



PERSPECTIVES

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New Strategic Dimensions of the Eastern Mediterranean

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The geostrategic, diplomatic, and economic influence of the Eastern Mediterranean is more significant today than ever before. This creates opportunities for Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, but also increases the challenges and perils ahead.

For the first time since the collapse of the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Mediterranean is in the midst of a tectonic shift.

The region presents all the required attributes to function as a distinct sub-regional system in the 21st century's international environment. The Eastern Mediterranean holds the interest of the great powers (the US, Russia, and China); it contains resolute regional actors that influence the sociopolitical orbit of the region (Israel, Egypt, and Turkey); and international diplomacy may create firm ties between states that go far beyond normative alliance arrangements and thus function as power maximizers for the parties concerned (Greece and Cyprus). There are also two ongoing civil wars in the region that offer a venue in which the great powers can sharpen their claws, often by proxy (Syria and Libya). There are two major basins with potential natural gas resources that can play a decisive role in the difficult transition period from oil energy monopoly to alternative energy resources (the Nile Delta Basin and the Levant Basin).

Today, the Eastern Mediterranean has taken on the grim role the Balkans played in the early 20th century. Political and economic volatility affects more or less every state in the region. The cycle of violence, either in the form of open civil war or in terms of domestic troubles, seems almost impossible to stop

solely through external institutional intervention or pleas deriving from international law.

Regarding the latter: events in the region prove that in Hobbesian geostrategic conditions, the implementation of international law as the ultimate tool for effective crisis resolution is utterly futile. The region has never before witnessed such a profound period of high competition among major players – and such a prolonged period of uncertainty and gloom regarding the sociopolitical prospects of the states. This can be seen in qualitative and quantitative data regarding local economies, social cohesion, happiness, and so on.

However, not everything in the Eastern Mediterranean deserves to be approached through so Stygian black a shade of analysis. Israel, for example, is gradually becoming an IT superpower. The so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution has been hastened on an international level by Israeli companies and academic institutions that are actively researching and manufacturing. This might lead the whole region into a “Hi-Tech Spring” that could generate wealth, open up new jobs, tackle unemployment and radicalization among underprivileged youth, and counter the negative aura of the “Arab Spring” that continues to torment the region.

Cyprus, too, has left the economic crisis behind and now has the potential to be a reliable partner with the western world in transforming the Eastern Mediterranean into a lake of technological advancement.

Last but not least, the US has shown that it has returned to the region for good after a short but critical period that will be labeled in the historical analysis as one of cognitive denial – a period during which Russia took the opportunity to reestablish itself in the region. Washington’s recent decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, the capital of the state of Israel since King David’s reign, is a pivotal political move that may result in a strengthening of the Realist side within the Palestinian Authority and, as a result, enable positive steps towards resolving the conundrum of the Palestinian Question.

Quite often in international politics, a bold decision is the only useful step with which to achieve advancement. The Balfour Declaration and the embassy move are excellent examples. Also, Washington’s decision to reactivate the Second Fleet in order to bolster the US and NATO presence in the Atlantic means the role of the Sixth Fleet becomes even more salient, a development that strengthens the strategic triangle of Greece-Cyprus-Israel through the multidimensional operational advancement of NATO’s infrastructure in Greece and through close cooperation of the three states at the military level.

The US is also now showing a clear interest in challenging Russian Sharp Power and its consequences in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Balkan states as well. This may result not only in a strengthening of social awareness in general but also in a more stable and effective domestic political apparatus.

After a period of vigorous rejection, the US seems to be coming to terms with an international reality in which the systemic balance of power is under the influence of a firmly established multipolar reality. The recognition of this political fact is making the US much more willing and prepared to make the kinds of decisions that reinforce a western “smart” presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and underpin the status of the regional western elements (Greece, Cyprus, and Israel) as well.

Nevertheless, this must not be seen as a panacea for the domestic problems that affect the everyday functioning of those aforementioned states, particularly Greece. The establishment of a multipolar international modus operandi means interstate competition, and in some cases antagonism, will grow considerably, and soon. Therefore, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel must be prepared not only to face the music but to change the tune.

This means their role in the politics of the Eastern Mediterranean must be more active and constructive. This can be done only if the three states stop thinking regionally in political terms and begin to formulate a more extroverted strategy that will take into consideration the full international picture.

The future of the western world depends on the reinforcement of transatlantic prospects. Effective cooperation between the two coasts of the Atlantic on every level, and a deepening of the institutional modus vivendi between them, is vitally important and will drastically affect the way the global economy, technology, and diplomacy evolve in the decades to come.

The elevation of the Eastern Mediterranean to the status of a distinct sub-system requires that the region play a constructive role in the deepening of transatlantic functioning. This offers Greece, Cyprus, and Israel the opportunity to serve as regional pioneers of the transatlantic era and thereby shape the future. Athens, Nicosia, and Jerusalem must internalize the ancient Greek proverb that God helps those who help themselves. Whoever is not prepared to exit his comfort zone will be left behind.

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