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Challenges in The Mediterranean region
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Foreword

The New Year came with the same rivalries in the Mediterranean region. Therefore, Turkey is aiming to normalise relations with its Middle-eastern partners, while the EU is discussing its Strategic Compass towards the MENA region and elections were postponed in Palestine.

However, the North Africa is amidst changes: political turmoil in Tunisia and Libya, as well as the abolition of the emergency law in Egypt are shaping the Mediterranean region of tomorrow. Furthermore, Russian involvement in Libya and relations with Egypt are in contrast with Israel relations with Morocco driven by the Jewish community there. Historical alliances may hold, but they are to evolve with current events.
25/10/2021
Egyptian President Sisi terminated the martial law October 25, 2021

07/12/2021
Turkey and Qatar sign 15 cooperation agreements

21/12/2021
Turkey and Qatar sign MoU to operate Kabul Airport

01/01/2022
Armenia lifted its embargo on Turkish products

01/2022
Israel is leading the world in new daily COVID-19 cases per capita as Omicron outbreaks in the country

14/01/2022
Important meeting regarding normalization of relations with Armenia

28/01/2022
USA temporarily halts arms sales to UAE and Saudi Arabia

30/11/2021
Turkey’s Central Bank sells foreign reserves to prop up the lira.

18/12/2021
Third Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit

31/12/2021
The lira becomes the worst performing currency in emerging markets in 2021, shedding 44% of its value against the dollar.

02/01/2022
Erdogan announces visit to Saudi Arabia in February

04/01/2022
The meeting that took place between Turkish and Armenian special envoys in which a roadmap for the normalization of bilateral ties was discussed
Security is of the utmost importance for any country, but for Israel, it is arguably all the more so. In Sun Tzu’s “The Art of War”, fatal ground (sometimes translated as ‘desperate ground’) is a terrain in which one finds themselves with their back to the wall and escape impossible. It is here that a wise general, according to Sun Tzu, must fight with zealous ferocity. It could be argued that Israel is a nation state founded upon fatal ground and that its very existence is predicated on their military, scientific and economic success. This article will focus on the evolution of Israeli defense strategy since 2015, its domestic context and the shifting alliances abroad.

As a country that sees itself as surrounded by enemies, both inside and outside its ill-defined borders (Melman 2015), Israel must take great care when considering its position in the region. Iran is named as the distant threat and Lebanon as the near threat in the 2015 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Strategy Document (Eizenkot 2015), henceforth to be referred to as the “Gideon Plan”. It is here where the distinction is made between threats who are state actors, Iran and Lebanon, and what the IDF designates “substate organizations”, Hezbollah and Hamas, and a further category of “Terrorist organizations without links to a particular state or community” (Eizenkot 2015).

Although Israel possesses the single strongest military organization in the region, they must balance their organizational competencies between conventional warfare (i.e. tanks, missiles, planes and warships) as well as unconventional warfare (i.e. cyber, surveillance and missile defense systems) (Melman 2015). In the Gideon plan, the IDF states that it prefers to take a defensive posture, particularly towards its conventional military opponents, but an offensive/deterrent posture towards the non-state threats. This more active approach towards designated substate and terrorist organizations results in what is referred to by the IDF as “Limited Campaigns” (Eizenkot 2015). As recently as mid 2021, Israel conducted such an operation in Gaza with the intention of drawing out and eliminating Hamas fighters and leadership as well as establishing deterrence. These limited campaigns, sometimes referred to as “mowing the grass” (Taylor 2021), may also serve a political purpose for leaders who may want a boost in popularity for being seen as taking the Hamas/Hezbollah threats seriously.

The Gideon plan came amid an entrenched ISIS and as the Syrian civil war was in full swing – the unanticipated aftermath of the “Arab Spring” which has shaped, and will continue to shape, the region going forward. Israel has reacted to this change by continuing to reduce the number of conventional, sometimes outdated, warfighting platforms like tanks (75% fewer than 1985) or war planes (50% fewer than 1985) (Melman 2015), and vastly increasing its...
cyber-capabilities and drone arsenal. Over the 5-year course of the Gideon plan, the IDF budget has remained stable as a percentage of GDP (around 5.3%), but increased from $16.5b in 2015 up to $20b in 2019 (Macrotrends 2019).

Times have changed since 2015, however, and under the direction of the 2019 “Tnufa plan”, Israel appears to be shifting focus back to modernizing its conventional fighting forces (particularly the ground forces) and integrating the latest technologies into their respective service branches (Al-Zanoun 2019). The stated goal of the new multi-year plan is to increase “lethality, quantity and precision” and to improve its missile defense systems to match both Hamas and Iran’s respective increases in missile attack capabilities (Barkat 2020).

The end goal of the Tnufa plan related to ground forces is to build up a multidimensional force which relies on pressing the advantage provided by air superiority and following up on devastating missile strikes and/or cyber attacks. Communications and information systems will also be integrated across all forces so that “every part of the IDF can communicate with every other part” (Barkat 2020). The Tnufa plan also seeks to reinforce the missile defense system in three layers which hope to cover all possible threats from Hamas and Iran. The platforms from the outer layer to the inner layer are as follows: Arrow 3 and 2 missiles to intercept long and medium range ballistic missiles (Shaikh 2021), David’s Sling for intermediate range (50-300km) ballistic and cruise missiles (Shaikh 2021) and the Iron Dome for defense against rocket attacks often employed by the designated substate/terrorist organizations (Missile Defense Project 2021).

The Domestic Context

On the domestic front, Israel also finds itself in a precarious position. After years of trials, scandals and political games, Netanyahu’s position as prime minister has been overtaken by a slim, fractious majority headed by Naftali Bennet (Prime Minister) and Yair Lapid (Current Foreign Minister and next rotational Prime Minister). Through skilled politicking, Lapid has managed to coalesce disparate groups with competing agendas under his name, even giving away the first two years of his potential Prime Minister term in order to seal the deal. The ideologies of the groups are not as important as the fact that their thin marginal victory would realistically prevent them from tackling any controversy or grappling with the most difficult problems the country faces, like the Gaza Strip and the West Bank settlements for starters. Lapid (and Bennet) must spend his political capital wisely and on more immediate concerns like the pandemic situation. Should they falter, Netanyahu is waiting in the wings with claims that this new coalition amounts to nothing less than a political coup d’etat against him (Rabinovich 2021).

The pandemic situation in Israel is characterized by a bright red hue on heat maps nowadays, as a record number of cases were reported on Wednesday, January 4th (The Associated Press 2021). After opening its doors for tourism for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, travel restrictions are again put in place, leaving a whiplashed public to bear the brunt of the omicron variant of Covid. Top Israeli health official Sharron Alroy-Preis best captured the circumstances in one sentence live on Israeli TV: “There is no control of the omicron wave” (The Associated Press 2021).

The new government now faces a difficult choice: allow the omicron to spread while
remaining some sense of normalcy and progress, potentially risking the more vulnerable members of the population; or taking the plunge and instituting another lockdown which would theoretically protect the more vulnerable citizens, but threatens their fragile coalition and margin in parliament. In short, if the Bennet–Lapid government is to survive its infancy, they have a politically hazardous uphill climb ahead of them.

The Foreign Relations Context

The United States’ flip flop on the JCPOA agreement has left the possibility of a nuclear Iran on the table. And as the United States withdraws from the middle east in its “pivot towards Asia”, Israel feels somewhat left alone to deal with Iran, who they frequently target with cyber attacks (Burgess 2021), as well as the odd alleged assassination in an effort to prevent them from building a nuclear weapon. There are also small domestic concerns tied to the U.S–Israeli relationship connected to Netanyahu’s decision to work more closely with Trump than the traditional ‘both sides of the aisle’ approach. This momentum from the previous administrations in both countries carried over to the new governments and has left a small political drama in its wake, of particular note the aftermath of the May 2021 Gaza situation (Rabinovich 2021).

This same trend of the United States choosing to lessen its influence in the middle east allows for other opportunities to arise and strange bedfellows to acquaint themselves. A long list of Arab countries has long opposed the very existence of Israel stretching all the way back to its founding, refusing to even diplomatically acknowledge the state until the Palestinian issue is resolved in a manner they deem satisfactory. The needle appears to be moving in a direction the Israeli’s feel is positive and the Palestinians view as treacherous. The Abraham Accords, a series of political agreements between Israel, the UAE, Morocco, Sudan and Bahrain, normalized Israeli relations with the UAE and to a lesser extent promised to take steps to eventually do the same with Bahrain (Rabinovich 2021).

The case of Bahrain is significant because it is seen as the diplomatic proxy for Saudi Arabia testing the waters of normalization. Though they have worked together in the past, covertly on matters of security due to a mutually antagonistic relationship with Iran (Rahman 2021), the Israel–Palestine conflict is a bridge too far for normalizing ties just yet.

Even this once removed half step on Saudi Arabia’s part has infuriated Palestinians and could have added pressure to the bubbling tensions which culminated in the May 21 violence in the Gaza strip. The outbreak of violence has put a damper on the high of the accords, but it should be noted that the Palestinian push–back did not result in any diplomatically tangible results in relation to setting back the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE or Bahrain.

The State of the Israel–Palestine Issue

As part of the end result of the Six-Day War, Israel is a country divided along stark ethnic and religious lines. The only thing in Israel and Palestine older than these Old Testament spanning conflicts is the blood-soaked soil and rocks over which they occur. West of the Jordan valley, there live an equal number of Arabs and Jews (Rabinovich 2021); and for either side, their very existence as a people is at stake. On the Israeli side, a weak government lacks the political capital to make any lasting progress, while on the Palestinian side, a weak Palestinian Authority led by an aging Mahmoud Abbas faces an economic crisis and therefrom an emboldened Hamas. Significant progress on the major issues seems unlikely given the untenable positions of each government, making violence all the more attractive to the more radical elements of both sides (Rabinovich 2021).

The Israeli settlement of the West Bank will continue, as was announced October 24th, 2021 that 1355 homes are planned to be built to make
way for Jewish residents in the area (Wires 2021). These settlements and others like it claim territory and push out/dispossess Palestinians in their path, making for a Swiss cheese-like territory of Jewish settlements and pockets of Palestinian communities, each made all the more resentful of one another as a consequence. As more Palestinians are pushed from their homes, more seek refuge in the radical elements of Palestinian politics, like Hamas, who use violence as their strongest negotiating tool. In response to this ebb and flow of violence, the Israeli government continues to expand its settlements and uses increases in Palestinian violence to justify their own violent campaigns towards political/economic ends.

The balancing force in these zealous claims of religious and ancestral land has traditionally been the United States. During the Trump presidency, the Israeli side of the conflict was given the green light to pursue more aggressive settlement and violence against the Palestinian communities (BBC 2020). But now, one year into the Biden Presidency, the new Bennett-Lapid government cannot afford to relax their tone for fear of losing their majority because the more aggressive policy towards the Palestinians had suited many Israeli citizens (Politico 2021). This makes the Biden team’s job an uphill battle to move the political needle even back to where it was in 2016, let alone towards any peaceful solution to the conflict.

Good governance and cool heads could keep the violence to a minimum, but sadly, good politics and hot heads sometimes demand it. A strong Israeli or Palestinian government could be in a position to make progress through compromise, or a diplomatically prudent United States could keep the status quo bearable for the international community. But all signs point to yet no peaceful resolution on the horizon.

Sources


From sanctions and feuds with NATO over the acquisition of Russian military technology, to acute socio-economic problems, 2021 has proven to be a challenging year for the Turkish government. Nevertheless, it is precisely in this context that the idea of diversifying its partnerships appears as a strategic move in order to secure Turkey’s stance as a relevant actor in world politics. Considering the shifting geopolitical dynamics experienced in 2021, Turkey has chosen to look beyond the Mediterranean and pivot towards regions like the Middle East, mainly towards the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Despite their long-standing differences, Turkey managed to approach the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia during 2021 in order to normalize their ties and, alongside Qatar, move towards greater collaboration agreements in terms of commerce and security. These renewed alliances, while not entirely solidified at the moment, represent an interesting strategy from Ankara that will most likely influence dynamics in the Mediterranean in the long term.

This article will explore the implications of Turkey’s new partnerships in 2022. The first section will briefly summarize Turkey’s stance in 2021 in the international arena; this will include its relation with Greece, the United States, NATO, and Russia, in order to understand the reasons behind Turkey’s desire to diversify its partners.

This section will also focus on some of Turkey’s most pressing domestic challenges that have contributed to its consideration of new alliances. The second section will analyze Turkey’s moves in the last few months with the aim of closing ties with new partners, specifically three GCC countries: The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This segment will help to understand current trends in economic and security terms, and how these partnerships could bolster Turkey’s power beyond the Mediterranean. The final section will offer a few considerations of the implications in terms of security in the Mediterranean and the Middle East should these new partnerships consolidate.

**Turkey’s 2021 in a Nutshell**

**NATO and the US**

Turkey’s 2021 started with a rise in tensions with the United States and other NATO member states due to the purchase and reception of an initial batch of the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile system. This move was deemed not only as controversial but also as a threat to NATO itself (1). While Turkey’s decision led to hard sanctions established by the US, and its expulsion from the F-35 program, the general situation did not escalate to levels that suggested major problems would ensue.

In fact, presidents Biden and Erdogan had a brief meeting in the context of the last G20 meeting in late October 2021, which showed that both countries recognize their need to preserve this security alliance. On the one hand, the latest developments in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine reinforced Turkey’s role as a key NATO ally given its vital position in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. On the other hand, Turkey recognizes that a rupture with NATO would mean risking its access to Western technology and,  

therefore, putting its own security at stake (Bechev, 2021) (2).

Greece

Furthermore, Turkey’s 2021 was characterized by a continuous state of tension with its neighbor, Greece. Both countries have historical differences that have not yet been solved, and which have appeared in diplomatic feuds for decades. Following the 2020 Mediterranean crisis when these states came close to an armed conflict, in early 2021 the Turkish and Greece foreign ministers reunited in a summit in Ankara to address two of the nations’ main security issues: Territorial waters disputes and migratory flows in the region.

The first concern is related to a 2020 Turkish expedition to search for natural gas and oil in contested territorial waters. During said exploration, two Greek and Turkish naval vessels collided, an event considered to be a direct attack by Erdogan’s government (Kucukgocmen & Georgiopoulos, 2021). Considering Turkey’s heavy dependence on energy imports and the fact that it has been left out of two major energy projects in the Mediterranean (Mercan, 2020), it comes as no surprise that Ankara chose to continue its explorations for resources in 2021, a move that has prompted stronger disputes with Greece.

The second concern, related to migration flows in the region, has also increased tensions between both nations, who have accused each other of pushing migrants to their neighbors’ coasts for decades. The influx of refugees in the region, which has decreased in the past couple of years, could take a new surge due to the latest events in Afghanistan, a situation that brings concern to Turkey, who already hosts around 3.6 million refugees inside its territory (Armstrong, 2020).

While Turkey has declared they can no longer keep receiving refugees, Greece has proceeded to strengthen its surveillance systems, installing a 40km long fence along its border with Turkey, and building new facilities for refugees in the islands of Samos and Lesbos, which are close to its neighbor (Taylor, 2021). This could raise even more geopolitical constraints, considering that, in the past, many refugees in Turkey attempted to cross into Greece as a means to enter the European Union. The increase in Greece’s migratory controls could push more Afghani refugees to choose Turkey as their main destination, putting a bigger strain on Turkish society and economy.

Additionally, in 2021 Greece signed a $1.68 billion defense procurement deal with Israel, oriented towards upgrading Greece’s Air Force. While Israel had remained close to Turkey since the 1990s, after a few disputes arose they decided their alliance was no longer strategic and sought to close ties with Greece in 2010 (Blavoukos, 2021). This partnership agreement translates into further diplomatic and military isolation for Turkey in the Mediterranean, which could, in part, explain strategies like the acquisition of the Russian S-400 system, and its stance towards other NATO member states.

Russia

An additional point that cannot be overlooked when discussing Turkey’s 2021 is its relation with Russia. Last September, presidents Erdogan and Putin met in Sochi for talks that intended to reinforce their bilateral ties, despite previous political issues like their opposing stances in the Syrian Civil War and the situation in Ukraine. While these talks were considered ‘productive’ by both sides, it is worth noting that due to the fluctuating nature of their alliance these countries have eventually become utilitarian partners rather than actual allies (Litvinova & Fraser, 2021).
A recent event that highlights this type of relation is the S-400 missile system purchase. While the deal was not born out of a desire for cooperation in defense matters, but rather from fear of Russian economic sanctions after a major rise in tensions in 2015, Turkey managed to send a message to NATO in regards its ability to diversify its partnerships in order to obtain military technology. At the same time, Russia managed to convey a clear message to the West: That they can exert influence over its partners and compete with the West's technology. This specific alliance, therefore, did not answer to a genuine desire to cooperate in terms of security, but rather to ulterior motives on both sides.

Moreover, it is worth noting that Russia and Turkey still share significant economic ties. Considering that Turkey imports over 90% of their energy sources, Russia remains one of its key natural gas suppliers, which has given Moscow the ability to influence Ankara's economy should they choose to (Furuncu, 2020). However, Russia cannot deny the fact that Turkey represents a strategic transit country for its natural gas exports, meaning they need to maintain their bilateral ties as stable as possible for each other's benefit (Wilks, 2021).

**Domestic concerns**

Finally, it is vital to mention Turkey's 2021 domestic context, where central government decisions have put a heavy strain on the country's socioeconomic situation. Besides its tense relation with the European Union states due to the ongoing accession process, and the human rights concerns that arose from Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the country's economic problems have been a major point of inflexion for Erdogan's government.

Turkey has two main domestic concerns to address in 2022: On the one hand, the performance of the Turkish lira — which fell 44% against the US dollar in 2021 —, and the country's 36% inflation rate, which have negatively affected Erdogan's acceptance rates (Koc, 2022). Both issues could translate in the international arena by making Turkey a less attractive economic and political partner for other countries, which could in turn affect its political role in the region.

To summarize, Turkey's 2021 has been a year of constant tensions, both international and domestic. Erdogan's government will most likely face some key important challenges related to its closest allies in 2022. In the first place, the strife with the US and NATO in regard to the acquisition of Russian military technology has not yet been resolved, which could raise further tensions between both parties. Considering the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Turkey could prove to be a key ally for securing stability in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, one reason why they might need to make a crucial decision in regards to its ties with the West.

Turkey also faces an important challenge in terms of energy resources, which relates, in part, to its relation with Greece. Turkey's difficulty to secure energy sources within its own territory has not only made it dependent on other major powers like Russia, but has also prevented it from exerting a more powerful stance to secure alliances like Greece has done with other key actors in the region.

Finally, Turkey's domestic context — which could worsen with the migratory situation in the Mediterranean — might contribute to further isolation, as Turkey fails to present itself as a strong ally to other potential partners. In this context, Erdogan's 2022 agenda appears to be
directed towards a diversification in multilateral relations that could enhance its current position vis-à-vis other countries in the region, especially considering the upcoming presidential elections in 2023.

**Turkey and the GCC: A Love-Hate Relationship**

After establishing some of Turkey’s key challenges in the last year, it comes as no surprise that Erdogan’s government has chosen to look for close ties with partners outside the region. In an unexpected move, Turkey has chosen to normalize ties with the GCC states, and has secured key compromises that might improve their current situation.

Turkeys' relations with the Gulf Countries – especially with GCC states, which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – have experienced historical fluctuations. While the 2010’s were characterized by a defined rift between both sides, certain events in 2021 show that the existing gap between Turkey and the GCC might start to disappear.

Turkey began its approach to the Gulf Countries after the First Gulf War, especially because of economic interests. After the war, Turkey became an emerging economy in search of new markets for their foreign trade plans, as well as strategic partnerships for foreign direct investment (FDI); at the same time, the Gulf Countries, with considerable resources, showed an increasing interest in investment projects with new allies. Moreover, both sides had similar interests in pressing issues in the Middle East, like the ongoing concerns surrounding Iran’s nuclear program and the support for the Palestinian cause, among others. In this sense, cooperation between Turkey and the GCC states was considered not only profitable in economic terms, but also in geopolitical ones.

However, the Arab Spring proved to be a major point of divergence that would keep relations between Turkey and the GCC countries in a stalemate for several years. The power vacuum created by the fall of traditional Arab leaders allowed for countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia to take a more determinant role in the Arab world; however, it also opened a door for Turkey’s involvement in Middle East politics. This became a main area of concern for GCC countries since the Arab Spring uprisings threatened the Gulf monarchoies’ legitimacy; and since Turkey supported revolutionary forces in several countries, its involvement in the Middle East was seen as a threat to stability in the Gulf (Kardas, 2021).

During this period, Turkey proved to be a strong ally to Qatar, a GCC country that experienced considerable political and economic challenges in the region. Qatar’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood resulted in a series of warnings from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt, should they continue backing a ‘terrorist organization’ (Reuters, 2019).

The demands escalated to an economic blockade that negatively affected Qatar’s economy; in this context, Turkey remained one of Qatar’s main supporters. Both countries became strategic economic and security partners, with Turkey establishing a military base in Qatari territory, and Qatar investing heavily in FDI projects while also becoming one of Turkey’s main liquefied natural gas suppliers (Calik, 2020).

Additionally, Turkey’s relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been rather tense in the past few years. Despite its regional and domestic struggles, the aforementioned countries do recognize Turkey’s assertiveness and influence in the Muslim world, which, therefore, could threaten their own leadership in the region.

In the last decade, both sides have made decisions that reinforce their power struggles in the region. For example, Turkey angered the GCC countries when it took a more utilitarian approach towards Iran’s nuclear program (instead of siding with them against Iran).
Instead of siding with them against Iran). At the same time, GCC states decided not only to normalize ties with Israel (4) via the US-brokered Abraham Accords, but also to sign security and energy cooperation agreements with Greece and Cyprus, a measure that was not taken well by Erdogan's government.

Nevertheless, 2021 showed a slight tendency towards conciliation between Turkey and the GCC countries, which might push Turkey to choose a strategic approach towards the Middle East, and move its alliances away from the West. As for the UAE, in November 2021, Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited Ankara to sign a financial cooperation deal of $10 billion in the health and energy fields, as well as transportation, technology, environment, money laundering, among others. Additionally, there are expectations for both countries' central banks to engage in a swap agreement, which would improve the Turkish lira's current situation (Al Jazeera, 2021).

The dynamics between these countries seem to pivot towards cooperation based on economic interests, similar to what happened after the First Gulf War. On the one hand, Turkey is in great need for FDI projects and currency stabilization; on the other hand, despite the COVID-19 pandemic having slowed down foreign trade, the UAE is constantly looking for opportunities to diversify its investments and alliances.

The recent normalization of relations with Turkey is due to shifting political dynamics in the region, mainly due to events like the removal of US troops from Afghanistan, the possible retake of talks with Iran and the end of Qatar's economic blockade, among others. If the UAE is expecting to exert more power and take leadership of the region, they need to move towards a security-oriented strategy and surround themselves with allies that will offer either economic or political profits (TRT World, 2021). In this sense, Turkey could potentially provide the Gulf Countries with both.

Besides its key location, skilled labor and competitive exchange rate (despite its latest currency issues), Turkey is finalizing the creation of the Istanbul Finance Center, a project set to open in the first half of 2022 that aims to "become a major (Islamic) financial hub serving many banks, public institutions and multinational companies" (Daily Sabah, 2021). Additionally, the UAE does consider Turkey as a country with considerable leadership power in the region; therefore, these initial economic ties could serve bigger geopolitical interests in the long term.

As for Saudi Arabia, relations with Turkey took a positive turn in 2021. After almost three years of tensions between both nations (5), the Turkish Foreign Minister visited Riyadh last May to discuss bilateral relations, a meeting that took place after an alleged purchase of Turkish drones by Saudi Arabia in March 2021 (Al-Monitor, 2021).

This transaction and the fact that Saudi Arabia is currently co-producing Turkish-made drones, is not a coincidence: This GCC state has looked for a new partnership with Turkey, given that the US has held off arms sales to Saudi Arabia (6) (DW, 2021). Moreover, Turkey has vested interests in closing ties with this Gulf country, considering that it has collaborated with Greece in joint military exercises and energy projects in the Mediterranean. Mending relations with Saudi Arabia (and with the UAE) could give Turkey an opening for being considered in high-level Mediterranean forums that could offer new opportunities for their energy sourcing concerns.

(5) Tensions between Turkey and Saudi Arabia reached a peak in 2018 after the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. Saudi Arabia has also accused Turkey of supporting terrorist groups, like Hezbollah in Lebanon.

(6) The US halted arms sales to both the UAE and Saudi Arabia in January 2021. In November 2021 the Biden administration decided to resume the arms sale to Saudi Arabia.
Finally, relations with Qatar have remained solid, especially due to Turkey’s support during the GCC’s economic blockade. In December 2021, president Erdogan visited Doha to sign over 10 cooperation agreements in different areas that benefit both countries. There were also talks for convincing Qatar to extend the existing currency swap agreement with Turkey – that reached $15 billion in 2020 – a strategy that has greatly helped Turkey’s economy (Kucukgocmen & Coskun, 2020).

Moreover, as it was previously mentioned, both states have maintained a consistent military cooperation for several years, and during 2021, they entered negotiations with the Taliban-led government to work in ensuring Kabul’s airport security and continue offering humanitarian assistance to people in Afghanistan. This represents a key area of geopolitical influence that might influence other GCC countries to consider an alliance with Turkey. After the United States Forces left Afghanistan and the Taliban took control of the country, a power vacuum that threatened collective instability appeared in the region. Taking into account that countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia might want to consolidate their leadership in the Middle East, resuming amicable relations with two of the countries that have come closer to security talks with the Taliban might prove beneficial in the long term.

**Looking Ahead**

As it has been possible to observe, Turkey’s shift towards the Gulf countries answers several of its main concerns. Economics and resources appear to be the main driver in their reproach to countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia; however, these represent but a small area of why relations between Ankara and the GCC have thawed in the past few months.

Considering Turkey’s current challenges regarding the lira’s currency rate and the country’s heavy reliance on energy imports, an approach to wealthy, resource rich countries might seem like a natural move – especially considering that Western traditional allies have failed to fill these needs. Nevertheless, Turkey’s agenda with the GCC states goes beyond stabilizing its economy and, likewise for the Gulf countries, their approach to Turkey serves a bigger purpose beyond FDI.

Dynamics in the Middle East suffered considerable changes in 2021, and most states will try to exert as much influence as they can vis-à-vis their neighbors by using either soft or hard power. In the context of the removal of US troops from Afghanistan, some Arab countries – like the UAE and Bahrain – have chosen a more conciliatory approach towards Israel, for example, even after decades of tensions due to the ongoing conflict with Palestine. This normalization of relations answers to an increased instability in the Middle East, characterized mainly by the new Taliban-led government in Afghanistan, Iran’s ongoing nuclear program, the Syrian Civil War and the constant terrorist threat in the region. While these do not represent new challenges, most countries have come to understand that political stability in a region as diverse as the Middle East requires not only strong leadership, but also commitment and cooperation, even if it means working with unlikely partners.

This is also part of the rationale behind Turkey’s 2022 agenda in the Middle East: Due to its strategic position, instability in that region translates into instability for Ankara, a situation that Erdogan’s government will not tolerate. In order to avoid this, Turkey needs to reinforce
itself in relation to its main areas of concern, so that they obtain not only a stronger position in the Mediterranean, but also so that it manages to become a more relevant actor in the Middle East.

The recent approaches to the GCC countries – in addition to talks with Egypt – in 2021 offers new opportunities for collaboration with non-traditional partners and opens a chance for Turkey to be included in high level forums for energy cooperation agreements in the Mediterranean, which could be a first step into solving their issues with Greece. Moreover, Turkey's alliance with Qatar in managing Kabul airport could prove to be a key bargaining chip to deepen its relations with other Middle East countries, hence strengthening its position as an important actor in security matters beyond the Mediterranean.

Turkey’s approach to the GCC countries does not necessarily entail a complete disengagement with traditional Western partners, especially with NATO member states. It is possible that Turkey’s strategy towards the Middle East could be seen by the US as a more favorable move than siding with Russia, considering the current situation in Ukraine, where Turkey will definitely play a vital role. At the same time, this initial approach does not guarantee a solid partnership between Turkey and the GCC states in the upcoming months, especially with countries like Saudi Arabia. As geopolitical dynamics evolve in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, both sides will look for opportunities to capitalize on this new ‘friendly’ environment as long as their main interests are not threatened. The normalization of ties between Turkey and the GCC countries will remain a key point of interest worth monitoring during 2022.

Sources


Introduction

Following the failure of the European Union (EU) to appropriately respond to the Gulf Crisis in 1991, Mark Eyskens, the Foreign Minister of Belgium said that ‘Europe is an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm.’ (Whitney, 1991). Since then, Europe has undergone many changes that challenged this statement through a gradual development of its political and military capacities (Zandee, Stoetman and Deen, 2021). However, the Strategic Compass set to be voted on in March 2022 represents perhaps the most important recent development in this sphere. The Strategic Compass is a political proposal that will “set out a common strategic vision for EU security and defence for the next 5-10 years” (European External Action Service (EEAS), 2021, p. 4), and has been described as “the closest thing the EU could have to a military doctrine” (Emmott, 2020).

This doctrine and strategy come at a particular critical juncture in EU, and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) relations. Growing instability in the MENA region and the decreasing involvement of the United States (US) has opened the space for other actors and consequent shifts in power balances that can threaten not only EU interests but also overall European security (Genugten, 2021). Keeping this in mind, this article will explore what the Strategic Compass can and should mean for the EU’s security policy in the MENA region. The article will begin with an analysis of the EU’s policy towards MENA to date. It will then proceed to examine whether the components of the Compass can help European policy become more effective in the region. In this discussion, the EU–NATO relationship will also be considered. Altogether, through this exploration, this article aims to infer whether the EU is likely to remain a worm in the Middle East, as it had in 1991, or if it can finally shed this label.

How Things Were Going South: EU in the Middle East

The MENA region presents an array of security threats to Europe, ranging from terrorism and migration to maritime security and Iran’s nuclear programme. In recent years, increasing conflicts in MENA and a general lack of economic opportunities have made terrorism and irregular migration to the EU particularly salient threats, with discussions on these topics generating cracks in the internal stability of the Union (Zarhloule, 2019; Dempsey, 2015).

However, despite the negative spillover effects of MENA conflicts on European security, it is notable that the EU has “not been a major player in recent conflicts” (Anderson, 2021). In fact, The EU’s engagement in MENA has also been characterized by having a ‘short-term’ and ‘transactional’ character, designed to primarily focus on migration, and not the underlying drivers of instability (Zarhloule, 2019). This can be seen from the EU’s Agreements with Turkey and Libya on border control and refugees (Thevenin, 2020). Similarly, where the EU has tried to engage in diplomacy or conflict resolution, it has been described as ‘weak’, ‘irrelevant’ and a ‘bystander’ (Anderson, 2021; Weimers, 2020; Çetin, 2016). This was seen not only in the fall-out of the Iran nuclear deal, where the EU was shown to have a “limited ability to chart a truly independent foreign policy” (Grammer and Johnson, 2020), but also in two recent major conflicts in the region: Syria and Libya.
In Syria, the EU’s non-military tools of intervention such as sanctions and diplomatic dialogues proved ineffective in the first stage of the conflict resolution. At the time, the EU did not engage militarily as it did not possess a mechanism necessary for deploying coercive forces. Even if it had, disagreements among Member States came to the fore during this crisis, and many solutions were not possible due to different views on correct policy options and outcomes (for instance, some Member States thought a negotiated solution was feasible, while others considered the fall of Assad as inevitable). In such an environment, the EU only adopted a strategy for conflicts in Syria, as well as Iraq and the fight against the Islamic State 4 years later (van Veen, Di Pietrantonio Pellise, Ezzeddine, Napolitano, 2021). The issue of diverging policy priorities was one of the key reasons for the EU's ineffectiveness as a player in the Libyan conflict and peace process, as Italy and France declared themselves on opposite sides of the conflict. In such a scenario, even the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) military and civilian operations and the EU's participation in diplomatic dialogues were unable to have great influence. To add to this, Member States have been contradictory in their approach to Operation Irini (designed to enforce arms embargo), whereby some states continue to export arms to other regional actors involved in the conflict and thus undermine the EU's general interest(s) (Crosson, 2020).

The actions of the EU in these two conflicts illustrate why the EU has not been able to effectively engage in the MENA region: lack of long-term strategy, a lack of the right tools, and disagreement among Member States.

Moreover, an exacerbating factor to European ineffectiveness was the substantial role that the US played in the region. In the past, the EU had continually relied on US leadership due to the country’s ability to engage militarily to a much higher extent than the EU. However, this would often come at the cost of developing a European regional strategy (Zarhloule, 2019). Currently, there is an opportunity for the EU to put such a strategy in place, as the US is beginning to pivot away from the MENA region towards Asia (Genugten, 2021).

Changing Direction

Given the developing changes, it is clear that the EU needs to alter its approach to the Middle East and North Africa. It is predicted that in the next 10 years, the MENA region will require the most attention from the EU in terms of civilian and military crisis management deployments (Fiott and Lindstrom, 2021). In light of the current situation, the Strategic Compass has the potential to ensure a stronger, more effective presence of the EU in the region. This next section will now explore to what extent the Compass addresses the issues identified above regarding European engagement in the MENA region.

First, when it comes to developing a long-term strategy, the Compass aims to bring together a vision for European security and defense for the next 5–10 years. In doing so, it has outlined four points of focus: crisis management (scenarios for military civilian missions, geographical priorities, institutional capacity), resilience (mutual assistance and solidarity, protecting critical infrastructure, non-traditional threats), capability development (technological sovereignty, PESCO, European Defence Fund, space, cyber and maritime capabilities), and partnerships (UN, NATO, US, Africa, Eastern partnership, Indo-Pacific). Such an approach clearly envisions a long-term strategy that is multi-pronged and makes use of the EU’s already existing capabilities. However, how coherent the strategy will be, in accounting for the various EU instruments already in existence as well as the tendency of Member States to engage in conflicts outside of the EU framework, will only be visible during the implementation stage.

Perhaps the most debated contribution of the Compass is the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity, which aims to have 5,000 troops, including land,
air, and maritime components ready for deployment (EEAS 2021). Such a force could prove instrumental to quick and decisive reactions at the beginning of conflicts, such as in Syria, but it seems to fall short of the idea of a European Army (Novák, 2021). However, the deployment of such troops would still require consensus of the Member States (Emmott, 2021), and it is important to note that the EU already has deployable troops, the so-called EU Battlegroups of 1,500 troops, but it has been reluctant to use them, for example in Libya, due to disagreements among its Member States (Reykers, 2016). In fact, the Battlegroups have never been deployed at all (van Veen, Di Pietrantonio Pellise, Ezzeddine, Napolitano, 2021). As such, it is not entirely clear whether the addition of more troops will solve the problems in diverging foreign policy views unless serious consideration is given to the voting procedure on their deployment (Perissich, 2021).

It is on this front that the Compass can, and to a certain extent has, made progress. Through a shared threat analysis “based on information from the civilian and military intelligence services of the 27 EU member states”, the Compass did try to create the foundations for a shared vision for EU security and defence among European Union Member States threat analysis (EEAS, 2021; Amirfarhangi, 2021). This analysis was concluded in 2020, and aimed at establishing a common vision for the increasingly complex threats facing the EU in the future. Unlike the EU Global Strategy, the creation of the threat assessment and the Strategic Compass has been a Member State-led project. Given the commitment expressed by Member States to this endeavor, there is hope that a unified vision can be achieved not only of how threats themselves are understood, but also their solutions (EUISS Foresight, 2021).

On these three main issues, the Compass has certainly been an important start, but given the rising importance of the MENA region to the EU, the final version of the Compass needs to take into account how exactly the EU aims to engage. Taking into account the EU’s past actions, the Compass should provide a concrete explanation as to why engagement in the MENA region is necessary, how crisis management tools should be employed, and how to make better use of non-coercive tools if military engagement is not pursued (Fiott and Lindstrom, 2021). In addition, further attention should be paid to how to counteract the strategic competition of other...
actors such as Russia and Turkey that have in the past tried to undermine EU action in the region (Fiott and Lindstrom, 2021). If such aspects are not considered, the compass is likely to be a repackaged extension to the EU’s prior policies in the region, with a reactive rather than a proactive strategy (Zaborowski, 2022).

EU–NATO

Keeping in mind the pivot of the US away from the Middle East as well as the change of government in the US, the Compass needs to rethink what its relationship with NATO and the US will be. Debates on increasing European defense capabilities have always been controversial when it comes to NATO; various Member States believe that it will undermine the alliance, while others see NATO as an instrument of US dominance (Perissich, 2021), and particularly in relation to the Middle East, as a player that lacks diplomatic experience (Samaan, 2020). Therefore, some see debates on increasing EU strategic autonomy, and therefore the Compass, as a way for the EU to gain more independence in this relationship.

However, it cannot be ignored that NATO is the primary defense provider for the EU, and despite the US pivot, we will still be seeing a lot more NATO military engagement in the MENA region than European Union troops. The goal of the Compass appears to be a complementary partnership with NATO, rather than its replacement (EEAS, 2021). Though it is still unclear how this partnership will look in anticipation of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. Experts have pointed to the comparative advantage of each organization. As such, it has been proposed that in particular when it comes to the MENA region, that the EU should continue to respond to crisis management with its available civilian and military toolbox, while NATO covers collective defence (Zandee, Stoetman and Deen, 2021). As such, Europe will be working to both increase its own capacities, as well as develop its relationship with NATO (Herszenhorn and Bayer, 2021). In this regard, the Compass so far does little to better clarify this relationship going forward and how engagement will be taking place in the MENA region.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the Strategic Compass is meant to be a broad policy outline, and therefore does not make explicit mentions of the MENA region. Therefore, concrete conclusions on what it means for EU security policy in this region can only become apparent after the vote on the Compass in March 2022. Over the next couple of months Member States will be deciding in a strategic dialogue whether, and what kind of direction the Compass will take. For now, the Compass and its potentially positive impact on the EU’s position in the Middle East remains speculative. However, a good amount of the ground work has already been done. At the very least, increased capacity and an increasingly clear direction of EU security and defense policy can be expected. Though unlikely to materialize in the current Compass, the calls for qualified majority voting in this policy sector signal the want and willingness of different Member States to increase the EU’s strategic autonomy, and to define in the end what that means.

Sources


The Jewish community in Morocco, whose presence dates back centuries, has played a key role in recent Moroccan foreign policy through relevant political figures such as André Azoulay, Simon Lévy or Abraham Serfaty.

Religion alone does not explain the spate of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (Thomas 2010). It does, however, play a prominent role in international relations. While religions can be used to deepen social divisions and even fuel tensions, they can also help bring governments closer together and forge unlikely alliances. Diplomacy of religion, which promotes dialogue within and between religious traditions, is being explored by governments around the world as a tool to facilitate understanding between countries, without neglecting national interests (Thomas 2010).

It is no coincidence that the diplomacy of religion has been very latent over the past two years in the Middle East and the Maghreb. This period has seen unprecedented geopolitical movements that have led to a progressive reconfiguration of relations between countries, and a realignment of alliances. The Abraham Accords signed in August 2020 between Israel and two Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, consolidated the rapprochement that had been taking place for years between Tel Aviv and several governments in the Arab peninsula. Through the Abraham Accords, Israel gained formal recognition of the UAE and Bahrain (Sorkin 2021). This recognition has been followed by the opening of Israeli domestic markets to Emirati and Bahraini investors and vice versa (Guzansky & Marshall 2020).

Morocco was quick to join the agreements and normalised relations with Israel in December 2021. The Alawi kingdom has traditionally adopted a less critical stance towards Israel compared to other governments in the Arab world, also highlighting the involvement of part of its Jewish community in political affairs, as evidenced by the fact that André Azoulay, a Jew, is one of King Mohammed VI’s top advisors and confidants (Guzansky & Marshall 2020). Although the Jewish community in the country currently numbers a few thousand, Morocco’s history has long been linked with Judaism, being home to more than 300,000 Jews in the mid-20th century and, today, approximately 7% of the Jewish population in Israel are of Moroccan descent, according to the 2019 census (Jewish Virtual Library 2019). It is therefore relevant to analyse the Jewish community in Morocco and its political importance for the Alawi monarchy.

Jewish presence in the Maghreb region until decolonisation

The Jewish Presence in North Africa is Based on a Long Historical, Economic and Social History

The history of Jewish communities in the Maghreb goes back much further than the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 or the waves of migration that took place around the 13th century. Jews were the first non-Berbers to settle in the Maghreb and have been there ever since (Schroeter 2002).

The occupation of Algiers in 1830 was a real turning point that marked the years that followed. Morocco, which became a Protectorate by the Treaty of Fez on 30 March 1912, had already been greatly influenced by the European powers, as ports such as Agadir and Essaouira maintained a prominent position in trade relations with Europe, in which Jews played a key role (Stillman 2019).
One of the most prominent factors in the process of acculturation of Maghreb Jews was the Alliance Israélite Universelle (Laskier 2012). This institution, founded in Paris in 1860, fought for Jewish rights and against anti-Jewish prejudice wherever it manifested itself, but also to provide a European-style education to communities whose adopted language would be French, but also English, Spanish and Hebrew for liturgical matters (Laskier 2012). In this way, three types of training were offered that would swell the curriculum of the students who attended: general secular studies, vocational training (internships) and eminently Jewish studies. In 1862, two years after its foundation, the first schools in Tangier were opened and, later, it spread to Tangier, Larache, Rabat, Casablanca until it reached almost the whole of the Maghreb (Stillman 2019).

Unlike in Algeria, the French protectorate in Morocco made it part of its policy to keep the Jews in their autochthonous condition. Many of them had managed to become French citizens or citizens of other countries through emigration, marriage to foreigners or service to France (Stillman 2019).

The situation of the Moroccan Jewish community began to deteriorate with the Second World War when most of the French colonies fell under the mandate of the Vichy government (1940-1944) and were subject to its anti-Jewish legislation (Stillman 2019). In the case of Morocco, from this time until independence became effective in 1956, a withdrawal of the colonial powers was already beginning to be seen, while a Moroccan nationalist sentiment grew with the Istiqlal party, as well as a tendency against the Zionist movement among Moroccans (Stillman 2019). Thus, through various covert operations by the Mossad, more than one hundred thousand Jews decided to emigrate to the state of Israel throughout the 1960s (Jewish Virtual Library 2019).

The Jewish community in Moroccan politics

The political system in Morocco is characterised by the relevance of the Sultan as the head of the makhzen or central government, acting as arbiter in the conflicts between the different tribes that controlled the territory, while at the same time using these rivalries to strengthen their position (Boukhars 2010). Consequently, the foundations on which modern Morocco was built are based on the traditional pre-colonial Makhzenian system, which was adapted and modernised to the new circumstances and interests of the ruling elite. This model was based on a constitutional monarchy in which the King governs in his dual capacity as the supreme political and religious authority, creating an identification of the sovereign with the nation (Boukhars 2010).

Jews have long been a political boon as well as a political liability for Morocco. During Hassan II’s reign (1961-1999), by the time of the Green March, the country was in a climate of political instability following two coup attempts in 1971 and 1972. One of the reasons why the Alawi monarch was so unpopular was due to his heavy-handed repression of his political opponents. Likewise, the monarch began to have clandestine meetings with Israeli and American representatives from the early 1970s, positioning himself as a peace broker between Israeli and Palestinian representatives, yet Morocco’s involvement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has shrunk significantly since the Second Intifada broke out in October 2000 (Heckman 2020).

This position as a mediator led Morocco to start advertising Jewish tourism campaigns throughout the 1980s, marketed in particular to Israelis of Moroccan origin, thus inviting all those Moroccan Jewish communities that began to emigrate after the creation of the state of Israel to return to Moroccan soil (Heckman, 2020). Hassan II, always an adept politician, saw the value in Jewish tourism and working with the United States in the broader troubles of the Middle East and North Africa since such an
increased partnership, already strong due to Cold War alliances, would bring economic gains to Morocco (Heckman, 2020).

One of his first measures as monarch was to allow all political dissidents during his father’s reign to return to the country, establishing a Truth and Reconciliation commission to address the Years of Lead. The relationship between the Jewish population and Moroccan politics became even closer after 9/11 and the terrorist attack on Jewish targets in Casablanca in 2003, as Morocco and the United States joined forces in the War on Terror led by George W. Bush’s administration. In this context, relevant Jewish figures such as Simon Lévy or Abraham Serfaty, with clearly left-wing positions, turned into national assets who were intended to demonstrate Moroccan liberal ideas in the face of intolerance, where even the Moroccan Jewish Communists would be understood as symbols of tolerance against religious extremism (Heckman, 2020).

Referring to the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel, it comes after many years of steady rapprochement between the two countries. Morocco set up liaison offices with Israel during the Oslo peace process, yet it froze activities after negotiations broke down in 2000 due to the Second Intifada (Laskier 2004). This did not prevent then Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom from meeting Mohammed VI during an official visit to Rabat in September 2003. Two years later, Shalom, meeting in Istanbul with his Pakistani counterpart, noted that the time had come to establish full relations with other Muslim countries (Heckman 2020).

The Repercussions of the Israel–Morocco Normalisation Agreement

The political and economic motivations that pushed Morocco to join these historic agreements are clear, notwithstanding the pressure exerted by the US, which sought to present the Abraham Accords as a triumph for the Trump administration in its quest to help
stabilise the Middle East and in a context where Morocco gained US support for its sovereignty claim over Western Sahara. But the Abraham Accords, far from focusing only on economic issues, have gone hand in hand with greater cooperation on religious matters. The reference to the father of the three monotheistic religions in the name of the accords is a clear indication that they are not only intended to try to resolve a political conflict, but also to promote religious understanding (Guzansky & Marshall 2020).

Morocco has joined in the diplomacy of religion, especially since the mutual recognition with Israel. The Moroccan government announced, in December 2021, the rehabilitation of more than 13,000 Jewish graves in Fez, as well as the restoration of synagogues and other places of worship (Klaiman, 2021).

Indeed, even before the normalisation agreement, major renovations of Jewish places of worship had taken place, such as the Ettedgui Synagogue in Casablanca in 2016. Still, the agreements have opened up new avenues of cooperation between Morocco and Israel, as shown by recent excavations in the Atlas Mountains by a team of archaeologists from both countries. The preservation of cultural and religious richness have become one of the main objectives of the agreements, and a pillar of the two countries’ diplomacy (Guzansky & Marshall 2020).

What is clear is that the Moroccan Jewish community, although shrinking, continues to play a key role in Moroccan politics compared to other Maghrebi Jewish communities such as Algeria and Tunisia, which have had much less of a place in the political sphere of their respective nations (Stillman 2019).

With the agreements, a new chapter in Arab-Israeli relations has opened. Although relations between Morocco and Israel appear to have improved, there are many challenges ahead. On the one hand, Algeria, whose relationship with Morocco has always been complicated, has already reiterated its refusal to allow Israeli aircraft to pass through its airspace, complicating trade relations between the two countries. On the other hand, relations between Palestinian and Israeli forces will greatly influence relations with Morocco, where leaders cannot ignore the strong popular support for Palestine and the potential internal tension that could be caused by inaction.

Sources


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The history of Egyptian-Russian relations extends for more than 75 years. Both countries established diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Egypt on August 26, 1943. The relations between the two countries witnessed severe priority changes, both at external and internal levels. Today, Russia and Egypt have become partners.

The first step for Egyptian-Russian cooperation occurred in August 1948, when the first economic agreement was signed on exchanging Egyptian cotton for grain and timber from the Soviet Union (Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Arab Republic of Egypt, n.d.). The relationship witnessed successive developments; the most prominent of which was after the July Revolution of 1952, when the Soviet Union provided Egypt with assistance in modernizing its armed forces and constructing the High Dam (Ibid). Bilateral relations reached their peak in the fifties - sixties of the twentieth century, when thousands of Soviet experts helped Egypt establish production institutions, including the High Dam in Aswan, the Iron and Steel Complex in Helwan, the Aluminum Complex in Nagaa Hammadi, and the extension of Aswan-Alexandria electric lines (Ibid). In Egypt, 97 industrial projects were completed with the contribution of the Soviet Union and supplied the Egyptian armed forces since the fifties with Soviet weapons. Generations of those who currently constitute the political, scientific, and cultural elite in the land of Al-Ahram received Soviet knowledge, including former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who graduated from a Soviet military institute (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.). As both countries’ history is intertwined, so are their interests in the region. However, as the Egyptian and Russian governments may have the same national interests, rivalries are created. This article will highlight both states’ strategies in regard to Middle Eastern politics.

The Various Areas of Cooperation between Egypt and Russia

The files of cooperation between the two countries included almost all sectors of health, education, nuclear energy, and military cooperation (Strategic Assessment 2020). All this would have supported the Egyptian-Russian association in laying the foundations for peace in the region, but the Russian Federation has repeatedly tried to impose its policy on the conflict countries in the Arab world, including Libya and Syria. Even the Russian position on the issue of the Renaissance Dam dispute has caused tensions, the details of which will be addressed in this article (Shay 2020).

The Issue of the Renaissance Dam and the Russian Position

Moscow’s stance toward Cairo on the “Renaissance Dam” has raised fears in Egypt that Russia will take the issue for granted, which has led some in Egyptian political circles to suspect that Russia will demand more concessions before offering its full support at the United Nations (Emam 16/07/2021). Cairo is beginning to realize the limits of its partners, but the two governments will continue to cooperate on hot issues such as arms procurement (Yeheys & Chen 2020).

On August 5, the Russian ambassador to Egypt, Georgy Borisenko, appeared on the Egyptian “Ten” channel to respond to local media campaigns against his country (Hassanein 17/08/2021). Much of the criticism stemmed from Moscow’s stance towards Cairo during the Security Council’s deliberations last month on the
Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam or Renaissance Dam (Yeheys & Chen 2020, Emam 16/07/2021).

Faced with the most vital tensions in bilateral relations that have been seen in years, Borisenko stressed four points (Hassanein 17/08/2021): First: Russia will pursue a balanced policy on the "Renaissance Dam" and mediate disputes between its allies in Cairo and Addis Ababa if requested.

Second: Moscow highly appreciates its military cooperation with Egypt but is concerned about its military exercise in the Black Sea region alongside the United States and Ukraine in June.

Third: Russia still considers the "Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum" hosted by Egypt a competitor in the energy field, but it will consider joining it as an observer.

Fourth: The media affiliated with the "Muslim Brotherhood," based in London, is responsible for spreading false rumors about strained bilateral relations.

Tensions first surfaced on July 8, when Russia’s representative to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia, told the Security Council that diplomacy is the only solution to the Renaissance Dam’s disputes and that "statements about the use of force should be avoided and prevented." (United Nations 08/07/2021, Yeheys & Chen 2020). Cairo interpreted this statement negatively because it directly challenged the words of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who had been hinting for months that a military confrontation was possible. The situation then intensified on July 12, when Moscow and Addis Ababa signed a military agreement on the same day that Egypt sent its foreign minister to Brussels to meet with NATO officials (Ramani 16/08/2021, Yeheys & Chen 2020).

Cairo’s expectations of full Russian support over the Renaissance Dam dispute stem from its perceived alignment with many Russian goals in the Middle East (Emam 16/07/2021). Egyptian officials sided with Moscow in international forums, took positions hostile to Western-style NGOs, supported the Assad regime in Syria, tolerated the presence of Russian "Wagner mercenaries" in Libya, took an aggressive stance against political Islamists, and increased their purchases of Russian weapons to levels not seen since the 1960s (Emam 16/07/2021). Cairo also allowed Russia to open a consulate in the Red Sea city of Hurghada in 2016 (Emam 16/07/2021). Recently, Egypt has been attracting Russian investment into economic projects around the Suez Canal (Emam 16/07/2021).

But Moscow’s position on the "Renaissance Dam" raised Cairo’s fears that Russia would take the issue for granted despite all of the above, at the expense of Egyptian interests. And Sisi’s team appears unwilling to take any more privileges—or, in some cases, unable to make them. Moscow might not take Cairo’s complaints or ambitions seriously because it believed that the country’s regional influence did not exist—as shown, for example, when Egyptian officials did not allow readmission of Syria to the Arab League (Rossi 2021). The question that arises here is, to what extent does disrespect (if accurate) affect Russian policy toward Cairo (Rossi 2021).

Whatever the case, many pro-government intellectuals in Egypt reacted to this bilateral disconnect by writing articles and social media posts arguing that today’s Russia is not the Soviet Union of the 1960s, Cairo should maintain its relationship with the United States as an additional partner. In an article entitled "Those who let us down in the Security Council," Nasserist MP Imad El-Din Hussein, editor-in-chief of Al-Shorouk newspaper, expressed his appreciation for Washington’s "unexpected" sympathy in the dispute; over the "Renaissance Dam." (Teller Report 18/07/2021, Veilleux 2013). He questioned the position of Russia and China. Political analyst Imad Gad went further, writing on Facebook that Cairo should cancel its agreement with Moscow to establish the Dabaa nuclear reactor plant and sign a new deal with
Washington to obtain more incredible support on issues related to the dam (Teller Report 18/07/2021, Veilleux 2013). Likewise, political researcher Amr Al-Shobaki pointed to the relatively supportive positions of the "Renaissance Dam" taken by the United States and Europe, arguing that those who advocate an alliance with Russia and China do so because those governments do not push for democracy or human rights (Veilleux 2013).

**Russian Politics in Libya**

Unlike Syria, the spoils for Russia are not only ideological or geopolitical in Libya. Russia has objected to many United Nations resolutions from being issued, including the decision to criminalize Muhammad al-Kani and assist Haftar militarily to invade the capital and plant thousands of booby-traps in southern Tripoli and the Al-Jufra line. This policy distorted Russia's image in the Libyan scene and created many enemies despite its media attempt to stand with all parties.

To appease governments in the Libyan West, they promised to reopen their embassy in Tripoli on March 15, which was transferred to Tunisia in October 2013 after being attacked by protesters (Tekir 2020). Russia also sent 100,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik Covid vaccine to the Government of National Unity as a token of friendship (Tekir 2020). Furthermore, they concluded a deal to supply wheat from the previous government and activate the oil exploration program for Tatneft and Rosneft during the years 2017 and 2018 (Tekir 2020).

Russia is heavily involved in the region, through its relationship with the UAE’s relationship and Haftar’s faction in Libya; both impacting the local political scene (Karoutsos 2021). Through these actions, Russia intends to find a foothold on the Libyan shore and obtain a market for arms exports (see Strategic Assessment 2020, DW 29/05/2020). Some banks in eastern Libya have participated with the Central Bank branch in Al-Bayda in this regard by loading the Libyan state with more than 45 billion dinars in debts to the banks, which required the Central Bank of Libya to stop clearing since 2014 until now, and it opened for a short period during the month of October 2021 and then closed. Politically, Haftar’s exit from the peace conference in Moscow in January 2020 and his failure to sign the agreement due to Emirati intransigence made him a source of mistrust for the Russians, but rather an insult that could be used temporarily and then disposed of (Akl 2019).

Russia faces many challenges in its dealings with the Libyan parties. In the east, many activists no longer accept the presence of Wagner and its military programs over which they no longer have control. In the Libyan West, the Russians meet with resistance and disapproval of their policy, after the June 2019 arrest of two Russian Wagner company agents in Tripoli and the subsequent participation of this force in the war on Tripoli with Haftar’s forces.

Russia is, however, not the only foreign actor whose interests are at play in the region: Turkey and Italy have significant investments - the former with contracts exceeding 16 billion dollars, and the later and oil fields (Tanchum (23/09/2020)).

Playing the Saif al-Islam Gaddafi card to be a Trojan horse for the Russian bear is a far-fetched possibility, especially since many Libyans have been stung by the fire of the Gaddafi family, its connections, tyranny, narrow-mindedness, impoverishment of society, and deprivation of development for four decades. Who is Saif but the son of that vile tyrant? (Sukhankin 2020).

**Conclusion**

Despite the apparent Egyptian-Russian cooperation in various fields, Russia has its own interests in the Middle East, sometimes in the form of partnerships, or through Russian mercenaries spreading instability in the region. However, Egypt’s leading role in the Middle East has played a role in deterring Russian, Turkish,
and American ambitions, notably through the Egyptian initiative to stop the conflict in Libya.

The Middle East region will never be free of conflicts and ambitions from the former major colonial powers. With enormous oil wealth, there will inevitably be more events in the future. On the other hand, we find that Egypt has not decisively ended the issue of the Renaissance Dam crisis. However, Egypt and Ethiopia, should cooperate to end this crisis without military intervention, which would bring more violence and instability in the region, as stated by the Egyptian President personally.

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What does a president do when the polls for the upcoming election sour in favor of their opponents? What if losing the election means certain instability for the country and its more powerful neighbors - is there then even a choice to hold such a volatile election?

In Palestine on April 31, Palestinian President and leader of the Fatah movement, Mahmoud Abbas announced the decision to indefinitely postpone the Palestinian legislative elections, the first such elections since January 2006, denying Palestinians their voice (Kuttab 2021). And while this type of withdrawal of democratic rights can happen when a society turns authoritarian, there are some novel forces that belie the traditional power grab scenario. The combination of Hamas’ popularity and the fragility of the long governing coalition resulted in immense internal pressure and pressure from foreign (and the Israeli) governments to postpone these “unpredictable elections” (Kuttab 2021).

The Palestinian Fatah movement, a secular political party in the Palestinian Authority (PA) which recognizes Israel and has ruled out armed conflict in deference to negotiations in order to create a Palestinian state, has long governed the West Bank and enjoyed international support (Tahhan 2017). Their support from the population comes primarily from the economic gains they bring to their followers, be it in the form of government programs or bribes (Tahhan 2017). They lack a coherent ideology these days, however, as the promise of a Palestinian state through negotiations becomes less realistic every year. This loss in belief translates into political gain for Hamas, the Islamist party that governs the Gaza strip. Hamas and its more grassroots followers do not recognize Israel as a country and would accept a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders (Tahhan 2017). Israel tolerates the Fatah movement insofar as they prevent Hamas from gaining political power, but a political fracture has crippled the Fatah movement. While the elections were originally called by Abbas and the polling data suggested that the Fatah movement would win 40% and Hamas 30%, Mohammad Dahlan and Nasser al-Kidwa (among others) put their hats in the ring on separate lists, drawing a potential 10% and 7% from the Fatah movement respectively (Agencies 2021). This splintering of the party’s cohesion and Abbas’ inability to convince all necessary members to rejoin the Fatah list for the election left little doubt that no majority government would result from the elections.

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According to President Abbas, the primary reason for postponing the elections is due to the Israeli blocking of Palestinian voters in East Jerusalem (DW 2021a) - a fig leaf that Israel, perhaps, was all too happy to provide. A loss to Hamas in the elections could have dealt a devastating blow to regional security, which raised not only concerns in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but also in Egypt and Jordan, whose head intelligence officers lobbied Abbas to cancel the elections as early as January 2021 (Amer 2021). Egyptian concern comes from the fear that a victorious Hamas would lend their voice and support to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist party of their country, as well as the diplomatic headache violence within their neighbor's borders could cause (Amer 2021). King Abdullah II of Jordan has his own concerns with an ascendant Hamas because of his kingdom's proximity to the potential conflict and Jordan's newfound dependence on Israeli natural gas (3 billion cubic meters/year) (Ghazal 2018) and water (50 million cubic meters/year) (Al Sharif 2021). The cooling of relations between Israel and Jordan based on economic codependence, agreements under which they mutually profit, are put at major risk if the status quo in Palestine shifts towards Hamas’ more violent tendencies.

Israel sent a stark warning that an electoral victory for Hamas, which they consider a terrorist organization, would result in “a complete boycott of the PA, halting funds and transfers, and freezing security cooperation.” (Amer 2021) Given the deep intertwining of the Palestinian Authority and Israel, this amounts to nothing less than the total dissolution of the PA in the eyes of Israel, which could raise the prevalence of violence in a region that saw 250 Israeli and 5600 Palestinian conflict-related deaths as well as a further 115,000 injured between 2008 and 2020 (Richter 2021).

In December 2021, under immense public pressure to hold some semblance of an election, President Abbas allowed for municipal elections in the Gaza strip, which Hamas boycotted (DW 2021a). This amounts to the Fatah movement dipping its toes back into the water of democracy to gauge the political landscape they face going forward. The results were a poor performance by the Fatah movement and all other political parties, receiving together (Fatah and all other parties) only 30% of the vote while 70% of votes went to independent candidates (DW 2021a). It seems the cancelling of the elections eight months prior had exacted a heavy political cost as the Palestinian government’s popularity has sunk to abysmal depths after the outbreak of violence in the Gaza strip during the “11-day war” in May 2021.

As the Palestinian government reckons with its unpopularity, Hamas is politically profiting from their actions. Every misstep adds to the disillusionment of the Palestinian public, including the recent death of Nizar Banat, human rights activist and critic of the PA, at the hands of Palestinian security forces (DW 2021b). Calls for President Abbas’ resignation filled the streets as hundreds of Palestinians took to the streets outside the presidential compound following Banat’s death in June 2021 (DW 2021b). The situation appears grim for those who hold out hope for a lasting peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine crisis, as the PA is staring down the barrel of a Hamas takeover and every step taken to prevent it backfires and weakens them. Time seems to be running out for the 86-year-old President Abbas, as the clock ticks towards Hamas.
Sources


Turkey entered 2022 with a new name on the international stage: Turkiye (TRT World, 2021). However, this change in name did not signify a change in its foreign policy attitude, as its grand regional and global ambitions are set to remain the same.

The foreign policy of Turkey has been described as being based on the principle of autonomy, and nowhere has this been more visible than in Turkey’s expansion of its military and defense sector (Ataman, 2022). Almost 50 years in the making, Turkish military capabilities are world-class (Salihoğlu, 2021). Their developments in maritime defense rival that of any other country given the number of maritime conflicts Turkey finds itself in (Daily Sabah with AFP, 2021). However, Turkey has also been expanding its other capabilities, its most notorious weapon being the Bayraktar TB2 drone that was able to alter the course of conflicts in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh (Moriyasu, 2021). Over 13 countries have now signed deals to acquire the drone (Daily Sabah with AFP, 2021).

Nevertheless, not all countries are happy about Turkey’s growing military power. Most recently, this use of drones has angered Russia, when Ukraine deployed the Bayraktar against Russian-backed forces in Donbass (Reuters, 2021). In turn, Turkey urged Russia to be more cooperative with NATO and drop their “one-sided” demands (AFP, 2021). Turkey’s encroachment on Russian ‘territory’ is also visible on the African continent where Russia has been a key arms exporter, and where, in recent years, interest in Turkish weaponry has increased (Daily Sabah with AFP, 2021). Despite these squabbles, the two leaders met at the end of December in Kazakhstan to discuss their collaboration in Syria, particularly options for the transfer of humanitarian aid, the launching of the Syrian constitutional committees works in Geneva, the exchange of prisoners, the release of hostages, and further confidence-building measures (Frantzman, 2021). The two countries further reasserted a positive beginning in the new year with a phone call between Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to “reaffirm their determination to continue boosting the mutually beneficial partnership between Russia and Turkey” (RFE/RL, 2022). However, analysts have referred to this relationship as ‘precarious’, given that following the withdrawal of the USA from the Middle East, both Russia and Turkey may attempt to “fill the vacuum with their own economic and strategic interests” (Moriyasu, 2021).

On the other hand, Turkish relations with other countries and regions have flourished in the last year, especially on the African continent. The end of December saw the third Turkey–Africa Partnership Summit intended to deepen cooperation and ensure strategic ties (Daily Sabah, 2021). Turkey is “one of the largest contributors of humanitarian and development aid to the African continent” (Ataman, 2021). In addition to this soft power, Turkey places a particular emphasis on defense, as more and more African countries are “looking to buy military equipment at cheaper prices with fewer preconditions” (Daily Sabah with AFP, 2021). Most recently, Nigeria has agreed to place Erdogan’s enemies on surveillance in exchange for Turkey’s military assistance (Irede, 2021), and Sierra Leone has deepened bilateral ties with Turkey regarding trade, investment, education, infrastructure and mining (African Business, 2021). Despite such successes, Turkey has also faced competition. For instance, its attempts to
establish a military foothold in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Kenya, appears to threaten Egypt’s national security, “given the paramount importance of that area to the stability and navigation of the Suez Canal” (Hassan, 2021).

Turkey and Egypt have been “politically estranged” for almost 8 years due to ideological differences, but 2021 appears to have been the year to begin the normalization of this relationship (Daily Sabah with AA, 2021a). Overall, Turkey has been normalizing relations with its other Middle Eastern neighbors as well. This can be seen through phone calls and visits to the United Arab Emirates (Telci, 2021), and Saudi Arabia, set to take place in February (Daily Sabah, 2022).

One particular novelty in 2022 is the meeting that took place on January 14th between Turkish and Armenian special envoys in which a roadmap for the normalization of bilateral ties was discussed. The relationship, which has been strained over Armenia’s occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh, is set to continue improving. Already on January 1st, Armenia lifted its embargo on Turkish products (Daily Sabah, 2022) and from February direct flights will resume (de Waal, 2022).

However, without a strong economy, Erdoğan cannot maintain his power in Turkey, much less project such power externally. Unfortunately, Turkey entered 2022 with an inflation rate at a 19-year high (BBC News, 2022). The usual approach is to raise interest rates in order to stabilize the currency. Erdogan has, however, continued slashing interest rates in the hope that a competitive currency will drive exports and later transform into laudable economic growth (France24, 2021). So far, the strategy has not had much success, as can be seen in continually rising prices of consumer goods and Erdoğan’s inversely proportional popularity (BBC News, 2022). In order to counteract this, in late December, Erdoğan vowed to compensate savers for inflation that affected their bank deposits in lira (France24, 2021). This led to a significant recovery of the currency, but critics point to the short-term nature of this relief effort (Moriyasu, 2021).

This projected economic meltdown of Turkey is problematic not only for the country itself, but also for the European Union. Turkey currently houses around 4 million migrants and asylum seekers (Stamouli, 2022) and has received over 6 billion euros since 2016 of funding from the EU following the 2016 EU–Turkey deal. The combination of these two challenges and the high stakes that migration presents for the EU actually opens up a corridor of opportunity for Turkey who can effectively “instrumentalize” migration issues in order to receive more aid from the EU (Stamouli, 2022). These arguments will likely hold even more sway due to the increasing migration from Afghanistan following the less than successful exit of the United States from the country. As such, Turkey has been conveying a sentiment of “migrant chaos”. At the same time, Turkey wants to show the EU that it is capable of defending its borders, if provided with the right resources, and has invited journalists to document migrant raids and to observe their extensive border security measures (Stamouli, 2022). Financial aid is not Turkey’s only request, as it has also called on the European Union to restart talks on the country’s accession (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

Through all these actions Turkey aims to establish itself as a regional hegemon and a powerful international actor. In this regard, its sights are not limited to the Middle East and Africa, but also more recently Turkey has been looking towards Central Asia. The so-called ‘Bayram Belt’ of countries that have ethnic ties to Turkey stretches from the Balkan States through Central Asia and as far as Russia and China. In
the future, Turkey will hope to consolidate relations there as well. The implementation of this strategy can be seen in Turkey’s engagement in Bosnia–Herzegovina, where it is taking diplomatic action in order to de-escalate tensions (Daily Sabah, 2021b), and most recently in its support for Kazakhstan amid protests (Hurriyet Daily News Site, 2022). It remains to be seen, however, how well Turkey can achieve its ambitious goals, given its occasionally uneasy relations with major powers and its currently struggling economy (Moriyasu, 2021).

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Tunisia, the land from where the Arab Spring began; mere protests that transformed the Middle East into a base for proxy wars, sectarian conflicts, and terrorism. This series of turmoil began when a local vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire due to maltreatment by municipal officials under the autocratic government Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. After Bouazizi’s self-immolation, Tunisians came out on the streets demanding democracy, freedom, better livable conditions, employment opportunities and socio-economic uplift (Lageman, 2020). The chain of protests and demonstrations against other dictatorial regimes ruling various countries in the Middle East began and failed to bring democracy and freedom, however, Tunisia was one of the few that achieved a political solution to the Tunisian uprising (The Gaurdian, 2014).

This mass uprising in Tunisia is also known as the “Jasmine Revolution”, brought Ben Ali’s rule to end as he fled on 14 January 2011; from January till October that year, Tunisia was in the hands of the interim government which disbanded the former President’s party (Abouaoun, 2019). On October 24, an Islamist party, Ennahda came to power after an electoral process and formed a collaborative government with the other two secular parties of Tunisia (Abouaoun, 2019). What seemed like a political revival in the history of Tunisia was not sustainable, rather, 2012 saw clashes between the Islamist party, Ennahda, and the secular parties; while the masses kept on protesting against the conservative, Islamist steps taken by Ennahda (Abouaoun, 2019). Fuel was added to the fire when two Tunisian politicians belonging to secular parties were assassinated in 2013 blaming Ennahda (Gall, 2013). Consequently, Ennahda gave power to the interim government.

Elections conducted under the interim government resulted in the victory of Nidaa Tounes, a secular party (BBC, 2014). Stability was not achieved this time either. Tunisians started joining Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a terrorist organization; and were still enraged over poverty, inflation, and unemployment. A change of Prime Ministers led to elections again in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019 (Abouaoun, 2019). Presidential elections brought Kais Saied on the President’s seat. Saied’s regime is also turbulent due to the continued political rift between Kais Saied and the Tunisian legislative branch, Assembly of the Representatives of the People (Guesmi, 2021). The Tunisian legislature was mainly led by the long contending Islamist party, Ennahda. The new wave of crisis began on 25 July 2021 when President Saied dismissed the legislative body; this move was labeled as a “self-coup” and a threat to democracy and freedom in Tunisia, while the country is still recovering from the aftermath of Arab Spring amid CoronaVirus (Todman, 2021, see Maulida 2021). The crisis escalated and Najla Bouden was appointed by the President as the first female Prime Minister of Tunisia (DW, 2021). Yet the crisis did not come to an end, rather the new year, 2022, brought another episode.

The young democracy of Tunisia entered the second year of this decade with an announcement that the President of Tunisia has called for consultation over national reforms to formulate a new constitution (Al Jazeera, 2022). The major subject matters to be considered for reforms include the electoral process, socio-economic development, health, education sector and cultural matters. The constitutional referendum is announced to take place on the anniversary of the popularly known “self-coup” i.e., 25th July (Al Jazeera, 2022). This seems like
a step towards strengthening democracy, but is it intentional? Or is it just a cover-up for Saied’s crackdown against opposition parties? The most pertinent event of last year with its impacts this year as well, is the detention of the leader of the Ennahda party, Noureddine Bihiri, by men in plain clothes in the capital city of Tunisia, Tunis (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Noureddine has also served as a former justice minister and is now being accused of association with criminals and offenses such as terrorism by the President (France24, 2022). His arrest has brought the crisis to a new level, while the international community and the United Nations shows ‘serious concern’ over the matter. Not only this but the other segments of the country also fear, Saied’s way of handling matters, for instance, the General Labor Union (UGTT), has its own reservations (Al Jazeera, 2022), while the media reports restrictions on opposing political parties and the health sector faces collapse (Amara, 2022).

Conclusively, in light of the recent developments in Tunisia, it can be stated that Kais Saied should carefully bring the country out of turmoil while satisfying all factions so as to bring sustainable stability and growth, or else Tunisia might become the center of an uprising again.

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Background information

The history of military conflicts on Egyptian lands extends for more than 140 years, starting from the British occupation in 1882 through the June 30 revolution in 2013. For many years, the situation remained the same, with colonial regimes imposing laws and successive Egyptian revolutions demanding their abolition. Martial law was declared for the first time on 2 November 1914, under the banner of the prevailing military rule to report that the state of Egypt is under British occupation and that stricter regulations and impose curfews and others will be followed (Salameh 2018). During the Second World War, emergency law was applied until the famous Cairo fire and then the July Revolution of 1952. In 1958, the emergency law in force was issued, activated during the setback of 1967 until the end of the era of the late President Anwar Sadat. It was re-imposed again after his assassination in 1981, and it remained in force until it was abolished in May 2012. And in January 2013, President Sisi imposed the emergency law in the governorates of the Suez Canal for a month. The state of emergency was re-imposed after the June 30 revolution for only one month, and with the escalation of terrorist acts, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi imposed a state of emergency in Sinai from the end of 2014. In April 2017, the circle of the state of emergency expanded to include All Egyptian lands, and between 17 renewals and extensions, the emergency law remained in force until it was terminated by President Sisi’s last decision dated October 25, 2021 (Elliesie 2010).

The Egyptian Emergency Law and its Provisions

The emergency law is defined as a unique system with a specific time, duration and circumstances, which the concerned authorities announce due to extraordinary emergency circumstances. The use of these laws empowers said authorities to take urgent measures in unusual ways. In Egypt, the emergency law gives the right to both the armed forces and the police to use all available methods to confront terrorism or any threat that would destabilize the safety and stability of the Egyptian territories (Liguori 2012).

The Egyptian Constitution, issued in its latest version in 2014, supports that Article 154 regulates states of emergency declaration in the country, based on Emergency Law No. 162 of 1958. This article gives the President of the Republic the right to declare a state of emergency in the country for three consecutive months and, afterwards, the approval of the Council of Ministers and two-thirds of the members of the House of Representatives. The emergency law gives broad powers to the President of the Republic and the government, as it allows exceptional measures to be taken, including placing restrictions on the freedom of people to meet, move and pass in certain places or times, refer the accused to state security courts, curfew in some areas, and monitor messages of any kind. They tracked newspapers, pamphlets, publications, editorials, drawings and all other means of expression, propaganda, and advertisements before publishing them, confiscating them, and closing their printing places, as well as enabling the army to impose security (El-Ghobashy 2008).

The law also grants the President and the government the power to determine the dates for opening and closing public shops, confiscating any movable or real estate, ordering the imposition of guards on companies and
institutions, evacuating or isolating some areas, regulating means of transportation, and limiting and specifying transportation between different regions.

Security Stability and the Effects of Canceling the Emergency Law

One of the remarkable points in the current Egyptian view of the emergency law is that it is looked at as a means of dealing with disasters and crises. This view, although it was the main reason for the issuance of this law in the first place, was because the successive authorities in Egypt focused only on the security aspect of this law. Egypt’s new view of this law appeared clearly during the amendment approved in May 2020, as these amendments included some measures for dealing with health disasters, allowing the President of the Republic or his delegate to take all or some of these measures to confront the emergency. These amendments focused mainly on health, social and economic care and protection (Moustafa 2008).

Under President El-Sisi’s abolition of the emergency law, a long series of special judicial, governmental, and legal procedures that were in place under it will cease. Exceptional trials will be abolished, such as the emergency Supreme State Security Courts, abolishing the Emergency Supreme State Security Prosecution, lifting restrictions on people’s freedom of assembly and movement, abolishing censorship of newspapers, bulletins, publications, and editorials, and lifting restrictions on freedom of residence and passage at certain times and places. As ending emergency law will cancel all special operations before emergency state security courts, judgments are subject to ratification by the Office of State Security Affairs (Reza 2007).

One of the most significant gains that will result from stopping the emergency law is preventing the work of the Prime Minister’s decision No. 1664 for the year 2021, which refers some types of crimes to emergency courts so that the trials return to normal under the Code of Criminal Procedure and Punishment. Still, it is noted here that some superior courts, such as the Supreme Court State Security Emergency Cases filed under the Emergency Law will continue to be heard. As Article 19 of the Emergency Law states: when the state of emergency ends, the State Security Courts (or the Ordinary Misdemeanors and Felonies Chambers convened in an emergency State Security Authority) shall remain in place. Cases that have already been referred to it under a state of emergency continue to be considered according to the procedures followed before it. As for the crimes under investigation and the accused are not referred to the courts, they are referred to the competent ordinary courts, and the rules of the Code of Criminal Procedure are followed (Singerman, 2002).

Conclusion

We can say that the abolition of this law, which had a long and arduous journey in Egyptian history, is a new point of passage for the Egyptian ship towards the new republic, where there is no reason or justification to work with any exceptional laws, in light of the apparent security, economic and political stability that Egypt enjoys.

This decision was widely welcomed internally and externally and was an apparent response to each of Zayed on the Egyptian state in this file, mainly since this decision includes all Egyptian lands, including the governorates of North and South Sinai. Cancellation of this decision seems a strong motive for every Egyptian, to preserve the gains that Egypt has achieved, especially at the security and economic levels, so that Egypt avoids entering into new cycles of instability or terrorist threats, which may push us once again to return to exceptional laws.
Sources


Malta and Libya have had an ongoing relationship since independence due to geopolitical issues. The fall of Gaddafi in 2011 and the ensuing civil war have posed enormous challenges for the small island nation in terms of migration flows.

Libya is a highly relevant state in geopolitical terms due to its proximity to Europe and its countless hydrocarbon reserves. The ongoing internal conflict has motivated the involvement of various countries interested in obtaining strategic benefits. One of the points that have marked relations between Libya and Malta, and consequently with the rest of the European Union, are the irregular migrations along the Central Mediterranean route, particularly to Italy and Malta. These migration flows have political, economic, security and humanitarian consequences for European countries, especially for Malta, a country with a recent history of mass arrivals of migrants and whose control has been one of its major policy objectives under its EU presidency in 2017.

Maltese–Libyan Relations after their Independence from Colonial Powers

Libya gained independence from Italy in 1951, becoming a constitutional monarchy of great instability due to the country’s various tribal feuds. However, with the coup d’état carried out by General Muammar al-Gaddafi, who ruled the country from 1969 to 2011, the suspension of tribal politics during his time in power gave the North African country a façade of stability.

Malta gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1964, becoming part of the Commonwealth. The creation of the independent state of Malta required a replacement for the British because, as a small state, Malta could not guarantee its own security, especially in the context of the Cold War and the dispute over control of the Mediterranean (Attard 2020). Consequently, relations between Malta and Libya improved considerably, specifically in terms of economic assistance to bolster their economies and safeguard their security.

As a result, the Maltese Prime Minister Dom Mintoff made agreements with China and Libya respectively to secure additional funding, bringing Malta closer to North Africa, particularly Libya. Malta lifted visa requirements for travel to Libya and added Arabic to the education system, among other things; whereas Libya, in return, provided considerable financial help to the Maltese Dry Docks (Attard, 2020).

In fact, good relations between the two countries were maintained even during the process of Malta’s accession to the European Union (Attard, 2020). In the 2003 EU accession referendum, the Maltese Prime Minister at the time, Fenech Adami, maintained that Gaddafi was favourable to Malta’s accession to the EU as it would act as a voice for the Mediterranean. This statement was made to reassure the numerous Maltese people that were concerned that, if Malta joined the EU, relations with Libya would be hindered (Attard 2020).

Maltese–Libyan Relations after the Arab Spring

The good relations between the two nations were maintained after the outbreak of the Libyan Arab Spring, since they share interests in the Mediterranean and it was essential for Malta to maintain Libya as an ally, particularly in the issues relating to migration, which represents the major Maltese security challenge since its entry...
to the European Union (Harwood, Moncada & Pace, 2018).

Despite Maltese support, after the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, the power instability led to a return of tribal and ethnic identities as the primary form of identification and organisation in Libya, increasing levels of violence and making a new centralisation of authority almost impossible. Even today, despite the existence of a national interim government, there is no unitary actor that projects international sovereignty, nor can it provide physical security, legitimacy to political institutions, economic management or guarantee social welfare (Harwood, Moncada & Pace, 2018).

The lack of border control due to the weakness of the Libyan state made the country a highly attractive destination for migrants seeking to reach Europe. In 2017, in the midst of a massive wave of migrants arriving on Maltese shores from Libya, Malta began its first EU presidency. On this matter, Maltese Foreign Minister Carmelo Abela underscored the importance for the international community to assist Libyans in finding a solution to their problems, stressing that a unified Libya is crucial to Malta (Abela 2020).

On the different objectives to be pursued during the Maltese presidency, they therefore focused on the trouble spots of the Mediterranean region, particularly Syria and Libya, being of great relevance the establishment of the Quartet on Libya composed of the UN, the Arab League, the African Union and the EU (Harwood, Moncada & Pace, 2018). The Libya Quartet met twice during Malta's presidency, yet it is too early to judge how the Quartet will fare in their objectives.

**Challenges for the Maltese–Libyan Relations in the Coming Years**

In reference to Libya, the new government faces a number of major challenges in running the country until the next elections: it must deal with the different Libyan factions, which do not want to see their influence and power diminished; it must unify the various political and economic institutions, restore the country’s civilian infrastructure and basic services, provide security for millions of internally displaced persons and it must deliver vaccines and medical assistance to the entire population in the midst of the global pandemic (Varvelli, Arturo & Martini, 2021).

Libya has not held elections since 2014, which ended in the division of the country. There are many expectations that these elections will change the country. However, there are fears that it will be like 2014, when the election results were rejected as illegitimate by various militias and parties, starting a civil war that plunged the country into utter chaos. In the best scenario, a new president elected would be good news, as it would allow Libya to present itself as a real country, expel foreign mercenaries and return to order from the institutional chaos it has been in for the last few years (Vohra 2022).

Malta, whose migratory pressure has increased again in recent months, views with suspicion the political instability in Libya and the world powers’ inability to reach a peace agreement that would bring a secure and stable Libya and, consequently, security to the Mediterranean (Varvelli, Arturo & Martini, 2021).

The elections in Libya will have a particular impact on Malta’s internal politics, as the elections in the North African country will determine the migratory flows arriving to the Maltese archipelago. Malta is also preparing for the next general elections taking place in 2022, where a new migratory crisis would be detrimental to the re-election of the current Labour prime minister, Robert Abela. It is therefore a matter of time to see how political processes in Libya will influence relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean.
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