Russia and Turkey: A Roller Coaster Relationship between Securitization and Cooperation

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ABSTRACT

Understanding perceptions of Russian and Turkish foreign policy from their imperial past up to the present day constitutes a continuing puzzle for historians and policy practitioners alike. Now, because of their ambitious ideological posturing and power projections, the need to examine some of the most-discussed features of Moscow's and Ankara's respective approaches to foreign policy has arisen anew. What is novel and significant is to address how the emergence of the individual efforts of Russia and Turkey to secure a greater global role for themselves reflects a new *modus vivendi* whereby they continue cooperating, despite serious conflictual areas between them.

Keywords: East-Med Gas Forum, NATO, European Union, Energy, Security Community

Introduction

Over the last two decades, relations between Russia and Turkey have flip-flopped between conflict and cooperation, thanks to the resurgence of the assertive foreign policy of both Moscow and Ankara. Russia, besides claiming a hegemonic role in global energy, is also bidding to play the role of kingmaker in the former Soviet territories that it now seeks to subsume and proclaim as part of its hinterland. In Moscow's view, their political borders count for less than the economic, political, historic, cultural or theological ties that once bound them together. Based on its 1993 "Near Abroad Doctrine", Russia acts to prevent any development that it has not consented to, in relation to the former Soviet territories.[1] In seeking to expand

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1   Devrim Şahin, "Turkey's Foreign Policy in Post-soviet Eurasia", *Middle East Policy* Vol. 29, No 3, 2022, p. 17.

its authority, Russia is creating a buffer zone against the West, by giving political and military support to separatist regimes in places such as Ukraine and Georgia, which were once part of the old Soviet domain.

Contrary to Moscow's preferences, Turkey, meanwhile, has strengthened its defence ties with Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan, in the process proving itself to be a historically and geopolitically important NATO member in the alliance's efforts to push back against Russia. However, over the last two decades, Turkey's commitment to its NATO membership obligations has weakened visibly. United States (U.S.) and European Union (EU) policies of support for the Kurdish regions of Syria and Iraq, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) agencies in NATO members' territories and the anti-Turkey alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean have contributed discernibly to the deterioration of overall Western relations with Turkey.

Having adopted a more independent approach, one that transcends its previously NATO-orientated foreign policy, Turkey now pursues an ambitious regional leadership role, while seeking to become an energy center. By following a relatively independent line from the rest of NATO, Ankara has found it possible to venture toward a pragmatic collaboration with Moscow to the extent that it can even conceivably find itself in conflict with NATO. Examples include Turkey's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system and its exclusion from the U.S. F-35 fighter jet program. Moreover, Ankara did not automatically follow NATO and the West when it came to the sanctions that were imposed against Moscow in response to Russia's war on Ukraine.

This study offers a new interpretation of the Russia-Turkey relationship's heavy reliance on the Copenhagen School and the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). Influenced by the constructivist approach's focus on the role of ideational mechanisms, the Copenhagen School coined the terms of securitization, sectors and RSCT.[2] RSCT suggests that perceptions of the historical friendship/hostility and their global roles pursued help trigger either cooperation or conflict between states. It examines the research question of how the RSCT effectively explains the growing cooperation between Russia and Turkey based on their shared common threat perceptions regarding the U.S. and the EU. NATO's expansion into former Soviet territories, plus the unapologetic support of the U.S. and EU for the energy-driven transformation of the Eastern Mediterranean, based on the exclusion of Turkey, has resulted in the emergence of a mutual security interdependence between Moscow and Ankara. It is noteworthy how Moscow's and Ankara's hostile perception of the Western powers offers fertile ground for the two to move closer to the kind of strategic cooperation that characterized their collaboration more than a century ago, when they stood shoulder-to shoulder against the imperialist West.[3]

As a methodology, the RSCT of the Copenhagen School offers an appropriate basis for studying Russia-Turkey relations. Conventionally, international security studies generally

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2   Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 48.

3   Ibid.

apply real-politics and liberal approaches in examining the subject matter under consideration. However, their focus on rational decision-making or economic and material interests remains inadequate when it comes to explaining the role of ideational factors in the enduring confrontations of Eurasia and in the Eastern Mediterranean. The methodological tools that the Copenhagen School contends, focus on how the changing international roles adopted by Russia and Turkey, and their shifting perceptions of hostilities and friendships, shape the processes of securitization and de-securitization between the two countries. Taking the RSCT as a starting point, the study examines the existing scholarly works, official discourses and sources, and national and international media outlets. In doing so, it analyzes Russian–Turkish relations, paying close scrutiny to the political actions and speeches of the actors involved in Eastern Mediterranean affairs.

Considering the Russian bases in Syria (without fully defined maritime borders), Turkey's coastline on the Eastern Mediterranean, plus the U.S. decision to lift its Cyprus arms embargo as a signal of escalation aimed at Moscow and Ankara, Russian-Turkish relations fit into the big picture of regional politics. Stepped up patterns of cooperation between the U.S., the EU, the Republic of Cyprus (under the Greek Cypriot government), Israel and Egypt add to notion that the security dilemmas concentrated in the Eastern Mediterranean are affecting and are affected by Moscow's and Ankara's security structures.

Closer cooperation with Russia entails a shift from Turkey's conventional role, based on acting as an "insulator state".[4] According to the RSCT definition, Turkey qualifies as an insulator state because of the unique position it occupies at the crossroads of the different security complexes of the East and West. Nevertheless, while the RSCT envisions insulator states remaining passive in their foreign policy, Ankara's determination to play a regional role differentiates Turkey from other insulator states, taking into consideration its economic, political and geographical characteristics, and its active foreign policy. Moreover, the concept of the RSCT insulator can be applied not only to states but to regions like the Eastern Mediterranean, which the RSCT examines, albeit narrowly.

Given its focus on the policies of the actors involved, with regard to the developing energy sources and infrastructure in the Eastern Mediterranean, with specific emphasis on Russian-Turkish relations, this study seeks to validate the RSCT, by applying it to the situation vis-à-vis the region. The second section mostly reviews theoretical work on security studies in International Relations, paying particular attention to the works of Copenhagen School of Security Studies scholars including Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde, and others.[5] The third section then looks at the actors involved in the Eastern Mediterranean, scrutinizing their position, interest and strategies. In the fourth section, the study examines the overlapping global roles pursued by the relevant actors and analyzes perceptions of hostility and friendship between Russia and Turkey. In culmination, the fifth section explains how analysis of the

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4   Andre Barrinha, "The Ambitious Insulator: Revisiting Turkey's Position in Regional Security Complex Theory", *Mediterranean Politics* Vol. 19, No 2, 2014, p. 166.

5   Barry Buzan, "A Framework for Regional Security Analysis", Barry Buzan and Gowher Rizvi (eds.), *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers*, London, Croom Helm, 1986, p. 40.

Russia-Turkey relationship leads to the conclusion that not only material or economic interests but global roles pursued and perceptions of enmity and friendship are determinant when it comes to inter-state relations.

The Concept of Region in International Security

A contested issue among scholarly studies on international security has been the definition of region, a concept evaluated on the basis of the interconnected relationship of various social, geographic and economic parameters.[6] Through the lens of a state-centric perspective of security studies, the conventional wisdom focuses on system-level and state-level analyses, while overlooking regional-level analyses. Emphasizing rational cost-benefit calculations to explain regional politics, realism conceptually defines regions as subsystems of an anarchic international system.[7] This explains the changes in the regional security field (i.e. the Russian presence in Syria and the growing U.S. military presence in Greece) because of the balance of power dynamics in the region, and the shift in international power distribution (i.e. the decline of U.S. hegemony).[8] Nevertheless, the state-centric approach of realism in regions remains limited to the scope of security and geography.

More inclusive analyses like those undertaken by the liberal and interdependence schools extend their focus to the regional level. They consider the inter-relationships of regional states and the international role pursued by such regional powers (actors with regional capacities and influences) as Turkey. In focusing on overlapping mutual interests, the liberal and interdependence approaches view regionalism as a state-centric cooperation process designed to reduce their security costs and protect their survival interests. While realism and liberalism remained mainstream theories throughout the Cold War, likely state-centric approaches to international security began to diminish to a degree in the 1970s and 1980s, when critical approaches emerged to suggest alternative explanations – such as that of the English School and critical security studies.[9] However, it was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 that prompted scholars to come up with analyses and theoretical approaches like social constructivism, which has since evolved as a mainstream paradigm. Since then, a theoretical debate between traditionalist realists' rationalism and the constructivists' view of security as a social construct has played out in the field of security studies.

Placing its analytical focus on the role of identity in tracing patterns of cooperation and conflict in the regionalization process, the constructivist approach has strongly influenced the Copenhagen School. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde came up with the terminology of securitization, socially constructed sectors, and regional security complexes based on the

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6   Louise Fawcett, "Exploring Regional Domains: A Comparative History of Regionalism", *International Affairs* Vol. 80, No 3, 2004, p. 433.

7   Buzan "A Framework for Regional Security Analysis", p. 41.

8   Ibid.

9   Ken Booth, "Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist", Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (eds.), *Critical Security Studies,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 83.

security practices of the relevant actors.[10] They argue that today's security relations cannot be explained simply through the multipolar system, the international system within which power is distributed among many actors rather than remaining in the hands of a single hegemon (unipolar system), or the two competing superpowers (bipolar system). The RSCT expands the scope of security in the field of security studies, by emphasizing the importance of regions created by intense mutual security interdependencies.[11]

Buzan and Wæver define regions as regular and geographically-clustered patterns, structured as the result of the interaction between states and actors such as NATO. In this context, the RSCT places the region at a point where national and international levels of state security analyses and other units intersect with each other. Buzan and Wæver imply a high-level interdependence between the interaction of the region, national security and international security, and note that these three security parameters cannot be considered separately from each other.[12] For example, NATO signifies a region in which the alliance represents a collective security system, plus its independent member states' security, while acknowledging their combined commitment to the principle of global democratic governance.

The way regional and great powers perceive regional patterns and models generated within the historical process, and the relationship style of these powers, are closely related to the concept of change in regional dynamics. Regional security emerges from both relations of friendship and enmity between states. Suspicion and fear are effective in the formation of regional security, much as the existence of the Soviet threat was effective in the formation of NATO. Conversely, the collapse of the Soviet Union weakened the commitment of the NATO allies, to the extent that at one point France's President Emmanuel Macron declared the military alliance "brain dead".

The RSCT addresses regional security relations in terms of a relatively autonomous area independent of other variables, and defines the resultant interactions at the state and systemic level. State-level analysis of physical and ideological power is key to understanding regional security. This has been the case with NATO's ideological institutionalization, based on Western-style liberal democracy, which initially sought to provide a counterweight to the Soviet Union and communism.

Buzan and Wæver define regional security complexes like NATO as security dilemmas concentrated in certain geographical areas.[13] The RSCT views these complexes as based on variables such as intense conflict-cooperation dynamics, geographical and historical proximity, and/or geopolitical rivalry relations. Two or more states can be mutually influenced by these variables.

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10 Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers*, p. 48.

11 Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p. 1.

12 Barry Buzan, "Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World", F. Söderbaum, T. M. Shaw (eds.), *Theories of Regionalism*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 44.

13 Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers,* p. 41.

Buzan and Wæver coined the concept of "insulator" to define territories standing at the center of a strong pattern of securitization, and separating the regional security complexes from each other. Insulators play a high-level role in explaining the international security network. In fact, the insulator concept can be used both for states and regions. Traditionally, the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey have displayed the intrinsic characteristics of an insulator region and an insulator state, situated in a locale of indifference between East and West. It is because of their insulator characteristics that the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey mutually influence each other.

Buzan and Wæver point out how an organization with no geography and clearly defined borders can serve regional security. Such an understanding of regionalism goes far beyond a representation of geography and a perception of security. Moving beyond geographical proximity, the Copenhagen School offers a definition of region, by stressing the need to show common elements where security priorities and security dynamics overlap. These elements create a binding dependence between "a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, de-securitisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved separately from one another".[14]

By dint of the securitization process in international relations, states identify the threats they perceive against their national security in terms of subjective rather than objective assessments. Based on threat perceptions to their national security, states securitize military, political, economic, societal, and environmental sectors, by adopting measures to strengthen their security. This process of securitization takes place not necessarily through public debate and the democratic process, but through elite-level processes such as speech-act and decisions of military or foreign policy elites.

The Copenhagen School views security as a speech-act, a group of declarations in public speeches and political pronouncements which represent and recognize phenomena as "security," thus admitting its special status and linking it to a specific interactive outcome.[15] The speech-act views the discourse itself as the act by which the discourse labels a threat (such as the issue of the securitization of the Eastern Mediterranean in Turkey) and calls for emergency measures.

In defining the term "region", the Copenhagen School builds on the concept of "security communities" suggested by Karl Deutsch.[16] This concept advocates that regional security benefits more when "communities" rather than states develop mutual relations.[17] Security communities and the states that form them forge an identity of "we" and "us" by promoting communication and transportation opportunities between social segments.[18] By doing so, they create common values.

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14 Ibid. 44.

15 Buzan, Waever and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework,* p. 26.

16 Karl W. Deutsch, "Communications Theory and Political Integration", Philip E. Jacob and James V. Toscano (eds.), *The Integration of Political Communities*, Philedelphia, Lippincott, 1964, p. 46.

17 Beril Dedeoğlu, "Yeniden Güvenlik Topluluğu: Benzerliklerin Karşılıklı Bağımlılığından Faklılıkların Birlikteliğine", *Uluslararası İlişkiler,* Vol. 1, No 4, 2004, p. 1.

18 Ibid.

Countries that collaborate within NATO exemplify a security community, representing an operating base for common values, including democracy, the free market economy, and the international community. An enhanced sense of common security and shared identity deters NATO member states from clashing with each other. A case in point is how NATO policies prevented "hot" conflicts from developing between member states Turkey and Greece during the Cold War, even though the two have gone through tense periods over the Aegean dispute and the Cyprus issue.

Yet another example of a security community is how the EU managed to build a collective zone of peace on the strength of internalizing a sense of common identity and shared values. The EU also evokes the "spillover effect" – another concept proposed by Deutsch.[19] EU member state cooperation, which started with the coal and steel industries, has long since extended into the wider economic, social and political sphere. For example, the EU now seeks to advance its cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean by adopting the continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) as laid claim to by Greece and the region's Greek Cypriot leadership as official maritime zones of the EU itself.

The security community approach emphasizes the importance of building mutual trust between communities of a similar nature.[20] However, such collaborations can also result in the emergence of an opponent, a so-called "enemy" or "other" which can then threaten the security of communities in the complex interdependent system of today. For example, the parallel expansion of the EU and NATO by joining with former Soviet republics became a target of Russian foreign policy, reflecting Moscow's growing resentment at the implicit affront to its status.

Regional changes like the expansion of the Western alliance into what once were Soviet territories altered national perceptions, as evidenced when Russia's "Near Abroad Doctrine" was issued in 1993.[21] The doctrine insists that Russia's unique role and responsibility in what had been the domain of the former Soviet Union cannot be filled by another power and/or international organization.[22] It is safe to argue that the Russian wars of the past decade against would-be NATO members (like Georgia and Ukraine) attest to the dangerous nature of securitization processes.

Similar to the confrontation between NATO and Russia, a number of countries are entangled in a series of confrontational crises in the Eastern Mediterranean, over the development of its energy resources and infrastructure. Since the discovery of hydrocarbon sources -- initially offshore Israel and later around Cyprus and offshore Egypt -- the EU has been extending diplomatic and military support to all three countries, with the current focus on connecting renewable energies to an undersea power cable in the region. This cooperative

19 Deutsch, "Communications Theory and Political Integration", p. 351.

20 Ibid.

21 Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "The Transformation of Russian Foreign Policy", Karen Dawisha (ed.), *The International Dimension of Post-Communist Transitions in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1997, p. 43.

22 Dimitri Danilov, "Russia's Search for an International Mandate in Transcaucasus", Bruno Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels, VubPress, 1996, p. 142.

interaction between EU member states and Israel and Egypt has seen the Eastern Mediterranean transformed into an extension of the greater Euro-Mediterranean region, as it acquired its own unique regional security complexity. Turkey, meanwhile, has been excluded from the development of energy resources and infrastructure, becoming an "other" or an "opponent" as far as Israel, Cyprus and Egypt were concerned, while Turkey's relations with each of them deteriorated.

The Regionalization and Securitization of the Eastern Mediterranean

The Eastern Mediterranean occupies a strategic position in the context of Western and Middle Eastern regional security complexes. Besides the discovery in the last decade of sizable hydrocarbon fields off the coasts of Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt, the current prospects for renewable energy and transcontinental electricity connections are adding to the region's strategic importance. All of these developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region demand that greater attention should be paid to the actors involved, as well as to their interests and their strategizing.

The EU has stepped up its involvement in the region thanks to its coastline member states Greece and Cyprus, and those like Italy, Spain and France, with access to the Eastern Mediterranean. Middle Eastern and neighboring countries, including Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority, also have Eastern Mediterranean shorelines. Since 2020, when it became independent of the European common security area, the United Kingdom (UK) has retained a say in the region, because of the two sovereign bases it has in Cyprus, which abut the Eastern Mediterranean.[23] These littoral states aside, many other actors are also engaged in the Eastern Mediterranean energy issue.

The U.S. exerts influence in the region thanks to its special relationship with the UK and its superpower capabilities. As the Copenhagen School contends, the U.S. can draw on its capacity to influence the processes of securitization and de-securitization in regions, and the construction of legitimate universal values. Post-Cold War Russia, still widely regarded as a major power, can exert its significant capabilities in military terms, making it, in the RSCT context, an influential actor when issues of power distribution are considered. Moscow's presence and influence is a real factor in the Eastern Mediterranean, given its bases in Syria, even though geographically Russia is not a part of the region. Adding salt to the wound, China is showing an interest in extending its influence throughout the region, as evidenced by its increased engagement with Cyprus. The Greek Cypriot leadership has become a signatory to Beijing's ubiquitous 'Belt and Road Initiative'.

It should be noted also that the East-Med Gas Forum (EMGF) has evolved into a significant platform for member states Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan, Italy, and the Palestinian Authority. The forum was set up in Cairo in January 2019, to facilitate the development of the most appropriate and viable infrastructure for the development of the region's hydrocarbon

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23   The treaty of Establishment for the Republic of Cyprus (Annex I, Section III) specifically excluding any Cypriot claim to the two maritime areas (Please indicate the name of these areas) adjacent to the UK sovereign base areas provides the UK with the right to claim an EEZ.

resources and their transfer to Europe. Accordingly, the EastMed pipeline idea emerged as a planned offshore/onshore natural gas pipeline between Israel, Cyprus and Greece, to directly transfer Eastern Mediterranean energy to Europe.

The result has been a marked increase in cooperation between its members, transforming the EMGF into the semblance of a regional security complex. Thus, its fate is immutably intertwined with its member states' fortunes. Parallel to the forum's evolving role, the Eastern Mediterranean region has itself undergone a fundamental transformation that emphasizes mutual security interdependencies and concentrated security dilemmas. Realists define security dilemmas as the most important source of interstate conflict, and point to overlapping conflicts that are mainly about maritime boundaries and the distribution of rights to access, extract and transport energy sources.[24]

Steps taken by EMGF member states prompted Turkey to react unilaterally with its own legal and military measures, to help secure its claim to maritime borders that overlap with the forum's proposed route to transport extracted offshore gas or renewables to their intended destination. Thus, the "security communities" inherent in the RSCT context serve to explain how the EMGF has become a regional security complex opposing Turkey, while Turkey has become an "other" or an opponent as viewed by members of the gas forum and the EU. In this instance, Turkey's increased engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean is being countered by an ever-growing anti-Turkey alliance, reinforced with the backing of the U.S. and France. It was when Turkey announced its unexpected rapprochement with Libya that the U.S. and France threw their weight behind the launch of the EMGF.

Official statements from Brussels make clear that the conflicts and tensions over the delimitation of maritime zones have shifted from it being a Greek-Turkish issue into an issue involving the EU and Turkey. Repeatedly, the EU condemned Turkey for confrontational policies, and threatened Ankara with economic sanctions, all the while demonstrating, diplomatically and militarily, its support for the EMGF. A primary cause underlying this transformation stemmed from Greece and Cyprus having registered their rivalries with Turkey on EU platforms. Additionally, fuelled by the ongoing absence of a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue, the EU membership of Greek Cypriot-dominated Cyprus continues to play an important role in "Europeanizing" Turkish-Greek rivalries. One outcome of this has been that the expansion of the maritime zones of EU member states Greece and Cyprus, which has resulted in the expansion of the EU's maritime zones.

The explosive nature of the energy rivalries has remained passive, as the EU reduced the demand for offshore hydrocarbon resources at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and, thus, gas explorations were suspended until late 2021. However, it was the U.S. Biden administration's January 2022 decision to withdraw political support for the EastMed pipeline project that signified a new era in Eastern Mediterranean affairs. The current plan is for a pipeline between the Israeli offshore gas field and Egypt, where it would be converted to liquefied natural gas (LNG) to ship to Europe.

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24 Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, p. 3.

The U.S. decision signifying that Cyprus and the offshore region disputed between Greece, Cyprus and Turkey would be bypassed, helped renew Ankara's interest in energy cooperation, thereby restoring its relations with Tel Aviv. Ankara is now proposing a pipeline linking the Israeli gas field with Turkey's pipeline network to transmit to Europe. In this context, the TANAP-TAP pipeline between Azerbaijan and Italy via Turkey offers an important alternative, which is already in operation and has strong western support.[25]

It should be noted that the Eastern Mediterranean remains vital to EU strategies for diversifying its energy supplies and increasing the level of renewable energy resources, in securing its electricity power mix for the coming years. Also, the EastMed pipeline project is now under consideration within European policy circles for possible use in transmitting green hydrogen instead.[26] Clearly, a primary cause of the EU's rising demand for renewable energy stems from its need to balance carbon emissions, but more pressing right now seems to be its need to reduce its political and energy dependence on Moscow, especially given the roll-out of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2024.

The EU aims to construct a transcontinental electricity connection, linking power grids in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. In order to do so, it seeks to utilize the Eastern Mediterranean's immense potential for solar and wind energy.[27] Securitization of the Eastern Mediterranean energy issue invites scepticism as to whether commercial incentives alone would be sufficient to ensure political cooperation for the proposed expansion of the region's renewable energies and electricity interconnection. Suspicions were aroused when Cyprus, Israel and Greece signed an initial agreement on March 8, 2021, to lay a 1,200-kilometre undersea power cable, which is projected to pass through the continental shelf claimed by Turkey. Objecting, Ankara sent a diplomatic note to Greece, Israel and the EU delegation, demanding that all three seek its permission before conducting any work on its section of the continental shelf, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported on March 15, 2021.

On August 6, 2020, Egypt and Greece signed an agreement delimiting their maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, the culmination of a lengthy negotiation process that began in 2005. The agreement calls for the signatory countries to extend military assistance to each other should one of them be attacked. In the course of 2021, France repeatedly sent its naval vessels, including a nuclear carrier, to the Eastern Mediterranean, amidst rising tensions between Greece and Turkey.

A better understanding of the regional confrontation that threatens to escalate, and a possible armed clash in the Eastern Mediterranean requires familiarity with the conceptual framework of the RSCT. These confrontations exemplify how the ideational mechanisms help a gradual progress in the construction of material interests. Mistrust and deep-rooted enmities,

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25 The Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) connects with the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) on the Turkish-Greek border to carry Azeri gas to European markets.

26 Moritz Rau, Günter Seufert and Kirsten Westphal, "The Eastern Mediterranean as a Focus for the EU's Energy Transition", *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, Vol. 8, February 2022. https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C08/ (Accessed 21 May 2023).

27 Ibid.

especially those between Turkish and Greek foreign policy elites, are shaped by adverse historical experiences that impede them from securing a sustainable pattern of cooperation. Turkish and Greek threat perceptions stem from their strong attitudes of insecurity and vulnerability, as well as a strong sense of determination about their claims to regional leadership.[28]

The issues of regionalization and securitization of the Eastern Mediterranean over the last decade have arisen as both a result and a cause of Turkey's confrontational policies in the region. Constructive and inclusive approaches toward the expansion of renewable energies and electricity interconnection, instead, demand de-securitization strategies through which relevant actors would pursue cooperative policies to advance their joint interests. As the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean becomes more and more complicated, politics has become embroiled yet again in a maritime agenda. The relevant parties persist in confrontational rhetoric, and decisions that securitize the other actors' moves.

Greek and Turkish leaders continue to pump up the nationalist rhetoric against one another, and fail to take into account the potentially disastrous consequences of this securitization process. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has warned Greece in response to perceived threat of a growing military buildup on the Greek Aegean islands, close to Turkey's coastline. "Our patience has a limit," Erdoğan said, adding that Turkey "can come down suddenly one night when the time comes".[29] Athens responded that it is ready to use all its diplomatic and military might to defend its sovereignty.[30]

At the end of the day, it seems that the various parties involved in the Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon controversy are incapable of sorting out, much less reconciling their overlapping claims to EEZ and pipeline routes. Instead, they adopt hardline positions by employing threatening rhetoric, conducting seismic searches backed by gunboat diplomacy, and invoking partial cooperation agreements, all of which are part of the regionalization and securitization process. Considering the commitment of the parties to the tactics of confrontation, retaliation in the Eastern Mediterranean is part of a securitization process, making it very difficult to predict or anticipate the next move by any of the actors involved.

A New Modus Vivendi between Russia and Turkey?

A closer look at the changing regional context reveals how changing threat perceptions and the global roles pursued by the relevant actors influence Russian-Turkish relations.[31] Given the size of Russia's offshore natural gas reserves, the Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon resources cannot offer an adequate alternative. Moscow prefers that Eastern Mediterranean

28 Bahar Rumelili, "Turkey: Identity, Foreign Policy, and Socialization in Post-Enlargement Europe", *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 33, No 2, 2011, p. 235.

29 Andrew Wilks, "Tension Rises as Turkey, Greece Voice Festering Grievances", *AP News*, 6 October 2022. https://apnews.com/article/nato-middle-east-greece-recep-tayyip-erdogan-19903884a66cd3116ee318b8d0283ccd (Accessed 21 May 2023).

30 Ibid.

31 William Hale, "The Turkey-Russia Relationship in Historical Perspective: Patterns, Change and Contrast", *Uluslararası İlişkiler,* Vol. 20, No 78, 2023, p. 45.

offshore natural gas and renewable energies stay *in situ* – that is that they should not be explored, exploited, or developed – if the choice is made by the consumer countries "under the influence of ultimatums and threats made across the ocean".[32]

In keeping with its bid to hold on to its role of energy hegemony, Moscow does not want Russia's gas monopoly and influence in Europe to be broken. Russia uses natural gas as a political weapon, rendering Europe susceptible to Moscow's manipulation of the energy markets. Unlike Washington's hardline Russia policy, Germany and other EU members are hesitant to press Russia too hard, lest they worsen the existing energy crisis to the point where Moscow reduces or completely stops the supply of natural gas flowing to Europe.[33]

The Russian monopoly weakens U.S. influence in Europe, and challenges Washington's efforts to maintain its global superiority in the post-Cold War era. In the circumstances, Washington promotes having Eastern Mediterranean offshore natural gas and renewable energies reach European markets. It views the Eastern Mediterranean's offshore and renewable energy resources as offering a viable alternative that will reduce dependence on the natural gas monopoly Russia has enjoyed (and exploited). The U.S. encourages and supports the EU's intended energy transformation, to set itself up as a global leader in the green energy transition. Brussels, meanwhile, plans to increase the level of renewable-produced electricity, and to link the European electricity grids with those in the Middle East and Africa.

While the U.S., Russia and the EU compete for global roles, littoral states with small-sized economies like Greek Cypriot-dominated Cyprus, Greece and Egypt, and medium-sized economies such as Turkey and Israel pursue more myopic interests. They want to own and to utilize hydrocarbon and renewable energies from the maritime zones they lay claim to. Aside from the commercial benefits, the Greek Cypriot leadership seeks to develop offshore natural gas resources and the potential of renewable energies as part of its strategy to solve the Cyprus issue in a way that best suits their preferences.

Besides the EU's diplomatic support, Athens and the Greek Cypriot administration are emboldened by the aims of the proposed Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to ensure that EU member states cooperate on a permanent basis when it comes to defence. Keen to take on an EU military leadership role now that the UK has exited the EU, France is advocating a European-based security architecture within the framework of PESCO as an alternative to NATO. Needless to say, asserting such independence from NATO would cause further divisions within the alliance, most notably those involving Turkey and Greece, and the U.S. and France.

In its ambition to be a regional power, Turkey seeks to be an energy hub that would provide security, to ensure that regional offshore natural gas and renewable energies reach

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32 Sergey Lavrov, "Dialogue with Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov", *Rome Med Mediterranean Dialogues International Conference,* Moscow, 4 December 2020.

33 Jeff Colgan, "Putin Has a Big Piece of Leverage Over Europe. Here's How to Take It Away", *Politico*, 8 February 2022. https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/02/08/europe-dependent-russian-energy-00006690 (Accessed 21 May 2023).

European markets. However, Ankara opposes the transfer of energy using facilities such as the EastMed pipeline project or undersea power cables, from which Turkey is being excluded. Also, it is opposed to any routing through maritime jurisdictions for which it claims sovereignty. Should Turkey's ambitions for such a regional role continue to be frustrated or blocked, its interests may well shift and come to coincide with Moscow's preference that the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean remain at the bottom of the sea.[34]

Turkey's foreign policy decision makers as well as its military chiefs now characterize and securitize the positions of the U.S. and the EU as unapologetic supporters of the ever-growing alliance against Ankara. Even if the primary goal is to contain Russia's energy hegemony role, this Western behavioral trend stirs up the "Sèvres Syndrome" in Turkish public opinion and among the ruling elites -- the belief that the Western powers continue to have imperialist ambitions to reduce and divide Turkey.[35] The 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, imposed on the feeble government of the last Ottoman sultan, sought the occupation of most parts of the old Ottoman Empire (Turkey's predecessor) by the Greeks, Kurds, Armenians, French, British, and Italians.[36] At the time, Britain, France, and Italy also supported a buffering chain of governments in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, as a means of driving a wedge between the Turkish and Soviet revolutionaries.[37]

Now, as the crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean escalates, perceptions of historical enmity toward the imperialist ambitions of the Western powers rise up anew in the minds of Turkish military and political elites, while the Soviet role in establishing modern Turkey is remembered as an act of historical friendship. Starting from the late-1910s, Turkish revolutionaries collaborated on a strictly pragmatic basis with the socialist Soviet revolutionaries in their common struggle to defy the imperialist ambitions of the Western powers. The Turkish-Soviet collaboration turned the tide in the Caucasus, with the Soviets helping socialist revolutions replace Western-allied governments, while offering support to independence movements in Turkey. In exchange for this Soviet support, the Turkish revolutionaries allowed Soviet influence to go unchallenged in the Caucasus, and to integrate Turkic regions such as Azerbaijan's oil-rich Baku and Kazakhstan's Emba oilfields. The Soviets continued to extend their political and economic support both before and after the establishment of modern Turkey in 1923.

Come the Cold War, however, Turkey perceived the role pursued by the Soviet Union to expand communist ideology as a direct threat to its security and, as a result, took its place within NATO, a move that contributed to the regional security complexity to contain the Soviets. Moscow and Ankara thus found themselves in opposing camps, as Turkey acted

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34 Lavrov, "Dialogue with Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov".

35 Umut Can Adısönmez and Recep Onursal, "'Strong, but Anxious State': The Fantasmatic Narratives on Ontological Insecurity and Anxiety in Turkey", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 19, No 73, 2022, p. 62; Nick Danforth, "Forget Sykes-Picot. It's the Treaty of Sevres that Explains the Modern Middle East", *Foreign Policy*, 10 August 2015. https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/sykes-picot-treaty-of-sevres-modern-turkey-middle-east-borders-turkey/ (Accessed 21 May 2023).

36 Danforth, "Forget Sykes-Picot".

37 Şahin "Turkey's Foreign Policy", p. 18.

as a buffer zone, insulating NATO members from being a target for the geographical and ideological expansion of the Soviet Union. It was the demise of the Soviet Union that allowed the de-securitization process, and the kind of cooperative patterns now seen between Moscow and Ankara.

Once the Soviet expansion threat diminished, Turkey's commitment to the obligations of NATO membership began to weaken. Ankara embarked on a more independent course of behavior than that ordained by U.S. preferences.[38] The main reason driving this quest for relative independence was that Ankara was unable to find the kind of support it had hoped for under the NATO umbrella in its struggle against the PKK – a recognized terrorist organization which has fought a bloody insurgency inside Turkey since 1978.[39] For Turkey, this has meant that the obligations of NATO membership are not as binding as before, a decision soon made manifest when it went ahead and purchased Russian S-400 defence systems over U.S. objections. More recently, rather than pressing Moscow too hard, Turkey has opted to follow a balancing act with regard to the Russian war in Ukraine.

While Turkey's weakening resolve about NATO has helped bring Moscow and Ankara closer together, analyses from varying perspectives would lead to different interpretations over the limits of the Russia-Turkey relationship. Realists and liberals, with their focus on material and economic incentives, would point to the current economic and political turmoil in Moscow and Ankara, and question whether Russia would extend its commitments by forming an alliance with Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean which did not directly affect its own security. Since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine, it now looks very unlikely that Russian forces will grind their way to victory in any meaningful sense.[40] An ongoing war, and predictions that gas prices will fall, when combined with continuing sanctions, threaten to do serious damage to the Russian economy in the medium term, taking Russia's political system into the most turbulent period of its post-Soviet history.

Highlighting the severe deterioration of Russia's international image, realist or liberal arguments would therefore stress that closer alignment with Russia would make little long-term sense from the Turkish viewpoint. Turkey's own economic situation is dire, with soaring inflation and unemployment. Accordingly, Ankara's outreach to Moscow and its resort to strident nationalism has to be linked to the unpredictability of Erdoğan, and his urgent attempt to boost his domestic political credentials. Such a rational approach leads to the assumption that should Erdoğan lose Turkey's 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections, the opposition alliance is likely to take steps to restore its relations with the Western powers, if only to repair the current damage to the economy. However, it can be safely argued that the hostile perceptions of the Western powers (including the Sèvres Syndrome) and Turkey's pursuit of

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38 Nora Fisher-Onar, "From Realist Billiard Balls and Liberal Concentric Circles to Global IR's Venn Diagram? Rethinking International Relations via Turkey's Centennial", *Uluslararası Iliskiler*, Vol. 20, No 78, 2023, p. 103.

39 Meliha Benli Altunışık and Lenore G. Martin, "Turkey and the Middle East and North Africa under the AKP: A Three Level Analysis of Foreign Policy Change", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 20, No 78, 2023, p. 82.

40 Raphael S. Cohen, "Why Putin's Nuclear Gambit Is a Huge Mistake", *Foreign Policy,* 19 October 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/19/putin-war-ukraine-nuclear-weapons-escalation-west-nato/ (Accessed 21 May 2023).

a more independent course of behavior than that ordained by U.S. preferences, is not limited solely to Erdoğan, but is a widely held view among the Turkish public.[41]

Realist and liberal arguments theoretically neglect how the changing international roles pursued, and the hostile perceptions of Russia and Turkey toward Western powers, facilitate the construction of material interests between the two countries. The deepening contradictions of Russia and Turkey against the intensified mutual security interdependence between the U.S., the EU, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, guide Moscow and Ankara in acting together against the Western powers. The increased U.S. military presence in Greece, and Washington's decision to lift its arms embargo on the Greek Cypriots, as well as the appearance of a French nuclear presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, have aroused growing resentment in Moscow and in Ankara. Through the lens of the RSCT, the negative sentiments in Moscow and Ankara about the growing U.S. and EU influence in Eastern Mediterranean affairs suggest that there is fertile ground for strengthening cooperation, and that Russia and Turkey are moving closer to one another on the issue of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The current circumstances in the Eastern Mediterranean compel Ankara and Moscow to reconsider their relationship in terms of its overall potential, and to consider and design more cooperative patterns. Accordingly, both Moscow and Ankara need to adapt the kind of "re-security community" that the RSCT suggests is a must, in order to prevent hostilities and to strengthen friendship between their two disparate societies. Whether Russia and Turkey can revert to an approximation of the camaraderie that Soviet and Turkish revolutionaries once attained depends on each country ridding itself of the imperialist-cum-expansionist policies toward one another that otherwise could raise their threat perception regarding each other. Better they should respect one another's security perceptions of the territories they see as their respective hinterlands – Eurasia for Russia and the Eastern Mediterranean for Turkey.

Conclusion

While actors like the EU and NATO, and regional-level threats such as the rise of organized rivalries in Eurasia and the Eastern Mediterranean may change, other actors like Russia and Turkey cannot be expected to remain stable. National and international security concerns (like those of Russia and Turkey) and regional issues (like the energy-driven transformation of the Eastern Mediterranean) vary in relation to each other. The RSCT explains how the emergence of struggles seeking to attain ambitious global roles by key actors and their perceptions of their historical enmity and friendship toward each other shape the fate of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Washington, in its ambition to maintain the role of U.S. global supremacy in the post-Cold War era, seeks to contain Russia's ambition for a role of global energy hegemony, which would otherwise weaken U.S. domination over Europe. The interaction of these rival global roles helps generate securitization, with the sometimes devastating results evidenced by the Russian wars on would-be NATO members Georgia and Ukraine. In its drive to maintain its

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41 Ahmet Sözen and Devrim Şahin, "Perception of Axis Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: An Analysis through 'Butterfly Effect'", *İzmir Review of Social Sciences* Vol. 1, No 1, 2013, p. 56.

global supremacy, the U.S. seeks to contain Moscow's energy monopoly, and therefore seeks to expand NATO's influence throughout the former Soviet republics, which Russia claims as its hinterland. Additional to its containment policies against Russia in Eurasia, the U.S. also supports the development of Eastern Mediterranean energy resources as an alternative to the EU's energy supply needs, and as a way of preventing Russia's energy hegemony aspirations.

In line with U.S. preferences, Brussels has sided with the EMGF (which evolved into a regional security complex), in its efforts to diversify its energy sourcing, and by doing so to lessen to varying degrees Russian influence on EU member states such as Germany. However, as the security communities and securitization concepts explain, this increased cooperation between the U.S., the EU and the EMGF is being securitized by Turkey, which has been excluded from the Gas Forum both as a result of and as a cause for increased confrontations.

Turkey perceives hostility toward the U.S., the EU and the Greco-Cypriot 'trilateral cooperation agreements' with Israel and Egypt, in viewing their pursuit of imperial ambitions to seize Turkey's territorial waters in the Eastern Mediterranean, just as the Western Powers attempted with the failed Sèvres Treaty over a century ago. Since NATO is no longer trusted by Ankara, Turkey feels free to cooperate more closely with Russia, based on their increased mutual security interdependence against what they perceive as Western imperial expansion in Eurasia and the Eastern Mediterranean. Henceforth, historical perceptions of friendship and enmity, as well as the international roles being pursued by Moscow and Ankara will have a significant role to play in defining their relationship, as well as in remaking the Eastern Mediterranean.

While Moscow and Ankara may have securitized each other during the Cold War, and particularly in the mid-2010s, the RSCT offers important hints when it comes to reassuring such societies to trust each other. Such reassurance calls for an enhanced sense of mutual security, and a shared identity through proactive advocacy of communication and transportation opportunities between Russian and Turkish social systems. Their earlier cooperative patterns trace back to Turkey's independence struggle, just before the establishment of modern Turkey a century ago in 1923. However, if they are determined to expand and sustain their cooperation against what they mutually perceive to be Western imperialism, Moscow and Ankara need to rid themselves of imperialist and expansionist policies toward each other.

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