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Articles

Geopolitical Shift in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Theoretical Analysis of the Factors to Turkey's Isolation in the Region 2002–2021

Imen Ktari ^a, Filiz Katman ^{a, *}

^b Istanbul Aydin University; Istanbul, Turkey

Abstract

This paper investigates the motives behind the geopolitical shift explained by the outcome of Turkey's exclusion from the emerging institutionalization operations by littoral states in the Eastern Mediterranean. Studies have stressed on the tremendous profits cooperative institutions would have engendered in the region, consequently the foundation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which includes major concerned littoral states in the region (Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, France, Italy, Palestine and Jordan) is one of the prominent steps toward a constitutionalized cooperation based on the motive of gas exploration and extraction in the region through multiple agreements and demarcation of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZs) between the concerned actors, which stimulated a geopolitical shift against Turkey. The study aims at demystifying the nature of the geopolitical shift through the use of the balance of threat theory derived from Stephen Walt's book of "The Origins of Alliances" and the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSC) developed by Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde and Ole Wæver. The present volume defends the idea that Turkey projects a permanent threat to the above-mentioned states starting from 2002, as subsequent developments in its foreign policy compiled with its rising economic and military power, has in turn a tremendous impact on its encirclement and exemption by its neighbors. Case study aims to testify the applicability of the Balance of Threat Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory on the exemption outcome using specifically the embedded case study to include various analysis of foreign policy relations with Turkey, data is collected from both the primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: geopolitics, regional security complex, balance of threat, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to explore the motivations behind the dynamics of the isolation of Turkey from the interests of the performed regionalization operations within the Eastern Mediterranean. Respectively, the study sheds the light on the regional cooperative projects implemented by major Eastern Mediterranean littoral states (particularly Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt) to conjointly explore and extract gas reserves under the international organization of the Eastern Mediterranean

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: filizkatman@aydin.edu.tr (F. Katman), imenktari@stu.aydin.edu.tr (I. Ktari)

Gas Forum founded in 2020 without the inclusion of Turkey, despite existing mutual economic interests and geopolitical incentives in the region. The argument the volume defends is that the intentional encirclement of Turkey by its neighbors (particularly Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt) is specified to the threatening environment Ankara projects to these states in the region since 2002 as being preeminently a rising economic and political power in the region. The distinction resulted in Turkey's conjoined opposition by its neighbors, who permanently fear its growing influence in the region. For the sake of expanding this argument, useful field-related theories were adopted including the balance of threat theory derived from Stephen Walt (1987)'s book of "The Origins of Alliances" together with the Regional Security Complex Theory of Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde and Ole Wæver (2003), which granted further demystification to the nature of the established alignment formed against Turkey and a practical analysis to the reasons behind the geopolitical shift in the region. In the same perspective, the present research aims at untangling the nature of the geopolitical shift in the Eastern Mediterranean and the anti-Turkey alliance formed accertified after the foundation of the EastMed Gas Forum in 2020 as a response to the rising inter-regional power of Turkey. Findings reveal that both Israel and Egypt perceive Turkey as a permanent threat in the region for a number of reasons. The first reason goes back to late 2010 after the Mavi Marmara incident against Israel, Turkey's constant distorts of Israel's public image and support for the Palestinian case and Arab revolts in the Middle East, which undermines its popularity in the region. Similarly, for Egypt, Turkey is regarded as a permanent threat and a rising assertive military power, particularly after its intervention in the Libyan affair since 2019 and its support for the Libyan military officer Khalifa Haftar against the Egyptian army, its back-up for the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood Party in Egypt along with its host for anti-governmental media channels within its lands. Likewise, the Turkish-Cypriot dispute comes across as a protracted conflict in which countries rival against land and sea sovereignty issues, EEZs bilateral agreements and pivoting political and social conflicts since mid 19th century. The main research question is formulated as follows: What is the nature of the alliance of the East Med Gas Forum littoral states formed against Turkey? Whereas the other sub-research questions are stated as follow which (economic, military, political) Turkey is perceived as a threat in the Eastern Mediterranean? How Turkey's strategic reaction was evaluated within the framework of recent geopolitical shift in the region?

The past few decades was a period marked with exceptional events addressing the concept of geopolitical shifts at both the international and regional levels in many areas around the globe, consequently the Eastern Mediterranean region is none of an exception especially after the exploration of volatile hydrocarbon resources in its seabed as soon as the geological survey by United States of America (USA) was conducted in late 1990s. Developments in the region were reflected in the geopolitical shift emerged in the region against the interests and entitlements of Turkey to the region resources. The issue provoked revolves around the alignment of major Eastern Mediterranean actors being mainly Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, France, Italy, Palestine and Jordan to be cognitively entitled to the regional activities of gas exploration and extraction under the EastMed Forum in 2020 along with a number of bi-lateral and trilateral gas exploration-related partnerships some of which has started since 2003 between littoral actors all against the maritime claims of Turkey, which led to its encirclement. Therefore, starting from the beginning of 21st century, a wealth of literature has been growing treating the Eastern Mediterranean as an area of interest. Within this framework, many scholars in their scientific researches defended the idea of how resource discovery under a neoliberal regime will drive to institutionalized and regionalized cooperation processes to include all the concerned littoral actors in the region despite existing protracted conflicts, which will eventually lead to its increased stability and prosperity thus, will grant less pivotal weight to the protracted political and cultural contradictions that existed in the treated region of interest (Dizdaroglu, 2010; Tanriverdi, 2013; Poteau, 2018) whereas other realist specialists countered the idea and looked at it from a pessimistic angel, demystifying the fact that resource-discovery rests as a mean to discord and escalations of protracted political and ideological tensions due to the adopted egoist and zero-sum game perceptions of states in the international system (Opcin, 2015; Yazgan, 2016). Correspondingly, today, Turkey comes across as the only Eastern Mediterranean country to be prevented from the multinational gas exploration activities in the region with a growing anti-Turkey geopolitical realignment in the region proved by the recent formation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020, without the inclusion of Turkey despite its common geostrategic, security and economic concerns with the above stated actors.

In order to demystify the reasons behind the unprecedented outcome, a number of scientific researches including the academic work of Pinar Ipek and Volkan Tibet Gur (2020) demystify the role of ideational mechanisms particularly the precedent shift in Turkish foreign policy preferences such as cognitive priors, redefined exogenous ideas and incongruent political culture as opposed to the power-driven accounts for cooperation, that shaped the result of Turkey's isolation from the regionalization processes. Furthermore, other scientific researches emphasize the importance of the recent subsequent developments of Turkey's foreign policy in its relations with regional neighbors resulted in its isolation, such as the adoption of a militarized foreign policy "Blue Homeland" which gave rise to power rivalries in the region and intensified foreign powers inclusions in field of battle, which will obstruct negotiations focused on areas of protracted conflicts between neighbors rather than cooperation and compromise talks (Adar, 2020). In favor of this assertion, Turkey's distrustful relations with Egypt since 2013, its support for the Muslim brotherhood party in Egypt along with its military presence in Libya against Egyptian interests, compiled with Israel downgrading relations due to the Gaza Flotilla (*Mavi Marmara*) incident in 2010 and its consistent support to the Palestinian case and Arab revolts along with the Turks-Greek protracted conflict was argued to be the main results to its regional isolation and exclusion from regionalization processes despite newly on-going efforts from Turkey's side to reconcile and repair its regional ties (Gormus, 2021). In this context, the geopolitical research of Andrikopoulos (n.d.) examines the initiatives undertaken by littoral states explained through the outcome of a conjoint cooperation against Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean to be triggered by the sense of threat shared by all of these countries, offering as such a detailed analysis to the main triggers of weaknesses and insecurities the concerned countries such as Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and Israel have in common within the region (Andrikopoulos, n.d., "Manuscript in preparation").

2. Methodology

This paper is a qualitative study based on historical analysis and case study as techniques to accentuate the relevance of ingrained historical events between countries on the present outcome of Turkey's isolation. The research technique will use the case study in order to testify the applicability of the Balance of Threat Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory on the current outcome of the isolation of Turkey, for this sake, embedded case study technique or multiple case studies are used, including the study of Greece, Israel and Egypt foreign policy relations with Turkey. The paper discrepancies lie in its exemption of Palestine, Jordan, France, Italy and great powers interest-driven policies from the systematic analysis despite their importance on the outcome the research might come up with, this is mainly due to time constraint the thesis completion predetermine, also the study will not visit the international law perspective on the justices of the Libyan-Turkish Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or the Greek-Turks conflict case surrounding EEZs rights and sovereignty issues solutions hence it will limit itself to demonstrate their impact on the current event of Turkey's isolation.

Within this framework, data is collected from both from primary and secondary sources. Data from primary sources are generated from the semi-structured interviews with political reporters and analytical experts in a face-to face setting, where all interviews are recorded and transcribed to seek new insights about the topic of relevance and reach clarity about the findings. Data from secondary sources is collected through literature review, which requires document review from articles, press releases, books, and reports. Quantitative data is collected from secondary sources from books and articles, numeric characteristics are classified. In data analysis, the study uses both the content analysis technique to examine the qualitative data collected and discourse analysis technique to scrutinize the relevant data derived from the interviews.

3. Results and discussion

Geopolitical Shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean (2010-2021): Analysis of Factors to Turkey's Isolation in the Region

Balance of Threat

The importance of this theory revolves around demystifying the forces that stimulate states' alliance formation and regionalization processes of some local units against one specific power within a shared geographical arena (Walt, 1987). It also highlights the types of potential threats states according to which start seeking to form alignments to counter balance a rising regional

power (Walt, 1987). Within this framework, Walt (1987) defines balancing as allying with other states against the common perceived threat, in order to to maximize states' security vis a vis the common threat, announcing that "states join alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat" (Walt, 1987). Alliances are the main means of states' foreign policies and their existence contribute to a great extent to the outbreak of peace or conflict within a defined area (Andrikopoulos). The exclusion of Turkey from this realization is explained in terms of the external rising material and political threat it poses in the region, states thus choose to balance against it for two main reasons. The first reason is that states often balance in order to curb a potential hegemon from becoming too stronger and more powerful to dominate them, therefore avoiding being dominated by its potential is the preferred option (Walt, 1978). bandwagoning is their second option, it means allying with the main source of danger and comes across as being risky since it boosts the dispensable resources of the threatening power with no trust in its continued loyalty (Walt, 1987). Walt states that "Because perceptions are unreliable and intentions can change, it is safer to balance against potential threats than to rely on the hope that a state will remain benevolently disposed" (Walt, 1987). Likewise, the weaker and less secure the state is, the more preferable for it to bandwagon than to balance.

Walt (1987) highlights the different sources of threat in international relations as following:

i) Aggregate power denotes the state's total resources with regards to population growth rate, industrial and military capabilities and technological development that project it as a potential threat to others (Walt, 1987). Recognizing this fact, states usually tend to alien against any state that is more powerful and dominant than them.

ii) Geographic proximity is considered as a type of threat, as "the ability to project power declines with distance, states which are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away" (Walt, 1987), therefore approximate power of a rising power often intensifies the threat posed to a region, where acts such as balancing or bandwagoning can be established according to states' security conditions and capabilities.

iii) Offensive power signifies states with large offensive capabilities, which spur the emergence of an alliance because of geographical proximity and a military posture (Walt, 1987). The offensive capability states combined with geographic proximity will provoke threat to the sovereignty of local actors and as such will spur an opposition (Walt, 1987).

iv) Aggressive intentions is for states who are perceived by the other local units as aggressive, which provoke a balance against them. Perceptions of intent play a significant role in alliance choices and they are revealed through the official statements of states, crises or other confrontations that may engender a level of fear and concern (Walt, 1987).

Threat Factors

According to the balance of threat theory, the nature of bilateral support that exists between all of Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt is primarily, a balance of threat alliance formation promoted for the sake of balancing the security threat perceived against Turkey. Turkey is frequently regarded as a high level threat in the region for a number of reasons. For instance, its dominating and rising military and industrial capabilities, its population growth, its geopolitical proximity to the above stated actors along with its perceived ideologies and intentions in the region.

Turkey as an Emerging Threatening Power in the Eastern Mediterranean

Turkey comes across as a rising emerging power in a number of fields that project a threat to the rest of the regional actors, with a distinctive rate of military expenditures and industrial developments vis a vis all of Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and Israel added to that its geographical proximity to the area of tension and its perceived intentions in the region.

Industrial and Military Capabilities

In the balance of threat theory, Walt (1987) identifies the most significant items due to which a state's power is considered as superior than those of its neighbors in a particular region, primarily where perceptions of alliance for a balance of threat and power opposition start revealing. Some of these items are being the size of armed forces and military expenditures.

Statistical data derived from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2020) showcases that Turkey's military expenditures recorded its peak levels between the years of 2019 and 2020 from the 2019 and 2020. The development was accentuated after Ankara's considerably guarding its military budget around the 12.5 million dollars all during the last 15 years, hence impulsively skyrocketed its annual military expenditures to 19.5 million dollars

following the years of 2019 and 2020. Contradictory, Greece's military expenditures were steadily maintaining the 5 million dollars between the years of 2011 to 2020, Egypt expenditures also registered a slow graduation during the same years revolving around 4.5 million dollars until 2020. Israel's military expenditures on the other hand were the most valuable since the beginning of 2000s. However its expenditures were considerably growing up especially since the discovery of Tamar and Leviathan gas deposits in early 2010. Israel's military expenditures significantly climbed from 16.2 million dollars in 2012 to register 21 million dollars last year.

Population Growth

Population is a highly important organ to measure a country's economic development and military weight within a particular region. The subject often engenders fear and threat perceptions between state actors due to the population growth direct influence on a country's hard power capabilities and defense potentiality in a region. In the book of the "Origins of Alliances", *Aggregate Power* is a term used to identify the incentives based on which states decide to form alliances against a significant potential threat, one of the stated threats is being a country's population growth rate, industrial and military capabilities.

Among the concerned littoral states of the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt comes across with the highest population growth record in the region, registering 102,33 million with a yearly growth rate of 2.5 % (Worldometers, 2020). After that, comes Turkey with a population record of 84.3 million in 2020 and a growth rate of 0.55 % per annum (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020). Followed by Greece registered 10,7 million in 2020 (Worldometers, 2020), after that comes Israel ending at 9.2 million in 2020 according to the same source (Worldometers, 2020). Population growth is a crucial element to a country's strength due to its direct influence on the manpower available for military in each state. Against this background, Egypt's manpower available for military registers the highest record, reaching 41,157,220 (Armedforces.eu, 2019a). Followed by Turkey registering 21,079,077 (Armedforces.eu, 2019d). After that, emerges Greece's manpower capability, which slightly records 2,535,174 (Armedforces.eu, 2019b) and then ending up at Israel touching 1,797.960 manpower available for military (Armedforces.eu, 2019c).

Geopolitical Proximity

Geopolitical proximity is another source of threat, as "the ability to project power declines with distance, states which are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away" (Walt, 1987). A state's geographical adjacency whose power is considerably rising often spurs up a collective opposition from its weak neighbors frequently formed through the act of a collective alignment to counter-balance the threatening power state. Against this background, Turkey emerges as the nearest country to Greece with regards to its islands being fully militarized in the Eastern Aegean sea despite violating several international law agreements on the demilitarization of the 18 Aegean islands in the area aforementioned in Lausanne Treaty (1923) (Aslan, 2020), the threat perceptions with which Greece treats Turkey, in terms of Athena's adoption of a bilaterally agreed delimitation of exclusive economic zones strategy with key states in the region, being Lebanon and Israel in the given picture, whilst damaging Ankara's EEZ rights in reaching gas fields and intensifies its encirclement in the region. On the other hand, the heavy militarization of Turkey to the TRNC is also another subject that demonstrates the perceptions of securitization Ankara parallelly adopts in its relations with the Greek Administration as a way to protect its claims in the island. Against this backdrop, Turkey's geographical adjacency to the Eastern Mediterranean aligned states seems to be intimidating and is one of the core existing motives that further intensifies the pro-active assertive atmosphere engendered out of the lack of trust and de-security perceptions in the region.

Aggressive Intentions

Aggressive intentions are exemplified through the type of official statements a country uses, which frequently engenders a source of fear and threat to the sovereignty of the targeted actors, especially in the case of regional states (Walt, 1987). Within this context, Turkey's newly reframed foreign policy was often exhibited as active and bold especially with regards to issues related to conserving its own national rights and interests. Turkey's adoption of bold official statements in defending its stances and assertive foreign policy was often criticized by its Western neighbors. To Greece's perspective, Ankara exemplifies a threat to Athens's security and maritime sovereignty primarily after Ankara's adoption of the "Blue Homeland" doctrine or the "Mavi Vatan" in Turkish and the bold tone up shift of its official statements as a way to issue a threat to the states who want

to isolate the country. For instance, due to escalations in the Eastern Mediterranean, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan remained steadfast in spite of increased sanctions on the country claiming that “We are proud to wave our glorious Turkish banner in all our seas. I submit that we are ready to protect every swath of our 462 thousand square meter blue homeland with great determination and undertake every possible duty that may come” (Gingeras, 2020) or “We don’t have our eye on someone else’s territory, sovereignty or interests” Turkish President Erdogan declared, “but we will make no concessions on that which is ours. We are determined to do whatever necessary” (Norris, 2020). The rhetoric seems to be bold, straightforward and committed, transmitting an alarm to regional actors of Turkey’s unwillingness of escalations at a time when an equitable compromise would serve the region’s stability and prosperity better (Outzen, 2021).

Turkey was also perceived to undertake opposing stands to Israel’s policies with regards to the Palestinian case. Ankara’s official statements were actively advocating the rights of Arab Muslims whilst at the same time accusing Israel to be “oppressive” vis a vis the Palestinians calling it a “terrorist state” that commits “genocide” followed by an expulsion of the Israeli ambassador Eitan Na’eh and its consul in Istanbul (Staff, 2021). The following events damaged Israel’s reputation worldwide and downgraded its popularization among countries eventually, resulted in its isolation in the Middle East (Talbot, 2020). In Israel’s perspective, Turkey is undertaking a biased position whilst harshly criticizing and hosteling Israel’s stances in the region since 2010, which made Ankara to be collectively regarded as a common threat in the region under today’s circumstances (Talbot, 2020).

To Egypt, it perceives Turkey as a threat to its domestic political stability due to Ankara’s support to the former elected government of Morsi and criticism of the new Egyptian government of Sissi considering it as “a permanent product of the military coup” and “brutal murders” as the Turkish PM Erdogan declared in 2013 (Aa.com, 2013). Hosting as well several Egyptian opposition channels and journalists in exile to tone up their rhetoric against events that should be heard about in Egypt, which make Cairo look at Ankara as a permanent threat to its stability and constantly doubt its intentions and motives in the region (Sofuoglu, 2018).

Regional Security Complexes

The regional security complex theory is stemmed from the “Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security” of Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde and Ole Wæver. It defends the argument that “most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones” and that “most states have been concerned primarily with the capabilities and intentions of their neighbors” (Buzan et al., 2003), which creates a regional complex security interdependence dilemma between the local units because they are highly defined by the security environment of their local region. Buzan offers two patterns to international relations security analysis being the national and global levels (Buzan et al., 2003). The global level is attributed to the exceptional case of superpowers and great powers who compete at the system level and are minimally integrated in security terms since their capabilities of power and intentions often transcend boundaries of geography, and the regional level, which is beneficial to the Eastern Mediterranean case, where states are tightly influenced by the power and intentions of their neighbors. The theory grants a more constructivist approach to the definition of security accentuating on variables such as the of durable amity and enmity among states within a particular geographic arena and the actions and interpretations of actors to determine regional complexes based on state historical relations (Buzan et al., 2003). The character of a local complex as such, is identified by the historical factors, the long-standing enmities or amity, the existence of a shared culture or an embrace of a common civilizational area (Buzan et al., 2003). The causes that create complexes are exemplified in the anarchic structure of the international system, the constant rival of balance of power along with the pressures created by a geographical proximity.

States’ Securitization-Desecuritization Dynamics

As discussed in the theoretical framework, patterns of long-standing enmity and amity within a historical framework analysis is a core component behind the current dynamics of securitization and de-securitization within the Eastern Mediterranean region. In the light of historical amity and enmity patterns, Turkey’s relations with its neighbors in the region were interpreted to be as either deteriorated or inconstant. To Greece’s perspective, there exist a number of pre-existing issues that made Turkey a security threat (Tziarras, 2016). The main issue started in 1974 after Turkey’s military invasion of the northern part of the Cyprus island being under its administration until

today as the “Turkish of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)” and is unrecognized by Greece, which switched the Greek Cypriots patterns to Turkey both domestically and diplomatically (Tziarras, 2016). The geographical proximity of the divided island along with the lack of recognition to TRNC sovereignty status led Turkey to develop offensive military capabilities in Cyprus and in the Mediterranean to preserve its claims, which spur up threatening intentions in the Greek Administration, who perceives it as a high level of threat (Tziarras, 2016). Adjacency of geography also induced disputes surrounding the Aegean maritime zones, airspace and the issues around the unfair treatments of the Greek and Turkish minorities in separate parts of the island (Aydin, Yfantis, 2004). According to Greece, Turkey’s perceived intentions and offensive capabilities affect the way it perceives it since decades. To Greece, Turkey is illegally claiming rights to the Aegean sea through projecting intimidating hard power capabilities to defend its stances though violating Greek maritime and airspace borders, the reason why it is regarded as a prominent threat to Greece (Tziarras, 2016).

For Israel, relations doesn’t have the same historical background of enmity with Turkey as relations were at its best during the 2002 and 2010 period, flourished by the sign of several strategic agreements since late 1990s (Tziarras, 2016). Yet relations changed soon after Ankara’s shift in foreign policy toward supporting the Palestinian case and its rhetoric disfavoring Israel’s policies in a number of occasions (Brom, 2011). Both states relations were at their lowest in May 2010, after the Turkish ship “Mavi Marmara” was carrying humanitarian aids to Gaza, Israeli soldiers raided the Turkish ship and killed nine Turkish activists (Tziarras, 2016). Consequently, all types of defense and diplomatic ties were suspended in 2010. Although, Turkey was eventually compensated by Israel in 2014, Israel continues to perceive Turkey as a threat. The reason to that, according to Israel, goes back to the country’s newly emergence as an ultimate supporter to the Palestinian case, advocating their voice at the expense of Israel’s sensitive interests and image in the region, joining as such the Anti-Israeli Arab camp (Tziarras, 2016). To Israel, Ankara maintained a high stance of hostility in a number of issues veering always to one side against the other, which ultimately doesn’t serve its interests in the region, consequently weakened the diplomatic process between them. In conjunction with the present events, Israel favored turning towards Cyprus, Greece and Egypt at the expense of Turkey, furthering as such its isolation in the region to co-balance its rising threat (Tziarras, 2016).

For Egypt, Cairo perceives Ankara as a threat especially to its domestic political stability due to Turkey’s support to the former elected government of Morsi and constant criticism of the new Egyptian government of Sissi considering it as “a permanent product of the military coup” and “brutal murders” as the then Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan declared in 2013 (Anadolu Ajansi, 2013). Hosting as well several Egyptian opposition channels and journalists in exile to tone up their rhetoric against events that should be heard about in Egypt by public, which make Cairo perceive Ankara as a permanent threat to its stability and constantly doubt its intentions and motives in the region (Sofuoglu, 2018).

Against this background, the regional security complex theory argues the presence of two regional security dynamics whilst analyzing a regional situation, being mainly securitization, where actors securitize each other for survival and treat each other as security threats (Katman, 2018). On the other hand, desecuritization is subject to the promotion of integration and stabilization plans within the analyzed region (Katman, 2018). Based on the present indications, the formation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020 is projected as a prominent remedy for regional actors such as Greece, Cypriot, Egypt and Israel to desecuritize each other in terms of the promotion of the exploration activities of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean through the creation of several bilateral and tri-lateral treaties along with the demarcation of their EEZs (Katman, 2018). Have these countries consolidated good relations with each other, the developments that took place had in fact immense impact on Turkey’s isolation and exemption in the region. Turkey comes across as being the sole Eastern Mediterranean country that was intensively securitized by its neighbors, facing as such, rejection from the operating regional natural gas cooperation plans. In fact, there exist numerous co-operation agreements between the stated quasi-alliance of cooperation surrounding the political, economic, energy and military levels when some of which has been operating starting since 2009 (Tziarras, 2016). For instance, Greece and Israel signed military along with several other agreements that ended up with the sign of a joint committee for strategic security cooperation against terrorism in 2011 (Midkiff, 2012: 49)

followed by another treaties of military nature in 2015 ([Middle East Monitor, 2015](#)) Greek Administration and Israel as well has signed multiple agreements to promote military and defense cooperation in 2012 and in the summer of 2015 they created a Cooperation Committee to strengthen their bilateral agreements in the defense and security arenas ([Tziarras, 2016](#)). Soon after that, areas of cooperation between Israel and Cyprus multiplied to cover the energy sector aimed at defending Cyprus stance in the subject of its extraction and exploitation areas of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean primarily against Turkey's claims, which intensified Turkey's insecurities in the region ([Tziarras, 2016](#)). Against this background, agreements mainly covered the subject of co-exploitation of the natural gas reserves between the two countries particularly, the Cypriot reserves of Aphrodite, and Israeli's reserves in "Leviathan" and "Tamar" ([Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 2011](#); [Athanasopoulos, 2012](#)). The following few examples of the cooperation projects and the progressively on-going negotiations undertaken between all of Israel, Cyprus and Greece are absolutely a testimony of their firmly-built relations, which in fact bypasses the act of balancing threats toward a collective motivation into realizing the full pro-longed integration and reaching complete desecuritization dynamics in the region was merely a fruitful result to a number of historical, energy, economic and security motivations the concerned states had in common ([Tziarras, 2016](#)). In fact, they collectively consider Turkey as a threat, the negative stance they hold around Turkey and Turkey's bad relations with the above stated countries played a decisive role in the determination of their securitization plans against it, which resulted in Ankara's ultimate isolation ([Tziarras, 2016](#)).

To sum up this part, there exist several variables that led to Turkey's isolation in the region, most of which according to the Regional Security Complex theory are the patterns of durable amity and enmity among states in the region, which was the pro-longed conflict case between Turkey and Greece since 1874. Add to that, the different political and social culture Northern Turks and Southern Greeks adopt in Cyprus, which strained the process of their integration in the region. The present was also the case with Israel, in fact, Turkish- Israeli relations deteriorated particularly in 2010, after Turkey's bold foreign policy claims in veering toward the Arab side against Israel's coercive perceptions in the region, impeding as such the progress of the long-established diplomatic ties with the country, which in turn threatened and warned Israel. Adjacency of geography is another thing to add to the list of security threats under the present theory, where pressures of geographical proximity between all of Turkey, Cyprus and Greece is a crucial force to their unresolved land, air and sea sovereignty claims. Being the main reasons as well behind Israel's fear of a military confrontation against Turkey, as proximate states are frequently influenced by the power and intentions of their neighbors, which led major regional actors to consolidate their state to state relations, except with Turkey.

States Balance of Threat Reaction

Against this background, and due to the threat stances analyzed earlier by collective powers of all of Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt and also due to their interrelated motivations and goals in the region, the present emerges as an alliance formed intentionally to counter-balance Turkey's perceptions in the region and weaken its power influence ([Tziarras, 2016](#)). In fact, the factors that led to their alignment through the creation of several energy and security-oriented inter-state partnerships, are mainly triggered by the collective deterioration of their relations against the common actor being in this case, Turkey ([Tziarras, 2016](#)).

there exist both power-profit and threat-related incentives that led to the establishment of the EastMed Gas Forum in 2020 without the inclusion of Turkey, despite being a key player to the stability of the region. A cluster of historical, energy, economic and security forces gave rise to the alignment of Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt against the common perceived threat in the region being Turkey ([Tziarras, 2016](#)). Most importantly, Turkey's deteriorated relations with all four countries exemplified a catalyst role to their alliance to balance against its power and threat ([Tziarras, 2016](#)).

Establishment of the East Med Gas Forum

The decentralization and regionalization plans of the international system often establish new regional approaches to facilitate demystifying the new geopolitical order, stability and peace procedures along with security dynamics in a region ([Tziarras, 2018](#)). Regionalization highlights the importance of organization and non-state actors in promoting multipolarity of the international order, which consists of coming up with new ideas and actors to facilitate cooperation between them.

The process is significantly useful in terms of building regional resources and enhancing security affairs between states through peaceful negotiations and dialogue (Tziarras, 2018), the discovery of the seabed hydrocarbon wealth of the Eastern Mediterranean advanced agency and fostered relations between regional states as never to be unprecedentedly seen. Eastern Mediterranean states leaned toward regionalization and institutionalization to promote their cooperation and interdependence (Tziarras, 2018). Member states in this case, enjoy an advantageous position learning from the The European Union (EU) and The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a model to realize regional development and integration (Tziarras, 2018). That said, although the establishment of the East Med would bring about fruitful outcomes, the exemption of Turkey is an issue to be addressed before implementing a full inter-state network in the region (Tziarras, 2018). Given Turkey's troubled relations vis a vis its neighbors, the cooperation occurred based on institutionalization is as a counter-balance to Turkey, which the act itself will impede the further stability and progress of the region (Tziarras, 2018). A number of reasons contributed to its exclusion, some of which are related to the pro-longed issue of the Cyprus problem, the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy with regards to supporting Arab Palestinians at the expense of Israel's incentives in the region, its support for the rise of Muslim Brotherhood party in Egypt along with its perceived intentions in the region noting the intimidating hard power capabilities it enjoys vis a vis its neighbors in the same region (Tziarras, 2018).

The Eastern Mediterranean Forum was formed on January 2020, it includes major Mediterranean countries from Egypt to Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Jordan, Palestine and Italy (Staff, 2020). Being officially converted to a regional organization, the forum aims at empowering cooperation projects in the region to include all forms of available energy in the area. It is the first international organization that connects gas producers, consumers and transit-countries under one entity (Staff, 2020). Sharing the same visions, its members aim at conjointly involve in all parts of the production and trade of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean region through financially supporting new infrastructure routes to transport natural gas such as pipelines and underwater electricity-related cables to facilitate the exportation of electricity and gas along with reducing the costs of production and transportation to member states (Qandil, 2020). Based on these indications, it would be a great disadvantage for the countries that have not yet joined the entity especially to Turkey, Spain, Algeria and Portugal as it is estimated to gain further international interest especially in the near future being under the permanent observation of the USA and France's request to join the forum (Qandil, 2020).

Bilateral and Trilateral partnerships since 2003

The orientation toward excluding Turkey through undermining its exclusive economic arenas in the region has started years ago, some of the bilateral and tri-lateral agreements were signed starting from the year of 2003 and so on (Tziarras, 2016).

Within this context, one of the prominent treaties were signed on the month of February in 2003 between Egypt and Cyprus for the sake of strengthening their diplomatic links based on cooperation in the maritime field and delimitation of EEZs between both countries, which will facilitate the share of their maritime resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, the treaty worked in conjunction with the UN convention of the Law of the Sea (United Nations, 2004). Moreover, both countries signed other bilateral agreements in the year of 2012 for the sake of promoting cooperation on gas exploration in the area (Tziarras, 2016). The second agreement emerged between Egypt and Israel in 2005 with an aim to transmit Egyptian natural gas to Israel in a 15-year deal via an undersea pipeline from the north Egyptian of el-Arish to the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon, highlighting as such the solid established trust and peace between both actors (The New York Times, 2005). Another treaty signed between Cyprus and Lebanon in 2007, the partnership also targeted cooperative gas exploration plans between both actors. In addition, a growing alignment between the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean countries occurred in another treaty recognized between all of Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine under the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) in 2020 with concerns to promote activities of gas exploration and production in the region along with other bi-lateral treaties formed exclusively between Egypt and Greece on 6 August 2020 (Tziarras, 2016).

The cooperation agreements soon consisted of treaties covering new range of fields regarding politics, economic, energy and military (Tziarras, 2016). Especially those between Greece and Israel, which have started since 2009 with an aim to foster military cooperation against terrorism

and security-related issues, followed by a joint committee for strategic security cooperation in 2011 (Tziarras, 2016). In 2015, another agreement on security and military affairs was signed (Middle East Monitor, 2020). Regarding Greek Administration and Israel, the agreement signed revolves around the defense and military cooperation in 2012. Parallely in 2015, they engaged in the foundation of a Cooperation Committee with an aim to strengthen their bilateral agreements in the fields of hard power security (Tziarras, 2016).

The indicated agreements soon led to Turkey's aggressive reactions in the Eastern Mediterranean after being completely left out and exempted. Being conscious that the events will undermine its position toward profiting from the discovered energy resources, especially during a time where it feels desperate to confront its economic stagnation and reduce the energy importing rate of foreign countries being at its highest level 95%, Ankara therefore veered toward signing two Memoranda of Understanding with the Government of national Accord (GNA) recognized by the UN in Tripoli in 2019 (Ongun, 2020). One of these agreements connotes a military cooperation agreement, whereas the other is about demarcating the EEZs between Turkey and Libya, the treaty has efficiently changed the game rules in the region to the benefit of Ankara as it countered the conjoint claims of the already established EEZs between all of Greece, Egypt and Cyprus, which led to further intensifications in the region (Ongun, 2020). In addition, Turkey signed a military cooperation treaty that guarantees Turkey's hard power support to the GNA against the efforts of General Khalifa Haftar, who is supported by France, Egypt, UAE and Russia, which stimulated tensions during the Libyan civil war upheavals (Ongun, 2020). Having eventually succeeded in the war, Turkey now enjoys a great military presence in Libya that challenges Greece, Cyprus and Egypt over their maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean and pressed Greece's claims by operating exploration attempts through sending the Oruç Reis, an energy exploration ship supported by five naval vessels in waters near the Greek island of Kastellorizo to affirm its position in the region, which augmented the escalation cycle in the Eastern Mediterranean (Ongun, 2020) but also made actors aware of Turkey's determination and valuable diplomatic strategy in protecting its rights on the assumption of the inefficiency of solving emerging issues based on mutual dialogue and compromise.

Turkey's Reaction to Developments in the Region

Ankara has undertaken several adjustments in terms of its foreign policy since 2002 revolved around preserving its own rights and claims in the region under any circumstances, veering as a result from the portrayed unbiased position toward an assertive active foreign policy (Outzen, 2021). Turkey's reactive strategy connotes several strategic elements including adopting a doctrine that articulates and connects Turkey to its maritime claims and resource rights based on projecting and developing power capabilities, the doctrine is known as "the Mavi Vatan" or "Blue Native Land" (Outzen, 2021). Developers of the doctrine, naval officers Cihat Yayci and Cem Gurdeniz, assert that the doctrine is protective in nature and aimed at fostering compromise and fairness rather than dominance in the region (Outzen, 2021). At the time when developers insist the strategy's purpose would boost Turkey's rights within the framework of the international law in the region, several other lectures and political analysts doubted the objective, arguing the strategy to be "Expansionist", "Neo-ottomanist" and thus ineffective in stimulating actors to work conjointly and cooperatively with Turkey (Outzen, 2021). The second element of Turkey's reactive strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean was to multiple its naval power projection tools relying mostly on its domestic production of ships and submarines, missiles and naval drones (Outzen, 2021). The third strategy revolves around bestowing executive trainings and recent modern equipment to the Turkish Navy for the sake of extending their reach along with signing access agreements with foreign navies such as with those of Qatar, Libya and Albania and signing demarcation of EEZ agreement in late 2019 with Libya to further its interests in the Mediterranean (Outzen, 2021). Finally, Turkey has been also working tremendously within the framework of international law to reiterate its legal stance and concerns within the region and calming recent troubled waters by restoring negotiation plans with several key actors in the region after a considerable strain of relations during the end of this year (2021), the act included for instance, reviving diplomatic ties with Greece to negotiate maritime rights of both countries (Hurriyet Dailynews, 2021), with Egypt to process normalizing ambassadorial links and economic relations after a strain of more than ten years (El-Khazen, 2021) along with seeking a fresh start with Israel (Goren, 2021).

Against this background, Turkey believes there would be much more to be gained in the region with its inclusion. Once the deals in the region will enable all the concerned littoral actors to benefit from the energy finds in the Mediterranean without exception, the region is estimated to become eventually stable and prosperous (Outzen, 2021). Whereas Turkey's intimidation plans by neighbors with the help of foreign powers in the region will only undermine its rights and claims in the region, which will eventually lead to an escalation and intensification to the existing disputes as Turkey will not compromise with the hostile intentions that aim to violate its rights (Outzen, 2021). In fact, Turkey's foreign policy despite portrayed as hard and assertive, played a catalyst role in convincing actors that Ankara cannot be easily intimidated in the region and that peaceful negotiations and a compromise seems to be a more promising path to all the actors in the region (Outzen, 2021).

4. Conclusion

This paper argues that the alliance of Israel, Cyprus, Greece and Egypt is not a mere coincidence or an established cooperation aimed at merely targeting their economic interests and resource-needs in the future. Yet, it explores the core motivations behind the states' alignment in the Eastern Mediterranean against one defined actor, being Turkey.

As discussed above in the theoretical section, states often undertake efforts in forming an alliance exclusively in the case of a common perceived threatening power, so the act is called a "balance of threat". Within the light of the Eastern Mediterranean case, Turkey comes across as an emerging rising power in the area, with strong economic power, military capabilities and different ideologies aiming to impose in the region, causing as a result a security dilemma to all of these countries. Israel is constantly menaced by its deteriorated relations with its major Arab neighbors in the Middle East because of its severe politics adopted in tackling the Palestinian case, which on the other hand Turkey dearly and boldly supports. Within the framework of its relations with Greece, Ankara poses a threat to Athens in terms of its assertive claims in the region surrounding unresolved maritime boundaries rights, unrecognized sovereignly claims over land, sky and sea along with the prolonged social, cultural and political issues between both parties. In Egypt, Cairo feels menaced by Turkey's hostile discourse in undermining the legitimacy of Sissi's administration of Egypt, which emerged after the outbreak of a coup in 2013 and its undemocratic politics. Turkey also depressed Egypt's interests and objectives in Libya after its opposed intervention in 2019 supporting the UN recognized government of national accord in Libya, which created a sense of threat against Turkey in the region. In this respect, the present volume determines that the nature of Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt's alliance is an act formed intentionally to counter-balance the threat opposed by Turkey in the region. Most of these countries shares different perspectives of threat with Turkey and at different levels, which gave their alliance a new edge of importance, being once to share the estimated economic interests found in the region and most importantly to meet the security and balance of threat motives they commonly perceive in Turkey. In terms of the balance of threat theory, the approach was a useful pattern to allow unfolding Turkey's supreme potential in the Eastern Mediterranean and the sources of threat the other neighboring countries perceive in Turkey, which brought forth the process of its isolation. Turkey's threatening status in the region was then concluded by actors given to its rising *aggregate power* in terms of population, military and resources capacities. The outcome of power rise in intimidating the most approximate neighbors in the region and thus subsequently face a aligned opposition were all demystified through the *geographical proximity* of Turkey to all of Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Egypt. *Offensive intentions* of Ankara were also measured based on the conjunction of two basic initiatives, being the geographical proximity it has and its rising military power primarily during the recent years especially of (2019–2020). Lastly, the actors' estimated *aggressive intentions* they perceive in Ankara led to its ultimate isolation, the idea was further explained in terms of Turkey's new assertive and power-driven foreign policy in the region mainly being the adoption of the "Blue Homeland" doctrine, and the bold assertive statements Turkey uses in defending its rights and ideological perceptions in the region. The regional security complex pattern granted a helpful assumption in strengthening the role of patterns of *durable amity and enmity* among states in the region based on historical factors, long standing enmities or amities along with shared culture in demystifying the idea that regional power states project more threats than dominant powers as long as they are neighbors. Another conclusion can be drawn from the discussions presented in this

volume, the theory's relevance in pre-determining the outcome of the acts of cooperation, like what occurred with the institutionalized case of Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt or the act of exemption and exclusion, which was the case of Turkey. Based on this evidence, within this theory the reasons behind Turkey's isolation almost by-pass the material factors, yet concentrate more on the conjunction of perceptions of power and intent based on the study of the constructive state-to state relations situated upon the type of relationships among regional powers or long-standing historical rivalries or amities between states and the shared political and social culture states commonly enjoy. The theory also classified the actions based on which states securitize or desecuritize each other, based on the identified patterns of "enmity" or "amity". The desecuritization approach was evident in the analysis of the foundation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020 that connotes major Eastern Mediterranean littoral states with a concern to conjointly benefit from the gas resources found in the sea bed of the region. More essentially, states' insecurity in the region led most of them to initiate bi-lateral and tri-lateral agreements in terms of gas exploration and drillship activities along with the demarcation of their EEZs with each other without the consult of Turkey despite having common security and economic incentives in the region, which is a clear sign to their intentions in encircling and undermining Turkey's rights in the region.

Turkey emerged as a more strategic and assertive active power in the region, adopting a more realist approach to its foreign policy based on the multiplication of its naval power projections in the region and military presence in key places to showcase actors that Ankara is capable of a military confrontation during a time where solving the issues through mutual dialogue and compromise seem to be inefficient since Turkey's exemption will not bring the long-term stability and prosperity actors aspired for through Turkey's imprisonment. Turkey's strong diplomatic weight at both the regional and international levels and is witnessing an unprecedented rising economic and military power let it to not to be undermined.

Actors have to start working again conjointly with Turkey in addressing their issues starting from the low level of politics and concentrating more on the advantages their efforts will bring once the resource-based cooperation will take place with the equitable inclusion of the entitled actors to the region's wealth. The act seems to be the only promising way for all actors to enjoy a sustainable prosperous and stable region especially when dialogue focuses on cooperation plans instead of the protracted regional conflicts.

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