

THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: NEW DYNAMICS AND POTENTIAL FOR COOPERATION

N. Goren (Ed.), M. Asseburg, Th. Dokos, E. Eiran,
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**EUROMESCO
JOINT POLICY STUDY**

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JOINT POLICY STUDY

Published by the European Institute of the Mediterranean

Editorial team:

Aleksandra Chmielewska, Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria

Proof-reading: Neil Charlton

Layout: Núria Esparza

ISSN: 2462-4500

Legal deposit: B 8969-2018

March 2018



EUROMED



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or the European Institute of the Mediterranean.

The coordinator of the group would like to thank the participants of the Dialogue Workshop held in Athens on 10 November 2017, the reviewer of the Joint Policy Study, Mrs Valeria Talbot, Senior Research Fellow and Co-Head of Middle East and North Africa Centre at ISPI – Italian Institute for International Political Studies, the IEMed for supporting project implementation and the European Union for co-financing the project.

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Foreword

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New dynamics are taking place in the Eastern Mediterranean. Signs of increased political cooperation between different countries, new opportunities for economic cooperation due to natural gas finds, and common threats related to security and refugee flow all lead to the emergence of the Eastern Mediterranean as a new sub-region. This has been acknowledged by the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which stated in late 2015 that “the EU will support sub-regional cooperation as appropriate in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Maghreb and the Southern Caucasus.”

While the Arab Middle East is in turmoil and is capturing international attention mostly due to crises and instability, the Eastern Mediterranean sub-region is witnessing some positive diplomatic momentum. In recent years, this has included the reconciliation agreement between Israel and Turkey (although tensions between the countries remain); the tripartite summits between the leaders of Egypt, Cyprus and Greece; the coming to power of pro-peace Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot leaders; the forming of an alliance between Israel, Cyprus and Greece; and the increased security and economic ties between Israel and Egypt.

However, this positive momentum is challenged by a variety of geo-political factors, including the war in Syria and its consequences; the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian and Cyprus conflicts; the crisis between Turkey and Egypt; the Palestinian split and the situation in Gaza; the growing involvement of Russia in the sub-region; and mounting obstacles to the promotion of democracy, tolerance and human rights.

The numerous actors, factors and developments listed above created a complex ecosystem in the Eastern Mediterranean. Navigating the sub-region towards a win-win, rather than a zero-sum, reality requires relevant stakeholders to gain more knowledge, better understand regional dynamics, identify opportunities for cooperation, overcome conflicts and contradictory interests, and practise skilled and inclusive diplomacy.

This Joint Policy Study on “The Eastern Mediterranean: New Dynamics and Opportunities for Cooperation”, led by the Mitvim Institute in the framework of the EuroMeSCo project, aims to contribute to these needs, and to conflict resolution and enhanced cooperation in the sub-region. It includes three chapters that were written by leading experts from Greece, Israel and Germany, following consultations with colleagues from additional countries in Europe, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The first chapter, by Dr. Thanos Dokos and Prof. Panayotis Tsakonas, focuses on promoting collective security schemes in the Eastern Mediterranean. The chapter

provides a definition of the Eastern Mediterranean and presents its evolution as a distinct sub-region. It argues that in order for the Eastern Mediterranean to evolve into a successful sub-region, rather than a failed one, a limited security regime should be established there – namely a cooperative and stable security architecture that will centre, at least in the beginning, on two particular issue areas: energy security and Jihadist terrorism. The chapter claims that it is upon these areas that the interests of the various states in the Eastern Mediterranean sub-region are expected to converge.

The second chapter, by Gabriel Mitchell and Dr. Ehud Eiran, focuses on regional effects of the natural gas finds in the Eastern Mediterranean. It reviews specific gas discoveries in the region since the late 1990s, looks at their effect on regional security and on environmental policies, analyses international boundary demarcation in the region, and examines the roles of external actors – the US, EU and Russia. The chapter claims that the discoveries have yet to become a game-changing driving force of regional integration, reconciliation and closer relations with Europe, and that in some cases they even created new regional tensions. Despite this state of affairs, the chapter emphasises those areas that show potential for regional cooperation and the instances where this potential has already materialised.

The third chapter, by Dr. Muriel Asseburg, focuses on the war in Syria and its effect on Eastern Mediterranean dynamics. It analyses the interests of key Eastern Mediterranean actors regarding Syria, and how these interests converge or diverge with those of other involved actors. The chapter claims that Eastern Mediterranean actors developed fundamentally opposing interests, often considered vital, which do not cater for constructive sub-regional dynamics or closer sub-regional collaboration. At the same time, it shows how these interests – and in particular their divergence from other crucial actors' interests – are detrimental to achieving sustained stabilisation in Syria. The chapter also provides recommendations for the EU on how it can support constructive dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean and prevent military spill-over of the war in Syria.

Promoting Collective Security Schemes in the Eastern Mediterranean

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Introduction

In the context of regional integration, the Eastern Mediterranean does not resemble the adjacent Middle East (although geographical and political overlapping makes a clear distinction between those regions extremely difficult, as discussed elsewhere in the chapter), namely a region with the lowest relative degree of regional integration in the contemporary world. However, it remains largely absent from the more general trend of intensification of regionalism that seems to have been taking place across the globe over the past two decades. Indeed, the long-standing trends of disintegration, confrontation and potential armed conflict seem to be going “hand in hand” with certain positive trends of cooperation in the region. However, to get the political elites of the states of the region, not to mention their populations, to overcome the burden of the conflictual past and present and focus on the possibility of reciprocal cooperation in the future is, to say the least, a challenge.

After providing a definition of the region and presenting the evolution of the Eastern Mediterranean physiognomy in terms of both structure and process, the chapter argues that, by using the conceptual tool of “security complex”, the Eastern Mediterranean can be viewed as a distinct “new/separate” region and as an autonomous geopolitical entity with specific needs, characteristics and interests. To enable the Eastern Mediterranean to evolve into a successful sub-region, the chapter proposes the establishment of a “limited security regime”, which will constitute, at least in the beginning, a tacit security arrangement on particular “issue areas”: energy security and Jihadist terrorism. It is upon these areas that the interests of the states (both inside and outside the Eastern Mediterranean sub-system) are expected to converge. The establishment of a “limited security regime” should not be considered as a naive enterprise to be agreed and undertaken by certain states in the Eastern Mediterranean region but as a pragmatic first step on behalf of the states of the region to build a forum of coordination of their policies for effectively addressing common concerns and interests.

Defining a Region of Conflict and Cooperation

After taking into account the various geographical definitions given to the Eastern Mediterranean so far, the one selected in this chapter suggests that the Eastern Mediterranean is comprised by nine particular states, namely Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Syria (to the extent that it can still be treated as a unitary/single actor) and Turkey. A word of caution applies herein regarding

the difficulties that are inherent in any analysis attempting to examine the Eastern Mediterranean (or the whole Middle Eastern region for that matter) from a security perspective and in relative isolation from developments in the adjoining regions of the Maghreb, the Persian Gulf, Transcaucasus/Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa.¹ Needless to say, the situation is being further complicated by the active role external/non-regional powers, such as Russia, the United States (US), Iran and Saudi Arabia but also the European Union (EU) and NATO play in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Negative Signs of Limited Regionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean

Unsurprisingly, the Eastern Mediterranean is a region where a limited amount of regionalism has been witnessed throughout the Cold War and post-Cold War history of the region, particularly in regards to the formation of interstate associations or groupings serving similar goals and/or values and acting in pursuit of the region's overall development. According to Joseph Nye (1968), regionalism is defined as "the formation of interstate associations or groupings on the basis of regions and refers to an intentional political process, typically led by governments with similar goals and values in pursuit of the overall development." One should also distinguish between regionalism and regionalisation, with the latter being defined as the process of forming regions due to similarities between states in a given geographical space.

The general picture in the region is quite bleak. There is a general failure of governance as the Eastern Mediterranean and its adjoining regions remain an extremely turbulent and unstable neighbourhood and the security environment continues to be "Hobbesian". The list of frequently interacting problems is very long indeed: civil conflicts; the emergence of fragile, unstable, dysfunctional or even failed states; the possibility of de facto (or even de jure) border change in various parts of the region; sectarian tensions; Jihadist terrorism; extreme inequality in the distribution of income; democratic deficit; population flows; the proliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as small arms and light weapons; existing regional conflicts; the ambitious agendas of regional powers (including Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia); competition for energy resources; the lack of a regional security architecture; a relative decline in US interest and presence in the region; and a deep, structural European crisis also affecting the EU's global and regional influence and policies. All the aforementioned factors combined to cause an almost perfect storm in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Although of critical importance, the Arab revolts and related security developments are not the only factors shaping regional balances and security in the Middle East. Things

¹ To give one especially pertinent example, developments in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq may have profound security implications for countries "belonging" to the Eastern Mediterranean region, such as Syria and Turkey. Another example is the impact of Libya's transformation into a failed state for Egypt's domestic security and stability. Apparently, the list of such examples may unfortunately be quite long.

are not happening in a vacuum. The impact of the Arab revolts is being added to the impact of other global trends (megatrends) and drivers such as the emergence of non-Western powers and the shifting global balance of power, demographic changes, technological developments, globalisation and climate change.

The transformation of the Arab world over the past few years has contributed to the weakening of state structures and to the creation of ungoverned territories (Sinai, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere) that can be exploited by hybrid actors. In combination with the struggle for power between regional powers, this weakening of state structures could possibly lead to the collapse of the Sykes-Picot architecture and to the change of borders in the Middle East (with the Kurds in northern Iraq being the most likely candidate, although traditional divisions among Kurds may complicate things and eventually prevent the creation of a larger Kurdish state).

Short- and longer-term concerns include the nature and stability of new regimes, the consequences for relations between the West and the Arab world (including the impact on oil prices) and implications for transatlantic policies towards the region. The emergence of fragile, unstable, dysfunctional or failed states can have important destabilising consequences not only in the immediate neighbourhood but also in adjacent regions. In some cases, such states may constitute “black holes” for the whole international system (for example, Afghanistan in the Taliban/al-Qaeda era). There are states in sub-Saharan Africa that could be classified in the above categories. In some cases, they may constitute safe havens for a wide variety of criminal activities, with only local or limited regional impact. In other cases, such as Somalia and piracy problems, the impact is much wider.

In the Middle East, the list of failed or dysfunctional states includes Yemen (with its population explosion, resource shortages, crumbling infrastructure and sectarian violence), Libya and Syria (which will remain the main regional concern as it has become a source of instability not only for the neighbouring countries but well beyond as a result of the refugee flows). Finally, the role of non-state actors, mostly of the militant Islamist/Salafist variety but also hybrid organisations like Hezbollah, has been growing and state bureaucracies always find it much more difficult to engage against non-state forces/actors.

The diversity of threats and challenges for regional stability underlines the need for consultation and cooperation between regional actors but also explains to a considerable extent why such cooperation has been largely absent. Indeed, past efforts to create

regional fora for consultations and possible cooperation between regional countries in the security sphere have met with limited success. Examples include the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process), which included a political basket and NATO's Mediterranean Initiative with seven Southern Mediterranean partners. Past efforts for the establishment of an arms control regime between Israel and its Arab neighbours (the ACRS talks) have collapsed with the Oslo Peace Process. It is also worth noting that there is no political/security dimension in the Union for the Mediterranean (which is a project-oriented initiative) and so far no regional security-related initiatives in the context of the EU's [Southern] Neighbourhood Policy, which is a "unilateral" EU policy, in any case (Blockmans, 2017).

Positive Signs of Potential Cooperation

More recently, however, and besides the fact that balance of power dynamics are undoubtedly still present in the region, i.e. some states are concerned about relative (instead of absolute) military or economic gains or believe that the use, or the threat of the use, of violence are a means of achieving political gains and of dealing with territorial conflicts, the Eastern Mediterranean is also witnessing a rather positive diplomatic momentum and an increased political and economic cooperation, which should be encouraged and, more importantly, consolidated.

Indeed, apart from the longstanding and ongoing confrontation between Israel and its Arab neighbours, between Greece and Turkey, and between Turkey and Cyprus – which seem, at least according to a realist parlance, to make any attempt for an all-embracing regional project meaningless – one can hardly ignore the new, both political and economic, cooperative dynamics that have appeared in the region over the last couple of years and auger well for the emergence of the Eastern Mediterranean as an area with viable regional structures.

As a matter of fact, although recovery in diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkey after the Mavi Marmara has been extremely slow (and even that may be reversed as a result of Trump's Jerusalem decision), economic relations between the two sides are thriving (Arbell, 2017). Moreover, the discovery of potentially significant natural gas deposits in the exclusive economic zones of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt and the alleged deposits of the Levant Basin may provide an additional energy source outside the former Soviet space and the Middle East proper, although current discoveries do not qualify this development as a "game changer" for Europe's energy security (Giannakopoulos, 2016; De Micco, 2014).²

² For more on effects of gas findings, see the chapter written by Gabriel Mitchell and Ehud Eiran in the same volume.

Moreover, it appears that there are certain potential success stories in this context mostly regarding the triangular strategic partnerships developed by Greece, Cyprus and Israel, with the involvement of Egypt because of its LNG facilities and the most recent addition of Jordan. The common link is concern about regional stability, and, to a certain extent, cooperation in the energy sector. It should be noted, however, that the relationship is evolving from the initial concept of perceived common adversaries, which constitutes rather shaky ground for a strategic relationship and a source of friction with Turkey, to one based on common interests.

Since January 2016 there have been several official trilateral meetings in Nicosia, Tel Aviv and Thessaloniki among the Prime Ministers of Greece, Cyprus and Israel. The meetings were hailed by the three countries' premiers as constituting a "strategic alliance" in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although the core of those meetings' agenda is related to the discovery of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean region, the three states pledged closer cooperation in many more fields, including energy, tourism, research and technology, environment, water management, anti-terrorism and migration. More importantly for remaining relevant and for further increasing the usefulness of the particular trilateral (multi-level and multi-dimensional) sub-regional cooperation scheme in the Eastern Mediterranean the three states have repeatedly stressed that their new strategic axis is not exclusive, and – in a nod to Egypt and Turkey – stated that they would gladly welcome other states with similar goals into this alliance (Tziaras, 2016).

Indeed, regional cooperation might in principle be feasible under very specific circumstances but it will not be an easy undertaking as Turkey's difficult relations with Cyprus, Egypt, Israel and Greece make the discussion of economy-driven ideas for joint exploration or other forms of energy cooperation a politically-sensitive issue. The same obstacles seem to prevent any meaningful discussion of energy-related issues between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel and Lebanon and Cyprus and Turkey.

Particular reference should also be made to the Greek proposal (presented in the Rhodes conference of May 2017) for the creation of a "Mediterranean OSCE", with the participation of all regional states (plus a number of extra-regional powers). The first Rhodes Conference for Security and Stability took place on 8 and 9 September 2016 with the aim of creating a forum for dialogue and cooperation among states of the Mediterranean region for dealing with the current challenges that the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean faces and for creating a positive agenda for cooperation among the participating states. The second Rhodes Conference was held on 22 and 23 May 2017, with the participation of foreign ministers and high-level officials from Albania,

Algeria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates and representatives from the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council.³ It should be stressed that the absence of Israel from the particular initiative, i.e. a key state of the region and a vital element of the “essential structure” of any future security arrangement in the Eastern Mediterranean, weakens the initiative’s external legitimacy and does not auger well for the realisation of its goals.

It should also be noted that there is lack of established, systematic Track-II or Track one-and-a-half diplomacy efforts like the Shangri-La or Manama Dialogue organisation by the London-based IISS in Asia and the Gulf region, respectively. The Jerusalem issue is expected to complicate the situation even further as well as to hinder formal or informal regional cooperation efforts between Israel and the Arab countries.

Eastern Mediterranean as a Regional “Security Complex”

Comprised by nine states, namely Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Syria and Turkey, the Eastern Mediterranean region can be considered as a “regional sub-system” (Thomson, 1973), especially if one takes into account the number of states involved; the states’ geographic proximity; the regularity and intensity of interactions among them (in such a way that a change in one part affects other parts) and the increasing recognition of the Eastern Mediterranean distinctiveness by external actors as well as by the states of the region. Interestingly enough, in order to take account of the overlap between sub-systems and boundary diffuseness in regional membership, Cantori and Spiegel suggest an interesting distinction between (i) a core sector or a principal focus of international politics within a given region, (ii) a peripheral sector including states that play a role in the political affairs of the region, which are separated from the core as a result of social, political, economic, organisational or other factors, and (iii) an intrusive system, which takes account of external power whose participation in the sub-system is important (Cantori & Spiegel, 1970).

In the early 1990s, a new flair was given to the above comprehensive definitions of the “sub-system” by Buzan who argued that “regional security sub-systems” could be seen in patterns of enmity and amity that are substantially confined within the same geographic area. Based on this line of reasoning, Buzan proposed the term “security complex” (as a more coherent notion that incorporates that of the “regional sub-system”), to define “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that

³ See <http://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/news-announcements/second-conference-for-security-and-stability-rhodes-22-23-may-2017.html>

their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another” [our emphasis] (Buzan, 1990, p. 190). More specifically, for the theory of security complexes the central idea is that “since more threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security independence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes” (Buzan & Waever, 2003, p. 4).

By implication, to view and analyse the Eastern Mediterranean as a “security complex” is useful to the extent that the “essentially indivisible relational patterns” among the states of the Eastern Mediterranean are highlighted and the relative autonomy of particular security dynamics that stand out from the local and systemic levels is pronounced, thus making the Eastern Mediterranean appear as an autonomous geopolitical entity with specific needs and interests. Indeed, developments in the 21st century have not only given the Eastern Mediterranean increased significance in world affairs but also led analysts to start viewing it conceptually as a distinct “new” region with specific characteristics.

Promoting Cooperation through Collective Schemes

What kind of regional cooperative initiatives could overcome the burden of the conflictual past and present, ameliorate the “insecurity dilemma” facing local state-actors in the Eastern Mediterranean and make them as well as external state-actors redefine the parameters of their strategic “cost-benefit” calculations on the basis of common interests, realistic expectations and an option worth pursuing?

We argue that the most appropriate means for promoting a new more cooperative and stable security architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean is the establishment of a concert and/or arrangement that can incorporate both the existing balance of power dynamics and the collective security considerations of the states of the Eastern Mediterranean. Such an arrangement may take the form of a “regional security regime”, which would be based on the states’ common interests and their pragmatic expectations on particular issues, rather than on common dangers.

Security Regimes: Definition and Prerequisites for their Establishment

The decline in interstate wars, the rise in internal and inter-ethnic conflicts, the increase in the influence of non-state actors and the redefinition of the notion of “threat” led to an increase of the role and influence of security regimes in the 21st century. Indeed,

although states kept pursuing their own interests, they have also acknowledged a strong interest in forgoing unilateralist and balance of power policies and proceeding to the adoption of certain either formal or tacit institutional arrangements of collective action and multilateral cooperation.

These arrangements, broadly known as security regimes, are defined as coherent sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations. More specifically: "Principles are beliefs of fact, causation and rectitude. Norms are standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations. Rules are specific prescriptions or proscriptions for action. Decision-making procedures are prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice" (Krasner, 1983, p.2). Interestingly, security regimes do not constitute any form of agreement or contract, but rather refer to a coincidence of interests between opposing countries. Nevertheless, in order for even tacit cooperation to be maintained between the countries that will create a security regime, it is necessary that quite a high level of reciprocity with regard to participating states' intentions, the integrity of their communication channels, as well as specific values, be attained in advance (Lipson, 1991; Garfinkle, 1995, p. 202).

Jervis identifies "four plus one" reasons, for a security regime to form: first, the great powers must want to establish it; second, the actors must believe that others share the value they place on mutual security and cooperation – if a state believes it is confronted by an inherently aggressive and revisionist power, it will not seek a regime; third, even if all major actors would settle for the status quo, security regimes cannot form when one or more actors believe that security is best provided for by expansion; fourth, war and the individualistic pursuit of security must be seen as costly; last, the most propitious condition for regime formation is the case in which offensive and defensive weapons and policies are distinguishable but the former are cheaper and more effective than the latter, or in which they cannot be told apart but it is easier to defend than attack (Jervis, 1982).

Establishing a "Limited Security Regime"

Apparently, the current situation in the Eastern Mediterranean is also not ripe for the establishment of a "comprehensive security regime" in which all major security issues are covered (Craig & George, 1990, p. 264-265) or for turning the region into a "security community".⁴ Indeed, as a prominent figure of international security regimes put it: "If states view politics as a zero-sum struggle, if they actually desire wars of expansion, if they cannot seek joint gains for domestic political reasons, if they fail to recognize that

⁴ A security community is a conceptual construct to describe a region where governments and political leaders hold dependable expectations of peaceful change and consider large-scale violence to be virtually unthinkable. The concept was developed by Deutsch, who posited that, within such a community, the members resolve their conflicts and problems through institutionalisation procedures without resorting to force (Deutsch et al., 1975). For a more recent discussion on the evolution of the concept, see Adler, E., & Barnett, M. (1998). A Framework for the study of security communities. In E. Adler & M. Barnett (Eds.), *Security communities* (29-65). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

their policy choices are interdependent, if they cannot distinguish each other's offensive and defensive weapons and military deployments, if they are unwilling to reassure other states by permitting adequate verification, then the prospects for security regimes will be poor indeed" (Stein, 1985).

Realising that the establishment of a "comprehensive security regime" or a "security community" in the Eastern Mediterranean requires a Herculean feat with unprecedented consequences, this chapter instead argues that a balanced and gradual approach⁵ promoting the establishment of a "limited security regime" is indeed a feasible and worth-pursuing enterprise. Obviously, a limited security regime, as the one envisioned and proposed here, could come about either as a result of an official agreement signed among the states involved or as a tacit arrangement based on unofficially agreed rules and norms of conduct.

In accordance with rational institutionalism, "limited security regimes" (Flynn & Scheffer, 1990; Rice, 1988, p. 301-303; Lebow & Stein, 1987, p. 56-63) refer to the regularisation of the states' action, the generation of more orderly relationships and define "which state activities are legitimate or illegal and punishable and have an influence on whether, when and how the conflicts between the states will be resolved" (Puchala & Hopkins, 1982, p. 299). Most importantly, "limited security regimes" can lead to the institutionalisation of cooperative outcomes, by making the states of a region (or a sub-system) realise that the costs involved in following unilateralist policies due to the dominance of balance of power considerations exceed the benefits or possible payoffs they could collectively achieve if more cooperative relationships were chosen. Thus, "limited security regimes" are vehicles that can bring about the limited learning that is necessary for cooperative arrangements to be agreed and promoted.

Towards this end, the identification of particular "issue areas" upon which a "limited security regime" is expected to function constitute the strongest legitimising factor for its establishment. More specifically, the agenda of the proposed security regime in the Eastern Mediterranean should regard two particular "issue areas"⁶ around which the interests of the Eastern Mediterranean states converge: (i) "Energy (in)security", and (ii) "Jihadist terrorism".

Indeed, there seems to be a common objective of most states in the region to foster energy cooperation through bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral alliances formed within

⁵ The establishment of a security regime lies thus in between two extremes: an almost total chaos (a Hobbesian state of affairs, which is characterised by enmity between all) and a security community (a Kantian state of affairs, which is characterised by amity between all).

⁶ It should be noted at this point that the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) have not only drawn the attention of the international community but they have also created particular security concerns for most of the states of the Eastern Mediterranean, thus calling for multilateral action and collective management at the regional level. However, Israel's continuing opposition to any past effort regarding the establishment of a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East remains a major obstacle and practically prevents any thought of considering WMD as constituting a third "issue area" of the proposed regional security regime agenda.

the region as well as promoting sub-regional cooperation with the US, NATO, and the EU. There is also a view shared by almost all states of the region as well as by extra-regional powers, such as the Arab League and the EU Counter-Terrorism Cooperation framework,⁷ that “Jihadist terrorism” constitutes the most imminent of the threats emanated in the broader MENA region over the last decade.⁸

It should be also noted at this point that the majority of the Arab States⁹ are participating in the global coalition against ISIS/Daesh. However, apart from the positive signs of common views shared by most states in the Eastern Mediterranean and their participation in international coalitions in the fight against terrorism, the “state blame” tactic followed by certain countries of the region against Saudi Arabia, Iran or Qatar as terrorist sponsors undermines the possibility of the advancement of a holistic strategic cooperation initiative against terrorism by the states of the Eastern Mediterranean. Of course, such cooperation is also undermined by various other factors including the difficult relations between external powers, such as the US and Russia, geopolitical competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia their regional influence, sectarian differences and concerns about Teheran’s nuclear programme.

The Security Regime’s Rationale

The establishment of a limited security regime in the Eastern Mediterranean develops through the recognition of the Eastern Mediterranean states of the need to address common concerns and purposes of extreme importance to their security as well as their intended decisions to respond to new demands and build upon the evolving political and economic cooperative dynamics in the region.

Moreover, the successful establishment of a “limited security regime” presupposes that a balanced distribution of gains should be achieved by the participants of the regime.¹⁰ Indeed, only if negotiations are based on balanced exchange agreements – which would promote the achievement of a balanced distribution of gains (or at least when these gains

7 See Section 5 at: “Declaration Adopted at Third European Union-League of Arab States Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting, Athens, Greece, June 10-11, 2014”, European External Action Service, 11 June 2014; and “Press release following the meeting between the High Representative and Vice President Federica Mogherini and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States (LAS), Dr. Nabil El Araby”, European External Actions Service, 19 January 2015.

8 According to a CSIS report: “Moderate Moslem regimes in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE – and other parts of the world – are key partners in counterterrorism and security”, see Cordesman, H. A. (2017, February 15). Tracking the trends and numbers: Islam, terrorism, stability and conflict in the Middle East. Center for Strategic & International Studies. Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/tracking-trends-and-numbers-islam-terrorism-stability-and-conflict-middle-east>

9 Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon.

10 In the neorealist line of reasoning, states are always seeking to compare their absolute gains with those of other states (relative gains argument). Cooperation is therefore difficult, even when all sides can achieve absolute gains, because no state wants to realise fewer absolute gains than any other. See Grieco, J. (1990). Cooperation among nations. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. This in fact seems to be the case of relations between certain antagonists in the Eastern Mediterranean (Greece-Turkey, Turkey-Cyprus, Israel-Turkey, etc.) and to a large extent the essence of their “security dilemma” relationship; namely, that the central concerns of some of those states are fear of cheating and, most importantly, fear of strengthening the other.

were perceived as such by policy-makers in the Eastern Mediterranean states) – would there be a desire for reciprocity¹¹ and equivalence. This would in turn make the participants of this limited regime align their behaviour with the agreed modes of conduct since any infringement of the rules and principles established would trigger the reversal of the cooperative relationship and negate the gains they could achieve through cooperation (the so-called “shadow of the future”).

The preoccupation of the Eastern Mediterranean states with the establishment of a limited security regime is also related to certain functions that are expected to take place after the regime’s establishment.¹² Indeed, although the establishment of a limited security regime does not imply the cessation of existing conflictual relations among certain states of the Eastern Mediterranean over certain political issues, it can however constitute the appropriate substratum that would further strengthen the status quo by enmeshing all states involved in a context based on certain rules and procedures.

It should be noted at this point that the tacit security regime that is proposed to be established in the Eastern Mediterranean sub-system/security complex should be inclusive, not exclusive. Indeed, contrary to alliances,¹³ collective security is both non-exclusionary and non-discriminatory. Thus, all regional countries should be invited to join upon meeting some clearly defined criteria. Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt appear for now as the most prominent candidates for taking the initiative and forming the proposed limited security regime on energy security, especially given the progress already made through a series of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral agreements of cooperation, either tacit or formal. Jordan has been approached in this context and has indicated that it would in principle be interested in considering its participation, while Turkey may also be dragged into considering its participation as a way out of the “splendid isolationism” it still experiences.

11 Emphasising the importance of understanding how regional actors respond to external intervention in confidence-building and conflict resolution, Goldstein et al. examined whether the presence of both *bilateral* (i.e. between regional powers) and *trilateral reciprocity* (i.e. of local state powers toward the US, the main intervening power in the region) in the Middle East helped improve regional relations. Interestingly, the authors came to the conclusion that although bilateral reciprocity is quite widespread in protracted as well as less conflictual relationships, it is not sufficient to increase long-term cooperation in the Middle East. Thus, although triangular reciprocity is rare, it may serve as an alternative way to pursue cooperation when bilateral reciprocity is absent. See Goldstein, J., Pevehouse, J., Gerner, D. J., & Telhami, S. (2001). Reciprocity, triangularity and cooperation in the Middle East, 1979–97. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45 (5), 594–620. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176315>.

12 According to rational institutionalism, a “limited security regime” can be very useful after its establishment, particularly during periods of relatively unconstrained rivalry, because it can provide regulation; encourage and institutionalise cooperative outcomes; play a moderating role; codify mutual vulnerability (the link between offence and defence) and parity, rather than military superiority, as the pillars on which arms cooperation would rest; solve the defection problem, due to improvement on each side’s information about the behaviour of the other; provide (and promote) balanced and reciprocal agreements; aid in the negotiation of cooperation in another issue-area; and, last but not least, intensify the learning process in the conflict which, in turn, will allow each side to change its mode of thinking, redefine its goals and means in the conflict and, most importantly, change its attitude toward war by dismissing the use of war as a legitimate political means to accomplish its incompatible objectives in a conflict. See Keohane, 1984; Keohane, 1986; Haas, 1990; Duffield, 1992, pp. 819–855; Duffield, 1994; Krasner, 1983.

13 Alliances grant preference to a select group of states at the expense of others (Wolfers, 1962). Moreover, within an alliance states seek to balance each other’s power, they are affiliated with security dilemmas and they are particularly concerned about relative (either military or economic) gains.

What Role for Extra-Regional Powers?

It goes without saying that the Eastern Mediterranean states are faced with a complex security equation, with a number of known variables but also multiple unknown ones. The regional security matrix involves a number of influential regional and extra-regional actors, with bilateral and multilateral relationships changing, shifting and evolving on an almost continuous basis, hence the need for sound planning, readiness, flexibility, caution and, most importantly, pragmatism.

An attempt to describe the evolving regional security environment in the Eastern Mediterranean will have to include several scenarios, with numerous variations (Dokos, 2016). However, irrespective of which scenario will more accurately reflect future developments in the region, it would be fairly safe to predict that in the long-term the wider Middle East is gradually evolving into a multi-player security system and the West may have to adjust to a new reality where its influence in the Middle East will decline, at least in relative terms, as changes in the global balance of power will be reflected in this region as well.

China has been implementing a policy of close relations with resource-rich states in Africa and the Gulf region and is undoubtedly an emerging player both in the Eastern Mediterranean and in Southern Europe. Through initiatives and projects such as “Belt and Road”, “16+1”, the acquisition of ports and other strategic infrastructure assets, China is continuously increasing its economic but also political footprint in the above-mentioned regions. Indeed, European officials have expressed concerns about Chinese intentions and called for greater scrutiny of Chinese investments, especially in the so-called critical infrastructure area. For the time being, China has limited its regional involvement in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean mainly to the economic sphere, satisfied with the US guarantee on the safety of supply lines. But this may change given its growing energy dependency.

Russia has also been trying – quite successfully, one might add – to regain some of its past influence in the region. Smart use of its rather limited – at least in comparison to the US – capabilities has allowed Moscow to become a key player in Syria but also in the Eastern Mediterranean in general. Russia felt sidelined by the West’s handling of the Libyan crisis (although Gaddafi was not an ally of Russia) and tried to avoid a similar situation in Syria. It tried – and succeeded – in projecting the image of a great power willing to invest considerable resources to support an ally (although it is not specifically committed to Assad’s political survival). It also used Syria as a “get out of jail card”, a

bargaining chip that would allow it to negotiate with the West from a position of relative strength and exchange an agreement on Syria with a compromise solution in the Ukrainian crisis (hoping that the West would accept Crimea as a *fait accompli*). Along the way, it took advantage of rather poor policy choices by the US and the Europeans to increase its own influence in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean in general, although it underestimated the complexity of the Syrian conflict and overestimated its own ability to facilitate a negotiated solution. It was also prepared to prevent a Cyprus settlement that would diminish its influence on the island (it needed not to worry, though, as the central players in that conflict were once more unable to reach an agreement) and also kept an eye on hydrocarbon developments in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The EU has lost some of its regional influence and appears to lack a coherent and comprehensive policy/vision towards its Southern neighbourhood. Based on the Global Security Strategy adopted in 2016, the EU is interested in investing in the advancement of its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and in supporting cooperative regional orders worldwide, especially in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa. It is also actively seeking to strengthen its defence capabilities through a series of initiatives such as PESCO (Fiott, Missiroli & Tardy, 2017), CARD and the European Defence Fund.¹⁴ Efficient use of its – still considerable – normative power and of other foreign policy tools at its disposal would have a significant impact on Mediterranean stability and security.

The other transatlantic partner, the US, has been shifting its strategic attention to Asia and has been trying to reduce its military presence in the Mediterranean by delegating responsibility for the Western Mediterranean and parts of sub-Saharan Africa to the EU and for the Eastern Mediterranean to regional partners and allies. Although currently US foreign policy towards the Eastern Mediterranean seems to be lacking a strategic focus and clarity, the very good relations of the Trump Administration with Israel, Egypt and Greece augur rather well for sub-regional cooperation efforts with US support. However, the US decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem may have serious negative consequences for regional stability and indirectly affect regional cooperation efforts. Additionally, the Trump administration's policies regarding Iran, either in the Eastern Mediterranean (Syria, Lebanon) or the Gulf region, may further complicate the regional security equation, especially regarding the issue of terrorism, since President Trump frequently accuses Iran of being a terrorism "sponsor" state. Another divergence is the US stance on the case of Qatar.

Finally, few, if any, analysts would disagree with the argument that Iran and Saudi Arabia are important players, especially in Syria and Lebanon. Both in an effort to promote their

¹⁴ Most recently, the inclusion of Turkey in the PESCO mechanism was presented as a novel way to foster mutual trust between the EU and Turkey and possibly contribute to breaking the vicious cycle of blockage with NATO, see Aydin-Duzgit, S. (2018, January). PESCO and third countries: Breaking the deadlock in European security. Istanbul Policy Center and Sabanci University. Retrieved from http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Pesco_and_Third_Countries_AD%C3%BCzgit.pdf

national interests and regional influence but also as a result of their bilateral geopolitical competition, these two regional powers have been quite influential in shaping regional dynamics, although their involvement has not been particularly constructive.

What Way Ahead?

Undoubtedly, an essential prerequisite for the establishment of a “limited security regime” in the Eastern Mediterranean is that energy insecurity and Jihadist terrorism are identified by the dominant states of the Eastern Mediterranean as well as by the sub-system’s major external or extra-regional powers as the “core security issues” that demand collective institutional responses.¹⁵ The collective security arrangement proposed for the Eastern Mediterranean sub-system thus takes a more systemic approach to the notion of threat by linking the (individual) Eastern Mediterranean states’ security with systemic stability.

Moreover, energy insecurity and Jihadist terrorism are also representing a new growth area with potentially significant possibilities for regional cooperation while their centrality and importance for global stability is shared by external powers, i.e. the US, the EU and NATO, which may thus consider their contribution to the establishment and growth of a security regime in the Eastern Mediterranean particularly useful and legitimising.

Especially in regards to the issue of Jihadist terrorism, the EU and the US should promote and support a holistic regional initiative to address the root causes of terrorism and avoid the “isolation” and “blaming states” diplomacy, which produces divergences and is blocking any strategic cooperation on this issue. There is an urgent need to tackle the underlying factors of radicalisation and to take a comprehensive approach to fighting terrorism, moving the cooperation beyond just counter-terrorism policies and military measures.

According to Cordesman (2017), “the battle against Islamic extremism, and for stability in the MENA region, must be fought primarily by the governments of Muslim states. The struggle will be won or lost by the US strategic partnerships with states like Morocco, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman. It will not be won by trying to isolate the US or Europe from Muslims, or by measures that alienate the Islamic world.” One concrete policy proposal may thus regard the establishment of a counter-terrorism quartet with the participation of the EU, the US, Russia and the Arab League. In principle, Turkey could also play a role in this context but

¹⁵ As a prominent figure of regional security notes: “Regional institutions are vehicles for coping with a security predicament, for alleviating state weakness in a hostile international environment,” see Ayoob, M. (1995). *The third world security predicament*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

its current difficult relations and limited trust with the US and the EU would probably prevent its participation. Implementation of this proposal would in turn mean that certain extra-regional powers can be expected to act in concert to collectively administer security affairs within the Eastern Mediterranean and in accordance with a regional security arrangement where the issues of systemic importance, such as energy and terrorism, will be collectively discussed and acted upon.

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The Gas Effect: Assessing Hydrocarbon Development's Impact Upon Eastern Mediterranean Politics

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Introduction

The following chapter investigates the regional effects of the gas finds in the Eastern Mediterranean since the 1990s. Specifically, the chapter looks at these effects regarding regional security, border demarcation and conflicts related to them, environmental and crisis management, and relations with external actors, such as the European Union (EU) and the United States (US). The chapter concludes that, despite some achievements, the discoveries generally did not, to date, live up to the potential and the expectation that they will become a “game changer” (Tzimitras & Faustmann, 2014): a driving force of regional integration, reconciliation and closer relations to Europe. Indeed, as the chapter shows, in some cases, the gas findings created new sources for regional conflict or added fuel to pre-existing tensions. Moreover, the effect of the gas finds was somewhat overshadowed by other developments, such as the civil war in Syria, Russia’s re-emergence as an important regional actor, and the conflict in Sinai between the government of Egypt and Islamists. Despite this state of affairs, the chapter points to areas that show potential for regional cooperation and the instances where this potential did materialise. It continues in five parts. In the next section, we review the specifics of the gas finds in the region since the late 1990s, including exploration efforts that did not lead to any finds thus far. In this section – indeed the chapter – we analyse all regional state actors on the shores of the Mediterranean from Egypt to Turkey, as well as the island of Cyprus. In the second section, we look at the effect of the gas discoveries on regional security, with an emphasis on the naval competition that is unfolding in the area. In the third section, we analyse international boundary demarcation in the region and show how the gas finds led to both conflicts and agreement among regional actors regarding these matters. We then – in the fourth section – look at the effect of the finds on environmental policies. In the last section, we analyse the responses of external actors – the US, EU and Russia – to the gas finds and the effect on regional dynamics.

Hydrocarbon Finds and Development in the Eastern Mediterranean

The offshore Eastern Mediterranean covers two major geological formations: the Levant and Nile Basins. The Levant Basin, approximately 80,000 sq km, is considered one of the most underexplored and prospective territories in terms of oil and gas potential globally. Beginning in the 1990s, exploration efforts led to significant discoveries of natural gas in the region. Studies suggest the region may additionally hold oil deposits as well.

Egypt has been a regional exporter of natural gas since the early 2000s. It has pipes that connect to Israel and Jordan (both of which fell inactive in recent years) as well as two LNG facilities: Damietta, currently operated by Eni and Unión Fenosa, and Idku, operated by Shell. Just like its neighbours, Egypt also benefited from the wave of offshore gas explorations. In August 2015, Italian firm Eni discovered the Zohr gas field. Located over 150 kilometres off the Egyptian coast, Zohr is estimated to hold 850 bcm, making it the largest Eastern Mediterranean natural gas discovery to date. Egypt's potential as a regional energy player is subject to debate. The country has high domestic gas consumption of (roughly) 50 bcm per year, and growth is proceeding unchecked due to heavy government subsidies that artificially lower the price of electricity for end-consumers. This dynamic has complicated the Egyptian government's relationship with international corporations like Unión Fenosa, Eni and Shell to whom it owes approximately \$3.6 billion in total debt. Zohr's inclusion in the Egyptian energy picture will certainly balance things out, yet it remains to be seen how much will be set aside for export. If additional offshore reserves in Egypt's EEZ are uncovered, it would alter some of the more conservative estimations.

Gaza Marine, off the shores of the Gaza Strip, was discovered in 1999. It is estimated to hold roughly 28 bcm, enough only for domestic consumption. Israel blocked efforts to explore and develop this reserve, citing security concerns (Boersma & Sachs, 2015). Currently owned by Shell, Gaza Marine lies dormant while residents of the Gaza Strip have suffered years of power shortages. Gaza Marine is of high symbolic importance for Palestinians, as production from this field would allow them to assert sovereignty over their natural resources. It would also give a significant boost to the economy. However, the internal division in the Palestinian camp between the internationally recognised the Palestinian Authority (PA) government in the West Bank, and the de facto Hamas statelet in Gaza creates a major barrier to progress. Negotiations between Israel and the PA in the West Bank regarding the importing of Leviathan gas means that there is little incentive for Israel to allow gas from Gaza Marine to flow, which would further undermine Leviathan's efforts to locate sufficient buyers for its own gas fields.

Israel's first discoveries came in 1999 (Even, 2004) but the more significant ones came a decade later. In January 2009, Houston-based American firm Noble Energy and several Israeli partners (including Delek Group) discovered the Tamar field, a 280 bcm gas field located 80 kilometres west of Haifa. A year later, Noble Energy and Delek Group found the much larger Leviathan gas field. Leviathan, which holds an estimated 540 bcm, was the largest discovery in the Eastern Mediterranean at the time and was hailed by many as a "game changer" with the potential to turn Israel, historically a net energy importer,

into a regional exporter. Several smaller fields have been discovered since, and there are those who believe future fields are waiting to be uncovered in Israel's EEZ. Israelis rejoiced upon learning that their historically energy-dependent state had transformed overnight into a potential energy exporter. However, in the subsequent years the Israeli government struggled to establish the legal and regulatory framework that would both satisfy the developer's commercial needs and the demands from the public. After intense debate and multiple proposals, the current arrangements will allow for 40% of Israel's natural gas to be exported to foreign markets (Weisman & Barkat, 2013).

Noble Energy and Delek group also conducted explorations in Cyprus' EEZ. In 2011, Noble Energy discovered the Aphrodite gas field. Aphrodite holds around 128 bcm, enough to reduce dependence on foreign oil as well as export reserves to Europe. However, most analysts agree that the field does not warrant the kind of investment necessary for its development. To realise its export potential, Cyprus would have to transfer its gas either through an onshore or offshore LNG terminal, or via pipeline – options that demand significant capital investment. Even if such hurdles were overcome, Cyprus must also wrestle with Turkey, who neither recognises Cypriot maritime claims, nor is a signee of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Moreover, the Cypriote Aphrodite field extends into Israel's EEZ and forms a smaller field called Ishai. Negotiations between the two countries towards a unitisation agreement were never concluded, creating some tensions between the states (Cohen, 2015).

No doubt influenced by the discoveries elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean, Lebanon has been eager to find companies interested in exploring its waters. Seismic research conducted in 2012 suggested that there could be as much as 700 bcm in Lebanese waters. However, the lack of infrastructure, political transparency and security risks of investing in Lebanon has scared away companies for nearly a decade. It also shares a contested maritime border with Israel. In late 2017, the Lebanese government approved the first bid to explore in its EEZ from an international consortium, including Total, Eni and Novatek. So far, this is the only group to place a bid to explore in Lebanon's waters.

Historically, Syria enjoyed robust domestic energy production. It is unclear whether its territorial waters contain significant reserves, although Russian company Soyuzneftegaz won an exclusive tender to explore and develop Syria's offshore gas reserves in 2013 (Sogoloff, 2017). Operations were quickly suspended following the intensification of the civil war, though it is reasonable to assume that once Syria's political future is more settled investors will return to explore its waters.

Turkey is an energy dependent state without significant offshore energy resources to date but it is a key transit state in the regional energy landscape. Natural gas from Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and eventually Russia flow from Turkey to Europe. As of today, there are six LNG and gas pipeline entry points into Turkey, and that number is likely to expand. Turkey has entertained the possibility of importing Israeli gas, both for its local market and for continued transportation to Europe.

Most experts agree that Eastern Mediterranean states – in particular Israel, Cyprus and Egypt – should seek a cooperative strategy in order to maximise their economic gains. Without embracing a regional approach, Israeli and Cypriot hydrocarbons are unlikely to independently reach European or Asian markets. While Egypt possesses both the domestic quantities and facilities to operate independent of its neighbours, cooperation could present commercial benefits, increase market confidence and expand the appetite for regional investment. Sharing costs for infrastructure could also create an “economies of scale” effect that would benefit all the parties involved.

However, creating a regional energy cooperation framework is easier said than done. Of the many pipeline options that would potentially bring Eastern Mediterranean gas to the European market, most fail to check off the political, commercial and technical boxes required for feasibility (Baconi, 2017b). The most ambitious proposal: a 1,900-kilometre-long undersea pipeline that would link the Leviathan and Aphrodite fields, then transport their gas from Israel to Italy via Cyprus and Greece. The plan, dubbed the “EastMed pipeline” was revealed in April 2017 during a summit involving the Israeli, Greek, Cypriot and Italian Ministers of Energy. In 2017, the European Commission (EC) deemed the project, which would be the world’s longest undersea pipeline, technically feasible and economically viable. The commission stated that it “strongly supports” the project and that it is an “important option among other existing and possible future evacuation routes for the export of gas from the region to the EU” (European Parliament, 2017). However, the proposed route faces significant technical and economic challenges, and it is unclear if it will be able to secure the kind of necessary investment to get it off the ground. Specifically, the proposed route of the EastMed pipeline would reach depths of over 3 kilometres; repairs would be both costly and dangerous.

The most viable alternative to the EastMed pipeline is the so-called “Egyptian option”, which would transport Israeli and Cypriot gas to Egypt for re-export to Europe or Asia. In August 2016, Egypt and Cyprus signed an agreement for the construction of a pipeline that would transport Aphrodite’s gas to Egypt. This agreement was made possible by previous agreements between Israel and Egypt to link the Tamar and Leviathan fields to

Egypt's existing LNG facilities in Damietta and Idku, respectively. Shell is both the operator of the Idku facility and co-owner of the Aphrodite field, making this a particularly attractive option to transport Cypriot gas. In February 2018, Noble Energy and Delek group signed two agreements to export 64 bcm of gas to Dolphinus Holdings Ltd, an Egyptian company, over the next ten years (Barkat & Gorodeisky, 2018b). Details of the plan are not yet clear but a cooperative initiative with Cyprus and Israel would provide Egypt with inexpensive source of revenue (transit fees), a means to resume full operation of its LNG facilities, and a new set of strategic and commercial benefits.

If realised, the Egyptian option would help Cyprus and Israel avoid the potential difficulties surrounding the EastMed pipeline, but challenges remain. According to a Swiss court, Egypt owes \$1.7 billion in fines to the Israel Electric Corporation and the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Company, dating back to the last energy arrangement between Cairo and Jerusalem. It has been reported that these disputes have been resolved but the details have yet to be released (Wahba, 2018). There is also a question of transportation: Israeli gas could be transported either by existing undersea pipelines or infrastructure across the Sinai Peninsula. However, questions exist regarding the ownership and capacity of the undersea option, and the security of any Sinai route would be difficult to guarantee. An alternative option, perhaps through Jordan, might be considered before all is said and done.

Energy discoveries impacted regional diplomacy. First, it strengthened the relationship between Israel, Greece and Cyprus. The three countries have signed several MOUs related to the development of regional energy and water cooperation (Zeiger, 2013b; Nir, 2017). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was the first Israeli head of state to visit the island of Cyprus in 2012. Security cooperation has also been increased over this period. Though energy plays a role in this alliance, much of it is driven by broader strategic considerations, such as the tensions that remain between Israel and Turkey, despite 2016 efforts to patch up relations between the two. Second, energy development has strengthened ties between Egypt, Greece and Cyprus. In 2015, the leaders of these three countries pledged cooperation in matters of security and energy cooperation. They also reached EEZ delimitation agreements with one another, eliminating the potential for future conflict over their maritime borders. Third, the prospect of energy cooperation played a role in Israel and Turkey's reconciliation agreement, signed in June 2016. The dispute between Israel and Turkey included a clash regarding compensation for Turkish casualties in the 2010 Gaza Flotilla affair. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu emphasised the connection between the need to export Israeli natural gas and reconciliation with Turkey: "This agreement opens the way for cooperation on

economic and energy matters, including the gas issue...gas is so important and contains the possibility of strengthening the Israeli economy and state coffers with vast capital... these are vast sums but we need markets...this could not have come sooner without this agreement and now we will work to advance it" (IsraeliPM, 2016).

While hydrocarbon discoveries can create new opportunities, they have the potential to create new threats as well. Pre-existing tensions between Turkey and Cyprus, for example, have been further enflamed by disputes over maritime borders and exploration rights. In February 2018, for example, Turkish Naval Forces threatened to use force against an Italian gas rig that was about to start exploration in block 3, off the shores of Cyprus. Coupled with Turkish manoeuvres in the sea, the threats led the Italian operator of the rig – oil giant ENI – to give up the planned exploration there (Offshore Energy Today, 2018). As the prospects for various energy projects shift, so will the region's complex dynamics. For this reason, prognostications about Eastern Mediterranean energy cooperation should remain modest.

Regional Security: Naval Competition

The last few years saw significant expansion of naval capabilities of a number of regional actors. The discovery of offshore gas drove this process, at least in part, though other causes had also played a role. Chief among them is the reduced presence of the US Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the increased presence of both Russian and Iranian vessels. This section will explore some of the securitisation of the Eastern Mediterranean's maritime space and its role in defining the relationship between various actors.

Nowhere has the investment in naval infrastructure over the last decade been as visible as in Israel (Eiran, 2014). Traditionally, Israel's navy was the smallest branch of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). This was mostly a reflection of the limited threat from the seas to the state and, perhaps more broadly, the limited attention Israel paid to the sea for many years. In the last few years, however, Israel began a "turn to the Sea" (Eiran & Zur, 2013). Concerns over securing its offshore natural resources led to a significant expansion of the navy. Hezbollah's leadership has threatened to target Israel's offshore platforms. According to Israeli military intelligence, future conflict with the Shiite militia would likely include attempted sabotage of these platforms, all of which sit within range of Hezbollah's missiles. In 2012, the Israeli Ministry of Defence granted the Israeli Navy an \$800 million budget increase for the purchase of new vessels (including four corvettes), and in 2013 Israel's navy requested an additional \$700 million increase in order to expand its capabilities. New surface vessels,

maritime patrol aircraft, and coastal radar networks are all being prioritised as the navy undergoes this sudden evolution.

As the search for offshore gas and oil continues, Israel is likely to continue expanding its navy in order to protect energy infrastructure and patrol Israel's EEZ, including the instalment of missile defence systems on its offshore oil and gas platforms. But Israel is not the only Eastern Mediterranean state that is prioritising the expansion of its naval capacity. In the last three years, Egypt has acquired four Gowind corvettes from France, two amphibious assault ships, combat helicopters, and four submarines from Germany (Eiran & Rubin, 2015). An additional corvette from South Korea was added in October 2017 (Shay, 2017). These investments will allow Egypt to monitor activities in its naval space – which stretches from the Mediterranean to the Suez Canal and into the Red Sea – and in particular contain migrant and terror activities, but it will also provide it with the means to secure its EEZ and any hydrocarbon infrastructure that is developed in it in the coming years.

In comparison to Israel and Egypt, Cyprus' navy is quite small. Still, in January 2018 Larnaca celebrated the arrival of its first offshore naval vessel (OPV), built by Israel Shipyards. ("Cyprus's First Offshore Patrol Vessel Arrives at Larnaca Port", 2018) Several additional ships will reportedly be ordered in the coming years, part of a general overhaul of Cyprus' capacities. In statements at a naval base in December 2017, Cypriot Defence Minister Christoforos Fokaides framed these developments as a necessary step in order to establish maritime and energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. ("Defence Minister: Cyprus Navy Upgrading a Strategic Priority", 2017) Since its establishment, Cypriot defence policy has been dominated by its strategic concerns with Turkey, and the expansion of its naval capacity is no different. Following the announcement of Aphrodite's discovery in 2011, Ankara has repeatedly challenged the legality of Cyprus' offshore activities, claiming those territorial waters belong to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and should not be exploited until negotiations on the divided island are resolved. On several occasions Turkey has sent naval vessels into the waters Cyprus deems a part of its EEZ, including seismic vessels and in December 2017 its first drillship. In 2014, the Turkish navy expelled a Norwegian vessel searching for hydrocarbons in Cyprus's EEZ. Like its neighbours, Turkey is also expanding its naval capacity, including a multipurpose light aircraft carrier that will function as the flagship of the Turkish navy. Both Cyprus and Turkey are NATO member states; open conflict between the two is unlikely. Still, lingering disputes and misunderstandings could produce suboptimal results in a region with so many existing tensions.

The naval expansion of many Eastern Mediterranean countries has coincided with a similar increase in military cooperation. Following the collapse in bilateral relations

between Israel and Turkey in May 2010, Israel, Cyprus and Greece deepened their security cooperation. When Turkey withdrew from its annual search-and-rescue exercise with Israel and the US in 2011, Turkey was replaced by Greece and the name of the exercise changed from *Reliant Mermaid* to *Noble Dina* (Zeiger, 2013a).¹ In January 2012, then Cypriot Defence Minister Demetris Eliades visited Israel – a historic first. One month later, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Cyprus. During his visit, Netanyahu and then Cypriot President Demetris Christofias signed an agreement that would permit Israel to operate in Cypriot airspace and territorial waters for the purpose of search and rescue operations (Tanchum, 2015) Over the course of the subsequent years, Israel and Cyprus' military cooperation has continued to expand, including joint land and air drills (Ahronheim, 2017). In July 2015, Israel and Greece signed a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Greece is only the second country, after the US, to sign such an agreement with Israel. According to reports, Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt are looking to conduct joint air force drills in the coming year ("Israel To Conduct Joint Air Force Drills with Greece, Cyprus, Egypt", 2017).

Despite its membership of NATO, Turkey over the last decade is very much the Eastern Mediterranean actor on the outside looking in. Given its history of territorial disputes with Greece and Cyprus, Turkey cannot realistically participate in joint strategic activities prior to resolving outstanding differences with these states. Similarly, Turkey-Egypt relations cratered in 2013 when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan questioned Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's legitimacy and demanded former President Mohammad Morsi's release from prison. Diplomatic ties remain downgraded. And although Ankara reached a reconciliation agreement with Israel in 2016, relations still experience frequent turbulence. As Erdoğan's foreign policy inches closer to cooperation with Moscow, relations with members of the Western alliance will continue to deteriorate.

Russia's naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean has expanded in the last few years. Russian intervention in the civil war in Syria led to a larger naval deployment and expansion of naval bases. In 2015, Russia reinstated the Cold War era fifth Eskadra, a standing naval task force (Eiran & Rubin, 2017). Following the 2015 skirmish between Russian and Turkish planes, Moscow installed an S-400 SAM battery near Latakia, expanding its ability to monitor airspace over the Eastern Mediterranean. Russia's plans to expand the existing naval facility at the port of Tartus – on lease from Syria – is yet another example of Moscow's growing regional influence (Osborn, 2016). This is a worrying development for many of the region's actors. Russia may not pose an offensive threat but its presence demands both the attention and respect of all who operate on the high seas.

¹Exercise *Noble Dina* has continued through 2018.

One of the challenges brought about by Russia's expanding influence is the introduction of Iranian activity in the Eastern Mediterranean. In 2012, Iranian warships passed through the Suez Canal on their way to the port of Tartus. Israel perceived the manoeuvre as symbolic of Iran's designs to further entrench itself in Syria – a goal it appears close to accomplishing (Mroue & Abdul-Zahra, 2017). In a 2017 interview with the BBC, Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed concern that Iran sought to introduce its submarines into the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean (Pasmanick, 2017). Iran may not pose a threat to the majority of states in the region but the combination of its decades-long tension with Israel and its engagement in Syria and Yemen is more than enough for its activities to occupy everyone's attention. More broadly, as Shaffer (2012) noted, governments in the region might take greater risks, as they feel empowered by new resources.

While the discovery of offshore natural gas certainly contributed to the rapid development of Eastern Mediterranean navies, it is hardly the only factor for the naval competition. Without the pre-existing geopolitical tensions, either between Cyprus and Turkey or Israel and Lebanon, et al, there would not be the same perceived need for bulking up on naval capacity. The continuing conflicts in Syria and Libya, which has forced thousands of refugees to seek safe passage to Europe by boat, have prompted many to rethink their maritime security strategies. But the biggest factor is the diminution of the US Sixth Fleet over the last quarter century. Once a pillar of the US's Mediterranean presence, demands in other maritime spaces and a general US Navy policy of reducing fleet strength has taken its toll on the Sixth Fleet (Lesser, 2015). And it is not too early to begin thinking about China's role in Eastern Mediterranean security issues. The Middle East, and more specifically the Mediterranean, plays an important role in China's ambitious One Belt One Road initiative. Chinese investment in ports across the region – from Piraeus, Greece to Ashdod, Israel to Abu Dhabi, the Suez and Djibouti – will further integrate the Eastern Mediterranean into the global economy (Ghiselli, 2017). Furthermore, Chinese investment will generate increasing interest in the region's complex diplomatic web.

The Eastern Mediterranean's maritime security deserves the attention of European leaders. The diminution of a US naval presence in the Mediterranean and subsequent increase of Russian and Iranian naval activity has prompted several regional actors to expand their maritime security budgets. Discovery of offshore natural resources has similarly encouraged naval expansion, as many states seek to protect their offshore energy infrastructure and EEZs from sabotage by state and non-state actors. But with the expansion of naval capabilities the potential for confrontation over maritime resources also increases. Eastern Mediterranean states – particularly those with outstanding

territorial disputes – must take extra caution in avoiding armed conflict with one another. As the securitisation of offshore facilities creates new questions about the limits of state sovereignty, Eastern Mediterranean actors should begin asking themselves what kind of regional security paradigm would best serve their interests.

Drawing the Lines: Hydrocarbons and Maritime Borders

Compared to other regions in the world, the Eastern Mediterranean is decidedly less advanced in the arena of maritime border demarcation. Of the fifteen states that are non-parties to UNCLOS, three (Israel, Syria and Turkey) are located in the Eastern Mediterranean. While outstanding maritime borders disputes exist between multiple actors, and recent energy discoveries have exacerbated these disputes. Developing a regime that will resolve existing disputes and put in place mutually agreeable maritime policy is in the best interest of both state actors and the private companies that seek to exploit offshore hydrocarbon deposits.

Cyprus has been the most proactive Eastern Mediterranean state in the arena of maritime border demarcation. At present, it possesses EEZ delimitation agreements with Egypt, Lebanon and Israel (signed in 2003, 2007, 2010, respectively).² Turkey disputes Cyprus' EEZ delimitation agreements because of its own continental shelf claims to both the east and west of the island. Turkey also claims that Cyprus must manage the island's natural resources together with the Turkish Cypriots (represented by the government of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus – TRNC) who live in the northern portion of the island, as stipulated in the 2004 Annan Plan. Although the parties did not adopt the Annan Plan at the time, subsequent negotiations have followed the same basic guidelines. Negotiations over the last decade stalled, and Cyprus continued to offer licences to international companies to explore in its waters. In response, Turkey directed its own ships into the same territory ("Turkey 'Determined' To Continue Exploration Amid Threats from Greek Cyprus", 2014).

Ever since offshore reserves were discovered in Cyprus' waters, there have been those who believed that energy cooperation should serve as a catalyst for renewed negotiations between Cyprus, Turkey and the TRNC. As the argument goes, the Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides already share their electricity, so imagine the economic opportunity for the island's residents if the gas from the Aphrodite and Leviathan fields were together transported in an undersea pipeline to Turkey (Bryza, 2018). At the time, Turkey was seeking to diversify its natural gas supplies away from Russia, and some in Cyprus were

² Lebanon's parliament has not ratified the EEZ delineation agreement with Cyprus due to claims that the agreement signed between Israel and Cyprus included disputed waters that Lebanon claims belong to it, but which Israel has included as its own.

convinced that the island could become a regional hub. Multiple negotiations since 2011 have proven that this argument is fundamentally flawed. The natural gas that exists in Cyprus' waters does not offer a sufficient incentive that would overcome the historic grievances between the parties. In addition, Turkey's energy calculus has changed since the start of negotiations. The opportunity to import Cyprus' natural gas is less of an incentive for Turkey than originally assumed. Indeed, the lack of trust between the parties transformed the potential for energy cooperation into yet another source of discord at the negotiation table.

Cyprus' efforts to reach EEZ delineation agreements with its neighbours also prompted a maritime border dispute between Israel and Lebanon. Following the Israel-Cyprus delimitation of the EEZ treaty in 2010, Lebanon protested against the agreement, arguing that it violated the southern portion of Lebanon's EEZ that had been previously agreed upon with Cyprus in 2007. As Lebanon argued to the United Nations (UN) at the time, the line negotiated between Cyprus and Israel overlapped with Lebanese maritime territory. By maritime standards, the disputed territory is quite small but it is situated close to the Aphrodite and Leviathan fields, and Lebanon believes that its territorial waters hold a similar amount of reserves as Israel (Yefet, 2017).

According to Lebanon, Israel's maritime border creeps north of the internationally recognised territorial borders of Lebanon (Ayat, 2013). Land borders are critical for determining from which point a state's maritime territory begins. In its claim to the UN, Lebanon posited that its borders were "set forth in the Paulet-Newcombe agreement [determined by Great Britain and France in 1923] and the Armistice Agreement signed on 23 March 1949" (Wahlisch, 2011). Based on Lebanese measurements, a portion of the Leviathan field falls into the 850-square-kilometre area that both states claim a part of their exclusive economic zones (Zhukov, 2013). Israel has rejected this claim. It holds that the Paulet-Newcombe line ends several metres shy of the Lebanese coast and in fact never set a boundary between the two states. It has also asserted that the 1949 Armistice Agreement did not include any map determining the Israeli-Lebanese border (FES/INSS). The dispute between Israel and Lebanon was quickly politicised (Eiran, 2017). For its part, Hezbollah has repeatedly threatened to strike Israel's offshore platforms – a warning Israel's security establishment takes seriously. Hezbollah's expanding capabilities prompted Israel to prioritise the securitisation of its national energy infrastructure. Negotiated efforts by the US and the UN came up short. Indeed, in early 2018 the tension over the maritime boundary heightened as the issue was coupled with Lebanese claims against Israeli construction near and on the international terrestrial boundaries between the countries. As these lines are written it seems that an American

mediation effort on both matters had failed. The current disputes add to concerns that Israel and Hezbollah will engage in the medium range in another direct confrontation. Continued efforts to bridge the differences between the two parties must remain a priority in the coming years as exploration in the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean continues.

Finally, there is an outstanding dispute between Israel and the PA on access to the Gaza Marine field, discovered in 2000 about 36 kilometres off the Gaza Strip coastline. The Gaza Marine field holds a modest 28 bcm but it is enough for the Palestinian energy sector to be self-sufficient. Given the current economic conditions in the Gaza Strip as well as the PA's overall dependence on Israel for energy and electricity, the exploitation of the Gaza Marine field would be a welcome boon for Palestinians – especially those in Gaza who suffer from daily electricity shortages (Baconi, 2017a).

Since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in 2007, Israel has severely restricted the flow of goods in and out of Gaza by land and sea. Similarly, it has blocked attempts to develop the Gaza Marine field. While this strategy has prevented funds and arms from reaching Hamas, it also limited the development of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and crippled the economy. More importantly, it left Palestinians in Gaza dependent on Israel for their energy needs, impacting their access to clean dependable water and functional sanitation systems. Israel's policies may have limited Hamas' capabilities but it did not weaken Hamas either. It also did not prevent a succession of conflicts in 2008, 2012 and 2014. The last attempt to develop the field was in 2016, when Royal Dutch Shell acquired British Gas (BG) and its 55% stake in the Gaza Marine field. However, by 2017 Shell informed the PA that it would sell its stake (Bouso, 2018).

In theory, exploiting the Gaza Marine field would reverse many of these negative trends. Revenues from the field would provide a boost to the Palestinian economy, provide the PA with greater energy security, and alleviate some of the issues pertaining to water treatment and waste management. Improving the daily conditions for Gaza's residents could improve the nature of the relationship between Israel and Hamas, and repair, if but marginally, the bitter sentiments held by Palestinians towards Israel. Likewise, strengthening the Palestinian economy would offer the PA more resources to devote to other areas of need. Finally, a cooperative policy towards the Gaza Marine field would assuage concerns by Egypt and Jordan about the prospects of engaging with Israel on other energy issues (Bar-Eli, 2014). There are strong political, economic and humanitarian reasons to open the Gaza Marine field for development. Without addressing Israeli security concerns, however, Palestinian dreams of utilising this small but crucial energy source will not be realised.

These three cases demonstrate how the lack of clearly delineated maritime borders generated opportunities for actors in the Eastern Mediterranean with pre-existing disputes to find new ground upon which to extend their disagreements. The development of hydrocarbons has not contributed to resolving these disputes, and indeed may have even caused them. These disputes, in turn, could discourage international energy corporations from bidding for exploration on the region (Scovazzi, 2012). They may even contribute to renewed hostilities between parties as evident from the Israel-Lebanon-Hezbollah exchanges regarding this matter, as well as from the deployment of the Turkish navy in Cypriot waters. Efforts by third party mediators such as the US and the UN have all come up short. This does not mean a different third party, one that has the economic flexibility to serve as a potential buyer of Eastern Mediterranean gas (such as the EU) could not find more success – still, this would require a change in EU policy, which historically deferred to other actors and international bodies on these issues. Until that time, state actors with a vested interest in maintaining regional order – such as Israel and Egypt – should prioritise the establishment of EEZ delineation agreements in an effort to avoid future confusion over maritime borders and resource exploitation.

Environmental and Crisis Management

There is an increasing global awareness of the dangers of climate change but more can be done to protect the Eastern Mediterranean's unique ecosystem. Global warming and its myriad consequences are a particular threat to the Eastern Mediterranean, and the region is especially vulnerable to the effects of extreme climatic shifts. Scientists now know that the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean have risen 3 degrees Celsius in the last 30 years, impacting the oceanic ecosystem and the behaviour of its wildlife (Austin, 2017). Expansion of the Suez Canal has led to the introduction of invasive species into the region, threatening much of its biodiversity (Galbraith, 2015). Although the Eastern Mediterranean is only now entering a period of offshore development and increasing maritime border delineation, this process should be a collaborative one that incorporates voices from political, industrial, scientific and emergency response communities.

The Mediterranean is a closed sea, and pollutants that enter the waters of the Mediterranean should be considered a transnational concern. From offshore drilling to the laying of undersea pipelines, every step of the energy development and exploitation process carries the risk of accidentally releasing toxins into the environment. Oilfields are inherently riskier than gas fields – gas leaks carry risks for the physical infrastructure (i.e. rigs and platforms) – and the consequences can be the extermination of marine life,

toxification of the surviving fish, mass contamination of coastlines and underground reservoirs located in close proximity to the shoreline, and health risks to those at the drill site or responsible for the cleanup process. Evidenced by the Exxon Valdez (1989), Persian Gulf (1991) and Deepwater Horizon (2010) spills, industrial-size disasters impact economies as much as they do environments. All Eastern Mediterranean states are contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (1995), established in order to enable sustainable development that will also protect marine environments. The convention begot seven more specific protocols that were accepted by most regional actors (The Council of the European Union, 2012). One of the protocols deals specifically with the protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil. Among other things, the protocol calls for the creation of shared procedures to determine liability in the case of environmental damage. Such mechanisms do not currently exist, but would serve the interests of all regional actors. One possibility would be for Eastern Mediterranean states to adopt similar safety policies, such as the EU's Environmental Liability Directive. The Directive created a framework aimed to both prevent accidents and outline an effective response in the event that one occurs:

- Before exploration or production begins, companies must prepare a Major Hazard Report for their offshore installation. This report must contain a risk assessment and an emergency response plan.
- Companies must keep resources at hand in order to put them into operation when necessary.
- When granting licences, EU countries must ensure that companies are well financed and have the necessary technical expertise.
- Technical solutions that are critical for the safety of operators' installations must be independently verified. This must be done prior to the installation going into operation.
- National authorities must verify safety provisions, environmental protection measures, and the emergency preparedness of rigs and platforms. If companies do not respect the minimum standards, EU countries can impose sanctions, including halting production.
- Information on how companies and EU countries keep installations safe must be made available for citizens.
- Companies will be fully liable for environmental damages caused to protected marine species and natural habitats. For damage to marine habitats, the

geographical zone will cover all EU marine waters including exclusive economic zones and continental shelves (European Commission, 2018).

In Cyprus, for example, permits are not given out if these preconditions are not met. If the same policies were adopted by all Eastern Mediterranean states, then the onus would fall on the energy companies to operate within the boundaries of a shared set of values. As with so many regional and international initiatives, success is measured first and foremost at the national level. The rights that states enjoy within the boundaries of their EEZ must be balanced with a commitment to preservation and protection of their marine environment.

Despite the many issues that divide Eastern Mediterranean actors, environmental protection should be seen as a shared goal. One way of encouraging greater cooperation on environmental issues is by building off previous emergency situations that triggered a regional response, or in other words a “good neighbour” policy. Historically, Eastern Mediterranean states have demonstrated a willingness to aid others in moments of crisis. Following the 1999 Izmit earthquake, search and rescue teams from Israel and Greece travelled to Turkey to lend a hand in the international effort. Similar gestures were made towards Israel during the 2010 Mount Carmel forest fires. Unable to fend off the flames alone, Israeli fire-fighters were supported by Turkish, Palestinian and Cypriot teams. Jordan and Egypt also offered to help (Medzini & Greenberg, 2010).

But while these incidents were unanticipated, energy development presents certain known risks. Eastern Mediterranean states can prepare for accidental environmental catastrophes brought on by offshore energy development. This requires integrated planning, cooperative initiatives between government ministries, scientists, search and rescue agencies, and of course industry experts. States can develop joint research initiatives to explore the environmental impact of energy development and potential natural disaster protocols. With proven success, such initiatives could expand their work to other types of natural disasters (flooding, wildfire, earthquakes, etc.), creating a large umbrella for regional cooperation.

Regional Energy, Global Engagement: The Role of the EU, the US and Russia

Three global actors have the largest impact on the dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean: the EU, the US and Russia. Hydrocarbon discoveries both impacted the

manner in which all three are engaged in the region, and all three played central roles in defining the region's new energy politics.

Of the three, the EU has the most complicated role. For starters, two Eastern Mediterranean states – Greece and Cyprus – are members of the EU and therefore their interests had a natural impact on the formation of European policy towards the region during this time period. In addition, Turkey has been a EU candidate for many years; Israel, Lebanon, and Egypt fall within the scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). All Eastern Mediterranean countries are partners in the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

When hydrocarbon deposits were first discovered, Europe was deemed the most likely buyer of Eastern Mediterranean natural gas. The reason for this was multifold: Europe is the largest market located in closest geographic proximity to the energy fields of the Eastern Mediterranean, European energy policy over the last decade has prioritised diversifying its supply away from Russia, and there were immediate economic and strategic benefits to supporting projects that would strengthen EU members (Cyprus and Greece) and countries with whom the EU has strong relations (Turkey, Israel, Egypt). The EU continues to play this role, actively supporting efforts to develop the EastMed pipeline. Although the project is not yet finalised, the EU earmarked €38.5 million for the EastMed pipeline in January 2018 (Barkat & Gorodeisky, 2018a).

No European country is more invested in Eastern Mediterranean affairs than Italy, whose largest company Eni is the primary developer of Egypt's Zohr field, which started producing in 2017, and is also exploring in other Eastern Mediterranean waters (ElWardani, 2017). Italy is the final destination of the proposed EastMed pipeline, and therefore has the most to benefit from the development of this project. In December 2017, the energy ministers of Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding that created a framework for political cooperation if the project is deemed feasible. The MOU is non-binding but demonstrates commitment between the parties (Reed, 2017).

The US also advocated Eastern Mediterranean gas being delivered to Europe. Under the Obama administration, relations between Russia and both the US and EU suffered, and fears that Moscow would use energy as a weapon against Europe soared (and continue to exist). Reducing European dependence on Russian energy was a foreign policy priority for many European states as well as the US. At the same time, the US hoped to support Noble Energy, a Texas-based American company, find financially viable

markets for its fields in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Obama administration also hoped to support American allies in finding safe routes to export their energy, and offer its assistance where there were opportunities to link additional diplomatic agendas to potential energy projects.

One of the most important executors of this policy was Amos Hochstein, who served as Special Envoy for International Energy Affairs at the Department of State under the Obama administration. During his tenure, Hochstein spent significant time trying to resolve the maritime border dispute between Israel and Lebanon (Habib, 2015). He also supported the negotiations between Israel and the energy developers, assisted in concluding the energy cooperation between Israel and Jordan, and contributed to the 2016 reconciliation agreement between Israel and Turkey. Hochstein's efforts were backed by additional US officials, including Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry, both of whom at times showed a deep commitment to negotiations on the island of Cyprus. Israel is the closest US ally in the region, so not surprisingly there was particular emphasis – both by the administration and US Congress – to help Israel achieve its energy goals. In 2017, the US Senate approved the development of a US-Israel Energy Center (Udasin, 2017).

The Trump administration has not demonstrated as serious an interest in Eastern Mediterranean energy matters but there are several potential reasons for this. First, the Obama administration's efforts were unsuccessful in reaching all of its goals. Maritime disputes have not been resolved; many bilateral relations in the region remain tense. Moreover, global energy prices are so low that most of the proposals that would deliver Israeli or Cypriot gas are either deemed unaffordable or irrelevant. Many of the pipeline projects praised in 2012 now appear to be pipedreams. And while there are plenty of other Eastern Mediterranean issues that may deserve the attention of the White House, US priorities lay elsewhere for now.

One possible agent for change is Russia. It is the primary supplier of energy to Turkey, as well as most European states. Russia's linking of energy and geopolitics produces unanticipated consequences at times, and future Russian energy projects such as Nord Stream 2 concern not only some European states but the US as well (Goettig & Kelly, 2018). In 2016, Eni sold 30% of its stake in the Zohr field to Rosneft (Politi & Farchy, 2016). Other Russian firms have expressed interest in Israeli gas, as well as Lebanon's. Logically, the more invested Russian companies are in the Eastern Mediterranean energy landscape, the more influence the Kremlin will wield over regional energy prospects. Furthermore, Russia is arguably the more dominant outside actor in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its increased naval presence and installation of surface-to-air batteries have given it unprecedented

access to the region's maritime activities and an obvious hard power presence. This does not mean that Moscow has a clear regional policy that it intends to execute in the coming years but the confluence of Russian interests and Eastern Mediterranean politics is growing.

While the EU, the US and Russia all have a role to play in the affairs of the Eastern Mediterranean, their attention to regional developments waxes and wanes. There is a role for Europe and the US to play in resolving disputes, encouraging regional actors to reach EEZ delimitation agreements and supporting regional cooperation on environmental issues and natural disasters. But rather than waiting for outside intervention during crises, Eastern Mediterranean states should seek consultation and mediation from third parties in order to facilitate the construction of a regional framework for cooperation on maritime issues. During the Cold War, tensions between the global powers often dictated the path of economic cooperation between other states in the international arena. Current global economics do not appear to work in that manner; states engaged in diplomatic disputes often continue to increase their bilateral trade. At the same time, long-term projects depend on not only feasibility but also the security of the relationship between the parties involved. Though difficult to predict, future tensions between the US and Russia, or the US, EU and Russia, have the potential to push Eastern Mediterranean states on one side of the divide or the other.

Conclusion

The discoveries of gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean beginning in the late 1990s created an expectation that they will lead to significant regional changes. Specifically, observers of the region hoped for greater regional stability, a closer relationship with Europe, and a perhaps even a degree of regional integration. However, as the chapter shows, these did not materialise. On the contrary, the discoveries have contributed to existing tensions. Regional actors expanded their navies, at least in part, in order to defend their new assets. In other cases, navies were deployed in context of new tensions over energy resources. These new discoveries further created new disputes over boundary demarcation in the sea that have the potential to further escalate. The effect of the gas finds was somewhat overshadowed by other developments, such as the civil war in Syria and Russia's re-emergence as an important regional actor.

A realistic approach to the potential of energy cooperation should not eliminate the potential for natural gas to play a positive role in the region. Recent deals between Israel and Jordan, Egypt, and the PA can only create interdependence between these former

enemies. Inclusion of Cypriot gas likely turns Egypt into a regional energy hub, and perhaps will establish a framework for regional cooperation on other maritime issues. At the same time, there are limitations to energy cooperation. It is unrealistic to expect economic opportunities to dramatically improve how Egyptians see the state of Israel, for example, or for energy revenues to wash away the historic grievances of Israelis and Palestinians. Similarly, it is difficult to predict the consequences of Cypriot-Israeli-Egyptian cooperation on those on the outside looking in, like Turkey. And while the prospects of energy cooperation may generate positive diplomatic momentum in the short term, Eastern Mediterranean states need to start thinking about long-term initiatives that will both seize upon the opportunities offered by the current gas bonanza as well as develop mechanisms through which regional stability and multilateral communication can take place.

As is the case with all natural resources, offshore energy reserves possess both the potential to bring states together and tear them apart. The Eastern Mediterranean proves that both sides of this coin can coexist in the same space – the question going forward is which side will be more dominant, and whether the region’s actors can see beyond the immediate gains in order to build a more collaborative and integrative future.

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Eastern Mediterranean Dynamics and the Evolving War in Syria: The Risk of Military Spill-Over and Policy Options for the EU

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of the Assad regime and its allies reasserting control over important parts of Syria as well as the nearly complete collapse of the territorial basis of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in the course of 2017, many observers concluded that the civil war in Syria was over and IS defeated. This perception led to calls for accommodation with the Assad regime, for an international engagement in the country's reconstruction as well as for an early repatriation of Syrian refugees. Yet, such a reading of events seems to be rather detached from realities on the ground. Rather, in the mid-term, an escalation of fighting in some arenas, including the risk of regional spill-over, the continuation of militia rule and the war economy, as well as the entrenchment of regional spheres of influence seem more likely than conflict resolution, sustained stabilisation or even just a country-wide ceasefire. Indeed, the Syrian President has been emboldened by the military victories that he has secured thanks to Russian, Iranian and Iran-led militias' support and has thus not seen any need to engage seriously in UN-led talks aimed at a political settlement. The perception of an endgame has also prompted intensified diplomatic and military efforts by local, regional and international actors to secure their interests in the developing arrangements. Thus, while Russia has become the dominant military, political and diplomatic force in the Syrian arena, it has by no means been able to steer developments according to its own ambitions. Rather, military interventions by regional players have expanded and an ever more complex set-up of state and sub-state actors with their – at times vital and contradictory – interests as well as situational alliances has evolved in Syria.

This chapter explores the mutual repercussions between the evolvement of the conflict in Syria and sub-regional dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean. The objective is a policy-oriented one: to tease out commonalities in interests and approaches that could be made fruitful for regional cooperation, on the one hand, as well as peace-building and sustainable stabilisation in Syria, on the other, and to understand how such dynamics could be supported by the EU and its member states. The chapter starts out from an analysis of how conflict dynamics in Syria have been developing, followed by a closer look at the concrete interests of the Eastern Mediterranean actors that are most involved in and affected by the conflict in Syria – i.e., the neighbouring states Turkey, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan, as well as the Lebanese Hezbollah – and how these interests converge or diverge with other involved actors' interests, and the (actual and potential) repercussions of the conflict on each of them. Such a mapping will help to analyse the conflict's impact on sub-regional dynamics and allow us to draw conclusions as to whether there are any common agendas, converging practices and/or possibilities for collective (or, at least, coordinated) Eastern Mediterranean action. These could be in the field of humanitarian aid; addressing the refugee issue; a sub-

regional dialogue forum on the conflict or even security cooperation; future stabilisation, transition and post-conflict reconstruction processes in Syria, to name but a few. The chapter will end on concrete policy recommendations on how Europeans should support constructive dynamics and work to prevent, contain or at least not worsen destructive ones.

The War in Syria – A New Phase of the Conflict

By the end of 2017, the civil war in Syria had been decided in favour of the Syrian regime and its backers. The rebels had been driven into several isolated pockets of territory, mainly in the northwest and the southwest of the country, and the eastern suburbs of Damascus. They also continued to hold onto some strategic junctures and border crossings. At the same time, the so-called Islamic State (IS) had lost all but territorial control. The Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) succeeded in winning back most territory in the eastern part of the country from IS and in liberating Raqqa, the former Caliphate's capital, with the support of US air cover and special forces. Regime forces and their allies took back swathes of land from IS as well. And US backed rebel groups also did, even if to a much smaller degree. According to the Omran Center for Strategic Studies, which is close to the Syrian opposition, by mid-December 2017 the regime and its allies controlled some 55%, the SDF around 24%, armed opposition groups 12%, and IS 9% of Syria's territory (Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 2017). Yet, these "successes" of the regime and the anti-IS-coalition are likely to usher in a new phase of the conflict rather than end the bloodshed and pave the way for sustainable stabilisation. This is the case mainly due to five dynamics:

Firstly, the Assad regime has increasingly perceived itself as a victor and thus has seen itself under no pressure to negotiate a political settlement with the opposition that could set the country on a path of stabilisation. The new self-confidence paired with even greater intransigence became blatantly evident, for example, at the UN-mediated talks in Geneva in December 2017, in which regime representatives refused to engage in direct or indirect negotiations (United Nations Security Council, 2017). Stabilisation through an empowered transition body – consisting of government and opposition forces as foreseen in UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (United Nations Security Council, 2015) – is therefore unlikely to occur.

Stabilisation through an arrangement of shared territorial control is as unlikely as the regime is unwilling to accept that opposition-held areas under so-called "reconciliation agreements" or "de-escalation zones" remain permanently beyond its sovereignty. It chose to freeze the fighting on several fronts initially (and often only partially) through

local reconciliation agreements with rebels and, from May 2017 onwards, consented to the creation of four so-called de-escalation zones (the province of Idlib and parts of Aleppo, Latakia and Hama governorates on the border with Turkey; rural areas north of the city of Homs; the eastern suburbs of Damascus or Eastern Ghouta; and a southwestern zone in areas adjacent to Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights) under Russian-Iranian-Turkish supervision. The Russia-Iran-Turkey deal stipulated ceasefires in the four de-escalation zones, the halt of air strikes, “rapid, safe, and unhindered” humanitarian access, restoration of basic infrastructure and the creation of conditions for the voluntary return of IDPs. The fight against Jihadists was set to continue in the zones, with attacks on IS and the Liberation Committee of Syria (HTS), an al-Qaeda offshoot, exempted from the ceasefires. The three guarantors were to deploy military observers to see the implementation of the ceasefire agreements through (“Syria’s ‘De-escalation Zones’ Explained”, 2017).

Yet, fighting has already recurred or is likely to recur in these areas as the regime is no longer focused on re-establishing territorial control in the east of the country. In any case, sieges and bombardments have continued in the de-escalation zones, if to varying degrees. By the end of 2017, de-escalation in Eastern Ghouta had effectively collapsed (United Nations Office at Geneva, 2017) and in November 2017 the regime had started an offensive in Hama and Idlib province. It had also become clear that Russia was not able to use the (anyway limited) international presence in the de-escalation zones as a means of exerting pressure on the regime to bring about a political settlement or at least a nationwide ceasefire.

In that context, a second dynamic is key: in spite of the military advances, a major weakness of the regime has been the blatant shortage of soldiers it trusts to fight, reconquer and hold territory. Assad has therefore had to rely not only on Russian and Iranian backing but also on the support of paramilitary forces as well as the Lebanese Hezbollah and other Iran-led militias. Iranian and Iran-led militia backing has, in turn, immunised the Assad regime against Russian pressure to a considerable degree. Yet, one of the side effects of this stark dependency on external support was that the establishment of an Iranian-controlled land corridor between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (providing access to Hezbollah-controlled areas as well as the Mediterranean) was accelerated in 2017, raising major concerns among Syria’s southern neighbours, Israel and Jordan, as well as Saudi Arabia.

Thus, while the de-escalation zone in the south of the country that Russia, the US and Jordan agreed upon in July and confirmed in November 2017 was in line with Israel's

and Jordan's interests in calming the situation along its borders, it did not serve to prevent an entrenched presence of Iran and Hezbollah in the border area or in Syria in general (Casagrande, 2017). And although the November 2017 trilateral agreement confirmed that all foreign fighters should leave Syria, it did not provide for a timetable. Also, the distance Iran and Iran-led militias should keep from the borders fell short of the expectations of Jordan and Israel. Finally, when the Russian Foreign Minister stressed that these forces' presence in Syria was legitimate (in contrast to the US-led anti-IS-coalition forces) because they had been invited by the regime, it put into doubt Russia's willingness to take Syria's neighbours' concerns seriously. This, in turn, prompted Israel to step up its diplomatic activity with both Russia and the US as well as its military operations against Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria – thus moving towards a more active containment approach and increasing the risk of regional conflagration (Murciano, 2017).

Thirdly, the anti-IS-coalition so far has not presented any strategy with regard to how the territories liberated from IS could be governed without triggering a new conflict. In particular, there does not seem to be any plan about how to address the strategic, ethnic, tribal and technical challenges linked to the question of recovery and governance in places such as Raqqa (Petkova, 2017). It will be a major challenge to turn these towns and areas, which have seen major destruction, displacement and bloodshed, into islands of stability and stepping stones towards peace-building. This is even more the case as even in the short- to mid-term it is by no means clear who will control the liberated territories. In late 2017, early 2018 there was fierce competition between the SDF (as well as armed opposition groups) and their backers on the one side and the regime and their allies on the other over reconquering the last strongholds of IS in the Euphrates Valley, the oil-rich Deir ez-Zor province, the provincial capital and the border area with Iraq. An understanding between the SDF and the regime to divide territorial control along the Euphrates line is unlikely to hold as regime representatives have expressed their intention to re-establish central authority in all of Syria, not least by reconquering territories liberated from IS. In any case, truly inclusive governing bodies responsive to the local population's needs that could pacify areas liberated from IS control would be unlikely under either of the two forces: Kurdish control over predominantly Arab populated areas and cities would trigger resistance, even if local councils with Arab representation obscure Kurdish dominance. Given the overwhelmingly Sunni population in eastern Syria, a stabilisation under the control of Shiite militias would hardly work either. Under such circumstances, the appeal of Jihadist or militant Sunni groups will hardly be reduced. There are already indications that IS, while having almost completely lost its territorial control, is likely to continue to exist as an underground guerrilla force or morph into new

formations attractive for those who feel marginalised or repressed under developing arrangements (Abdulrahim & Coles, 2018). Moreover, its fighters were able to conquer new territory in the northwest of the country in early 2018.

Fourthly, Turkey reacted strongly to the SDF's territorial gains in the course of the fighting against IS aided by US arms deliveries, air cover and special forces. The backdrop is that Ankara is not prepared to accept a contiguous Kurdish zone of autonomy or self-administration in northern and northeastern Syria as envisioned by the dominant party in Syria's Kurdish areas, the PYD, whose YPG fighters dominate the SDF. Ankara sees the PYD as an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which it – like most Western countries – considers a terrorist organisation. Turkey has strongly protested against US (and to a minor degree Russian) support for the SDF and, in 2016, intervened militarily in Syria to prevent Kurdish territorial contiguity with its operation Euphrates Shield. A secondary objective of Turkey's military operation was to establish a safe zone for refugees inside Syria and to prevent another wave of refugees from reaching Turkey in the context of an expected military campaign against HTS. Based on the May 2017 Astana agreements with Russia and Iran, it militarily entered Syrian territory again in mid-October 2017, ostensibly to implement the de-escalation zone agreement in Idlib. In previous years, so-called "reconciliation agreements" between the regime and rebels in several parts of the country had led to an increasing number of Islamist fighters and their families being deported to the Idlib province. As a result, the Salafist Ahrar ash-Sham and the Jihadist Nusra Front (now renamed HTS) had gained the upper hand there over competing groups belonging to the more moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA). Yet the Turkish military intervention's main purpose was not to fight against the Jihadists but to forestall Kurdish territorial contiguity and push back the PYD from its border. After the US administration declared that it would support establishing a 30,000 strong border force manned by the SDF to prevent IS from resurging and Iran making inroads (Barnard, 2018), Turkey intervened once more in late January 2017 with its operation Olive Branch with the aim of ending PYD control in the enclave of Afrin, one of the three cantons of the Kurdish self-government.

Last but not least, the Astana format that Russia established in May 2017 with its situational partners Iran and Turkey undermined the UN Special Envoy's efforts to bring the conflicting parties to the table to negotiate a conflict settlement based on the 2012 Geneva Agreement and UNSC Resolution 2254 of December 2015. While Moscow portrayed its activities as complementary to the UN Special Envoy's efforts, it actually thwarted the approach and list of priorities agreed upon by the Security Council, the centrepiece of which was supposed to be a transitional governing body (TGB),

comprised of regime and opposition representatives, with full authority. In contrast, Russia not only shifted the attention from Geneva to Astana, it also sought legitimisation of the Assad regime leading a process of limited reform, including the adoption of a federal constitution devised in Moscow by a National Dialogue Conference, followed by elections. The meeting held in Sochi in January 2018 was boycotted by the newly-formed Syrian Negotiating Committee (SNC), comprising the most important strands of the political opposition because Russia was not seen as an honest broker and Russian invitation policies would have guaranteed a pro-regime majority in any case. Moreover, the PYD was not represented due to Turkey's objections; other Kurds objected to taking part in the protest of Turkey's Afrin campaign. Overall, the Sochi meeting produced no substantial progress. The UN Special Envoy scored a procedural success by bringing the constitutional process back to Geneva and under his rather than the Russians' lead (Çandar, 2018).

Eastern Mediterranean Actors' Interests In and With Regards to Syria

The perception of the conflict in Syria entering the endgame, or at least a phase of temporary stabilisation of zones of influence, triggered renewed efforts by, among others, Syria's neighbours in the Eastern Mediterranean to safeguard their interests and secure their spoils in the developing arrangements in Syria. This dynamic was intensified even further by the so-called Astana Process, in which Russia engaged two of the imminent regional powers, Iran and Turkey, in efforts aimed at pacifying the conflict – thus granting them a “legitimate” presence on the ground, an opportunity to engage in local reconstruction efforts and secure lucrative business deals, and a prominent say in future governance arrangements (Berti, 2017).

Israel: From Restraint to Active Containment

Israel's interests in and towards Syria – averting a spill-over of fighting across the border; preventing the Lebanese Hezbollah from acquiring long-range, high-precision weapons; thwarting an entrenched Hezbollah and Iranian presence in the border area specifically and in Syria more generally – have remained constant since the eruption of violence in Syria. Over the last few years, Israel's stance could be characterised as pragmatic and guarded (as it avoided taking sides in the conflict), and mainly defensive – with the exception of targeted strikes by Israel's air force to enforce the proclaimed red lines with regards to the interests mentioned above. Israeli Air Force chief Maj. Gen. Amir Eshel claimed in mid-August 2017 that Israel struck Syrian and Hezbollah targets nearly 100

times in the five years before, although not all of these strikes happened on Syrian or Lebanese territory (Harel, 2017). Since Russia established a military presence in Syria in September 2015, Israel has taken care to actively de-conflict its sorties with Russia. As a result, Israel has been the only neighbouring country (next to Jordan) that has successfully prevented a spill-over of fighting to its own soil and has avoided being drawn into the conflict. In addition, Israel has extended humanitarian support for Syrian civilians in the border area. It has also provided support to rebels there and has treated combatants and civilians in its hospitals. While the motivation for this kind of support can be partially explained by Israel's general ambition to give itself a positive image, it is also safe to assume that Israel has intended to use the opportunity to build relations with Syrian non-regime forces and gain access to first-hand information on developments on the ground. One of the underlying reasons as formulated by former Israeli Minister of Defence, Moshe Ya'alon, was to commit rebels to keeping anti-Israel forces away from the border area ("Israel Reportedly Providing Direct Aid, Funding To Syrian Rebels", 2017).

From an Israeli perspective, the overall balance sheet of the last few years' developments in Syria is rather favourable. First, with the debilitation of the Syrian army in the fighting, Syria joining the Convention on Chemical Weapons in October 2013, and the demolition of its declared chemical weapons stocks by August 2014, the last conventional and WMD threat to Israel in its direct neighbourhood was eliminated (even if undeclared stocks persist). Second, while there is no longer an effective UNDOF presence in the demilitarised buffer zone between Syria and Israel, Israel has never relied on the UN presence to prevent attacks anyhow. Its government is confident that deterrence has worked well so far (and is set to work in the future), even with Jihadist groups. In addition, for the time being, Jihadist groups are seen as being focused on other struggles, even though their ideology would at some point obligate them to "liberate Jerusalem". Third, due to the situation in Syria, in the foreseeable future no international pressure is to be expected on Israel to reverse its annexation of the Golan Heights or enter into negotiations. This aligns well with the Israeli interest in keeping the territory. More generally, the instability in the region has helped a hard-line government in Israel to deflect international criticism of its occupation and annexation policies and has served as a handy argument to postpone any peace initiatives or territorial compromises.

Yet since the perception started taking root in Israel that Syria was moving towards the endgame, Israel has had a keen interest in preventing developments seen as detrimental to its security from becoming entrenched. This relates, first and foremost, to a long-term presence of Iran and its proxies in the border area, which would allow them to open a

second front against Israel, the establishment of a “land corridor” under Iranian and its allies’ control from Iran via Iraq and Syria to Lebanon and the Mediterranean, and the establishment of Iranian weapons factories in Syria and Lebanon, which would make it more difficult to monitor and prevent the delivery of weaponry to Hezbollah. In this vein, and as it does not have the means to shape developments on the ground itself, the Israeli government has exerted efforts to influence the trilateral agreement (US, Russia, Jordan) for a ceasefire in southwestern Syria, mainly via the US and Jordanian governments, to safeguard its interests. Ever since, it has continued to impress on its allies and Russia that they take care to do so beyond rhetorical commitments. Yet, at this point in time, it is rather doubtful that these commitments will actually be translated into reality – as the US administration is reluctant to assume a prominent role in monitoring and implementation, Russia still has to show that it is willing and capable of effectively imposing constraints on its allies on whose ground forces it relies to help the regime in reconquering and holding territory, and Jordan being in no position to actively impact on military developments on the ground. As a consequence, Israel has shifted from an approach of restraint to one of active military containment and increased its air strikes since the second half of 2017. Even though Israel and Hezbollah have signalled to each other that they are not set on military escalation, the new assertiveness bears the risk of unintended regional escalation.

Lebanon: Between Dissociation and the Risk of Collapse

From the start of the uprising in Syria, Lebanon’s main concern was to prevent violence and sectarian strife from spilling over from the neighbouring country. It thus declared a “policy of dissociation” from the conflict early on (Macaron, 2017). As a consequence, Lebanon was one of the few members of the Arab League that did not vote in favour of suspension of Syria’s membership in the organisation in November 2011 and did not support the League’s call for Bashar al-Assad to step down in January 2012. It also abstained in several UN votes calling for a political transition and condemning the Syrian regime’s human rights violations.

Yet, at the same time, Lebanon’s dominant political forces started to engage on opposite sides of the conflict in the neighbouring country. The predominantly Sunni Future movement, led by Saad al-Hariri, sided with the rebels and initially equipped them with the support of the Arab Gulf states. The Shiite Lebanese Hezbollah – political party, member of the government and a militia stronger than the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) – rushed to the aid of the Syrian regime, on which it relied strongly as a channel for military and logistical support from its main sponsor Iran. Together with other Iran-led militias, Hezbollah, with at times as many as 12,000 fighters deployed to Syria, was

crucial to shore up the regime against rebel attacks and to reconquer terrain mainly in the border areas with Lebanon and in parts of Damascus. While the group initially denied that its followers were fighting in Syria, in May 2013 its Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah confirmed the militia's involvement arguing that it was protecting Shiite shrines and fighting, in a sort of forward defence, on the side of the Syrian government against Sunni Jihadists who not only threatened the Lebanese Shia community but all sects. While for Hezbollah the safeguarding of its supply lines – linked to the survival of the Assad regime – was the main motivation for its involvement in Syria, the war was also an opportunity to prove itself as an indispensable partner to Iran and Syria and to enhance its military and tactical expertise in a multilateral combat alliance, also including Russia (International Crisis Group, 2017).

While to date Lebanon has successfully resisted being drawn completely into Syria's civil war and maintained a modicum of stability, it was not successful in shielding itself from severe spill-over effects. First, the diametrically opposed stances on the conflict in Syria quickly led to the blockade and further erosion of governmental institutions (Wimmen, 2015). Second, Lebanon has been severely affected by Syrians fleeing the fighting and the Assad regime. The number of refugees registered with UNHCR in Lebanon increased drastically, from more than 130,000 in January 2013 to almost a million by November 2017 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017), the largest refugee population per inhabitant in the region, even though Lebanon officially closed its border to Syrian refugees in October 2014. In reality, the number is thought to be considerably higher as many who have fled Syria have not registered for fear of being persecuted by the Lebanese security services or Hezbollah. The enormous influx of refugees has been a considerable burden on the Lebanese state and society, leading to miserable conditions in which refugees live as well as increasing frictions between refugees and the local population. As a consequence, politicians from across the political spectrum have increasingly called for Syrian refugees to be returned. As part of ceasefire deals between Hezbollah and rebel groups, some 10,000 fighters, their families but also unrelated refugees, were bussed back into the Idlib province and the Qalamoun region in mid-2017. As no international organisations were granted access to the returnees, doubts abound that conditions for a safe and voluntary return were met.

Third, in April 2014, militant rebels and IS fighters established a presence in Aarsal on the Lebanese side of the border, often drawing cross-border fire. Areas close to the border were subject to incursions, abductions and arms trafficking, until Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces cleared the area and sent radical fighters back to Syria in 2017. At the same time, Hezbollah established a buffer zone along the Bekaa valley on

the Syrian side of the border to prevent infiltration and attacks, thus creating territorial contiguity between the two areas across the border.

The risk of Lebanon being drawn once more into civil strife and chaos persists, however. That is even more the case as Saudi Arabia's regional politics have become considerably more robust under the lead of Crown Prince and Minister of Defence Mohammed bin Salman (MbS). While the Kingdom scaled back its support for Syrian rebels, it increased its pressure on allies and competitors alike to roll back Iran's influence in the region which had risen markedly since 2003. In June 2017, in unison with the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt, it broke off diplomatic relations with and imposed a partial blockade on Qatar to force its leadership to distance itself from Iran and its allies. In November 2017, in reaction to a rocket attack on Riyadh Airport by Yemen's Houthi rebels that it ascribed to Iran and Hezbollah, the Kingdom intensified its bombardments in Yemen and imposed a complete sea, air and land blockade on its southern neighbour. At the same time, it apparently pressured Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri to minimise Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon and achieve its disarmament. To date it seems that the Saudi measures have played into Iran's hands rather than pushing it back. In any case, they have detrimental effects for the civil population in Yemen threatened by hunger and epidemics, with the risk of massive destabilisation of Lebanon as well as the danger of regional escalation. This would especially be the case if Saudi Arabia were to actively pursue an approach aimed at rolling back Iranian influence and disarming Hezbollah, as signalled by Hariri's forced resignation. Such an approach would not only destroy an understanding between Iran and Saudi Arabia to shield Lebanon from regional conflicts, it would also have little chance of success (Atallah & Ezzeddine, 2017). That risk would be greatly elevated – and regional conflagration ensue – if Israel were to change its current guarded approach, deepen its cooperation with Saudi Arabia, and intervene militarily in Lebanon as proposed, amongst others, by a right-wing Israeli think tank (Dostri, 2017).

Turkey: From Regime Change to Containing Kurdish Ambitions

Among all of Syria's neighbours, Turkey is the country whose priorities and policies with regards to Syria have changed most radically over the years. In 2011, Ankara was among the first and most vocal proponents of regime change in Damascus. It quickly emerged as a decisive supporter of the Syrian civilian opposition as well as of armed opposition groups, mostly of various strands of Islamist orientation, and later hosted the military operations centre supporting Syria's northern rebels. It took Ankara a while to realise how the fighting across the border reflected back unfavourably on its own security and the regional balance of power. Turkey quickly became the host country with the largest

number of Syrian refugees of all – more than 3.4 million by the end of 2017 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017). Since Turkey closed its border to all but seriously injured Syrians in early 2015, border guards have pushed back thousands of Syrians. As a result, tens of thousands of people fleeing conflict have been trapped in camps close to the border where they have become victims of shelling and airstrikes. Turkey has long promoted the concept of a “safe zone” inside Syria where people fleeing the fighting could go instead of entering Turkey. In 2015 a series of violent attacks claimed by IS led to a significant number of civilian casualties in Turkey. The same year, the peace process between Ankara and the PKK broke down and domestic armed hostilities escalated dramatically. Against this backdrop, Turkey saw the ascendance of Kurdish self-governance in Syria with particular suspicion and the arming of the PYD with heavy weapons by the US in the fight against IS as a direct threat to its own security. It tried to block the military aid by the US but without success.

By 2017, Ankara had accepted the perceived inevitability of the Assad regime remaining in power, prioritised vital domestic interests, and shifted its cooperation from the former Friends of the Syrian People (i.e. the US, Europe and Arab Gulf States) to a close cooperation with Russia and Iran – the Syrian regime’s closest allies and anything but natural partners for Turkey. The trilateral cooperation in the Astana format has provided Turkey with an opportunity to pursue its foreign policy objectives independent from its traditional allies with whom it has had increasingly strained relations since the July 2016 botched coup in Ankara. It has also allowed it to have a military presence in Syria’s north without Damascus, Tehran or Moscow interfering in its operations. Ankara has used that presence in order to prevent a contiguous zone of Kurdish self-government along its southern border, which could have served as a model for Turkey’s Kurds as well as a safe haven and a basis for cross-border operations of PKK fighters. In Operation Euphrates Shield in October 2016, Turkish troops collaborated with Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters to split the Kurdish controlled territory effectively in two. What is more, the involvement in Astana has not hindered Ankara’s continued cooperation with Syrian rebel groups, including the extremist elements that control much of the Idlib province and its surroundings. Turkey has also used its presence on the ground to create a buffer zone along parts of its border and thus prevent radical fighters as well as refugees from crossing into Turkey. And it has created what it likes to call a safe zone in al-Bab. By late 2017, Turkey claimed that some 75,000 Syrians had returned to these safe zones in areas liberated from IS and the PYD (Chohan, 2017). Indeed, the relative safety in the town as well as the recovery efforts that Turkey has exerted there has also attracted a large number of IDPs.

Jordan: Limited Support for the Rebels

Like Lebanon, Jordan aimed to keep a distance from the conflict in Syria and prevent spill-over into a country that was already host to large refugee communities from Israel/Palestine and Iraq and had a significant problem with Jihadist extremism. In this vein, Amman kept channels open with Damascus throughout the conflict. Yet, under pressure from its allies in the Friends of the Syrian People group, Amman allowed support for Syrian rebels through a military operations centre in Amman. In contrast to Syria's northern front, where rebels used to move relatively freely in and out of the country from Turkey, rebel movement to Syria's south was much more closely controlled by Jordan's intelligence services. Indeed, throughout the civil war, Jordan's main aim seemed to have been not to help the rebels achieve victory but rather to limit the rise of extremism, preserve stability in Jordan, and control its borders (Hubbard, 2014; Vignal, 2017). Thus, it was a welcome development for Amman when the US decided to diminish and later end the CIA programme in support of moderate rebels against the Syrian regime and focus its support on groups that would concentrate on fighting IS. Jordan has also been concerned with the effects of the rise in extremism in Syria and Iraq for its own stability – some 2,000-4,000 Jordanians are estimated to have joined the fighters of IS – and therefore was part of the anti-IS-coalition from early on. It escalated its involvement after the dramatic immolation of Muath al-Kasasbeh, a Jordanian pilot captured by IS in early 2015.

Jordan, whose King Abdullah had already warned of a "Shiite crescent" in 2004, has shared Israel's concerns over an entrenched Iranian and Hezbollah presence in the border region. The Kingdom has also had an interest in implementation of the de-escalation zone agreement in Syria's southwest so as to stabilise the border region, allow for a reopening of the Nassib border crossing with Syria and thus significantly increase cross-border trade, as well as to create a safe zone for Syrian refugees (AlSharif, 2017). The effect of the war in Syria on Jordan's economy, heavily dependent on tourism, expatriate remittances, external aid, and the service sector (amongst others transit trade), has been stark, and is likely to continue to be so for the foreseeable future. Like its neighbours, Jordan has also been heavily affected by the fighting in the form of Syrians seeking refuge, becoming one of the major host countries of Syrian refugees with numbers reaching more than 655,000 by the end of 2017 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017). Jordan closed its border with Syria in December 2016, which resulted in fleeing Syrians being stuck on the Syrian side of the border. By late 2017, some 50,000 IDPs remained caught there under unbearable conditions with almost no aid reaching them. Since 2014, but especially in 2016 and 2017, Jordan has

also deported Syrian refugees, including the collective expulsion of families. In 2016, the Hashemite Kingdom entered into an arrangement with foreign governments and international financial institutions known as the Jordan Compact. In exchange for low-interest loans, for example from the World Bank, and preferential access to European markets for goods produced in special economic zones, Jordan committed to issuing work permits to 200,000 Syrian refugees, and providing easier access to education for over 165,000 Syrian children (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2015).

A Lack of Common Objectives and Shared Priorities

Overall, there has been a lack of shared interests, objectives and priorities among Eastern Mediterranean actors. Thus, while all Eastern Mediterranean state actors – with the notable exception of Israel, which has viewed Kurdish independence at least more favourably than its neighbours – have shared the interest in maintaining Syria as a single state, it has not been a priority for any of them. Moreover, while there has been a convergence of interests among some actors, for example, between Israel and Jordan regarding Iran’s future role in Syria and in particular in the border area, this has not triggered positive dynamics of cooperation between the two countries beyond the immediate interest – above all, due to tense bilateral relations over the incident at the Israeli embassy compound in Amman in July 2017 and the stalled Middle East Peace Process in general and Jerusalem in particular (Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif crisis in the summer of 2017, tensions over US President Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in late 2017). The only other issue where a convergence of interests exists among all neighbouring states – again with the exception of Israel, which has not opened its borders for refugees – and which all consider a priority, has created competition between them rather than incentives for cooperation: host countries’ interest in securing international funding for dealing with refugees from Syria. What is more, as refugee communities have been framed and perceived ever more as a burden and danger to national interests in host states, Syria’s neighbours have been seeking to create so-called safe zones to allow for pushing refugees back into Syria and prevent Syrians from leaving the country in the first place – steps starkly adverse to the protection of refugees.

From the outset of the civil war, Eastern Mediterranean actors have not agreed on priorities and approaches with regards to Syria that would have paved the way for constructive regional conflict management. The endgame perception has not only led to a shift in priorities among some of the actors, it has also brought to the fore strong, and at times vital, diametrically opposed interests among Eastern Mediterranean actors involved in and affected by the conflict in Syria. The cooperation between Turkey and

Iran initiated by Russia in the framework of the Astana process has been used by the two countries to safeguard their own domestic and foreign policy objectives or to preclude developments seen as adverse to these objectives rather than focusing on conflict resolution. Also, an increasingly open alignment between Israel and Saudi Arabia has not been geared towards pacification of the war in Syria but rather to a roll-back of Iran and allied militias. This will hardly pave the way for constructive sub-regional dynamics or closer sub-regional collaboration, for example in the context of a sub-regional dialogue forum on the Syria conflict, let alone a broader sub-regional forum on security cooperation. At the same time, these diverging interests – and in particular their divergence from other crucial actors' interests involved in Syria – will be detrimental to achieving sustained stabilisation in Syria and bear the high risk of further violent conflagration, in particular in the Israel-Iran-Hezbollah and the Turkish-PKK-PYD arenas.

Outlook and Policy Recommendations

As a consequence of the five dynamics mentioned above and the diverging interests and priorities of external actors involved in Syria, a negotiated transition between regime and opposition is the least likely scenario for the foreseeable future (for plausible mid-term scenarios, see Meinders, van der Lijn & van Mierlo [2017]). Rather, there is a high risk of renewed escalation on several fronts, including regional spill-over of fighting, in particular on the Israeli-Iran-Hezbollah and the Turkish-PKK-PYD fronts. Repatriating refugees in such an environment would be irresponsible.

Moreover, the Russian-dominated conflict-settlement approach and the expected continued presence of Iran-backed militias is unlikely to bring about even a minimum of the political, security, administrative and economic reforms that would address Syria's deep-rooted socioeconomic and sectarian imbalances, even if it were to lead to an imposed conflict settlement. Reconstruction cannot, as Russia implies, be reduced to the physical reconstruction of infrastructure and economic recovery. Rather, measures to safeguard citizens' security, establish effective governance, and lay the ground for reconciliation are key for peace-building and durable stabilisation. They would need to lead to an effective division of power with functioning checks and balances and effective economic and administrative oversight bodies; to include a comprehensive disarmament of militias and the establishment of army and security services loyal to the state and its citizenry, not to the regime; to address forced displacement and expropriation of property and allow for social reconciliation; to provide for an inclusive constitutional process in which majority and minority rights are respected and a political climate in which free and fair

elections are possible, political rights are guaranteed, and civil society can operate. With the absence of meaningful reform, engaging in large-scale reconstruction would not serve the purposes of peace-building but rather cement militia rule and the war economy, feed corruption, and legitimise forced displacement and dispossession – thus creating new conflicts rather than supporting long-term stabilisation (Asseburg & Oweis, 2017).

Policy Recommendations for the EU and its Member States

The EU and its member states have only limited influence on the conflict dynamics in Syria as well as on the negotiations regarding a political settlement. At the same time, they have a strong interest in their direct neighbourhood that violence should not escalate and states not be weakened further. Therefore, they should above all concentrate on: preventing further spill-over of violent conflict and regional conflagration; the protection of refugees and the development of their capacities and potentials; and leveraging their future reconstruction support in Syria for peace-building and long-term stabilisation.

Preventing Regional Conflagration

The conflict in Syria will not calm down if the vital interests of Syria's neighbours are not taken into account in interim arrangements and a permanent settlement or if they feel threatened by developing arrangements in Syria. Such perceptions of threat also bear the risk of regional conflagration, especially so in an already very tense regional environment and with governments willing to pursue their interests militarily. Europeans should be in close contact with all actors in the region, maintain open lines of communication and propose their good offices, with the aim of agreeing on codes of conduct that go beyond military de-conflicting in the strict sense and serve to prevent violence from spilling over. That would be particularly important in the Israel-Hezbollah-Iran arena. It would also be crucial in the Turkey-PYD-PKK arena. In this domain, Europeans should be careful to distinguish between tensions with Turkey over EU accession and criticism of Turkey by the EU, its member states and individual politicians, on the one hand, and Turkish interests in the region that are closely linked to its domestic situation, on the other.

Protection of Refugees and Capacity-Building

The EU and its member states should significantly increase their support for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the other neighbouring countries (Jordan, Turkey, Iraq) so as to allow Syrian refugees adequate living conditions and provide them with prospects. At the same time – and this applies in particular to Lebanon – host countries must be

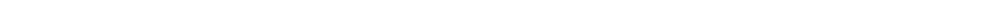
obliged to ensure that they provide adequate protection for refugees, offer them educational opportunities and open up economic prospects, in accordance with the so-called "Compacts" with Jordan and Lebanon adopted in February 2016 and the agreement with Turkey struck in March 2016. In this respect, only Jordan has made some progress to date. Refugees returning to Syria voluntarily should be supported with humanitarian aid. But Europeans should not encourage return to an environment in which refugees are still faced with existential dangers.

What is more, rather than conceiving refugees as a burden and thinking about sending refugees back to situations where their lives and existence are threatened, the EU and its member states should at last devise a large-scale initiative focused on building Syria's human resources in the neighbouring countries and among the refugee communities across Europe that would equip refugees with the skills to contribute meaningfully to rebuilding Syria's institutions, infrastructure, economy and society once they return.

Future Reconstruction, Stabilisation, Support for Local Structures

Europeans should refrain from all measures that remove pressure from the Assad regime to adopt an inclusive approach and engage in substantial structural reform – a sine qua non for any meaningful reconstruction. This would include, in particular, the premature dispatch of ambassadors to Damascus. Those EU countries that withdrew their ambassadors should agree to send them back only jointly and after substantial steps towards a conflict settlement. In the same vein, they should not engage in early reconstruction as it would run the risk of feeding destructive dynamics and foregoing incentives for political settlements. Europeans should therefore stick to the approach outlined in the April 2017 strategy (European Council, 2017), and clearly state so.

They should also gauge when to throw their weight around and leverage their diplomatic, financial and technical support so as to achieve conditions under which reconstruction would serve long-term stabilisation rather than lead to renewed violent conflict and radicalisation. At a later stage – and because of the sheer amount of investment needed – the regime will not be able to depend only on its allies. Rather, it might be forced to turn to international sources of financing. That might be the starting point for pushing toward the realisation of measures aimed at building credible institutions. One should not exaggerate the chances of success, though: such a development is by no means guaranteed, as the regime might choose to



continue defying European conditionality, even if it comes at the cost of stagnation and massive human suffering (Asseburg & Oweis, 2017).

In the near future, it is mainly the rebel-held areas where Europeans can engage in stabilisation and early recovery efforts. The challenge in these zones is that some of the areas are controlled by forces that cannot be partners in reconstruction, such as al-Qaeda linked groups, meaning that support can only be administered through civil society organisations rather than the local councils and the interim government. Europeans will therefore have to look for tailor-made approaches, depending on the conditions and partners available in each of the areas. These approaches should focus on humanitarian aid, early recovery and support for non-violent community-based organisations as well as continued support for local governance, where possible. It is far-fetched to believe that with such kinds of support, one would be able to create “islands of stability”, which could be the basis for nationwide stabilisation. But Europeans should still strive toward helping local civilian and governance structures survive – not least to counter Jihadist propaganda and influence. Humanitarian aid, the provision of basic services and support for civil society should also be the focus of European support in the PYD-controlled areas, where repression of opposition forces and independent activists and forced recruitment have become major problems, despite the progressive and inclusive image projected by the PYD (Asseburg & Oweis, 2017).

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EuroMeSCo

Founded in 1996 and comprising 106 institutes from 32 European and South Mediterranean countries, EuroMeSCo (the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) is the main network of research centres on politics and security in the Mediterranean, striving at building a community of research institutes and think tanks committed to strengthening Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The objectives of the network are to foster influential quality analysis and reflection on Euro-Mediterranean politics and policies; to serve as a platform for dialogue between the members of the network and key stakeholders to discuss the key trends and challenges on the region's agenda; to increase the impact of think tanks and research institutes and to actively contribute to policy-making through dissemination of research outputs of the network to experts and national, European and international institutions linked to Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with five publication lines (Joint Policy Studies, Papers, Briefs, Spot-Ons and reports), as well as numerous activities, including annual conferences, seminars, workshops, presentations, formal and informal meetings with policy makers on the key political and security dynamics. It also includes communication and dissemination related activities (website, newsletter and targeted institutional dissemination) to raise awareness and promote the work of the network and to stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

IEMed.

The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a consortium comprising the Catalan Government, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Barcelona City Council. It incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council formed by Mediterranean universities, companies, organisations and personalities of renowned prestige.

In accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's Barcelona Process, and today with the objectives of the Union for the Mediterranean the aim of the IEMed is to foster actions and projects which contribute to mutual understanding, Exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures as well as to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

Adopting a clear role as a think tank specialised in Mediterranean relations based on a multidisciplinary and networking approach, the IEMed encourages analysis, understanding and cooperation through the organisation of seminars, research projects, debates, conferences and publications, in addition to a broad cultural programme.



Mitvim – the Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies is a foreign policy think tank, established in Israel in 2011, with the mission to improve Israel's foreign policy, advance Israeli-Palestinian peace, and promote Israel's regional belonging in the Middle East, Europe, and the Mediterranean.

The Mitvim Institute develops and promotes a pro-peace, multi-regional, internationalist, modern, and inclusive approach to Israel's foreign policy. It generates new foreign policy knowledge and puts it into policy use. The Mitvim Institute works at the political, diplomatic, and civil society levels to achieve its mission. Its core staff, policy fellows, and researchers produce original analysis and concrete policy recommendations.

The Mitvim Institute conducts outreach activities to advance these recommendations, shape the political discussion, and influence policy. These activities include briefings to parliamentarians, government officials, and foreign diplomats; policy dialogues with regional and international think tanks; expert-workshops and public events; media interviews and commentaries; and public opinion polls. The Mitvim Institute's website is: www.mitvim.org.il.