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Challenges in The Mediterranean region
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Foreword

The Mediterranean region is split between political alliances, long-term conflict and geopolitical interests. Between Cyprus and Turkey, tensions have accumulated, but the same can be said of Algeria and Morocco. On the other hand, peace initiatives emerge, as the New Sham project.

While new events highlight changes in the region, old wounds still remain. The Lebanese crisis is far from being over, and the same can be said of Syria. Both new and old events participate to the current regional dynamics, which we will present in this publication.
27/06/2021
Tripartite meeting between Egypt, Jordan, Iraq in Baghdad.

18/10/2021
Lebanon: IMF talks started, with finalized recovery plan due end of November

20/10/2021-04/11/2021
Turkey violated ceasefire with Russia, and prepares further attacks on Syria

23/10/2019
Algeria close its airspace to all Moroccan aircrafts

12/10/2021
Said Bouteflika was sentenced to two years in prison

17/10/2021
60th anniversary of the Paris Massacre

19/10/2021
European Commission’s report stated that Turkey had “ignored the EU’s recommendations” in terms of reforms to democracy and rule of law

22/10/2021
Latest peace negotiations on Syria labelled a ‘big disappointment’ by UN envoy

28/10/2021
Lebanon signs energy deal with Syria, Egypt and Jordan

31/10/2021
Presidents Erdogan and Biden’s meeting on the margins of the G20 Summit

09/11/2021
Turkey extended its troops’ presence in Azerbaijan for one more year

11/11/2021
The Algerian government announced the halt of gas exports to Spain via Morocco

13/11/2021
Turkish Cyprus’ new coalition government wins vote of confidence in the Assembly of the Republic
Recently, there has been a growing interest in Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in the Arab region. Many Arab countries have started to take serious steps towards women’s empowerment and inclusion in achieving and sustaining peace and security. For example, the United Arab Emirates issued its first plan for Women, Peace, and Security last June. Meanwhile, Egypt has declared its relentless pursuit to develop its Women, Peace, and Security national plan. Some Arab countries have advanced in this field like Iraq and Palestine, however, such progress remains limited in comparison with other regions. Although twenty years have passed since the security council issued its historic resolution 1325 of 2000, which focused on promoting women’s role in peace and security, there are still many challenges that stand in the way of women’s active participation in efforts towards peace and security which limit the ability of women to play many roles despite the availability of their expertise in this field or other related fields (Ibanga, 2015). This article highlights the most prominent challenges and presents some interventions and approaches to deal with them.

Challenges hindering the full participation of women in peace and security measures

Cultural and religious obstacles

Cultural and religious obstacles negatively affect the roles that women can play in the context of promoting peace and security, especially in light of the prevalence of patriarchal culture in traditional societies, which do not consider women as equal with men and do not recognize the ability of women to participate positively in these efforts (Idris and Abdelaziz, 2017; Verveer, 2016). The roles that women can play in this context besides their traditional roles remain very few or almost non-existent. When women seek to participate in any form of community activity, their families do not allow them to do so.

Exploiting women’s rights to achieve other goals

Exploiting women’s rights, gender equality, and empowerment to achieve security purposes or externally imposed agendas is one of the main challenges facing women in this field (EU, 2016; Fink et al., 2013; UN Women, 2016; OSCE, 2013). Some researchers emphasized that linking women’s rights agenda to national security agendas and activities may put women at risk of becoming targets of extremists or at least create a negative reaction to the women’s rights agenda in local communities (GCTF, 2015). Trust between local communities and women’s groups may be undermined if their activities are described as serving the goals of a particular security agenda. To achieve their goals, governments may compromise themselves over women’s rights in the context of negotiating with extremists if they existed (GCTF, 2015a). Therefore, it is necessary to empower women to advance gender equality and women’s rights agenda independently from the security agenda, regardless of whether or not this serves security objectives (CHRGJ, 2012). This can be done through the development of a comprehensive rights-based approach (UN Women, 2016). Female academics refer to the importance of gender equality, women’s economic empowerment, and education as important tools for promoting women’s integration and inclusion in promoting peace and security measures. Realistically, they adopt the Couture study issued in 2014 (2014:3), which shows that women’s
empowerment and gender equality can contribute positively to enhancing women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. There are some criticisms directed to this study, despite its importance and the importance of the argument it raises for its lack of coherent empirical data.

Logistical issues, lack of funding, and limited resources

Lack of funding and limited resources for women's groups hampers the inclusion of women in promoting peace and security efforts (Bhulai et al., 2016). Even when such funding is available, it is often not allocated to traditional security activities and actions (Satterthwaite and Huckerby 2013; d'Estaing, 2017). In this context, Esting's study notes that direct access to funding becomes more difficult for women's organizations due to donors' preference for transferring available funds to large organizations (2017:114).

Moreover, Qudrat in Fink et. al (2016:26) notes that there is a gap between peace and women's security (and women's rights group) which is dominated by women, and the traditional and hard-core security community, which is dominated by men. Where communication processes are absent and there is an atmosphere of mistrust between the two sides. Schaffler explains in her study that such a matter is a big problem because it leads to the traditional security community to produce research and analysis that lacks methodological strength on the one hand, or results in the research community missing basic data to maintain the validity of its results on the other hand (2015a:2). The work of these communities should be integrated to ensure that research is inclusive of this policy. The lack of coordination and cooperation between stakeholders is an obstacle to women's participation in promoting peace and security measures. There is a coordination gap within international development partners in their response to what can be done specifically for women.

This gap is found at all levels of participation in government sectors, the civil sector, donors and international development partners. This issue often leads to a redoubling of effort and the existence of unhealthy competition among stakeholders, which often results in setting an
agenda that does not meet the needs of local communities. Sometimes, receiving funds from international donors is often an entry point for local organizations’ subordination to those donors who gain the upper hand in defining the agenda and scope of interventions of peace and security activities. This agenda may not meet the needs of local communities or fit their context. International donors often favor large organizations over small ones. To overcome funding issues, there is a need for government intervention to ensure continuity or adequacy of funding sources for peace and security related engagements, especially psychological support for battered women.

Limited Instance and Discriminatory Legal Policies and Frameworks

Both Majoran (2015) and Fink et al. (2013) found that women are underrepresented in government agencies involved in security apparatus, particularly in the security sector. Despite their great importance, the number of women involved in shaping security strategies is very limited, and, in many cases, their presence is limited to consultation rather than direct participation (Satterthwaite and Huckerby, 2013). Also, many of the current policies and legal frameworks contain many discriminatory and biased texts against women. Such frameworks are neither gender-responsive nor gender-sensitive. Even if they exist, other problems arise related to the absence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that measure progress on the ground.

Disagreement over definitions and interventions related to peace and security

The lack of agreement on the definition and activities that fall under peace and security promotion, as Fink (2013) explains, is an additional challenge facing women’s participation in achieving them, as this matter hinders cooperation between stakeholders working in this field, which results in a redoubled effort and repetition of avoidable mistakes, as well as failure to satisfy the needs of local communities. Data and evidence show that women’s representation in all government agencies is marginal, especially in the formal and informal security sectors. This evidence echoes the literature which acknowledges that shallow representation is one of the main challenges to women’s meaningful participation and involvement in promoting peace and security. Even when women are represented, they are not allowed to be fully and actively empowered. Governments should make more efforts in this regard. Especially, since most of the current efforts are nothing more than last-minute decisions to show off or (honourable) representation only and without real content.

In light of these and other challenges, it seems pivotal to explore what mechanisms and strategies are effective to support women’s full and meaningful participation in the efforts of promoting peace and security. In this capacity, the literature has offered many steps and interventions that can be taken, including but not limited to the following.

Focusing on gaining the support of moderate religious leaders and advocates of men and women is vital to the success of efforts to promote women’s presence in peace and security measures. This is because religious leaders are well placed in their communities to play an important role in preventing exclusive narratives that hinder women’s presence in public life, especially in traditional societies where they wield considerable influence over the minds of individuals. Religious leaders, whether male or female, are responsible for developing alternative religious and cultural discourses to exclusive discourses (UN Women, 2016). Religious leaders can support women in their broader societal roles in parallel with their traditional roles as well as address the social stigma that afflicts women at all levels. Religious leaders should also stress the importance of education, especially girls’ education.
Their discourses should be appropriate and sensitive to the local context and be tailored to people’s real needs and issues. These discourses should also be broadcast extensively, especially in areas that are difficult to reach and communicate with, provided that they use various means of communication such as radio, television, and other media to reach a large number of people, bearing in mind that extremists also use these platforms effectively.

It is also important to have the full and active support of open-minded men to ensure gender mainstreaming in all security-related activities. This issue is crucial in traditional societies, which are male-dominated (UN Women, 2016; GCTF, 2015a).

Investing in education, women’s economic empowerment, and gender equality is a real entry point for better inclusion of women in promoting peace and security efforts, based on the success of these three issues in promoting women’s inclusion in peacebuilding and conflict prevention and resolution. Education can equip girls and women in the context of counter-radicalization, for example, by challenging extremist discourses and offering alternative models for peaceful coexistence and activism. Economic empowerment also increases women’s ability to express their opinions freely in the face of pressures from their families and traditional societies.

This necessarily coincides with the development of gender-sensitive and gender-sensitive special programs (GCTF, 2015a). These programs must address the needs of women as former members of violence groups or as victims and survivors of violence. These programs should take into account the fact that women have different motivations, needs, and experiences than men, and should form part of a comprehensive national security strategy designed specifically to promote security and end violence (UN Women, 2016). It is also linked to the need to ensure that different peace and security interventions are context-specific and tailored to the needs of local women to avoid any backlash stemming from cultural factors (Couture, 2014; GCTF, 2015a; Holmer, 2015). Therefore, women should be involved in all peace and security interventions throughout all phases of these interventions, including design, implementation, and evaluation (GCTF, 2015a). Programs that include women from the beginning should be evaluated to set the importance and relevance of women’s participation in these programs.

It is a must to start working on building the capacity of local women’s groups and organizations to ensure the effective implementation of different peace and security interventions (GCTF, 2015a; Bhulai et al., 2016; Fink et al., 2016; 2013). Potential areas for improvement include but are not limited to mediation, community engagement, communication, monitoring and evaluation, and program and activity management. Building the various capacities of women through various training programs, and here we mean ordinary citizens, whether they are mothers or not. The state agencies must cooperate with civil society organizations in building women’s capacities to obtain the best-desired results.

Finally, increasing the recruitment and training of women in the security services and removing any barriers that might hinder their professional development, as well as implementing gender-awareness training programs for all members of the security sector (OSCE, 2013; GCTF, 2015a; Fink et al., 2013; Bhulai et al., 2016; Idris and Abdelaziz, 2017; Hassan, 2017).

In Conclusion, this introductory and general analysis paves the way for a series of in-depth articles concerning the status of Women, Peace and Security agenda in the Middle East and Mediterranean in the coming issues.
Sources


Events in the run-up to the 38th anniversary of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) unilateral and non-recognised declaration of independence marked heightening tensions between Turkey and Greece. Turkey’s pursuit of a two-state solution strategy in Cyprus is resisted by Greece and the international community, but Erdogan’s regional adventurism and influence in TRNC appears to be heightening.

The Cyprus question

Cyprus remains an extraordinary diplomatic question; one island, one country, but split into two entities; the Greek Cypriot side to the south west and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) side to the north east. Turkey annexed the territory in 1974 through the unlawful use of force (Henrikson, 2019). The TRNC has not been recognised by any state apart from Turkey. On-the-ground in Cyprus a 57-year-old UN peacekeeping force (UN Peacebooking, 2021) supervises ceasefire lines (UNFICYP, 2021) and engages with civil society (UNFICYP factsheet, 2021), yet at the strategic level a series of UN facilitated negotiations repeatedly fail (Alexandros Fotiadis, 2021) to produce a permanent solution. The Greek Cypriots favour a federal system (Greek Times 2021), the Turkish favour a two-state solution (Euractiv, 2021). With growing regional tensions and entrenching positions on both the Turkish and Greek sides, is the Cyprus question actually answerable?

What has happened recently?

38th anniversary of TRNC unilateral declaration of independence

On November 15 the 38th anniversary of the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) of 1983 was observed by both sides. In Cyprus, the next generation of citizens, university and high school students, protested against the UDI while calling for a federal solution to the Cyprus problem (Jonathan Shkurko, 2021).

Media coverage on the November 15 from the respective sides was particular insightful into the current geopolitical realities. The pro-Turkish outlet, the Daily Sabah, led with the title ‘Turkish Cyprus celebrates 38th anniversary of independence’ (Daily Sabah, 2021). The article strongly pushes pro-Turkish and anti-Greek narratives in Cyprus, employing emotive language, “many years of suffering under the oppression of the Greek side” in reference to the situation before the forceful Turkish annexation in 1974. Embedded in the piece is a tweet from Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu “We will continue to walk shoulder to shoulder with our Turkish Cypriot brothers in the TRNC’s fight for the future and independence!”. With similar emotive vigour, published at almost exactly the same time, the Greek City Times published an article entitled ‘Cyprus marks 38th black anniversary of declaration of illegal ‘state’ in north’ (Greek City Times, 2021). The article restates the current Greek Cypriot position “The government and political parties strongly condemn the move [continued annexation] which violates international law and UN resolutions”. The article adds the Greek Cypriot continued commitment to a federalised system, observing its failure to materialise till now is “mainly due to the Turkish intransigence.”

On the same day, Greek Cypriot diaspora in
Britain, Cyprus’ former colonial power and ‘guarantor’, penned an open letter to British PM Johnson. The letter denounced Turkish ambitions for the permanent partition in Cyprus. Moreover, they stress that the “United Kingdom, as a permanent member of the Security Council must defend international law and insist on a solution based on the UN resolution”. Whilst the British strategy in Cyprus will be discussed later in this article it is important to note Britain’s continued involvement and responsibility (perceived and real) to the island.

Embroided TRNC governance

On the November 13, Turkish Cyprus’ new coalition government wins vote of confidence in the Assembly of the Republic (Hurriyet Daily News, 2021). Prime Minister Ersan Saner had stepped down as PM on October 13 (Daily Sabah, 2021b), citing that the minority coalition formed in December 2020 was “no longer sustainable” (T-Vine, 2021). In late October, Saner was implicated in a scandal (Theo Ioannou, 2021), forcing his resignation from his UBP party. Saner said he was framed (Theo Ioannou, 2021). Social media ostensibly supports him, suggesting the mafia (Twitter @GuidoFawkes, 2021) and Erdogan’s (Twitter @cevheriguven, 2021) influence may be responsible. Saner was the leader of the UBP party, later replaced by Faiz Sucuoglu on October 31 (Evie Andreou, 2021). The tripartite coalition of the UBP, the DP and the Rebirth Party (YDP) was approved by President Ersin Tatar last December. It appears that this vote of confidence is a temporary measure allowing the minority government of UBP and DP (YDP notably absent from reporting) to govern until early elections - which are now expected in the first quarter of next year, one year ahead of schedule (AA, 2021).

Energy

Currently the island is powered almost exclusively by heavy fuel oil and limited renewable energy sources. The government is making efforts to import natural gas for domestic use (Trade.gov, 2021).

On November 9 the UAE foreign minister visited Cyprus. The UAE and Cypriot representatives spoke about closer ties bilateral ties, building on April’s cooperation meeting on energy, in partnership with Israel and Greece. Last year the UAE joined an alliance with Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and France opposing Turkey’s offshore energy exploration activities in the area (Al-Monitor).

Just two days after the UAE foreign minister visited Cyprus, the EU Observer on November 11 reported that the EU is choosing to end Cyprus’ energy isolation by “funding of €100m to Cyprus for the construction of the EuroAsia Interconnector to link Europe’s electricity network with that of Israel”. The article suggests this comes at moral expense of “complicity in Israel’s colonial settlement enterprise in the Occupied Palestinian Territory” (EU Observer, 2021).

These recent developments reflects the geopolitical realities of Cyprus’ search for energy imports; building and balancing relationships in Europe and the Middle East.

Security

Cyprus’ key security issues are driven by the the Greek–Turkish tensions, with Greece’s strategic allies supporting the Greek side, and Turkey backing the TRNC.

On November 5, the Defence Post reported that Israel’s military will build an electronic surveillance system, monitoring activity along the UN-patrolled ‘Green Line’ across the divided island. The surveillance system will monitor activity such as “smuggling and illegal migration, as well as provide military intelligence”, officials said (The Defense Post, 2021).

As a possible response on November 8, the
TRNC criticised an arms program of Greek Cypriot administration. The Turkish Daily Sabah said the "Greek Cypriot side's increased military alliances against the TRNC and its purchase of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and heavy weapons were clearly visible", (Daily Sabah, 2021c) adding a comment from the TRNC foreign ministry "the Greek Cypriot administration continuing arming itself to threaten our country, pursuing provocative activities, is serving nothing other than raising tensions on the island and region."

As with the energy sector, it is likely that the Greek–Cypriots will continue to deepen relationships with allies through security cooperation contracts, in part for legitimate security concerns on the island, but also in part as a strategic counterweight to perceived Turkish influence.

Migration

Cyprus is looking to curb irregular migration to the island, as numbers are significantly increasing in 2021 (Reuters, 2021).

On November 10, the Republic of Cyprus accused Turkey of orchestrating a crisis by allowing irregular migrants to cross over from the TRNC (France 24, 2021) Migrant flows recorded in Cyprus in 2021 were 38 percent higher than for all of last year, said government spokesperson, Marios Pelekanos. In the first 10 months of the year, 10,868 irregular migrants arrived in Cyprus, 9,270 having crossed the island’s dividing line in a "prescribed and conscious policy by Turkey". There are 33,000 people already "illegally" residing in the republic. 5,000 of which have had their asylum applications rejected but Pelekanos said that they cannot be deported because "there is no coherent EU policy or agreement with their home countries on sending them back".

In May, Cyprus said it was in a "state of emergency" because of an inflow of Syrian migrants overwhelming reception centres. In the past four years, the number of asylum seekers in Cyprus has reached four percent of its population, compared to one percent in other EU states (The Defense Post, 2021).

Organised crime

The Organised Crime Index currently positions Cyprus very low at 134th of 193 countries. In particular, the criminal markets for human trafficking and human smuggling in Cyprus are considerable. Russian criminal groups and governmental corruption are also problems on the island (OC Index, 2021).

On November 15, 18 suspected trafficking victims were found in Nicosia (Nick Theodoulou, 2021). This was particularly notable for two reasons, firstly some of the victims were of Russian origins. Russian ties illicit and organised crime in Cyprus has been well documented (CSD, 2020). Secondly, from a human security and justice perspective, Cyprus was recently downgraded in the US State Department’s 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, primarily due to a lack of convictions on the issue (Evie Andreou, 2021b).

On November 12, the Cyprus police announced they would probe how a docked migrant boat loaded with migrants "gave them the slip" and continued its journey to Italy (Washington Post, 2021).

On November 7, Cyprus issued terrorism charges against six individuals for an alleged plot to kill five Israelis (Times of Israel, 2021). Three Pakistani nationals have been charged, with the leader from Azerbaijan. The other suspect holds Cypriot citizenship, and no identifying information was released about the sixth suspect. Charges of forged passports and money laundering have also been brought, and some of the group have links to Hezbollah and an allied Iranian-backed militia.

UNFICYP civil society engagement through environment
On November 12, a good news piece was published about the UN peacekeeping mission, UNFICYP (France 24, 2021). The mission engages civil society in an environmental clean-up drive, describing the effort as a “unifier”. “We are all living in the same island, actually, and we share many similarities and many values,” said Lahoud, who in August joined the two-week Youth Champions programme which brought together people from both sides of the island, with a focus on environmental peacebuilding.” It is notable that the article features photographs of Russian police and Slovakian peacekeepers only, though they are not mentioned in the article. Russian-Slovak relations are generally good (China CEE, 2021), both do not recognise breakaway republics for their own internal reasons, (Craig Turp-Balazs, 2020), and both have good relations with the Greeks and Greek Cyprus (Eduard Heger, 2020), (Krisztina Hegedüs, 2020).

Why is this happening?

Turkish Strategy

Cyprus is part of Turkey’s strategic design. Erdogan’s strategy in the eastern Mediterranean is his neo-Ottoman “Mavi Vatan” (Blue Homeland) doctrine (Antonia Colibasanu, 2021). Turkey aims to support the two state solution, persuading the international community to recognise the TRNC. This would lead to the successful de jure Turkish annexation. By persuading the international community to recognise the TRNC it would become its own state, a strategically positioned puppet in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey could then facilitate the TRNC integration into Turkey should it choose. Both courses of action will give Turkey greater presence in the Mediterranean, and give Turkey much needed leverage in an ongoing exclusive economic zone maritime dispute between itself and Greece. (Institutmontaigne, 2020).

Following Turkey’s contribution to last year’s Nagorno-Karabakh conflict it was rumoured Azerbaijan were close to recognising the TRNC this Summer (Duran Podcast, 2021). Recognition never came, and despite Turkey wooing some of the central Asian states as well as some Muslim states including the Balkan Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia it is highly unlikely any country will recognise the TRNC any time soon. The precedent, the damage to the recognising state’s international credibility and the damage to the respected international law principle of ex injuria jus non oritur (illegal acts do not create law) would be too grave.

In spite of Erdogan’s dashed hope of Azeri recognition, Erdogan visited the TRNC this summer, suggesting the Cyprus question is still high on his agenda. Erdogan is employing various instruments of state influence and is planting seeds now to create narratives of tomorrow. A key example of this is the reopening of Varosha, a city to the east that straddles the Green Line. Varosha has been closed to the public for 47 years. Many Greek Cypriots lost their property in Varosha due to the conflict, leaving them with no recourse to reparations. A lawfare strategy employed by Turkey and Turkish Cyprus can be detected, whereby the authorities offer the opportunity of letting some Greek Cypriots reclaim their Varosha property if they accept the rule of the breakaway Turkish Cypriot state as legitimate (Independent, 2021). This is causing consternation and discord at diplomatic levels, with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell “very concerned” (France 24, 2020). Tensions will also be felt on the ground amongst Greek citizens. The more people that take up this offer, the more difficult it becomes for others in the international courts such as the ICJ or at individual ECtHR applications. The Turkish side will then argue that when enough people have consented to this offer, it has become de facto reality and therefore consented to. By people accepting this offer, it weakens the people that don’t take it. This becomes a question of money, and people cannot be blamed for putting their own individual interests first, after 47 years of loss. As the Economist put it, the Verosha issue “further
complicates the Herculean task of reuniting the island” (Economist, 2021).

Turkish media has already begun to portray the reopening of what it calls Maras as a success story for all (Daily Sabah, 2021d).

It is against this backdrop that recent events in Cyprus can be linked to Turkish strategy on the island. Erdogan’s Turkey will continue to push emotive narratives in the media landscape, as well as ensuring that “he alone calls the shots in northern Cyprus”, (SWP–Berlin, 2020), influencing the TRNC administration. Turkey will continue developing the TRNC in order to make it appear more state-like. It is also possible that migration flows from the Middle East and Africa will continue to arrive at the TRNC’s shores, slipping through to the Greek Cypriot side - building pressure for the EU. Whilst no evidence can confirm Turkish command and control, the use of migration flows into Europe is an increasingly common hybrid warfare tactic (MWI, 2021).

Organised crime linked to Turkish interests is likely to continue having an impact in Cyprus, particularly socio-cultural impacts on local communities.

Erdogan will continue to try to strengthen relationships with Muslim countries, framing himself as a voice of Muslims everywhere (Economist, 2020). On the November 9 Turkey extended troops in Azerbaijan for one more year (Daily Sabah, 2021e) with conflict flaring again between Azerbaijan and Armenia on the evening of November 16 (BBC, 2021). It is possible Erdogan will try to seek return on this favour with Azeri recognition in the TRNC. On August 16 the needle moved closer to the TRNC’s first recognition when Pakistan pledged “solidarity” with the TRNC (Daily Sabah, 2021f).

On November 25 the Turkish Daily Sabah (Daily Sabah, 2021g) repeated Tatar’s definitive remarks “the federation is no longer an option on the table for the government and our president.” (Greek City Times, 2021).

What will Greece do?

It is highly unlikely that any Greek Cypriots will ever accept any security guarantees from the Turkish side. Greek Cypriots do not feel safe to let the UN peacekeeping mission UNFICYP leave (Monocle 24: The Foreign Desk, 2021).

Greece will continue to push for a Bi-communal and Bi-zonal Federation (Bianet, 2002) as defined in paragraph 11 of the Secretary-General’s report of 3 April 1992 (UN Secretary-General, 1992).

Greece will likely continue strengthening international relations with strategic partners, isolating Ankara further. Recent meetings with Christian Orthodox allies Armenia is a good example of this. On November 11 the Armenia-Cyprus Friendship Park was inaugurated in Nicosia (Siranush Ghazanchyan, 2021). The two counties have a shared competitor in Turkey.

Recent diplomatic engagement with Georgia has also been demonstrated (Agenda.ge, 2021) (Agenda.ge, 2021b). Like Cyprus, Georgia shares the experience of an occupier who has annexed territory seeking strategic advantage.

Greece historically has good ties with Russia, with Russia supportive of Greece over the Cyprus issue. Russia favours a “just, viable, and comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus issue that complies with international law”, and has described the reopening of Varosha as "unilateral" and “unacceptable (Daily Sabah, 2021h).

Greek and Greek Cypriot diaspora living in the UK will likely continue petitioning the British government into action. It is likely however that the status quo suits Britain’s strategic interests; access to two military bases in the eastern Mediterranean less than 175KM from the Middle East. A federalised solution or two-state solution will likely see Britain lose access.

Alliances in recent energy and security
arrangements has seen Greece move closer to Israel, UAE, France, Egypt.

Some pro-Russian commentators suggests there is a weakness of Greek and Cypriot diplomacy in their foreign policy (Daily Sabah, 2021h). In extremis, Greece could take action at the European council, vetoing sanctions on Russia over Ukraine, arguing that similar steps should be taken with Turkey. Whilst this is highly unlikely to happen, it would change the dynamic. It would force the EU to listen to Greek complaints due to the EU’s unanimity rule.

Greece will likely take a less sensationalist approach than Ankara, and generally enjoys popular support in Europe and strong regional alliances. Conversely, as the increasingly authoritarian Erdogan is seen as too extreme in many diplomatic circles, his own extremism may itself act as a buffer to the two-state solution. Should a more reasonable, rational Turkish leader pursue the strategy then this may change the direction of travel back towards a two-state solution.

What next?

Unfortunately for Cyprus, a resolution is not in sight anytime soon. This was again made clear by Greece’s Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias on November 16 who said “Unfortunately, I am not optimistic about the prospect of resolving the Cyprus issue” when asked about Turkish-Cypriot President Ersin Tatar’s continued insistence of a two-state solution (The National Herald, 2021).

The crucial points to watch in the immediate future include the speed of development and the arrival of Turkish identifying citizens in the TRNC, in particular to the newly reopened city of Varosha. In turn, the Greek Cypriot reactions will be important. On-the-ground facts will be crucial, and the UNFICYP mission remains integral to this. It will have to preemptively put out little fires in a classic peacekeeping and engagement role. An increase in deployed troop numbers would represent an indication of the UN’s growing concerns of possible conflict. Bureaucratic details that affect the daily lives of people on the either side of the of the island will also be crucial, for example the UK government’s refusal to accept the vaccination status of those in the TRNC, including its own British born-Turkish Cypriots (T-Vine, 2021b) will further antagonise tensions.

It is unlikely that recognition for the TRNC will come in the short-mid term, despite recent speculation from Pakistan and Azerbaijan.

Cyprus needs to clean up its own affairs from human security concerns such as organised crime, trafficking, hostile state corrosive capital, and last year’s revelatory Cyprus papers scandal still needs to be addressed (Al Jazeera, 2020).

At an even grander scale, the Cyprus question undermines the credibility of NATO, the world’s oldest and biggest collective defence organisation.

Total Turkish citizens outnumber Greek citizens by 8:1, a ratio roughly matched by each country’s GDP. Greece will have to continue engaging with regional allies to counterbalance this.

Turkey will continue to support hardening rhetoric in the TRNC, further emboldening the TRNC President Tatar. President Erdogan will continue to push for the two state solution, to which the Greeks and Greek Cypriots will steadfastly refuse.

Anniversaries mean a lot to people. Between now and the 40th milestone of the TRNC’s UDI in 2023, a lot could change. Of most significance to Cyprus may well not actually be occurring on the island of Cyprus; the Turkish presidential and parliamentary election is scheduled for 18 June 2023. Erdogan’s preparations for the election and the result itself may have the most significant consequences for the future of Cyprus.


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The year 2021 has proven to be a rather unstable period for Algeria’s political dynamics both domestically and internationally. This brief situation report will focus on the latest events related to domestic politics, as well as Algeria’s current tensions in regards to its bilateral relations with Morocco and France.

As for the domestic sphere, in mid-September Algeria faced the death of ex-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, which represents a relevant event in the country’s post-colonial history. Like other countries in North Africa, Bouteflika served as president for a considerable amount of time (from 1999 to 2019), a period that proved difficult for Algeria, given the constant political instability due to ongoing civil wars. While his government contributed to the so-called ‘war on terror’ (which gave him international support of his regime) by battling groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, his two decades as president were also tainted by continuous corruption allegations. This is why, shortly after current president Tebboune was elected in 2019, many of Bouteflika’s close allies were prosecuted by the Algerian justice, most predominantly, his brother, Said Bouteflika, who was sentenced to two years in prison in mid-October, 2021.

Additionally, it is important to mention that, in late September, Algeria “started producing the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Chinese firm Sinovac” (RFI, 2021). While their main objective is to promote domestic immunization, Algeria, the largest country in Africa, plans on exporting the vaccine to other nations in the region, since it is one of the 6 countries in Africa where Covid-19 vaccines are being produced (Usman & Ovadia, 2021). This will certainly provide considerable leverage vis-à-vis other African nations, and could play a vital role in how political dynamics are influenced by external partners in the upcoming years (considering that Chinese and Russian companies have taken the lead in vaccine production in the continent, while western pharmaceuticals have chosen to keep their production solely in South Africa).

In terms of bilateral relations, during the past couple of months Algeria has experienced fluctuating dynamics with two historical partners: Morocco and France. As for Morocco, tensions continue on high levels after both countries cut diplomatic ties in late August, with no possibility of reaching an agreement in the short-term [1]. As part of the ongoing issues between the neighboring nations, in late-September Algeria announced they would close their airspace to all Moroccan aircrafts – both civilian and military – due to hostilities arising from the Moroccan side (Deutsche Welle, 2021).

While there were no major reactions from the Moroccan government, and tensions seemed to have reached a stalemate, both countries faced a new wave of conflict during the first days of November, after three Algerians were killed in an alleged bombing in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott. Similar to what happened in mid-August with the raging wildfires in the Kabylie region, the Algerian government “accused Moroccan forces in the disputed Western Sahara of being behind the attack” (AP News, 2021). So far, Morocco has denied any involvement in the alleged bombing.

In the case of bilateral relations with France, tensions began to surface in late September. The

escalation started when the European nation announced a 30% reduction on visa issuances (Chrisafis, 2021) for Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia – all three, former French colonies –, alleging these countries have failed to tackle undocumented immigration from their nationals in French territory. Algeria responded to the aforementioned measures by summoning the French ambassador for talks during the first days of October.

The general situation did not improve after President Emmanuel Macron allegedly made “irresponsible” remarks in relation to the existence of an Algerian nation prior to French colonization (Goillandeu, 2021), which prompted Algeria to respond with a ban of French military planes from its airspace, and recalling its ambassador to France for consultations. Algerian president Tebboune stated on November 10 that their ambassador would only return to France after the European nation shows “total respect” for their state (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Tensions between both nations continued escalating, especially since president Macron’s remarks were made in the context of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Paris Massacre, when the police killed dozens of Algerians in Paris during a demonstration against French colonization, their bodies allegedly thrown into the Seine River (Rouaba, 2021). The event was covered up for decades until the former president François Hollande finally recognized the massacre took place in Paris; and while president Macron stated that the actions of the police were “inexcusable” and “unforgivable” many Algerian families consider this does not represent a proper apology, and that the government has announced no process for reparations (BBC, 2021).

The current political situation has Algeria surrounded by several disputes that could contribute to the increase of instability in the north of Africa, especially in the ongoing conflict in Western Sahara. In late October, the United Nations extended the peacekeeping mission in the territory, in an attempt to end the historical conflict. There is no denying that Algeria – who supports the Polisario Front’s claims – will remain a key party to ensure a political solution to the dispute. However, while tensions remain high with neighboring Morocco, there are fewer chances for all parties involved to come up with a plausible strategy for peace.

Moreover, the recent tensions with France could set a precedent for further issues with other countries surrounding the Mediterranean. For example, considering that Algeria remains a key oil and gas producer in the region, maintaining a relative peace among its neighbors could prevent the already reactive government from responding with extreme measures like cutting their supply to other countries. In fact, on November 11, Algeria announced they would halt their gas exports to Spain via Morocco (Africa News, 2021), a move that ultimately affects the European nation whose main gas supplier is Algeria. This represents a basic example of how bilateral tensions with Morocco ultimately affect relations with third parties, and could trigger higher levels of insecurity in the region. Considering recent developments in vaccine production, it would not come as a surprise if Algeria chose to engage in similar strategies with neighboring partners who are not aligned with their political interests.
Sources


During the past two months, Turkey has been at the center of several events that have affected its local and international political dynamics. This brief situation report will focus on three main areas of concern for Turkey: its bilateral relations with the US (and ultimately, with NATO), its multilateral relations with European states, and its current economic situation.

Turkey–US relations are probably one of the most significant developments in terms of peace and security in the past couple of months in the Mediterranean. Earlier this year, a period of high tensions surfaced among NATO members after Turkey received the first shipment of the Russian S-400 defence system, a move that had already been questioned by countries like the US, who opted for sanctions towards the Mediterranean country should their deal with Russia continue [1].

During the last UN General Assembly in mid-September, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan expected to meet with President Biden to tackle this issue directly, in the hopes that both parties could reach an agreement and lower tensions. In the midst of the US’ exit from Afghanistan and the Taliban taking over the county, Turkey offered military assistance to safeguard Kabul’s airport to ensure the safety of those who chose to eave the country. This proposal was one of Turkey’s bargaining chips in mending its relation with the US, alleging that both countries continue being strategic partners in terms of security, and that they have a common agenda in the issues surrounding the situation in Afghanistan (Wilks, 2021).

Turkey’s international relations status has fluctuated during the past few weeks, triggering a series of local events that have affected the Mediterranean country’s economy in the short term. While October started as a productive month for Turkey – ratifying the Paris Agreement ahead of the COP26 meeting in Glasgow, and setting for a diplomatic tour in Angola, Nigeria and Togo – a couple of setbacks have appeared, threatening its international agenda. On the one hand, Turkey’s accession to the European Union faced a recent obstacle, after a European Commission report stated that the country had “ignored the EU’s recommendations” in terms of reforms to democracy and rule of law (Al Jazeera, 2021a). This report has led to a new

standstill in their process to join the EU, which, despite starting in 2005, has not yet achieved a definitive outcome.

On the other hand, Turkey had to deal with an unexpected move from ambassadors of several western nations during the last month. Diplomats from 10 different countries in Ankara released a joint statement that called for the release of philanthropist Osman Kavala, who was arrested in 2017, accused of being involved in the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. Nevertheless, Kavala remains in prison up to this date, without a conclusive verdict from the Turkish judiciary system. The statement prompted president Erdogan to declare the involved ambassadors ‘persona non grata’ for meddling in internal affairs, and ordering their immediate expulsion from the territory, a declaration that was taken back after several European countries condemned the decision (Euronews, 2021).

Finally, in the midst of these events – after which President Erdogan ultimately decided not to attend the COP26 meeting – Turkey’s economy has suffered a significant impact. While the Mediterranean nation has conducted talks with the United Arab Emirates during 2021 to procure beneficial investments, internal economic management and the aforementioned multilateral tensions have ultimately affected the country’s currency and inflation rate. Since late September, the Turkish lira has faced a continuous devaluation against the US dollar. From 8.75 on September 23, to 9.34 on October 18, to an all-time low of 9.97 on November 11, meaning, only in 2021, the currency has not only "lost 25% of its value" but is also facing a growing inflation of almost 20% (Al Jazeera, 2021b). This situation could jeopardize investment opportunities for Turkey in the long term, as well as undermining its credibility with new potential partners in regions like North and Central Africa (Daily Sabah, 2021).

The general geopolitical context suggests Turkey will close 2021 with rising socioeconomic dissatisfaction at the local sphere, and increasing tensions with other Western nations in the international arena. Continuing disagreements with other NATO and EU member states could prove a considerable challenge for Turkey’s economy in 2022, which could potentially influence the general elections scheduled for 2023. At the same time, the constant discrepancies with the US in terms of defense could push Turkey to make a definitive move towards other actors in the region. This decision would most likely increase instability in the region, considering the strategic role Turkey plays in the Mediterranean, especially in ongoing conflicts like the Syrian Civil War and the uncertainties of the new Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Sources


Following almost 10 years of civil war, Syria is no closer to achieving peace. The country has been plagued by constant foreign intervention and the perpetual failures of peace negotiations, resulting in a crippled economy and a huge humanitarian crisis.

The decade of war, combined with the Covid-19 pandemic, have left the country’s economy and people in shambles. The country’s infrastructure has been decimated and there is a lack of clean water and sanitation. Currently, over 11 million people in Syria require humanitarian aid, as over 80% of the population lives below the poverty line (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Furthermore, over the last year, the national currency has significantly depreciated, resulting in an inability to secure basic needs and goods such as food and medicines. The war has also meant a mass displacement of Syrians. Currently, there are around 6.8 million internally displaced people in Syria, and many (5.6 million) have sought refuge outside the country in neighboring Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon (BBC, 2021).

This economic situation is not helped by the numerous international sanctions that have been placed on Syria. The sanctions placed by the United States (US) and the European Union include asset freezes, travel bans and trade restrictions. And in the case of the former, the arms embargo and financial sanctions have been described as some of the most far-reaching sanctions ever imposed (Walker, 2016). In 2020, the US introduced additional sanctions under the Caesar Act, which greatly impacted the "local economy especially in the construction, energy, and financial sectors" (Hassan & Presbitero, 2021). Not only did these prevent reconstruction of the country, but they also failed to achieve their main objective, which is the weakening of the Bashar al-Assad regime.

Regarding the conflict(s), as the situation stands right now, government forces have reclaimed control over Syria’s biggest cities. However, rebels, jihadists and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) retain control over many parts of the country, namely Idlib, northern Hama and western Aleppo provinces (BBC, 2021).

Recently, two ceasefires have been negotiated. In October 2019, Turkey signed a ceasefire with Russia and the United States to end its military operations against the SDF. Furthermore, in March 2020, Turkey and Russia signed a ceasefire concerning Turkey’s attacks in Idlib (BBC, 2021; Farooq, 2021).
However, Turkey and the SDF have both accused each other of violating the ceasefire. For instance, in October of this year, Turkey launched a drone attack on Kobane in violation of the ceasefire. Turkey “often threatens offensives against Syrian Kurdish forces” and despite calls from organizations and countries to respect the ceasefire, it is currently actively preparing to launch an offensive (Daily Sabah with Reuters, 2021).

These planned attacks come right after the Turkish parliament extended its mandate for operations in Syria for another two years (The Defense Post, 2021). Since 2016, Turkey has been launching offensives/counterterrorism operations in northern Syria including Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018) and Peace Spring (2019). The goal of these operations has been the prevention of the “formation of a terror corridor” (Daily Sabah with Reuters, 2021), but more than that, they aim to project Turkey's power and maintain a sphere of influence in Syria (Dri, 2021). They are also aligned with Turkey's overall policy towards the Kurds, which is the breaking up of their area of control. Notably, this also has the consequence of making it easier for the Assad regime to re-take control over this region in the future (Farooq, 2021).

However, Turkey’s plans of attack are complicated by Russian and US presence in the region. Several potential areas for offensive maneuvers would require clearance from Russia, and would “test the limits of the countries’ cooperation post the 2020 ceasefire agreement” (Ibid). However, this is unlikely given recent tensions and Russia’s overall objective of supporting the Assad regime, as opposed to Turkey’s further expansion. The United States, who support People’s Defense Units (YPG), a Kurdish militia and main component of the SDF, also present a challenge to further attacks. Though the Trump administration has allowed for Turkey to take over more areas in northern Syria in the past, Biden is unlikely to “ignore any new Turkish operation that includes attacks on the SDF” (Ibid) as these forces constitute a key component of its fight against Islamic terrorists.

However, these three actors are not the only ones with a stake in the Syrian conflict. For instance, countries like Iran, Afghanistan, Yemen and the Lebanese Hezbollah have sent support to Assad. On the other hand, various Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar gave arms and money to rebel groups (BBC, 2021). But the war demonstrates how quickly alliances can change. With Assad entrenching his position in Syria, previous opponents of the government have changed their tune. For instance, the United Arab Emirates reopened its embassy in Damascus in 2018, called for Syria to be readmitted into the Arab League and announced plans in October 2021 to deepen economic ties with Syria through the latest solar plant deal (Harb, 2021; The Arab Weekly, 2021). Relations with Jordan also appear to be improving, as exemplified by the reopening of the main border crossing between the countries (Harb, 2021). Qatar, however, has no such plans, and continues to refuse normalizing ties with the Syrian government (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Lastly, it is worth noting the slow progress of the peace negotiations aimed at ending the conflict. Peace negotiations started back in 2012, with little to show for them. Most recently, in 2019 the Syrian Constitutional Committee (after a lot of back and forth discussions) was created in order to draft a Constitution for Syria under the supervision of the United Nations. The committee consists of 150 members, with 50 representatives belonging to each of the main stakeholders: the government, opposition and civil society (UN News, 2021). Great expectations were placed on the October meeting, the first meeting since a 9 month long break. However, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, declared it to be a ‘big disappointment.’ There was no agreement on any of the constitutional provisions as there was an evident lack of understanding on how to move forward. This is clearly reflected in the fact that there was no date set for future negotiations (Chehayeb, 2021). Against this backdrop, parallel talks are set to continue between Iran, Turkey
and Russia regarding the ceasefire in Syria around December (Tass, 2021).

As such, it is clear that Syria’s economic and humanitarian situation is unlikely to improve as long as the conflicts continue. However, it is also clear that the responsibility for ending this fight is not only with the Syrian people, but also with the foreign powers involved. At least for the foreseeable future, the situation in northern Syria is likely to remain the same, with the resumption of widespread violence being unlikely, unless major changes occur either in Turkish–U.S. or Turkish–Russian relations. (Erkmen, Heras & Semenov, 2021).

Sources


The end of 2021 does not paint a bright future for Lebanon, as the country continues to struggle with what the World bank has called "the greatest financial crisis since the 19th century," (Leonhardt & Yar, 2021).

Economic turmoil and corruption, guided by a sluggish and corrupt political elite (Houri 2021), have been bubbling under the surface for years, reaching a boiling point in 2020 when following the Beirut port explosion, the government resigned amid mass protests. The lack of government for over 13 months with the raging Covid-19 pandemic has brought the country to this critical point.

The United Nations (UN) currently estimates that 78 percent of Lebanese people live below the poverty line, with 36 percent of the population living in extreme poverty (Chehayeb, 2021c). Almost a quarter of the population now relies on the World Food Programme (Rogers, 2021). Furthermore, since 2019, the value of the Lebanese lira has plummetted by 90%. Given Lebanon’s reliance on imports, this resulted in a shortage of basic supplies like food, medicine, fuel and electricity (Karoutsos, 2021). In the last few months, the shortage of fuel, and therefore electricity, has been particularly apparent. Around mid-October, Lebanon’s two biggest power stations shut down because of fuel shortages (BBC, 10 October, 2021) and this has not been an isolated event (BBC, 9 July, 2021). This does not come as much of a surprise, given the alarming rise in gasoline prices in recent weeks. Currently “refilling an entire tank for a standard car costs more than the country’s national minimum wage”(Chehayeb, 2021b).

The new government is making some progress on this front. For one, it recently signed an energy deal with Syria, Egypt and Jordan. With this deal Egypt will be able supply natural gas to Lebanon via a pipeline that passes through Jordan and Syria (Reuters, 2021b). The deal was particularly contentious as it required the United States to sign a waiver on its Cesar Act, which sanctions the Bashar Al-Assad regime (Morning Express, 2021). Many have pointed to how the energy crisis in Lebanon has actually benefited Syria, allowing it to start regaining its credibility in the international arena (Hussain, 2021). While the benefits for Syria appear immediate, the pipeline will not be operational until the end of the year, leaving Lebanon in crisis for some time. Lebanon’s crisis further creates a situation for yet another outcast to come forward. As a way to continue growing its expanding influence in the Middle East, Iran offered to build two power stations in Lebanon in an 18 month period, and rebuild Beirut’s port. This Iranian offer of help creates concern for Israel, which fears the consequences of encroaching Iranian influence.

Altogether, it is evident that the solutions to Lebanon’s energy crisis will take a long time to materialize. A similar conclusion could potentially be drawn about its talks with the International Monetary Fund. The talks were relaunched at the beginning of November and, according to the Prime Minister, they are advancing well. A revised financial recovery plan is set to be completed at the end of November (Reuters, 2021a). However, experts remain skeptical, as the current government may choose to maintain the status quo of the political system (Sabaghi, 2021).

In addition to Lebanon’s economic problems, internal strife is also reaching an apex. The last couple of months have been marked by protests regarding the investigation of the Beirut port explosion as people seek accountability
The most recent protest that called for the removal of the main judge of the investigation (organized by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement - two Shiite parties) resulted in 7 deaths (Williams, Lyall & Ott, 2021).

In external relations, various political and security tensions have also come to the fore. The most prominent of these was the diplomatic rift with Saudi Arabia over the comments of Lebanon’s information minister at the end of October 2021. In a video that preceded his ministerial post, Minister Kordahi described the war in Yemen as an aggression by Saudi Arabia. In response, Saudi Arabia and subsequently other Gulf States (UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain) recalled their ambassadors. Moreover, in a major economic blow, Saudi Arabia (Lebanon’s biggest export market) suspended all imports from Lebanon, adding further strain on its government (El Deeb, 2021).

Given the video in question was recorded long before Kordahi became minister, the current crisis is a clear illustration of the Saudi–Iran rivalry playing out in Lebanon. The Saudi’s, once very important allies, have been slowly withdrawing their support from Lebanon over several years as Hezbollah grew in power. The Saudi’s now consider Lebanon to have “fallen completely within the Hezbollah–Iran axis” (Yee, 2021). This latest blow, delivered at a time when Lebanon is at its most vulnerable, is an obvious punishment for this development.

Moving forward, there are additional developments in relation to security and foreign policy concerning Israel. Discussions about diffusing tensions following rocket launches in August (Al Monitor, 2021) and the maritime border are mediated by the United States and United Nations, respectively (Bassist, 2021). In regards to the former, it is important to recall that Lebanon and Israel lack formal relations and are, in essence, at war. These August cross-border attacks consisted of several rockets launched at Israel by Hezbollah, and a retaliatory attack by Israel on Lebanon’s rocket launch site. These attacks represented a serious escalation in the conflict between the two countries, though the United Nations hopes that this can remain an isolated while the remaining problems fester on the agenda, unaddressed. This visible lack of political will was evident in a recent parliamentary session where a rescheduling of the election was voted on (from May to March 2022). Following this, Parliament was adjourned without discussing key incident (Al Monitor, 2021). Regarding the latter, recent talks on the maritime border were apparently fruitless. The dispute concerns around 860 square kilometers of a maritime area that both countries consider as part of their “exclusive economic zone.” Each country is trying to exploit the natural resources from the area by drilling for natural gas. The talks represent a revival of previous negotiations, but once again, no agreement was reached and will have to continue at a later point (Bassist, 2021).

Overall, Lebanon will be heading into 2022 with much of the same problems. Though the new government has made steps to procure an energy supply, it will only come into effect next year, points such as the IMF negotiations (Chehayeb, 2021a). Moreover, it remains to be seen how Lebanon will address its diplomatic crisis with the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, at this critical economic time.
The Middle East has always been a region full of conflicts and challenges, and one of the region leaders had to take over peace initiatives. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has launched an initiative to create a national project aimed at uniting a number of countries in the region in many activities. The New Sham project or the New East Project, aims to promote peace processes in the Middle East, in addition to reducing or eliminating armed terrorist operations.

On June 27, The Egyptian president met with The King of Jordan at the Iraqi prime minister in Baghdad. The meeting was the focus of the Arab world’s attention, especially when announcing the New Sham project. But the importance of the visit lies in several elements: it is the first official visit from Egypt to Iraq in nearly 30 years, and secondly, The summit focused on the region’s conflicts and the attainment of security and stability in Arab nations. Thirdly, it also boosts collaboration between the three countries economically, politically, culturally and in terms of security (Wahby, M., 1989).

The tripartite summit focused on the idea of a project through which a common vision can be constructed to implement a number of strategic projects between the three countries, in the fields of energy, transportation, and food security. This is what they later called the new Sham project or the new East project. Many of the Levant countries who wanted to rise had to join the steadfast states such as Egypt, the Emirates, and others; hence, the new term Sham.

The aim of the project is to promote the common interests between Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq through landline routes. It depends heavily on Iraq’s oil, the enormous human capital of Egypt, and the presence of Jordan as a link between them. The project starts from Basra, Iraq, and continues to Egypt, passing through Jordan’s Aqaba region (Steiner, J.R., 2015). This project is of great benefit to the three countries and we will explain this as follows:

Egypt and Jordan benefit from Iraqi oil, with discounts of up to $16 per barrel, a large amount, according to OPEC. On the other hand, Iraq benefits greatly, as the goods will move to Egypt through Jordan to be processed in their final form, so Iraq can export oil securely through the Basra-Aqaba landline. Iraq will import electricity from Egypt until it reaches self-sufficiency, instead of remaining under Turkish control, which exploits this to cut off water from Iraq, i.e. electricity in exchange for water (Helfont, S. and Helfont, T., 2012).

On reconstruction deals, Egyptian and Jordanian companies will work to rebuild Iraq. It was agreed between the three countries that Egyptian and Jordanian contracting companies would carry out repairs and construction work for projects agreed between the three parties. The export of building materials and workers between the three countries should facilitate transport between them and speed up the implementation of the project.

At the last summit between the three presidents, it was agreed to establish a land route connecting the three countries in order to facilitate the movement of land navigation between them. Through the application of the protocol between the Egyptian Internal and International Road Transport Regulatory Authority, and the Egyptian, Jordanian and Iraqi
International Federation (Péidy, N., 2005). This route facilitates the movement of internal trade between the three countries, in addition to cultural exchange between them (Ryan, C., 2000).

For Iraq, the project represents a real turning point in getting rid of many national security problems, which in turn are reflected in the Middle East. It will remove the constant threat of Turkey cutting off water and electricity from a region that has suffered from the American invasion, and then through the presence of many terrorist groups that arose in the devastation.

In June 2021, seven agreements were signed to organize the start of work on several security and trade files and the restoration of antiquities. But there appear to be many countries troubled by such agreements as Turkey, Iran, and Russia (Cotterell, R. and Callison-Burch, C., 2014).

For Iran, this project will pose a major threat to Iranian influence in the region, which will also deprive it of the dream of expanding in the Middle East. In addition to the cases of Iranian militias in Iraq, they have declined commercially. For Turkey, this project will be a fatal blow to their leverage over Iraq: energy and water. As for Russia, which is also trying to put pressure on several European countries through energy and oil bargains, if successful, Iraq will be able to export energy to European countries, threatening Russia’s influence in Europe (al’Arabi, A.Q., 1996).

There is a close relationship between this project and the issue of security and peace in the Middle East. It will be the beginning of real success in the region and will help the rise of other countries, such as Libya, Yemen, and Lebanon. Perhaps the biggest beneficiary is Iraq, which will benefit from its true independence, which will reduce the role of terrorism in the region (Ali, L.S.S., 2019).

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