

The background of the entire slide features a close-up of a globe showing the Eastern Mediterranean region, with a large, light-colored chess piece (likely a king or queen) in the foreground on the left. The globe is partially obscured by the text boxes.

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The Ungovernable Eastern Mediterranean

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The Ungovernable Eastern Mediterranean

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Abstract

By adopting a neorealist approach to Eastern Mediterranean, this paper examines the geopolitical perspectives of the subregion. It argues that Turkey is the most critical and aggressive state of this subregion and the alliances and conflicts have taken place between the regional countries are significant. The biggest and most historical conflict is between Turkey and Greece, including Cyprus. Eastern Mediterranean, after the first marine zones delimitation agreements and researches of Cyprus, started to be a very important geopolitical spot in energy diplomacy and economic profits of exploitation. The pie of the region started to be shared and Turkey's ambitions starting to multiply. The EastMed, the Turkish-Libyan pact and Greek-Egyptian EEZ partial delimitation were determined by the alliances and conflicts of nowadays.

Introduction

There has been a vacuum of power in the Eastern Mediterranean, because none of the Great or regional powers have taken control of this region yet. This power vacuum has led regional countries to seek a decisive place in the region. The most ambitious of these countries is Turkey. Erdogan is trying to build an empowered state alike the Ottoman Empire, with the great doctrine of "Blue Homeland" and make the Eastern Mediterranean a Turkish lake, like it was in early sixteenth century. To understand how this regional subsystem became one of the most interesting, worrisome and dangerous places in the world of foreign affairs, we must take look back to the incidents led to nowadays.

Considering this background, this paper has four main goals in its geopolitical analysis: (i) to identify the regional players, (ii) to examine their interactions, (iii) to present the whole subregion's perspective and characteristics and (iv) to examine the rest of the world's perspective and involvement in this crisis. Eastern Mediterranean is an extremely important region that will still be considered this way in the following years. Each player is important, but significant attention is given to Turkey. Its aggressive behavior to Greece and Cyprus, the illegal Turkish-Libyan pact and the plans of "Blue Homeland" have made the country the most worrisome player of the region. Its ambitions to be a regional hegemon must not be underestimated and Eastern Mediterranean cannot be allowed by the other players to get converted to a battlefield for Erdogan's Empire.

The analysis reaches the conclusion that although nobody wants Turkey to become regional hegemon, a few of them try to stop its increasing development in the era.

Great Power haven't been evolved in the way of preventing the change of status quo. Turkey has been empowered enough to cause security dilemmas in the region and threaten its neighbors.

Conceptual and analytical framework

First of all, the countries that belong to this region are Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and non-state actors, as "Islamic State", Gaza, "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", Jordan and Palestinian Authority. As a "new" region, Eastern Mediterranean is an intriguing region with a lot of dangerous incidents that had returned it into an unstable geopolitical era. The civil war in Syria has included the use of chemical weapons and the involvement of other countries, such as Russia, USA and Turkey (1). The civil war in Libya, a weak state might become a failed one, in which were involved states as Turkey, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Russia is also a factor of instability of the region (2). The rise of the Islamic State still controls part of Syria and Iraq and has increased its brutality that expanded to West, with ongoing terrorism attacks until nowadays. The Egypt's and Arab Spring's failure and the regional ambitions of Turkey are also incidents that led to the nowadays crisis (4). All of them are factors that make Eastern Mediterranean a geopolitical spot where states tend to increase their power before a competitor maximizes its own, especially the more powerful ones. The energy findings lead to an increasing competition between these states and the energy wealth of the region has led countries to make maritime zones delimitations between them.

The beliefs of (neo)liberalism theory, that spread of democracy, strengthening international institutions and globalization and increasing economic interdependence displace war and lead to cooperation and stability is weak. The geopolitical rivalries are largely obsolete and have given way to economic cooperation and interdependence. Realists believe geopolitics and geo-economics are two sides of the same coin, which is nothing more than ubiquitous international competition. The ultimate goal of any state is not its economic development, it is their survival in the context of an anarchic and competitive system. The road to the international stability doesn't go through globalization and economic interdependence, this theory is not empirically verified nor theoretically correct. States are not only interested in how much they will gain in general, but also how much they will gain in relation to their partners or enemies. Indeed, they are not only interested in absolute gains, but mainly in relative gains. At the time of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the two countries were at the height of their economic interdependence. Greece's and Turkey's conflict only confirms this rule. Geopolitics and geo-economics interact as theories and in the practical level and Turkey has understood these principles as it seems from its strategy. The country is trying to control the sea of the Eastern Mediterranean, Red Sea and Aegean Sea in order to increase its power and become a regional power (3).

Turkey's significance

Except Eastern Mediterranean region, Turkey is one of the most interesting geopolitical hotspots all over the world. This state is at the intersection of Europe

and Asia, is a NATO member, a very important economic EU's ally and, as it is not expecting to become an EU member anymore, the pressure that exercises to EU and Greece cannot be furthermore handled under the aspirant of the entrance in the European family. Turkey has also close ties to Russia, USA, Balkan's states and Israel. The presidency of Erdogan has started being more oriented to West morals but ended up being more closed than ever after Kemal's presidency to Muslim morals, strengthening its Muslim identity and ties to Muslim states and Islamic State (4). Although it was expected Turkey would have disturb its alliances with West, its relations with EU and US remained strong and tied.

The ambitions of Turkey are to become the protector and leader of Muslim states and get empowered enough to participate as a Great Power in international relations. So, secondary ambitions can be interpreted as a goal to become a regional hegemon. According to Mearsheimer, given the fact that planetary hegemony is not realistic, states try to control the region they belong, as to be established as regional hegemons. A trial of becoming a planetary hegemony would be an overexpansion and would end up catastrophic for a state, like the history of states which over-expanded have taught us. Not all states have the same ambitions and goals; bigger and more powerful states use to seek the regional hegemony. Furthermore, regional powers tend to prevent other regional powers of taking control and increase their power (5).

Greek-Turkish Conflict

The conflict between Greece and Turkey about maritime zones had started back in 1973. Greece wanted to take advantage of marine resources, a fact that awakened Turkey to assert also marine resources from the Est Aegean islands' continental shelf. After the Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, the possibility of extending the coastal zone would benefit only Greece and to a lesser extent Turkey. It would greatly restrict free navigation areas and it would move the inner boundary of the continental shelf, while at the same time discounting a percentage of it, which would be part of the enlarged Greek coastal zone.

This historical and legal review help someone to understand the strategy of Turkey and the *casus belli* this country has imposed to Greece. Greece accepts only one legal dispute with Turkey, that of the delimitation of the continental shelf and, by extension, Exclusive Economic Zone. Athens has promoted the idea of referring to the International Court of Justice for resolution. Greece has signed the UNCLOS in 1995, while Turkey hasn't yet, so the two countries have to make a pre-agreement so they can appeal to the Court (6).

After many years in peace between the two countries, the coup in Turkey in 2016 seems to be the starting year of the new conflict. Tayyip Erdogan after the incident of coup decided to cut the exploratory contacts with Greek government and started to act extremely hegemonic inside and out his country. After taking care of the internal conflicts in Turkey, in 2019 he makes an EEZ (exclusive economic zone) delimitation with Libya, infringing and rejecting the sovereign rights of Greek islands' potential continental shelf. The disputed point between Greece and Turkey is the Kastelorizo Complex. Turkey claims that Kastelorizo has no influence. It hastened to put this view into practice with the Turkish-Libyan pact and the delimitation of the

EEZ, which not only flattens Kastelorizo, but extends to the 28th meridian, violating Greece's sovereign rights in SE Crete and the eastern side of Rhodes.

Greece's response in August 2020 was a partial EEZ delimitation with Egypt trying to cancel the illegal treatment between Turkey and Libya. In the meantime, Turkey has begun to publish and practice numerous of Illegal NAVTEX for research in potential Greek islands' continental shelf and carry out the Turkish-Libyan pact (7).

After the Greek-Egyptian partial EEZ delimitation, Turkey's NAVTEX for research was about the 28th to 30th meridian, which is illegal. According to article 83 par. 1 of the Maritime Law Convention '82, there is an obligation for demarcation agreement. Unilateral demarcation is not allowed in areas of geographical narrowness, where the claims on the continental shelf overlap. This obligation concerns research and exploitation of the continental shelf of neighboring states. Demarcation by agreement implies that neighboring coastal states will negotiate in good faith towards this goal and any unilateral action in disputed areas constitutes a breach of the obligation to trade in good faith (8).

Some analysts claim this is the strongest conflict between Greece and Turkey and are afraid of a more heated episode. Turkey's demands are far from the eligibility of the international treatments and the Court's decisions. The doctrine behind Turkey's Mediterranean claims is called "Blue Homeland". The phobic syndrome of Turkey getting imprisoned by unfair settlements, has led Erdogan to implement this doctrine. According to the "Blue Homeland" theorem, the area west of the 28th meridian to the 25th meridian is also covered. The 25th meridian is the line along which Turkey, in its own perception, delimits the Aegean continental shelf between the two countries. Finally, Erdogan followed the suggestion of Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and based on this extreme position, contrary to any notion of the law of the sea, bordered with Libya (7). In order Greece to overturn Turkey's empowering it is imperative to balance the ambitious and expansive state by ensuring the country's national security. Greece has significant geostrategic and geo-economic interests in the region and the "redistribution of the deck" creates opportunities (and threats) for a stronger Greek economic, diplomatic and military presence in order Greece will not be negatively influenced in the region and in international politics (3).

Israel-Cyprus-Greece Alliance and other regional players

The alliance between Israel, Cyprus and Greece has begun unofficially after Cyprus initiated exploration for the discovery of hydrocarbons in its Exclusive Economic Zone, on 2011. Before that, in February 2003 and January 2007, Cyprus signed an EEZ delimitation agreement with Egypt and Lebanon. December 2010 was followed by the signing of an agreement between Cyprus and Israel on the demarcation of the EEZ between the two states, which provoked strong reactions from Turkey. The trilateral co-operation was about to happen, first of all because of the security threat of Turkey and secondly, because of energy interests. There was an increase of profit and power in this alliance, but Israel was an unpredictable ally, one which could always get close to Turkey under specific circumstances (9). These circumstances came, but not to strengthen the relations of Israel and Turkey. Israel and Turkey's relations were about not to tie further, after Erdogan supported Hamas. In 2010 Erdogan could rely on the friendships with Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Hezbollah in

Lebanon, Iran and Levant region south of Turkey, but not on Israel friendship until US Vice President Joe Biden helped the two countries to refresh their relations (10). At the beginning of 2020 the three states signed the East Med Pipeline Project, which didn't include Turkey. As a result, Turkey was about to be isolated from the energy perspectives of Eastern Mediterranean and its move was the Turkish-Libyan pact. After the last intensifying security threat Erdogan unleashed in Eastern Mediterranean, the trilateral alliance became stronger with a military treaty between the three states in September 2020 (11).

The energy diplomacy in Eastern Mediterranean continues to get deeper, after the creation of EastMed Gas Forum (EMGF) in January 2019, including the countries of Israel and Palestine also, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, Italy and Jordan. The gas from EastMed can be used in the region and it's not likely possible to offshore gas in Europe, results that come out from the EU's energy plans for the next decade. The important result of these alliances gets close also to politics and not exclusively to economic profits, like the entrance of Palestine Authorities and Jordan to this forum. The entrance of Turkey to this forum depends on its attitude and the continuously of the security threat that is practicing at the moment. An unstable environment may disappoint the investors (12).

Egypt's role in the region is for now close to Greece's interests. They are both in a strong dispute with Turkey about the maritime boundaries and rights to search for and exploit natural gas deposits. Egypt is the main regional producer as it holds the 16th largest gas reserves in the world. The Greek-Egyptian partial EEZ delimitation puts Egypt to the Greece's side and Turkey didn't embrace that. Also, the relations of two states had also broken down after the involvement on the Libyan issue, by supporting different sides on this civil war, and the military coup in Sudan, where Ankara lost influence taken by Cairo (13). One thing between these countries cannot be missed is the Muslim Brotherhood that governed after the 2011s revolution had and continues to have excellent relations with Turkey and governmental party AKP. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi tries to be more neutral to the religion issue and Turkey is not convenient with his governance (14). Egypt is not a very stable state and a government change with the influence of Brotherhood may cause more stability problems to the region, because of its great relations with Erdogan.

EastMed project has a lot of issues that must be solved so the investments take place. The unstable environment is not an issue that can be solved easily. Regarding the security threat Turkey creates to the other states of the region, a peaceful co-operation in the name of energy and financial profit is not enough for all these countries to overcome their security doubt for a country with hegemonic goals. As a result, the realistic theories are more current than ever, no common profit can make a state overcome its fear of another state becoming more powerful, states, especially the more powerful ones, don't pursue general profit, but relative profit.

Furthermore, an extremely important issue about the region remains the Cypriot Problem. The island on 1974 was invaded by Turkey, which resulted in the division of Cyprus and produced two "Cypruses", the north Turkish part and south Greek-Cypriot part. After a lot of tries and the last on 2017, which all had collapsed, analysts believe now are the most critical times on the history of this problem because of the aggressive Ankara. It is extremely important also to be notified that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was very interesting to Erdogan. He has supported

Azerbaijan and believed that this controversial land belongs to the state of Azeris (10). After the previous conflict and role of Turkey in addition to the Cypriot Problem there are questions about how the Turkish President calculates his next move (15). According to writer's opinion, Erdogan will not continue to separate Nagorno-Karabakh and Cypriot Problem in the future, at least on a practical level. The win of Azeris will motivate the Turkish President reconsider his options for the island and try to influence the international view for the issue. There have been numerous of analyses on how Cyprus and Greece should have taken part to Armenian-Azeris conflict, considering the long-term friendship with Armenia, with the fear of not to equate the two different issues of controversial lands. This was a trap of Erdogan; he actually might want Greeks and Cypriots to reconsider their actions in the fear of equalizing the issues and act like it wasn't a big difference between them. As a result, there is no equality between these issues and Greeks and Cypriots have to defend this true internationally as the Cypriot Problem will not be managed and the island might be as damaged as Nagorno-Karabakh.

Tukey expands involvement in critical and numerous regional issues and one of them is the flirt with Islamic State, while trying to be a Muslim's leader. Erdogan is caricaturing Ottoman's Empire religious doctrine and has ambitions of making Turkey a great Muslim power. Regardless his effort of getting close to West, in recent years Erdogan is getting closer to the East and adopts a Kemalist view of presidency (10). This is not only a cause of insight problems of Turkey making Erdogan seeking internal legitimacy, but also an ambitious plan of making Turkey a Great Regional Power with the support of other Muslim states. Erdogan has built a tie relation with ISIS through the Syrian war, oil industry and assistance supply and he never started counterterrorism operations (16). Another critical issue is that Erdogan is spying Europe through DIYANET. Officially, it is the state Office of Religious Affairs, founded in 1924 and all mosques and imams belong to it. Its role changed from season to season and for many years DIYANET has become a branch of the Turkish secret services. The conflict between Turkey and France is deepening and the Netherlands and the ally Germany are not excepted from the Turkish espionage. DIYANET has become a tool of Turkish foreign policy, a mechanism for attacking Sunnis, regardless nationality. Its mission is to put into practice Erdogan's strategy of Turning Turkey into a "protector" and leader of Muslims everywhere (17).

EU's and Great Powers' role in Eastern Mediterranean

First of all, EU is not united in the Eastern Mediterranean issue and that is providing help to Ankara. After numerous of summit meetings EU hasn't imposed financial sanctions to Turkey for its aggressive behavior to EU's member state of Greece. There are a lot of disagreements in EU for this particular issue and yet, the biggest disapprove for sanctions comes from Germany. Also, an unjustified delay is being observed by the Union when the policy making and decisions must be immediate, especially in foreign affairs.

Germany created a climate against the imposition of sanctions on Turkey and the Greece's hopes for EU's practical support are dying (18). It has a powerful alliance history, a great economic and arms trade with Ankara, that don't "allow" it to proceed to sanctions or arms embargo. Greece is curiously complacent about the Turkish aggressive behavior and is not pressing the Union for actions as was

expected. Greece has chosen a low-profile diplomacy, the calming of Turkey and a soft power strategy, nevertheless made military alliances and is close to arms purchase deals.

France, on the other hand, is a player on Eastern Mediterranean that gets no benefits from the Turkish aggressive behavior, nor in the energy profit factor, neither in the creation of a hegemonic power in the region under the umbrella of Russia's protection. France has a lot of profit to lose by letting Turkey exclude it from the energy resources of the region and take the control (19). Except the diplomatic involvement, France has taken part also in military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean with Italy, Greece and Cyprus (20).

Russia is a strong player in the region, and it has a strong economy and energy profit to claim. The relations with Ankara are getting stronger the last years with arms deals and common interests. The Libyan and Syrian wars, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, nuclear bases in Turkey and the interests of Russia for Eastern Mediterranean are factors that empower and sometimes weaken the unofficial alliance between the two countries. It's not a clear alliance, but in the region threatens all the other players, as Russia is not disturbed by a possible regional hegemony of Turkey. Ankara is dealing with numerous of insight problems, such as the free fall of the Turkish lira, but this doesn't seem a factor that can actually stop the empowering of the state in the region, unless a catastrophic economic crash happens (21).

Last but not least is the role of USA in Eastern Mediterranean. Trump's presidency didn't help in the stability of the region, Obama's presidency had underestimated Erdogan's intensions for the Muslim world and now Biden's upcoming presidency is promising a more energetic role in the region and less tolerance for Turkey. The Soleimani's murder was in the boarders of preventive defense, but if Iran had started a war, that would be a completely disaster. Expansion of military bases in Greece was a very positive outcome for the threatening country. The Congress of USA approved EastMed project and this was also, a creative involvement of the country. Generally, the USA elevated its engagement on energy with the region. Even the encouraging involvement of the country in Eastern Mediterranean, its hegemonic presence remained lukewarm. And that's because the most powerful state if wanted to hold the scepters would have been more energetic. USA seemed to have more interesting issues than an unstable subregion and its removal from Middle East made obvious that the region could wait. The relations with Turkey have been increasingly warm, like Trump had no warries of Ankara becoming a region hegemon, in contrast with Iran's empowering (22). The S-400 and F35 crisis was not actually a crisis. The Turkish-American friendship relies on NATO and Russian-Turkish relations seem to have more problems than the first one in the region interests (10).

Conclusions

This paper has set four goals: to identify the regional players, to examine their interactions and to present the whole subregion's perspective and characteristics and to examine the rest of the world's perspective and involvement in this crisis. Eastern Mediterranean is a significant region in the spotlight of world politics. The alliances and conflicts are about to continue to exist and get strengthened, until the aggressive Turkey starts to act with the principles of good neighborliness.

Greece is the most threatened state from Turkey ambitions, including Cyprus. As a historical and strong alliance of two countries, they usually adopt the same statements. According to a recent article of Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. N. Dendias, Greece's stance is not dictated by a punitive attitude towards Turkey, but by the need to defend its sovereignty and sovereign rights, wants a long-standing good neighborly relationship, based on respect for international law and is expecting from EU to close the window of opportunities that has opened for Turkish unilateral and illegal ambitions (23). Greece is investing in soft power, USA and EU, which hasn't intervened yet by sanctions to protect its member-state. A security dilemma is suffocating mostly Greece and Cyprus and the other states of region with preventive strategy.

Regional hegemonies aren't disturbed by the existence of one or two regional powers in different regions around the world. As a result, it is likely that this is the reason why Great Powers at this moment are not feeling threatened by Turkish ambitions. The quintessence of weight transfer, as Mearsheimer calls it, refers to the regional hegemons who leave the threat of a regional power to the neighbors to face alone. The only moment they prevent the regional power of getting full control is when its region neighbors have repeatedly failed to do so (5).

The problem begins to emerge when a power with the ambitions of Turkey taking control of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and materializing the "Blue Homeland" doctrine. According to this paper's conclusions, a state capable of curtailing Turkish expansion is absent. If the only power wielding regional control is Turkey, there will be no other competitor and the new goals the state will become an extreme inconvenience to Great Powers. They think they have this country under control, but the control in a multilateral system where the pie will soon be reshared is not a realistic overview. In writer's opinion, even though Great Powers might have more serious problems to solve for now, especially with the pandemic and the following economic crisis, Turkey must be included in their agenda before it becomes uncontrollable.

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