

# MARITIME SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

## DECIPHERING THE SECURITY PUZZLE

WRITTEN BY: ROMY YAHCHOUCHI







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# FOREWORD

The Mediterranean Sea, although very ancient, has re-emerged in the last decade as one of the most contested seas with the highest military presence, important discoveries related to energy resources and being one of the main routes for illegal migration to Europe.

Indeed, the significance of the Mediterranean Sea is clear on different aspects; economic, geopolitical, strategic and security related. Maritime Security, especially with the rising role of different actors, could be challenging and even lethal to the stability of the South Mediterranean region.

It is in this context that the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean (KAS PolDiMed) publishes this study to give an overview of the significance and implications of the Maritime Security in the Mediterranean region. It will also shed light on the shifting alignments and the interconnected dynamics between the different dimensions be it military, geopolitical or economic.

We would like to thank our partner the Middle East Institute for Research and Strategic Studies (MEIRSS), and more specifically the author, Ms. Romy Yahchouchi, for her valuable contribution and her dedication towards this project and through this study, we hope to build a valuable knowledge on such a relevant topic. This study is a part of KAS PolDiMed's activities, which works on the political developments in the South Mediterranean region and aims to implement cross-national projects with reference to the South and East Mediterranean. Its objective is to strengthen the political dialogue and societal and economic integration in the Mediterranean region and to sustainably promote cooperation and partnership with the European Union.

**Thomas Volk**

*Director, Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean  
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*

# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>MS</b>	Maritime Security
<b>EEZs</b>	Exclusive Economic Zones
<b>BoP</b>	Balance of Power
<b>MB</b>	Muslim Brotherhood
<b>GNA</b>	Government of National Accords
<b>LNA</b>	Libyan National Army
<b>LNG</b>	Liquified Natural Gas
<b>ENI</b>	Ente Nazionale Idrocarbur (State Hydrocarbons Authority)
<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>TRNC</b>	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>EMGF</b>	Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum
<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters
<b>IOC</b>	International Oil Company
<b>NOC</b>	National Oil Company
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road initiative
<b>PA</b>	Palestinian Authority
<b>UNCLOS</b>	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
<b>ENP</b>	European Neighborhood Policy
<b>EMP</b>	European-Mediterranean Partnership
<b>IR</b>	International Relations
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>RoC</b>	Republic of Cyprus
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>AK Parti</b>	Justice and Development Party
<b>SWIFT</b>	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
<b>SPFS</b>	System for Transfer of Financial Messages



# INTRODUCTION



The maritime milieu, in general, and the Mediterranean Sea, in particular, are increasingly construed as important sites where cooperation or conflict arises. In the Mediterranean area, composed of twenty-two nation-states, the security of states is linked. The battle for Maritime Security (MS) is “often a quintessentially cooperative one” (Bueger & Edmunds, 2017). This assertion becomes apparent when one considers the security factors that threaten national security, economic development and human security, especially since the 2010s. The threats to MS are numerous and hybrid, ranging from world trade, energy discoveries, spillovers from the Libyan and Syrian civil wars, illegal immigration, human trafficking, eco-terrorism, transnational organized crime, return of super power competition, and overlapping sovereignty claims expressed via maritime delimitation boundary disputes.

The theoretical expectations and material incentives resulting from these numerous security components that shape the Mediterranean Sea, historically predict the emergence of regional cooperation and the development of a security cooperative apparatus in which most, if not all, nation-states are involved. Yet, the Mediterranean Sea has failed, until now, in that regard.

Nowhere have changes in conceptual and practical understandings of MS been more apparent than in the Mediterranean area. The case of MS in that region is, in effect, emblematic of the recently evolving, multifaceted nature of MS; the interconnectivity of security threats; the cross-cutting security concerns and the simultaneity of unconventional and conventional threats. The maritime policies of the key concerned states reflect the changing nature of MS as being influenced by land power rather than solely by naval power, as in the past when security of the sea was mainly about “good order (at sea)” and the threat stemming from a state-on-state conflict (Taufers, 2015). The rising prioritization of the Mediterranean Sea’s MS can be explained by the emergence of four specific and interconnected dynamics: energy discoveries and overlapping sovereignty claims expressed via maritime delimitation boundary disputes, geopolitical rivalries, return of super power competition and illegal immigration/human trafficking. Together, these resulted in the increased involvement of numerous actors (e.g., Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, France, Italy, Egypt, Libya and Algeria) and outside powers, namely the U.S., Russia and China. New actors, therefore, are now involved more than ever in the Mediterranean Sea, partly engendering the intervention of NATO and the EU, with each institution having member states at odds with one another (e.g., Turkey-Greece in NATO and France and Italy in the EU) in this porous sphere.

In such a situation, assessing the status-quo of MS in the Mediterranean Sea is of utmost importance, especially given the Eastern Mediterranean as a newly complex geopolitical hotspot, consequently heightening the significance of geopolitical concerns in the wider Mediterranean area. Many of the security challenges to the Mediterranean area and Southern Europe go beyond geographical considerations, as the Mediterranean Sea acts as a major security nexus and is a zone of insecurity, volatility, and crises on all fronts.

The new multidimensional understanding of security requires a new comprehensive and cooperative approach, with regionalism as one of the most effective ways to achieve political and institutional order (Graceffa, n.d.). In the abstract, security in a region is the outcome of arrangements as different as national defense policies, dyadic pacts and opposing military alliances on multiple sides, and measures and mechanisms of co-management of security issues agreed on by almost all the countries of the region.

The first attempt towards regionalism was the establishment of a Euro-Med partnership under the Barcelona Declaration in 1995. Yet, the past security-building process of the Mediterranean region, manifested, for example, by the writing of the Mediterranean Charter of Peace and Stability in the late 1990s and officially declared during the Barcelona process, failed to produce any concrete result.

The role of the European-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), which is the Barcelona Declaration’s political program, had the potential to contribute to regional stabilization and development to compensate for the intra-regional struggles for political influence. These Euro-Med partnerships go beyond economics towards a synergy among the different security sectors. As illustration, the new MS agenda requires addressing cooperation as part of an interlinked security complex, with strong connections between land and sea. Hard and soft security ties have formally linked EMP member states through a complex structure beyond mere foreign policy and diplomatic ties. These initiatives indicate the political, economic, and culturally strategic significance of the Mediterranean region to the EU, and to NATO also.

Despite attempts at developing a security architecture based on cooperative frameworks that tackle the multi-faceted concept of security (military, economic, environmental, energy, societal, political), such as the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, the EMP and European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), this region still suffers from an insecurity complex. The recognition of the Mediterranean’s unique regional security challenges, of the interdependencies of national securities, and of the disparities (economic, cultural and theoretical) between the two sides of the Mediterranean, were insufficient in forging any significant degree of regional integration.

In this paper, the geopolitical significance and implications of MS in the Mediterranean area form the analytical framework of reference. The literature on MS in the Mediterranean Sea, Çitlioğlu (2020) claims, lacks an adequate understanding of the region’s complex geopolitical dynamic. Understanding the complex regional security, the importance of geopolitics to the Mediterranean Sea’s MS and the ever-changing geopolitical Mediterranean chessboard requires a much broader outlook than the “narrow parameters of analyses” that were used in the literature.

In adopting this broad geopolitical framework, we can assess the wider dynamics and rivalries at play; whereas adopting a narrower frame would preclude making sense of the pluralization of actors and interrelated security issues in the Mediterranean region.

This exercise is consistent with the new MS agenda that necessitates the adoption of a framework in a way that explains MS as an interlinkage of security complexes (energy, national security and human security).

Just as the concept of security has evolved to include multiple dimensions beyond the classical military one, so should maritime security studies rely on a comprehensive analysis. In effect, this paper will proceed first by providing an overview of the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of the Mediterranean Sea. It will then briefly contend that the Mediterranean region is witnessing an unprecedented, chaotic multipolarity and a constantly changing geopolitical environment. This argument will be followed by an in-depth analysis of the four dynamics shaping the Mediterranean Sea, and specifically the eastern part.

# LITERATURE REVIEW



## DEFINITION OF MARITIME SECURITY

The phrase “maritime security” comprises too much, complicating what is needed for present and future MS and prosperity. There is no universal definition of MS, but for the purpose of this paper, the ultimate objective of MS is peace in the ocean by protecting the “maritime domain against threats and intentional unlawful acts” (Shelala, 2014). Since this paper adopts a geopolitical framework, MS is the mitigation of security threats that stem mainly, but not exclusively, from the “possibility of standoffs between the various navies” (Report of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference, 2016).

## GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Because the Mediterranean is the oldest sea in recorded history, maritime history began in the Mediterranean Sea (Train, 2008). The centrality of the Mediterranean in the global geopolitical scene, albeit at different degrees throughout the centuries, stems from its main strategic characteristic as a nexus of energy transit and trade routes. Indeed, the Mediterranean joins western Europe with Middle East oil; it joins the Atlantic Ocean with the Indian Ocean shipping; it brings together NATO's geographically separated nations in its southern flank; it joins Black Sea ports with the Indian and Atlantic Oceans; it also joins some of the West's most important industrial nations with their market and resources (Train, 2008). As such, over the centuries, the Mediterranean basin's geographical position has turned it into a real channel of communications and an essential element in exchanging goods and services. The Mediterranean also contains one of the world's most significant straits, and its importance for world trade is exemplified by the Suez Canal's relevance for global commerce, which has for centuries relied on the linking of the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Further, the Mediterranean is located at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia, connecting these continents both geographically and commercially.

While a description of the central character of the Mediterranean Sea is accurate, it nonetheless fails to capture the multiplicity of representations and issues that rendered the Mediterranean Sea a strategic space for different actors and states. The Roman idea that the Mediterranean Sea is a central landmark is not shared with the Egyptians, who conceptualize it as a boundary rather than a center, nor with the Arabs, who referred to it as the “White Sea.” Our focus is surely not to analyze the security of the Mediterranean Sea through the different meanings assigned to it. Instead, the point is to manifest the ambiguity in defining this space.

Importantly, the Mediterranean is a strategic “space for ideological projection”, particularly in the South and the East (Train, 2008). In effect, the Mediterranean Sea has the longest history of maritime security issues in the world, as well as cultural clashes (Germond & Grove, 2010).

Moreover, there are two adjacent seas which are highly relevant in geopolitical terms. The Black Sea (main Russian exit sea) and the Red Sea (crucial choke point for oil routes and commerce departing from the Middle East) converge in the Mediterranean, making it a sea, where a perilous mix of interests coming from North and East, meet those of the indigenous nations. This geographical convergence is significantly exacerbated by the politically driven presence, albeit reduced, of the U.S., and the increasing economic-based presence of the emerging global power, China, notwithstanding the return of Russia as a player. The presence of numerous islands complicates the application of customary international law in regards to the delimitation of maritime boundaries. Equally important, every island on the western and eastern basin has known a history of war and continuous alternation of powers that exercise control over them, since the control of the Mediterranean Sea is pivotal to ensure trade and navigation.

## HISTORICAL AND PRESENT GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

In much of the existing discussion in international relations (IR) and security studies, the sea is conceived of as a stage for geopolitical power projection and disputes, with a militarized dimension. Importantly, the sea in general, and the Mediterranean Sea in particular, tend to be understood as a connector between different continents and states, enabling a multitude of phenomena, such as colonialism and globalization. We will later see how China's policies in this region can fit the latter category, and is being called the “new colonial power of the 21st century” (Umbach, 2017). The sea is also a space for specific threats, such as piracy, and in the case of the Mediterranean, illegal migration and human trafficking.

The nucleus of maritime geopolitics can be found in the late 19th century. At that time, maritime power, or lack thereof, was an indicator of the rise, or fall, of states. In that sense, naval power was directly related to the concept of dominating states. This realist conception of maritime and sea power relates to one of the dimensions of maritime security, which is national security. Yet, the sea's geostrategic importance evolved to include in maritime security's matrix an economic dimension, a human security dimension (e.g., human trafficking), and a marine environment dimension (i.e., maritime safety, climate change, accidents).

The important distinction to be made between then and today relates to the evolution of the definition of security beyond the classical military one. On the other hand, the nature of the maritime milieu underwent a transformation, whereby sea power as a maritime strategy of power projection and deterrence, is no longer sufficient to determine ‘good order at sea’.

Because the seas have historically been an instrument of geopolitical dominance, it should not be surprising that the great powers of the last two centuries were great naval powers, as well. Today, the increase in naval defense spending by Mediterranean actors, namely Turkey and Egypt, points to their aiming towards becoming full Mediterranean players again (Cristiani, 2019). Indeed, along the shores of the Mediterranean, we are witnessing a gradual acquisition of modern naval equipment and naval anti-submarine and air defense (i.e., area defense systems) by new regional sea powers. The interdependencies of national securities thus operate in a framework where interests and belief systems still clash, and regional conflicts are ubiquitous. In fact, Villegas (2020) claims that the Mediterranean waters are “among the most military-loaded in the world.” Data on armaments trade and military expenditures are indicators that expose an upward progression of the tense relations in the Mediterranean basin. In particular, the Eastern Mediterranean, as a sub-region, is conflict-ridden and witnessing a widespread desecration of state sovereignty and structures, namely in Syria. As proof, global peace indices show that the Eastern Mediterranean region is the least peaceful in the world. It is, therefore, not surprising that, in the disordered multipolarity that reigns over the Mediterranean, the literature describes the security situation by the acronym, VUCA, (Villegas, 2020), which stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Shama, 2019).

A relevant lesson that highlights the crucial connection between land and sea was learned during WWII. Particularly, the West learned that winning the maritime campaign in the Mediterranean and sustaining that victory assures the outcome of the land war. As a consequence, maritime resources dedicated in peacetime are just as necessary, if not more so, than those dedicated during war. In effect, in addition to the hard-power strategy of deterrence, peacetime maneuvers, such as joint or unilateral naval exercises, can allow competitors like the U.S. and China to “one-up one another” (Holmes, 2015) by appealing to potential partners, strengthening citizens’ and allies’ morale, and intimidating rivals. Thus, naval power has a dual purpose, one that is functional, or interoperable, and the other, symbolic. Their cumulative effect is the core of super-power naval diplomacy.

Moreover, Germond (2015) identifies the strategic value of controlling the sea far away from home. He considers that this ability to expand one’s zone of control and competencies beyond one’s external boundary is “a form of post-modern territorial expansion.” The control of distant maritime areas is deemed vital to assure security on land. By virtue of its nature (Med-Terra means a sea among lands), developments on land have influenced naval power more directly than in open seas. The importance of coastal land has driven outside powers yearning to establish a naval presence in the Mediterranean to employ attempts to control seaside land portions before projecting power. The current U.S. model, even if different today from in the past, still follows this geo-historical imperative. NATO and U.S. bases in multiple Mediterranean countries like Spain, Italy and Egypt, and the alliances associated with the bases constitute the main springboard for U.S. power projection in the Mediterranean. Russia acquired the port of Tartus in Syria, and China acquired the ports of Haifa in Israel and Piraeus in Greece. Moreover,

one of the distinguishing characteristics of the “new” MS agenda is liminality (Bueger & Edmunds, 2017), which asserts that issues in MS cannot be understood and addressed only through the marine environment, as the environment and issues in question are perpetually interlinked with challenges on land, as well. Therefore, these maritime policies and approaches seek to address the rising interconnectedness and interdependence of the nature of security challenges that the insecurity of the Mediterranean Sea presents.

## HEIGHTENED PRIORITIZATION OF GEOPOLITICS IN MARITIME POLICIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The geopolitical dimension of MS explains how geography limits and informs maritime security policies and operations, in addition to how states consider geography in devising their maritime security strategies. Intrinsically, MS is geopolitical, since it is often about a projection of public power in areas beyond the state’s external boundary. The focus of most of the debates regarding the challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean has shifted away from socio-political factors towards geopolitical issues (Report of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference, 2016). Moreover, the primacy of geopolitics in a regional state’s foreign and maritime policy is exemplified by Greece adopting a strict geopolitical approach to promote its strategic significance. In particular, Greece considers itself to be “the strategic center of a triangle of instability,” comprised of Ukraine, Libya and, Syria (Stergiou, 2019). This position contributed to the shift in its policy from passive to active. Turkey is the most blatant example of how states’ maritime policies are intertwined and used for geopolitical objectives. Turkey’s “Blue Homeland” doctrine, developed in 2006, is, arguably, an “overt bid to assert neo-Ottoman hegemony” (Lerman, 2021).

# **INTER- CONNECTED DYNAMICS SHAPING THE GEOPOLITICAL GAME IN THE MEDITER- RANEAN SEA**

From a geopolitical prism, MS and the security environment of the Mediterranean Sea is a case study defined by the four aforementioned interconnected dynamics, with each one containing a militarized dimension in which the new multi-dimensional concept of security is most at play. A geopolitical military competition has re-emerged in the Mediterranean, due to the toxic mismatch of intra-state wars, state fragility, a security vacuum and energy discoveries that awoke decades-old conflicts over maritime sovereignty and pushed regional and international states to adopt more proactive policies, all intertwined with unprecedented ambitious objectives.

The cumulative discoveries of offshore natural gas fields in Cyprus, Israel and Egypt make the Levantine Basin one of the world’s largest deposits. Furthermore, competing narratives of national sovereignty (Dalay, 2021) that have existed since the founding of Greece and Turkey, reemerged in force and are no longer confined to these two players and to the Aegean Sea. All these issues are playing out in the Mediterranean region, specifically in Libya, consequently altering the regional status quo and the geometry of regional power, while also attracting an unprecedented number of actors. At the same time, that shared economic and security interests provided a way for some states, such as Cyprus and Israel, to improve their relations (Neely et al., 2021), these interests, nonetheless, failed to transform rivals into friends (e.g., Cyprus and Turkey, Greece and Turkey). Regionalism could have done that, if only because the dynamics at play raise the opportunity costs of conflict.

Clearly, the status-quo is far from being settled but, instead, presides in a delicate balance between a dormant volcano and an organized chaos, where progress on multifaceted fronts is possible (e.g., development, energy, migration). With such a precarious balance, no regional nor outside actor seems to have an incentive to escalate conflict and risk an all-out war; yet the necessary building-blocks for such escalation are already in place.

OFFSHORE ENERGY DISCOVERIES: GAME CHANGERS AND POLITICALLY LADEN

The interlinkage of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Conflicts (Alekseenkova, 2020) was produced by the discovery of offshore energy in the vicinity of multiple Eastern Mediterranean countries (Fig. 1). Specifically, the role of these offshore energy discoveries has been to re-awaken and subsequently to interlink three conflicts: the Cyprus problem, the Greek-Turkish disputes over maritime boundaries and the Libyan conflict.

Figure 1: Offshore Natural Gas Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean

Country	Discovery date	Field Name	Estimated reserves (bcm)	Production Status
Ctyrus	2011	Aphrodite	140	Awaiting development
	2019	Glaucus-1	142-227	Further evaluation needed
	2018	Calypso-1	170-230	Further evaluation needed
Israel	1999	Noa	1.2	Nearly depleted
	2000	Mari-B	30	Nearly depleted
	2009	Tamar	317	In production
	2010	Leviathan	605	Awaiting development
	2012	Tanin	34	Awaiting development
	2013	Karish	50	Awaiting development
Egypt	2015	Zohra	850	In production
World proven reserved in total	201.729 bcm			

Source: İşeri, Emre and Barta, Ahmet Çağrı “Turkey’s Geostrategic Vision and Energy Concerns in The Eastern Mediterranean Security Architecture: A View from Ankara” in Tziarras, Zenonas (eds.) “The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean Trilateral Partnerships and Regional Security” Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO): 117.

ENERGY SECURITY, MARITIME SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICS

The region’s potential as a rich source of natural gas and oil was reaffirmed with the energy discoveries in contested exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of countries, mainly in the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy runs the global economy (Nyman, 2017) and the Eastern Mediterranean sits at the center of the global energy landscape (Kim & Shin, 2021). As a result, two distinct behaviors have resulted from the discovery of gas fields-competition and cooperation. Geography drives these strategic decisions, but so do economic, political and military motivations.

The discovery of natural gas below the seabed triggered regional actors to switch their geopolitical focus to the seas. When natural gas is the energy at stake, it is complemented by an additional interrelated political and economic feature. The supply chain of natural gas has significant potential either to trigger geopolitical tensions or to incentivize states to resolve conflicts peacefully by linking themselves, via energy infrastructure, as the “peace pipeline hypothesis” (Demiryol, 2019). In regard to the former option, we can think of the ‘resource oil curse’ that transformed the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) region and that today might be replaced by natural gas in creating insecurities related to energy. In effect, a global trend is fueling states’ maritime space expansion, which is related to the belief that the amount of gas expected to replace oil consumption will be found in offshore reservoirs (Østhagen, 2021).



Because energy needs of the world are already great and growing, energy security significantly links two dimensions of the maritime security matrix—economic development and national security. Energy security, defined as the “uninterrupted availability of energy at an affordable price”, relies on discoveries of offshore hydrocarbons off Cyprus, Egypt and Israel. These countries welcomed new opportunities but also recognized their security needs. While gas reserves were discovered in the past, it wasn't until Israel discovered the Tamar gas field in 2009 that the Eastern Mediterranean started to attract significant global attention. These discoveries resulted in regional and international actors reshaping their strategic calculations to acquire geo-economic and geopolitical significance to the area. Both a beneficial tool and a contentious issue, the discovery of these fields and their promising, maybe overestimated, return, constitute a central organizing principle for regional and international actors' energy policies that they are trying to synthesize with their foreign policies.

Concerns over long-term energy security, and especially import dependency and energy source diversity (Nyman, 2017), pushed these Mediterranean states to accelerate exploration to reduce dependency on their neighbors, such as on Iran and Qatar (Kim & Shin, 2021). In other words, countries around the Eastern Mediterranean Sea have long suffered from an imbalance between supply and demand, with the world's largest oil-producing countries, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), at their southeast borders and one of the world's highest consumers of oil and gas, Europe, at their northwest side. The discoveries are indeed game changers in the region and the world's landscape. Indeed, they transitioned Israel's energy status from importer to gas exporter, in addition to Cyprus's and Egypt's return, after more than a decade of gas importing, to being exporters of natural resources (Rubin, & Eiran, 2019), ultimately elevating each individual state's international status.

## Actors' Turn to the Sea in Hope of Developing Regional Hubs

Precisely because of their location, at the nexus between the biggest consumers on the west and the biggest producers on the southeast, Eastern Mediterranean countries enjoy a highly strategic position in becoming a regional hub at the intersection of transit routes.

Greece's shift towards a more proactive foreign policy is directly linked to its crucial geopolitical position in the region and Greek decision-makers' belief that Greece has the potential to become a regional energy hub (Shama, 2019). On the other hand, the discovery of Egypt's gas fields, such as the Noor field in 2018, might transform Egypt into a major global hub for gas exports (Rubin & Eiran, 2019). Egypt is the only regional player that has two liquified natural gas (LNGs) facilities. Thus, Egypt presents an export option that is required for the optimal monetization of these natural gas discoveries. In the “new great game,” from the eastern part of the Mediterranean to its northern neighborhood of Italy and the rest of Europe, Egypt seeks to exploit its location and infrastructure to become the point of connection and the link for energy trading between Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Further, Egypt will use these natural gas discove-

ries to diversify its partnerships and increase its strategic autonomy in the region. In fact, like Turkey, Egypt has increased its effort to strengthen its naval presence and to develop its naval forces as a reflection of its growing interest in the Mediterranean (Salihoğlu, 2019).

Turkey's economy is highly dependent on its special status with the EU. However, its access to energy resources is limited, its Lira has hit a record low and energy trade is the main source of the country's budget deficit (Dalay, 2021). From a purely energy security perspective, therefore, Turkey has a substantial incentive to explore energy resources to address its chronic economic problems, reduce its energy dependency, and mitigate its strategic vulnerability. These reasons partly explain Turkey's pursuit of a policy of energy independence from countries like Russia and Iran in recent years. In addition, its presence in Azerbaijan stems also from concerns for energy security, manifested by increased imports from Azerbaijan. Turkey's plans to increase its international status is, however, hampered by the “security dynamics of its regional context” (Barinha, 2013). Turkey's turn to the sea and its emergence as a full Mediterranean player is not surprising from a historical point of view. Both in the 1960s and today, its will to defend what it considers its territorial waters and EEZs, has been significantly triggered by the Cyprus problem, and Turkey's realization that naval forces should have a critical place in its defense (Salihoğlu, 2021). In the 60s, the Turks believed that only a military naval operation could save the island's Turks. The military geopolitical relevance of sea power, through an expansion and strengthening of naval forces, still figures as a vital maritime security strategy, as Turkey and other states have increased naval defense spending, complemented by soft-power precautions through strategic agreements.

## Energy and Geopolitical Alignments

For the optimal monetization of these energy discoveries, cooperation is required. But as we'll see, regional alignments are more, but not the only, determined by power and geopolitical considerations. The choice between two distinct behaviors, competition or cooperation, as a result of gas field discovery, is a choice between securitization or de-securitization, which is itself determined by the presence of animosity or amity between the involved countries, rather than by the balance of power (BoP). Adamides and Christou (2015) argue that securitization is the “intersubjective establishment of an existential threat that is salient enough to have significant political effects.” Consequently, behaviors that are based on a securitized framework, whereby state actors prioritize political purposes over the expectations of profit maximization models, are at odds with the maximization of economic utility that prioritizes other conceptions of gain.

The supposed fight for energy resources resulted in the emergence of two blocks, the EastMed block versus the block led by Turkey and the internationally non-recognized TRNC. Indeed, realignments in the region are mainly visible by means of the establishment of new geopolitical and energy alliances among Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, the UAE, KSA and France on the one hand, and Turkey, and, to a lesser degree, Qatar, on the other hand, while Italy is trying to juggle its relationship with the two sides.

Although other players, such as Cyprus and Israel, can implement gas development schemes independently of Turkey, Ankara's politics and policies will shape the prospects of regionalism (Demiryol, 2019).

The intense, yet controlled, competition for geopolitical influence was stoked by the discoveries of natural gas in 2011 in the Eastern Mediterranean. In a multipolar order, and in a region that suffers from an insecurity complex, regional actors opted for the development of several cross-cutting security alignments that exacerbated the region's volatility (VUCA) and tense environment, because of a "zero-sum" game mindset (Demiryol, 2019). The cross-cutting security agreements that took the form of bilateral and trilateral partnerships among Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt are multifaceted, as they include commercial-economic aspects, as well as strategic political and security aspects. For example, Israel and Cyprus cooperated to divide the Aphrodite field, which is a joint Israeli-Cyprus field (Hariri, 2021).

Furthermore, these bilateral and trilateral partnerships did not emerge from a vacuum. In fact, since the 2000s, Turkey's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean has played an instrumental role in bringing the neighboring states together. For example, Turkey and Israel's relation deteriorated following the Mavi Marmara incident, in 2010, in which armed Israeli commandos boarded the Turkish ship in international waters and killed ten Turkish activists attempting to breach the Gaza embargo to deliver aid. This incident, coupled with Turkey's alleged practical support for Hamas led to an increased securitized relation and hostility between the two countries. Before, however, Israel envisioned an important role for Turkey in its energy projects, especially that a gas pipeline that would go through Turkey towards Europe would be the most economical option (Stergiou, 2019). The breakdown of negotiations with Israel revealed, therefore, that politics and security sometimes take precedence over geo-economics. The relationship of enmity that accrued between the two was first manifested by Turkey suspending its military cooperation agreement with Israel; then Israel unilaterally sending warplanes to harass Turkish ships that were searching for gas (Stocker, 2012). As disputes over EEZs have become highly militarized, Israel and Greece have started cooperating in the defense sector.

Additionally, the so-called Arab Spring triggered the return of proactive postures and policies, especially by regional players. Indeed, the upheavals engendered an Ankara-Doha competition with Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Cairo, to shape the regional order. This strategic competition highlighted the first ideo-political cleavage over the role of Islam in politics and is best exemplified by the support, or lack thereof, of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hence, regional and outside actors intervened heavily in arenas marked by power vacuums and instability, thereby fulfilling the Med Sea's stage, or function, as a "theatre of operations" (Allmang, 2017). We can think of Syria, but mainly, of Libya in the case in which actors have been combining infrastructure, such as acquisition of ports, hard-power initiatives to develop military assets and support for proxies, as well as soft-power instruments like alliances, loose alignments and normalization to promote their interests.

Energy triangles developed at the same time among Cyprus, Israel and Greece in one group and Egypt, Cyprus and Israel in another. Such partnerships are surely related to Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's arrival to power in 2014 as President of Egypt. Sisi's overthrow of the MB caused Turkish-Egyptian relations to plummet to a new nadir. The confluence of interests between the actors in these new alignments is arguably based on a strategic commonality: opposition to expansion of Turkish influence.

Importantly, and as examined below, France played a significant influential role in creating this new Mediterranean front (Lerman, 2020). Other factors contributed to the growing economic, political and security regional cooperation also. While the Turkish "factor" greatly pushed these states to collaborate on a set of interlinked issues, the "weakening of the EU anchor" (Tsardanidis, 2019) played a major role in the midst of a power and security vacuum that led to establishing trilateral strategies. Simultaneously, Israel and Cyprus's and Egypt and Greece's regional cooperation did not only anchor Israel economically to Europe, but also created a major step toward Egypt's reintegration into the West's security and political structure. Indeed, Europeans see an important role for Egypt in the region's security, as they perceive it to be a "southern Mediterranean state that can help police the region and secure Europe's southern border" (Nachmani, 2019). Therefore, while the EU lacks a consistent and impactful approach to the Mediterranean region, some of its member states still abide by a policy of "offshore balancing," manifested by increased arms sales to Egypt by core EU member states. Paris, London and Berlin are, thus, transforming Egypt into a powerful military player in the Mediterranean region.

Threats to energy security that can happen at any moment and easily escalate from small to an existential threat, have an impact not only on the energy sector but also on the securitization process in other non-energy sectors. Although based on energy, regional networking is also a way for states to improve their political relations. Another important example is Greece, whose security is an indispensable component of bilateral and trilateral partnerships (Stergiou, 2019). Thus, the energy factor can play the role of a connecting glue that links states through energy infrastructure or as another point of contention between geopolitical rivals, especially if those rivals dispute maritime boundaries. Finally, while each state has its own specific interests, the decision to develop relationships for the co-management of security problems significantly allows each state to increase its leverage. Indeed, the Eastern Mediterranean's main geopolitical fault-lines balance Turkey's increased aggressiveness and hegemonic regional ambitions, and have led the involved states to cooperate, ultimately increasing all parties' margins of security and leverage.

## CASE OF LIBYA: AN “INTERNATIONALIZED CIVIL WAR” PLAYING OUT ACROSS THE MARITIME SECURITY MATRIX

Because Libya is the major hotspot of various rivalries, the conflict in Libya reflects the insecurity dominating the Mediterranean region. We can think of the Libyan conflict as spilling over across other areas in the wider Mediterranean region and, interactively, as an extension of conflicts in the Mediterranean, specifically in the Eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, the biggest threat to MS stems from a possible escalation of energy conflicts between the regional and outside states in the Eastern Mediterranean (Bekkers, 2019).

Briefly, in regard to energy security, Libya is an important strategic space for involved actors, such as Italy and France. In addition, Egypt's borders are at risk of falling prey to unconventional attacks and the spill-over effect of erosion of state control, which greatly exaggerate its national security fears.

### Making Sense of the Chessboard in Libya

Importantly, Italy, but to a lesser extent than Turkey, shares influence over western Libya (Eljarh, 2020). In contrast, France's historical sphere of influence in Libya is the southern region of Fezzan. In maritime strategies, air power often complements sea power. Turkey complemented its development of a naval presence in Misrata, the Government of National Accord's (GNA), an interim government (2015-2021), stronghold, with an air force presence located close to the Tunisian border. In doing so, Ankara increased its influence in Tunis as a first step in its long-term objective to create “trans-Mediterranean commercial activity” (Çittlioğlu, 2020) through the central Maghreb. Despite the formation of a national unity government and the subsequent de-escalation of tension, the divide between Dbeibeh and Haftar is still present and is even deepening (Mahmoud, 2021).

The fall of Qaddafi in 2011 opened the space for a competition of external influence between wider Mediterranean regional actors (e.g., France), Gulf countries (e.g., UAE and Qatar) and international ‘great power’ actors (e.g., Russia). Regionally, Libya became the platform where Cairo and Ankara refocused their conflict for “regional dominance and influence”. These players' intervention in Libya also manifest their division over political Islam as manifested by President Sisi's alliance with Haftar, a strong opponent of political Islam, and Turkey's alliance with Al-Sarraj. While Egypt has exercised caution when it comes to military action in Libya, by participating in multinational coalition, low-risk and legitimate missions, Sisi's red line were the central towns of Sirte and al-Jufrah. In fact, Sisi threatened to directly and militarily intervene if Turkey crossed this line, potentially triggering a military conflict between two regional giants. For all of the players involved in Libya, the conflict there is more than about Libya.

Italy, a case in point in that regard, aspires to develop its own Belt and Road Initiative by positioning Rome at the “center of trade, energy and transportation in southern Europe and beyond” (Tanchum, 2020). This strategic imperative, coupled with the fact that Italy's Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI), the Italian State Hydrocarbons Authority, operates in the western side of Libya, has pushed Italy towards Ankara. However, Turkey's attempts to dominate the contracts related to energy and reconstruction, at the expense of Italy, might push Italy closer to the French-Egyptian alignment. Turkey's stronghold in the west allows it to exploit the energy field to leverage actors. At present, primarily Italy is being pressed into changing its stances and behaviors in a way that serves Turkey.

Furthermore, the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) quasi past division was strategically mobilized by Turkey to compensate for its economic weakness. Indeed, Qatar and Turkey developed a strategic partnership whereby Turkey's military could be supplemented by Qatar's economic might. A common trend in the wider Mediterranean region reveals that the Ankara-Doha axis has utilized its capabilities to increase its clout in Libya, Tunisia and Algeria. Turkish hard- power entrenchment in Libya has also created a new strategic paradigm in the Mediterranean. However, Turkey's wider Mediterranean plans for trans-connectivity and a corridor linking Africa to the Mediterranean and to Europe, requires Italy to side with Turkey, even though Italy's relatively recent pivot to Africa is challenged by France's dominance there. In Libya specifically, Italy and France have supported two different sides consequently undermining the EU's vision of supranational unity and increasing each country's strategic autonomy in the region.

Turkey's fear of being isolated and excluded from the region's developmental projects did not start with the discovery of huge gas fields in Turkey's neighboring territorial waters and EEZs. Indeed, the perceived threat that Turkey is being “caged” in Anatolia (Dalay, 2021) was clearly expressed in the 2006 *Mavi Vatan* doctrine (Blue Homeland Doctrine). This geopolitical statement asserts the indispensable right to have access and high status in the Mediterranean, the Aegean and the Black Seas. Furthermore, it re-imagines a new place for Turkey in the region and the world by expanding its maritime boundaries for projection of power and control of resources. The objective of increasing maritime power has overlapped with finding gas fields in parts of the region where Turkey maintains non-friendly relations. This situation has resulted in Turkey initiating exploration in internationally recognized Cypriot waters. In fact, Turkish naval troops were given permission by the Turkish leadership to “engage militarily with any warships in the disputed waters of the Eastern Mediterranean” (Shama, 2019).

Indeed, the Mavi Vatan doctrine requires more and more militarization to support Turkey's activism and is directly linked to energy geopolitics and competition. Moreover, Turkey established a naval base on the coast of Libya as a counter-measure to any new Mediterranean alignments which might lead to closing the Mediterranean to Turkey. These initiatives prove once more that Turkey is ready to challenge, with all means at its disposal, any initiatives that exclude it from the “great game of gas in the eastern Mediterranean” (Shama, 2019). These arguments lead us to the maritime memorandum of understanding between Tripoli (GNA) and Ankara.

From the perspective of the Law of the Sea, Turkey's actions that violate its neighbors' internationally recognized territorial waters are illegal because they challenge the principle of good neighborhood relations (Talbot, 2020). The first move of that sort was when the Turkish foreign minister unilaterally announced the start of drilling activities in the waters west of Cyprus (Talbot, 2020).

## Turkey's Clout in Libya and Implications of Maneuverability in the Mediterranean: On the Libya-GNA-Turkey Memorandum of Understanding:

The two Memos of Understanding (MoUs) signed between Ankara and al-Sarraj, arranged for Turkish military intervention in the Libyan war, and delimited maritime boundaries between the two, subsequently setting in motion a broader regional crisis.

If the MoU on maritime boundaries is applied, it would cut across the western and eastern parts of the Mediterranean. Thus the MoU threatens MS, pipeline infrastructures in the central part, and gas exploration (Stanicek, 2020). If enforced, Egypt, Cyprus and Israel would be denied access by cable or pipeline to Greece and the European energy markets (Lerman, 2021). Further, gas supply lines and underwater oil reach Sicily from Libya through gas pipelines, in addition to submarine cables used for broadband that are vital for Italy and European countries and economies. The implementation of this MoU would also threaten these infrastructures (Taufer, 2015). As a concrete example, Italy's vital economic interests are at stake in Libya, given Ankara's clout that renders Italy's energy interests vulnerable to the latter's dictate (Tanchum, 2020). In threatening the Mediterranean's maneuverability, Turkey also threatens French interests. From that perspective alone, the MoU was received with strong condemnation by a majority of actors in the international community, including the EU Commission and the U.S. Adding to the tense situation is Turkey's perception that "its NATO's allies support for this common front is tantamount to a policy of containment that it cannot tolerate" (Tanchum, 2020).

Both MoUs, military and maritime, fail to pass the test of law. Turkey is not part of UNCLOS. Nonetheless, maritime international customary law still applies to Turkey, and, therefore, the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provisions regarding EEZ also apply (Stocker, 2012). As such, not only are the agreements or bilateral treaties to determine the delimitation of boundaries and create sovereign rights and obligations in international law, applicable, but so are their legal preconditions necessary to validate such agreements. From that argument, the MoU between Libya's GNA and Turkey is not an agreement that would be binding in international law. Domestic law is also violated by the MoU, given that all international agreements require the endorsement of the House of Representatives which resulted from the 2014 Libyan parliamentary elections. Specifically, Article (8), clause 2f in the additional provisions of the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement stipulates that the need to conclude international agreements requires endorsement by the House of Representatives (Stanicek, 2020). Consequently, Turkey will be keen to consolidate its position as a power broker in Libya

and as a solid springboard for securing its position in the Eastern and wider Mediterranean, given that it considers that the "Libyan conflict and the Eastern Mediterranean are inextricably linked" (Ahmed, 2020).

## A Diplomatic Tit-for-Tat Game

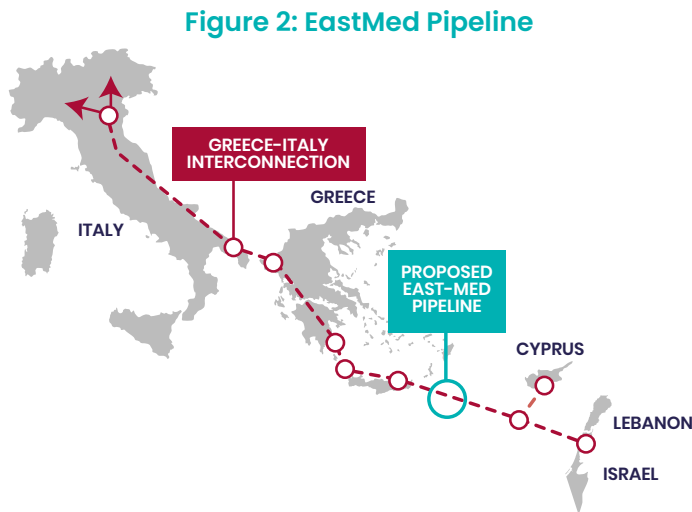
The East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), established in January 2019 and based in Cairo, officially became an "international intergovernmental organization" in 2020 (Sukkariieh, 2021). This platform for regional cooperation, which was needed to unlock the full potential of offshore gas in the region, includes Egypt, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Cyprus, the Palestinian Authority, and, recently, France, but it excludes Turkey. The EMGF, a multinational forum, seeks to establish a common gas market by coordinating the members' energy policies (Wolfrum, 2019). Thus, it offers economic benefits by decreasing the price of making the gas, as a result of coordinating extraction processes and increasing competitiveness in the global market, as well as by increasing political and security interests. By promoting interdependence based on energy, energy acts as a pretext for the EMGF member states that hope to extend their cooperative relations to different sectors. The EMGF is, arguably, the clearest indicator of the emergence of a regional-axis opposing Turkish influence and escalatory behavior.

Moreover, the establishment of the EMGF is a clear indication of the concept of "wider-Mediterranean," or of the Mediterranean being a single security complex that links the eastern neighborhood with the northwestern one. What started out in the Eastern Mediterranean has been transported across the entire space, forming a Mediterranean-wide alignment. The development of this interstate network of cooperation, based on energy, resulted in a Mediterranean-wide alignment that excluded one of the four principal actors in the region, the others being Italy, Egypt and France (Tanchum, 2020).



## Pipeline Diplomacy: Case of the EastMed Pipeline

The EastMed pipeline is an export option for the potential energy giants of the Eastern Mediterranean (Fig. 2). Signed by Greece, Israel and Cyprus in 2020, it seeks to connect Israel's Leviathan to Cyprus, then to Greece, and finally to Italy, thus joining the wider Mediterranean's European and Middle Eastern regional complexes. Importantly, the EastMed pipeline passes through Turkey's self-proclaimed maritime boundary and EEZ and also risks competing with Turkey's TANAP pipeline, which brings Azerbaijani gas into Greece and Europe" (Global Witness, 2021). Since the 2000s, the strategic objective of Turkey has been to become an energy hub in the EastMed (Jabbour, 2021). Turkey seeks to become the corridor that links the East's energy exporting countries with Europe's importing markets. In other words, Turkey's position as a crucial node between Asia and Europe is threatened by the Mediterranean players' EastMed pipeline project. In reaction, Turkey turned to Russia to cooperate on building the TurkStream pipeline (Bekkers, 2019). This turn to Russia shows once more how dynamics in the Mediterranean Sea are interdependent and not confined to boundaries, as well as the increasing interdependence of national securities.



**Source:** CGT Team (2021) "EastMed pipeline could be ready in five years", March 10, 2021. Accessed at: <https://greekcity-times.com/2021/03/10/eastmed-pipeline-ready-five-years/>

Adding to Turkey's feeling that it is deliberately being contained by the West, is the fact that the EU is one of the largest funders of this project. The EU's Clean Energy for All Europeans strategy might also incredibly benefit from these new reserves in two main ways. First, it will aid in the transition from fuel to renewable energy. Second, it will

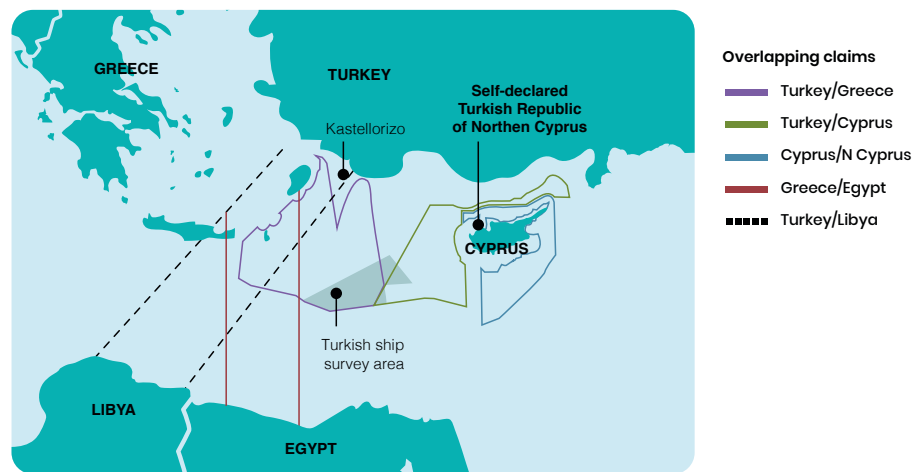
positively contribute to the EU's "energy diversification policy," because even if the EU imports gas from different countries, it still primarily relies on Russia (Stergiou, 2019). Therefore, for the EU's energy security in terms of reliability, source diversity and import dependency to remain stable, these gas reserves will potentially have a positive effect, especially in light of worries about declining production in the North Sea. Consequently, the EU has backed the EastMed pipeline, which would cost approximately EUR 7 billion and would be the world's longest and deepest offshore pipeline. It is expected to be complete in 2025.

Moreover, U.S. support for this project indicates the dedication of the U.S. to shrinking Russia's share in Europe's natural gas market (Alekseenkova, 2020), and to nourishing this "de facto democratic coalition" (Crospey, 2015). However, the EU has received considerable backlash for this decision, because it violates the EU's promise to fight climate change. In fact, if implemented, it would produce as much carbon as Spain, France and Italy combined currently emit in one year (Global Witness, "Hot under the collar," 4 May 2021). Moreover, from a geopolitical perspective, critics have called out this project as a factor that will add fuel to the tensions between Greece and Turkey, a dispute which has already divided EU member states and decreased the cohesion of NATO (Scazzieri, 2021, p.1). Further, the EastMed pipeline is of great benefit to Israel, because it does not require an expansion of the infrastructure that connects Israel to Egypt's LNGs, which is very costly for Israel. It would also provide Israel with the opportunity to escape being put under political pressure by Arab countries.

The EastMed pipeline seeks to enhance connectivity of energy infrastructure in the EU, however, it might undermine regional cooperation in the energy sector. Arguably, Egypt's anchor to the West is undermined by Arab countries of the EMGF. While the export of oil has long been achieved through the Suez Canal, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel signed an agreement in 2020 for the export of oil from the UAE without crossing the Suez Canal (Guzansky & Lindenstrauss, 2021), thus undercutting Egypt's transit role. Currently China, Israel and Iran are in the early phases of a project to develop an alternate route to the Suez Canal as part of China's BRI (Eiran & Rubin, 2020). Turkey, facing its own regional isolation, is well aware of Egypt's non-inclusion in the huge EastMed pipeline 2020 deal, and has been, for the past months, trying to restart constructive dialogues with Egypt (Duran, 2021). However, Egypt's fear of Ankara's military support for Tripoli (Melcangi, 2021), coupled with Turkey's support for the MB and the ways this support might impact the government in Tripoli, creates an atmosphere for Egypt in which Libya will continue being viewed through the frame of securitization that reveals Turkey as a threat to national security (Melcangi, 2021).

# MARITIME BOUNDARY DISPUTES: OVERLAPPING SOVEREIGNTY CLAIMS

Figure 3: Overlapping maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean



Source: Dalay, Galip (2021) "Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way Out of the Current Deadlock" Brookings Institution: 6.

The literature overwhelmingly agrees that for an efficient exploration of gas discoveries, agreement on the states' EEZ boundaries and a well-regulated maritime legal regime need to be in place. Yet, in the Mediterranean, a few coastal states have established sui generis jurisdictional zones, which are not provided for directly in the UNCLOS (Papanicolopulu, 2007). Because of the dual attributes of energy, not only to a state's economy but also to its sovereignty, energy is vital to a state's national security. This fact leads us to a multi-faceted energy security definition as having "secure means [of] having access to affordable energy without having to contort one's political, security, diplomatic or military arrangements unduly" (Papanicolopulu, 2007).

Increasing domestic and global tensions of maritime boundary disputes are a growing trend. With the heightened significance of disputes over maritime spaces has come an increased targeting of the intangible nature of disputes at sea (Østhagen, 2021). There are important distinctions between land and sea, whereby land sovereignty is simultaneously exclusive to the entire territory in question, thus "separating sovereignties in their totality". Moreover, in contrast to land disputes, in the sea, sovereign rights are limited to maritime boundaries with a functional character. Thus, they may result in dividing an area of overlap to a point where it is jointly shared, as in the case of oil and gas resources or fishery zones (Østhagen, 2021).

One can see that the politics of maritime disputes is changing, especially given the rising interest in the economic and functional attributes of ocean spaces. In effect, Østhagen (2021) points out that maritime spatial rights have become "central components of the modern state." Studies have, in fact, shown that states aim for a settlement of maritime boundary disputes, to gain legal guarantee for the development of potential gas and oil resources. This assertion might render easier the settling of maritime disputes which require compromise. However, it is precisely because of the rising value of maritime spaces that states will find it costlier to give them up. This state of affairs leads us to the salient potential for "geopolitical conflict in maritime areas with resource abundance" (Østhagen, 2021). Such a causal mechanism between the functional value of the sea and geopolitical conflict is specifically mediated by a third variable, which is the security relations between actors that are negotiating. However, even here the data result in unpredictable conclusions. Negative security relationships can trigger the settlement of maritime boundary disputes, such as the U.S. boundaries, or the opposite, when positive relations can push states to settle the dispute without a hard-power dimension, as we saw between Greece and Egypt and Cyprus and Israel. Thus, the presence of a securitized relationship between Greece and Turkey and Cyprus and Turkey are by no means inherently a cause for conflict, but they do add to the difficulty in predicting what comes next. At times, it is the symbolic, intangible, and mainly domestic value in the form of "rising nationalism" of maritime spaces that can lead to escalation of conflict beyond the initial dispute (Østhagen, 2021).

Energy has become another point of contention among both traditional and more contemporary geopolitical rivals in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly between Turkey, which treats TRNC's interests as the interests of the broader Turkish nation, and Cyprus-Greece. The new, yet historical, crisis between Turkey-TRNC and Cyprus-Greece was triggered by the discovery of energy, but it is essentially political in nature. The maximal boundaries drawn for Cyprus and Greece came at Turkey's expense. However, since Ankara is not part of UNCLOS, it could never explore the possibility of adjusting the Seville Map<sup>1</sup>. Notably, the officially declared reason behind the maritime MoU between Ankara and Tripoli was to "pressure the international community and the EM countries to devise an equitable settlement for the region's maritime boundaries required for offshore energy developments" (Tanchum, 2020). From a geopolitical point of view, Turkey's maritime dispute with Greece on the one hand and with Cyprus on the other hand are mirrors of Turkey's belief in the illegitimacy of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne that dismantled Turkey and kept it close to Western powers via its membership in NATO (Alnasir, 2021).

<sup>1</sup> The map is claimed to delineate maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean and outline the Greek and Cypriot exclusive economic zones". <https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2020/09/22/seville-map-us-turkey-greece/>. It is based on an EU-commissioned map study in 2007 by the University of Seville. It drew the boundaries "by using the coast of every inhabited Greek island no matter how small and no matter how close to the Turkish coastline". <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/24/where-to-draw-the-line-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/>.

## GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRIES

The EU has used the long-standing maritime dispute between Greece and Turkey as a means to improve EU-Turkey relations. In 1999, bilateral negotiations were the condition linked to resolving the dispute, when Turkey acquired the status of an EU candidate state (Dessi, 2020). In case bilateral negotiations fail, then the case would be referred to an international court. Indeed, legal solutions to this protracted conflict are present, leading us to the argument that the legal dispute is but a façade of “an imbroglio involving multiple parties who are impelled by potent economic and realpolitik motivations” (Shama, 2019).

We can think of Emmanuel Macron here. France has overtly and militarily supported Greece and Cyprus in their conflict with Turkey, which reached its peak in the summer of 2020. Arguably, this maritime dispute is at the core of the Franco-Turkish tensions. Within the new geopolitical axis, with opposition to Turkey as a strategic commonality, France, the UAE and Greece, collaborating closely in Libya, also conducted trilateral air force exercises with Greece in August 2020. With the stepping down of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Macron has actively sought to consolidate “strategic leadership” in the new post-Brexit Europe (Alnasir, 2021). He has also fostered an “Islam of the Enlightenment” (Piser, 2020) and opposed the current political Islam (Bremner, 2021). Beyond these considerations, France’s energy policy also partly explains its intervention in Libya and pushing ENI away from the French giant, Total, an integrated oil and gas company formerly known as Total Energies SE. Also, an aggressive foreign policy possibly serves as an instrument to divert from and help Macron moderate domestic problems (Inat, 2020).

In these ways, France has strategically benefited from Turkey’s entry into Libya and other East Med issues, as France gained more popularity in its opposition to Turkey’s foreign, and specifically its regional, policy. The UAE and France are capitalizing on the West’s disdain for the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) and igniting further friction between Greece and Turkey, both NATO members. These geopolitical rivalries and competitions hint at a new regional order in the making, arguably, at the expense of Turkey.

The so-called “escalation cycle” illustrates the military dimension of these potential legal disputes. The diplomatic tit-for-tat game in the signing of the maritime MoU between Ankara and Tripoli, followed by the one between Egypt and Greece, resulted in a direct game of brinkmanship. Following the Egypt-Greece maritime agreement, Turkey, feeling increasingly isolated, yet assertive in defending its alleged sovereign rights, unilaterally initiated a seismic search for energy resources near the Kastellorizo Island. These extreme events interacted with cross-cutting security agreements, such as between Egypt and France. These agreements strengthened their security relations, as well as Egypt, Greece and the UAE’s close security cooperation with France and Egypt in Africa.

## RETURN OF SUPER-POWER COMPETITION

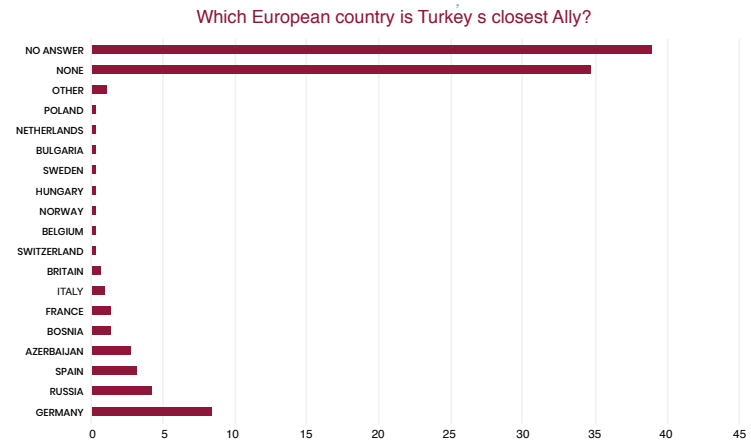
The Libyan case is emblematic of the multi-faceted, interconnected security threats to the Mediterranean Sea, in general, and to the insecurity complex of the whole MENA region, in particular. As evidence, from the post-Arab spring emerged what are considered “new wars” (Korany, 2020). These wars have replaced inter-state with intra-state wars. Yet they increasingly entangle geopolitical with domestic issues and regional/international powers with local actors, such as mercenaries and militias. Indeed, Libya is a concrete example of these new types of wars in the MENA region, multiplying their “warring components” (religion, tribal practices and expectations, identity, economy), thus blurring geopolitical fault lines and revealing strategic incoherencies.

The case of Russia and Turkey is interesting in that regard. Whereas Russia and Turkey are antagonists in Libya, they exhibit an interesting dynamic in the wider region. Russia and Turkey jointly opened a military facility in Azerbaijan, they are in conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and they share power over Syria’s post-war reality. In effect, Turkey and Russia’s relationship is both cooperative and competitive at the same time (Dalay, 2021). In 2015, Cyprus and Russia signed an agreement giving Russian navy ships access to Cypriot ports, in addition to combining efforts for other forms of military cooperation. Further, Russia re-affirmed its support of Cyprus’s sovereign rights to explore and exploit its natural resources. Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) have been increasingly calling for a two-state solution. Yet a two-state solution violates the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution on the Cyprus problem, which Russia supports. However, Turkey still purchases S-400 missiles from Russia. From the Russian perspective, this pattern is explained by the historic contribution of Turkey to NATO in defending the Black Sea from Russia. As defender, Ankara’s relationship is critical for Russia, and dramatically so in Putin’s second term. Apparently both Russia and Turkey use the Mediterranean’s geostrategic position as a way to increase their leverage over western institutions. An example is the opening of a joint military center between Turkey and Russia in Azerbaijan, which was officially aimed at monitoring the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, but it also is related to broader geopolitical considerations. In seeking a counterweight to Russian influence in the area, Azerbaijan wants to keep Turkey involved and active to balance Russian power (Kucera, 2021). This ploy allows Turkey to further project authority in international politics and gain more leverage against the EU, NATO and the U.S. In a similar vein, in linking directly with Russia, one of its historical foes, Turkey proved that it is an emerging force to be reckoned with (Kucera, 2021).

Just like in the Caucasus, in Libya, in maritime disputes and in the search for hydrocarbon resources, Turkey is imposing itself as an actor whose consent is needed for sustainable solutions. Thus, Turkey appears to be playing the role of a double agent. It established multi-dimensional security partnerships with Ukraine, proving itself a strong and

committed “Model NATO ally” (Peyronnet, 2021). At the same time, Stein (2018), argues that Turkey is simultaneously using foreign policy as a populist tool to erode domestic support for Turkey’s alliance with the U.S. and Europe (Fig.4). Moreover, the new Istanbul canal will run parallel to the Bosphorus plug, which has historically been a highly geostrategic and geo-military position, because it denies free passage of the Soviet navy into the Mediterranean (McGwire, 2008). Erdogan’s endeavor is simultaneously perceived as a way to deepen its cooperation with the U.S. by gaining leverage over Moscow and gain leverage against the EU and NATO. In effect, some pundits claim that Russia is supporting Turkey in creating an alternative to the Bosphorus plug<sup>2</sup> (Alnasir, 2021).

Figure 4: Public Opinion poll on the perception of Turkish citizens’ perception of Turkey’s Alliance with EU and European countries



Source: Stein, Aaron (2018) “The New Turkey: Making Sense of Turkish Decision-Making” Atlantic Council- Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East

Russia’s own trans-Mediterranean aspirations are factors in the strategic drive for warm ports, the warmest sea being the Mediterranean. This requirement can be traced back to no later than the 9th century (Alnasir, 2021). The Mediterranean Sea is used by Russia to control reinforcements of maritime power to the Turkish straits, in addition to providing arms to coastal states. These actions serve the “concept of operational diversion.” Alnasir (2021) cites as an example Russia’s presence in the Mediterranean as a strategic choice that allows it to display power and impose itself at the center of the diplomatic international game. This is what we would call a low-cost idea, or policy, intended to maximize gains in an area not close to the country’s most vital operations and outside its national security zone. Finally, Russia is highly dependent on oil and gas export revenues. As such, it has relied on its own oil companies, like Rosneft, to parti-

cipate in export projects from the Mediterranean as a means to block any gas exports to Europe. Indeed, by partnering in projects for the development of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, Russia is protecting its European market share. These moves showcase how, through international oil companies (IOCs) and national oil companies (NOCs), distant states can penetrate regional security complexes. These distant states can thereby add them as geostrategic spaces to increase their spheres of influence. For example, oil companies like Novatek, Eni and Total have determined the parameters of foreign policy in significant ways.

Despite what has been suggested, the U.S. remains the most decisive actor in the Mediterranean (Fig. 5). The U.S. policy has shifted from engagement and assistance to deterrence and defense, coupled with offshore balancing. Indeed, despite the U.S. pivot to Asia, Russia’s expanding influence and Turkey’s aggressiveness are being closely monitored. But conflicting messages, U.S. Middle East foreign policy in general and the U.S. President Barack Obama’s fiasco in Libya and the Middle East in particular, deepened the sense of U.S. inefficiency and ineffectiveness. In spite of differing accounts, the U.S. has clearly taken sides in these conflicts. Indeed, the bipartisan Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act (December 2019) lifted the U.S arms embargo on Cyprus and authorized the establishment of the U.S. -Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center (Browman & Panetta, 2020). Moreover, the U.S. took recent steps to reassert its military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. For example, on March 15, 2021, planes arrived at the Eastern Mediterranean waters by aircraft carrier, the U.S. Dwight D. Eisenhower. Clearly, the U.S. still follows a strategy based on projecting power. Moreover, American international energy companies are heavily and critically involved in the Mediterranean region. In fact, a consortium headed by U.S. -based Noble Energy (Stergiou, 2019) discovered the game-changing Tamar gas field off the coast of Israel. For energy projects to work, however, the security climate needs to be stable and safe. Thus, prioritizing regional stability and security greatly facilitates investment in the global market by involved countries (Stanicek, 2020) and the presence of the U.S navy’s 6th fleet in the Mediterranean positively contributes to the foreign investment climate. Furthermore, cooperative agreements signed with Greece reveal that the Mediterranean Sea still holds a geostrategic value that results from its vital maritime chokepoints and sea lines of communication. A critical consideration is how countries that have historically been allies, like Italy and Israel, will balance their relationship between the U.S. and China’s aggressive investment policy (Villegas, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The Bosphorus strait is located in northwestern Turkey. It separates parts of Asian Turkey from European Turkey and is under Turkey’s control. It was critical for NATO during the Cold War because it prevented the Soviet Black Sea Fleet from gaining access to the Mediterranean.



Figure 5: Balance of Power in the Eastern Mediterranean

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN POWER RANKING	COUNTRIES	NATIONAL POWER INDEX (NPI)	COMPOSITE INDEX OF NATIONAL CAPABILITY (CINC)	GROSS NATIONAL INCOME INDEX (GNI)	GLOBAL FIREPOWER INDEX (GFI)	US NEWS POWER RANKING
1	USA (extra-regional)	1	2	1	1	8
2	Russia (extra-regional)	11	5	6	2	26
3	Turkey	21	12	12	9	36
4	Egypt	42	21	26	12	42
5	Israel	30	44	50	16	30
6	Greece	32	43	48	28	28
7	Lebanon	81	90	84	106	75
8	Cyprus	94	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

**Source:** Tziarras, Zenonas (2019) “Cyprus’s Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the trilateral Partnerships: A Neoclassical Realist Approach” in Tziarras, Zenonas (eds.) “The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean Trilateral Partnerships and Regional Security” Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO): 59.

China's strategy concentrates on parts of the Mediterranean, namely southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, each with different priorities and drivers. Beijing's strategic and commercial engagement with the Middle East began in the mid-1990s, with China becoming a net oil importer. At the start of the 2010s, China's spheres of influence in the Mediterranean space increased exponentially, primarily because the Mediterranean holds a geo-economic strategic importance to China, but with an increasingly defined geopolitical dimension. To increase its influence, China is aggressively investing in ports and acquiring shares in Mediterranean Sea ports, hinting at increasing market control. For a successful implementation of China's Belt and Road Initiative, China needs a higher capacity in shaping the political dynamics of the region and intervening in active conflicts. Yet, for now, China arbitrates conflicts by massive economic power, in stark contrast to Russia. Nonetheless, China's economic investments are being translated into a military presence of a growing navy in the mid-term, such as military expansionism in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, and a gradual change in China's aspirations, as it forges military partnerships with regional countries like the UAE (Citrinowicz & Yellinek, 2021). The formalization of partnerships with fifteen Middle Eastern countries also included agreements on maritime cooperation (Citrinowicz & Yellinek, 2021).

The eastern Mediterranean Sea, the northwestern end of China's BRI, is witnessing an expansion of Beijing's footprints in its basin. The Chinese state-owned enterprise, China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) acquired stakes in numerous ports. Greece, a NATO member, leased its Piraeus port to China in 2008, resulting in Greek ships being responsible for the shipment of more than half of China's crude imports. This arrangement allows China to participate in the potential Euro-African commercial corridor by linking Piraeus's freight rail service with Egypt's rail connectivity to the “booming African Lion

economies” (Tanchum, 2021). As a highly important result, because Greece controls the largest fleet in the world, it provides China with tremendous influence. Moreover, China's BRI investments target approximately 80 countries, with Mediterranean states being the center of this hegemonic initiative. China's geo-economic strategy for global influence is based on creating an “integrated economy” that requires massive investments in overseas energy projects, ports, fiber optics, and other valuable resources and products (Umbach, 2017). To that end, China now has stakes in a myriad of ports in the Mediterranean region, such as Cherchell in Algeria; Ashof and Haifa in Israel; Port Said, historically, among the most important ports in the Mediterranean, (Taufer, 2015) and Alexandria in Egypt; ports of Naples, Genoa, Trieste and Savona in Italy; and a port in Istanbul. Moreover, China became the Arab world's largest investor in 2016, focusing on pipelines, ports, roads and industrial parks. Indeed, to protect its overseas energy investments, such as in Egypt's Zohr field, China is particularly focused on strengthening and increasing its naval and air forces. Yet, its “going abroad” strategy is tainted by China's “debt trap policy,” whereby China finances projects that are neither needed nor sustainable in countries with heavy debt burdens, thereby putting these countries at the mercy of China's geopolitical interests (Bekkers, 2019). Finally, China's aggressive investments in countries like Algeria and Morocco is another significant factor with the potential of changing the power configurations in the region, intensifying the already existing competition between them and contributing negatively to the regional arms race.

The resurgence of super-power competition has been mainly facilitated by weaknesses and security vacuums in the region. Until now, although China seems to take Russia's interests in the export of Mediterranean gas into account, the Mediterranean, and specifically the Middle East, is crucial for China's BRI because it links infrastructure and trade with Central Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe by developing overland transport infrastructure (Citrinowicz & Yellinek, 2021). Naval bases of both China and Russia are in close proximity, and their interests overlap in the Red Sea. This interaction can lead either to cooperation or to confrontation in these spaces. Another contested sector is the Middle East's weapons market. Building influence via military instruments is idiosyncratic of Russia's strategic thinking. Yet Chinese arms are also increasingly proliferating in the region. These “anti-Western” players have also created an “analogue of SWIFT, a Western-made international payments system,” known as SPFS, to communicate with each other and increase their financial security. Importantly, the EU and the U.S. have already shut Iran out of the SWIFT international payments system. However, the strategic partnership signed between China and Iran, poured \$600 million into Iran, potentially restoring Persia's role in Europe-Asia trade that was prominent on the Silk Roads routes of the 1500s. This investment is a factor that contributes to reconfiguring power relations in the wider region.

Regional powers were not the only players who used naval power and naval exercises to project power. Russia and China also conducted joint naval exercises, called “Joint Sea 2015,” in the Mediterranean (Holmes, 2015). This joint operation was meant to deepen practical and friendly interaction between the two countries. For some western analysts, according to Holmes (2015), China and Russia chose the Mediterranean Sea for their provocation as a sort of throw-back to Soviet maneuvers in the Mediterranean 40 years ago. Conducted in NATO's southern flank, the joint exercises sent a reply to the U.S. “pivot to Asia.” In contrast, the exercises are

perceived as normal saber-rattling in today's world that is characterized by a return of geostrategic competition after 25 years of U.S. seaborne hegemony (Holmes, 2015).

Sea power in that form actually serves a dual purpose. The functional purpose relates to interoperability and the need to render compatible what are incompatible military and naval weapons and equipment. The symbolic purpose targets global and national opinion by displaying remarkable war equipment, such as warships, thereby appealing to partners and strengthening the morale of allies in the region. In a global power competition, history proved that control of Eurasian waters is a sound strategy, as exemplified by British maritime supremacy. NATO's southern flank, and the Mediterranean, in particular, has remained an overshadowed point of strategic interest, consequently giving primary considerations to the eastern flank where Russia is acting with hostility. However, in addition to the security threat coming from human security issues and instabilities like failing states and non-state actors, NATO is also threatened by state-led challenges coming from Russia's rising military posture in the Eastern Mediterranean. As it has often proved, Russia can increasingly exploit the absence of a consensus among NATO allies, in this case the southern Mediterranean and its eastern flank.

## MIGRATION AND SECURITIZATION

The troubles in the MENA region led to huge social, security, economic and humanitarian crisis. According to the Munich Security Report (2020) citizens fleeing to Europe and the implications of "lives at sea" are dominating international discussions and efforts for collaboration (Tziarras, 2019). Most of the new challenges to Europe's security are located in the Mediterranean area, which became over years of strife the flashpoint and backyard of the Middle East's historical insecurity. Bekkers (2019) expects that up until the period 2030-2035, migration flows across the Mediterranean will remain a serious issue. Demographic and economic asymmetries and mismatches between the MENA region and the Mediterranean's northern neighborhood, present one of the main causes of migration, despite the development of cooperative tools to bring the north and south of the Mediterranean Sea closer. The NATO 5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean is one example. The EU's Frontex agency deals with illegal immigration and coordinates member states' activities in this field. The agency bases its work on the principle that member states are all impacted by the consequences of illegal immigration to the EU, whatever their geographical location. In 2012, counter-immigration represented 42.3%, the largest share of the agency's operational budget (Germond, 2015).

The collapse of state structures and systemic inability to deliver to citizens their basic needs, increased the attractiveness of the Mediterranean Sea's long European border. However, there are no permanent solutions to the migration crisis, since criminal networks have adapted to legitimate maritime operations, such as Operation Sophia and exploit the lack of unity of purpose between the interests and politics of the country of origin and those of the receiving country. In fact, Bekkers, (2019) points out that over 90% of traveling migrants to the EU use "facilitation services" provided mainly by criminal groups.

The economic gains of trafficking humans at sea are overwhelming, with an estimated £3 billion-£6 billion in gains to criminal networks. The new MS agenda is significantly dedicated to human security, an asymmetric and unconventional security threat that has made the Mediterranean a conduit for human trafficking and smuggling. Yet, capacity-building and security sector reforms of these countries, led by core security actors like the U.S., the UK, the EU and the International Maritime Organization are facing both economic problems and rampant corruption in the security sector. The linkage between a corrupt security sector and criminal organizations was clearly identified in the 2015 Rand Report (McNerney, Paoli, & Grand-Clément, 2015).

## Coercive Diplomacy and Militarization of Illegal Immigration

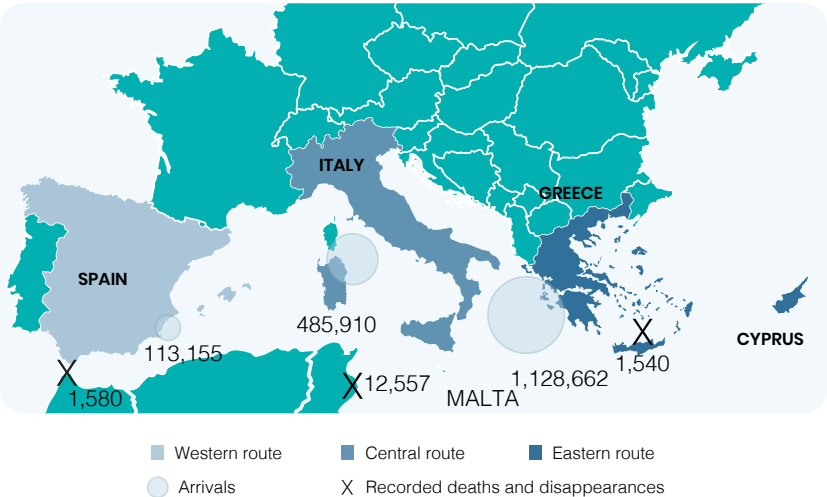
The Mediterranean has been the location of search and rescue activities in Europe. Furthermore, ongoing cooperation between NATO and the EU focuses on MS in the Mediterranean Sea. However, unilateral endeavors by EU member states such as France and Italy and fundamental differences over Europe's strategic direction between Germany and France, coupled with the crisis between two NATO members, Turkey and Greece, led to an "incongruity between NATO and the EU" (McNerney, Paoli, & Grand-Clément, 2015). These major multilateral actors that work to foster maritime cooperation in the Mediterranean are supposedly losing their ability to stabilize the region.

Furthermore, Turkish President Recep Tayip Erdogan's asymmetric strategy to weaponize population displacement adds decisive evidence of Turkey's hostile policy that uses the conflict in the Mediterranean basin as a menace. By threatening to allow massive flow of refugees to Europe, Erdogan seeks to strengthen his negotiating and bargaining position with the EU and European countries, such as in regards to sanctions. Moreover, Erdogan pounded the last nail in the coffin for a potential Greek-Turkish rapprochement in 2020 when he intentionally opened the land borders and encouraged Syrians and others to cross to Greece (Gorvett, 2021).

He is not the only player in the Mediterranean using the "refugee crisis" for political considerations. A recent incident casts some light on political trafficking. On 21 May 2021, 6,000 migrants crossed the border from Morocco to Ceuta, a Spanish border enclave that is usually "strictly controlled by Morocco" (Pardo, 2021). But Morocco deliberately decided to rattle Spain, allegedly because Madrid accepted to take in Brahim Ghalil for medical treatment. He is the leader of the Polisario Front which is a rebel movement in Western Africa that is campaigning for the independence of Western Sahara.

Indeed, when refugees become a geopolitical card exploited by politicians, illegal migration and subsequent loss of life at sea shifts from a humanitarian problem to a securitized one with a military dimension. Also, because of the economic and societal dimensions of security, refugees are viewed as a threat. Ghezelbaset et al. (2018) claim that the subordination of search and rescue operations to national security were not effective at putting an end to what they describe as “spiraling fatality rates in the Mediterranean.” These perils manifest the challenges facing MS in one of the most chaotic parts of today’s hyper-globalized world (Fig. 6).

**Figure 6: Migration across the Med Sea since 2015 by country and recorded deaths and disappearances.**



**Source:** Munich Security Report, 2020: “Westlessness” Munich Security Conference, p. 44.

# CONCLUSION

## Internationalization of the Mediterranean Sea: Insecurity Beyond Geopolitics

The challenges facing MS cooperation in the Mediterranean are multi-dimensional. In this sea, “building coalitions for common objectives is becoming more complicated” (Crospey, 2015). Yet, the EMGF, in an attempt to institutionalize cooperation among different nation-states on a set of interlinked issues, such as energy and security, is the result of years-old bilateral and trilateral partnerships. This union points to the argument that coalition-building, albeit punctured by instances of attempts of normalization with the other so-called Turkish bloc states and Turkey, is simultaneously the most defining regional cleavage and the leading factor determining the Eastern Mediterranean’s main geopolitical fault-lines.

The latest event in the Israeli-Palestinian saga engendered radically different responses from Egyptian President Al-Sisi, calmness and conciliation, and from Turkey’s President Erdogan’s sharp criticism and anti-Israel “vitriolic rhetoric” (Lindenstrauss & Daniel, 2021). Moreover, the regional cooperation of the EMGF, as well as trilateral and bilateral security partnerships among Egypt, Cyprus, Israel, Greece and the Palestinian Authority (PA) over the Gaza marine gas field partially allows Egypt to play a more influential and assertive regional role. Importantly, when the Gaza Marine field was discovered, Egypt’s intervention provided a sense of comfort to both Israel and Palestine and helps them “[better] deal with each other, and for the PA to benefit from these fields” (Gomaa, 2021). Specifically, the role of Egypt carries huge economic potential in energy and tourism. However, attracting Mediterranean members and thus further strengthening regional cooperation is partly contingent on the Arab-Israeli peace process. Although the battle for MS is often an essentially cooperative one, it can be deceiving, as the following will illustrate by briefly examining the challenges to regional cooperation.

## Changes in Threats to Maritime Security in the Mediterranean Sea

Throughout history, the sea has been viewed as a zone of danger and insecurity. During the Cold War, the security domain in the Mediterranean Sea was characterized by what was known as “good order at sea,” a pure “state-on-state” related threat (Taufel, 2015). At that time the threat was conventional, stemming from a well-defined state actor, the Soviet navy.

At the turn of the millennium, naval experts declared that “life is just not that simple anymore” (Bueger & Edmunds, 2017). The maritime sphere became explicitly conceived as a differentiated security complex in its own right. States began regarding MS as a collective problem of political order, over which no actor can exercise determinative control. In general, occupying the sea from a classical military sense is highly difficult. That is particularly true in the Mediterranean Sea, as it is composed of only 16% territorial water, while the rest is under no one-state’s sovereign command, hence belonging

to no one, yet everyone. Consequently, the rest is international or contested waters. Thus the nature of the Mediterranean Sea is itself an attraction to internationalization of the dynamics that shapes it.

Today, we can characterize the current Mediterranean scenario by a series of asymmetric and hybrid threats carried out by hybrid and non-state actors, such as terrorists, modern pirates, and others, in addition to a return of conventional threats.

Moreover, a “nation’s perception of what constitutes its national security” (McGwire, 2008) changed from depending on one’s capabilities and securing the area surrounding one’s borders to the idea that issues at the global level are interlinked and nations are interdependent. National security, henceforth, depends on mutual security. Together, these understandings resulted in increased internationalization of the governance of threats to the sea, especially given the transnational characteristics of MS issues. Indeed, transnationalism, liminality and interdependency of security challenges are the main distinguishing characteristics of MS (Buege & Edmunds, 2017). For example, as a manifestation of MS jurisdictional complexity, the EU has 383 groups or organizations that deal with the issue of MS (Buege & Edmunds, 2017). Moreover, at sea, security issues are strongly interrelated; therefore, “every time a tremor occurs, it shakes the entire system” (Allmang, 2017). One theatre affects another theatre’s security, hence all of the security policies of actors in the Mediterranean and beyond. Taken together, it only makes sense that threats are transnational and proliferating.

Libya represents an emblematic case of how the worsening of Maghreb countries’ internal security is directly related to a worsening of these unconventional threats. The Libyan internationalized civil war has massive repercussions on MS, not only because of the Eastern Mediterranean great game to reconfigure the geometry of power relations but also because of these hybrid threats that destabilize the Northern Mediterranean neighborhood, internal public order and energy supplies. In effect, because of the political and security situation in Libya and state collapse, sea state control capabilities of Tripoli have greatly eroded to the benefit of various militias, tribes and mercenaries (Taufel, 2015). Specifically, groups operating in Derna and Cyrenaica represent a significant threat. And despite the fragile formation of a new government of national unity, the militias formed since 2011 have not shied away from aggressive action. Another international threat to the Mediterranean Sea’s importance in global trade is the presence of structures of criminal organizations near the Adriatic Sea. Specifically, Italy’s planned LNG terminal, which is a crucial infrastructure for the needs of the country and its national and energy security, is a sensitive target of terrorist attacks on coastal infrastructure.

Another reason for the internationalization of MS in the Mediterranean Sea is the asymmetries in naval military capabilities between NATO and the EU, on the one hand, and MENA countries, on the other. In fact, the military expenditures of MENA countries, with Tunisia as an exception, far exceed the ones of European Mediterranean countries (Attinà, 2013). Additionally, waterways of the MENA region, which are among the most important in the world, became increasingly vulnerable due to internal political instabi-



lity, such as the Israeli-Iran naval war, and the “lack of adequate maritime capabilities of nearby states” (Shelala, 2014). Consequently, the EU started stressing its responsibility and interest to improve maritime governance. This mission took the form of capacity-building for coastguards in various coastal states, for example, in Libya as a means to enhance the stewardship of the oceans.

## Regional Security and Failures of Regional Cooperation

Addressing the new threats to maritime security is cooperative. Mediterranean countries, Europe and NATO have increased cooperation within their respective supranational organizations and started using their military and public policies to show renewed interest in MS of the Mediterranean Sea. While it is difficult to measure the impact, NATO’s “Operation Endeavor” to tackle terrorism from the sea, a hybrid threat, can be considered a success because it increased the feeling of safety for civil and commercial ships operating in the area. Russia joined NATO in this operation, which falls perfectly in line with the principles in the Alliance Maritime Strategy, or collective defense and MS cooperation, and with the EU’s principles in its maritime security strategy that emphasizes multilateralism. However, beyond this, it has been futile to attempt to institutionalize security management in the Mediterranean (Attinà, 2013). Regional cooperation, when it occurs, results from variables that relate to shared economic interests, power considerations and a shared value system (Rubin & Eiran, 2019). Distinctively characterized by cultural diversity and heterogeneity, the Mediterranean Sea’s cultural clashes have been idiosyncratic. From that lens, tapping into regional cooperation is significantly hindered.

Importantly, the security of a region is conceptualized differently from that of a state. For the longest time, the literature on IR provided a small space for the study of regions and regional orders (Acharya, 2007). Today, however, regions are central to our understanding of international politics. Because the Mediterranean region consists of two regions, the EU and MENA, each one has diverging patterns and different security complexes. A regional security complex is one of the three types of regional spaces, and refers to the “level where states link together sufficiently closely so that their security cannot be considered separate from each other” (Acharya, 2007). Here, however, we argue that the wider Mediterranean region can be regarded as a single security complex or a super-complex, in which the security of Europe and Mediterranean states of the MENA region are increasingly linked to a point where they merge more obviously today than ever before (Lesser et al, 2018). Evidently, the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy showcases the security of the EU and its neighbors in the Mediterranean region, which are intrinsically connected, with most of Europe’s security challenges “now localized in this area” (Germond & Grove, 2010). Under these conditions, the necessity of fostering a shared security community, both politically and practically, becomes evident.

In addition, the concept of security has evolved to include non-military dimensions (economic, cultural, political and environmental) that complement the classical military one. The security of states in the northern basin, namely Italy and Spain, are directly affected by the security of the southern and eastern basin, as exemplified by the spillover of the Libyan conflict and the consequent illegal migration to Europe. The “refugee crisis” of the Mediterranean is a humanitarian and societal problem, coming mainly from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, and it is directly related to insecurity in its classical military sense and to the heightened perception of societal security threats that catalyzed the rise of far-right movements and parties in Europe.

## The Potent Relationship: Securitized Relations, Security Vacuum, Disordered Multipolarity

To evaluate whether the Mediterranean Sea is ordered, we first have to define order. The word order is a slippery concept. A region can create order in two main ways. The first is descriptive of a particular status-quo, meaning an “existing distribution of power or institutional arrangement, irrespective of its consequences for peace or conflict” (Acharya, 2007). The second way is more normative and refers to increased predictability and stability, if not peace, per se.

In applying these definitions to evaluate the Mediterranean Sea, we argue that neither clarity of BoP nor increased predictability are present there today. This situation is contrary to that of the Cold War period, when the Mediterranean region was controlled by a clear distribution of power. The Mediterranean was unipolarly dominated by the U.S. However, the end of the Cold War also brought an end to clear-cut alliances and coalitions that had rendered the Mediterranean Sea ordered. Indeed, since the Cold War, the maritime environment has become more unstable. With neither the status quo nor the distribution of power settled, we infer that the wider Mediterranean region is far from being ordered, and the chaos in the Mediterranean area is unprecedented. In effect, in this “disordered multipolarity” (Dessi, 2020), fragmentation, radicalization and militarization are combined forces on the Mediterranean scene. The return of multipolarity in the Mediterranean is one of the “most noteworthy geopolitical developments” (Cristiani, 2019) of the past years. Despite all efforts at security cooperation, the Mediterranean has led the path to a security competition. It is not surprising that in a fluid, complex and constantly changing geopolitical situation mountains of difficulties hinder the establishment of a new security architecture.

Moreover, the fact that the securities of states are linked does not itself determine how states want to manage their security relations (Acharya, 2007). The failure to effectively institutionalize collective security (a sort of security community) results from the below-mentioned factors. This failure challenges theoretical and material incentives to states’ cooperation.

First, the development of collective security is significantly correlated with regional security complexes in which a global-level hegemony is created by a global-level power and/or by some collective institution, such as the EU-Europe. In other words, in the absence of a global-level hegemony and of a collective security institution, the prospects for weaving fragmented security frameworks are dim.

Second, an important requisite to mutual understanding, especially in the security domain, is cultural homogeneity and proximity. The Mediterranean region is distinctly characterized as culturally diverse, rendering difficult the development of common institutions for the joint management of shared problems and indirectly favoring the emergence of exclusive bilateral and trilateral strategies that are often confrontational. The security culture gap, especially between European and MENA groups, hampered political dialogue and have presented a challenge (Rubin & Eiran, 2019).

Third, another highly significant variable relates to the frame used by actors with sufficient authority to identify threats to their national interest that stem from the maritime theatre. MS of the Mediterranean Sea presents various issues of interdependence, namely migration, delimitation of maritime boundaries and energy. However, when dynamics of interdependence are replaced by securitization, they are perceived as threats, and thus securitized, consequently “enlarging [the] conflict map” (Korany, 2020) and resulting in increased militarization.

In addition to local polarities, super complexes in which more than one global power vies for strategic dominance (e.g., Russia and China) may become conflict prone via securitization. At the very least, cooperation structures in the MENA region have been ineffective in tackling the security situation. Notably, the Mediterranean region, and particularly the Middle East, is the most militarily loaded space in the world (Villegas, 2020) and has been witnessing an arms race as never seen before, even during the Cold War.

Such high levels of militarization are taking place within a framework of overlapping maritime borders, contested sovereignties and licensed international oil companies that are operating in similar zones. Therefore, the situation created increases the risk of maritime accidents and conflicts.

Arguably, stable states are a pre-requisite for regional security and order. The collapse of the rule of law in most of the region has spilled over into the maritime domain. Indeed, the region has become conflict prone, not only as a result of securitization's paradoxical relation with a security vacuum, but also because of a “legal vacuum” (Villegas, 2020).

The status-quo of this regional security complex, which falls incredibly short of a regional order, is far from being settled. Quite the contrary, the status-quo of the MS in the Mediterranean Sea exists in a delicate balance between a dormant volcano and organized chaos, in which progress on many fronts is possible, and, where no regional and outside actor seems to have an incentive to escalate conflict yet. However, the necessary building-blocks for such escalation are already in place.

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## Romy Yahchouchi's profile

Romy Yahchouchi is a 26-year-old Lebanese-Canadian woman. She earned a double Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Psychology from McGill University in Montreal, Canada, 2018. She also obtained a Master of Science degree in Public Policy from Queen Mary University in London, 2020. Today, she is a junior independent analyst in future global strategic affairs. She specializes in geopolitics and security and in reform and modernization of the public sector through digital transformation, automation and e-government. Among other things, she worked with think tanks, with a policy and strategic communications advisory firm, and with a political party in Lebanon. Her research focused on policy analysis, program implementation and evaluation of issues including cybersecurity strategies and the Middle East's access to information via e-strategies and key ICT projects for e-governance. She also worked with an IT firm's data science and implementation team on statistical analysis and on their marketing strategy for an e-government full automation project. Romy also extensively studied the phenomena of hybrid warfare and actors namely in the Israeli-Palestine conflict and the Hezbollah phenomena in Lebanon, the region and the world.

Romy's studies and focus on ethno-nationalist and religious conflicts in the Middle East evidence her interest in the development of culturally specific strategies to treat, manage or resolve conflicts. Her background in psychology and key academic projects provides her with critical insight into the role of identity and ideas on the policy-making process and state-society relations.

Lastly, Romy is the founder and program coordinator of Emcrey Foundation- an NGO that, she with other four concerned citizens founded following the Beirut explosion in August, 2020. She is the author of 'On the run', a 2015 published collection of poems.

Languages: French, English, Arabic







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Le Prestige Business Center,  
No. F.O.1, Rue du lac Windermere,  
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