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Challenges in The Mediterranean region



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Table of content

ANALYSIS

The Abraham Accords: Implications in Algerian–Moroccan Relations and the Ongoing Conflict in Western Sahara

Pamela Dávila

Tunisian Democracy is in Turmoil: What's Next after a Self-coup?

Anisha Maulida

The Dots of Discord from Past till Present: An Overview of Algeria and Morocco's Relations

Fatima Umar

BRIEF SITUATION REPORT

Lebanon

Ambre Karoutsos

Egypt

Pamela Dávila

Cyprus

Ambre Karoutsos & Filip Šandor

Greece & Turkey

Filip Šandor



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Foreword

Instability takes many forms: from tensions between Morocco and Algeria to the struggles of women to make their voice heard in peace processes, challenges are numerous in the Mediterranean region. Long-time issues remains, such as tensions in Palestine, while new concerns arise, such as the Tunisian political crisis.

In the region as a whole, geopolitical, environmental and political events shape what actions and peace agreements will become. How these will create new dynamics is what this issue will focus on.



Timeline



The Abraham Accords: Implications in Algerian–Moroccan Relations and the Ongoing Conflict in Western Sahara

Pamela Dávila

In December 2020, the Kingdom of Morocco joined the Abraham Accords, a United States–brokered normalization agreement under which they regularized their diplomatic relations with Israel. Throughout history, Arab countries have chosen to stand by Palestine in its territorial dispute with Israel, leaving the latter surrounded by a group of unwelcoming neighbors in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the political dynamics of the region shifted last year for Morocco, when the US decided to formally recognize its sovereignty over the Western Sahara in exchange for joining the Abraham Accords.

Formerly a Spanish colony, and home to the Sahrawi people, the area known as Western Sahara has been the center of a territorial controversy for over 40 years. The Kingdom of Morocco has claimed historical sovereignty over the resource rich land, while the Polisario Front, the sole representative of the Sahrawi people, has demanded the complete independence of the territory. After a series of violent clashes in the 1970s, a considerable number of Sahrawi refugees set camp in neighboring Algeria, who not only offered its assistance, but also declared their support for the Polisario Front's cause. This statement would later fuel the existing tensions between Morocco and Algeria.

In 1991, the United Nations decided to take action by enacting a cease–fire between the Polisario Front and Moroccan military forces. The UN also created a peacekeeping operation in Western Sahara, whose mandate is oriented towards conducting a referendum on the status of the territory; nonetheless, said referendum has not yet taken place, which has in turn created discontent on both sides. The signing of the Abraham Accords came in the midst of

escalating tensions between Morocco and the Algeria–backed Polisario Front, and since then, a series of chain events have unfolded in the south of the Mediterranean, reaching a peak on August 24, when Algeria decided to cut diplomatic ties with Morocco.

In this context, this article will explore the geopolitical effects of the Abraham Accords in Moroccan–Algerian relations and its impact in the development of the conflict in Western Sahara. The first section will offer a brief explanation of the agreement known as the Abraham Accords, as well as, the series of events that ensued between Morocco, Algeria and the Polisario Front in the past few months. The second section will delve into current Moroccan–Algerian relations, in order to understand how their power dynamics are shaping the region and how their latest actions answer to very specific political goals for both parties. The third section will analyze Moroccan–Algerian relations in the context of the ongoing process in Western Sahara, stressing the importance of this conflict in the overall security of the Mediterranean. The article will conclude with a few considerations in relation to regional geopolitics to emphasize the reasons why the Abraham Accords should be a vital point of focus to consider when analyzing security matters in the Mediterranean in the near future.

What are the Abraham Accords?

The Abraham Accords comprehend a series of agreements for the normalisation of relations between certain Arab countries and Israel, brokered by the United States (during Donald Trump's presidency) as a means to promote dialogue, cooperation and peace, especially in



the Middle East. This event appears as a historical move in the region, given that no Arab country had regularized relations with Israel since 1978, when Egyptian president Anwar el-Sadat agreed upon peace between both countries in the context of the Camp David Accords. Ever since, Arab states have rebuffed the establishment of formal ties with Israel, in part due to a joint solidarity with the State of Palestine and its decades-long territorial conflict with Israel.

The signing of said accords started in September 2020, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Bahrain being the first to normalize relations with Israel within a framework of joint efforts towards peace and security in the region, while committing to the US' "Strategic Agenda for the Middle East." [1] [2] A third party to join the dialogs, was the Republic of Sudan. While initially hesitant to regularise its ties with Israel, Sudan finally agreed with the condition that it was removed from the US list of State Sponsors of Terrorism (which has affected the country's development for several years), and clearing the path for accessing World Bank funding. [3]

The final member to enter the negotiations was the Kingdom of Morocco, the central case study for this article. Morocco signed the joint declaration with Israel on 10 December 2020, making it the first Arab country in the

Mediterranean region to do so. While the move was unexpected (as with the previously mentioned states), the main point of concern in terms of security is the strategy used by the United States: The recognition of the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco over the entire Western Sahara territory. The joint declaration not only formally establishes this point, but also stresses the commitment of the United States towards the development of the territory and promises the opening of a consular office in Dakhla, as a way of creating new opportunities for the region. [4]

Since the agreement between Israel and Morocco was signed, a series of events developed in the south of the Mediterranean, involving Morocco, Algeria and the representatives of Western Sahara. Soon after brokering the deal, the US not only took its first steps in setting up the aforementioned consulate, but also discussed moving ahead with a \$1bn arms sale to Morocco, an offer that would contribute to the Kingdom's security. Considering that in late 2020 the Polisario Front ended the 1991 ceasefire due to delays in the consultation process to solve the conflict in Western Sahara, an arms sale (and the support of the US) would give Morocco a significant advantage in the region. Nevertheless, this did not stop the Polisario Front from launching a military operation in Morocco-controlled Guerguerat border in late January 2021.

Tensions between all parties remained relatively unchanged until April of 2021, when Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali entered Spain to receive medical treatment for COVID-19, leading to Morocco's retaliation by allowing thousands of citizens to cross the border to Ceuta, contributing to the already existing migratory crisis in the Mediterranean. The situation became more serious when the Polisario leader was allowed to leave Spain and continue his treatment in Algiers, where he received a visit from the Algerian president Abdelmadjid Tebboune in early June. Considering the clear support Algeria has shown

the Polisario Front in their fight for independence, the decision to host Ghali for his recovery only contributed to the deterioration of Moroccan-Algerian relations. Moreover, a new escalation surfaced in mid-July, when a Moroccan envoy to the UN spoke in support of self-determination of the Kabylia region, which prompted Algeria to recall its ambassador to Morocco back home.

The growing disputes did not, however, hinder the processes established in the Abraham Accords. In early August, Israeli Foreign Minister, Yair Lapid, made his first visit to Morocco, where three deals related to bilateral cooperation between Israel and Morocco – including air service, culture, sports, and youth, and political consultation matters – were signed. Additionally, FM Lapid inaugurated the official Israel liaison office in Rabat, which was part of the resolutions established on the Abraham Accords.

A few days after the visit, wildfires spread through Algeria, an event the president's office linked to two local terrorist groups. Algeria also announced that said groups were backed by Morocco and Israel in an attempt to destabilize Algeria and secure its new alliance with Israel and the US. [5] Tensions reached their peak in late August, when Algeria officially cut diplomatic ties with Morocco, leading the international community to call for dialogue between both parties. While both the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have asked for talks of reconciliation between Morocco and Algeria, no steps have been taken by either side to improve the situation.

As it has been possible to observe, the recent increase in tensions in Moroccan-Algerian relations is the result of the accumulation of months of actions taken by key stakeholders that have activated old rivalries and suspicions. While it is not possible to claim that the Abraham Accords were the main trigger for the state both parties have reached, they have definitely contributed to the escalation of hostilities.

Moreover, the current situation has also impacted the peace process for the conflict in

Western Sahara, making it more complex than it already is. Both parties are crucial in the development of this peace process, and the involvement of third parties like the US and Israel have not made negotiations any easier.

Moroccan-Algerian 'new old' struggles

Tensions between these two North African countries have fluctuated between high and low points throughout history, with no signs for them to establish amicable relations: Therefore, the severing of diplomatic ties announced a couple of weeks ago, does not represent a critical action that might trigger a more severe state in bilateral relations. Nevertheless, it is important to note that both Algeria and Morocco have historically challenged each other in order to assert own dominance in the region, and that competition has had a considerable impact in the development of local conflicts. The conflict in Western Sahara represents a dispute that has been indirectly used, by both countries, to justify their actions against each other, as was possible to observe in the statements made by Morocco's envoy to the UN and Algeria's subsequent decision to recall its ambassador to Morocco.



In this context, it is vital to understand how Moroccan–Algerian interactions have developed during this year, and what steps both countries have taken in order to assert their leadership and dominance in the region. Morocco has probably been the country with the most assertive geopolitical strategy vis-à-vis In this context, it is vital to understand how Moroccan–Algerian interactions have developed during this year, and what steps both countries have taken in order to assert their leadership and dominance in the region. Morocco has probably been the country with the most assertive geopolitical strategy vis-à-vis Algeria: It not only regained its seat in the African Union four years ago, but has also secured the support of the US in relation to one of its long term territorial goals, and gained a new strategic partnership with Israel. The Abraham Accords do not only link Morocco to the previously mentioned country, but sets a precedent for collaboration with other parties involved in the agreements, all of them, coincidentally, strong oil producing countries.

Moreover, after its impasse with Spain and Algeria in April, Morocco has strived to offer a more conciliatory approach with its neighbor. In his Throne Day speech in late July, King Mohammed VI called for the necessary “development of bilateral relations [with Algeria] based on trust, dialogue and good neighborliness” [6]; the King also offered Algeria assistance in fighting the wildfires that spread throughout the country, a proposal that was ignored by Algerian president Tebboune, according to Moroccan media outlets [7]. The ensuing accusations of Morocco’s involvement in supporting the suspected terrorist groups (who are said to have started the wildfires) therefore, clashed with Rabat’s conciliatory discourse, and could jeopardize Algeria’s goals in the region, especially considering that they have not offered concise proof for this accusation yet.

In this sense, Algeria could be facing a disadvantage in the region, in relation to Morocco. The current socioeconomic context in Algeria has not been easy to manage for the government: Not only did they have to deal with

inflation and the devaluation of the dinar, but also with food scarcity in some areas of the country, most of which is imported. [8] Moreover, earlier this year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that Algeria could face a critical situation due to its budget deficit and decline in its oil reserves and gas exports. [9] The recent escalation in tensions with Morocco (especially the decision to sever diplomatic ties) might come as an attempt to diffuse local tensions towards an ‘external enemy’ while the Algerian government finds a way to stabilize its national struggles. Nevertheless, this strategy cannot be sustained in the long term.

While Morocco has chosen to side with the United States (and Israel), Algeria could be looking to strengthen similar relations with external partners, like Russia, a country that has already pursued major arms deals with Algeria and Egypt. In relation to arms transfers, Algeria remains the third largest importer of armament from Moscow [10], and last year signed a nearly \$2 billion purchase of 14 Sukhoi Su-57 fighter aircrafts [11], only months before the United States started discussing an arms sale with? Morocco.

It is worth noting that Algerian–Russian relations have not gone beyond the arms transfer realm in the last few years, with Algiers even engaging in close ties with Ukraine in 2019, a move that was not well-seen by Moscow. Nevertheless, their military ties have remained strong since the Cold War era [12]. While Algeria has not yet become a key power for Russian influence in the south of the Mediterranean, it is not entirely out of the picture that, given the current geopolitical context of the Abraham Accords, the Algerian government could consider getting closer to other partners in order to reinforce its assertiveness vis-à-vis Morocco.

There have indeed been key political shifts in the region in the past few months that have contributed to exacerbated tensions between the two countries, especially in organizations like the African Union. Both Morocco and Algeria have been working arduously in order to secure

support from other AU members and to bolster their own political agendas in the region; however, Morocco seems to be the one who has carried out the most effective strategy to attain one of its main geopolitical goals: its recognition of sovereignty over Western Sahara. Before Morocco's return to the AU, Algeria had managed to establish vital alliances with Nigeria and South Africa, which allowed it to create the position of AU special envoy for Western Sahara, assigning its representative, and thus securing its agenda not only in the AU, but also within the United Nations [13].

In this context, Morocco sought to recover its assertiveness in the region by tackling the same key partners Algeria had gained, and bringing them to their side. This, in turn, shifted the original approach of the AU in regards to Western Sahara –aligned towards Algerian goals – into a more neutral position that benefitted Morocco in the long term. One of these steps included collaborating with Nigeria for the creation of a joint gas pipeline project in 2016, which would tighten its economic bonds with Europe and expand the Nigerian market even more [14]. The project proved beneficial for Morocco: Nigeria, once a solid supporter of the Polisario Front, gradually shifted its discourse towards a more conciliatory and impartial one, supporting the political solution offered by the UN [15] and distancing itself from the conflict in Western Sahara.

The last African Union summit, carried out in February 2021, provided further evidence of the change in political dynamics in the region. Algeria was not selected to participate in the organization's councils or committees, while countries like Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – who could potentially back Moroccan interests – were elected as head of the AU commission and rotating president, respectively [16]. These events add to the list of Morocco's diplomatic achievements carried out in the last couple of years, which have bolstered its position in relation to the conflict in Western Sahara. Not only long-standing supporters of the Polisario Front – like Nigeria and Zambia –

became less vocal about their support, but have also indirectly sided with Morocco through their decision to establish consular offices in Western Sahara territory [17]. The recent opening of an American consulate in Dakhla – agreed upon in the Abraham Accords – has been the latest Moroccan political win, which has shifted the balance of power for Algeria.

The never-ending conflict in Western Sahara

While the issues surrounding the resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara are not the central part of the Abraham Accords, it is clear that the new Moroccan-Israeli-American partnership could have a considerable impact on the future developments of this particular peace process. The agreements have exacerbated existing tensions between Morocco and Algeria, and this could be problematic for Western Sahara, for a multitude of reasons that will be discussed in this section.

Since the end of Spanish colonial rule in 1963, Western Sahara became part of the United Nations' list of non-self-governing territories. Since then, surrounding countries have claimed sovereignty over this particular area, including the Kingdom of Morocco, who is also the most vocal of them all. The self-proclaimed Sahrawi Democratic Arab Republic (SDAR), led by the Polisario Front, was created in 1976 but remains a de facto state whose recognition status fluctuates around the world, especially in Africa. Despite this uncertain status, the SDAR does not hold a weak position, and is even part of the list of African Union member states since 1982 [18], which does give them a more formal recognition in the political dynamics of the region.

The greater problem with the status of the conflict in Western Sahara—and the subsequent potential recognition of the SADR—is that the process has taken more time than expected to

be resolved by the parties involved. In 1991, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established, not only to ensure a ceasefire between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario Front, but also to provide the necessary tools to carry out a referendum “for the people of Western Sahara to choose between independence and integration with Morocco” [19]. After 30 years, no referendum has taken place, and there have been several disagreements between both parties – including the eligibility to vote, and the acceptance of the UN special envoy –, which has only delayed reaching a resolution.



Morocco has taken advantage of this situation, as stated earlier, by using a strong diplomatic strategy that has secured key partners to claim its sovereignty over the territory in the long term. The Polisario Front, on the other hand, has continued siding with the Algerian government for leverage and protection, which has increased tensions between the latter and the Kingdom of Morocco over the years. The chain of events that has deployed since the break of the ceasefire and the signing of the Abraham Accords in late

2020 have only added to the list of issues that prevent both parties from reaching a consensus, and ultimately puts a strain on the population of Western Sahara.

The reasons for these two countries' continued involvement in the development of the conflict has been largely discussed, but it can be reduced to a simple geopolitical logic: the desire to establish regional hegemony. Algeria has historically supported the rights of the Sahrawi people, partly because of old Cold War dynamics, partly because, should the SADR obtain its independence, it would become a key economic and political partner for Algeria. Not only does it offer a gateway to the Atlantic, but it is an area with “abundant reserves of phosphate, lucrative fish resources, and possibly, offshore oil” [21], all of which could contribute to the improvement of Algerian fluctuating economic situation. Moreover, the SADR's potential independence, with the support of Algeria, would signify a political win vis-à-vis Morocco, and might bolster Algeria's position in regional political organizations like the AU, which has been declining over the years.

Morocco's intentions do not differ much from those of its neighbor. Establishing formal sovereignty – recognized by the international community – over Western Sahara would not only become a political triumph for Morocco, but would also help with the development of strategic projects the government in Rabat already has in mind for the disputed territory. A unified and stable Morocco represents an attractive zone of investment for external partners like China, who has already begun talks with Rabat for a billion dollar deal establishing manufacturing, and railroad and commerce projects [19], which would consolidate the political and economic influence Morocco has built in the region over the past few years. Considering the aforementioned facts, it is important to analyze the implications the signing of the Abraham Accords could have, in the long term, for this particular conflict, and why it could signify yet another setback for MINURSO. It is true that American support of Morocco in this specific issue is unlikely to change

the current sentiment among the international community in regards to Western Sahara; the UN and the EU, in particular, will continue pushing for a political solution to avoid direct conflict, and no level of US backing will alter that in the short term. Moreover, American recognition has no legal effect over previous UN resolutions which have already established the way in which the conflict in Western Sahara should be conducted.

Nevertheless, the US decision does have the potential to hinder the peace process, for the simple reason that it sets a precedent from one of the leaders of the West. In the context of the Abraham Accords, as states' politics and economies become more interconnected, there are higher chances for partners in the agreement to follow American leadership. In this sense, Israel, Bahrain, UAE and Sudan could play an important role in setting the balance of power in North Africa. Dynamics in the different UN bodies could also be affected. For instance, if a crisis arises among the parties involved in the following months, the US could be more likely to block motions that threaten Morocco's sovereignty and their new partnership.

In reality, one of the reasons why President Joe Biden found it difficult to reverse Trump's decision in regards to Western Sahara is the fact that it could pose a risk to Moroccan commitment with Israel, and discourage other potential partners. The US has made its first steps in integrating Israel in the Middle East (and possibly the Arab world), an achievement they will not give up on easily [22].

A final consideration in this context is the importance of the conflict in the larger geopolitical dynamics of North Africa, which can trickle down to other countries around the Mediterranean. Morocco's alignment with Israel and the US means one thing: Larger military power. Even when it is not part of the agreement signed among the three parties, discussions about arms deals have already taken place between Morocco and the US, which could set a precedent for Israel engaging in similar

arrangements with Rabat. A more militarized Morocco, could raise alarms in both Western Sahara and Algeria, who could see this move as a threat to their own security, and choose to either increase their arsenals somehow (Russia could play an important role here) or engage in small scale attacks. The Polisario Front has already opted for the latter strategy, and while the clashes in Morocco-controlled posts along Western Sahara have not had a massive impact, the consistent escalation in tensions between both sides could have serious results if there are no mechanisms for compromise.

Conflict fueled military violence could also contribute to further insecurity in the region. Considering that different insurgent groups have taken roots in neighboring countries, increased clashes between the involved parties could deteriorate socioeconomic and political stability, especially in Western Sahara and Algeria. This, in turn, would only worsen the migratory situation between Africa and Europe, and threaten human security while creating even more tensions among states. Therefore, working towards a quicker and more conciliatory approach to solve the conflict in Western Sahara should matter to the countries in the Mediterranean.

Final remarks

The Abraham Accords have represented a historic diplomatic win for the US in the sense that it allowed its long-term partner in the Middle East, Israel, to begin regularising its relations with other Arab countries in the region. However, and especially in the case of Morocco, the signing of the agreement came in the midst of an already tense situation with the Polisario Front and the stagnant process in Western Sahara. During 2021, a series of chain events have climaxed with the severing of diplomatic ties between Morocco and Algeria, a situation that could decrease the possibilities for a political resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara, and increase insecurity in the region.

The US' decision to publicly support Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed territory, while not

legally binding, does set a precedent and has probably jeopardised MINURSO's mandate. Moreover, it has shifted the regional balance of power and increased the already existing security dilemma between Algeria and Morocco. As far as it has been possible to observe, these two countries have clear goals in the region, and the new partnerships created by the Abraham Accords have bolstered Moroccan superiority, while leaving Algeria in a disadvantageous position.

These events, in turn, have indirectly affected the situation in Western Sahara, for the simple reason that a Moroccan-Algerian compromise has and will remain a key factor in the development of this specific peace process. Both states have invested interests in the territory and have the necessary means to create a context where an agreement could be achieved. Nevertheless, as long as external political forces remain involved, no compromise will be attained in the short term.

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Tunisian Democracy is in Turmoil: What's Next after a Self-coup?

Anisha Maulida

A decade after the Tunisian revolution, Tunisian democracy faces its biggest challenge as President Kais Saied sacked the government, froze parliamentary activities on 25 July 2021, and assumed executive power. His actions have caused major protests across Tunisia and has been labelled as a “coup” by the parliament [1]. Saied, on the other hand, insisted that he acted to protect the constitution and to save the country [2].

It is apparent that the global pandemic, COVID-19, has contributed to the Tunisian economic downfall [3]. Moreover, Tunisia has had to deal with other crises that have pushed Tunisia's democracy to the brink with the corruption scandal of the former Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh, a high unemployment rate, national debt, the accusation of police repression, and the tensions between the President and Prime Minister Mechichi that have constantly escalated [1] [3] [4] [5].

This article will discuss in further detail the political turmoil in Tunisia and how it affects their democracy.

A coup or not?

Kais Saied, the Tunisian President who was democratically elected by the people, ousted the government and suspended the parliament leaving Tunisia in political turmoil. Additionally, President Saied has yet to appoint a new Prime Minister, and it seems that he does not have a clear political road map. Adding to the concerns that President Saied's actions demonstrate a coup, he has declared that he will rule by decree and has extended the suspension until further notice [6]. Although Saied insisted that his actions are not indicative of a coup, as he claims

he is invoking Article 80 of the 2014 constitution which gives him this authority, it's clear to the people that his actions are a threat to the country's democracy.

Contrarily, there are some that argue in favour of Saied, saying his actions do not amount to an attempt to overthrow the chief executive, as Saied has repeated himself. Instead, some consider his actions to be more aligned with the concept of “self-coup.” A self-coup or an autogolpe occurs when the President closes the courts and the legislature, suspends the constitution, and rules by decree until a referendum and new legislative elections are held to approve border executive powers [7]. This action is seen as a temporary departure from democratic rule in terms of free and fair election in democracy [7]. However, this type of act could threaten the deliberative quality of democracy as it broadens the scope for executive abuses of power, weakens the checks and balances system, and leaves the government unaccountable to the public and immune to criticism [7].



Thus, with this concept in mind, one could argue that what happened in Tunisia is a self-coup which is an absolute threat to Tunisian democracy. The question that naturally arises is: will Tunisia return to a dictatorship? Rather than thinking this way, there are a series of scenarios that may arise, and this article will discuss this in more detail in the next subsection.

Violation of the 2014 constitution

The President has put forth a rational reason for his action and has framed them in accordance with Article 80 of the constitution which relates to a state of emergency— in this case it is in response to economic and political crises. Let us take a closer look at Article 80 of the 2014 constitution [8] [9].

Article 80 addresses the Presidential powers, specifically the actions the President of the Republic may take during an “event of imminent danger threatening the nation’s institutions or the security or independence of the country.” [9]. This became the foundation for Saied to justify his action. However, under Article 80 it states that such measures are only ‘necessitated by exceptional circumstances’ and should be done after consultation with the Head of Government, the Speaker of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People and after informing the President of the Constitutional Court [9]. That brings us to the question of whether President Saied has followed the proper protocol?

According to President Saied there has been a prior consultation with Mechichi and the Parliament Speaker, Rached Ghannouchi, and they have agreed that other decisions will be taken once social peace returns to the country [10]. However, the parliament has dismissed this claim and instead believes Saied’s action to be nothing but a “full-fledge coup” against the constitution and democracy of the country [11].

In addition, Article 80 states that after 30 days of entry into force— these measures, the Speaker of the Assembly of the Representatives of the

People or thirty of the members thereof shall be entitled to apply to the Constitutional Court with a view to verifying whether or not the circumstances remain exceptional [9]. The Court shall rule upon and publicly issue its decision within a period not exceeding fifteen days. Moreover, the President promised to limit his suspension to 30 days and now he has exceeded the deadline [2]. It has been two months of silence from the President and there has been no reform plans.

According to President Saied’s adviser, Saied attempted to amend the constitution. He issued Decision 117, which changes the preeminence of the Constitution: Constitutional laws will be maintained only if they do not contravene with Presidential measures [12] [13]. Such amendments would grant the President an extraordinary power and essentially abolish the political system [12]. However, the parliament and political parties such as Ennahda and Tunisia’s Labour Party opposed this decision which is rooted [14] in Article 144 [9]:

“The Constitution shall be amended upon the approval of two-thirds of the members of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. After an amendment by two-thirds of the members of the Assembly has been approved, the President may submit the amendment to referendum in which case it will be adopted if it receives an absolute majority of votes cast.”

There are two points that need to be highlighted here: the first is, Article 80 is being used by the Tunisian President as a justification for his actions and is without legitimate grounds. The second is that the constitution itself does not allow the President to suspend the government or amend the constitution.

The protest against the President

This is the first major protest since the Tunisian President seized power two months ago, and it could be seen as the beginning of a new series of protests across Tunisia. Thousands of people

rallied in the centre of Tunis chanting “shut down the coup”, “save our democracy”, and “we want to return to legitimacy” [15]. The Tunisians believe that what happened on 25 July took them back to 50 years of autocracy [15].

Meanwhile, pro-Saied argue that the people want to dissolve the parliament [15]. They believe in Saied’s actions and chant “Saied is good” as they viewed his actions as an opportunity to purge the corrupt elite and have accused the protesters of defending and protecting the corrupt elite [16].

The army’s new role

A lot of anxiety arises from the Tunisians if the army starts to enter politics. During the protest event in July, the army secured the parliament building and caused concern [17]. This is of particular concern because the Tunisian army has been apolitical for decades and under a democratic government, the army should stay out of politics and focus on their role in defending the nation [18].

Today, Tunisia under President Saied’s administration is starting to wrap itself around the army [18]. The relationship between the President and the army has started to become intertwined as Saied has been giving political speeches at military sites and promoting military leaders in an unstructured and political way, to civilian positions [17] [18]. Moreover, Prime Minister Mechichi has also involved the military in a pandemic response, increasing further the army’s involvement in civilian matters [19]. Further involvement could foster fear of the potential use of military courts to prosecute political opponents like in 2014/15 [17]. According to the Brookings Institution Report (2019), Tunisian military courts have been used in some cases that targeted a number of civilians, including political opponents and bloggers in the past [20].

If the army gets involved in Tunisian politics, it would first undermine the trust of the Tunisian people in their army because the army is seen as the most reliable and trusted institution in the

country, even more so than the police or judiciary [17]. Second, violation against civilians would likely happen if Saied is allowed to engage the military in his efforts to save the country and the people [17].

A threat to Tunisian democracy: What’s next?

What has happened in Tunisia today is obviously threatening the future of Tunisian democracy as previously explained in this article. Moreover, the trauma of having an autocratic regime still haunts the people of Tunisia. Therefore, the protesters who went to the street against the President’s monopolization are those who are doubtful of his actions.

To answer the previous question whether Tunisia will return to a dictatorship, the answer depends on their political democratic culture. Tunisian democracy is already fragile, as it is still in a transitional stage hence, the democratic political culture in Tunisia has not been fully internalized. When the culture of political democracy has not been fully internalized, the possibility of the President using his power to turn democracy into an autocracy will likely occur. However, if it is internalized then, the chances of reverting back to normal will likely to happen, as domestic conditions, both economic and political, are stable.

As of August, Saied has appointed several new ministers, including interior minister and health minister. Hence, it is arguable that the President will appoint a new prime minister, sooner or later. The Tunisians need to be patient and keep monitoring the moves of the President whether his actions are still in accordance with the constitution or not.

Conclusion

Although the Tunisian President was using Article 80 as a justification for calling a “state of emergency” his actions contradict democratic tradition. However the chances of Tunisia

returning to being an autocratic state are very narrow. Moreover, with the fact that the Tunisians are now not afraid to stage a protest and raise their voice against the government hence, there is a likelihood to have another revolution and to topple down the President.

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The Dots of Discord from Past till Present: An Overview of Algeria and Morocco's Relations

Fatima Umar

Algeria and Morocco's diplomatic relations led to an escalation in tensions between the two rival states. Before digging deeper into the historical conflict, it is important to note that both Algeria and Morocco have been colonized, but their major tensions grew after Algeria's independence from France in 1963, which was followed by the Sand War between the two bordering states. The primary reason for it was the claims of Moroccan authorities of Algerian lands: Tindouf and Bechar. While Rabat justified it as a response to provocative actions by Algeria, it was just the beginning of the bitter relationship between the two nations which is worsening.



After reviewing the reasons for this conflict, only then does a clearer and more rationale-based reasoning illuminates the recent rise in hostilities between the two states. The core cause of the Algeria-Morocco conflict is a territorial dispute over border demarcation, which, as previously mentioned, dates back to the independence of Algeria. What adds fuel to this fire is the proxy dimension: Algeria supports the Polisario Front, which is a political-military organization working against Moroccan control over Western Sahara. Morocco, on the other hand, supports the Kabyle people. A major blow to the relationship between

Algeria and Morocco, was Algeria's unilateral decision to close their border with Morocco after alleged accusations over Algeria's involvement in a terrorist attack in South-western Marrakesh in 1994 and the restrictions on visas for Algerians.

Another reason for their fraught relationship stems back to the Cold War era, where their difference in political ideology. Alger is still cautious of the possible plans of Rabat regarding the creation of 'Greater Morocco' and is still struggling for regional influence on various fronts. While the aforementioned causes are historic in nature, the contemporary causes, on the surface, are influenced by numerous reasons involving different regional and global actors. One of these is the US recognition of the territorial bone of contention between Morocco and Algeria: the Moroccan control of Western Sahara. This was a major blow to the decades-long Algerian struggle of keeping Morocco's authority of Western Sahara isolated and illegitimate in the eyes of the international community. The loss of the Polisario Front as a proxy for Algeria increased resentment and hostilities. This inclination of the US towards Morocco was not a gift, rather it was a bargain in which Morocco would then recognize and establish friendly relations with Israel, an ally of America. This added another reason for Algeria to stand up front in front of Morocco and criticize them for giving up the Palestinian cause. Algeria also claims Morocco's involvement in Israeli spyware software, Pegasus further heightens the discord.

The historic causes coupled with recent events has enlarged the conflict between Morocco and Algeria. For example, in July of this year, Morocco's Ambassador to the UN, Omar Hilale, emphasized the independence of the Kabyle

people, this was followed by Algeria's protest over Morocco's involvement in Pegasus Spyware.

Although efforts by King Mohammad VI of Morocco were made to establish a new era, this was put into question by Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune who demanded an explanation about Morocco's stance on Kabyle people. As Moroccan nexus with the US and particularly with Israel is not appreciated by Algeria, this added further resentment when Algeria linked anti-Algerian statements by the Israeli Foreign Minister during his visit to Morocco as an act instigated by Morocco. As these events deepened the hostilities, Algeria in late August unilaterally decided to cut diplomatic ties with Morocco, the former blaming Morocco for inciting people of the Kabyle region to put fires in the forest across Northern Algeria.

These political developments certainly have further implications: as an example, the energy sector. As one of the main gas supply pipelines connecting North Africa, Europe and travelling across the Mediterranean region, the Maghreb-Europe Gas (MEG) is one of the main gas supply pipelines of the region, and has been operating since 1996. But as of now, as confirmed by Algerian authorities the terms of MEG passing through Morocco will not be renewed in October: an alternative route of MEDGAZ pipeline will be used, which will worsen the two states' relations. These diplomatic tensions between both contenders might change the regional balance of powers and lead to the creation of new blocs.

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Lebanon

Ambre Karoutsos

Lebanon has faced crisis after crisis, from the August 2020 Beirut explosion to regional wars. While the latter led to more than 1.5 million refugees seeking asylum in the country, the former exposed state corruption and led to more than 217 people being killed, 7000 injured, and 300 000 displaced. Not only did it cause country-wide poverty and instability, it also led to political consequences, with Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government resigning and no replacement for 13 months.

Currently, 78 percent of the Lebanese population - equivalent to three million people - is estimated to be under the poverty line. As the economic crisis worsened and Lebanese authorities tried to shield the political elite from repercussions, the international community started to pressure officials in order to find a solution.

On 19 of September, a new government was formed: composed of 24 Ministers led by billionaire businessman Najib Mikati, it received a mixed reaction from the Lebanese population. While technocrats, and thus not directly affiliated with the previous political elite, the government leaves doubts for the population as to whether they will be able to respond to the crisis: some of them, for example, having backgrounds with no link with their new tasks. More so, the appointment of one female cabinet member, among the 24, has been criticized. Nonetheless, other cabinet members have sparked interest, such as the new Health Minister Firas Abiad, known for becoming the public face of Lebanon's COVID-19 response.

The challenges for this government will be multiple, as the cabinet will need to relaunch talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to unlock aid. It will not be easy, as

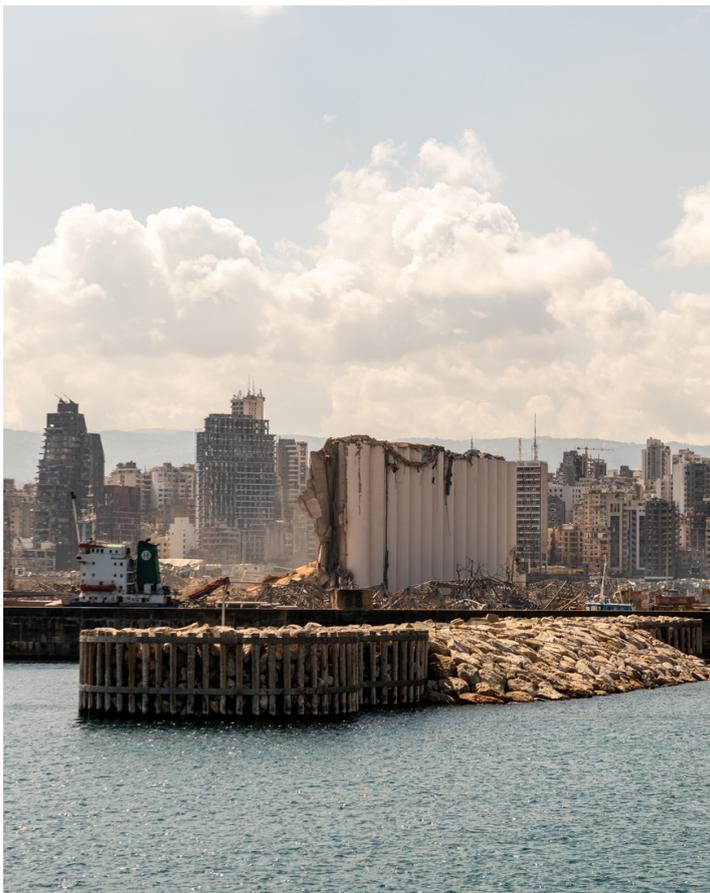
previous negotiations came to a stop when the state defaulted on its debt. After the Beirut explosion, and its following economic crisis, the Lebanese pound lost almost all of its value. Not only did it cause struggles for daily necessity goods such as petrol, medicine and food to be found, but the collapse of the country remains the first priority to tackle for the political elites. Beside economic difficulties, this government will have to go past political quarrels: the parties from the traditional ruling class that dominated Lebanese politics since the 1975-1990 civil war, all endorsed members of the new government. Any consensus is then hard to put in place, and May 2022, for which general elections were announced to be held, is still far away.

There are many challenges for the new government to face: there has been a shortage of many resources, from food to fuel and electricity to medicine. Lebanon relied, for decades, on the import of said goods, and the collapse of its currency led to dire shortages. To counter this, the government dialled back on specific subsidies, which in turn increased the cost of staple food (rice, beans, etc.). The shortages also disrupted people's ability to get legal documents, as paper and official stamps are hard to find. This state of affairs has led to an increased demand for black markets, giving power to cartels in cahoot with the ruling class. The covid crisis worsened an already dire situation: amid "brain drains" of doctors and electricity and fuel shortage, basic drugs and equipment became unaffordable for most.

This also has a geopolitical impact: on the 16 of September, Hezbollah delivered fuel without state authorisation. Aside from highlighting the ascendancy taken by the Shiite group, this measure, against official sanctions of the United States, has also been criticized for its lack of

transparency, and to be a short-term political solution to a structural problem. Described by Prime Minister Mikati as a violation of legitimacy, the current government distanced itself from this initiative. As these shipments have been purchased by Lebanese businessmen, according to Iran, it is unlikely Lebanon will face additional US sanctions.

Other international actors, including the UN, announced the creation of an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) worth \$383 million to provide assistance and protection to Lebanon citizens and migrants over the coming 12 months. It will also provide an emergency logistic operational plan establishing a fuel supply chain, aimed at helping humanitarian aid and support critical establishments for a limited period of time.



However, international effort is not only focused on relieving Lebanese populations. On 30 of July, the EU adopted a legal framework targeting all Lebanese individuals and entities involved in undermining democracy or the rule of law in Lebanon. Five Hundred and Seventy-One out of the Six Hundred and Eighty-One members of

European Parliament backed it, blaming political parties that let the crisis worsen, as part of their own interests. It is not the only pressure Lebanon faced, as France and the US pushed for a solution to be taken. Internally, protests have also been ongoing, as justice seekers for the Beirut explosion are still active. In that regard, Tarek Bitar, the judge in charge of the investigation, has been targeted by a smear campaign and political pressures. Recently, a Hezbollah official threatened him in a letter on 23 September. This threat can be tied to an arrest warrant Bitar issued on 16 September on ex-public works and transport minister Youssef Fenianos. The latter's lawyers demanded Bitar's removal from the case.

As such, the creation of the Prime Minister's Mikati government does not mean Lebanon's situation will automatically get better: not only are there political gridlocks remaining, but the traditional political elite is still powerful. Nonetheless, the announcement of the new government to hold general elections in 2022 can leave some hope for the Lebanese population and the country as a whole to gain some stability in the future.

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Egypt

Pamela Dávila

Between July and August 2021, Egypt has experienced a series of events that have influenced its local and international political dynamics. This brief situation report will focus on two of these events: The ongoing dispute with Ethiopia over control of the Nile River, and the long-term clashes with jihadist groups in North Sinai.

The conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia revolves around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), a construction project that started in 2011 which has become a source of dispute between both countries and Sudan—given that the dam is located near the Sudanese–Ethiopian border. This dam is designed to become a major hydroelectric power plant in the region, and will provide Ethiopians with better access to energy, thus reviving its economy. Moreover, since the dam would produce a hydroelectric surplus, Ethiopia plans to export that energy to neighboring countries, which would further contribute to improving their economic situation.

The major point of conflict with Egypt and Sudan resides in the fact that the filling of the dam would shorten both countries' supply from the Nile, a river which flows from south to north, and that has been a historical source of water for irrigation and human consumption. In 1929, the Anglo–Egyptian Treaty gave Egypt veto rights/power over construction projects in the Nile; however, after other African countries signed a series of different water management treaties, Egypt's power over the river slowly started to decrease. The GERD's construction, which began when Egypt was immersed in local political chaos (in the context of the Arab Spring), is a sign of that declining power of decision.

The major point of conflict with Egypt and Sudan

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Since the project started, both Egypt and Sudan stated that the creation and filling of the GERD would reduce river flows to their respective territories, which often face periods of droughts. In view of the consequences the dam could bring, representatives from all three countries have held meetings in the last few months, but no consensus has been reached yet.

In early July of 2021, Ethiopia announced they would begin the second phase of the GERD's filling. This statement prompted Egypt to raise its voice, saying Ethiopia was not only violating international norms, but also acting unilaterally, without considering that no compromise had been achieved among the interested parties.

Both Egypt and Sudan are pushing for a legally binding agreement on the filling speed of the GERD, the logistics of the filling, measures for water release in case of droughts and mechanisms for settling disputes. Ethiopia, however, wants to establish a simple set of guidelines that do not bind them to follow Egyptian rules. The lack of consensus and Ethiopia's actions have prompted both Egypt and Sudan to form a partnership, which has been conducting joint military drills near the Sudanese-Ethiopian border. That said, both countries deny the drills are related to the GERD situation, and have stated it is a matter of security cooperation.

The ongoing dispute between the three countries is relevant in our current context because it is a clear sample of geopolitical conflict based on one of the most important resources in our planet: water. While no direct action has been taken on Egypt's side, if the environmental situation become critical — for example, an extreme drought — and Ethiopia refuses to stop its project, military violence could ensue, which, in turn, would only worsen local and regional instability. If all parties managed to reach a consensus in the short term, the political, economic and social consequences of the GERD project in the Nile basin could be contained.

In regards to the rising tension in North Sinai, in August 2021, Egypt experienced two new episodes of clashes between the Egyptian security forces and ISIL fighters. Violence in North Sinai is not a new occurrence: Social and political resentment had been increasing for decades among the population in the area, an opportunity radical Islam groups took to expand their lines. After the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, and the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi in 2013, Egypt experienced a power vacuum that increased the number of extremist militant groups in the region who sided with the local population to confront Egyptian authorities and engage in illicit activities in the border with Palestine and Libya. From then on, the Egyptian military forces and jihadist groups have been in a constant battle.

On the first days of August, the Egyptian government carried out an anti-terrorist operation in North Sinai, where they claimed not only to have killed around 89 ISIL fighters, but also to have destroyed militants' cars, ammunition, tunnels and explosive devices. In return, two weeks later, a roadside explosion in the New Rafah region, near the border with the Gaza Strip, left eight casualties from Egypt's security forces and six wounded, in an attack ISIL claimed responsibility for.

While these cases of direct confrontation between both sides are not new, they led to tensions in the region, which not only decreases local security, but has also expanded to other areas, like Palestine. ISIL affiliated groups continue having significant leverage in North Sinai, and the government's inability to control extremism in the region could trickle down and jeopardize other political dynamics, like the territorial conflict between Israel and Palestine. The general situation represents a breeding ground for the emergence of radical groups in an already unstable region. Should the international community fail to counter such groups, overall peace and security will become less attainable, a reality that ultimately impacts human development around the world.

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Cyprus

Ambre Karoutsos & Filip Šandor

Amid the wildfires and diplomatic tensions with Turkey concerning Varosha, Cyprus has continued to reaffirm their commitment to the regional trilateral alliance with Greece and Israel, and their friendly relations with Egypt.

On 22 August, the foreign ministers of Cyprus, Greece and Israel met in Jerusalem in the trilateral meeting to discuss enhancing regional cooperation, including health issues, Covid-19 pandemic, and responding to emergencies such as wildfires, given the fires that broke out in the three countries recently. It was the first meeting since the new Israeli government took office. They also discussed the possibility of engaging other countries into the trilateral format, particularly the UAE, which participated in the Paphos meeting in April. Another country explicitly mentioned was the US, which represents a key ally for Israel. Cypriot foreign minister mentioned that “engaging the US more diversely in our 3+1 partnership has significant added value.” The ministers also aimed to prepare for the High-Level Trilateral Summit in Cyprus by the end of the year. Regarding the US, on 31 August, U.S. Senator Bob Menendez, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, paid a visit to Greece and Cyprus to assess and advance the partnerships among the US, Greece and Cyprus. Menendez has been a vocal proponent of negotiations and a strident critic of Turkish military presence in North Cyprus.

On 4 September, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades jointly chaired, for the first time on a presidential level, the Egyptian-Cypriot higher committee held in Cairo. Egypt and Cyprus confirmed their strong partnership in light of the challenges both

countries face. They also agreed to speed up the work for the construction of a submarine gas pipeline and the EuroAfrica interconnector. Before the presidential meeting, both countries conducted joint Egyptian-Cypriot military training, Ptolemy 2021, held from 2-17 of September.

Energy cooperation was also on the agenda with Israel during the virtual meeting of energy ministers held on 1 September. They discussed the next steps in the joint promotion of common projects, such as the EuroAsia Interconnector electricity cable and the two countries’ active participation in the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, intended to foster multilateral cooperation in the region.



Amidst the tensions between Greece and Turkey, the Turkish unilateral actions over Cyprus led to several warnings from the international community. Despite UN resolutions and international pressure, Ankara kept Varosha closed off for 47 years (1974-2021), which was condemned by the U.N., the EU, the US, Russia and others. The Republic of Cyprus, mainly inhabited by Greek Cypriots, is part of the EU and spans over the southern two-thirds of the island.

Turkish Cypriots nonetheless are also able to get a Republic of Cyprus identity card and passport, and thus can access the EU. Multiple attempts to resolve the current partition of the island have been made, without success. Varosha thus became a bargaining chip: while the place holds a political and historical weight for Greece, Ankara and the Turkish Cypriot authorities aim to legitimate a breakaway Turkish Cypriot state and to officially part Cyprus, creating two states.

So far, previous UNSC resolution 1984 states that only original inhabitants of Varosha are allowed to settle in the region, which makes any attempts by the Turkish Cypriot leaders to administrate the place as illegitimate. The place thus became a ghost town for almost half a decade: since Turkish troops took control of the region, the place was kept sealed off. This partition is the result of the 1974 coup. Turkey launched an intervention on Cyprus against the Greek military junta's aborted coup aimed at uniting the island with Greece. At that time, around 180 000 Greek Cypriots fled the region, while Turkish Cypriots settled in the bandonned lands. They later claimed their independence, but only Ankara recognised their status. Since then, several negotiation attempts have been made from UN resolutions, to the 2017 talks, however the situation remained stagnant. Although, in October 2020, Turkey and Turkish Cypriots changed their stance.

Recently, the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar, announced the partial lifting of the restrictions, thus opening a part of the Turkish side of Cyprus. Not only have tourists been authorized in Varosha since 2020, but Tatar also invited Greek Cypriots in July to regain their properties and live under Turkish Cypriot administration. This move is, obviously, not innocent: while the Immovable Property Commission is a Turkish Cypriot legal body, endorsed by the European Court of Human Rights, it also adds legitimacy to Turkish Cypriots' claims if endorsed by the former inhabitants. However, this announcement led to reactions from various international actors, including the

Greek Cypriots authorities. In retaliation, the latter withdrew the Republic of Cyprus passports given to some leaders of the Turkish Cypriot community who participated in the project of opening back Varosha, under the accusation that said individuals declared their loyalty to an unilaterally recognised state and have undermined the security and sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus and its Constitution.

This itself has consequences since removing elements of their recognition of the Republic of Cyprus potentially sets the stage for Turkish Cypriots officials to gain international recognition with parallel nationality and passports, and thus opens the door to the annexation of the region by Turkey.

These tensions occur between the two countries, in a context already strained. Ankara's revisions over the region are indeed not limited to Cyprus, but also over maritime zones in which important reserves of gas have been discovered. Turkey's actions in regard to the Cypriot territory inscribe themselves in a trend: the Turkish side has repeatedly insisted in pursuing solutions outside of the UN frameworks. The current situation in Varosha is revealing a broader strategy, as Ankara pursues paths to establish its power in the region.

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Greece & Turkey

Filip Šandor

"I had predicted in the spring that we would have a quiet summer. I see no reason why we shouldn't have a quiet autumn and a quiet winter"

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Greece-Turkey relations – lack of tensions amid wildfires

In the middle of summer, the Turkey-Greece relations could be seen in a more favourable light. Amid the wildfires which erupted in both countries on 9 August, Greek Foreign Minister N. Dendias thanked his Turkish counterpart for sending two firefighting airplanes to Greece joining the international effort (more than 20 countries provided help to Greece) to stop the fires in the country. Just ten days before, Greece offered support to Turkey, also struggling with forest fires. The signs of goodwill and friendly gestures represented a positive momentum which had not significantly formed the mutual friendly relations. Signs of decreasing positive momentum could be seen amid the Afghan crisis when Greece built a 40 km fence and surveillance system on the border with Turkey to respond to the potential migrant wave. In a telephone conversation with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that a sharp increase in people leaving Afghanistan could pose "a serious challenge for everyone".

Old-new tensions

Tensions continued as on 6 September Turkish Defense Ministry released a statement claiming that Greece has continued to violate Turkey's airspace, territorial waters and the status of the demilitarised islands in the Aegean Sea. The Ministry claimed that so far in 2021, Greece

carried out 206 airspace violations, 27 territorial water violations, 95 aerial vehicle harassment and 790 violations by ships on islands with demilitarised status. On 9 September, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said that Turkey was determined to press ahead with efforts to search for energy in the eastern Mediterranean in areas where it believes Ankara and Turkish Cypriots have rights. Greece has rejected new accusations by Turkey of promoting "maximalist policies" and raising tension in the Aegean, and according to Greek diplomats, Turkey is determined to maintain rhetoric at high decibel levels. Tensions continued as a Turkish warship reportedly issued a warning to a Greek research vessel to prevent it from entering what Turkey considers its territorial waters. Although there was no direct conflict, the danger was illustrated when a Greek frigate collided with a Turkish warship in August. However, on 24 September, on the margin of UNGA, the Greek PM Mitsotakis stated that he would make every effort to seek cooperation with Turkey emphasising cooperation in the climate crisis and refugee issue, adding that history and geography connect both countries. On 28 September, on a visit to Paris, Mitsotakis expressed that he does not want an arms race with Turkey by signing the defence cooperation agreement with France. Greece also signed the 3 billion dollar treaty on the purchase of French frigates. This came along with the confirmation of purchasing the 24 Rafael jets from France. Mitsotakis marked the defence cooperation as a "historic day" for Greece and France, as they clearly showed their intention for strategic cooperation. Signing these agreements released the signal to the US for strategic autonomy of the EU (although it is only a bilateral agreement) and the answer for the announcement of creating a trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK and the US

(AUKUS). Concerning that, Greece confirmed its intention to renew a defence cooperation agreement with Washington on a five-year basis rather than an annual extension that usually takes place. Greece is aware that along with France, who is a very important partner in the Mediterranean region (Paris traditionally backs Greece in relation to Turkey), the US is also a key partner supporting the EastMed Gas Forum and the trilateral cooperation of Greece, Cyprus and Israel.

Turkish attempts for reconciliation

From the Turkish point of view, it continues working with energetic diplomacy to reconcile relations in the region. On 8 September, the second round of exploratory talks between Turkey and Egypt were held in Ankara. According to the Can Acun, a foreign policy expert at the Ankara-based Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), the normalisation of relations is difficult since the countries have diverging views on important matters such as the Muslim Brotherhood and maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cairo expects Turkey to officially recognise the current Abdel Fattah el-Sisi government as the country's legitimate authority. Turkey expects Egypt to sign an alternative agreement on maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stated Turkey's win-win policy in the region and pointed out Egypt's potential gains in the Eastern Mediterranean: "We will start negotiations on maritime jurisdictions if they want. If they deal with us, they will see more gains if they agree with us". Turkey claims that the maritime agreement with Greece is not satisfactory for Cairo and the new agreement with Turkey is probable.

The normalisation of relations with Egypt as the regional player is crucial for Turkey's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. At this point, there is no expectation for the intensive cooperation between these countries even if they agreed to have a joint statement after the second-round talks. In the statement, they addressed bilateral issues, as well as, a number

of regional topics, such as the situation in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean. The two countries agreed to continue these consultations and the need for further steps to facilitate normalisation of their relations.

Normalisation steps are also moving with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Last week, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held a phone call with UAE Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan for the first time after a year.

However, Egypt is firmly tightened with the new formatted coalition of states to stand Turkey in EastMed. Egypt is aware of its relative weakness to face Turkey in EastMed region and Ethiopia in the south with the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) issue. This is also crucial for Turkey, and its contributing to its intensified engagement in Sudan and South Sudan, which could be the leveraging point concerning Egypt (along with the GNA support in Libya).

On 14 August, Sudan's Sovereign Council chairman concluded a 2-day visit to Turkey during which several agreements and memorandums of understanding (mainly in the fields of energy, defence, finance, and media) were signed. During a news conference with al-Burhan, Erdogan said that Turkey "is committed to standing by the brotherly people of Sudan and their administration", expressing hope that al-Burhan's visit would herald in a new chapter in the friendly ties between the two countries. Moreover, on 17 August, Turkey agreed to strengthen and support the unification of forces after years of conflict in South Sudan.

However, the signs of reconciliation seem to be in the shadow of real strategic policy which is being created among partners in EastMed. On 26 September, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt held military drills in Greece. In early August, Egypt conducted a two-weeks joint air exercise in the UAE.

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