocked oil fields and thus, a source of massive revenues for the Libyan State.

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[6] Mustafa Abdul-Jalil, in office until summer 2012, could stand in for a description of Libya’s appointed leaders generally: ‘Most Libyans agreed . . . he was a man of principle, but it was frequently unclear what, if anything, he did’. (Winer 2019 p.10).

[7] One of the factors leading the way for the second Libyan conflict was the lustration law. It delegitimized anyone who had worked for Gaddafi’s regime between September 1969 and October 2011. As such, it was used as a tool to remove opponents of those enacting the law. For more information, see Gaub 2015.

[8] Migrants and refugees were escorted back from the EU and detained in several camps from both sides. Regarding the terrorist threat, Daesh was expanding its territory, leading to several anti-Daesh operations by Libyans forces, backed foreign states such as the United States.

[9] It has been revealed in The Guardian that the UNSMIL’s head negotiated with the United Arab Emirates’ government for his personal interests.
From the Libyan National Conference onward

In July 2019, the head of the UNSMIL proposed a three-point peace plan during the Libyan National Conference. It consisted of a ceasefire, enforcement of arms embargo and an internal Libyan conference composed of economic, military and political tracks. Despite ongoing clashes near the capital led by the LNA that delayed the process, continued dialogue between the parties led to a permanent ceasefire on 23 October 2020.

Co-hosted by the UN and the Government of Germany, the Berlin International Conference on Libya is the second step of the three-point peace process announced in 2019. On the 19th of January 2020, the actors involved agreed on a 55-point list of Conclusions to address the issues fuelling the conflict [10], but also committed to stop international interference. Several international actors were indeed directly or indirectly aiding the two governments – some, as Germany itself, involved both in the mediating process and military aid.

Regarding the political basket of the peace plan, the first Libyan Political Forum opened on the 7th of November to the 15th November of 2020, bringing 75 representatives of the Libyan society together. The talks ended with a roadmap to national elections, reforms to the executive authority, as well as agreements to pursue the dialogue over time. One year after the Berlin Conference, the GNA and LNA agreed on setting up an interim unified government as well as national elections on the 24th of December.

When reviewing the mediating process, what stands out is the lack of attention paid to the subnational level. The 2011 and 2015 negotiations did not address that issue, thus failing to consider the traditional distribution of power Gaddafi had instaured [11]. As the 2017 peace agreements did not manage to take input from all of Libya’s society, they also focused toward a presidential system, without establishing clear guidelines for subnational authorities. It created tensions, as they have different priorities and interests: on one side, the country’s west is in favour of a centralized system that would allow them to unify the country and keep control of resources mainly in the east and south, while the eastern side supports a federal system to be able to participate in the country’s governance. The south remains divided over the possibility of regional autonomy or an unified state improving local services.

Challenges the new interim government will face.

The new interim government, selected via a joint ticket system by the Libyan Peace Dialogue Forum, is composed of a three-person Presidency Council: Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah is the Prime Minister, Mohammad Younes Menfi as the president of the Presidency Council, from the east and a former Libyan ambassador to Greece, Musa Koni from the south and Abdullah al-Lafi from the west as Presidency Council members. Surprisingly, losing candidates conceded defeat, including the

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[10] The Follow-up Committee results from the security basket, creating a committee composed of 5 military officers from the GNA + 5 officers selected by the LNA leader Haftar. The UNSC endorsed it to negotiate the monitoring process over the ceasefire via the Resolution 2510 in February 2020. Tensions during the talks occurred due to attacks from the LNA over Tripoli’s ports, but the negotiations resumed.

Haftar camp. As many politicians had joined the election, the process gained legitimacy.

Currently, the UN, via its Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Libya and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya Kubiš, focused on supporting the new executive: priorities are to address the issue of migrants, refugees, detainees, as well as violations of human rights and international humanitarian law [12] and establish a constitutional basis, legal framework and the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement. In discussions are also preparations for the national elections scheduled for December 24, as stipulated by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum Roadmap. Unity and stability are however not guaranteed by the peace process: crimes and human rights violations are still ongoing.

The Libyan civil war: the international community’s proxy war.

In regard to factors that pushed for the peace plan to proceed, the LNA failing to take Tripoli in June 2020 highlighted how the conflict would not be solved by a military solution. The opposing party also realized how difficult it would be to seize Haftar’s controlled territory without greater conflict in which foreign backing would only worsen the situation. The peace processes indeed have to be put in relation to international relations: not only are Daesh and other terrorist organizations still operating in the region, but foreign troops are also participating in the fighting, despite the 23 January’s deadline for their withdrawal. As such, Haftar’s forces, tied to the HoR, are supported by the Russian military group Wagner, while Turkey, backing the GNA, deployed militants too. In the current context, considering the proxy dimension of the conflict is crucial: NATO members – France, Greece and Turkey, in particular, have indirectly clashed in military operations [13].

These tensions have also impacted how to conduct the negotiations, since Paris considers the LNA as one of the key actors and Ankara does not. These inferences in the conflict are not new: in 2013 already, the LNA was backed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arabs Emirates, while Qatar and Turkey assisted the GNA, as the conflict reflected deeper tensions in the region. Other foreign powers such as France, Italy and the United States also fueled the conflict by providing troops and/or armament to the warring parties. As such, Libyans are critical of external interference.

In insight, the UN’s involvement in the conflict did bring key successes toward the peace agreement. However, divisions between its members resulted in the absence of a common strategy, frequently undermined by the members’ personal interests in the conflict.

[12] In particular, around 625,638 migrants and refugees in September 2020 were trapped in Libya and suffered from mistreatments. More so, mass graves have been discovered in Tarhouna. It remains an object of concern for the international community, as armed groups continue to operate in total impunity.

[13] All part of NATO, Ankara’s actions clashed with its allies: not only did Turkey avoid the UN arms embargo, but it also instigated conflict with Greece and Cyprus. The latter have been in conflict in Turkey over its maritime agreement with the GNA infringing over their Exclusive Economic Zone. The warships sent by Ankara to reinforce its legitimacy over the area unsurprisingly reinforced the disagreement. More so, an incident occurred between France and Turkey: the French frigate ‘Courbet’, part of the “Sea Guardian” operation (enforcing the arm embargo), approached three Turkish warships and a cargo vessel on June 10 2020. Targeted by the Turkish warships, Paris left the operation.
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Tunisian protesters returned to the streets a decade after the revolution. The protests started on 14 January this year, just after the tenth anniversary of former dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali’s flight into exile. The unrest lasted approximately for two months until 30 March. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions in Tunisia, the unrest that was provoked by a video of a police officer humiliating a shepherd in the northwestern governorate of Siliana erupted nationwide.

Another factor leading to the protests was the worsening economic situation that has been impacted by the pandemic hence, caused a high unemployment rate in many areas in Tunisia, including in El Kabaria. Tunisian economy is highly dependent on tourism contracted by 8.8 percent in 2020 compared to 2019 with 1 percent growth.

Projected Tunisian Real GDP Growth 2019–2022

Throughout the episodes, the protesters had ten demands that were concerning not only the economic downturn but also the police repression. The demands were spread through social media, such as Facebook, where the first point urged to immediately release all detainees, dismantle a repressive system of policies and laws, and create specialized judicial institutions against security agents to protect the rights of the citizens. Tunisia’s revolution has been told as a success story of the Arab spring in the region. It had succeeded to achieve democratic government and a peaceful political transition. However, the issue of police repression has not yet been resolved for ten years. This article will discuss the police repression in Tunisia, especially the severe protest policing style that still lasts today.

Protest and Police Repression

Clashes between police and protesters are common in many protest events. During the protest, the police should act as facilitators and/or mediators, thus not treating the protesters as opponents or enemies, and vice versa. In fact, both parties behaved the opposite way and a clash between the two ensued. This provided the police with a momentum to employ repressive measures in handling the protest events. Repression is conceptualized as a state or private action that is meant to prevent, control, or constrain non-institutional, collective action, including its initiation. Furthermore, repression involves the use of force and other forms of standard police and military action e.g., intimidation and direct violence. In the case of the 2021 Tunisian protest, the repressive agent...
was the police, whose tactics involved an excessive use of tear gas as well as beatings when handling the protesters. The police also arrested a large number of protesters (approximately 1,680 people) and hit a young man’s head with a tear gas canister to death.

In discussing police repression when handling protest events, the complex relationship or interaction between the police and the protesters in a protest event should be taken into account. Behavioral threats of protesters could lead to police repression, including disruptive protest tactics and illegal protests. In Tunisia, the protesters used both disruptive and non-disruptive tactics in several episodes. The police will likely give a severe response to a protest that involves violent tactics, such as throwing stones, burning tires, looting, etc. During the protest events, some protesters, in fact, looted supermarkets, burned tires, threw stones and Molotov cocktails to the police. As a response to this, the police fired tear gas and arrested hundreds of protesters.

Nonetheless, the repressive action by the police in handling the protest did not only emerge in violent protests but also in peaceful protests. It is interesting to note that there were some episodes in which the protesters did not use disruptive tactics, however, it appeared there was an excessive use of tear gas and police beating. The justification for the repressive policing style in handling the protests was because of the COVID-19 regulations in Tunisia. Prior to the first protest on 14 January erupted, the Tunisian government had announced a four-day lockdown regulation: the night-time curfew from 8pm to 5am and banned gatherings. However, the Tunisians believed it was more of a political lockdown rather than a lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, many of the protesters defied the lockdown from 14 January to 17 January 2021, which made the protest itself considered as an illegal protest. Moreover, from 18 January 2021, the night-time curfew still came into force and as of 14 February, the government further extended the measures to combat COVID-19 until 7 March 2021. However, an illegal protest due to COVID-19 cannot fully explain why the police repression still exists in Tunisia. The following discussion can further help in explaining the repressive police phenomenon in Tunisia.

**Ben Ali and The Political Police**

Another reason for the continuing police repression in Tunisia has to do with the function and professional culture of the police far before Ben Ali ruled Tunisia. Tracing back to the pre-revolution period, between 1956 to 2011, the security apparatus had controlled Tunisia and the government had enacted approximately 1,700 legislation and most of them were promulgated in the form of presidential decrees so that, the security apparatus could be functioned to protect the regime legally. Then, when Ben Ali ruled as the president of Tunisia in 1989, which was oppressive in practice, the police stood for him as his principal instrument for repressing internal dissent and the police acted as political police. It made Tunisia known as a police state par excellence hence, Tunisia was viewed as one of the most heavily policed states in the world.

Under Ben Ali’s dictatorship, demonstration was regarded as a threat to the survival of the regime, as the protesters disrupted the harmonious relations between the state and society. The police was then characterized by a mentality wholly concerned with the maintenance of law and order and the interests of the state’s leader. Due to the police’s capacities to use oppressive measures and have committed abuses, it became the most feared and reviled institution in Tunisia. The nationwide discontent over the repressive regime and its political police thus led Tunisia to a revolution.

In the 2011 Tunisian revolution, which was then marked as the first case of the Arab Spring, the protesters had several demands to end corruption, poverty, and political repression.
These problems were rooted in the legacy of Ben Ali’s regime. Similar demands were chanted again a decade after the revolution, implying that those demands have yet to be met. Moreover, after the revolution, particularly during the interim government, there were some clashes between the police and the civilians during which the military prevented the police from using violence to suppress the protesters. Therefore, since the revolution, repressive protest policing became a customary style hence, the police reform became an important objective.

Is There Any Police Reform?

Given the oppressive nature of Ben Ali’s leadership, it made any attempts to reform the country’s internal security apparatus as a challenge of the post-revolution period. In addition, it will be quite challenging for the police to change their professional culture and characteristics from the political police that are repressive and abusive to the citizen’s police that respect the rule of law and human rights. In another way, through the police reform, it will shift the police culture and characteristics from their task of defending the interest of an authoritarian leader with a narrow range of elites to their task serving a broader range of political elites with a great number of interests and the people.

Besides transforming the police culture and characteristics, it would also require changes on these two levels: the legislative level and the institutional level. At the legislative level, it is important to establish a clearer legal framework for practically all areas of police work and organization, as well as to abolish or amend the repressive laws of the former regime. As at the institutional level, it should have a greater transparency and accountability of the police force.

There was an effort for the police reform from the initial transitional government, such as the dismissal of 40 high-level officials from the interior ministry, dissolution of the so-called political police, issued the White Paper on Police Reform entitled “Security and development: towards security in the service of democracy” that has never been made public, created a Facebook page for the Interior Ministry, and introduced a new police uniform.

Under the current Ennahda-lead government, they primarily focused on cleaning up the country’s internal security apparatus. Many of the party’s members, including the interior minister, Ali Larayed, are former political prisoners who experienced severe abuses by the police and have fired several high-level officials who were associated with the former regime. However, no major overhaul of the Tunisian internal security system has been undertaken so far and the true reform never happened. There is a tendency that the Tunisian politicians avoid reforming the security in larger part due to the myriad of security threats in Tunisia: the attack at the United States Embassy, the civil war in Libya which the neighboring country of Tunisia, multiple terror attacks, high number of Tunisians join the ISIS, and the existence of Islamic extremist in the mountains bordering Algeria. Therefore, after the 2014 election, the Ministry of Interior has reverted to old practices involving systematic human rights violations by the police, including torture. As a form of counterterrorism action, the police has violated the rights of people suspected of committing terrorism, such as arbitrary detention and torture by the police, is rarely discussed openly and only detailed in the foreign press reports.

Due to these circumstances, the police’s old culture and characteristics, including intimidating behaviour, harassment, and brutal action, resurrected in Tunisia. Once again, the police do not provide the Tunisian people with more security but abusive and oppressive actions towards them.

Conclusion

The current repressive police action against protesters cannot be justified by restrictions
issued by the government as a preventive measure for COVID-19.

It has, in fact, been embedded in the Tunisian police culture and characteristics since being ruled by the authoritarian government. Thus, it is difficult for both the government and police to transform into a more democratic system.

The Tunisian government still has homework to end the police repression and has a chance to do so. At the very least, the government can hold special training for the police in handling protests, detention, and counterterrorism that should be undertaken in a manner that respects human rights. Otherwise, if the government continues to ignore the protesters’ call for change in Tunisia, then it will be the Tunisian people who will pay the consequences of the police’s repressive actions. With that, the Tunisian revolution in many ways is not over, it is just started.

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The ongoing territorial disputes and tensions have been in the spotlight in the East-Mediterranean region, especially between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus in the past few years. Since the discoveries of the tremendous amount of oil and gas in recent years, tensions rise over the frozen territorial disputes and territorial waters claims and real control. The situation has implications for the stability of the whole region. However, as the regional power, Turkey seems to set the dynamic in this geopolitical chess game and move the pieces against the interests of its neighbours, particularly Greece and Cyprus, which make a natural reaction. The past two months showed that security development is crucial in these processes in the Eastern Mediterranean. Geographically, this region connects the east and the west, and it is an important trade route. Therefore, the interest in the region of countries such as the USA, Russia, UK, Italy, Germany, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran on sharing energy resources with the Eastern Mediterranean is increasing. On the other hand, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, and Libya are carrying out an active policy in the region.

A complicated fact is also the non-recognition of Cyprus by Turkey and its territorial water claim. 

**Turkey–Greece sea disputes – a dialogue amid tensions**

The geographical proximity and historical memory between Greece and Turkey determined several disputes. One of the critical disputes is the delimitation of the territorial borders. In the mid-1990s, Greece attempted to extend in the Aegean Sea to 12 miles, but the plan failed after Turkey declared such a move would cause war. However, Greece approved a bill in January 2021 that envisions increasing Greece’s territorial waters in the Ionian Sea from 6 nautical miles to 12. This legislative act signaled that Greece would not back down from rights granted by international law. This attempt also comes amid the number of actions taken by Turkey that conducted a marine research of gas in the disputed seas. In this situation, Cyprus is cooperating with Greece over offshore gas exploitation rights. Cyprus has made significant progress in recent years in extracting and converting natural gas resources through licenses given to international companies. Cyprus strategic interests are to enhance its energy security and lower energy prices. However, the divided island ends non-recognition of Cyprus by Turkey determined the problems in overlapping declarations on the sea zones where the gas is located. Despite the tensions, the dialogue still exists and attempts to talk between Greece and Turkey were at least on the program. In 2002 they began with exploratory talks over demarcation across the Aegean Sea. However, these talks broke down in 2016. On March 16 2021, Senior diplomats from Greece and Turkey met in Athens on exploratory talks without high-ranking politicians. Finally, on April 16, Greek and Turkish Foreign ministers met in Ankara to
restore the political dialogue amid their tensions. They spoke about keeping the channels of dialogue open and increasing economic cooperation. But then, at the press conference, both ministers accused each other of maritime borders, migrants, and the treatment of minorities. This meeting also came after mutual accusations concerning Greece’s support to Kurdistan Workers’ Party, what Ankara sees as Kurdish terrorists and Greece’s charges of Turkey for granting citizenship to Islamic State militants. These accusations and naval-military drills are seen as a provocation on both sides and can be understood as leverage before meeting in Ankara. Despite all, they agreed to meet in Geneva to discuss in the Informal 5+UN Meeting the conflict in Cyprus.

In that meeting in late April, Turkish Cypriots expressed their positions that efforts to negotiate the bi-zonal, bi-communal federation have been exhausted. They have inherent sovereign equality and have an equal international status. On the contrary, the Greek Cypriots claim that the solution lies in a settlement based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality based on relevant UN Security Council resolution. In the end, they have not yet found enough common grounds to allow for the resumption of formal negotiations concerning the settlement of the Cyprus problem.

**Building coalitions**

During the last two years, Turkey’s frequent activity to conduct naval drills and especially the search vessels escorted by the military vessels in the disputed sea zones. It evolves critical voices not only from Greece, Cyprus but also from the EU. Despite that, Turkey is trying to find an ally in this dispute. Therefore, it signed the Maritime Boundary Treaty with the Government of the National Accord (GNA) of Libya in 2019 and deposited the agreement to the UN in order to drill south of the Greek islands Crete and Karpathos. Greece has claimed that it violates its national sovereignty and is illegal under international law. Since the “Arab spring” in 2011, Turkey supported the attempts by the Muslim Brotherhood to gain power in the respective countries. That is why Turkey signed the maritime agreement, particularly with the GNA, which is partly composed of figures linked to the Brotherhood. Turkey also militarily backed the GNA in its fight with the Libyan National Arab Army (LNA) in eastern Libya backed by Egypt, UAE and Russia. Turkey’s help to the government in Tripoli saved GNA from the defeat when the LNA was on the doorstep in Tripoli in summer 2020. In March 2021, after the new interim government was elected in Libya, Turkey’s president met with the interim president. Furthermore, in April, the Turkish president reaffirmed a mutual maritime agreement with Libyan Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, who said that the deal serves both Turkey and Libya’s national interests. However, he is also aware of Greece-Turkish tensions. Therefore, he expressed his willingness to establish a joint Libyan-Greek committee to resume negotiations to set the sea boundary between the two countries and demarcate an exclusive economic zone for oil and gas drilling rights. Lastly, on May 3, the Top Turkish Defence and Diplomatic politicians paid the next unannounced visit to Tripoli.

Greece acted promptly too, and in April were organized several meetings between Greeks and Libyans politicians. On April 6, Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis visited Tripoli to restore the bilateral relations with Libya after the new interim government was elected. The ties were soured after signing the deal in 2019 with Turkey.
Mitsotakis noted that "it is geography that determines the framework of our bilateral relations, and not artificial lines that somebody draws on maps". Greek Foreign Minister met with Deputy Prime Minister for East Libya Hussein Atiya Abdul Hafeez al-Qatrani in Benghazi and noted that Libya's parliament had not ratified the maritime accord with Turkey, which Greece considers has no legal force. On April 14, interim president of Libya Mohamed al-Menfi met with Mitsotakis in Athens in order to agree "on the immediate resumption of talks" between two countries "on the delimitation of the maritime zones". It is clear that finding an "ally" in Libya both for Turkey and Greece lies in the fact that Libya has not a united stance on the issue and, therefore, depends on the respective person in the interim government.

**Greece making its moves**

In the light of the rising tensions, there are signs of building several blocks as an informal coalition against Turkey's interests in the region. Philia Forum can be considered a one of such a coalition considered by some as the Forum putting Greece in the centre of the transcontinental geopolitical order. On February 11 2021, Greece hosted the Foreign Ministers of Cyprus, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq, UAE and France. Forum positioned Greece in the middle of two geographical arcs – a horizontal one from Portugal to the Persian Gulf and a vertical one from the Balkans to Egypt, which connects Europe with Africa. Greece has the ambition to be a bridge between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf in order to change the international perception of Greece as an economic and geopolitical nuisance on the periphery of the European Union to a geopolitical centre that connects Europe, West Asia and North Africa. The members' composition of the Forum is not a coincidence. Greece and Cyprus started to cooperate with these respective members much more closely past few years to build bilateral ties against Turkey concerning the newly found gas resources in East Mediterranean.

The next dimension of possible coalition block seems to appear as an Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) created in 2019. In 2020, it transformed into an intergovernmental organisation based in Cairo that includes Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine. Its charter legally entered into force by March 9, 2021. Excluding Turkey, it is evident that the energy cooperation could be symbolised as the initial step in the possible future deep collaboration in the region. However, there are also disputes among the Member States within EMFG (e.g., between Lebanon and Israel, which reportedly did not resolve the maritime border dispute during the last meeting).

However, after more than a decade of negotiations, on 9 March, an agreement was reached over the natural gas field Aphrodite-Yishai that lies in the territorial waters of Cyprus and Israel. According to the agreement reached by the two ministers at their meeting in Nicosia, the companies operating on the Cypriot side of the Aphrodite reservoir will start negotiations with the companies operating on the Israeli side (Yishai) in order to agree upon how the Israeli companies will be compensated for their share in the reservoir.

Another concrete step towards closer cooperation is seen by the Eastern Mediterranean pipeline, which represents the plan of Greece, Cyprus and Israel to transport the gas to Europe.
On 2 January 2021, Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed a deal for a 2,000-kilometre pipeline designed to move gas from the eastern Mediterranean to Europe. It plans to transfer up to 12 billion cubic metres a year from offshore gas reserves to southeast Europe. It is expected to provide around 10% of the EU’s natural gas needs. In March, the next step was made for achieving this goal by the signing of an addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding between Israeli and Cyprus-Greece corporations. Furthermore, Israeli, Greece and Cyprus agreed to connect their national electricity grids through 1,500-kilometer and 2,000-megawatt underwater Mediterranean electricity cable to provide energy security for each of the three countries, using clean energy sources. It plans to be completed in 2024 as the deepest and longest submarine electricity cable in the world, co-financed by the EU. Along this step, the "coalition" also has its military aspect as the defence ministers of Israel, Greece and Cyprus expressed their willingness to increase military cooperation last year. This March, they conducted a joint naval exercise together with France. Along with that, Greece and Israel signed a defence procurement deal in April that includes a $1.65 billion contract to establish and operate a training centre for the Hellenic Air Force by Israeli defence contractor Elbit Systems over 22 years. On the opposite side stands Turkey, which protested against a new deal that plans to build an underwater electricity cable and warns the countries that they must seek Turkey's permission launching works on the proposed undersea power cable claimed transgressed Turkish territorial waters.

However, these “coalitions” are not only one, and there are attempts to strengthen ties among several regional players with their interests in the region. The Greece, Cyprus and Israel partnership joined the UAE in April at the Cyprus meeting, which indicates the new era in the Middle East geopolitics after signing the Abraham Accords. The meeting came after signing the first military cooperation agreement between Cyprus and UAE in January 2021. Having military contracts with Egypt, Israel and Jordan, Cyprus moves towards security against Turkey. Greece’s bilateral military cooperation with the UAE is also increasing as well as with Saudi Arabia, which signed a deal for providing a US-made Patriot air defence system in April. This comes after the two countries have engaged in political consultations at the highest level last year.

Egypt also plays a significant role in the sea disputes, whereas it builds its coalition with Greece and Cyprus. Athens has signed an agreement with Cairo after 17 years of negotiations delimiting maritime jurisdiction as a response to the agreement signed between Ankara and Tripoli. On April 6, a tripartite cooperation program deal was signed between Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus in order to strengthen military coordination between these three states. It seems that Turkey, as the most powerful state in this region, is in a situation when it is losing its potential partners. This situation pushes Turkey to a disadvantageous position against Greece and Cyprus. Turkey knows it very well, and that’s why it is trying to improve bilateral relations with the main countries in the region. In 2013, Turkey severed diplomatic ties with Egypt over the coup that deposed Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood, and it considered the coup as an illegal act. However, on May 5, the Turkish Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs met his Egypt counterpart to make the first step in improving ties. Turkey is also trying to make some positive steps towards improving relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel. At this point, the only country which holds its more-less cooperative stance with Turkey is Libya.

It may seem that Turkey confirms its role in NATO by the joint drills with US military ships in Eastern Mediterranean. However, the relations with the US are not perfect due to the purchase of the Russian S-400 and to the recent Biden’s recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Turkish President Erdogan reacted that relations between Turkey and the US had sunk to a low point. Furthermore, the US facilitated the Israel—
Greece–Cyprus alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean by the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act from 2019. The situation is complicated while Greece is also a member of NATO, which provides them with another communication channel for talking at least.

The reaction of the EU

A crucial role in this geopolitical theatre plays the EU and its sanctions mechanism. Due to Cyprus and Greece membership in the EU, they often raise their voices to impose sanctions on Turkey concerning its drilling activities in disputed waters. The membership of Cyprus and Greece in the EU is their leverage on Turkey. However, the EU is not united on the stance on Turkey as it is on Belarus or Russia. The differences in interests among the EU Member States are too significant to impose sanctions on the EU level. This confirms the EU–Turkey summit in late March when the EU released a joint declaration that welcomes the resumption of bilateral talks between Greece and Turkey and the discontinuation of unlawful drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Along with Greece and Cyprus, France and Austria want a more robust line against Ankara. Even in April, a French research vessel accompanied by a Greek frigate conducted scientific studies in the waters recognised by Turkey as its continental shelf. Turkey perceived it as a provocative act. French president even stated that the Mediterranean countries have to create Pax Mediterranea due to “imperial regional power coming back with some fantasies of its own history”. On the other hand, Germany favours giving dialogue with Ankara a chance first, while there exist worries about fragile migrant deal with Turkey. The Turkish diaspora in Germany also has its leverage on German politics. Italy, Malta and Spain, are also hesitant to back new sanctions while their security interests in Libya are similar. Moreover, Italian ENI has one of the largest stakes in the region. Italy has conducted separate military drills in the Eastern Mediterranean not only with Greece and France but also with Turkey. The other reason why the EU did not impose sanctions on Turkey lies in the Turkish diplomatic effort, which was composed of the willingness of Turkey to talk with Greece and of successful Turkish diplomacy with Germany ahead of the forthcoming EU summit. At the same time, US President Joe Biden has urged the EU not to impose sanctions.

Conclusion

The Mediterranean is now a multistage theatre for demonstrating military might and engaging in geopolitical competition. The involvement of many countries makes the situation unclear and complicated. During the past two months, tensions have continued tensions mainly between Turkey and Greece. However, both countries could come together to talk in mid-April after the five years of bilateral political silence regarding their disputes. According to the recent development, the tensions will continue as Turkey will try to balance the EU and its interests, attempting to make alliances (like Libya) or improve ties with Egypt, Israel, or Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, Greece and Cyprus’ dynamic foreign policy indicate a determination to secure its vital interests that are crossing with Turkey’s interests. In that relation, the ad hoc coalition is quickly formed against Turkey and its interests. The crucial would be the position of main powers such as the US, France and perhaps Russia. So far, France’s place is clear, and it is providing full support to Greece. Greece has smaller capacities but plays with more cards: membership in the EU, building the coalition and strengthening ties with other key partners such as Israel, Egypt, France, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Amid financial problems and the Covid-19 Pandemic, Turkey faces several dilemmas – when it pushes more on Cyprus and Greece, the EU may react by sanctions. Turkey has leverage in the migration question, but it is less likely to use it. As long as the economic and Pandemic problems in Turkey will persist as well as the Turkish and Greek endeavour to do more dynamic foreign policy, it can be expected to be the rising dynamic in the region.


