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Challenges in The Mediterranean region

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Foreword

Security challenges are numerous in the Mediterranean region: despite peace progresses in Libya, or economic agreements between Turkey and its neighbours, conflicts and tensions remains. From political changes in the Israelo-Palestinian relations to migration management between Morocco and the EU, geopolitics are shifting: how these changes will impact the region as a whole is what this issue will focus on.

Far from being restricted to the Mediterranean Basin, tensions are repercuted to the international scene as a whole: the EU, the US, China or even the United Nations are watching what is happening. From there on, their motives and actions will further intensify the current dynamics at play.
18/04/2021
Polisario Front leader enters Spain under a secret identity to receive medical treatment for COVID-19

05/05/2021
Egyptian and Turkish officials met in Cairo on May 5 to hold exploratory talks

10/05/2021
The Israeli forces attack worshippers in Al Aqsa mosque during Fajr Prayer

17/05/2021
Morocco lifts border controls in Ceuta, allowing around 10,000 people to enter the Spanish enclave, including a large portion of minors. Spain mobilizes army in the city.

07/06/2021
Turkey has discovered an additional 135 billion cubic meters of natural gas in the Sakarya gas field.

14/06/2021
Turkey ratified a comprehensive cooperation agreement with the Palestine

16/06/2021
Demonstrations in West Bank increase. House of political leader of Hamas is destroyed. Raids across Gaza killing 42 dead, making death toll 200 with 1225 injured.

02/05/2021
Israeli court meets to decide whether to displace 28 Palestinian families or not and Israeli settlers break into Al Aqsa mosque compound.

07/05/2021
Burkan al-Ghadab militia men entered the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli and supported Turkey’s demands.

10/06/2021
European Parliament adopts resolution condemning Morocco’s use of migrant children to exert political pressure on Spain.

16/06/2021
Ceasefire broken as Israel carries out airstrikes in Gaza after balloon firebombs launched in response to Jerusalem march.

10/06/2021
European Parliament adopts resolution condemning Morocco’s use of migrant children to exert political pressure on Spain.

13/07/2021
Over 100 migrants cross metal fence in Melilla’s border.

02/05/2021
Israel court meets to decide whether to displace 28 Palestinian families or not and Israeli settlers break into Al Aqsa mosque compound.

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Burkan al-Ghadab militia men entered the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli and supported Turkey’s demands.

16/05/2021
Demonstrations in West Bank increase. House of political leader of Hamas is destroyed. Raids across Gaza killing 42 dead, making death toll 200 with 1225 injured.

20/05/2021
Ceasefire held between Israel and Hamas.

15/07/2021
Over 100 migrants cross metal fence in Melilla’s border.

26/07/2021
Tunisian president fired the Prime Minister amid COVID crisis and faltering economy.
On 10 June, Juan González-Barba, Spanish Secretary of State for the European Union (EU) informed that the Spanish government is considering suppressing the special regime for the enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta, which allows Moroccan residents to enter Spanish territory without a visa. This statement came after the latest migratory influx from mid-May, when Morocco allowed around 10,000 people—including a considerable amount of minors—to enter the autonomous city of Ceuta in 48 hours, which prompted Spain to begin thinking about a “more stable and safe future for itself” and the rest of Europe [1].

Morocco’s latest actions—fueled in large part by the ongoing conflict in Western Sahara—have put a strain not only on bilateral relations with Spain, but also with the EU, whose Parliament has expressed its support to its member state. While the dynamics between Spain and Morocco have had historical rough patches, the entrance of a considerable amount of people to its enclaves in Africa (in the middle of the Covid crisis) has been considered by some as a coercive strategy to uphold Morocco’s stance in the Western Sahara conflict, and a clear example of migration diplomacy in action. This key will represent a central part in this article, given that it could challenge our current considerations in regards to our visions of hard and soft power, and how political forces—like globalization or geopolitics—are restructuring our approaches to global security.

In this context, the present article will explore the impact mass migration in the Mediterranean has exerted in interstate relations between Spain and Morocco, with a special focus on migration diplomacy and continuous issues surrounding the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta.

The first section will make an approach on the current situation of migratory flows between both countries, in order to understand the most recent escalation in tensions between the two states. The second section will delve into the concept of migration diplomacy and the use of migratory movements as a bargaining tool for state goals. This section will also address Spanish–Moroccan relations, making a special emphasis on diplomatic goals and how interstate relations have been affected by the latest events. The article will finish with a few considerations related to future prospects on this particular feud in the Mediterranean, and the configuration of the contemporary global security agenda.

**Migratory and diplomatic situation in Spain**

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there has been a total of 37,815 people arriving to Europe through the Mediterranean [2] in 2021, with the most common destinations being Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, and Spain [3]. The latter has received the second largest influx of people of all the Mediterranean states, with around 13,176 people arriving by both land and sea. While land arrivals to Spain are significantly lower than those by sea, the former have caused a rise in tensions in the country’s relations with Morocco, specifically due to the high migratory flows in Spain’s territories in Morocco, Melilla and Ceuta.
Melilla and Ceuta are two Spanish enclaves located in Moroccan territory, and have been an important factor in diplomatic relations between both states. While not entirely accepted by Morocco, Spain claims historical sovereignty over these small cities and considers they have the same status as its other semi-autonomous regions located on mainland Europe [4]. Nevertheless, Melilla and Ceuta do not constitute part of the Schengen territory since Spain established a special regime under which Moroccan residents can access the cities without a visa requirement. This particular characteristic has transformed Melilla and Ceuta as the only point of entry from Africa to the European Union by land, and one of the main areas of transit for migrants in the surrounding areas.

Both Melilla and Ceuta constitute a vital zone for Morocco to engage in economic exchanges with the EU; nevertheless, it has also become a key point of geopolitical tension with Spain, a situation that worsened in mid-May when Morocco opened its border and allowed between 8000 and 10000 people to enter Ceuta [5], exacerbating the migratory crisis in the area [6]. This action from Morocco is considered to be a response to the Spanish Government’s decision to offer medical assistance to Brahim Ghali, leader of the Polisario Front and president of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic [7] — the de facto state commonly referred to as Western Sahara — a territory over which Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania claim historical sovereignty. Clashes between the Moroccan army and the Polisario Front restarted in late 2020 after the latter broke the 1991 ceasefire agreement, and hostilities have continued hindering any short-term solution for this territorial dispute.

In this context, some have considered Morocco’s decision to lower its border security and allow a massive influx of its citizens in Spanish territory as a ‘punishment’ for aiding the leader of the Polisario Front, a liberation movement that threatens to destabilize Morocco’s territorial sovereignty [8]. Even the Spanish Ministry of Defense, Margarita Robles, has accused Morocco of attempting to ‘blackmail’ not only Spain, but also the EU, by allowing thousands of minors to cross the border between both countries, risking its own citizens’ lives and going against international humanitarian law [9]. The comments made by Ministry Robles are related to the already tense situation between Morocco and other EU member states who have not supported Morocco in its claim for sovereignty over Western Sahara, rendering the latest exodus towards Ceuta a clear example of migration diplomacy in action.

Migration as a bargaining tool

At this point, it is vital to mention what will be considered as migration diplomacy for this article, in order to understand how the dynamics between Spain and Morocco fit in this concept’s context. The present analysis will build on the definition and scopes of migration diplomacy developed by Adamson & Tsourapas (2019), who point out that the term focuses on the “use of diplomatic tools, processes, and procedures to manage cross-border population mobility” [10]. Migration diplomacy does not differ from regular diplomacy since power dynamics, state capacities, and state interests heavily influence it; what does make it different, is the use of
migratory movements, of people, as a bargaining chip for achieving state goals.

It is also important to note that the position in which countries are perceived in terms of migration plays a key role within the underlying forces of migration diplomacy. Whether states are mainly receivers, senders or a place of transit for migrants, tells us more about their capacity to either exert power, or deal with larger influxes of people. Both Spain and Morocco fall under these three categories — as do many other countries — which transforms interstate dynamics into a complicated power struggle. Morocco does receive large amounts of migrants, but it is also one of the main sending states in the Mediterranean, and possibly a core area of transit for people travelling to the EU. Similarly, Spain receives significant sums of migrants on its coasts—the Canary Islands being one of the main areas of arrival by sea—but it also constitutes a key point of transit for people who wish to move to other countries within the EU. Therefore, in the context of migration, both Morocco and Spain hold positions that allow them to turn the balance of power to either side, which could explain, in part, Morocco’s decision to ‘punish’ Spain for its latest actions.

The concept of migration diplomacy itself is interesting for various reasons. On the one hand, states who engage in it are making use of one of the most powerful forces that shape our current system — globalization — to involve their population in state power struggles. On the other hand, it transforms regular people (not armed institutions like the military) into a state tool, placing them in a blurry limbo between soft and hard power, which tells us that, today, the power balance between states can be measured in many forces beyond the military and economic realms. Demography is slowly transitioning from a source of intrastate conflict, to a source of interstate conflict, a situation that can be perceived in the recent events in Ceuta.

What is at stake in the Moroccan-Spanish feud? In this context, and following the work of the aforementioned authors, this article will analyze why the current feud between Spain and Morocco can be classified as an example of migration diplomacy. Examining both countries’ diplomatic goals and how they are influenced by people’s mobility is important given that it offers an in-depth approach on the power dynamics between states, which will help us to understand why this situation is relevant for international security in the Mediterranean. Comprehending both states’ goals and interests are vital to explain patterns of interstate behavior, competing external forces in this conflict, impacts in diplomatic relations, and possible courses of action to promote de-escalation strategies.

The main event that seems to have triggered a response from Morocco, to allow a massive influx of its citizens in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, was Spain’s decision to offer medical assistance to Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali. Morocco has previously used mobility as a hard power tool in relation to the conflict in Western Sahara: 1975’s Green March, after which Morocco gained control of Spanish Sahara. This is a clear example of migration diplomacy to achieve sovereignty goals. The most recent events in Ceuta are directly related to Morocco’s known intent to pressure not only Spain, but swaying other EU member states to their side, in regards to their claims to the territories of Western Sahara. Morocco’s action can therefore be categorized as a case of coercive engineered migration [11]. Another clear example on how the use of coercive power and resources have significantly changed in our current international
system, and how states can exert their influence by making use of means other than military force.

While the EU — and, therefore, Spain — does not recognize neither the Polisario front as the legal representative of the disputed territory, nor the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic itself, it has vouched in favor of self-determination, in accordance with the UN’s approach to the situation. Consequently, the fact that Spain allowed Brahim Ghali to enter its territory — despite doing so with forged documents — and receive medical treatment for COVID-19, alerted Morocco and raised doubts about Spain’s true position in regards to the ongoing conflict [12]. This perception is reinforced by the fact that, in early June, Spain refused to initiate legal procedures against Ghali [13], and allowed him to leave the country for Algeria, where he is currently recovering. Moreover, the fact that Algeria is one of the parties who claim sovereignty of Western Sahara, and is Spain’s main supplier of natural gas, has contributed to rising suspicions from Rabat.

Spain’s position is inevitably determined by the overall goals of the European Union. While this scope does not take into consideration the dynamics of international organizations or other non-state actors, given the nature of a community like the EU, and the role of Spain as one of its members, this particular aspect will also be taken into consideration for this analysis. Several EU representatives have established the organization’s clear support for Spain and have denounced Morocco’s actions, reinforcing the idea that Ceuta represents European Union’s territory and that any threat to its security shall be considered as a threat to the entire community [14]. These statements go hand in hand with the position the European Parliament has taken towards the situation in Western Sahara, which it considers a “non-self-governing territory (whose) final status (...) will be determined by the outcome of the ongoing United Nations led process” [15]. Moreover, several EU countries have brought attention to the 2019 Joint declaration with Morocco, which not only recognizes its value as a political and economic ally [16] [17], but also has a specific area related to mobility cooperation and the respect for human rights- areas of work that were overlooked in May when security controls in Ceuta were lowered. EU-Moroccan relations regarding border cooperation began in 2000, and have deepened as time went by. In 2013, Morocco implemented its National Strategy on Migration and Asylum, which continues being actively supported by the EU and is managed alongside Spain in the cases of Melilla and Ceuta. Furthermore, recognizing Morocco’s long standing labor in border control, the EU adopted in 2019 the Single Support Framework, which not only addresses the Kingdom’s internal development, but also allocated a budget of €101.07 million to “support border management and fight against human trafficking” [18]. This program emphasises the protection of human rights, with a special focus on the vulnerability of minors in migratory contexts, which is one of the points EU representatives consider to have been breached in mid-May.

The EU’s — and thus Spain’s — position in this feud is torn between two sides. On the one hand, it adheres to the United Nations’ vision of the situation in Western Sahara, and supports its member state’s claims that its territorial sovereignty rights were threatened with a massive influx of people. In this sense, it recognizes that allowing similar actions from Morocco in the future could take a toll on the organizations credibility and its position as a key actor in Mediterranean politics, especially considering that the migratory crisis other EU members — like Italy and Greece — have experienced in the last few years, has already threatened the community’s social cohesion. On the other hand, neither Spain nor the EU want to lose Morocco as an ally; not only to address challenges in the region like counter-terrorism,
but also to continue benefiting from important Moroccan resources that are — coincidentally — located in the disputed territories of Western Sahara [19]. Therefore, engaging in direct confrontation with Rabat could damage bilateral relations and weaken the EU and Spain’s security and economic capacities.

However, it is also important to understand the potential damage of Morocco’s actions, not only towards bilateral relations, but also to inter-organizational dynamics in which it is already involved. The coercive strategy carried out by Morocco in mid-May relies on the belief that Spain could represent a key advantage in swaying other states towards its territorial claims to Western Sahara; which could not be further from reality. Spain is not only a country that has come a long way from a military dictatorship, but has also managed to integrate with one of the most powerful international communities in the world, and has positioned itself as a strong legitimate actor, who is backed up by a solid political and economic organization. The European Union will not be easily swayed by coercive strategies that go against international humanitarian law, which is why Morocco’s actions, while effective to draw attention, might be short-lived and futile to achieve its real long-term goals, despite having the support of the United States in relation to the conflict in Western Sahara. Just as Pedro Sánchez, president of the Spanish Government stated, interstate relations and cooperation must be based on respect if they are to work in the long term [20].

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Spanish government is currently reevaluating the regime of both Melilla and Ceuta given the latest events in the border with Morocco. The idea to change the cities’ status and make them adhere to Schengen territory regulations could signify an attempt not only to tackle human security issues in the area, but also for Spain to demonstrate its stand vis-à-vis Moroccan tactics to exert pressure by using migration diplomacy. Should these changes be approved, Morocco could lose its power of decision in terms of cross-border mobility, a move that could undermine the historic exchange of people and goods between both countries, a situation that could prove to threaten the stability of the Moroccan government.

Looking ahead

As it has been possible to observe, this ongoing feud in the Mediterranean has a wide array of factors that are not only contributing to the escalation of tensions in the region and the involvement of third parties, but it is also creating further cleavages for the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict. The recent use of migration diplomacy by Morocco to ‘punish’ Spain for its decision to offer medical assistance to Brahim Ghali, and allowing him to leave the country, is a symptom of a much larger and complex dynamic between states.

Considering that the entire world is facing a health crisis due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the use of migratory movements as a tool to exert influence or power towards other states tell us that the basic concepts of conflict, war and power have experienced a profound change in the last few decades.

These perceptions and the fact that many other countries are involved in the Western Sahara conflict — including other EU members, Algeria, Israel and the USA — reinforce the idea that one of the main concerns for global security in this century is the potential of regional conflicts to become threats to international stability and cooperation. The use of migration diplomacy in our 2021 context not only exacerbates previous tensions between states, but also puts a strain on human security in an area that is already unstable, like the Mediterranean.

The current tension between Spain and Morocco and the use of migration diplomacy in the region is not a current event. In 2015, the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean highlighted the risks that uncontrolled migratory movements could bring to a supranational institution like the EU, and how
border control could be used not only as threat or punishment, but also as leverage for achieving state goals. Turkey is probably the most suitable example of a collaboration with non-EU members in terms of migratory strategies. During the initial negotiations for Turkey’s access to EU membership, border control— in order to avoid a refugee crisis in the EU, was a key area of compliance for Turkey. Nevertheless, Ankara quickly realized that it could also use refugees and low border controls as leverage to adjust EU accession conditions for its own benefit, which resulted in an escalation in tensions between both parties and more instability in the region.

Turkey’s actions however did influence its accession to the EU, and ultimately strained relations with other member states, rendering it as an unpredictable partner. While Morocco is not in the same position as Turkey, it is worth noting that current events could negatively impact its Turkey’s actions however did influence its accession to the EU, and ultimately strained relations with other member states, rendering it as an unpredictable partner. While Morocco is not in the same position as Turkey, it is worth noting that current events could negatively impact its previous agreements with Spain and the EU, which not only finance a large part of its border control, but also socioeconomic development. The use of migration diplomacy in this context is, therefore, a risky strategy that could become a zero sum game in which states that ‘threaten’ such actions could end on the losing side.

Considering prospects to this particular conflict is, therefore, complicated, and the possible actions contemplated by Spain might not offer a suitable answer. Spanish authorities have considered terminating Melilla and Ceuta’s special administration and including them in Schengen space legislation, which would slow mobility between Morocco and the Spanish enclaves.

While this could prove useful in improving the migration panorama for Spain and the EU (at least in legal terms), it could also trigger a state of crisis for the exchange of goods and services, and people’s mobility in the region. Moreover, this move could increase instability in Morocco and decrease the possibilities of creating a better context for addressing the situation of Western Sahara.

Additionally, it is important to note that migration issues in the Mediterranean are not recent events, and that there are intricate underlying reasons for the upsurge in migratory movements between the north of Africa and Europe. While it might send a message to Moroccan authorities, “closing” the borders of the Spanish enclaves will not solve the mobility problems in the region; on the contrary, it could exacerbate illegal crossings and affect interstate security.

Finally, it is necessary to delve into the difficulties that surround the resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara, since it is one of the main background factors for the recent feud between Spain and Morocco. Immediately after the conflict broke out in mid-May, EU representatives reinforced the idea that this issue involves more than Spain, but the whole European Community and that it would “not be tolerated” [21]. At the same time, the conflict does not only involve Moroccan interests, but those of the states who claim sovereignty over the territory as well. In this context, the EU should re-evaluate its role in the development of the conflict. Regional disputes require regional mediation and actors who understand what is at stake; failure to do so can encourage the use of drastic measures, like the use of states’ own population as a bargaining tool to obtain what they want.

Therefore—and considering other cases in the region, where outside forces have hindered peace processes—Spain (and the EU) should keep in mind that Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario Front should work on their own differences and come to an agreement adjusted to the reality of the region. Spain’s latest actions—and the EU’s consecutive statements—might have given the wrong message to Moroccan
authorities in regards to their position on the conflict in Western Sahara. In order to avoid further tensions in the region, as well as, ensuring individual and state security, it is important to prevent actions that could affect bilateral relations, and that could lead to the use of new forms of state pressure, like migration diplomacy.

**Endnotes**


[2] Information last updated on June 28, 2021, related to arrivals by either land or sea. These numbers reflect the influx of both migrants and refugees.


[5] According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner from Refugees, this represents almost two times the amount of people who arrived to Spain from Morocco by land in 2020, when only 1288 people entered the enclaves. A more detailed comparison of arrivals from Morocco in 2020-2021 can be observed in Figure 1. A few days later, the Spanish Government announced that the situation had been controlled, and that over 7500 people had already returned to Morocco.


[7] The EU has maintained its distance with the Polisario Front, despite the UN General Assembly recognizing it as the representative of people in Western Sahara. Moreover, The EU does not refer to Western Sahara as ‘occupied territory’, but as a space administered by Morocco, allowing the latter to include this territory in its bilateral agreements and causing confusion in regards to the true nature of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.


[13] Brahim Ghali has accumulated several allegations of engaging in genocide, terrorism, torture, among others.


[16] Bilateral trade between the EU and Morocco achieved a total of 37.4 billion Euros only in 2017.


Human interaction is bound to bring conflict of interests based on incompatibility of goals; as William Zartman (1997:197) defines it in the following words: “Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions.”[1]

While the Latin definition of ‘conflict’ implores the engagement of a fight or clash, conflict can simply be understood as the struggle of parties towards limited ends. As human interaction varies, so do the types of conflicts emerging as a result of those interactions vary considerably. Peter Wallensteen proposes three major types of conflicts in the realm of international relations: interstate, intrastate and state-formation conflicts [2].

But as the world is reducing in its distant size due to an incremental rise in globalization, conflicts have also become more complex with increased actors and factors, causing conflicts to become transnational in nature – hence called ‘global conflicts’. There is then a dire need to properly understand the conflict from all lenses and perspectives, in order to formulate better conflict transformation, management, and resolution mechanisms for viable and sustainable peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Conflict analysis is an in-depth articulation of a conflict while viewing it from a multi-faceted perspective, and so several models have been proposed to analyze different conflicts [3].

One such conflict analysis tool is the “Conflict Wheel” which can be classified as a meta-conflict analysis tool with six sections referring to six angles, in which to view a conflict as it incorporates other more particular and specific models. As it is a meta-tool it can be aptly used to understand protracted, multi-causal, and complex conflicts such as Israel-Palestine [4].

Below is the pictorial representation of the Conflict Wheel Tool:

Starting from the first section of this tool, it defines the conflict actors including conflicting parties, stakeholders, and 3rd parties; their relations may vary from being conflicting or good/ alliance-based relations. This section is analyzed through Conflict Mapping, in the case of Israel-Palestine: Israel conflicts with Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas [5].

A brief introduction of the PA and Hamas is pertinent to know before proceeding to other sections of the Conflict Wheel Tool. The PA, also known as Palestinian National Authority was formed as a result of the Oslo Accords in 1993 between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization [6]. While Hamas was founded in 1987 during the first Intifada, currently holds control of the Gaza Strip and is labeled by Israel
and the United States of America as a terrorist organization [7]. Its counterpart party mainly holds territories in the West Bank, while the PA has used a more moderate approach towards Israel, Hamas has been inclined to use violent means. The following pictorial representation further explains the Conflict Mapping tool:

Below is the pictorial representation of issues of these three conflicting parties:

**PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY:**
- Israeli occupation
- Refugee crisis
- Walls & checkpoints
- Economic Crisis
- Lack of resources (Dead Sea minerals, water etc.)
- No religious freedom (Al-Aqsa)
- Status of Jerusalem

**HAMAS/PLJ/FATAH:**
- Israeli occupation
- Gaza blockade
- Economic Crisis
- Refugee Crisis
- Acceptance of Israel as a state
- Walls & checkpoints
- No religious freedom (Al-Aqsa)
- Status of Jerusalem

**ISRAEL:**
- Non-acceptance of Israel as a state
- Terrorism
- Security concerns
- Status of Jerusalem

The second section of the Conflict Wheel Tool refers to the issues of the conflicting parties and can be explained through micro-tool of Needs Fear Mapping, which maps the needs/ issues and fears of conflicting parties; this section will explain the incompatible interests of Israel, PA and Hamas [8].

The issues for the Palestinian authorities and Hamas are more similar, with their primarily demand being a 2 state solutions with the pre-1967 borders, which have been changed due to constant Israeli occupation. Furthermore, both demand for a change in the status of Jerusalem and for religious freedom to perform religious rituals at Al-Aqsa Mosque. Along with religious freedom, freedom of speech and movement is also restricted through checkpoints.

Other issues which curtail the peace process that are common to Hamas and PA, are the lack of resources, the refugee crisis, and economic crisis. Additionally, the Gaza blockade adds to the issue-list for Hamas. While Israel argues over its lack of acceptance as a state, security concerns, terrorism from Hamas, and the status of Jerusalem.

The third and fourth section of this tool explains the dynamic factors of the conflict which have shaped the conflict over the years, while the fourth sections explain the root causes of the conflict. Both of these sections can be explained with the “Conflict Tree Model” [9]. Chronologically explaining the dynamic factors, the conflict dates back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, before its dissolution and creation of Turkey as a state in the year 1923, the then known Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. After the Empire’s breakup, the lands were carved by British and French colonizers and so Palestine landed in the share of Great Britain [10].

Even prior to the British Mandate for Palestine in 1920, Britain through Balfour Declaration in 1917 declared its support for "national home for Jewish people” in Palestine; with the Holocaust happening across Europe, the rise of Zionism, more and more Jews had landed in Palestine. But gradually Palestinian land became a hub of issues with Jewish militias aiming to acquire more of Palestinian land. It was then that the United Nations came up with the 2 state solution in 1947; creating the State of Israel, and the State of Palestine, giving Jerusalem, a holy site for all three Abrahamic religions an international status [11].

Israel accepted the UN solution and declared itself as a state; Palestine on the other side rejected it and viewed it as a tool of colonization by colonizers and so, Palestinians along with...
adjacent Arab countries went to war with Israel from 1948–49 [12]. Resultantly, Israel won the war and occupied much of Jerusalem, and even parts of Israel which eventually led to a mass exodus of Palestinian refugees.

While the Palestinian struggle continued and they formed a more organized structure for their struggle, called the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1964, three years later both parties fought another war, the Arab–Israeli War of 1967. This war led to the seizure of the entire Palestinian territory according to the UN, including Golan Heights from Syria, and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt; this was followed by the Yom Kippur War of 1973 [13].

These wars led to Camp David Accord in 1978, where Israel returned Sinai to Egypt and so this dynamic factor transformed the conflict to solely being an Israeli–Palestinian conflict rather than an inclusive Arab–Israeli conflict. Over the years the occupied land saw the incremental settlement of Israeli settlers on the Palestinian land.

This increase in occupation, massacres, and seizure of Palestinian homes coupled with restrictions and lack of facilities, burst out as the first Intifada during 1987–89, it was during this same period that Hamas was formed. Although various peace attempts were made during the last decades of the 20th century, they failed to transform and manage the conflict, and so Palestinians rose up again for the Second Intifada from 2000–2005 [14].

Since then the conflict has been in a stalemate situation, with a rise in atrocities from Israel during 2014, and again in 2021. The recent wave of violence by Israelis came up during their attempts to evict Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah to settle Israeli occupiers. During the month of May 2021 clashes broke out between both parties at Al-Aqsa Mosque, while Muslims were busy offering their religious rituals [15]. This led to a 2-week fierce battle between conflicting parties with airstrikes from Israel, leading to a grave humanitarian crisis [16]. Following is a summary of major dynamic factors of the conflict:

1917 - Balfour Declaration
1920 - British Mandate for Palestine
1922 - Collapse of Ottoman Empire
1930s - Jewish immigration & militias
1941-1945 - Holocaust
1947 - UN Proposal
1948-49 - Arab–Israel War
1964 - Creation of PLO
1967 - Six Day War
1973 - Yom Kippur War
1978 - Camp David Accord
1983 - Oslo Accords
1987 - Creation of Hamas
1987–93 - 1st Intifada
1991 - Madrid Conference
1993 - 1st Suicide attack by Hamas
1994 - Paris Protocol
1994 - Cairo Agreement
1995 - Oslo II
2002 - Hamas suicide attack on Seder
2002 - Operation Defensive Shield in Westbank
2003 - Middle East Peace Summit
2003 - West Bank fence created
2004 - Ashod Port attack by Hamas
2005 - Gaza blockade
2006 - Hamas wins Palestinian Parliament elections
2008 - Gaza Invasion & Operation Cast Lead
2012 - Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza
2014 - Operation Protective Edge in Gaza
2017 - USA accepts Jerusalem as capital of Israel
2017 - Russia accepts West Jerusalem as capital of Israel and East Jerusalem as Palestine’s capital
2018 - US embassy opens in Jerusalem
2019 - USA considers Israel settlements as legal
2020 - US Peace Deal
2021 - Forced Evictions from Sheikh Jarrah,
- Clashes at Al-Aqsa Mosque,
- 2-week battle with grave humanitarian crisis

As mentioned above, the fourth section deals with the root causes of the conflict; analyzing the conflict the root causes of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict link with the emergence of national/ethnic identity. The rise of Palestinian identity and Zionist movement, coupled with Jewish immigration and the Holocaust laid to the foundation of the Israeli–Palestine conflict.
The fifth section deals with how causes are multi-faced and so must be kept into consideration with structural and actor-oriented causes.

**STRUCTURAL REASONS:**
- Territorial dispute
- Political dispute
- Religious dispute
- Dispute over resources

**ACTOR-ORIENTED REASONS:**
- US Economic relations with Israel
- US containment of Hizbullah and Iran
- Iran’s motive to spread Pan Shiite Khomenism
- Iran’s interest to become a regional hegemon
- Israel’s interest to prepare land for their awaited Messiah

The last section of this tool uses the Need–Fear Mapping once again to explain the possible solution to the conflict. In light of the above research and analysis of the conflict, below are some proposed options to manage, transform and resolve the conflict.

**OPTIONS:**
- Ceasefire from both sides
- Jerusalem gets free travel, international status
- Settlement of refugees
- 2 State solution is adopted in which both states have freedom and security in their region.
- Recognition of both Israel, Palestine as states
- Mutually agreeable and UN-sponsored and secured borders.
- Mutual trade and economic relations.
- Easy travel regimes.
- Israel’s assistance to support Palestine’s economy.
- Equal resource distribution

**Endnotes**


The current Israel–Palestine conflict escalated on 2 May 22021, after months of tensions and disturbances. It was marked with massive protests, police riot control, rocket attacks on Israel by Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, and Israeli response through airstrikes in Gaza strip [1]. On 6 May, Palestine protested in East Jerusalem over the anticipated Supreme Court of Israel decision on the evictions of six families in Sheikh Jarrah. The area is considered an occupied Palestinian territory although Israel applies its laws in the area. The violence later exploded when the Palestinians protested over the eviction. In response, the Israeli forces stormed the compound of Al-Aqsa Mosque using rubber bullets, stun grenades, and tear gas prompting condemnation across the world.

This article highlights the European Union’s position on the Israel–Palestine conflict and how the elected Israeli Prime Minister affects the conflict in the future.

Long-Unresolved Issues

While the majority of the people were shocked with the level of violence, as they called for peace, the conflict is a testament of the existing issues that have not been resolved and the failure of the United Nation to give justice to the Palestinians [2]. The Two-Statesolution appears to be far from reality as hardliners and extremists stand against such resolution hence, the extreme actions of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad serve as a catalyst to the violence. Furthermore, the conflict is a reminder of the illegal occupation of Palestinian land, including the recent Palestinian families’ eviction in Sheikh Jarrah by the Israelis.

Palestinian Evictions

Dozens of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood have faced potential eviction for years amid intensified efforts from right-wing settler groups that assert the land was owned by Jews before 1948, when Israel was founded [3]. However, the argument that the lands previously belonged to Jewish communities seems to be another way to justify the occupation of the land, and to remove Palestinians.

While the Israeli government has long claimed that the dispute is a civil matter, right-wing groups have over the years been determined to evict Palestinians and settle in East Jerusalem. This move is calculated to change the demographics of East Jerusalem which has been predominantly Arab for many years, taking cues from the successes of the Israeli government which has emphasized Israel’s right to build within its own capital.

Role of Supreme Court in Evictions

Overall, Israeli courts have been permitting the evictions of Palestinians from their homes on a regular basis [4]. Their justification is based on Jewish claims of ownership prior to the creation of the Israeli State. In the recent eviction case, however, the court has relied on the claims that the residents had not paid rent to the owner of the property. As a result of Israel courts having
sided with the Jewish community on these issues, the Israeli government has continued to support evictions and has urged that doing so is legal, providing them with the right to displace Palestinians who have not paid rent and have lost their status as “Protected Tenants”.

However, under international law, East Jerusalem is an occupied territory and Israel has no sovereignty nor jurisdiction to exercise its laws over the territory. The Supreme Court has postponed its ruling on this issue, but the government still went ahead and evicted these Palestinians residents.

The Fragile Ceasefire Agreement

The ceasefire held on 20 May between Israel and Hamas ended 11 days of violence, leaving more than 240 reported dead, the vast majority of which were Palestinians (230), who were killed as a result of Israeli attacks; and at least 12 Israelis dead due to rocket attacks by Hamas and other extremist groups [5]. As the ceasefire was held into a third day, the mediators spoke to all sides and focused on halting hostilities in the longer term [6].

However, the ceasefire has been broken, after less than four weeks as Israel carries out air strikes in Gaza after balloon fire bombs were launched in response to a march by far-right Israeli protesters through East Jerusalem [7]. Therefore, there was no guarantee that the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas would hold for a longer period.

Two-State Solution

The conflict between Israel and Palestine originated in the 1948 establishment of the Israeli state [8]. However, the real battle and animosity began in 1920, when intercommunal violence occurred in Mandatory Palestine between Arabs and Israelis.

The Two-State solution for Palestine and Israeli would allow Palestinians to have self-governing over their own State [9]. Although the international community is in favour of a Two-State solution and recently, President Joe Biden expressed his commitment to the Two-State solution, there continues to exist numerous hurdles. As of today, 193 United Nations Member States already recognise Palestine as an independent entity. By allowing each group (Israeli and Palestine) to have their own territory, ethnic identity would be protected and hence create a chance for peace in the region. Unfortunately, the Israel government has adopted an extremist position on the issue which is evident in the expansion of settlements in occupied Palestinian territories.

Palestinians are the most affected by the failure to implement a Two-State government. A majority of them live in extreme poverty, as their territory is under illegal occupation by Israel and they are not given access to education, jobs, or other public services. A Two-State solution would allow Palestinians the same rights as Jews and equal status in society. The lack of a unified Palestinian government with sovereign power over all Palestinians, forces a majority of Palestinians into poverty.

Taking aside the fact that Israel has been unwilling to support a Two-State solution, there exist many issues regarding the implementation and potential success and durability of a Two-State solution. One of the key issues remaining is the status of Gaza. Hamas seeks to control the territory and does not recognise any authority in the region, causing a stalemate in terms of the plausibility of negotiation. Moreover, as it is nearly impossible to negotiate with them, as Hamas is viewed by many as a terrorist organization, the necessity in creating a Palestine State is imperative as it would allow different groups to negotiate. This could aid in the formation of a united government for all Palestinians.

The City of Jerusalem is another major hindrance to the Two-State solution and has led to an end of all negotiations on this issue. Most of the nations across the world, including the UN,
is in favour of the state being divided into two with one side being Israeli and the other being Palestinian. However, the proposal is theoretical, as the division would be overseen by the UN Nations- in order to ensure each side respects the agreement. There are many issues with this proposal, not excluding the wishes of Palestine and Israel.

Finally, Zionist ideology is a huge obstacle in the path towards a Two-State solution. The majority of Jews ascribe to Zionism which favours a unified nation that integrates both Israel and Palestinians [10]. Today, a Two-State solution in Israel is considered to be an elitist affair that does not represent the wishes of the people [11]. Integrating Palestinians into Israel would be a disadvantage as the latter considers itself a Jewish State and hence non-Jews would be discriminated against and largely unprotected by the law. Palestinians have been very vocal on the issue of the Two-State solution, with majority stating that they would prefer reclamation of all historical Palestinian land rather than dividing the territory into two [12].

Where does the European Union Stand on This Conflict?

Besides being the most affected region by the Israel-Palestinian conflict, not the least because of the historic and extensive links to Israel and Palestine, the European Union (EU) has played a key role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for a very long time. EU has been the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority, supporting the Two-State solutions, and consistently not recognizing any changes to the 1967 borders, until both parties agree. In addition, the EU has been vocal on Israel’s settlement program, considering it illegal under international law [13].

Taking this into consideration, has the EU done anything that is truly tangible, in their effort to de-escalate the conflict, or did it instead support every Israeli-Palestinian peace processes passively? Throughout history, the EU has apparently been passively supporting a Two-State solution due to the absence of any peace process negotiation between Israel and Palestine [14]. Prior to the 20 May ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, the EU had discussed what they could do in response to the current crisis and interestingly, the answer has always been “nothing”. This is because of the division that the EU member states have over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, hence it is difficult to reach a full consensus among them.

Belgium, Ireland, Sweden and Luxembourg are among those most critical of Israel in the EU. Countries in Eastern Europe, such as Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, are among those in strongest support of Israel, though in recent days the flag of Israel has flown prominently over the HQ of Germany’s biggest governing party, as did official buildings in Austria and the Czech Republic in a show of support. Greece and Cyprus have also grown closer to Israel in recent years, partly because of tensions with Turkey [15]. While France is typically on the neutral ground, recent statements from President Emmanuel Macron’s office have failed to reiterate his support for the rights of Palestinians [16].

Responding to the Recent Conflict

Despite Hungary’s veto on the immediate ceasefire between Israel and Palestine that left no joint statement agreement possible, the rest of 26 EU countries still called for an immediate ceasefire with the purpose to protect civilians and give full humanitarian access to Gaza [17]. Moreover, the EU has attempted to set a peace talk band together with the United States and Russia after the ceasefire [18].

Although the ceasefire itself did not last longer than a month, these efforts are the important steps that the EU took, although still inadequate to prevent further violence. In addition to that, Biden’s administration would rather not prioritize the Israel-Palestine issue beyond supporting the
ceasefire arrangements— which is only a diplomatic effort [19]. Therefore, it is crucial for the EU to step up and stop depending on the United States.

The EU could take action to de-escalate the conflict, for example, by focusing on many issues related to the conflict itself, such as addressing the protection of human rights, security needs, supporting the long-term ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, and also assisting the International Criminal Court on their investigation into alleged war crimes committed by both Israel and Palestine. Moreover, the EU could also use their leverage through trade, cooperation, recognition, and aid [20]. Implementing a stick and carrot approach by using the leverage that the EU has, would be a way to halt the violence and Israel’s settlement program unless the EU has truly lost their leverage over Israel and Palestine. However, these measures would be tough to be done as each member states have their own stance towards the conflict and also, different bilateral relations with Israel and Palestine.

Furthermore, the EU considers the conflict between Israel and Palestine mainly as a conflict between Israel and a terrorist organization [21]. This perspective causes a bias in framing the conflict, which is already happening as the EU tends to be more supportive of Israel. As demonstrated by this recent statement made by Josep Borrell, the high representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy, “We strongly condemned the rocket attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups into Israel; we acknowledge Israel’s right to self-defence, while needing to respect proportionality and respect for international humanitarian law” [22]. He has shown, through his own remarks, that the EU only condemns the action taken by Hamas; a terrorist organization, and has essentially turned a blind eye to Israel’s actions which should also be condemned in this matter.

New Israel Prime-Minister

Naftali Bennett was elected the new Prime Minister on 13 June 2021, after a parliamentary confirmation vote [23]. In his landmark victory, ultra-nationalist ousted the long-running Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Despite forming a government with centrist politicians and politicians, Naftali is a student of Netanyahu, and his policy solutions resonate with the radical stands of the former prime minister [24]. Part of the success of his campaign was based on his hard-line remarks against the Palestinians, and his ambitious plan that includes annexing the West Bank.

Naftali Bennett was born in Haifa by Jewish immigrants from San Francisco and served in the Israeli forces [25]. Bennett made his name nationally in 2013 as a leader of the pro-settler party, Jewish Home; announcing their opposition to the formation of a Palestinian State and marking it as a central theme for the party. In 2014, he caused a controversy by writing an article in the New York Times noting that old models of peace between Israel and Palestinians are no longer relevant and hence we must rethink the Two-State solution [26]. In 2018, Bennet stated that as a defence minister, he would implement a shoot to kill policy on the border with Gaza, and would shoot even children because those attempting to cross the border are terrorists. Taking into consideration this mentality, there seems to be no solution to the conflict, with Bennet continuing his radical stands and further complicating an already complex issue.

Post-Netanyahu Means to the EU

The EU and Israel relations have been well maintained during the years of Benjamin Netanyahu’s tenure as prime minister. Many EU countries have changed their relations with Israel, especially those led by leaders from the far-right political parties. Moreover, Netanyahu saw illiberal nationalist leaders such as Hungary and
freedom, and the promotion of Israeli’s integration into European policies programs which are still in force until January 2022 [31]. This framework underpins political relations and aims to strengthen economic performance. Along with the aforementioned EU guidelines, these could be used as a leverage to further urge Israel to halt their settlement program.

However, considering Naftali Bennett does not have a policy that differs much from his predecessor and as he tends to be rather more radical, it will be a challenge for the EU to use their leverage against Israel. One could reflect from his stances when he was a minister, he would do anything to defend Israel’s actions towards Palestinians and continue the settlement program.

If Bennett will act more radical than Netanyahu, it is time for the EU to take decisive actions on this conflict without disregarding Israeli actions on conflict.

Conclusion

To sum up, the conflict between Israel and Palestine is a long unresolved conflict due to the complexity of the conflict itself, including the nature of the Israeli’s government and the presence of Hamas in Palestine.

The European Union’s position on the conflict is to consistently support the Two-State solution, end occupation, and uphold the resumption of the peace process. However, its member countries have deliberately shifted their behaviour towards Israel, making it a challenge for the EU to step up and assist in a peaceful resolution of this ongoing conflict to a larger degree. If the EU was able to use their leverage, it could be a way to de-escalate the conflict. However, the division and differing stances of EU countries on the nature of the Israelis government makes it quite difficult for the EU to do so; especially given that Naftali Bennett’s election has complicated the issue further with his radical policies towards the Palestinians and settlement program.

Way Forward

In 2005, the EU–Israel Action Plan was agreed based on shared values of democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law, fundamental
Endnotes


[14] Ibid.


[16] Ibid.


[18] Reuters (19/05/2021), EU set to call for Israel-Palestinian peace talks with U.S., Russia, Euronews, Available from: https://www.euronews.com/2021/05/19/us-israel-palestinians-eu


[21] Ibid.

[22] EEAS (22/05/2021), Israel/Palestine after the ceasefire: what should Europe do?, Available from: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/98873/israelpalestine-after-ceasefire-what-should-europe-do_en


[26] Picheta, R. (2016, July 16). What you need to know about Israel’s new Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett.


[19] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[30] Michel C. (13/06/2021), “Congratulations to Prime Minister @naftalibennett and to Alternate PM & MFA @yairapid for the swearing in of the new Israeli government. Looking forward to strengthen the partnership for common prosperity and towards lasting regional peace & stability.”, Twitter, Available from: https://twitter.com/eucopresident/status/1404170851440812033

[31] European Commission, Israel, Official Website: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/israel_en
“External interference will only exacerbate the crisis, thus further delaying the political solution, which is the only path of enabling the Libyans to take control of their country’s destiny” [1].

Since the Government of National Unity (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) agreed to hold elections on the 24 of December 2021 and to form an unified government, Libya still has to face many hurdles. In particular, the international community’s interests could threaten its peace processes, as many actors back the official government and Haftar’s LNA, leading to clashes and setbacks between the factions [2]. In particular, terrorist attacks are a renewed concern: jihadists, weakened by the loss of their strongholds in the region, nonetheless try to weaken the Libyan state, while salafi and Islamist groups allied themselves with other factions such as the LNA and the GNA, and thus manoeuvre to gather power and influence [3]. Another matter of concern are foreign troops and mercenaries; Turkish and Russian (among others) sent in the region, officially to deal with the terrorist threat. These actions have, of course, consequences: at the international level, the United Nations (UN) and some of its Member States condemn these strategies.

At the national level, the population is weary of foreign inferences. Recently, Haftar and its military forces, from the LNA, headed to Tripoli, under the guise of expelling Turkish mercenaries [4]. This has consequences over counter-terrorism strategies [5] in the region, as not only are there two security forces in place in Libya, but also foreign interests at play. Haftar’s declaration of fighting terrorism is then mostly political: the territory he claims to protect is vast, the LNA forces are limited and other factions are in place in the region [6]. This article will study how terrorism and counter-terrorism motives and structures foreign states’ interventions within Libya, as well as, how they impact the latter’s peace processes.

The evolution of terrorism in the region

The region is a hotspot of terrorist activities: Libya is categorized as one of the epicentre countries within the United Nations Development Programme’s project ‘Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach’ [7]. Most terrorist attacks are concentrated in the Middle East: from 9/11 onwards, Iraq and Afghanistan were the most impacted. Then, the Arab Spring and the emergence of ISIL led to an increase in terrorist activities in the Middle East: back in 2011, the Brotherhood was elected following Gaddafi’s fall, but their political influence did not last, as they couldn’t rebuild Libya in the resulting chaos [8]. Their presence nonetheless remained in the West [9]. More so, Salafi militias allied themselves with the LNA [10]. While the jihadists fled to the Fezzan region after Misratan militias defeated them [11]. These are not isolated incidents: terrorism is an important concern in the region. In 2015, 72% of terrorist attacks occurred in Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Israel, Algeria and Tunisia [12].

The situation evolved in 2014, as ISIS rose in the region. It had been dealt with, at the time, by Haftar in his “Operation Dignity”: it is important to note that Salafi Madkhalists [13] were not concerned, as they became a part of his army [14]. Two other elements participated in the shift in Islamist groups’ power: the parliament
election, which led to the loss of seats—both for their lack of achievement and discontentment of their stance both from seculars and Islamists—and the breakout of the government. In August 2014, Islamist militias forced the seculars out of Tripoli, which led to the formation of two factions, leading to new disagreements between what became the GNA backed by Islamists, and the Tobruk government, composed of seculars, mostly [15].

In regard to counter-terrorism, the UN’s approach consists of four pillars (addressing of conditions leading to the spread of terrorism; prevention; the building of state capacity; and ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law): it resulted in the strengthening of border forces in the Sahel and youth engagement projects in South Asia [16].

The EU’s strategy follows the same guideline, with a focus on prevention and border management [17]. In the case of Libya, its weapon arsenal was seized by militias and smugglers who sold their stocks to terrorist groups [18]. These weapons not only spread throughout the region, but also led to the adoption of an arms embargo in 2011, which was violated by many international actors [19].

In particular, the UAE, Russia, Jordan, Turkey and Qatar were denounced by UN experts, and 11 companies involved in the conflict are believed to have supplied weapons to belligerents [20] [21]. The civil war and the resulting instability also led to a spillover of terrorist activities in the region [22]. Within Libya, terrorists benefit from smuggling drugs and diverse traffics [23].

In 2021, only the Muslim Brotherhood seems to hold political and military power: while it isn’t likely to win the announced elections, it remains strong in the west—notably through its militias [24]. On the other hand, ISIS lost its strongholds of Derna and Sirte in 2016, and its forces are scattered throughout the country, even though they gathered in the south (Fezzan province) and keep insecurity high through their participation in smuggling activities (human, weapon, drugs traffics [25]). Salafi militias however remain present throughout the country, especially in the east as they are allied with the LNA [26].

Terrorist groups are then interlinked with Libyan politics, as Salafis and Islamists are part of these factions. Nonetheless, terrorism is a threat to Libyans, as attacks and smuggling participate in the local instability. The fight against jihadis is then not over, but that faction is less powerful than in 2016. Some foreign actors, such as Turkey, claim it is thanks to their actions [27]. This propaganda is, of course, not innocent.

**Libya, a territory of importance for foreign powers.**

In regard to geopolitics, Libya is a place of tremendous importance within the region, as it not only sees Daesh forces within its territory [28], but refugee flows also originate from there [29] [30]. As such, the international community invested funds and troops in order to fight terrorism: until 2016, France provided military assistance to the LNA, so that Haftar could eliminate jihadist groups [31]. This support allowed it to secure a stronghold in Cyrenaica, at the expense of its relations with the GNA [32]. On the other hand, Russia did support Haftar, but did keep ties with the government in Tripoli [33]. While Russia seeks to increase its influence in the region, other foreign powers such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE bear in mind that the Tripoli government is a remnant of the Arab Spring [34]. As such, there are other motives behind the attention to counter-terrorism on the Libya territory.

Currently, tensions between foreign powers dominate the political scene: the US, the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the EU, from which several Member States are indirectly involved in the conflict, Russia and Turkey, their motives not only
create international disputes, but also threaten the peace processes agreed upon, since international troops have become a contentious issue for both the population and political elites [35]. In particular, the EU is in a paradoxical position, as it is in its interest to maintain good relations with Ankara, as the latter is the key to its migration management dispositive [36].

Germany is in favor of maintaining a status quo to not jeopardize the EU’s agreements with Ankara, despite the latter’s infringement of the ban on arms [37]. On the other hand, Italy has cooperation treaties in place with Turkey [38], while France – whose presence in the region dates back to the 2011 instabilities [39] – currently shows degraded diplomatic relations with Turkey [40]. It nonetheless did not hinder Ankara in its Libyan endeavors, as it has many crucial projects with its Libyan partner: $35 billion contracts, as well as, a memorandum of understanding on maritime boundaries of countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, which helps the latter for its claim on gas drilling in said region [41]. More so, as it also supports (funding, arms supplying and military coordination) GNA militias against LNA assaults, it allowed Ankara to maintain a presence and its interests in the region even if it had to withdraw its forces from the country [42].

As such, not only is the Libyan political scene split between multiple interests and factions, but several bilateral programs have been implemented. In regard to cooperation with Libya, Turkey provided since 2019 military training, but also funds and personnel [43]. In particular, its assistance has been decried, as the departure of foreign troops has been asked for by Libya and the international community since the October 2020’s ceasefire agreement [44]. Not only have these demands been unanswered, but neither Turkey nor Russia or the UAE have reduced their military activities in the region, adding to international tensions [45]. The UN reminded involved parties that foreign interference not only participated in the fighting impetus, but hindered the peace process [46]. The current state of affairs was highlighted by the Libyan representative during the 8 of July Security Council’s meeting, whose discourse also reveal growing internal dissensions between the Tripoli government and Haftar forces [47], as well as between Libya and some of the UN Member States, including the UAE and Egypt [48] [49].

The impact of foreign troops is not limited to military assets and fundings, but also to other states’ soft powers [50] [51]. Turkey’s approach is often encountered, as both China and Russia are trying to spread their influence in the region through soft and hard means [52]. Ankara’s strategy is nonetheless also inscribed in a regional struggle with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt (supporting Haftar) on the other side, and Qatar as its ally [53]. This rivalry, started long ago between Turkey and the UAE, only hinders
local Libyan actors [54]. As an example, on the 7 May, Burkan al-Ghadab militia men, tasked by the GNA to defend Tripoli in 2019, entered the Corinthia Hotel (one of the headquarters for the interim government in the Libyan capital of Tripoli) and publicly supported Turkey’s positions and demands [55]. Acting as proxy for other powers, already decrebibilized by the population, this could lead not only to distrust from the population toward militias, but in turn generate inter-militias feuds, thus impeaching the peace processes [56].

Nonetheless, it is unlikely an international presence in Libya will decrease, as both the EU, Russia, the US, Turkey, the UEA and Egypt have interests in the region. The recent anti-Daesh coalition meeting saw its members reaffirming their “shared determination to continue the fight against Daesh/ISIS, and to create conditions for the enduring defeat of the terrorist group” [57].

Conclusion

Inferences in the Libyan conflict is not limited to Ankara of course, as Moscow, Abu Dhabi, Roma, Paris, Washington but also Beijing are also trying to spread their influence through various means [58]. Within Libya’s fragmented political scene, Turkey’s case illustrates how foreign intervention contributes to maintaining fighting impetus, even indirectly. As it is now the patron of former GNA aligned militias, and also has ties to Haftar’s LNA [59]. As Libya’s political scene is composed of different factions with various opinions and ideologies, Turkey’s soft power and positions aren’t likely to reach them all, thus increasing the bridge between them, in a state within which the unified government has only been formed for a few months [60]. Internal concurrence to concur favors and advantages then is not likely to lead to peace and stability, but rather impede on the reconstruction process in the short-term and long-term.

Endnotes


[15] ibid

[16] European Parliament (February 2017), Counter-terrorism cooperation with the Southern Neighbourhood, Policy Department Directorate-General for External Policies, Available at: https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/EXPO_IDA%282017%29578013_EN.pdf


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[25] ibid

[26] ibid

[27] Daily Sabah (28/06/2021), Turkey, Italy cooperation vital for Libya, region, Daily Sabah, Available at: https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-italy-cooperation-vital-for-libya-region


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[48] The Libyan representative stated that "the United Arab Emirates was involved in supporting the failed coup attempt in Libya and threatening international peace and security in many parts of the world [...]. Pointing to Egypt's unilateral initiatives, such as the Cairo Declaration, and its threats to arm young Libyan tribespeople, he said that Libya will confront any act of aggression with firmness and strength". UN Security Council (2020), As Foreign Interference in Libya Unprecedented Levels, Secretary-General Warns Security Council 'Time Is Not on Our Side', Urges End to Stalemate, UN.org, Press Release [08/07], Available at: https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc4243.doc.htm

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For additional information, see the Coalition’s website: https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/


In the May issue of Peace & Security Monitor, we affirmed that the dialog between Greece and Turkey state leaders must persist in order to maintain peace and to reduce the tensions regarding sea disputes and drilling activities. The meeting of foreign ministers in April 2021 clearly showed that relations between countries are at a low point. That said, it should be noted that at least there exists a political dialogue.

Despite the signs that a rapprochement might appear in the Turkey–Greece tensions during the last months, the same assertive policy persisted. However, the disputes and different interests were mainly on the diplomatic level, and they also appeared in several states in the Eastern Mediterranean where both – Turkey and Greece – supported different groups fighting against each other. Turkey is aware of its necessary task to reconcile its policy with several key regional partners, without whom, it would deepen an already extensive isolation. However, several events, such as the new escalation of violations in Israel and Gaza, confirmed an uneasy task for Turkey, which has to manoeuvre between its State’ interests and its ideology-satisfying the core groups of Erdoğan’s voters.

Greece understands its vital interests and has been pursuing a dynamic foreign policy, the past two years of Kyriakos Mitsotakis’ government. In this article, we also empirically confirmed Greece’s active foreign policy by analysing the state meetings of Greece. The analysis confirmed that Greece has built strong ties with some states (Egypt, Israel, UAE) to stand against Turkey’s foreign policy steps.

Turkey’s moves towards reconciliation of relations

Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan pursues a foreign policy to promote hegemonic strategy with a neo-ottoman approach to secure its vital energy and security interests. A large portion of this policy derives from a domestic scheme, with Erdoğan demonstrating his willingness to encompass the interest of Islamic groups of the population. This is particularly important before the 2023 presidential election. That is also one of the reasons why Turkey supports Islamic groups in Libya (GNA), Egypt (former president Morsi) and Palestine (Hamas). This is also the reason why Turkey is continually isolating itself from its neighbourhood. Therefore, it is imperative that Turkey reconcile their relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel, who are already fostering stronger ties with Greece and Cyprus. All of this is interconnected to Greece’s foreign policy, which indirectly isolates Turkey by strengthening ties with these countries.

Are sea disputes not on the agenda?

After Turkey brought its research Oruç Reis vessel back to port in November 2020 amid threats of EU sanctions, Ankara resumed direct talks with Athens after a five-year hiatus. From January till July there was a relatively peaceful atmosphere between Greece and Turkey, during which they tried to lead a dialogue concerning their disputes [1]. This however was followed by the ministerial meeting in April where they openly accused each other at a press conference [2]. Turkey then stopped their research activity in contested seas and has since discovered an additional 135 billion cubic meters of natural gas in the Black Sea, bringing its total reserves there to 540 billion cubic meters. The discoveries enable Ankara to reduce its dependence on Russian, Azerbaijani and other foreign energy sources. In addition on 4 July, Erdoğan stated that “we will carry out our oil exploration operations in the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, and all those seas” [3],
confirming that another provocative action might jeopardize the negotiating process with Greece in the near future. Erdoğan’s comments came a week after the EU promised 3.5 billion euros ($4.14 billion) to Turkey to continue hosting Syrian refugees until 2024. Ankara later dismissed the funds as insufficient and called on the bloc to take concrete steps to increase cooperation [1]. Moreover, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu warned that Turkey would resume operations in the Eastern Mediterranean if the EU and UN did not take steps on equitable sharing in Cyprus, after an informal UN-led conference in Geneva in April came without significant results [1].

**EU – Turkey: a fragile relationship**

The EU also confirmed the de-escalation of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean at the EU Council summit last June. However, Erdoğan stressed that the EU needs to take positive steps in its ties with Turkey during a phone call with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [4]. Moreover, Turkey’s Foreign Ministry marked the EU’s actions as a “delaying tactic” because the EU has not made any concrete decisions to implement a positive agenda including updating the Customs Union, which the Foreign Minister marked as a lack of will and abuse of EU membership by one or two member states. According to Turkey, it has more than fulfilled its responsibilities in reducing tensions and initiating dialogue and cooperation with Greece. In addition, Turkey played with the migrant card and called on the EU to review the migrant deal from 2016 with all its aspects [5]. The deal represents the key strategic interest for the EU and the guaranty to not repeat the massive migrant influx to the EU as it was in 2015. The recent EU-Turkish relations have not positively contributed the Erdoğan’s decision to withdraw Turkey from the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention. Experts noted that his decision is an attempt to rally conservative support ahead of Turkey’s next presidential election in 2023 [6].

The political relations between EU and Turkey are fragile, and it requires considerable effort to maintain the status quo. However, the technical cooperation between the EU and Turkey proceeded by Turkey’s decision to submit an application to participate in the EU’s Dutch-led military project on military mobility as a part of the Permanent Structured Cooperation program, has improved?. While the request is being reviewed, EU diplomats are split over Ankara’s possible participation [7].

Amid decreasing tensions, the respective EU members, especially France, have also taken a gentle approach towards Turkey. Although in May, Erdoğan publicly issued a warning about the rise of Islamophobia in Europe and particularly in France [8], Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu accepted the French Counterpart’s invitation to meet on 7 June to discuss their bilateral relations, cooperation with EU and regional developments [9]. Unfortunately, this meeting led to a “verbal ceasefire”, as stated by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs [10]. That said, the following meeting between President Macron and Erdoğan at the NATO summit was conducted in a “peaceful atmosphere.” The French Foreign Minister also stated that it is up to Erdoğan whether the softer rhetoric between the two countries will lead to the resolution of issues. France-Turkey relations deteriorated after Macron’s controversial comment on Islam and his stance defending the cartoon depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, which led to the brutal murder of a high school teacher in France. Macron’s stance has led to international condemnations, protests and calls to boycott French-made products, especially from Turkey [11].

Regarding the other key EU member states, Turkey also conducted active diplomacy with Italy and Germany. On 17 July, the Defence Minister met with the Italian Counterpart to discuss bilateral and regional defence and security issues, as well as, the latest developments in Afghanistan, Libya, and the
Eastern Mediterranean [12]. On 14 July, Turkey’s Treasury and Finance Minister Lütfi Elvan came together with top managers of German companies operating in Turkey to discuss investment opportunities [13].

Reconciliation of partners

As Turkey is practically alone in East Mediterranean disputes, it must take a friendly approach towards key regional partners such as Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

However, the new escalation of the Israel–Palestine conflict confirmed Turkey’s hostile position towards Israel and its role as the biggest supporter of Palestine and the Islamic leader [14]. According to some experts, the Turkish public has the impression that the government is pursuing a course of rapprochement with Israel. Despite the many harsh words Erdoğan regularly directs at Israel, talks have recently become more frequent again. Trade is also on the rise, with exports to Israel increasing steadily in recent years [14]. Moreover, Turkey appeared in recent years as the mediator between Hamas and Fatah in Palestine. Turkey can benefit from this cooperation with the recent, unofficial proposal on the Palestine–Turkey maritime deal. This deal should have the same purpose as the Turkey–Libya maritime agreement. This proposal came after the signing of the Security Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Palestine, which covers many areas of cooperation such as combating terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal immigration, money laundering, and the illegal trade of historical artefacts, weapons, ammunition, explosives; nuclear, biological, chemical and radioactive materials; and forgery of official documents, cybercrimes and organized crime. Under the agreement, Turkey aims to train and support the Palestinian police, gendarmerie and coast guard forces to prevent terrorist attacks and the financing of terrorism through know–how, information and intelligence sharing [15].

On the other hand, after the change of administration in Israel, Turkey saw an opportunity to improve energy relations [16]. According to Turkey, there is a plausible development concerning east Mediterranean gas disputes based on Turkey’s market and consuming economy. As the closest geographically and the most cost–effective, Turkey would offer transfer possibilities to Europe from the gas discoveries in Israeli waters. Turkey suggests a new pipeline from Israel via Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey to Europe, that should replace the planned East Mediterranean pipeline (the project of Greece, Cyprus and Israel), that is expected to be very costly. Many experts concur that the estimated natural gas transfer cost would be three times cheaper if the pipeline passes through Turkey [16]. In addition, after the Israeli–Palestine escalation of tensions, Erdoğan had a phone call with the new Israeli President, Isaac Herzog. They discussed potential bilateral cooperation, particularly in energy, tourism and technology. Notably, this call follows on from positive sentiments expressed by Israel’s former Energy Minister, Yuval Steinitz, who, in March 2021, said that Tel Aviv was ready to cooperate with Turkey on natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean [16].

Clearly, Turkey plays on both sides. On the one hand, it is the biggest supporter of Palestine and has pushed for the new maritime deal with Palestine, to justify its sea claim (as it has done with Libya). On the other hand, Turkey continually wants to improve relations with Israel, in order to cooperate in the energy sector, and has been working to persuade Israel to abandon the current East Mediterranean pipeline plan; changing the direction of the pipeline to Turkey instead of Cyprus and Greece.

Besides Israel, Egypt is also in the spotlight of the Turkish foreign policy interests as it understands that reconciliation of their relationship with Egypt is necessary. On 2 June, Erdoğan said at an interview that “[o]ur desire is to use these
opportunities for cooperation at the maximum level and improve our ties on a win–win basis ... The same situation is valid for all Gulf countries too” [17]. This comes after the first meeting in Cairo on 6 May, (exploratory talks by Foreign Deputy Minister) following years of tensions between Turkey and Egypt [18]. Ayman Samir, a professor of international relations at Cairo University, said that Egypt adopts the principle of "step by step" in its relationship with Turkey. He stressed that Turkey must realize that its relationship with Egypt is not linked to the latter's relationship with Cyprus and Greece, and should be well aware that restoring ties between Ankara and Cairo will not come at the expense of the latter’s relationship with any other country [18]. It also applies to the relationship Turkey has with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Generally, Turkey’s diplomacy is considered to be very active, as to avoid being totally isolated. Between 18–20 June, Turkey held its first Antalya Diplomacy Forum attended by 11 Heads of State and 45 Foreign Ministers [20]. Despite the Antalya diplomatic Forum and the EU summit taking place those days, Turkey conducted military exercises in the Aegean Sea’s international waters causing uncertainty in Turkish political moves [21].

**Greece foreign policy: two years of the new epoch**

For Greece, a small country, it is vital to find allies to face Turkey’s foreign policy interests. For small states, the most vital interests are survival and to adapt their policies to reflect this goal. This realistic view of international relations illustrates Greece–Turkey relations. Greece is almost 6–times smaller in land area, with over 8–times smaller population and 4–times smaller GDP than Turkey. Therefore, it has to push its foreign policy to find allies and enlarge its military, economy and political potential.

This July, the new Mitsotakis government has entered the second half of its election period since the 2019 parliament election. Greece conducted a new epoch in its foreign policy to intensify cooperation with Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, and after the Abraham Accords, with UAE and Saudi Arabia. This has provided Greece with a very advantageous position towards isolated Turkey and its interest. Greece Foreign Minister Dendias described this new epoch at the conference "Discussion on the Greek Grand Strategy: The Foreign Policy Dimension". He pointed out: "Given the potential of the country, its geopolitical footprint and its geographical position, I must say that we are quite pleased with what has been achieved by the Mitsotakis government during its two years in office. We believe that the serious Turkish aggression, indeed a neo-Ottoman attitude not known to us until this point in time, was dealt with to the degree it could be dealt with. We managed to turn Turkish aggression into a "weapon" against Turkey itself, that is, Turkey inadvertently helped us to establish understandings and alliances. We are optimistic that by employing the same tactics and constant diplomatic mobility, we will be able to expand our horizons and finally reach what is the ultimate goal for our country, the creation of conditions for security and prosperity" [22].

Diplomatic mobility can be confirmed empirically while the most often held between Greece Foreign Minister Dendias and "new allies" countries. Since Mitsotakis government took office, Dendias has met with the representatives of Cyprus 16 times, with Egypt 13 times and Israel 8 times. In fourth position is Germany (7 meetings), Italy (6) and the US (6) [23]. This confirms the interaction of Greece towards the new coalition against Turkey. In the past months Dendias visited Cairo in May [24] and Abu Dhabí in June (4th Dendias consecutive visit in UAE) [25].

The concrete result of those interactions is the creation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2019. On 6 July held a Ministerial meeting in Cairo to discuss deepening regional cooperation in the field of natural gas energy. Forum launched a joint website and also approved applications from the EU, US and World Bank to join the Forum as observers [26].
According to Tziampiris (2021), Greece remains convinced that the US is the most powerful regional actor in military capabilities, though Washington has been less engaged than in the past. However, the US supports regional cooperation initiatives when they serve US strategic goals [27]. Tziampiris (2021) claims that Greece pursues a national strategy with four central pillars: First, closer relations with Israel which is perhaps the cornerstone of Greece’s regional policy. Second, deepening military and political relationships with the US. Third, pursuing new cooperative initiatives with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. And finally, the pursuit of its energy projects and participation in regional energy organizations [27]. The linkage of the relation between Greece and Israel directly affects the relationship between the US and Greece.

Concerning Turkey–Greece “ceasefire” since April’s ministerial meeting, the fourth round of talks on “confidence-building measures” by Defense Ministry delegations took place in May [28]. On 1 June, the Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu met with Greek Foreign Minister Dendias in Athens [29]. Furthermore, on 14 June, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met in Brussels on the sidelines of the NATO summit and agreed that the tensions from 2020 could not be repeated [30].

However, on 16 July, it was reported that the Turkish coastguard fired warning shots at one of Cyprus vessels patrolling for undocumented migrants. The Cyprus government said it was preparing a protest to the UN over the incident, which it said was the first of its kind. Nevertheless, a Turkish diplomatic source denied that either the Turkish or the Turkish Cypriot coastguard had fired on any Greek Cypriot vessel [31].

Conclusion

In the last three months, we could see the attempt to rapprochement the relations, especially in the Turkey foreign policy, which began in spring 2021. As we pointed out to the beginning of the process in the last issue, the reconciliation process continued in the last months and persisted till the summer. We can expect a more assertive approach of Turkey in the region (like Greece) but with a very dynamic and contradictory foreign policy. It will require more effort towards the key partner countries in the region and more precise policy, particularly one that is not contradictory. To this moment, Greece appears in these disputes as the winner with the indirect support of the US, EU – mainly France, and nearby states in the East Mediterranean and Arabian Peninsula. As long as the US supports Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum and other regional initiatives and projects, Greece could lean on US security against Turkey. In this regard, Manis (2021) said that “the ball is very much in Turkey’s court now”. Therefore, many around the Eastern Mediterranean will closely watch Turkey and see just how Ankara returns that serve [32].

Endnotes


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