

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

Issue: Security challenges and regional cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean

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INTRODUCTION

The region of the Eastern Mediterranean has been home to many diplomatic and armed conflicts amongst most of the countries located in this area. From territorial concerns to maritime law disputes, it is a surprise that in a world of pandemics, wars and poverty, the main conflict is over diplomatic conflicts regarding countries' rights. The merging of old conflicts and the creation of new ones along with conflicting legal claims have caused Europeans a certain concern.

The heart of these tensions goes back many years to the conflicts over common ground between Greece and Turkey and the long-unsolved dispute in Cyprus for the gas fields. These tensions have grown enough to encompass the civil wars in Libya and Syria, and have drawn interest in countries as far away as the Russian Federation. The East Mediterranean's hydrocarbon riches can turn the region into one of the world's most important sources of natural gas. However, there are multiple barriers for the nations that have jurisdiction over these waters to ultimately take advantage of the resources lying there. Politics, conflicts and transportation costs are just some of the issues that need to be overcome in the next years.

If regional cooperation is finally achieved between the countries involved, it could mean a massive boost for Europe and the Middle East, a great reduction in electricity shortages and the potential of transforming the international energy market, since the profits of these projects would be immense. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to propose solutions for the issue at hand, since, if we do, civil wars and long-lasting disagreements between countries in the Eastern Mediterranean (East Med). will finally come to a halt.



Figure 1: Gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean (Getty Images)

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Eastern Mediterranean Countries

Eastern Mediterranean countries are considered to be the following: Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, Egypt and Jordan.

Continental Shelf

According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the continental shelf is considered to be the continuation of a country's land in the sea. The country has exclusive rights to the defined distance of roughly 370 km from shore and roughly 185 km beyond the 2500-metre isobaths.

Casus belli

It is an event that justifies a proxy war (a war that is instigated by a major non-involved power) or an armed conflict.

Procès-verbal

It is a written record of an official proceeding.

Exclusive economic zone (EEZ)

It is defined as an area of coastal water within a certain distance off the coast, to which the country has exclusive rights for activities such as fishing, drilling and other economic or exploratory activities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Aegean Continental Shelf disputes

The disputes between Greece and Turkey date back to November 1973, when the gazette of the Turkish government authorized their national petroleum company to research the Greek continental shelf west of the Eastern Aegean region. Since this decision, the violations of the Greek rights on the continental shelf have made the relations between the countries extremely fragile, and they were close to becoming a “casus belli” three times in the past (1974, 1976, and 1987). In 1976, Greece decided to bring the issue before the Security Council and later to the International Court of Justice. However, the Turkish side did not recognize the court’s jurisdiction and therefore did not attend court.

There was a launch of negotiations in November 1976 with the signing of the Berne procès-verbal that set a framework for dialogue until the issue was finally examined. The dialogue was inconclusive, and the negotiation framework ceased to apply, rendering another attempt to solve the issue unsuccessful. However, in March 2002, an ongoing agreement of confidential explorations was made to find out to what extent there is common ground and if there is ground for negotiations for a final agreement under the Law of the Sea.

The disputes at hand concern the expansion of territorial waters, the greater airspace, the legal status of certain geographical features and the demilitarization of the Eastern Aegean Islands. Starting with the maritime boundaries between the countries, there is yet to be an agreement. As it stands, the territorial sea of both Turkey and Greece in the Aegean is 6 nautical miles. However, it is a fundamental element that such boundaries should be bound by an agreement that stands according to international law. Also, the Continental Shelf areas have yet to be bound by an agreement. The two countries have no jurisdiction beyond the 6 nautical miles of territorial sea.

Closing with the status of the Eastern Aegean islands, this status stands under relevant international instruments such as the Treaty of Lausanne and the Paris Peace Treaty, in 1923 and 1947 respectively. However, Greece has broken this status by militarizing certain islands such as Lesbos, Chios and Samos as a response to Turkey’s invasion in Cyprus after the Greek coup. Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974, violating the Cyprus Treaty of

Guarantee, to which Greece is a signatory state. Turkey violated the basic terms of this guarantee where it is stated that the Republic of Cyprus has the right of sovereignty over its lands throughout the island. Turkey continues to maintain military forces in the occupied territories despite the numerous Security Council resolutions and pressure from the United Nations.



Figure 2: The territorial sea limitations as they stand

The Maritime Delimitation issue and the East Med pipeline

The recent discovery of rich gas reserves has drawn the attention to most of the Eastern Mediterranean states and has triggered tensions between Turkey and Cyprus over who will take advantage of these reserves. Cyprus and Turkey have contending claims in the waters that surround the island, as they venture into each other's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The region is delimited under the EEZ Delimitation Agreement signed in 2003 between Cyprus and Egypt.

The leaders of Israel, Cyprus and Greece met in Athens to jointly create the framework that is required to build an undersea pipeline that would transport gas from new offshore deposits to continental Europe. However, Turkey was excluded from this joint agreement, as it has not made any discoveries in its waters yet. Of course, this race to secure offshore energy deposits has brought tensions between allies Greece and Cyprus and rivals Turkey. In contrast to Cyprus extraction permits issues, Ankara has chosen a more alternative approach for gas exploration, taking advantage of the suspension of operations from major oil companies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Turkey has already deployed drills and vessels inside the Cypriot EEZ, even in places where private oil companies have been granted exploration and extraction rights there. These actions have caused the reaction of

several nations inside and outside the EU (e.g. UAE, Egypt, France, Greece and Cyprus) that have released statements stating that such actions represent a violation of international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The concern was raised after Ankara confirmed it intends to intensify its illegal drilling off the island.

The aforementioned pipeline project faces backlash once again from Turkey, as they claimed a section of the Mediterranean that the pipeline must pass through as its maritime jurisdiction. Of course, Turkey could have a major interest if they were involved in the project so that could be a reason for them to make the claim. However, Greece had already claimed the area in a 2011 law, therefore the European Union has declared Turkey's move legally invalid. East Med backing nations such as Greece, Israel and Cyprus are called to find a solution for this claim.



Figure 3: The East Med pipeline course. The pipeline will connect with the Arab world through Syria, where it will connect with Greece, Cyprus and Italy.

Crisis in Turkey-Israel relations

The relations between the two countries are very sensitive after Israeli commandos killed eight Turkish and one US citizen (of Turkish descent) in May 2010. The citizens killed in the incident were activists on board a flotilla attempting to break the Gaza blockade imposed due to the conflict in Gaza. Since then, the two countries have not had high-end diplomatic relations, despite some attempts from both sides to maintain cooperation that have unfortunately failed. The level of suspicion has been increasing even reflecting personal hostility between Erdogan and Netanyahu. After the flotilla incident, the Turkish

president has shown his fullest support to Palestine and has found his wish of having access to the Gaza Strip more difficult than ever, since the relationships between Turkey and Egypt have also deteriorated. The transfer of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and the demonstrations in the Gaza Strip led Turkey to withdraw its ambassador in 2018 and to instruct Israel to return its ambassador in Turkey to Jerusalem for consultations.

Public opinion has been against Israel, with the flotilla incident as their main attack towards them. Media and non-governmental organizations that benefit from this crisis in relations between Ankara and Jerusalem have played a major role in the escalation of this crisis. On the other hand, Greece and Cyprus, Israel's allies, have suggested that the incident was due to Turkey's aggression and their relations with Israel have become even warmer.

There were some signs of improvement in the relations of the two countries In the last months with negotiations between the two leaders taking place and the humanitarian help that Turkey sent to the people affected by the Gaza Strip crisis, as well as the effort of creating maritime boundaries between the countries. However, these rumors were unfortunately declared false by Turkish officials and the intentions of Israel for the West Bank will not be helpful for the relations of the two countries.



Figure 4: Humanitarian aid and a Turkish delegation were sent to Gaza to help with the conflict and the demonstrations.

The Syrian conflict

In January 2011, after an interview with Syria's Assad about the protest situation in the Arab world and the socio-economic state of the country, an uprising soon began in Syria.

The environmental crisis also played a major role in the uprising. Between 2006 and 2010, Syrians experienced the worst drought in the country's modern history.

By the summer of 2011, Syria's regional neighbors and global powers had been split into pro and anti-Assad camps. European leaders and US President Barack Obama urged Assad to step down, while long-standing allies Iran and Russia continued their support. An indicator of the rivalries was the first vetoes from Russia and China to block a Security Council resolution that would secure Assad's fall. By 2012, the armed conflict had expanded into a civil war.

In 2012, the Arab League managed to secure agreements with the Syrian government for the protection of the protesters and for Arab League representatives to monitor the situation in Syria. Soon, though, the conflict continued and the representative teams from the League and the UN had to be withdrawn for security reasons.

In 2013, when it was clear that diplomacy was not alleviating the situation, global forces and Syria's allies started equipping the rebels and Syrian forces respectively.

The conflict continues to this day and is constantly escalating. Innocent people have been killed and even more are threatened from bombings and mass killings. The global force involvement is immense, and some would say that is bigger than the actual conflicting sides' one. Long terms solutions on the issue are not presently at hand.

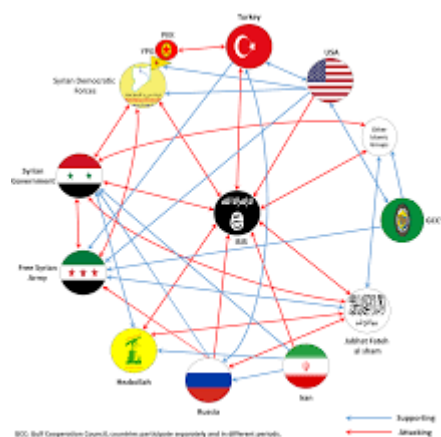


Figure 5: The foreign involvement in the Syrian Civil

War

The Israel-Palestine conflict

The conflict between the two neighboring states, which has been evolving since the end of the nineteenth century, continues to this day. Since the conflicts for territory during the Six-Day War, where Israel managed to conquer East Jerusalem, there has been a significant uprising among the Palestinians, starting in 1987, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Oslo Accords in 1993 eased the conflict, by giving the chance to the Palestinians to govern themselves by setting up a certain framework. However, in 2000, the second intifada, which was a serious conflict between Israeli and Palestinian extremist groups unfortunately began and eventually, in 2015, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced that Palestine would not be bound by the Oslo Accords.

There are concerns over a third intifada that could mean that escalated tensions could lead to large-scale violence. Of course, the United States has an interest in protecting their ally, Israel, and improving regional security.

One of the major headlines in recent years has been the approval of Donald Trump, the current president of the United States, to move the American Embassy in Israel, from its initial position in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and at the same time, formally recognizing Jerusalem as the official capital city of the country. This move from the POTUS was criticized and was considered the most controversial political move of recent history by experts in the field. The United States and the White House fully support the current territorial situation in Jerusalem, opposing the majority of the Member United Nations States, a stance that may be harmful for their beneficial hierarchical position.

Despite recognizing the west side of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which is the side that was occupied by the country before the Six-Day War, the Russian Federation has refused to move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. To justify such action, Russia's ambassador to Israel, Anatoly Viktorov explained: "The issue of transferring the Russian Embassy to Jerusalem is off the agenda...Russia is committed to the international legal framework concerning Jerusalem, including corresponding United Nations Security Council resolutions". The resolutions mentioned condemn Israel's actions in Jerusalem. This raises concerns in Russia's intentions and contradicts Russia's initial position upon the issue at hand.



Figure 6: The annexation of the West Bank and the conflict between Israel and Palestine

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

European Union (EU)

The Eastern Mediterranean issue has brought the EU and Turkey to increased tensions since the policy of Turkey disrupts Europe's agenda as member states of the EU are involved. Europe is expected to cover a large amount of its energy needs with the East Med pipeline and has addressed Turkey multiple times to not interrupt neighbour nations' progress. Turkey's wish to enter the EU makes this conflict even more complicated.

Furthermore, many member states of the EU have been involved in the Syria issue and have supported the forces involved.

United States of America (USA)

As always, the involvement of the United States has been very notable. When it comes to the Israel-Palestine conflict, the United States has made its stance clear by recognizing Jerusalem as the capital and transferring their embassy there. These actions have also made Turkey take evasive action, thus worsening the crisis between them and Israel. Moreover, in the Syrian conflict, the USA has been one of the major but most cautious supporters of the rebels and has major influence over the conflict.

The United States has made the achievement of a deal between Israel and Palestine one of its priorities, but their decision to move their embassy to Jerusalem has been condemned by Palestine and other Middle East Nations, and they have yet to release their proposal for a peace process.

Greece

Greece is one of the major states involved in the Eastern Mediterranean scene, since they have conflicts with Turkey over the Continental Shelf rights and their maritime delimitation agreements that are not bound to international law or even to an official agreement. They are also part of the forum for the East Med pipeline and have a very sensitive and defensive approach in their discussions and their rivalry with Turkey.

Turkey

Turkey has been one of the main characters in some of the Eastern Med conflicts. The conflicts between their policy and those of other countries are disrupting progress for the European states located in the area and are causing major diplomatic trouble that needs to be addressed.

Israel

Israel is currently involved in almost every major crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean. They are part of the East Med forum and are trying to figure out a long-term solution for their conflict with Palestine and the United Nations over Jerusalem as well as for their unsuccessful diplomatic solutions with the state of Turkey.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
November 1973	The Turkish governmental gazette authorizes the national petroleum company to start exploring in the Greek Continental Shelf.
July 1974	Turkey invades the Northern part of Cyprus.
November 1976	The Berne proces-verbal is signed for a negotiation framework about the Continental Shelf issue.
1976	The Continental Shelf case is brought to the ICJ, and the verdict is no jurisdiction.
1993	The Oslo Accords are signed.

March 2002	A framework for negotiations that still exists to this day is set for Greece and Turkey.
May 2010	The flotilla incident happens, and eight Turkish citizens are killed by Israeli commandos. This is considered the start of the Turkish-Israeli crisis.
2012	The Arab League manages to close an agreement to monitor the protests that were happening in Syria.
2013	Global forces begin to support the rebel forces and the Syrian government with arms and resources. All diplomatic discussions come to a halt.
2015	Palestine president announces that Palestine would no longer be bound by the Oslo Accords.
2018	The United States officially recognizes Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel and the US embassy is moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.
2018	Turkey withdraws its ambassador from Israel and advises the Israeli ambassador in Turkey to return to his country for instructions.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The decision of the ICJ on the Aegean Sea Continental Shelf

Greece decided to appeal to the International Court of Justice to decide on the issue of the Continental Shelf. However, Turkey questioned the validity of a decision from the ICJ since they believe that this issue is political and not legal. Therefore, the verdict was of no jurisdiction due to lack of competence.

Resolution S/RES/2401

It was adopted unanimously, and it demanded a cessation of hostilities in Syria.

Resolution S/RES/2254

This was the first resolution focused on finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Resolution S/RES/2249

It called for the necessary measures on the territory under the control of ISIS to prevent terrorist acts committed by terrorist and extremist groups.

Resolution S/RES/1860

This resolution called for an immediate, durable, and fully respected ceasefire leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip.

Presidential Statement S/PRST/2014/13

This statement called for respect of international humanitarian law and the achievement of a durable ceasefire, as well as for the implementation of resolution 1860.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Two important agreements are recognized as the most important attempts for a solid and long-term solution. Both agreements were opposed by the Turkish side.

Cyprus-Egypt delimitation agreement (2003)

This agreement attempted to propose a solid solution for the maritime delimitation issue. However, it was rejected by Turkey since it opposed their policy on the issue and their rights over the island of Cyprus.

Cyprus-Lebanon agreement (2007).

Many diplomatic discussions and agreements were conducted for the annexation of the West Bank and the two-state solution. Turkey opposed this agreement for similar reasons as the one in 2003, as many factors were not fulfilling any of the state's expectations, while the continuous hostility has not helped the situation at all. Additionally, Turkey's attempts to influence public opinion have caused tensions for civilians.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The Aegean Continental Shelf dispute

There are plenty of solutions for this issue, but there is no way to implement these solutions if there is no intention for cooperation from all sides involved. That is the reason that both sides should be willing and available to participate in long-term and high-end diplomatic discussions so there can be a middle solution that can benefit both parties involved in the issue. In the case of Greece and Turkey, which disagree on whether the issue at hand is of a legal or a political manner, the disagreement stops the case to be under the jurisdiction of reliable juridical bodies such as the International Court of Justice. The two countries must conduct discussions to decide whether the matter will be solved between them or if it needs a third-party intervention for it to be cleared.

Also, another obligation the two sides have is to respect international law of the sea and to not challenge one another with actions that even worsen tensions or limit the chances of intentions for diplomatic discussions. There must always be a climate of trust and respect towards international law and internal relations established to achieve solid cooperation.

EastMed pipeline issue

The main issue of the pipeline project is that Turkey is not a part of the cooperation between Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt and so they wish to be part of this project. One solution to the issue is for the 4 countries to welcome Turkey to the forum and allow them to claim an interest in it. For this solution to be successful, however, all actions that might lead to tensions between the states have to be immediately eradicated to ensure cooperation. In any event, Turkey's abidance with International Law is essential.

The Turkey-Israel crisis

This issue can only be solved by discussion and diplomacy. The two countries should restart their diplomatic relations and start dialogues to manage regional cooperation once again. Additionally, the media that are usually government-affiliated should not promote hostility and hatred between the states. The efforts of the past few months with the humanitarian aid and with the discussions between the leaders should continue to secure cooperation in the long term.

The Syrian conflict

The Syrian government and all global forces involved have moved past diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the conflict. Without the immense support with arms and resources by the global forces, the two sides would weaken and thus would be forced to end the conflict. So instead of showing military support, they should show support by diplomatic means.

The Israel-Palestine conflict

UN has proposed that the borders should be like the pre-1967 ones where Israel had control over the East side of the city.

The one-state solution, sometimes also called a bi-national state, is a proposed approach to resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Some Israelis advocate another version of the one-state solution in which Israel will annex the West Bank, but not the Gaza Strip and remain a Jewish state with a larger Arab minority.

Many Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the Arab League, have stated that they would accept a two-state solution based on the 1949 Armistice Agreements, more commonly referred to as the "1967 borders".

The two-state solution has been described as the “only way to guarantee peace” by Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General. For a two-state solution to be possible, nevertheless, a sustainable and democratic Palestinian government needs to be established.

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